

SUMMARY

IEP Quality for Transition Age Youth with Autism

For students with autism, Individualized Education Program (IEP) content and implementation is one of the most frequently cited complaints leading to legal action (White, 2014). Specifically, parents express concern about a lack of measurable goals and objectives and specific information regarding accommodations and related services documented on the IEP (Ruble, McGrew, Dalrymple, & Jung, 2010). IEPs for transition age youth lack goals and supports related to students' postsecondary goals and inadequate documentation of research-based transition practices (Shearin, Roessler, & Schriener, 1999). For young children with autism, who received an evidence-based consultation intervention, IEP quality predicted achievement of IEP outcomes (Ruble, Dalrymple, & McGrew, 2010). This finding was replicated in a second randomized control trial (Ruble et al., 2013). Taken together, despite federal requirements, IEPs tend to have poor quality even though increased compliance suggests better transition planning and improved outcomes.

The purpose of this paper session is to answer three research questions:

1. What is the quality of IEPs for transition age youth based on Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requirements and National Research Council (NRC) best practice recommendations in education for students with autism?
2. Does IEP quality predict student outcomes for transition age youth with autism?
3. How does quality of post-secondary transition planning measure up to best practices suggested by the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC)?

Content. Twenty dyads of transition age students (16-22) with autism and their special education teachers were recruited as part of a randomized control trial of a consultation intervention (see Table 1). An IEP Quality measure based on IDEA (2004) requirements and NRC (2001) recommendations for best practice in education for students with autism was used to evaluate IEPs on a 0-2 scale, with higher scores indicating better quality (Ruble et al., 2010; see Table 2). The IDEA indicators evaluated descriptions of the students' present level of performance along with the measurability of IEP objectives. The NRC best practice indicators assess how well IEP goals and objectives associate with the core needs for students with autism.

An adapted version of Indicator 13 developed by NSTTAC was used to measure postsecondary transition planning quality in employment, education, and independent living domains (NSTTAC, 2012).

After a presentation on quantitative aspects of IEP quality, case studies on two IEPs of transition age youth with differing autism severity will be examined to outline existing problems with IEP content.

Results. Transition IEPs score an average of 0.62 ($SD = .20$) out of 2 on the NRC indicator, indicating poor quality in terms of breadth of goals that match needs associated with autism. Transition IEPs score an average of 1.51 ($SD = .24$) out of 2 on the IDEA indicator, indicating IEPs fall short of federal requirements for quality written descriptions of IEP objectives. Despite autism's core diagnostic criteria related to social communication skills, only 30% of students had an IEP goal related to social skills and 20% had a goal related communication skills; on the other hand, 60% had goals related to academic skills and 65% had goals related to learning/work skills. On average, transition IEPs had 1.6 postsecondary goals ($SD = 0.8$) with 40% of IEPs including goals for independent living. The current results are preliminary as final data is being

analyzed. Additional results will be provided during the presentation. For instance, the predictability of IEP quality on learning outcomes controlling for child-related factors (e.g., IQ and autism severity) will be studied. Implications of these results suggest IEPs need to be more individualized to the transition age student's needs with more emphasis on social and communication skills to prepare students to be more successful in post-school work, leisure, and independent living activities in the community.

References

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Tables

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Participants (N = 20)	
Teacher Variables	
Mean years teaching	12.3 (SD = 7.6)
Gender (% Female)	85.0
Student Variables	
Mean Age (years)	18.2 (SD = 1.1)
Gender (% Female)	10.0

Table 2
Description of Measures

Indicator	Number of Items	Sample Items
NRC Best Practice	8	Includes goals/objectives for social skills to improve involvement in school and family activities
		Includes goals/objectives for expressive, receptive, and nonverbal communication skills
IDEA Requirements	9	This objective is able to be measured in behavioral terms
		The conditions under which the behavior is to occur are provided (i.e., when, where, with whom)
NSTTAC Indicator 13	12	Is there evidence that the measurable postsecondary goal(s) were based on age appropriate transition assessment?
		Is (are) there postsecondary goal(s) related to the student's IEP goal(s)?