

## Parent and Student Participation in IEP Meetings: Transition-Aged Students Still Overlooked

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### A Quick Look

This article explored how parents and transition-age youth (ages 14 to 21, as defined by the authors) participated in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. The study interviewed parents about their involvement and their opinions about their child's involvement. Researchers wanted to learn more about a parent or student's participation.

"Participation" in the IEP meeting is not defined across research and can be categorized in different ways. Some define participation as the student having a leadership role throughout the meeting, while others define participation as defined behaviors that show attunement. Most importantly, the researchers wanted to identify the predictors of a successful IEP meeting and share practical tips that could be implemented by everyone involved.

### Key Findings

The study found that IEP meetings focus on two categories: school-related topics and transition-related topics. School-related topics involved "courses, class placement, strengths, needs, and IEP goals" while transition-related topics were categorized as "transition goals, post-school work, post-school education, and post-school living" (p. 99). Parents noted that school staff asked more about school-related topics than future plans.

While school staff are well-versed in IEP meeting procedures, meetings like this may be a new experience for students. The authors noted that it is hard to participate in a meeting when you're trying to figure out how meetings operate. Students and parents would benefit from being told about meeting procedures or 'norms' to better equip them to participate in the discussions.

## Putting It Into Practice

The authors suggest several practices that educators could use to improve parent and student involvement in IEP meetings.

1. Inform students and parents about meeting procedures or 'norms' to better equip them to participate in the discussions.
2. Create opportunities for conversations before the IEP meeting to get questions or other input from students and parents [to include family members or other caregivers].
3. Ask for and share data about student progress before the meeting to better evaluate growth and identify gaps. Use evidence-based practices to educate and empower students to understand and contribute to IEP meetings.
4. Set an agenda or meeting structure that allows time to discuss both school-related topics and transition-related topics.
5. Complete the IEP paperwork during the meeting to ensure family and student input.

## Where To Go from Here?

While this article captured the parents' experiences, it did not interview students about their lived experiences. It used an online survey, which might have excluded certain groups of people. The survey was mainly shared through disability organizations, so people who aren't connected to these groups might not have had the opportunity to be represented. Additionally, most parents interviewed were mothers, so fathers' perspectives were largely absent.

A note for future practitioners, as mentioned earlier, is that "participation" is not well defined in this study. There is a fair amount of research examining student participation, but there isn't an agreed upon understanding of what counts as participation.

Finally, practitioners can help define what participation is and will look like during an IEP meeting. Keeping students' and families' voices central during the IEP process will be critical for improved participation, family engagement, and student outcomes. Take time before each IEP meeting to touch base with all parties involved to gather information and share progress. Teach students the purpose of the IEP, their role in the process, and the self-determination skills needed to be actively engaged.

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