Independence Plans F.A.Q.

**What is an independence plan?**

An independence plan is a required part of a student’s IEP when the student accesses 1:1 paraeducator support. It is a tool in which the IEP team clarifies the steps that will be taken so that the student can become less dependent on their assigned 1:1 paraeducator and more independent with the ability to transition to existing classroom structures while still being successful. This involves targeting the role of the 1:1 paraeducator throughout the day and the strategies that can be used to build up the student’s skill set to function on their own. Goals from the IEP are cross referenced to ensure that independence is a priority in the student’s plan and next steps are considered as the student advances their ability to navigate their school day.

**Why is promoting my student’s independence important?**

As indicated in the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA), special education and related services to students with disabilities must be provided in the “least restrictive environment.” When an IEP Team is considering adult support for a student, all aspects of the student’s program must be considered in how they benefit the student, with the intent of maximizing student independence. While extra an extra adult can be helpful in getting things done, too much adult support can be harmful to the student’s learning. Research and current practice indicates that misuse of paraeducators can result in students becoming over-dependent upon adult support and segregation and isolation of the student from their peer group. (Marks et al., 1999; Giangreco et al., 1997; Mueller, 1997). Independent skill development can lead to greater opportunities beyond public education, but only if it is a point of focus throughout the student’s education.

**Does this mean my student will no longer have a 1:1 paraeducator?**

Every student is on their own individual path. What is important is that the IEP team prioritizes the student learning to do more on their own with less help, one skill at a time. If this leads to one day the 1:1 paraeducator time being reduced or discontinued because the student is able to be successful with the existing school structures, then that is something to be celebrated!

**How will progress be tracked on my student’s level of independence?**

The goals in the IEP that relate to the student’s independence will be tracked and reported at the same as report cards. That is three times a year for elementary and four times a year for secondary.

**Who decides if reducing or discontinuing the 1:1 paraeducator time is appropriate?**

The IEP team ultimately makes this decision. If it is believed that the student is prepared to be successful with classroom supports and no longer needs support from a 1:1 paraeducator for at least part of the day, an IEP meeting will need to be held. The team can consider additional supports that would aid in the transition such as teacher training, assistive technology, or scheduled check-ins from school staff. A trial period can also be utilized where for up to six weeks the 1:1 paraeducator’s time is reduced prior to the IEP meeting. This can be helpful in making data based decisions. Trial periods do need to be agreed upon by parents and teachers and a prior written notice must be sent home prior to the start of the trial.