

Self-Advocacy and IEP Unit

A few notes before starting. I know in this day in age, how many things everyone has on their plate. This curriculum was designed to be used with a variety of groups, sizes, abilities, and time commitment levels. There are so many ways to teach this information; big or little groups, one day a week, a unit, or a class. I started off teaching it in my study hall once a week over the whole year. At one point my school district even passed an actual class based off the curriculum that was mandatory for all 8th grade special education students to take for one quarter for a quarter credit as an elective. The most important thing to remember is that this information is most likely the most important information your students will ever learn.

To help with the many possibilities, I have sectioned this off into parts and tried to label the worksheet/material needed in green. Each part takes various amounts of time. Some of the activities I labeled with time frames based on what I have needed. Adjust as you need. There are links to the worksheets (sometimes labeled WS) or you can click on the worksheet button and it will take you to all the worksheets. There is also a [lesson plan outline](#) that is more basic than this set of instructions.

I can't stress how important it is for the kids to feel comfortable and safe during this unit. In my class, we are very informal and open about this topic. During Power Points, kids are allowed to sit in beanbags, I do a lot of candy rewards, play games, private journaling, and have discussions whenever something comes up. We talk a lot about how we need to support each other, because several people are going through the same issues and hardships. We also stress that no one will be forced to share or talk about anything they don't feel comfortable sharing.

I always send home a parent letter describing the class and what we do. I also have each kid sign a wavier form, stating they understand the things we talk about in class are confidential and private. They understand that they will be in trouble for breaking the confidentiality agreement they sign.

I would also suggest getting through part one and part two as soon as possible because you always have the first IEPs close to the beginning of the year. This will help to get the kids familiar with the material before the IEP meeting, which is very important. You will need a copy of each students current IEP for this unit. Some of this will take some extra time outside of class but just remember that this is some of the most important information they will ever learn.

It is important to remember the main goal of this whole unit is to empower our students and help them to start being good self-advocates. Each student should be able to run their meeting, know what their disability, and be using their advocacy skills by the end. For the IEP meeting, each child should meet with (possibly for at least two class periods) to go over the old IEP, make changes to it for the next year, talk about transition information, write their script, and practice at least once (ideally, try to show the student where the meeting will be held and where he or she will be sitting).

Part One:

- I send home a [Parent Letter](#) before we start the unit, just to give all parents a heads up on what we will talk about and encourage them to talk more about each topic with their child. I also include a statement about talking with me in they themselves need more information.
- [Survey \(WS\)](#): Give the disability survey to each student at the beginning and end of the unit to see what progress has been made. It asks basic questions about all different areas of the IEP and disabilities.
- **Introduce unit:** Start the unit by explaining why it is important to learn this information. Also address the issue of confidentiality for everyone. Another important issue is attitude. Explain that this can be a sensitive subject and that to get the most out of the unit they need to keep an open mind, try their best, and they need to participate. The last area to address right away is that they are responsible for the information they are going to learn. Right away when I mention legal document, I always get can I sue,

and people go to jail? I explain that this will not happen and that if they have further questions they can talk to me after class and that usually ends it. We also talk about the fact that having a disability does not mean that you are not responsible for actions or don't have to try as hard. We talk about how they need to try harder and should be able to help themselves more by the end if they listen and take it seriously.

- To address confidentiality I have each kid sign a [Confidentiality Wavier Worksheet](#).
- **Post-It Community Building (WS)**: Put on the board a bunch of statements (EX: I have trouble spelling, I have trouble controlling my temper, I have trouble staying organizing). Then have each child use Post-Its to write their name on and stick under each sign they agree with. Then talk about how no one is alone in having these difficulties. We then repeat the same thing in a different color post it on things they feel they are good at.
- Frequently at the beginning of the unit the main goal is to get away from stereotypes. Most kids think they are stupid and in the "retard" classes. We talk about how you must have an average or above IQ to qualify for LD and how some special education students are gifted and talented in some areas. We have also renamed the D's from disability/disorder to differences in our room. We also do a [Disability Definition](#) activity, in which we look up the word disability in the dictionary (which is horrible) and talk about how the definition makes them feel. We then list all the words that people normally associate with the word disability. I then rip up that sheet and we create a new definition of the word Disability/Difference and write all the words we would like to be associated with the word and the students.
- We watch a video from You Tube called "My Life With a Learning Disability". It's a good amateur video about a young man with a disability talking about his life and feelings. We watch it to give them someone to relate to right away. It also gives lots of talking points (being successful in some area, bullying, effort, frustration, loneliness, sharing). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiqDq0fimXk>
- I created and put up a Famous People Poster in my room that states, "They did it and so can you." We spend some time talking about how they are not the only people that have disabilities and that many people with disabilities have gone places, been very successful, etc. I would highly encourage this.
- Intro what an IEP is and what it stands for (there is a Power Point: [What is an IEP?](#) for this and [What is an IEP Notes](#) sheet for students to follow if you choose, as well as the [NICHCY Guide to the IEP](#) which is what the notes and power point are all based on.
 - Be sure to cover not only what IEP stands for but what it is. Many kids think it is the meeting, but we talk about the fact that it is a legal paper document containing the goals and plan for their education. We also talk about the IEP basics like how long it takes, how often there is a meeting, who attends. This is all in the Power Point and the packet. **1-2 days**
- Intro and discuss what each of the labels are and discuss the details of the disabilities (use the [Vocabulary/Abbreviations Worksheet](#) and Power Point: [Disabilities or Differences](#)). We go through the Power Point as they answer the fill in the blank notes (candy rewards). **2 days**
- **Journal Options Worksheet**: Journal One - What do you think your disability is and how do you feel about it? How will it affect you now and in the future?
- When they finish the journal, I hand each kid a post it with their disabilities on it and have them go back over the notes to see what their disability is about. I also tell them if they are unsure why they are diagnosed with something to talk with me after class.
- Puppet analogy: My principal comes in after we have talked about the basics to tell the kids why this unit is so important. We talk about how this is the most important thing they will learn all year. The puppet analogy is the following: we use a puppet on strings and ask the kids who is in control of the puppet (puppeteer). Then we ask who they would rather be, puppet or puppeteer? They all want to be the puppeteer. Then we explain that right now they are the puppet in the IEP process and that we would like to see them take over and be the puppeteer. This usually gets them pretty fired up and excited to get started. (**Warning**: be cautious with students who take things literally, this can make them upset. Be sure to stress that it's an analogy and that you are talking about the IEP process not life with those students.)

- Another analogy is a road trip. Lots of ways to get there, sometimes you hit road construction and it takes longer.
- **Journal:** How do you feel about being the “puppet”? Why is it important to become the puppeteer? How do you think you can become the puppeteer?
- **Disability Awareness Activity** (this is a separate page on the website with all the needed sheets and list of materials. It could be done with regular education students, parents, other teachers, or your special education students – I have done this at faculty meetings). *****
- Disability Study: students will research their disabilities (if only one disability, research one extra) and create a poster about the disability to hang in the classroom or handout. The student section of this site has all been set up to use with this activity. It goes through the goals, process, and has resources to answer questions with. The worksheet **Disability Research Project** has the questions the students will answer. And there is a document with information on many of the types of disabilities called **NICHCY Disability Info Sheets** . **2-3 days – need computers**
- Be sure to conference with each student at some point to specifically discuss their disability and be sure they understand what it is and how it affects them and their learning. Show them sites that are good to use to learn more about their disabilities.
- I also give students the assignment or reading a book about their disability and writing a reflection on it. I use the following books: *Survival Guide for Kids With LD: Learning Differences* by Gary Fisher and Rhoda Cummings, *The Survival Guide for Kids With ADD or ADHD* by John Taylor, *The Behavioral Survival Guide for Kids* by Thomas McIntyre and many others. All these books are well written and easily understood. This could be an extra credit thing.

Optional

- At this point we review all the information we have learned about the different types of disabilities and the IEP information. We have the students pick a different disability to research. Its called **Other Disability Research**. The students also do a short research on a celebrity with a disability. The worksheet for this is called **Celebrity Research**.
- We play **Difabilities Bingo** (WS) at this point to review the information and take a small break.

Part Two: (you could combine Part Four with this)

- Pass out a **blank** IEP and begin discussing the parts (describe what each part is for and the information it provides and why). I have taken an IEP and white out all the information that would show identity and put together a sample IEP with goals, etc. I then labeled each page with what it is for in simple terms. We talk about the page numbers (I-9, I-5, etc.) Due to the amount of new vocabulary with go through this very slowly and review many times. I do not go over every detail, but go over all the main points of the page to be sure the students understand each page’s purpose. **2-3 days**
- **IEP Vocabulary** can be very hard, so we do a short worksheet on this to work on recognizing those words.
- With the goals, discuss what an annual goal is and how the benchmarks are small goals that help you to reach the annual goal if you use benchmarks.
- Discuss the difference between modifications and accommodations.
- Journal: What do you think your goals and modifications are?
- We create a chart of all class periods and put down one modification and one accommodation for each class period. We also talk about the responsibility of using modifications, and we talk about how some modifications are at teacher discretion and may not be available at all times. Finally we talk about compromise and understanding that sometimes the answer for modifications is no.
- Again discuss confidentiality and privacy of each student and their IEP.

Part Three:

- Hand out students’ real individual IEPs to look through and go over the parts again (quick for review)

- Allow students time to look through their IEPs while you review the responsibilities that go along with this information.
- Complete the [IEP Scavenger Hunt Worksheet](#). It will help the students to become more familiar with their own IEP, help them get to know their goals, and review some of the important responsibility information.
- Meet with each student to look at individual goals and modifications at some point to see if they have questions.
- Play [IEP Baloochies](#) (Power Point). This game is similar to Jeopardy.
- You could have students start setting weekly/bi-weekly goals on how to work on their IEP goals.

Part Four:

- During Section Four we talk about the IEP meeting itself. We start by answering any question students may have on the IEP we didn't cover (specifics). We also talk about the time, who comes, why we have it, why its important for them to be involved, how they will be involved, etc. I use the [What is an IEP?](#) (PowerPoint) when doing this (by NICHCY), along with the PDF file.
- It is important to remember the child's age and abilities when planning for this. It is important for all students to be involved when they are ready. Even if that child only shares a few sentences or even pictures about themselves and their goals/school year.
- After we have talked about the basics, I show the students a video of past students who ran IEPs from the year before (with permission). We also look at the [IEP Meeting Script](#). Each student will get a copy of a script to look at as well.
- I typically show each student the room that the meeting will be held in and even practice there if time allows. I also sit next to the student during meetings and conference with them after the meeting to see how it went and if I can help/improve anything.
- Extra: I have used a variety of resources for this part. I have found many worksheet and videos. We talk about speaking loudly, making eye contact, asking questions when they are confused, and how to go through and run their IEP meeting.
- The last part of this section is to write an [IEP Meeting Invitation](#) (WS) to one teacher to come to the meeting. **You may need to do this early on for students with early IEPs.**

Part Five

- Introduce self-advocacy using the PowerPoint: [Self Advocacy and Participation in the IEP](#). There is a handout to go along with this on [Being A Self Advocate](#). It is important that students understand the importance to being a self-advocate. I encourage my students to ask for their modifications and tell me which modification they feel would help them most for particular assignments, rather than me just giving them.
- **Journal:** Write three ways that you want to try to be a better self-advocate this year.
- Discuss other factors that can get in the way of being a good self-advocate: self-esteem, fear, communication, and attention. These can all prevent students from advocating for themselves. We talk about how we can overcome these things in class. If students are having trouble with these things it could be a goal they work on for the two weeks or could even be added as a goal to the IEP.
- Option to play [Who Wants to be an IEP Expert? game](#).
- We also create a chart of all class periods and list one way we can advocate in each class. [Ways to Advocate Chart](#)
- [Difficult Situations](#) discussion. For this activity we have a class discussion of all the frequent problems students may cross while learning to be a self-advocate.
- **Role Playing:** The next thing we do is discuss a few frequent situations where kids need to be advocates right now and then role play how to deal with the situations appropriately. For example: My students need to have their tests read to them in a different room, but hate to leave in front of the class. We role-play walking into class before it starts and asking to have a test and go to the special education room

early. If the teacher says no, we are going to review, the kids then practice to state to the teacher that they are embarrassed to leave and would appreciate it if they could also review in the special education room. (I have a teacher from a different grade, who they don't know, come in to help us role play.)

Part Six (Optional):

- Talk about Learning Styles using the **Multiple Intelligence and Learning Styles** Power Point. The reason I talk about the learning styles is because it helps to show the students where their strengths are helping them to know how they learn best and what types of things to ask for in modifications and in class. It also helps us to see where they may be lacking skills and work towards improving those areas.
- Take learning styles quiz. I have used a number of them from the Internet. Please feel free to search and find one that works best for you and your class.
- Finally we fill in a **Framed Letter to the Teachers** the covers a lot of information from this and other Sections. It has the kids let teachers know about their disability, the ways they learn best, modifications that help them, and what the student has difficulty with.

Part Seven

- Begin discussing Transition: What is it? Why is it important? What do you do with it? Who has it? We also have the kids think of a time in their life they have already transitioned and what they did to get ready for it.
- In 8th grade we begin filling out the required transition materials for the district. Our district has the students do a number of things for this: Sixteen Career Clusters (by www.careerclusters.org), Parents of Teenagers Survival Checklist (by Fremont Union School District), and WisCareers (by www.wiscareers.wisc.edu). There are tons of resources out there to use.
- During this time we also fill out a course selection sheet. I give each student a chart with the required classes they must take in high school. It also lists how many more classes in each area they must sign up for. Then they get a Courses Available List, and fill in the classes they may want to take over the next few years.
- In addition, they sit with me and fill out a **Coordinated Set of Activities** sheet. This sheet can be adapted to fit any needs.
- Another activity we do is a **College Look Ahead Worksheet**. They are required to look at our area tech schools (NTC) and fill in some information on possible career options they have. They also look at what is required for admissions, cost of tuition and things. This is a fun conversation, one of the students' favorites. I try and answer as many questions about college as I can and tell them fun stories. It is important to stress how they can ALL go on to some type of education. A lot of students just think they are not capable of college and don't think about the many other options and accommodations that can be made.
- Our group also takes a field trip to our area tech college and meet with the admissions department about how to get modifications and how students with disabilities can get different services. The school typically shows the kids all the different assistive technologies that they offer too. This is a great motivator for kids.

Part Eight:

- **About Me PowerPoint/Handout** and presentations: Each student is required to make a power point or handout about themselves to keep in their portfolio. I have them cover six key areas: about me, about my disability, my strengths, my weaknesses, how you can help me, how I will be helping myself. There is an **Example Handout** and an **Example Power Point** included in the worksheet area. I give them the choice of using a handout or Power Point.

Part Nine:

- Discuss other areas of special education: IDEA, ADA, the basic laws. I don't spend a lot of time on this area, but go over each briefly. I do let the kids know if they want to learn more to see me for resources.
- **IEP test:** I have the students take this test as a way to show me what they have learned. I like to have lots of documentation. I require each student to pass with a 90% (less than 5 wrong) or they need to correct their mistakes. This is more to be sure they know the information than to give a grade. (This could be broken down into smaller tests too.)
- **End of the Unit Survey:** This is the same survey that was given at the beginning of the unit to compare the answers.
- **End of the Unit Interview:** I do this to get some more in depth information from the students and to see what impacts have been made. I meet with each student individually

Other Activities:

- Read a book about their disability or someone who had a disability
- Talk about the history of how the ADA and IDEA came around
- Interview someone in the community with a disability
- Have someone in that has graduated college who has a disability (this can be very influencing as well)
- Visit a college to see what options and help there is for students with a disability. (we do this an its very interesting to see all the accommodations they can provide)
- A suggestion for grades: if you do this in a class that does not give grades, see if the other teachers will work with you to give your students extra credit for doing the assignments. It worked wonderfully for me.
- Look at all the assistive technologies available for kids to use.