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NEWSLETTER

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5 STEPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD BRIDGE SKILL GAPS



Your second grade son is struggling blending letters and reading words, needs extra explanations of directions and has a short attention span. The Teacher tells you that the second grade curriculum is frustrating him, he is at-risk of retention and recommends he receive an Independent Psycho-Educational Evaluation (IEE).

Your high school sophomore is getting failing grades, complains the homework is too hard and does not socialize anymore with her friends. She has been receiving tutoring but it does not seem to be helping. The school tells you to get your daughter a comprehensive evaluation.

What do you do? Parents know they must act as soon as possible, but are often not sure what steps to take to help their child. **The stakes are high as this is your child!**

Below are 5 easy steps for Parents to take to help their child bridge the learning gaps and increase their education and self-esteem.

STEP 1. GET AN INDEPENDENT PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION

When searching for your dream house, the most important words you hear are LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION or the house's place and position.

When searching of ways to help your child succeed in school, the most important words you hear are EVALUATION, EVALUATION, EVALUATION or the testing and assessment of your child's skill levels, areas of strengths and weaknesses, rates of progress and interventions to help guide educational decisions.

An Independent Psycho-Educational Evaluation gives explicit answers to your questions and integrates the information gleaned into the understanding of your whole child. It provides an action plan with specific goals and recommendations to address your child's learning style and unique needs.

For example, if a child has a reading disability due to an auditory processing disorder, they should have goals to address both of these deficits. If the deficits are large, the child may need more goals, which would then lead to increased services. If your child has many language deficits, they will need goals to address these skill gaps, which would then equate to more language therapy.

A good evaluation also assists Parents in understanding what they can anticipate about their child's future school years. For example, the severity of the disability, if college is an option and how to prioritize the interventions to bridge the learning gaps.

STEP 2. THE BREADTH AND DEPTH OF A GOOD EVALUATION

The breadth and depth of the evaluation depends on the assessor's education, training, profession and areas of expertise. Some evaluations only assess one or two areas such as cognitive ability and academic functioning.

Others look at the big picture of the child as a learner and assesses expanded areas such as language, social skills, memory, attention, behavior, auditory and visual processing, fine and gross motor and executive functioning or organizational skills. The expanded evaluation includes interviewing parents and teachers and observing the child in the school setting in-home program environment.

Licensed Educational Psychologists (LEP's) are professionals with master's or doctoral degrees in education that conduct IEE's. They have worked in education and understand how school systems works, skilled at administering and interpreting tests, gather information from multiple sources and an expert at putting all the information into one true and accurate picture of the child. As LEP's are Educational Psychologists versus Clinical Psychologists, they are able to write educational goals based on state standards and evaluation results.

For example, I evaluated an elementary grade child performing at the kindergarten reading fluency of 53 words correct per minute using poor expression. Based on this child's **Present Levels of Performance** (PLOP), I developed the following goal in my report: *Read passages at the second grade fluency rate of 70 correct words per minute using natural sounding speech in three consecutive weeks as measured by dated Teacher-Charted observations.* (CCSS Reading Fluency 2.4). The CCSS refers to Common Core State Standards and the 2.4 refers to the fourth month of second grade level.

Let's suppose I found a middle school student writing stories at the fourth grade level. I developed the following goal: *Using a visual graphic organizer, compare and contrast two or more characters, setting or events in a story or a drama, drawing on specific details in the text such as how the characters interacted scoring at least 3 on a 4-point rubric in three consecutive*

weeks as measured by dated Teacher-Charted observations. (CCSS Writing 5.9- Character Traits, Motivations and Actions Contribute to Events)

Lastly, suppose I found a high school student unable to use three on-topic back-and-forth volleys in conversations with peers. I developed the following goal: *Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly* (CCSS Speaking and Listening 7.1).

You need a precise and comprehensive evaluation to develop appropriate and measurable goals. If the child is working on skills already mastered, they are wasting precious learning time, not focused on needed skills and the learning gaps only increase between what they should and actually know or able to perform.

STEP 3. FINDING AND CHOOSING THE RIGHT EVALUATOR

Some tests can only be administered within a certain time frame. For example, if a test was administered in the past few months, it may or may not be administered again to your child for some time. Therefore, you don't want to have the wrong evaluator administering tests and then you need to wait months before it can be re-administered correctly to your child. Choosing the wrong evaluator can lead to wasted time, lack of report credibility and inappropriate goals, recommendations and services for your child.

How do you find a good evaluator? Interview potential candidates. Ask the professional how much time they spend with the child, how many evaluations they have completed with children that have the same disability as your child, do they administer the testing themselves or do they have technicians do that, do they write goals and recommendations into their reports, do they consider the district's current and proposed goals when writing their goals and do they attend Individual Education Program (IEP) or school meetings.

You can also ask parent groups, professionals and organizations specializing in your child's disability. There are many organizations that offer solid advice for Parents. For example, in the area of Autism, there are organizations such as Talk About Curing Autism (TACA), Families for Early Autism Treatment (FEAT) and Autism Speaks. Referral resources also include attorneys specializing in special education law and educational advocates and consultants.

STEP 4. WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE REPORT IS PRESENTED TO THE DISTRICT

After the evaluator presents the IEE report to the school district, it is the Parents responsibility to follow-up on the goals and recommendations in the report. The school district merely has the responsibility to listen to the findings in the report but not act on them.

After I present my report to the school district, I work with Parents and make a list of follow-ups needed such as obtaining district goals based on the proposed goals in my report. I then create a goal comparison document that outlines the district response to the proposed goals in my report and the Parents return response to the district's goals. The **Goal Comparison** document makes the I.E.P. meetings more productive and collaborative, as everyone is aware of the current functioning and priorities for the child.

Do districts adopt all IEE proposed goals? A comprehensive IEE usually contains 20-30 goals addressing all areas of deficits. These proposed goals have the Present Levels of Performance (PLOPS) outlined by the teacher, therapists, student and parents that shows the rationale and support for the goals.

The process of goal adoption is meant to be a very collaborative process as the school personnel, evaluators and parents work together in the best interest of the child. Everyone may not always agree on which goals should be adopted, but each person on the team listens to each other's reasoning and discuss what they believe is most appropriate for the child at this time.

Some of the proposed goals not adopted by the IEP team, may be worked on at home or in after school or weekend tutoring sessions.

STEP 5. MONITORING ACHIEVEMENT AND GOAL PROGRESS

After the goals are agreed upon, Parents need to monitor their child's progress. Most districts provide goal progress every three to four months. It is the Parents responsibility to review the progress, ask questions such as what is working and not working and keep a portfolio of completed work and tests completed by the child.

After the evaluation, most of my clients request that I develop a **large curriculum packet full of 'easy to teach' skills** based on the proposed goals in my report. The curriculum packets use state adopted textbooks, engaging instructional materials and visuals such as *Lindamood Bell Structure Words* to bridge the learning gaps. Together, the teachers and I update the curriculum packets as needed moving the child through the standards.

Special education teachers in my office then work with students in their skill deficit areas. They complete daily data monitoring skill acquisition independently and with prompting or assistance and provide daily feedback to the parents. Each child has state standards progress tracking sheets, which indicates the child's current mastered and progress toward the standards. Our goal

is for the child to learn and generalize the skills to other environments and have fun while increasing their education and self-esteem. Students enjoy coming to tutoring and feel part of our family.

I re-evaluate my students annually to determine academic achievement and goal progress. For example, if the child was fluently reading 53 words correct per minute a year ago, I would re-administer a reading fluency test to determine the correct number of words they were currently reading. I then develop a **Comparison Chart** showing the number of words read last year versus this year, to determine growth and new goals.

In summary, Independent Educational Evaluations can be a valuable tool for Parents and Districts to assist with determining a child's educational unique needs. The evaluations help parents act as equal participants in the educational decision-making process for their child.

School Districts that welcome Independent Educational Evaluations, rather than viewing them with suspicion or unnecessary, benefit from the additional information. When Parents and School Districts work collaboratively together, the outcome is always in the child's best interest.

