

“What’s Your Vision?” - The Importance of a Vision Statement on an IEP

What is a vision statement?

The vision statement is a key section of the IEP (Individualized Educational Program). This is where YOU, the parent, can express your hopes and dreams for your child’s future. Your vision should guide the Team throughout the entire IEP development process, and result in the creation of a program that will bring your child closer to that vision in a meaningful way. This includes the planning of your child’s schedule at school and choice of classes, as well as the planning of supports and services for access to academic and non-academic activities.

What are the laws that support a great vision for individuals with disabilities?

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA

...to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment, and independent living...

[Sec. 601\(d\)\(1\)\(A\)](#), [Sec. 300.1\(a\)](#)

Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring quality opportunity, full participation, independent living and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.

[Sec. 601\(c\)\(1\)](#)

The Massachusetts Program Quality Assurance Services, Compliance and Monitoring, Question and Answer Guide, Fall 2002

For the IEP "vision statement", whose statement is it? The parent's or the Team's or somehow both?

Guidance regarding a Team's proper development of an IEP "vision statement" is provided on page 4 in the Department's June 2001 IEP Process Guide found at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/iep/proguide.pdf>. In general the intent of the IEP Vision Statement is (1) to reflect the thinking of the entire Team (including the parent and the student), (2) to look forward to future goals of the student, (3) to represent high expectations and dreams for the student, and (4) to be reflective of federal requirements for transition aged youth.

How can a “Vision Statement” be woven through my child’s IEP?

IEP 1 - Parent and/or Student Concerns - This is where a parent indicates their concerns for their child that need to be addressed in the IEP.

IEP 1 - Student Strengths and Key Evaluation Results Summary - This is where a parent indicates their child’s interest, strengths, skills, preferences and their personal accomplishments.

IEP1 - Vision Statement - is developed by parents and/or the student, aged 14-22. It is written with high expectations of fruition and indicates desired outcomes for approximately the next 5 years of their child’s future.

IEP 2 - Present Levels of Education Performance A: General Curriculum - How does accessing the general education curriculum support the student’s vision outcome goals? Share accommodations that can be used in a variety of settings.

IEP 3 - Present Levels of Education Performance B: Other Educational Needs - Check all that could support the vision. Be sure to look at extra curriculum activities, non academic activities, behavior needs, travel training or other related services.

IEP 4 - Current Performance Level/Measurable Annual Goals - Think about the **skills** required to accomplish the vision outcome goals and how they could be supported through the measurable goals in the least restrictive environment.

IEP 5 - Service Delivery - Check that the services delivery page reflects the support services and personnel expertise that is imperative for a positive vision outcome for your child.

IEP 6 - Schedule Modification - Does the vision outcome require a shorter day, longer day, shorter year, longer year?
Transportation Services - Can be part of the vision.

IEP 7 - State or District-wide Assessment - How will students take standardized tests including MCAS? You can take MCAS three ways: without accommodations, with accommodations or through a portfolio of the student's best work to access the general curriculum.

IEP 8 - Additional Information - Any part of the vision that was not supported in another part of the IEP document can be added here. i.e. Assistive Technology, common planning time, communication log ...

How can related services support vision?

Vision can be supported throughout the IEP and it can be embraced in **related services** (IEP 3). For example, related services in IEP 3 can support ‘**friendships**’ which could translate into social pragmatic groups, social skills support and extended day services.

Listed below are other related services that are supported by the law and could be incorporated into a vision and supported by the school:

Parent Training/In home training	Early Identification
Speech Language Pathology	Music Therapy
Physical Therapy	Medical Services
Occupational Therapy	Vision Therapy
Counseling Services	Recreation (Therapeutic)
Audiological Services	Rehab Counseling Services
Psychological Services	Art Therapy
Adapted Physical Ed	Transportation Services
School Health Services	Orientation and Mobility
Social Work Services in the school	Assistive Technology

VISION STATEMENT DEVELOPMENT

Vision Statement Considerations

- Parents should enter a Team meeting prepared to talk about their child's hopes and dreams for the future.
- When preparing to develop their child's vision statement, parents may struggle to rectify the goals they set for the child they expected with the realities that face their child who has a disability. Even though it may be difficult and it will likely be a different set of goals, parents must embrace a new vision and create new dreams for the child they now love and support.
- A vision statement should be founded upon the expectation that the child will be treated with dignity and will have equal access to participate in the life of their school both with disabled and non-disabled peers. Parents should assume their child will have opportunities and will face challenges, and like their able-bodied peers, they will be able to strive and succeed or fails, just as others do.
- The development of the vision statement should be driven by the parent's high expectations and the child's hopes, dreams and interests, no matter what their age. Parents are cautioned no to limited their vision for their child based on what they feel is realistic or what skills or abilities the child now possesses.
- The law intends for the Vision Statement to guide the Team in the IEP development in order to create a program that will bring the child closer to their described vision in a meaningful way.
- As the child grows and matures their Vision Statement will be updated and revised many times. Each time this happens it is an opportunity for the child and parents to acknowledge and reflect on how education has helped the child reach his/her goals.

What do parents bring to the vision?

- A rich history of the child's life and the unique perspective gained from parenting.
- A life time of experience in supporting their child.
- An understanding of how the disability impacts their child.
- The passions of their child's heart and how those might translate into future outcomes.

What might result if parents do not participate in the vision development?

- A vision written without parents participation may not reflect an accurate understanding of the child's disability characteristics.
- A vision written without parents participation may not represent the hopes and dreams of the child and parents, and it may not match their goals and expectations.
- A vision written without parents participation may not reflect the child's interests and skills.
- A vision written without parents participation may misguide the Team's IEP development in a direction where the child doesn't want to go.
- Your child's vision could be written by professionals who have an understanding of the disability characteristics but do not have a full understanding of how the disability affects your child.
- If the vision is written only by professionals it may not match your expectations for your child's future.

Is a vision statement required to be realistic?

- The vision statement identifies the student's hopes and dreams for the future. There is no requirement for the student's hopes and dreams to be based on pragmatic or logic. However, pragmatism and logic are acceptable components of the vision statement is the student so chooses.
- The vision is intended to inform and guide the Team through the IEP development so that the education program brings the student closer to realizing those hopes and dreams.
- Children, teens and young adults will discover, develop and redefine their passions, interests and preferences several times as they grow and mature. Parents, teachers and other adults should support students' development and self discovery. Discouragement, doubt and resistance from trusted adults can cause lasting harmful effects on a young person's self esteem. Success and failures are just different types of learning experiences.

Developing a Vision Statement for a child entering elementary school

- Vision statements for a child entering elementary school should address the development and needs of the whole child. Academic, social, physical, artistic and character growth can be incorporated into the vision.

- Consider if the child has particular areas of strength or weakness that could be addressed by special education?
- Parents should take into consideration what experiences and opportunities for growth and development are provided to their school district's non-disabled peers. Children who have a disability are guaranteed equal access under federal civil rights laws.
- In the vision development parents can draw a connection between their values and goals for their child and the child's classroom and school environment. For example, a parent's vision for a socially well adjusted and peer connected child could be undermined by a placement in a substantially separate classroom with few opportunities for interactions with non-disabled peers.

Developing a Vision Statement for a child entering middle school

- Middle school is often a time of unsettling transition and adjustment. Parents would be wise to incorporate these realities into their child's vision development. A vision statement can prompt a Team to think about strategies and supports that would help the child with the transition to middle school. The Team can support the child's transition and adjustment to the new environment by providing organizational support, tutoring or peer mentoring; or the Team may designate weekly peer group meetings with the school adjustment counselor to assist and promote 'friend development'. A well crafted vision could prompt the Team to direct a hand-selection of the child's class schedule to assure a 'circle of friends' will be in the child's class and/or at lunch.
- The vision statement can reflect on past programs and supports in order to inform current and future programs and supports. If a past program included a well developed network of support that enabled the child to make meaningful progress in their education program then it would be appropriate to high light the effectiveness of those supports in the current vision statement.

Developing a Vision Statement for a child entering high school

- By the time a student enters high school they have already begun to think about their future and what it would look like. Where will they live? Where will they work? Who will be part of their community and support network? In what kinds of activities will they participate? When a student reaches high school their vision statement should clearly identify and include their passions, interests and preferences.
- As students mature they reign in impulsivity and make more deliberate decisions which are reflective of and influenced by life experience and goals. To the maximum extent possible, students at this age should be the primary authors of their vision development. This is the same for students with and without disabilities; all young adults are engaged in a journey of self discovery!
- The internet contains a number of downloadable vision development tools that can be utilized to help students develop a comprehensive and meaningful vision statement to inform and guide the Team in IEP development.

Can a vision be changed?

Visions are living, breathing statements that can take on many forms throughout the years. The important thing is to write one!

How can I get more information on vision?

<http://fcsn.org/pti/topics/vision/index.html> www.concordspedpac.org/IEPvision.htm
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/iep/proguide.pdf> www.doe.mass.edu
<http://www.fcsn.org/parentguide/pguide1.html> www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/ltrs/masterplan.htm

Where can I get a copy of a blank IEP? - www.doe.mass.edu

Many thanks to Julie Sinclair from the Federation for Children with Special Needs (www.FCSN.org) who's article was directly quoted for much of this presentation.

A Parent's Guide to Special Education

**A Joint Publication of the Federation for Children with Special Needs
and the Massachusetts Department of Education <http://www.fcsn.org/parentguide/pgintro.html>**

The IEP is a contract between you and the school. As with any contract you should make sure you fully understand the terms to which you are agreeing and make certain that everything that was agreed to verbally is written in the contract.

Input from parents and students is key IEP information.

The first part of the IEP requests information regarding the concerns of the parent and/or student, key evaluation results, and the future vision for the student. This is an opportunity for you, as a parent, to talk about your concerns and what you want special education to accomplish for your child. Consider: What information from the evaluation report seems particularly important? Has your child expressed some particular concerns or desires that you think can be helped by special education? Are there areas of particular strength or weakness of the student that you want to make sure are included? In addition, the Team should consider all information including the student's medical and educational history and personal interests. This discussion provides an opportunity for you and the school to discuss what special education can do and what it might not be able to do. This part of the IEP process can also be an opportunity for you and your child to express thoughts about the educational program as it has been in the past and how it could change to better meet your child's needs.

Student Vision: Parents and students should enter the Team meeting prepared to talk about their hopes and dreams for the child's future. If the student is able to indicate what he/she would like, then the student's vision should be clearly indicated, if not the vision will be developed by the family. In discussing a vision for the future, the Team should be careful not to limit the discussion only to what they believe is "realistic"--everyone needs to have dreams and wishes. The law provides that those dreams and wishes should help to point out a direction for the Team. This vision should guide the Team throughout the IEP development process in order to create a program that will bring the student closer to that vision in a meaningful way and help the student to see how education can help the student reach his or her personal goals.

QUESTIONS FOR THE VISION STATEMENT

Considerations to think about when planning you're child's vision:

What do they love to do?
(Describe behaviorally)

Skill/Target Behavior:

Do they have any sensory needs?
(If so list here and include strategies)

Skill/Target Behavior:

Describe your child's communication system?
(Phrases, sign language, icons, eye gaze etc...)

Skill/Target Behavior:

How do they deal with changes in their routine?
(Describe behaviorally)

Skill/Target Behavior:

How do they transition from one activity to another?
(What do you and others do to make it go more smoothly?)

Skill/Target Behavior:

How do they interact with their peers?
(Initiate conversations? Play next to them?)

Skill/Target Behavior:

Are they able to understand social situations?
(Display appropriate behavioral expectations in a variety of settings)

Skill/Target Behavior:

Are there other things that could impact progress?
(Changes in the family, new sibling, friends, move)

What are they communicating as their vision for the future?
(Doesn't need to be realistic?)

What is your child's learning style?
(When you are going to teach your child something new, how do you do it?)

Stay Positive!

(List their strengths, interests, preferences and accomplishments)

A Parent's Guide to Special Education