

Administrivia
Interlocal 637
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Last week I was invited to speak at a night class for Labette County Junior College. The students were mostly 18-20 year olds just starting college course work. Our discussion was about student diversity in the classroom. In addition, I provided a timeline of events that lead to our current IDEA.

After class, one of students came up to thank me and as I moved on to the next student, she touched my arm and said, "No, really thanks"! I could see that her eyes were welling up with tears. Now she had my full attention. She shared with me that she had grown up in a small rural Kansas school district and that they didn't have any special education classes. Because of her age, I knew she had to be mistaken, there had to be services. Before I could inquire further, she corrected herself. She said that her school *had* special education services but that she was never *considered* for services. She had trouble keeping up with other students in her grade and was frustrated, but seemed to have few options. As a middle school student, she and her family moved to a new community in Kansas. The teachers in this new school quickly recognized her need for support. They discovered that she suffered from a learning disability and she was provided with an IEP and services.

The detail and clarity of her story and the tears that came when she shared it, told me how personal this experience had been for her. She told me quite clearly that her IEP saved her. It was crystal clear that this thought was woven into every fiber of her being. She finished by sharing that she would not be taking college courses today were it not for the intervention of her IEP.

I couldn't stop thinking about this young lady and the positive and indelible mark that special education made on her life. You never know when or how you are

improving a student's life. But, I am most certain that special education teachers and all the supporting cast who are a part of each IEP are saving students every day.

Another story I want to share occurred as I was visiting a low incident classroom. I was observing Angie Poppe who is a PT for the Interlocal. It just so happened that a new student to Southeast Kansas started in class that very day. This little guy was a preschool student who came into the classroom in a fetal position in a stroller. He had a feeding tube and didn't act like he could so much as wiggle or even respond to the environment around him. He came with no IEP. In fact, there was no documentation except what was shared verbally by his parents.

So, here we were with a new student and not much information. We didn't know how fragile his health conditions were or what strengths he might have. A miracle unfolded right before my eyes. For the next 30 minutes, Angie carefully completed several activities with him to assess his needs. She found that he had good upper body strength. He also had low vision that was most affected when he had to focus on objects travelling from left to right. His ability to track up and down were pretty good. With continued work she discovered that his hearing was somewhat impaired. I was so impressed that Angie could determine all of this in such a short amount of time and begin to develop a plan on how to improve this little guy's quality of life.

In short, I have been reflecting on the importance of all those IEP documents that you complete. Angie's little student came with nothing. Now, he has a file that will help him wherever he goes. The quality of the goals and objectives and the important detail that is woven within that information is paramount to his continuum of success.

The lesson I learned and that I want to convey to you is this. Write IEP's as if you are writing a plan for your own child. Paperwork is a pain, but when you write your next IEP, think of it as a story leading to success for that child. Keep up the good

work and know that I realize you are out there every day helping children. I appreciate each and every one of you and all you do! Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

Dan Duling