

# CTE AND IEPs: MAKING THE SYSTEM WORK FOR ALL

By Lakshmi Mahadevan, Cheryl Grenwelge and Rick Peterson

**T**he Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 supports local CTE programs that ensure access to special populations, including those with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> In order to ensure a successful and safe learning environment for all, CTE instructors will need to advocate effectively for students with disabilities and their curriculum at individualized education plan (IEP) meetings. Additionally, CTE instructors attending IEP meetings should be able to actively participate in the process to ensure that their students receive free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Active participation from CTE instructors entails asking insightful questions at IEP meetings, explaining the rigorous and relevant nature of CTE programs of study, addressing safety concerns, collaborating with key personnel, formulating IEP goals related to CTE courses and providing suggestions for accommodations and modifications. In addition, CTE instructors need to understand state and federal laws and their rights/access to students' information, as CTE instructors have an "educational need to know."

## What Is an IEP Meeting?

The IEP meeting, required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is convened within 30 days following the determination of a student's eligibility for special education services.<sup>2</sup>

At the high school level, a best practice IEP committee consists of several members, including you, the CTE teacher, the parent/guardian (if the student is younger than 18), the student, the special education teacher, general education teacher, principal/administrator, educational diagnostician and other invited guests.

## Attendance

It is important that you determine what the laws are for attendance in your respective state. For example, the Texas Administrative Code states that the IEP committee shall include a representative from CTE, preferably the teacher, when considering initial or continued placement of a student in a CTE program, unless federal conditions regarding excusal have been met.<sup>3</sup>

No matter what the laws are in your state regarding attendance at IEP meetings, your responsibilities as a CTE instructor are as follows:

1. In order to receive adequate notice, collaborate with the special education department, diagnostician and counselors to make sure that you are included on the IEP listservs.
2. For students interested in your course, attend the IEP meetings and share information about your course and its requirements.
3. You or your representative must attend the IEP committee meeting

for students who are currently enrolled in your classrooms.

4. For students already enrolled in your course(s), you will report on their performance, whether the suggested accommodations/modifications are effective for the student's success and share any concerns that may need to be addressed by the IEP committee.
5. You may also attend the meeting to represent a CTE colleague. In such cases, it is important for you to meet with the colleague prior to the meeting and collect all pertinent information regarding the student, so that reporting is accurate.
6. If someone attends the meeting on your behalf, make sure that you provide documents related to your classroom (for initial placement) or the student's progress reports (continued placement) so that he or she may speak on your behalf.

## Documents

IDEA Sections 300.114–300.117 recommend that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities be educated in regular classes alongside their peers who do not have disabilities, i.e., in a least restrictive environment, or LRE. In selecting the LRE, consideration needs to be given to any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services that he or she requires.<sup>4</sup>

In order to establish and maintain a safe LRE, we suggest that you bring documents to the IEP committee that will aid detailed discussion on eliminating potential harmful effects. These documents must be a result of a thorough examination of your CTE program of study that takes into account student characteristics, instructional style, physical environment and learning outcomes. Examples of such documents<sup>5</sup> include:

1. Program inventory: Use a program inventory to inform the IEP committee about the tools, instructional methods, physical environment and evaluation strategies used in your course. Supplement the inventory with pictures/videos of your classroom and lab settings, and if possible, host open houses to allow IEP committee members, including parents/guardians, to visit and learn more about the environment you teach in. Such an inventory is particularly helpful to stimulate conversation on environmental accommodations and modifications.
2. Basic skills inventory: Providing a list of the basic skills (e.g., following directions, staying on task, listening, etc.) necessary for students with disabilities to succeed in your courses will enable the IEP committee to make informed decisions about appropriateness. This skills list will encourage discussion about individualized accommodations and modifications.
3. Comprehensive skills inventory: This inventory enables CTE instructors to establish the skills that students are likely to acquire by the end of the course. Assigning a rubric for mastery of the various skills will allow for discussion on content modifications and realistic exit points for students with disabilities.

The above documents are meant to enable IEP committees to make informed CTE-related initial and continuing placement decisions. The documents can help the IEP committee members develop ways

to improve students' learning experiences in CTE classrooms and labs, as well as empower CTE instructors to advocate for their students and the coursework, so that the outcomes of the IEP meetings are optimal for all. However, we want to caution and remind you that using the documents to advocate keeping students with disabilities out of CTE classrooms results in non-compliance with IDEA and Perkins.

### Ask Questions

When attending an IEP meeting, it is necessary that CTE instructors ask detailed questions to acquire a comprehensive picture of the student's abilities, skill sets and potential for initial and continued success in their settings. Following are some that we recommend:

- What disability category qualified the student for special education services?
- How does this disability affect the student's:
  - academic performance (reading, writing, calculation)?
  - behavioral performance (defiant, respect for others, noncompliant)?
  - functional performance (following directions, communication)?
- What student interest/aptitude measure was used to match him or her to my course?
- How can I help develop CTE-related IEP goals and/or objectives?
- How can I make my curriculum and my class accessible and safer for the student?
- What related services will be available to assist the student in order to make progress in my class and, thereby, receive a free and appropriate public education?
- What documentation would you advise that I keep and how often should I update it so that it will be helpful in our next meeting and to ensure a free and appropriate public education?
- When is the next meeting scheduled to review progress?

### During and After the Meeting

As we mentioned earlier, if you attend a student's IEP meeting either as the student's CTE teacher of record or are representing a colleague, you have an educational need to know about the student. What this means is that you have the right to access and peruse as necessary the entire IEP packet and related documents. It also means you have to provide pertinent documents to all the other members of the IEP committee who have the same right. Additionally, remember to:

- Voice any concerns about the committee's decisions during the meeting so that they are recorded in the IEP minutes.
- Ask where all documents will be stored so that you may access them when necessary.
- Speak to the other signees (usually diagnostician, special education teacher, counselor, etc.) to determine what your responsibilities are in relation to the student, if you were unable to attend the meeting.
- Sign in the "Additional Participant" slot if none is available for "CTE Instructor."
- Check "Disagree" if you are uncomfortable with decisions made by the IEP committee, or sign on the back of the sheet if a checkbox is not available.
- Sign in the "General Education Teacher" slot if you are the only general education teacher present or the only general education teacher of record. However, put "CTE" in parentheses so that there is no confusion as to what your role was and the standards against which you are to measure the student's performance.
- Ask that a copy of the IEP minutes be sent to you.
- Store all pertinent documents in a secure place or on a password-protected computer.
- Update grade sheets, progress reports, present levels of academic achievement and functional

performance, and stay in touch with parents/guardians.

- Document absences and/or performance and contact the special education teacher (who may be called “case manager” or “tracking teacher” in your school) or the diagnostician. A meeting may need to be called for the student who is currently failing to meet IEP objectives in your class.

## Transition Role

Over the past decade, the emphasis has shifted from supported employment and group homes, to independent living and self-sustaining job skills for individuals with disabilities. CTE’s focus on providing a rigorous and relevant curriculum and a safe learning environment that prepares students for high-skill, high-demand and high-wage careers makes it best positioned to teach those skills, which means that as a CTE teacher, you will have an even more critical role to play.

Additionally, IDEA mandates that by the age of 16 (14 for students on the autism spectrum), measurable transition goals be included in all students’ IEP packets, and all activities that encourage the acquisition of these goals be documented.<sup>6</sup> Some states’ laws require that the transition begins at an earlier age, therefore, we advise that you check to see what your state’s recommendations are.

Given the postsecondary nature of these transition goals, it is important that you as the CTE teacher actively participate in the IEP meetings and determine your role in the transition process. Specifically, you may be asked to help determine the transition goal and collect data for IDEA’s Indicators 13 and 14,<sup>7,8</sup> which relate to transition services and post-graduation success of students with disabilities who are currently enrolled in your classrooms. Indicator 13 relates to transition services for students and addresses:

- measurable postsecondary goals in education and/or training
- employment opportunities
- measurable annual IEP goals that accurately reflect postsecondary goals

- students’ courses of study related directly to their post-secondary goals

Indicator 14 relates to the percent of youth who had IEPs, are no longer in secondary school and who have been competitively employed *or* enrolled in some type of postsecondary school, or both, within one year of leaving high school.

This implies that all states are held accountable and will need to report on the number of successful youth who transition into employment and/or other postsecondary opportunities. For CTE instructors, this means reporting on those students who have opportunities for acquiring work skills within a program of study through participation in co-ops; work-study programs; and completion of certification requirements and garnered skills necessary to obtain industry-recognized certifications and/or qualifications for employment purposes and/or entrance into community colleges or technical/trade institutions.

Collaborating, strategic planning and detailed documentation allow CTE instructors to create a successful and safe learning environment for all their students. Putting in place best practices also ensures that your classroom is universally designed and accessible at all times, and therefore, may not need to be retrofitted constantly for students with unique IEP needs. Finally, we want to remind you that active participation in IEP meetings is not just required by law, but one of the most reliable ways to ensure that CTE programs of study survive and thrive as least restrictive environments. **Tech**

**Lakshmi Mahadevan, Ph.D.**, is an assistant professor and special populations specialist at Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Lakshmi has eight years of experience in conducting face-to-face and online professional development, addressing various special populations issues. E-mail her at [lmahadevan@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:lmahadevan@ag.tamu.edu).

**Cheryl Grenwelge, Ph.D.**, is an assistant professor and disability and transition specialist. Cheryl has twenty years of experience in the areas of transition, youth leadership and special education. E-mail her at [cgrenwelge@tamu.edu](mailto:cgrenwelge@tamu.edu).

**Rick Peterson, Ph.D.**, is an associate professor and parenting specialist with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. He has statewide leadership responsibilities for program development and outcome evaluation of parenting and family life education programs. E-mail him at [rlpeterson@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:rlpeterson@ag.tamu.edu).

## ENDNOTES

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## EXPLORE MORE

Please visit <http://ctsp.tamu.edu/instructional-videos/ard-meetings/chapters/toolbox/> for the tools and resources mentioned in this article.

Lakshmi Mahadevan and Rick Peterson will be presenting “Best Practices for CTE Instructors Attending IEP meetings” at CareerTech VISION. For more information, see [www.careertechvision.com](http://www.careertechvision.com).

