2022

Models and Professional Development for High-Quality Goal Writing Among Special Education Team Members

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

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MA, Walden University, 2014

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Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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December 2022

Abstract

Special education team members have shown an inability to write rigorous individualized education program (IEP) goals that meet students' needs. Researchers have focused on special education team members' ability to write IEP goals, and the phenomenon continues to be a vital concern. This basic qualitative study was conducted to examine the abilities of special education team members in writing IEP goals that align with student needs. The research questions focus on how IEP teams currently develop goals for students that align with best practices in the local setting. Gathering and analyzing data from special education team members regarding their experiences with IEP goal writing brings awareness to improvements necessary for the process. The framework for this study was Hauser's operation, benchmark, scale, and evaluate model. Open-ended semistructured interviews were conducted with 11 special education team members to gather data. A priori coding was used to analyze, label, and organize themes from the data. A color-coded systematic process was used to capture the collected data's in-depth meaning further. The analysis revealed that special education team members need a comprehensive and personalized model of steps to write high-quality IEP goals that meet student needs. These findings led to the creation of a professional development program to improve the IEP goal-writing process among special education team members by creating a model to support team members. Stronger IEP goal writing skills matched to student needs will increase student learning and may lead to greater satisfaction among special education team members, both of which have potential implications for positive social change.

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Dedication

"Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? …He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." (Isaiah 40:28-29). My mother comes to mind when I read these scriptures from the Bible. Early in life, she instilled in me that there was nothing that I could not do with the help of the Lord. She often added the phrase, "You can if you think you can." With the help of the Lord and incorporating her favorite scripture and phrase into my everyday life, I have reached goals that would not have otherwise been possible. Very often, my mother or one of my nine siblings would ask, "Are you finished yet?" And to that, today, I say yes. Thank you, family. I complete this life-long goal for Elisa, E J, James, my children, and Journie Rae, my grandson. My parents before me prepared and paved the road to excellence for me, and now I, for you. The road to excellence is a bumpy road of frequent character refining and purposeful acts of kindness and self-sacrifice. As children, you would often ask, "Why do I have to do this?" I would answer, "Because it makes the world a better place for people to live in." I especially dedicate this page to my sweet husband, Roman, with whom this accomplishment has been much easier to obtain. God sent you into my life at the right time. You showed me love, devotion, and support through your actions. You took over every household task imaginable for countless days wholeheartedly without my asking. You gave me the time to pursue my delayed dreams and goals. There is no way to show you my complete gratitude, but I will keep trying. My greatest supporter through this academic journey, I pray I always find you beside me, sharing the ride.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the support of my research review committee, Dr. Andersson, Dr. Schroll, and Dr. Hoffman. Thank you for your direction and encouragement, even when I was frustrated. I am highly grateful to Dr. Andersson, who, in her wisdom, knew the right amount of help to offer and allowed me to reach, stretch and grow on my own. In this literary pilgrimage, the strength to continue came from God, family, friends, and looking at others who finished their doctoral journey before me. I now lend my scholarly voice to others aimed at making effective social change in the field of education and research.

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Section 1: The Problem

Special education teams have frequently shown an inability to write well-developed goals and objectives that meet the needs of students with disabilities (Bray & Russell, 2018; Kurth et al., 2019; Yell & Bateman, 2019). Because special educators have not had sufficient training (Yell & Bateman, 2019), they have resorted to using goal banks, which do not allow for individualizing per student need (Fox et al., 2021; Goran et al., 2020). Individualized education programs (IEPs) lack individuality because special education team members lack education and training support (Fox et al., 2021; Hamrick et al., 2021). According to Kurth et al., (2019), IEP goals are written without rigor and lack quality. Teachers often do not have enough time and resources to meet the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and produce goals not well-suited for students and lead to incorrect assessment data (Greene, 2018).

Past researchers have shown an interest in how an IEP reads, as well as its content; studies have revealed that special educators struggle aligning goals that meet student needs (Hoover et al., 2018; Hott et al., 2021). Special education team members continue to reuse old data from previous IEP goals (Hedin & DeSpain, 2018). Hedin and DeSpain found that teachers simply copy and paste the same goals from the prior year's IEP, which does not reflect student progress or lack of progress.

States must provide students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) that meets state educational guidelines under IDEA (Jameson et al., 2020). State standards include presenting specific goals that could reveal student progress (Jameson et al., 2020). In *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, the U.S.

Supreme Court ruled that a student's IEP demands relevancy and aggressiveness with effortful targets to incur reasonable progress, which is a pivotal point for all students who qualify for special education (Yell & Bateman, 2019). In addition, a two-part FAPE standard is being imposed in the U.S. Courts of Appeals that supports assessing the relevancy of a student's IEP (Prince et al., 2018). Present researchers have affirmed that individualized goals and objectives prepare and enable students to thrive in their academic and community environment (Hedin & DeSpain, 2018). Therefore, IEP goals are a necessity to a special education student's success in the classroom and must be written properly (Rojo et al., 2021).

The Local Problem

In one local school district, teachers often have many questions about connecting relevant goals to a student's performance. The administrators realized that although some IEP goals were well written, they did not yield an authentic representation of the child's baseline performance. At the local level, a professional gap in practice was evident in the difference between special educators' abilities and how they write relevant IEP goals (special education director, personal communication, October 1, 2017). One local special education coordinator on the southeastern coast of the United States stated that during the facilitation of IEP meetings, they often noticed a disconnect between goals and student abilities (personal communication, February 1, 2018). According to a special education director on the southeastern coast of the United States, special education team members do not receive relevant training to write active IEP goals and objectives (personal communication, October 1, 2017). The director of exceptional children (EC) at the local

setting of a small, economically challenged school district in the southeast region of the United States reported routinely working with special education team members who struggle with writing goals that match student needs; the director has informed them continuously of the importance of component alignment (personal communication, December 1, 2018). At the same local setting, the EC preschool director said they are often sent to area schools to assess the IEP development before scheduled meetings and has found many inconsistencies with IEP goals and student needs (personal communication, December 1, 2018).

Rationale

The purpose of this study was to examine the abilities of special education team members who write IEP goals that align with student needs and bring awareness to the fundamentals needed to improve the process. Insight requires an observation of the challenges and obstacles that prevent special education team members from writing applicable goals. Team members may feel distress and lack self-determination because of their inabilities (Chu & Garcia, 2021; Hurwitz et al., 2021; Räty et al., 2019; Stelitano et al., 2021). Special education team members may be unaware of the vital role they play in the success of a student in the classroom. U.S. Supreme Court case *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* brought awareness of parental complaints regarding vague IEP goals that fail to incur reasonable progress (Elder et al., 2018; Zirkel, 2021). Current research has confirmed that well-written goals are essential to preparing and providing means for a student with special needs to have access to the classroom (Hedin & DeSpain, 2018). Appropriate IEP goals are vital to the success of students with special

needs, as they connect their level of functioning to a map for improvement and growth (Barton, 2018; Elder et al., 2018). For example, Barton (2018) found that students who had learning disabilities were able to improve on learning multiplication facts over time with the use of specifically design interventions. Without this personalized pathway, students lacked the appropriate accommodations to allow them access to the general education environment (Barton, 2018; Wilmshurst & Brue, 2018).

Special education teams require competency to meet the requirements to produce IEP goals specific to student needs (Love et al., 2020; Swain et al., 2021). When team members have proper support to write meaningful goals, they feel accomplished in their abilities and performance (Love et al., 2020). Systematic changes across multiple disciplines are needed to support the competency of special education team members in writing equitable goals that align with student ability. These changes include (a) examining the disassociation between special education team members and in-service IEP training and support in the educational setting, (b) identifying what types of administrative support are beneficial to special education teachers to increase IEP competency, and (c) exploring practicable tools of in-service learning for special education team members to help write high-quality goals that align with the needs of special education students (Gesel et al., 2021). Thus, the purpose of this descriptive case study was to examine the abilities of special education team members to write IEP goals that align with the needs of the student and bring awareness to the fundamentals needed to improve the process.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were pertinent to this case study:

Benchmark: The achievement marks or criteria from baseline data ensuring each component is applied one at a time; this prevents unexplained criteria from being found in IEP goals (Dawson & Guare, 2018; Drake, 2020).

Evaluate: The way special education team members list the evaluator(s), evaluation times, environment, and collection method and assess doable approaches to data collection and evaluation methods, eliminating unspecified evaluation frequencies (Hauser, 2017).

Operationalize: The process by which special education team members write measurable goals specific related to the skills and behaviors of the student, which helps team members understand the concepts instrumental in reducing vagueness (Harmon et al., 2020; Hedin & DeSpain, 2018; Lesh, 2020).

Scale: The assessment tool to collect data and create practical benchmarks. The measurement scale is constructed from what is examined, how it is described, the interpretation methods, and the aim for student progress (Goran et al., 2020).

Significance of the Study

Policymakers may use the findings from this study to provide insight to design and mandate collaboration opportunities for special educators based on IDEA requirements. This study might be of assistance to universities in creating active pre-service learning for special educators. School administrators may use study findings to determine relevant in-service professional education that supports the team's ability to

align goals with student needs. The local problem being examined through personal accounts may bring awareness and influence administrative leadership to routinely evaluate teacher IEP competency in all areas. The study findings may provide information that can be used to formulate practical modules of professional learning for special education team members who lack skills in writing IEP goals that align with student needs (Hott et al., 2019). Hott et al. stated that teachers located outside of towns and cities need regulated and meaningful training to address the inconsistencies found in IEPs. Being isolated from abundant sources of support, teachers may not have connection with other team members and useful modes of training. Implementing a model to assist special education teams with writing goals that align with student needs is not only practical but also beneficial. Informing stakeholders of the needs of the special education team may increase relevant trainings and increase team collaboration and support.

Research Questions

Two research questions were used to direct the study and provide the foundation to uncover relevant information about the abilities of special education team members to write goals that align to the needs of students:

RQ1: What is the current practice at the local setting for developing IEPs for students with disabilities?

RQ2: How do IEP committees at the local setting develop IEP goals that align with the operationalize, benchmark, scale, and evaluate model based on best practices?

Review of the Literature

The literature review contains seminal works, research studies, and professional articles about the ability of special education team members to write goals that align with student needs. The Walden Library, Google Scholar, and the Educational Research Information Center database supports the current literature. The university's online library was used to locate peer-reviewed articles published within the last 5 years from the following databases: Academic Search Complete, Education Source, Eric, Sage Journals, ScienceDirect, SocINDEX with Full Text, Taylor and Francis Online, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. Search terms used included *IEP goals, special education team members, IEP teams, individual education plan, special educators, IEP goal training, IEP goals and objectives, academic and functional progress, special education student, benchmarks and assessments, IEP outcomes, methods of evaluation, scales of measurement, special educational need, special education, specially designed instruction, teacher preparation, teacher knowledge, pre-service teacher training, in-service professional development,* and *measurable annual goal.*

Peered-reviewed journal articles were used to add value as necessary to further strengthen the literature review. Special education concepts have been grounded and influenced by preexisting literature. An interpretation of the research involves a summary of terminology and processes. In addition, I explain the hindrances that special education team members experience when writing relevant goals and the benefits to applying the sequential steps of the operationalize, benchmark, scale, and evaluate (OBSE) framework.

Hauser's (2017) OBSE was the conceptual framework for this study in which I sought information regarding creating well-written, practical IEP goals. Hauser (2017) designed various programs to assist special education teams with writing goals that meet specific student needs. These programs were constructed to help special education teams collect and analyze student data (Hauser, 2017). Hauser's OBSE framework was developed to reach students considered at-risk: students, K–12, who had a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school (Hauser, 2017). According to Hauser, the OBSE framework helps special education team members write IEP goals using relevant methods of collecting, analyzing, and evaluating student data.

Hauser (2017) illustrated a useful model of successive components to guide the input of each team member. Following Hauser's model, special education team members collaborate and share the accumulated information and thus successfully build a complete student profile from which they can write practical goals that meet the student's needs. Hauser found that four successive components bring a usefulness to the inexperienced, undertrained, or veteran special education team member in developing and writing goals that are rigorous and align to student needs: operationalize, benchmark, scale, and evaluate. Additionally, special education team members can collaborate in writing IEP goals that align with student needs using Hauser's model.

Operationalize

Hauser's (2017) first component of the OBSE framework, operationalize, is a systematic way of helping special education team members target character traits that build a complete picture of the student, starting with the academic and functional

behaviors the student displays. Special education team members need to know how best to support students with special needs in the classroom. Special education students require specifically designed instruction, so knowing precise facts about their academic strengths and weakness can help educators build a complete student profile. Determining what leads to success for a student with special needs in the classroom requires input from all members of the special education team. To do this, special educators need a systematic way to frame essential factors for the student.

Creating a baseline summary of the student's abilities in the present level of academic and functional performance (PLAAFP) section of the IEP requires diligence from all members of the special education team. Because the PLAAFP includes all the information found in the operationalize component, each team members' information is essential to build a complete profile. Research has shown that PLAAFPs tend to be vague and short; many special educators are unsure of what to include in the abilities section of the IEP (Hott et al., 2019; Kern et al., 2019). An IEP addressed through comprehensive team effort supports student progress, and special education members who engage in this practice understand the student better and produce more effective goals (Kern et al., 2019). Putting all the information together to form a complete picture of the student is necessary to ensure other IEP components are appropriate, such as the annual goals (Hott et al., 2021). Special education team members have different views and experiences working with a student and collect various kinds of data regarding the student's strengths, weaknesses, and skills (Kern et al., 2019; Ruppar et al., 2018). According to Ruppar et al. special education team members' expertise directly affects how students with special

needs receive support in the classroom; however, student support services remain inappropriate if there is an unclear profile of the student's PLAAFP (Hott et al., 2021; Kern et al., 2019).

Special education team member expertise comes from knowledge about the student's learning needs. A complete profile develops when special education team members meet to share information about the student's abilities. The completed profile helps the special educator write goals that directly relate to the student (Kangas, 2018; Tran et al., 2018; Yell et al., 2020). Special education team members share their views, are attentive, and welcome feedback when they can work together (Hargreaves, 2019; Hauser, 2017). Collaboration of supports directly helps teachers form the baseline data necessary to develop benchmarks.

Benchmark

Hauser's (2017) second component of the OBSE framework, benchmark, is a detailed, short-term objective created from the student's baseline data; the benchmark is necessary for developing an annual goal and is beneficial to student success in the classroom (Schmitt et al., 2017). Benchmarks are an essential step in the sequential process. Benchmarks specify the temporary steps a student takes to reach their annual goal. Short-term objectives also provide a way to measure and monitor student progress toward goals. Specific benchmarks designed based on student abilities genuinely measure student performance (Bowring et al., 2018; Stiefel et al., 2021).

Some special educators have difficulty writing parameters that characterize a student's ability (Stiefel et al., 2021). For example, Stiefel et al. identified a problem with

creating effective benchmarks for special education students in inclusion classes and noted that IEP teams face demands to create and implement effective tools for students with academic performance. Team members need to know the necessary structures for writing useful benchmarks; they require regulations and strategies to do so (Reed et al., 2019; Stiefel et al., 2021).

Hauser's (2017) OBSE framework is consistent with findings from Bowring et al. (2018) and Schmitt et al. (2017) that showed a need for benchmarks to be dependable and connect to the behavior monitored. Through interim tasks that are measurable and doable, the practical benchmark could motivate students to reach their annual goal (Hauser, 2017). To create useful benchmarks, generated from the student profile, requires each special education team member's input. Special education team members determine the time needed to observe and monitor the benchmark (Hauser, 2017). Team members make instructional decisions based on effectively monitoring student progress or lack thereof (Hauser, 2017). Hauser's 2017 framework provides a similar safeguard in managing how IEP goals are developed, which helps secure an active process. From the benchmark data, the special education team further works together to develop definitive scales to score the student's performance and behaviors.

Measurement Scale

The third component of Hauser's (2017) OBSE framework, scale, is a tool used to gauge student ability to perform an objective. Measurement scales rely on (a) the ability measured, (b) how the skill is defined, (c) the evaluation method used, and (d) the skill's criteria. Measurement scales allow special education team members to determine the

strength of the student's abilities, the progress made, and follow performance over the length of the objective reliably and credibly. Special education team members learn whether the scale is interrelated, reliable, and valid. Then the retrieved data are used to assess goal relevancy and support proper related services.

Special education teams have been found weakest in their ability to measure student progress (Räty et al., 2019). Special education teams have problems with creating and implementing an assessment tool (Austin & Filderman, 2020; Jung et al., 2018; Ruble et al., 2018). Ensuring that assessments are appropriate can be complicated. If the approach is not authentic to gauge student needs, the data will yield false results (Austin & Filderman, 2020). For example, Austin and Filderman (2020) showed the necessity of implementing a model of steps to help special educators evaluate student ability to gauge whether the intervention was working or needed to be adjusted. Following scale rules when measuring a student's performance can increase data reliability, and using the data effectively helps special educators make decisions regarding student instruction and therefore increase skill mastery (Austin & Filderman, 2020).

Input from all members of the special education team is necessary to develop and implement practical assessment tools (Conley et al., 2019; Timothy & Agbenyega, 2018). Furthermore, each team member needs to understand the design intent (Räty et al., 2019). Hauser's (2017) template can support special education team members in developing measurable, clearly written goals. According to Hauser, a template may prove beneficial in assisting team members in creating accurate scales to measure student behaviors. Without a model, special education team members may write vague and questionable

goals. Using OBSE, special education team members can discuss and plan an active process that will yield valuable data. Hauser (2017) stated that the scale and evaluation method must correspond, and special education team members must make certain that there is an agreement between the two.

Evaluate

In Hauser's (2017) OBSE framework, the evaluation component is the method used to monitor and document student performance. Collected data must be accurate and reliable. Well-written goals and objectives that authentically portray the student are essential to the evaluation process; these goals and objectives arise from the operationalization, benchmark, and scale components (Hauser, 2017). Evaluate takes the guesswork out of the who, when, where, and how of evaluating student performance (Hauser, 2017). Special education team members decide who will assess the student, when the assessments will take place, where the evaluation will take place, and how often the student data will be evaluated (Hauser, 2017).

The competencies and preparation educators need to support special education instruction is a current vital concern (Konrad et al., 2019; Sandigo et al., 2020). Special educators need to be able to determine, conduct, explain, and formulate assessments and create goals that align with students' needs (Sayeski et al., 2019; Walker & Barry, 2018). All team members' input is necessary because team members' views of a student may differ (Hauser, 2017).

Special education team members have difficulty collecting data regularly (Ruble et al., 2018) and tracking student progress consistently (Sayeski et al., 2019). Because

special educators lack assessment competency, they are not able to monitor student progress effectively (Kozikoğlu & Albayrak, 2022), and this negatively affects students (Hott et al., 2021). Although special education team members know data collection is valuable to assess student progress and inform instruction, few have training and experience in engaging in the practice (Sayeski et al., 2019).

Guidelines, such as the OBSE framework, benefit special educators in developing relevant, rigorous, and lawful IEP goals that meet the new standards of the U.S. Supreme Court (Cramer et al., 2018). Members learn how to monitor student performance. Each member has input and shares information about the student (Al-Shammari & Hornby, 2020; Peltomäki et al., 2021; Travers, 2020), and special education team members work better when time is allotted to collaborate, as assessment data are crucial to practical, measurable goals that guide instruction (Al-Shammari & Hornby, 2020; Travers, 2020).

Individual Education Program

An individual education program (IEP) is a legal document for the student who needs educational and functional support in the classroom (Jachova et al., 2018). An IEP is also the foundation of the Individual Education Disability Act (IDEA), which supplies services to student with a disability (Bryant et al., 2020; Goran et al., 2020). According to Jachova et al. (2018), the IEP is a progressive document that includes specific details about the student's PLAAF in the general classroom. This legal document provides annual goals and possibly short-term objectives of skill or steps the student will do to show mastery within a year (Jachova et al., 2018). Because the annual goal is essential to

the IEP, it must be understood by all members of the special education team (Al-Shammari & Hornby, 2020; Jachova et al., 2018).

To write practical goals, special education team members need knowledge about the student, their academic and functional requirements, and how to support their learning in the classroom (Sayeski et al., 2019). Being able to share and combine knowledge takes practice because each special education team member has a different experience with the student (Al-Shammari & Hornby, 2020). Trying to meet during instructional hours can be frustrating for special education team members (Gesel et al., 2021; Gomez-Najarro, 2020). However, IEP meetings are a legitimate reason for collaboration (Al-Shammari & Hornby, 2020). Team members need purposeful allotted times to collaborate (Dillon et al., 2021). Dunn et al. reveals the positive outcomes of special education team members when allotted time to share their relevant information (Dillon et al., 2021). All members learn more about the student and how to best support them (Al-Shammari & Hornby, 2020), and they develop better skills to the IEP process (Ní Bhroin & King, 2020). Because learning requires a scaffold of comprehension components, providing different supports has been proven substantially beneficial to the expected learning outcome (Dillon et al., 2021). Policymakers and educational leaders need to understand the problems that special education team members face and establish district practices to support their ability to write applicable IEP goals.

Literature has shown that students supported by well written IEP goals make academic and functional progress (Dillon et al., 2021; Finnerty et al., 2019; Hott et al., 2021). Educators have a strong influence over the academic and functional progress of

students (Burkholder et al., 2019; Hurwitz et al., 2022); therefore, special educators need skills and training to address the individualized learning needs of their students. Bettini et al. shows that special educators' teaching quality improves when training is collaborative and generalized across school districts. Local school administrators become involved in meeting the needs of special educators in gaining skills necessary in supporting student learning and progress (Burkholder et al., 2019).

Current research studies sparsely document how well IEP goals have been effectively implemented in inclusive settings (Dean & Chang, 2021). Raising awareness of the needs of special education teachers to write high quality goals is beneficial for students. Students show little progress when special education team members write ineffective IEP goals (Rokowski, 2020).When IEP goals have errors, teachers lose the opportunity to assess the student's actual performance and overlook their real strengths and capabilities (Elder et al., 2018).

However, a direct correlation exists between quality IEP goals and IEP proficiency (Firestone et al., 2021). Special education teams face problems in preparing quality IEP goals. According to Kozikoğlu and Albayrak (2022) and Berry (2021), member ineptness stems from the IEP teams' lack of skillfulness, insufficient training, and limited time to collaborate. Even though current research studies suggest members of the IEP team work together, special educators in rural settings are often isolated from continuous opportunities of professional development, and peer support (Berry, 2021).

Research has shown that special education team members are ill-prepared in demands of collaborating to write IEP goals (Mueller et al., 2019; Yell & Bateman,

2018). Because special education team members receive no coaching and lack support and guidance from their administrators, they have feelings of uncertainty and doubtfulness (Dinnebeil et al., 2019; Farrell, 2019). According to Dinnebeil et al. (2019), special education team members feel inadequate to serve students. According to Farrell, (2019) the lack of support from administration makes teachers feel abandoned. Special educators need training, time, and help to understand the process and think about how their roles interrelate with student success (Farrell, 2019). Providing ample opportunities to learn these new skills is the foundation for broadening IEP competency.

When special education team members strategically gain new skills, they use them during additional learning opportunities (Cheon et al., 2018). The acquired abilities directly affect students reaching their targeted goals (Cheon et al., 2018; Love et al., 2019). Hauser's (2017) model supports special education team members' ability to write goals systematically to ensure the IDEA requirements.

According to strict mandates from the Supreme Court, annual IEP goals must now be rigorous with the expectation of student progress (Yell & Bateman, 2018). Additionally, the Supreme Court and research studies further suggest practical solutions to school districts to help their special educators write relevant goals. One possible solution is providing a model to guide the process (Brown & Green, 2020). Using a model to guide the IEP goal writing process has been richly documented in current literature and in many research studies (Brown & Green, 2020; Hauser, 2017; Hedin & DeSpain, 2018). Special education team members can benefit from a model by gaining in-depth knowledge and meaningful collaboration.

Implications

Special education team members have shown an inability to write goals that align to student needs. The gap in practice lies in the absence and implementation of successful models to write and increase IEP goal writing competency. Grounded in Hauser's OBSE framework, using sequential steps has proven to increase the ability of special education team members to write practical goals. The implementation of a model may be comprehensive for special education team members. The guesswork of how to develop authentic profiles of students' abilities may dissipate. Team members may not stress over an approaching IEP meeting; instead, they may feel efficient, skillful, knowledgeable, and experienced. Using a specially designed model has the potential to increase special education team member competency and affect change for the student. I am considering a professional development project from the anticipated findings of this study. I have the information to implement an exclusive model to support special education team members' ability to create IEP goals that align with student needs. Given appropriate IEP goals, students can show academic improvement and make real-time progress in the classroom. Literature has shown that students supported by strong-based IEP goals make academic and functional progress (Finnerty et al., 2019; Hott et al., 2021). Because special education team members are required to follow IEP mandates governed by the U.S. Supreme Court, annual goals must now show adequate student progress. Considering the benefits of a useful tool to support special education team members, it stands reasonable to provide what works. If a model improves the way that special education team members write goals, then goals will be straightforward, simple to

implement, and monitor for effectiveness, which improves IEP goal writing competency. Possible project direction based on anticipated data collection and analysis findings include a specially designed model to support special education team members in writing goals that align with student needs.

Summary

Special education team members have shown an inability to write goals that align with student needs. Special education team members lack skill in writing useful goals (Fu et al., 2020; Russo-Campisi, 2020; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2020). The weakest area of the IEP is the PLAAF, where a precise profile of the student exists (Findley et al., 2022; Fu et al., 2020). The foundation of the IEP effectiveness lies in the ability to build a complete profile of the student's weaknesses and strengths (Fu et al., 2020; Harmon et al., 2020). Knowing what the student can do ensures that his capabilities are known. Then IEP goals are formed based on the student's abilities. A complete student profile happens when special education team members share the vision of positioning the student for IEP goal progress (Black & Hill, 2020; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2020). According to Black and Hill (2020), the collaboration between members of a special education team is more than just being co-workers; it involves sharing vital components, such as willingness, dedication to professional development. However, these qualities take time to develop and perfect, and obstacles stand in the way of members creating powerful bonds, such as the lack of time, infrequent communication, and differences in IEP competency (Black & Hill, 2020; Fu et al., 2020; Parkhouse et al., 2019). Members can carry a burden when they feel insufficient to collaborate with other members in developing IEP goals relevant

to student needs (Black & Hill, 2020). This dilemma can prove to be both strength and an opportunity for growth and collaboration. Black and Hill (2020), offer strategies to successfully collaborate in writing goals that align with student needs. Even though the educational environment is continuously evolving, educators are supposed to be able to teach all students (Silver et al., 2019). Educational reform plays a pivotal role in how teachers collaborate, which directly effects student learning (Black & Hill, 2020; Silver et al., 2019).

Literature shows failed attempts of developing goals that align with student needs and the missing tools needed to rectify the problem (Hott et al., 2021). Because the surmounting problem of pointless and unproductive goals has reached the U.S. Supreme Court's boundaries, it will no longer go unnoticed. IEPs must now show students' making reasonable progress on relevant goals (Couvillon et al., 2018; Yell & Bateman, 2019; Yell et al., 2020). For example, in the case of Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District, a monetary suit was awarded parents, who claimed they removed their academically stagnated son from public education to a private school, where he showed growth from relevant IEP goals (Yell et al., 2020). Expecting students to perform has added meaning to special education team members. Improved standards are mandated, which requires a substantial competency. Special educators need to expect and prepare for student progress (Palmer et al., 2018). IDEA amendments state that IEP goals must include the same meaningful opportunities to learn as typically developing peers (Palmer et al., 2018; Yell et al., 2020). Fundamentally, parents and the U.S. Supreme Court agree special education students supported by the amended IDEA, lawfully are entitled to

reasonable goals that influence progress in the classroom (Yell et al., 2020). As

administrators of school districts become aware of the need to improve special education

teams' ability to write practical goals, a useful model should be the beneficial choice.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This qualitative study derived logically from the problem of special education team members' inability to write goals that align with student needs. In the research study, I aimed to identify best practices special education teams use to align goals with student needs, which have parallel outcomes to the OBSE framework. Qualitative studies are essential to explore participant perspectives (McGrath et al., 2019). The qualitative research method allowed special education team members to share their experiences about collaborating to write goals, the implemented process used, and its effectiveness (Kamal, 2019). A qualitative analysis is used to examine and describe an event or happening in a sample population and generalize its findings, further adding to an established research community (Creswell, & Báez, 2020; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The chosen research design was beneficial to gaining insight into the detailed experiences and processes of participants' IEP goal writing abilities and using the findings to develop and implement relevant approaches that support writing practical IEP goals.

To determine a particular qualitative model, the type of research problem determines the design; in other words, what a researcher wants to understand depends on how they decide to approach understanding it (Basias, & Pollalis, 2018). A basic qualitative study is highly descriptive and helpful in understanding complicated social phenomena and gathering full, real-world viewpoints (Creswell & Báez, 2020; Yin, 2018). Therefore, I chose a basic qualitative study to address the research questions.

Alternate qualitative designs, such as narrative research, grounded theory, phenomenology, participatory action research, and case study, did not apply to the present study (Grysman & Lodi-Smith, 2019; Mohajan, 2018; Squires, & Dorsen, 2018).). Narrative research is an inquiry into an individual's life experiences (Grysman & Lodi-Smith, 2019; Mohajan, 2018). Spoken or written in their own words, the individual shares their story throughout a life span (Grysman & Lodi-Smith, 2019; Mohajan, 2018). The purpose of this study was not to inquire about an individual's life, so narrative research was into appropriate.

Grounded theory research aims to formulate a strategy of investigating social relationships from the opinions of participants (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Mohajan, 2018). Collected data and the analysis process define and support the grounded theory (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Mohajan, 2018). The present study was not intended to generate a theory based on participants' experiences; therefore, I did not select grounded theory research for my study.

Phenomenological researchers seek to capture the meaning of a human occurrence by studying a specific group and then develop an interconnection based on the group's accounts (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Mohajan, 2018). The present study's purpose was not to investigate a phenomenon affecting a group, so I did not use phenomenological research. Participatory action research is used to incorporate educational ideas and actions from various educators and students for improvement and changes in schools (Mertler, 2019). In this study, I was not investigating a phenomenon affecting a group or explaining the differences in group or community to enhance change.

A case study is a qualitative approach in which a researcher studies a system within a confined setting (Mohajan, 2018; Moskovicz, 2019). The researcher collects data from multiple sources, such as documents, interviews, observations, and reports (Mohajan, 2018; Moskovicz, 2019). I was not studying systems within confined settings, so I did not use case study research. In a basic qualitative study, research examines real-world experiences, beliefs, and attitudes (Kamal, 2019; Mohajan, 2018). Researchers may choose the basic qualitative methodology when a qualitative study is required, when the researcher has prior information and knowledge about the research to explain the participants' views thoroughly and no other methods will work (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Additionally, I could have used quantitative methods for this study. In quantitative research, researchers use closed-ended questions to collect data, perhaps on a scale (Stockemer, 2019). In qualitative research, researchers use interviews, observations, videos, books, and records of collected data, which yield rich and descriptive information freely (Schoch, 2020). This research study's foundation was in the experiences of the participants. Gaining an in-depth understanding was the purpose of this research, and how and why questions invite responses through qualitative study (Yin, 2018). The most effective choice for examining the abilities of special education teams to align goals with student needs and generalize findings was a basic qualitative study, which could add to an already established body of special education research.

Participants

To collect data for this study, I interviewed special education team members in a public school district of a small town. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling. They were part of a special education team that writes IEP goals for students who have a disability. According to Yin (2018), participants can offer a real-world view of their experiences, which can yield valuable insight. In qualitative research, sample size varies, with participants from five to 30; however, Yin (2018) advised using as many participants as necessary to solidify and support the focus of the problem statement; this could mean a few or many, as saturation is reached at different points in different studies (Saunders et al., 2018). Saunders et al. noted that although there are no clear guidelines to follow, collecting rich and thick data are needed to answer research questions.

Participants were purposefully chosen to participate in this research study, as they were best suited to help answer the research questions and were able to provide insight regarding the phenomenon under study. Special education team members could relate to the theoretical concept and research questions through their experiences with writing goals to meet student needs. I interviewed 11 participants who were members of special education teams (e.g., local education agency, special education teacher, speech therapist, occupational therapist).

Qualitative research needs to be credible and valid with thick descriptions (Billups, 2021). To increase knowledge about activity through reasons, opinions, and motivations, participants describe their experiences (Billups, 2021). Researchers need study participants who are willing and ready to give an account of their experiences and

share their ideas (Tartari, 2020); participants are encouraged to speak their truth, as they see it. In this study, special education team member participants were given the option to add further insight and provided a complete and thorough descriptions of their ability to write goals that align with student needs.

The first step in the procedure for gaining access to participants was contacting district leaders in the school system. When contacting district leaders, researcher transparency is beneficial. District leaders are more open to learning about the research study, plans to conduct the research, and the many benefits to the participants' involvement when a sincere intent is perceived. Gaining access meant talking to executives, administrators, and principals to build a rapport and provide information regarding the research study. I contacted the school superintendent to gain access to special education team members and gained approval. All participants completed an approved informed consent form prior to data collection.

When recruiting participants, sending a formal letter is the best way to contact relevant personnel (Sun et al., 2019). I emailed a formal letter to the superintendent's office, which included a research proposal that presented information about the research purpose, description of the study, and requirements for conducting the study, instrumentation, and consent forms. The proposal was reviewed by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and approved based on their guidelines. My proposal was approved, and I was notified that I could proceed with contacting schools. After gaining approval from school administrators of several schools, I emailed each special education team member an invite and informed consent form.

Giving participants relevant outlets to explore their human nature can help produce rich and detailed information beneficial to a study's authenticity (Schrijvers et al., 2019). Being able to have an open dialogue gives the participants a forum by which to "verbalize and consider a wider array of thoughts, feelings, and perspectives" (Schrijvers et al., 2019, p. 34). According to Wilson (2019), direct access to participants mostly depends on a researcher's skills and the demeanor of the targeted group. One way to gain insight into social interactions is to have participants reflect on their professional experience and verbally share those experiences (Schrijvers et al., 2019). By working together, a researcher and participant can interpret the meaning of an interview and provide a genuine, authentic narrative. The quality of study results depends on the experiences, skills, and thoroughness of a researcher (Rumrill et al., 2020).

A researcher, viewed as a trained listener and data collector, must have keen insight into human interactions (Rumrill et al., 2020). As a special educator, I related to some of the professional learning and experiences the study participants shared. I was able to understand, sympathize, and empathize with their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. As the researcher, I encouraged open and honest dialogue after obtaining permission to use an audio recorder during interviews. To establish a researcher–participant working relationship, I respected the participant and the research site by introducing myself, and I explained, in detail, each component of my research study. I shared pertinent background information with the participants, including that I am a special educator, support systematic learning for teachers, and value special education team members' collaboration to write goals that align to students' needs. Sharing

information, such as organizational work practices, values, and experiences, may make participants feel more comfortable (Thurairajah, 2019).

Additionally, as the researcher, I remained mindful of the possibility of becoming too emotionally involved or too distant from my participants. When a researcher becomes too emotionally involved, they may lose the ability to be objective, which can put the study findings in jeopardy (Mallon & Elliott, 2019). On the other hand, being too distant may affect the ability to empathize or relate to research participants. To show participants that I cared and wanted to have a clear understanding of their professional experiences, I asked follow-up questions. To show concern and increase the interrelationship between the participant and me, I used probing techniques during the interview, such as asking, "How did you feel about that?" "What did you mean by that?" Or "can you give me an example of that?"

Researchers need to be tolerant and respectful when trying to study and understand the how and why of their participants' words and actions (Burkholder et al., 2019). Measures are taken to ensure participants' rights and protection and begin with adherence to ethical guidelines (Burkholder et al., 2019). In protecting research participants from harm, I reviewed the purpose of the research with the participants, the procedures involved, and the time it would take to complete the study. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, I did not reveal nor include names, titles, or the actual location of participants during the interviews and analysis. Special education team members were informed that discussions would take place in a secured online video website, such as Skype or Zoom, or by phone. Shared and collected data were kept in a

sealed and safeguarded location. I let the special education team members know they could ask questions or state concerns at any time during the research or afterward. I let them know their participation in the research study contributed to the understanding, care, and professional training of special education team members. I reviewed the informed consent form with each special education team member, providing contact information for myself and the chair of the IRB if they had further questions. Additionally, I clarified that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time from the study. I asked each special education team member to read over the consent form and sign it.

Data Collection

Personal experiences told from the original narrator hold authenticity, relevance, and essential information that yield insight necessary for comprehending a phenomenon. Personalized collected data incorporate vivid and detailed information that support and ground a study's focus by helping its readers visualize the event. During the semistructured interviews, participants give voice to experiences that were painful and empowering, hoping their personal accounts reach an understanding audience and benefit others (Delker et al., 2020). The collected data were pertinent to the overall research study, the research problem, the research questions, and the study results. The collected data lend additional insight to any implications, limitations, and additional future studies. Moreover, the collected data may lead to positive social change that may benefit special education team members by making education leaders aware and accountable of their needs.

Using an interview protocol (located in Appendix C) can show the researcher as planned, prepared and professional. After I created my own participant questions, three experts in the field of special education reviewed my questions. The three experts approved them as logical to address the research questions.

Semistructured interviews were used for data collection**.** The semistructured interview is a qualitative method for collecting data of participants' experiences. In the person-to-person interview, I asked the participants questions that led to answers directly related to the research problem. Several characteristics of the semistructured interview include the following: (a) participants have experienced the research problem, (b) the semistructured interview references events that have been previously examined, (c) the semistructured interview design follows set guidelines that relate to specific points of the research problem and (d) the semistructured interview is structured toward the participants experience as it pertains to the research problem (DeJonckheere, & Vaughn, 2019). The semistructured interview is a tool that allows the researcher to gather thick and rich data full of affection with an intimate perspective (DeJonckheere, & Vaughn, 2019). For any questions that needed more clarification, I asked follow-up questions for a clear understanding of what the participant said.

Semistructured interviews are suitable and widely used in research approaches because of their adaptableness (DeJonckheere, & Vaughn, 2019). Semistructured interviews have popularity in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, correspondence between researcher and participant, and design flexibility (DeJonckheere, & Vaughn, 2019). The responses to the interview questions allowed me to understand the

research problem. Semistructured interview data are beneficial and remain helpful for scientists who ask questions and participants who answer (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019.

According to Meriam and Grenier (2019), researchers question the reliability and authenticity of semistructured interviews to yield substantial information. Currently, the semistructured interview is the foundation of many research studies and is proven to be an authentic instrument in collecting personalized data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020). Semistructured interviews can gauge validity and reliability through reports of integrity, interpretations of participant responses, researcher self-reflection, and accurate recorded and transcribed data to verify the study's results (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). This proposed research study centers on the special education team member's ability to write goals that align with student needs, connecting the experiences of team members in each section of the research study through trustworthiness.

To record and gather data from the semistructured interview, I used an audio device to tape the interviews. Audio records are beneficial to the researcher as they can be reviewed frequently to gain a clearer understanding while collecting data (Flick, 2018). I used the audio recording to transcribe the collected data when categorizing and coding repeated themes. Cypress (2018) suggests several helpful strategies to use when audio-taping research participants, such as being prepared, organized and creating an atmosphere of professionalism.

Researchers need to make sense of the collected information. A systematic process allows the represented data to be organized and prepared for analysis

(Cypress, 2018). Hand-coding the text, I used color-coded themes arranged in various corresponding stages to capture the personalized and detailed descriptions of participants' experiences. Also, Corlett and Mavin (2018) recommends researchers use a journal entry to log and pour out their self-reflections, biases, decisions, thoughts, actions, and feelings about the research process. In doing so, problems and suspicions are handled immediately (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). I used a journal to self-reflect and write down any biases and thoughts that I had that might interfere with being objective to the research study. I also used a coding book to write notes, personal reflections, and spontaneous notes during the research process.

Access to Participants

Once I met the guidelines and approval secured (02-23-21-0246926) from Walden University IRB, I sent a signed copy of the IRB approval and the proposal to the school district's superintendent via email. Once the school district approved my request to conduct research through a written document, I forwarded the document to the Walden University IRB. The Walden University IRB gave me the final approval to conduct research. In the proposal, I briefly introduced myself, described the research study, explained the benefits to participation, and stated my request to conduct research with special education team members who write goals to meet student needs. The superintendent reviewed and approved my request, and I was sent, via email, contact information to the department of special education. The program administrator reviewed the packet and determined that the research proposal correlated with the school's beliefs and overall mission. I sent a copy of the research proposal to the principals. The

principals met approval at this stage, and 11 special education team members were

willing to interview and share their experiences. Sun et al. (2019) notes each step's

importance in gaining access to participants. Following each crucial step is necessary, to

build a rapport, be transparent, be diligent, and foster a connection between schools and

me as the researcher.

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher, I played a vital part in the direction and outcome of the research

study. I was aware of my inadequacies and biases in a self-reflective way, so they did not

appear in the research study. Additionally, having this type of awareness allowed me to

have sensitivity toward the participants' cultural differences and diverse perspectives.

According to Karagiozis (2018), there is a possibility that the researcher and the

participants' relationship can collide. Since I shared comradery in occupation and

activities, I understood special education team members' concerns. As a special

education educator in the public school system for over a decade, I could relate to special

education team members' issues face in writing goals that align with students' needs. I

was aware of the challenges of collaboration, time constraints, cultural differences, and

perspectives that present. Although the research sites and the participants were new to

me, I followed the exact steps to initiate and maintain a mutual and respectful researcher

and participant relationship to protect the study and interpretation of the data.

Data Analysis

The color-coded data were analyzed by identifying repeated themes, phrases, and

terms that participants used to describe their experiences of writing goals that meet the

needs of students. As I sought to understand the data, I noticed that the various lists and groups of phrases and words were interrelated. I saw a connection and common thread throughout the participants' experiences. The participants' recorded data were plentiful, unreserved, detailed, and vivid. The transparent data held meaning and value, as told by the participants. According to Rogers (2018), participants' data can yield interpretations that are personable, credible, and full of meaning based solely on the perceptions of the participant's full, descriptive experiences.

Evidence of quality and procedures to assure the accuracy and credibility of the findings employ consistent strategies (Rheinhardt et al., 2018). Astroth and Chung (2018) and Billups (2021) stated that rigor should be used throughout the research process for accuracy and reliability. Without tenacity, qualitative research would not be truthful, authentic, dependable, or trustworthy in the 21st century (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Billups, 2021; Rheinhardt et al., 2018). Mitchell et al. (2018) defined the characteristics of qualitative studies, (a) reporting honest data, (b) presenting precise results (c) participants' responding freely and unrehearsed. The researcher in Mitchell et al. showed a practical example of how participants' responses were honest, clear, and unrehearsed, establishing an authentic representation. Based on the research problem and guided by the semistructured interview questions, special education team members in this research study were also able to give honest, transparent, and unrehearsed information about how they learned, and what types of learning were most helpful. Because they cared about knowing how to write high-quality IEP goals that meet students' needs, they found various ways to gain proficiency. For example, Participant 2 mentioned the benefits of

live, in-person learning. She stated that meaningful learning meant having hands-on coaching and using actual student IEP goals to work through the errors found. She said that the quick assessments at the end of training did not truly represent proficiency but using follow-through and support for developing IEP goals was more efficient. Each participant's account was detailed, personalized, meaningful, and relevant, showing honesty and authenticity.

To show the accuracy and credibility of the findings, researchers engage in researcher reflexivity (Rheinhardt et al., 2018). As the researcher, I periodically reviewed my feelings and perspectives, took notes, and disengaged any preconceived ideas or biases as I interacted with participants. Member checking or collaborating with participants is another means of validity (Frey, 2018). Member checking is a way to connect and collaborate with participants when analyzing collected data (Frey, 2018). The participants and I engaged in member checking. Participants were sent a transcribed copy of their responses for feedback and account authentication. I asked each of them to confirm that their thoughts and experiences were recorded accurately. Participants also had the opportunity to review the themes and categories of the collected data to confirm that their perspectives were portrayed realistically. Participants were encouraged to contact me through email and phone if they found any discrepancies in the written transcripts.

Discrepant Cases

Participants may have varied experiences and viewpoints from the main results. These discrepant cases are acceptable because the findings strengthen the research study

(Bazeley, 2018). When this inconsistency has an explanation, the main body of evidence is increased (Bazeley, 2018). Discrepant cases also strengthen with transparency, which yields a form of trustworthiness (Bazeley, 2018). Stakeholders will believe that the research is accurate and that the process has been clearly explained (Bazeley, 2018). Additionally, Rose and Johnson (2020) noted that providing a line of evidence can provide trustworthiness. Procedures and protocols included establishing relationships between participants' experiences and perspectives and the research study questions. I used procedures and protocols that were simple to follow and manage the research process. While following the procedures and protocols of the research process, one discrepant case was found. The discrepant case is essential to the data analysis process (Rose & Johnson, 2020) and relevant compared to the other 10 consistent cases.

One of the 11 participants had varied experiences from the others. She felt confident in her ability to write goals. She did not require support from the special education team, nor did she feel the need to seek help from the special education program specialist or facilitator. The participant described her ability to write goals that meet student needs from years and years of practice and training in another school district. She reported that she was currently able to help her special education team members with IEP goal-writing inquiries. The participant's experience contributed to the trustworthiness and strength of the research because it supported the body of literature, implications for future research, and project study direction.

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the abilities of special education team members to write IEP goals that align with the needs of the student and bring awareness to the fundamentals that are needed to improve the process. Special education teams require specifically designed models of support that detail the components for creating high-quality IEP goals. Hauser's (2017) Operationalize, Benchmark, Scale and Evaluate (OBSE) was used as the conceptual framework for this study to seek information on creating well-written, practical IEP goals.

Process for Generating, Gathering, and Recording Data

Once I received the Institutional Review Board's approval (02-23-230246926), I contacted participants to set interview times. Eleven special education team members were used to inform this qualitative study, giving rich descriptive accounts of their experiences and feelings about writing IEP goals for students in need of special education. The data were collected through one-to-one semistructured interviews and recorded using an audio device, with the participants' permission. Members met with me via a virtual platform or telephone because of Covid 19 mandated restrictions.

I developed the research questions from the research problem and information from the literature review. I frequently wrote my thoughts and feelings down in my journal. As a special education team member, I reflected on my personal feelings, experiences, and biases. After the semistructured interviews were completed, I listened to the recorded data frequently to understand the participants' accounts and make sure that their words were audible and clear. I then transcribed the data to a Microsoft Word

document for a visual representation and to be more engrossed in processing the information. Participants were then contacted via email for a follow-up review of the transcribed data as a means of member checking and data accuracy. After the participants' approved accuracy, I identified common words, phrases, experiences and feelings.

I examined the data to identify repeated themes and patterns that I thought were important to the research study. I determined themes and patterns using an inductive approach. I used a hand-written color-coding procedure to label and organize data. This method of organizing data was beneficial to me because (a) I was able to review the data and personalize it to my understanding, (b) organize and develop my thoughts to notice biases, (c) study the words and phrases used by participants and develop and then redevelop meaning and understanding of the data, (d) present a visual picture of the colored hierarchy of information that helped me create themes, and (e) construct a vivid narrative that leads to the interpretation of findings.

Coding Procedure

From the colored codes, repeated and frequently used words, phrases and experiences were dissected into various categories (Team Collaboration, Team PD, Significant PD, Understanding the 'Why,' IEP Goal Common Errors, and Starting with Proficiency). Although most special education team members agreed on the need of goal writing support, the kind for support differed per member. Participants gave detailed accounts of what types of support were conducive to their learning styles. For further analysis of the categories, sub-categories (Meetings, Teacher Share, 'In' the Moment

Training, Technology Access, Incomplete Data, and Generalizing the Model) were developed, which explained and supported the emergence of themes. Sub-categories were used as examples to describe some of the errors that found in IEP goals and the influential models of learning that increase and maintain IEP goal writing proficiency. Categories and sub-categories were carefully analyzed repeatedly and rewritten several times for clarity and focus. The codes had specific colors. Categories were labeled in black, and sub-categories were high-lighted. All the color-coded data were inserted into a table. All data were stored and secured in several ways. Transcribed Microsoft Word documents were securely stored to the computer hard drive. Transcribed printed Microsoft word documents, along with the audio-recorded participant interview data, were securely stored in a locked file cabinet: I only have the key.

Research Questions

The research questions that were used to guide this research study were:

RQ1: What is the current practice at the local setting for developing Individualized Plans for students with disabilities?

RQ2: How do IEP committees at the local setting develop IEP goals that align with the Operationalize, Benchmark, Scale, and Evaluate model based on best practices?

Themes

Themes were realized from the redundancy of common words, phrases, and experiences found in the participant interview transcripts, categories, and sub-categories. There are five recurring themes found in this study, (1) Team members relied on each other's knowledge, (2) Team members engaged in various pieces of trainings and

supplemental learning, (3) Specific learning needs involved being able to see and practice the process of IEP goal writing, (4) Missing and incomplete data accounted for most errors in the IEP goal writing process, and (5) Special education team members required standardized learning that was practical to help them understand the 'how' and 'why' of writing IEP goals. Additionally, the themes reflect the participants' motivations, actions, and interactions.

Findings

Theme 1: Team members relied on each other to support and maintain IEP goal writing proficiency. Team members used creative ways to meet and share their knowledge base. Team members found innovative collaboration methods, such as impromptu meetings, phone calls, hall chats, and emails. There was also a person of expert knowledge in many schools that team members reached out to, such as the program specialist or Exceptional Teacher (EC) facilitator. To meet the requirement of implementing high-quality IEP goals, teachers regularly collaborated in this manner.

Theme 2: Special education team members engaged in varied training and supplemental learning. Supplemental learning was often informal, but planned, called 'how to meetings,' 'time at the table,' and 'catch your mistake and fix it' meetings. Some team members considered pre/post audits and pre-conferences to be modes of training. To streamline the process of writing high-quality IEP goals, some team members used the DPI or SMART Goal template or attempted to utilize the school district's current program for writing IEPs. As a support to glean a whole picture of the student, some team members used data from Power School, Educator's Handbook, and PBIS.

Theme 3: Special education team members needed strategies, models, and examples of the process to help them understand better. Team members wanted learning opportunities that were in person. Team members wanted meaningful training where they could see the process, practice the steps, and hear about specific topics directly related to writing high-quality IEP goals. Many team members recalled pre-service learning and college courses as their most significant training in writing high-quality IEP goals. 'In the moment' learning left a notable impression on many team members, as they recalled getting that specialized and condensed learning from earlier years.

Theme 4: According to team members, missing and incomplete data accounted for most errors in the IEP goal writing process. Team members noticed that IEP goals were either too vague or too specific. IEP goals were not clear, measurable, attainable, relevant, or timebound. Participant 2 noted that the goals were written without expressing how the student's progress would be measured or what the student would specifically do to reach the goal. Team members were known to 'follow the data' without understanding its importance. Looking over the data from the prior school year and rewriting the information was one way that some team members developed IEP goals. Common errors continued to be found without understanding the relevancy of each component of the IEP goal.

Theme 5: Team members understood that their IEP goal writing proficiency played a vital role in the instruction and support of the student's academic learning. Special education team members required practical standardized learning to help them understand the 'how' and 'why' of writing IEP goals. Team members wanted a

personalized, meaningful, relevant professional and additional learning opportunities and tools that were usable and comprehensive and could be generalized across the school district. Strategic and systematic learning was a practical way to sustain team members IEP goal writing proficiency.

Theme 1: Team Members Relied on Each Other's Knowledge

Participant 1 spent much time with the various team members by answering their IEP questions, viewing their IEP goals, and finding time to sit with them to help them better understand the process. Participant 1 stated, "We will walk through IEPs from the beginning to the end. I know their IEPs are good." Special education team members assured their proficiencies in writing IEP goals through impromptu meetings and brief diverse encounters with team members throughout their workday. This method supported their inquiries, and their collaboration was purposeful.

Special education team members had differentiated skills and abilities to write IEP goals and readily shared their knowledge with each other. Participant 2 said, "I'll often reach out to my program specialist and say can you kind of explain this piece to me…how does this work with our district…" Special education team members relied on each other's support and opinion when drafting IEP goals. Someone was usually available to have a quick meeting with about IEP goals. Participant 3 stated, "I usually go to my fellow EC teachers…if they're not available, I'll talk to the program specialist that's at our school."

Additionally, special education team members worked closely together when drafting and writing high-quality IEP goals. They would often assess each other's work

and discuss the goals to see if they met the students' needs. Participant 4 reported, "We reviewed each other's paperwork. We asked questions about each other. We bounced ideas off each other."

There was a strong reliance among all the special education team members, and the special education facilitators, and program administrators as a support system for writing IEP goals. Even when they did have a level of competency, special education team members wanted assurance and approval from colleagues that they were writing goals correctly. Participants 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 stated that in between EC (Exceptional Children) lead visits, they supported each other by reading each other's drafted IEP goals to make sure all components had been addressed. Special education team members discussed the efficiency of the goals and shared ideas. Special education team members knew they could rely on their EC leads to support them with writing IEP goals that meet student needs. Participant 10 reported that EC leads made regular bi-weekly visits and checked drafted IEP goals for accuracy. EC leads were devoted and reliable to their special education team members. Participant 10 stated, "So for me collaboration is huge…We have an expectation that we'll collaborate, because we are a team…"

Theme 2: Team Members Engaged in Various Trainings and Supplemental Learning

Special education team members found innovative ways to support IEP goal writing proficiency. Knowing how to write IEP goals was vital in the position of a special education team member. There was a confident or trustful dependence on the implemented programs, informal learning, and acquired models. Some special education team members talked about the various impromptu meetings they attended to help write

IEP goals, while others relied on programs or templates. Participant 1 said, "We sit down, discuss what do you see in the classroom, how are they doing in the classroom." Participant 2 said, "We got Training Goal Book. We have discussions on making SMART goals..." Participant 3 recalled using different supports to help her write IEP goals, such as an IEP goal bank, district-based training for SMART goals, diagnostic tools, and progress monitoring techniques. Participant 4 was accustomed to using new and old methods to obtain IEP goal writing proficiency, such as the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) model for writing IEP goals and distance learning programs that offered tools to help navigate the process of writing IEP goals. Participant 5 noted that she talked to regular education teachers about students, while other participants emailed a form to the teachers requesting information about the student.

Participant 6 showed extreme confidence in her abilities to write high-quality goals, separate from the intense collaboration efforts of all other team members. Participant 6 stated, "I'm not unclear about IEP goal procedures…" She reported that her proficiency came from years and years of practice at her former school district. She revealed that teachers were given time and opportunities to practice writing high-quality IEP goals and that support was always available to explain any part of the IEP goal writing process.

Other special education team members relied on various platforms to pass and share information about the student. Special education team members retrieved student profile information through power school, an educational technology software program shared by all teachers. Special education team members could access grades, classes,

performance, attendance, and behavior. According to Participant 7, the Educator's Handbook was another technology platform that helped her create a complete picture of the student and communicate with other special education team members. She mentioned that she also used Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS), a strategy used by schools to promote good behavior.

Participant 8 shared all ways that special education team members were supported in gaining skills to write active IEP goals. She said that being a small school district allowed for a personalized touch to increase comprehension of the process. Information and procedures were systematically passed down from one level to the next, carefully, in hopes of passing knowledge with precision. Participant 8 noted, "We don't want to go pick up documentation or paperwork from one school and see that it is drastically different from another school, especially within district."

There was ample evidence of each special education team member's ability to rely on something or someone for support in writing high-quality goals to meet the needs of students. Some team members used several other methods to support the IEP goal-writing process. Participant 9 said, "…I can just look at older IEP's. If I know I have a student with similar issues I'll just go back, look at it and see exactly how I wrote it…" Before IEP meetings, Participant 10 communicated with each special education team member and retrieved baseline data. Participant 11 remembered a former training that explained the components of writing an IEP goal and confided that she still uses that information today, even though she had been teaching in special education for a long time.

Theme 3: Special Education Team Members Needed Examples of the IEP Goal

Writing Process for a Clearer Understanding

When special education team members were asked to remember their most significant training, most recalled specific events, compelling individuals, and useful tools from the past, some dating as far back as 20 years. What was noticed repeatedly was the excitement in their voices and faces when they remembered how they learned. Special education team members spoke of meaningful and purposeful training and relevant support activities that involved regulated times for hands-on practice. Participant 1 reported, "I was at another county and in person definitely, and for the first 5 years you had to do it in person, and they went through step by step…" Participant 2 said, "I would say my most significant was probably in college, as far as goal writing." Participant 3 stated, "…it wasn't necessarily how to write it but it was when you're considering goals, this is what you need to keep in mind and they provided examples and videos and all that good stuff."

More interview participants further reiterated past times of meaningful professional learning. Additionally, some concluded that even the job training, completed with feedback, meant more to them, as they benefitted and learned from trial and error. Participants 4 and 6 recalled face-to-face training, where they were encouraged to ask questions, and responses given included answers with examples for a clearer understanding. Participant 5 had difficulty remembering her most effective special education training but replied that it was in college many years ago. Participant 6 reported that years of practice and looking at other special education team members'

IEPs, as an example, helped her write IEP goals. She said that in a former county where she worked, special education training took place every year and included learning to write present levels, benchmarks, and IEP goals.

Participants 7, 8, 9, and 10 explained the benefits of hands-on training, which included learning from real experiences and engaging with other special education team members. They all agreed that being able to work through errors helped them to understand better how to complete the process of writing goals. Much of the training was 'on the job.' There were no initial training periods. Participant 7 reported, "…When I was student teaching in elementary school, she just let me do it. She let me come in and she just let me take over. She was really good." Participant 8 stated, "…You learned by experience and reflection…taking the time to go back and look at what you did and look at any errors." Participant 9 said, "That was the most valuable training, I guess, as far as writing goals and IEPs."

Participant 10 discussed the new teacher training that she received many years ago. Further teacher training was purposeful, strategic, and planned. The instructors took the time to explain the many parts of writing an appropriate IEP goal, modeled how to write the IEP goal, and checked her work. Participant 11 praised Asheboro City Schools for the practical training that she received since working in the school system. Participant 11 stated, "So I think those professional developments that are done within your district or within your school even, or area is the most meaningful."

Theme 4: Missing and Incomplete Data Accounted for Most Errors in the IEP Goal Writing Process

Special education team members showed fragmentary abilities in writing active IEP goals. Special education team members exhibited strengths in one area while others lacked the know-how. For example, an incomplete student profile accounted for many errors in IEP goals and was the origin of some mistakes in the rest of the IEP document. Because the PLAAF holds a depiction of the student's current abilities, skills, weaknesses, and strengths, its vital use governs the rest of the IEP document. It, therefore, needs to be thoroughly understood and applied correctly. However, special education team members revealed their partial proficiencies and described undeveloped IEP goals from out-of-state IEPs received from year to year. Deficits were common and continued to appear in the IEP goal-writing process.

Other areas mentioned that held noticeable errors were in the data collection piece. Team members were known to struggle in this area, even when other steps to writing applicable goals had been written correctly. Participant 1 stated, "It's collecting data, oh my gosh, when I ask to see their data, they struggle. Collecting the data, monitoring their data, they really struggle…"

According to Participants 2, 3, and 5, the goals written did not match the student's needs. The goals were specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and within a time frame (SMART Goal), but the goal does not represent nor capture the student's profile. Special education teachers have had to write high-quality goals to match state content standards of rigorous grade-level expectations, which can be confusing. Participant 2 reported, "I

think in the present level of performance, a lot of it is just like, oh their good at this, or oh, they can do that, but I'm like, I need more specifics…" And then some of the goals are really not relevant to the functionality of my students." IEP goals have reflected that special education team members had difficulty writing goals that connect with the student's abilities and North Carolina state standards. A student's IEP goal must be balanced with the North Carolina academic content standard of the student's grade level. Participant 3 replied, "I have seen a lot of goals that are not geared toward grade level standards." Participant 4 noted that special education team members' IEP goals showed inconsistencies in being measurable and representing the students' abilities.

IEP goals that were unsuitable and imprecise characterized the remaining responses of interview participants. Participant 8 mentioned that the confusion might be because special education team members failed to understand the 'why' of the process, which she felt helped to know how to write a quality goal. Participant 5 said, "They're not specific…It's either very wrong or very laser focused…or they are just so you don't know what's going on." Participant 6 stated, "…well not everybody writes an effective PLAAF…when I get IEPs and they're a hot mess, and I have had some, we have an IEP meeting really quick to make any adjustments, updates."

Another noticeably weak area for special education members when developing goals is task analysis. Special education team members were required to break down the written goal to show a student's steps to reach the targeted yearly goal. Participants 7, 9, 10, and 11 discussed their noticed errors. Some of the goals were very specific and only covered a small section of what the student needed to do to reach the goal and would not

take a year to address. Other goals were written vaguely and could have been understood in many ways. Participant 8 saw the errors that special education team members made as an opportunity to help them understand why IEP goals needed to be specifically written for students who had special needs. Participant 8 stated, "I think the why is most important and is what creates the most errors, is the lack of why…so some people really struggle with understanding."

Theme 5: Special Education Team Members Required Standardized Learning to Help Them Understand the How and Why of Writing IEP Goals

Being able to provide various modes of training to support special education team members involves tuning into their personal and collective needs. Realizing the need to improve and gain complete proficiency requires an authentic insight into the learning needs of special education team members. Special education team members revealed being diverse learners, needing specific support to write high-quality IEP goals. Additionally, special education team members shared some of the same learning and applying knowledge processes. Participant 1 said, "Maybe I need a little more practice on is all that behavior part." Participant 2 revealed that personalized and ongoing professional development was beneficial to her. What she valued most from professional development was being able to ask questions about her paperwork and use her paperwork as an example. She felt a level of confidence in writing IEP goals but valued follow-up sessions and live coaching to address any mistakes that were found.

More interview participants discussed what type of learners they were and how they best learned new content. They talked about what they needed to be successful at

writing high-quality IEP goals. Having special education team members learn remotely, through videos and modules, without hands-on, in-person support and feedback, was not beneficial to them or the students they served. Participants 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 stressed the need for learning support. While online learning and training modules offered some support towards IEP goal writing proficiency, the participants' felt it lacked effectiveness. Participant 5 stated, "There's always, hey here's this, use this, and we're like, what is that…I've kinda gotten use to that over the years." Participant 7 said, "So it's very hard for me for somebody to say watch this video and try it without somebody talking me through it."

Participants expressed the difficulty of being expected to know how to write high-quality goals without an ample amount of time to practice and process the procedures. Participants 8 and 10 revealed that not knowing how to write high-quality goals effectively bothered them, and they wanted adequate time and tools to support their IEP goal writing proficiency. Participant 8 stated, "…I'm the type of person, I don't wanna know just what to do, I wanna know why we're doing it, so I can later apply it to the next thing and make it make sense…" Participant 9 reported, "I do like being able to read a goal and know specifically what it is asking for…"

Special education team members stressed the opportunity to be proficient in their job. Participants openly talked about what they needed and felt they did not have what they needed. The participants valued their skills and ability to write high-quality goals. The participants understood that having the skill and ability to write high-quality IEP goals for students directly affected their academic and functional performance in the

classroom. Participant 10 stated, "I feel like it's critical to be able to write goals because everything I do is based off of that." Participant 11 added, "I think if you do not write a proficient goal, a student will not make the progress that he or she needs to be able to access education within the regular classroom or even if they're in a self-contained class…"

Discrepant Cases

A discrepant case is identified when the comparable data findings are varied. According to FitzPatrick (2019), researchers should look for and state all discrepant cases in their research and try to understand the opposing data. All possible discrepant cases in this study were investigated for inconsistencies in participants' experiences and perspectives. For example, Participant 11 did not give an account directly related to the research problem of special education team members' inability to write high-quality goals. The discrepant evidence was revealed in the ability and proficiency of Participant 11 to write high-quality goals that meet the needs of students. However, Participant 11 did provide experiences and perspectives directly related to the research questions and interview questions, thus giving ample data that established a connection to the research study. No discrepant cases were found in this study.

Evidence of Quality

Member checking explores and validates participants' transcripts by accurately representing their experiences and perspectives (FitzPatrick, 2019). Member checking is also used for researcher self-reflection to safeguard against personal biases and feelings. FitzPatrick (2019) stated that participants' feedback should be welcomed from the

researcher's transcripts and interpretations. Participants were given an opportunity to connect with me throughout the interview process and transcribing of data. Participants were also given the option to review the interview transcripts to ensure that their experiences and point of view were accurately represented and held credibility. I encouraged participant feedback and questions to combat any potential concerns. To safeguard against personal biases, I self-reflected and used journaling to record thoughts and feelings and disengage from pre-conceived ideas.

Findings in Relation to Literature Review

Special education team members are expected to collaborate to write IEP goals that genuinely represent the student's strengths, weaknesses, and needs (Olson & Roberts, 2020). Each member has pertinent information about the student that is needed to gauge a complete picture of the student (Gosselin & Sundeen, 2019). The path to collaboration was not easy, as teachers' days were filled with work requirements that interfered with regular sit-down pre-conference meetings. To meet the mandated requirements of applicable IEP goals, team members found innovative and unconventional ways to meet and talk about students.

Research studies are in agreement that special education team members require purposeful times to collaborate to unite student data that each of them separately has in order to write goals that will support the student's academic learning and functionality in the classroom (Bricker et al., 2020; Dillon et al., 2021; Gosselin & Sundeen, 2019). Within many schools in this small district, special education team members know that they must find ways to connect with other team members during work hours. Aldabas

(2020) note that special education teachers need specific skills, flexibility, and collaboration with other special education team members.

Considering that special education team members purposefully collaborate as often as they can throughout their workday, it possibly means that (a) in-service learning was needed, (b) regulated, relevant and personalized training was needed, and (c) practical support tools were needed. Special education team leads revealed that team members' goal writing proficiency was weak in some areas and strong in others (Goodwin et al., 2020). Other IEP goal errors noticed were missing short-term objectives, a measurement scale, and an evaluation method. Ruble et al. (2018) stated that IEP team members often have difficulty writing applicable goals when critical information about the student is written vaguely.

On the other hand, one team member could write relevant IEP goals, yet she still felt the need to "check in" for approval that she was correctly writing the IEP goals. Additionally, special education team members have used sparse training, supplemental learning, and various other means to aid their comprehension, which leads to team members understanding and applying knowledge differently (Goodwin et al., 2020; Ruble et al., 2018). One special education team member called it the "telephone game," meaning that the information and process had changed by the time district training trickled down to the special education team members.

Special education team members viewed training such as follow-ups, follow-through, hands-on coaching sessions, examples, and in-person-live service learning as "in the moment." Although special education team members could not take nor find the

quality time to collectively meet, 'mini' bouts of learning appeared to be sufficient and acceptable among team members. A generalized, appropriate, and effective supplemental tool may provide the answer to support and maintain special education team members' IEP goal writing proficiency.

Strategic and systematic learning ensures that special education team members learn at a regulated pace, using varied and applicable tools that support their work cycles. Systematic and strategic learning that is personable, meaningful, and relevant is the foundation for IEP goal proficiency; the "why" and "how" of writing IEP goals would be simplified and answered. Special education teams may not need those frequent impromptu correspondences to understand how to collect, measure, analyze, and evaluate student data.

Hauser's (2017) OBSE framework supports special education team members' ability to write high-quality IEP goals. Through each component, the step-by-step guides ensure that team members comprehend the importance of building a complete and accurate student profile. Special education team members can feel assured in their ability to write high-quality IEP goals. With no more guesswork and varied and limited proficiencies, special education team members can be confident that the IEP goal written will adequately represent the student in the classroom.

Project Deliverable

Based on the presented themes, the project deliverable was a practical outcome of the study's results. An ongoing professional development, cited to decrease to a regulated minimum over time, was created to meet the needs of special education team members,

who write IEP goals for students in need of special education. This ongoing professional development was mainly designed for small school districts with limited opportunities for team members to meet and support and maintain IEP goal writing proficiencies. Special education facilitators and program leaders will strategically and systematically implement instructional steps of writing a present level of academic achievement and functional performance summary using a created model equivalent to Hauser's (2017) OBSE framework. PLAAPF proficiency for team members assures the ability to create a high-quality IEP goal, thus igniting independence from spur-of-the-moment and anxious minute workday meetings. Furthermore, these in-the-moment purposeful collaborations of competence and resourcefulness will directly benefit students who need differentiated instruction, which produces positive social change.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3 includes a brief description of the project based on the findings from my research. The project targeted special education team members who write goals for students with special needs. I designed a 4-day professional development training (see Appendix A). This section includes the rationale for the project genre, a scholarly review of literature that examines professional development training as a catalyst for change, the project description, project evaluation, and implications that influence social change for all relevant stakeholders.

During the semistructured interviews, special education team members shared their common experiences of their ability to write high-quality IEP goals that meet student needs. Special education team members also described their unique styles of learning and processing information. Participants also elaborated on the common need for relevant and personalized training modes to write high-quality IEP goals, with practice time and follow-up sessions. Because special education team members' IEP proficiency varied, they were not fully confident in their ability to write applicable goals and often met to support each other's competency. The professional development training project was used to address the specific learning needs of special education team members to improve and maintain IEP goal-writing proficiency using a generalized model to write IEP goals.

Rationale

After analyzing the collected data from the semistructured interviews, results showed that special education team members' ability to write high-quality IEP goals varied. Although the special education team members received some amount of professional development, they were still unsure about different aspects of writing IEP goals that meet the needs of students. Special education team members sought to collaborate among themselves to share their knowledge base, or they reached out to the EC program lead or special education facilitator for direction.

Some of the participants reported using handouts from former trainings, DPI templates for writing goals, special education programs to help write IEP goals, former IEP goal data, and other school-based programs that shared student data in efforts to write IEP goals that aligned with student needs. Participants did have some professional development trainings about writing IEP goals, but they stated that the trainings did not allot time for them to practice, receive feedback, or have follow-up sessions to gauge proficiency. Special education team members wanted that in-the-moment support to ask questions and receive answers about writing IEP goals.

Not having the time to effectively collaborate with each other or have professional development that included practice and coaching, special education team members were left to find other means to accommodate their IEP goal writing proficiency. This form of isolation, apart from relevant professional development trainings and tools used to improve and maintain IEP goal writing proficiency, has left the special education team members with limited and varied abilities. Special education team members require

applicable trainings and generalized models of how to write high-quality goals to improve and maintain their proficiency (Black & Hill, 2020; Bray & Russell, 2018). A personalized support system may (a) improve special education team members' ability to write IEP goals that align with student needs, (b) create uniformity in the IEP goal-writing process for all special education team members, (c) meet the diverse learning needs of special education team members who require additional supports, and (d) replace the need for impromptu workday meetings to discuss the quality of their IEP goals.

Review of the Literature

The review of literature for the project study involved peer-reviewed articles published within the last 5 years. The focus was on professional development for special education team members. An additional focus was given to support models that help special education team members with writing high-quality goals that meet student needs. Using Walden University's library database, I employed a systematic search. I used the key terms *special education professional development, special education educators, special education teachers, teacher development, continuing professional development, teacher qualifications, teacher competencies*, and *teacher collaboration*. Using the key terms, I was able to locate many relevant articles. I searched through many databases to find current literature that supported providing personalized trainings and tools to special education team members. Sage Journals, Academic Search Complete, Eric, Education Source, Taylor and Francis Online, Google Scholar, Sage Knowledge and Science Direct

were databases that I used to collect and analyze data from peered-reviewed current articles.

Special Education Teams' Lack Effective Collaboration

According to Hargreaves (2019), the teaching profession has fallen behind in comparison to other professional organizations in quality and quantity of professional development trainings. Special education teams still do not have routine times or scheduled appointments to collaborate during the school day, as they have full schedules (Drew & Gonzalez, 2021). Participant 1 stated that her days are filled with quick inquiries to other special education team members through emails, hall chats, or weekend phone calls. Some special education teams do not sit down to collaborate until the actual meeting takes place, which can extend the meeting time (Beck & DeSutter, 2020).

Additional reasons for ineffective collaboration stem from isolation with other colleagues or schools (Peltier et al., 2021; Travers, 2020) and having diverse schedules (Drew & Gonzalez, 2021; Travers, 2020). Special education team members who work in remote schools and school districts can be isolated from the mainstream of professional development and receive fewer training opportunities and support (Peltier et al., 2021; Rude & Miller, 2018). This lack of connection can directly affect how special education team members feel about their job (Rude & Miller, 2018) and their ability to support students through IEPs (Travers, 2020). Special education team members with fewer trainings and support can lack morale and the initiative to do their job well (Rude & Miller, 2018; Tugend, 2020).

A special education team includes several members, ranging from teachers to service-related providers to parents, and schedules do not always coincide, which can leave members frequently trying to share information about students through emails, forms, and during service hours (Drew & Gonzalez, 2021; Fowler et al., 2019). Miscommunication can happen, forms lost, and student service times interrupted because special education team members do not have time to collaborate effectively (Beck & DeSutter, 2020). Special education team members may have to collaborate during IEP meetings, which can extend the meeting because of a large amount of student information to sort and organize (Beck & DeSutter, 2020).

Special education team members have a responsibility to work together to create an individualized plan that supports each student in need of special education (Fowler et al., 2019). Teachers feel good about themselves and their jobs when they can collaborate (Fischer et al., 2018; Hargreaves, 2019; Postholm, 2018). For example, Hargreaves (2019) showed the effectiveness of trainings reinforced with additional opportunities to learn versus trainings that were weak and devitalized with reduced opportunities for feedback. The reinforced learning opportunities provided members with successful collaboration and a sense of morale (Hargreaves, 2019). Opportunities for feedback and additional learning can have a positive bearing on special education teachers (Fischer et al., 2018).

Using a Model for Competency and Efficiency

In history, models have been used as a description to help visualize an object or systems (Jacobson & Booch, 2021). Miniature representations of a prototype have been

used in various educational organizations to familiarize members with the guidelines or rules. Implementing a model to help organizational members recall how a process works or the specific steps to take can increase competency. For example, many districts have employed models such as the positive behavior intervention system (PBIS), the multitiered system of support (MTSS), and response to intervention (RTI) to support educators with students' academic achievement and overall school climate.

PBIS is a behavior intervention support to improve the overall school climate (McIntosh et al., 2021). According to McIntosh et al. (2021) study, the implementation of the PBIS model was effective in decreasing suspensions and improving academic achievements, school safety, and health practices. Educators were successful implementing the yearlong model through strategic professional development that highlighted the key points of the process (McIntosh et al., 2021). Castillo et al. (2022) found a correlation between professional learning and implementing models successfully.

Using the MTSS model of three distinctive learning levels, a problem-solving team collaborates to screen students for academic deficiencies (Castillo et al., 2022; Pirani-McGurl et al., 2022). The screening system lists explicit protocols for team members to follow when implementing the sequential steps. These steps are used to skillfully guide team members. Pirani-McGurl et al. (2022) stated that when educators implement the MTSS model with fidelity, students' learning increases statewide.

Educators can use the RTI model, a reading-based intervention, to help struggling readers (Thomas et al., 2020). However, many teachers need explicit professional development training to do this (McMaster et al., 2021). To help students through their

reading challenges, educators need to understand how to apply components of the leveled intervention (McMaster et al., 2021). The RTI model supports educators in comprehending and applying the crucial steps.

Models are used to support educators' abilities to retain knowledge and practice specific skill sets (McMaster et al., 2021). Models can hold concentrated amounts of content knowledge that extends past professional development training. Using models can help educators visualize the process and think about what steps to take to next. Educators' proficiency increases when they have the necessary tools to improve (McMaster et al., 2021).

Special education team members may benefit from a model to adhere to state regulation in writing IEP goals. The model may be used as a guideline to support IEP competency and as an efficient way to familiarize special education team members to the standards of writing high-quality IEP goals. For example, Hedin and DeSpain's (2018) model of SMART goals assists special education team members with writing high-quality goals that meet with the needs of students. By helping special education team members address each component of the acronym, a personalized IEP goal is designed to help the student improve performance or complete a task.

Additionally, Hauser's (2017) OBSE framework assists special education team members with developing a thorough characteristic profile of the student to be able to write active IEP goals and monitor the progression of the goals. Following the model's acronym as a guide, special education team members address each component, building a complete profile of the student, which includes the present level of performance. In

sequential steps, special education team members continue to follow the acronyms to create relevant benchmarks and measurement tools. Lastly, special education team members assess the progress through a planned evaluation method.

Because special education team members do not always have time to meet during or after work hours (Drew & Gonzalez, 2021), a model to write high-quality IEP goals is a practical way to support special education team members. Between professional development trainings, special education team members can use the model to support writing high-quality IEP goals without having to rely on impromptu meetings, hall chats, phone calls, email correspondences, and inquiries to special education facilitators and program leaders. The model is a simple visual representation of sequential steps that can be used anytime and anywhere.

A personalized model to increase the scope of understanding and application between professional development opportunities means that special education team members will always have a tool that supports them in writing high-quality IEP goals. With increased understanding, special education team members can begin to collaborate more effectively because the information is generalized throughout schools. With a continuing level of support for IEP goal writing competency, special education team members can write better IEP goals that directly relate to the student and support improved classroom performance and perhaps IEP goal mastery.

IEP Requirement Support

Special education team members are required to write high-quality goals that govern IEP requirements. Since the quality of the IEP goals is under scrutiny of the

Supreme Court, they must be written rigorously and progressively to help students functionally and academically in the classroom (Rojo et al., 2021). Using a model to write high-quality IEP goals helps the special education team member to align the student's present level of performance with reasonable goals and objectives that should map progression over time. Reasonable and progressive goals that can chart student improvement over time directly comply with state mandates and are also helpful in supporting other areas of the IEP.

Special Education Team Members' Effect on Student Learning and Improvement

When special education team members use a model to help them write specific student-centered goals, other IEP components can also be written effectively, such as classroom accommodations and related services. A well-written IEP goal positively affects the student's progress and success in the classroom (Juarez & Purper, 2018; Kern et al., 2019). Research has shown that when special education team members have IEP goal writing competency, the student's instructional needs are supported, learning takes place, and progress is made (Juarez & Purper, 2018; Kern et al., 2019). Special education team members will know what the student can and cannot do. The goal is broken down into objectives to show the special education team members the steps needed for goal mastery. Effective measurement scales can be designed that will allow special education team members to easily chart the student's progress and follow the results to evaluate the accomplishment of the goal. Accurate data helps the special education team member revise or create active IEP goals and design instruction that is relevant to the student.

Poorly written IEPs reveal a level of the special education team member's inability to write high-quality goals (Dietz, 2021). Students lack functional and academic progress in the classroom from poorly written IEP goals (Wilson, 2020). Irrelevant goals are above, below, or out of the student's abilities; altogether and can lead to the student being ill-prepared to transition into adulthood (McFadden & Whitaker, 2022; Findley et al., 2022). Special education team members need to understand the student's strengths and weaknesses, and what the student needs to work on needs to be addressed in the IEP. Poorly written IEPs show a disconnect between the knowledge of the student's needs and their strengths (Fox et al., 2021). Limited progress is made when students forego the opportunity for adequate classroom support through high-quality IEP goals. The student's abilities remain limited without active goals to support learning in the classroom.

Project Description

I created a 4-day professional development training for the final project of this study for 20 to 25 special education team members. Special education team members would be divided into groups of four and five. As a review, the professional development training would incorporate a PowerPoint with trainer notes for the first two days, visual examples, a question-and-answer session with relevant and immediate feedback, and a before and after training self-evaluation of five questions. The provided materials include unidentified sample students' narratives and a model of the four sequential steps to creating a high-quality IEP goal, writing tablets and pencils, small and table-size postage notes, and poster boards. Three rooms or areas have been allotted for daily breakout

sessions to accommodate diverse learners and the need for an extended time to maximize learning. The professional development goals are:

Goal 1: To learn a sufficient method to writing high-quality IEP goals.

Goal 2: To understand the connection between IEP goals and student progress.

Goal 3: To identify, develop, and measure meaningful IEP goals.

Although the professional training can be delivered in-person or virtually, special education team members have stated that in-person learning is more beneficial for visual samples and models, with time allotted for hands-on coaching and feedback. The materials that will be used for the training are a projector, a computer, a PowerPoint printout of the training information, a 4-day training schedule, a spacious room with tables and chairs for in-person learning, sizeable white poster boards, and small colorful sticky note pads. The professional development course and needed supplies are listed in Appendix A.

Potential barriers to professional development training are a slow internet connection or no internet connection, technology equipment malfunctions, a much larger class size, or low participation. Resolutions to address internet and technology equipment issues would be to plan and set up for the training early to confirm efficiency. Early registration with confirmation is recommended for the professional development training to prepare for a specific number of participants. To promote and encourage participation in the professional development training, the administration can offer various work-related incentives such as catered lunches, on-site massages for stress decompression, tech gadgets, small gifts, or 10-dollar gift cards.

The suggested timetable for the professional development training is over four consecutive days to encourage participation and promote a strong sense of collaboration and comprehension. The role of the trainer is to facilitate the PowerPoint presentation, simplify the model's process, guide learning, and promote conversation and collaboration between small groups in breakout sessions. The role of the special education team member is to participate in the training through an active dialogue of questions and comments, engage in small group conversation and activities in the breakout sessions, and self-reflect on their learning.

Project Evaluation Plan

Special education team members are the key stakeholders in this professional development training. The evaluation plan for the project deliverable is a summative and formative assessment of five questions using the Likert Scale. The special education team member will be given the same five questions twice, once at the start of the training, and then again at the end of the training. The special education team member will be able to follow their learning and progress throughout the entire exercise, referring to the answers given on the evaluation. Each daily breakout session will provide the special education team members with opportunities to practice using and applying the model to build active IEP goals. The formative evaluation includes a chance to apply the model to a student's profile, using the sequential steps of the framework to make an applicable goal. The special education team member's ability to write a high-quality IEP goal utilizing the model of sequential steps is the evaluation's primary goal.

Project Implications

Special education team members and students who receive special education may experience a social change. First, special education team members may collaborate effectively to write high-quality goals by participating in the relevant in-service professional training and learning how to apply the framework of sequential steps. Social change may be evident through universities, including the framework in pre-service education for special education teachers. Novice special education teachers would enter the workplace with the experience of writing high-quality IEP goals from the onset. Next, with increasing of IEP goal writing competency, special education team members can write relevant and active goals that genuinely represent the student, thus aligning appropriate supports to improve classroom performance and student learning. Students who show reasonable progress in the classroom may have a great foundation to continue to graduate, possibly furthering their education after high school. Finally, social change may be evident in the community, seeing the success of young adults with a disability who can effectively work and live independently alongside others.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

The conceptual framework was the strength of this project study. I used Hauser's OBSE framework. The OBSE framework refers to explicit steps that special education team members should take to build a complete student profile that supports writing high-quality IEP goals to meet student needs. Using this framework, I was able to generate quality semistructured interview questions that directly related to the varied abilities of the special education team members. The OBSE framework's usefulness was applicable to special education team members as a personable tool to support writing IEP goals that meet with student needs. Additionally, special education team members who write high-quality goals position students to show reasonable progress in the classroom. The OBSE conceptual framework's efficiency was operative in varied ways throughout the project study.

Using the basic qualitative study, I was able to capture the viewpoints of the participants vividly and openly. In the semistructured interviews, special education team member participants were able to elaborate on their experiences, offering insights that were helpful to understanding their abilities to writing high-quality goals that meet student needs. Participants revealed their learning styles and the relevant resources needed to maintain and strengthen their IEP goal writing competency. Other types of studies, such as the quantitative or mixed-method approach would not have been applicable for this study. Although the process to collaborate with the participants was

time consuming and required diligence, the collected data were extremely important and beneficial to the whole project study.

Limitations

Several school districts indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting their ability to participate in research. I spent two months attempting to work with various school districts through phone calls and emails to gain approval to conduct this research. Once I was given the approval to conduct research, potential participants were still difficult to find. Special education team members could have chosen not to participate because of work-related and personal experiences with COVID-19. Because schools were not having in-person learning during the time of this research study, I had to find alternate means of conducting interviews with participants via a virtual platform or a phone call. Potential participants could have felt uncomfortable with using technology, as many had to quickly learn how to connect with coworkers and students virtually.

This project study was intended for a small population of special education team members in small school districts. Some special education team members may have been concerned about confidentiality because they were from a small school district. I used purposeful sampling to select participants familiar with writing IEP goals, and this meant there was a chance participants could have known each other. Although special education team members did share their experiences, which showed their varied abilities with writing high-quality goals, some may have overreported or underreported their responses.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Because this project study took place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, scheduling semistructured interviews was a challenge. Many participants had to reschedule their appointment time. An alternative approach to data collection could have been a take-home survey in which participants completed the survey at their convenience and did not have to maneuver through a virtual platform to participate in a semistructured interview. However, a basic qualitative study requires interviews.

The quality of written IEP goals relating to students' needs could be the focus as an alternate definition to the problem instead of special education team members. The competency of special education team members could be determined by their ability to write goals based on a student's present level of performance. Special education team members could evaluate IEP goal data for student progress in the classroom.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

The saying *teachers are students too* has a deep and true meaning for me. Having taught for 12 years as a special education teacher, I had no idea how much learning I had to do. I was surprised at how much I learned about myself. I was challenged to rethink, reflect, and redevelop myself personally and professionally, to grow, improve, and progress as an agent of social change. The process to research study completion has humbled me in new ways I never would have imagined.

Scholarship

I believe that I have been preparing for this moment way before I began the research study process. The halls of education have always felt like home to me. From

the brightly decorated positive behavior boards of my elementary school to the concert stage of my orchestra Christmas program to the stern look of my tiny, yet powerful, high-school English literature teacher, I always held a zest for asking questions and searching for answers. I am grateful to my mom, and a few teachers, who allowed me to ask. I had a curious nature and saw a little deeper than most the conflict between learners and learning. I wonder at the powers behind it. Those brave few educators encouraged my curiosity and empowered me to think on, making my mind stronger and stronger to continue to search for the answers to my questions.

Project Development and Evaluation

Arriving at this point in the research study progress was a struggle. My mind was so full of thoughts. Having many of the same experiences as my research study participants gave me pause for concern, as I wanted to present work that was professional, free from biasness, and relevant to the needs of special education team members who write IEP goals to meet student needs. I had to revisit many areas of the project for clarity, tone, and format. Great effort was taken to ensure that all components of the project were applicable and vigorous.

The great quest of an effective teacher is to guide learners to their own enlightenment, using pertinent tools as a resource. I kept thinking about all the things that I learned along the way during the research process. I knew the professional development needed to be practical. Knowing this helped me build a project that considered diverse learners and supply tools that could maintain their skills and abilities. The errors and setbacks I experienced during the project were influential to my self-reflection. I have

come to realize with the support of my professor, support persons, and many additional resources that I am confident to teach, organize, plan and revise projects. Going forward, I am confident in guiding special education team members through this professional development project to refresh and improve teacher IEP competency.

Leadership and Change

I take my position as an educator seriously; it is an awesome responsibility. As an educator, my actions make all the difference for learners. As an educator, I must hold respect for all learners. I reflect on my own experience as a learner in hopes of understanding how to support learning for others. An educator's duty is to ignite in learners a curiosity for knowledge and skills. As an educator, I am forever seeking opportunities to grow and improve professionally, leading in areas where voices are quiet or overpowered by an ineffective systematic approach.

Leadership for change starts with inequitable practice and finding methods and ways that are beneficial for all. Ineffective practices in education have always bothered me, and I hope to continue being an agent of change beyond this research project. I am forever improving my educational leadership skills and am fit to partner with others who see social change in special education as a win–win situation for all. For example, when special education team members improve IEP goal writing competency, they write applicable goals that reflect the needs of the students; as a result, students are prone to show improvement and progress in the classroom, and students have the potential to transition from high school into adulthood with skills and abilities that support working or seeking higher education.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Currently, the US Supreme Court mandates that all IEP goals be written and show that the student can make reasonable progress. This study addressed the problem of special education team members' inability to write high-quality goals. The failure to write high-quality goals means that special education team members have had to find alternative ways of gaining, maintaining, and improving their abilities to write high-quality goals. I wanted to know how special education team members, in local school districts, write high-quality goals to meet the needs of students. I wanted to know what tools were used to assess its effectiveness, so I talked with special education team members who write goals that meet the needs of students. This study aimed to examine the abilities of special education team members who write IEP goals that align with the requirements of students and bring awareness to the fundamentals needed to improve the process. Primarily, the goal was to help special education team members write and maintain IEP goal writing proficiency using a model that can be generalized between school districts.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Thorough research and analysis revealed a need for other special education teams' professional development training to support IEP goal writing proficiency. The social change impact may significantly affect special education team members to learn, recall and review the sequential steps to writing high-quality IEP goals that meet student needs. Additionally, this social change can impact how students learn in the classroom. They

will have the support of active IEP goals to work on, allowing them to show reasonable academic and functional progress in the school.

Implication for further research stems from the findings and results, which show the vital importance of establishing policies and practices that support special education educators in the classroom. From pre-service to in-service special education educators, this study may be benefit universities, school districts, and policymakers to mandate effective learning support materials. Knowing about how special education educators learn and what is needed to sustain the practice of writing high-quality goals gives stakeholders valuable insight to make a change.

Conclusion

Special education team members have shown varied abilities in writing IEP goals that meet student needs. A basic qualitative design was used to conduct this study and examine the research problem. I sought to explore the abilities of special education team members and the tools used to write high-quality IEP goals. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 11 special education team members in a small local school district in the southeast region of the United States. The collected data provided a deep and accurate understanding of how special education teams obtain IEP goal writing proficiency. A 4-day professional development training was created from the study results titled "Reaching the Goal."

This project study may impact university social change by helping administrators understand the importance of preparing pre-service special educators to write high-quality goals from the onset. This project study may impact social change for small

school districts by helping administrators and educators provide an efficient support tool for special education team members who write IEP goals to meet student needs. Additionally, students will have applicable goals to access classroom instruction and show adequate progress.

This project study may also impact students, parents, families, community members, school board members, city council members, state representatives, and advocacy groups, as these stakeholders share a common interest in how students participate and perform in their academic environment. The stakes may be personal, professional, communal, or financial. Some stakeholders are concerned about the well-being and achievements of students. Other stakeholders make vital decisions about the school's organization and operation, while others lend their voices and opinions at town meetings. Stakeholders at the government level work to improve schools' function by implementing state and federal programs. Because each stakeholder mentioned shares an interest in the progress and improvement of special education and has an influence on its success, this research study was deemed critical in understanding the needs of special education team members.

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Appendix A: The Project

Examining Special Education Teams' Ability to Write High-Quality Goals

The purpose of the professional development is to provide special education team members with a basic model of sequential steps to writing high-quality goals. The model is a beneficial way to generalize the IEP goal writing process. This process is an additional way for special education teams to collaborate when supporting students' functional and academic skills in the classroom.

I created the learning outcome of this professional development from the specific needs of special education team members who participated in the project study. I designed the professional development to address the following learning outcomes:

Goal 1: To learn a sufficient method to write high-quality IEP goals.

Goal 2: To understand the connection between IEP goals and student progress.

Goal 3: To identify, develop, and measure meaningful IEP goals.

Target Audience: The professional development was designed to support special education team members, at the local level, in writing high-quality goals that align with student needs.

Timeline: The professional development includes four half-day morning sessions. During the 4-day sessions, special education team members will receive coaching, personal feedback, hands-on learning in small groups, and one-to-one training when needed.

Format: I designed the professional development for whole and small group learning to encourage maximum participation and engagement between all participants.

Evaluation: Participants are required to complete a professional development beginning

and ending survey to gauge learning needs and IEP goal writing proficiency. Participants

will also fill in the survey to measure the effectiveness of the professional development.

The Project includes 4 Power Points, with speaker notes, one for each of the 4-day

professional development trainings. Each participant will receive 1 packet/tote that

includes all materials for the entire 4-day professional development training (postage

notes, pencil, marker, writing tablet, a 'before' and 'after' training assessment, 4

unidentified sample students' narratives, a model of the four sequential steps to creating a

high-quality IEP goal and a copy of the 4-day Power Point presentation).

PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT (DAY 1)

Reaching the (IEP) Goal!
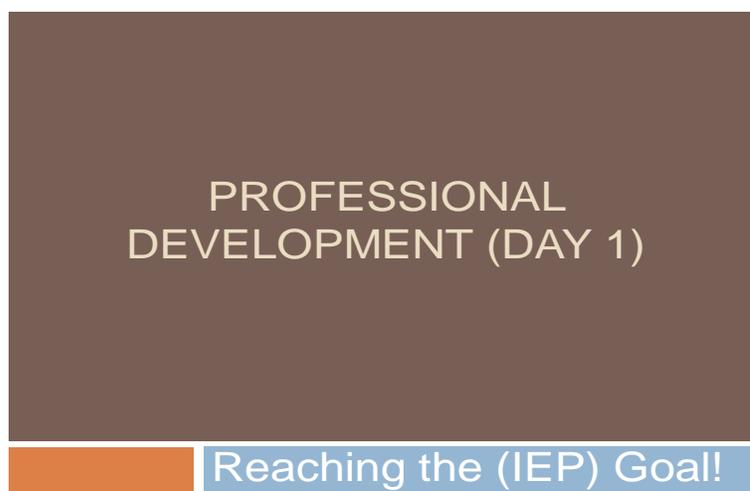
Greet participants. Use the first fifteen minutes to allow participants to sign in, pick up a

packet and take a seat (Three to four participants per table, to maximize participant

dialogue and participation). (Note to self: Try to adhere to the time constraints. Use a

timer if you need to.)

(To promote and encourage participation in the professional development training,

administrators can offer various work-related incentives such as breakfast snacks, catered

lunches, on-site massages for stress decompression (door prize), tech gadgets, small gifts (per correct answers) or 10-dollar gift cards.

Day 1 Morning Schedule

8:30-8:45	Participants Check-In
8:45-9:00	Welcome! Opening Remarks
9:00-9:15	Pre-Assessment
9:15-10:30	Group Session: What is the Connection Between IEP Goals and Student Progress?
10:30-10:45	Break
10:45-11:15	Break-Out Sessions
11:15-12:00	Group Session: Let's Talk About It

After the first 15 minutes, began to discuss the morning topic, and the learning target (To understand the connection between IEP goals and student progress). Tell the morning group that this is day 1 of the 4 morning trainings and the training times are from 8:30 am to 12:00 pm. Say, "I have placed a copy of the morning schedules in your packets. Please review the morning schedule."

(Note to self: Try to adhere to the time constraints. Use a timer if you need to.)

Introductions

Trainer(s) introduces themselves, including their credentials. Each trainer will briefly be

prepared to talk about why the topic of discussion is important them.

(Do we want to include participant introductions too? How much time will that take?)

Pre-Assessment

- Time to complete the 5 question pre-assessment included in your packet.
- You will complete the post assessment at the end of the professional development.
- Time to review, refresh and or relearn!

Please find and complete the pre-assessment in your packet. I will set the timer for 15

minutes, to keep us on track. You will complete the post assessment at the end of the

professional development. Both assessments will be collected, but not graded. It is used

to gauge your participation and progress. (Participants are asked to locate and complete

the pre assessment. Retrieve all pre assessments from participants)

Pre/Post Assessment Questions.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Undecided (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
****
1. The quality of the IEP goal is currently under scrutiny of the Supreme Courts.
2. "I know that my IEP goals are good."
3. "I rely on the support and opinion of my team members when drafting IEP goals."
4. "I have many different supports to help me when I am writing IEP goals."
5. The most meaningful professional development includes instructors who take the time to explain the many parts to writing an appropriate IEP goal, to model how to write the IEP goal, to check my work and offer feedback.

(Before the next slide, ask the question.) WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN

IEP GOALS AND STUDENT PROGRESS? Accept answers from the participants. Ask

for a show of hands per agreement, per response.

What is the connection between IEP goals and student progress?

A well-written IEP goal positively affects the student's progress and success in the classroom (Juarez & Purper, 2018; Kern et al., 2019).
- The student's instructional needs are supported.
- Learning takes place.
- Progress is made.

Special education team members will know exactly what the student can and cannot do.

The goal is broken down into objectives to show the special education team members the

steps needed to goal mastery. Effective measurement scales are designed that will allow

special education team members to easily chart the student's progress and follow the

results to evaluate the accomplishment of the goal. True data helps the special education

team member revise or create active IEP goals and design instruction that is relevant to

the student.

A Well-Written IEP Goal…

- States are required to provide…
- State standards include…
- According to the Supreme Court case of…
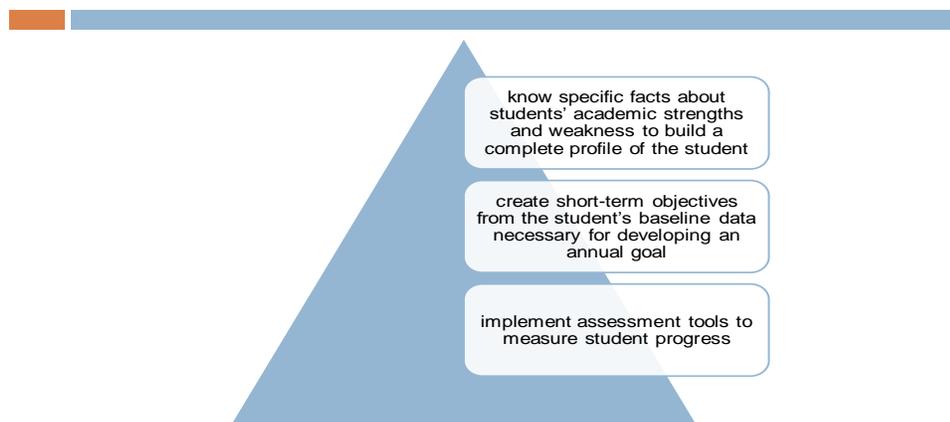- A two-part free and public education (FAPE) standard is…

1. States are required to provide students with disabilities a free and appropriate education (FAPE), which must meet state educational guidelines, under the enacted law, Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Jameson et al., 2020).

2. State standards include presenting specific goals that could reveal student progress (Jameson et al., 2020).

3. According to the Supreme Court case of Andrew F. v. Douglas County School District, a student's IEP demands relevancy and aggressiveness with effortful targets, to incur reasonable progress, which is a pivotal point for all students who qualify for special education (Yell & Bateman, 2019).

4. A two-part free and public education (FAPE) standard is being imposed in the U.S. Courts of Appeals that supports assessing the relevancy of a student's IEP (Prince et al., 2018).

A Well-Written IEP Goal…

know specific facts about students' academic strengths and weakness to build a complete profile of the student

create short-term objectives from the student's baseline data necessary for developing an annual goal

implement assessment tools to measure student progress

(Ask for readers.) What are some skills of special education team members who write active goals?

Let's take a break!

Inform the participants that it is time for a break and that a timer will be set for 15 minutes to keep the professional training on track and starting promptly.

So What's the Problem?

- □ According to a special education director, special education team members are not receiving the relevant pieces of training to write active IEP goals and objectives.
- □ One local special education coordinator stated that during the facilitation of IEP meetings, she often noticed the disconnection between goals and student abilities.

(Ask for readers.) Since the annual goal is essential to the IEP, it must be understood by all members of the special education team (Al-Shammari & Hornby, 2020; Jachova et al., 2018).
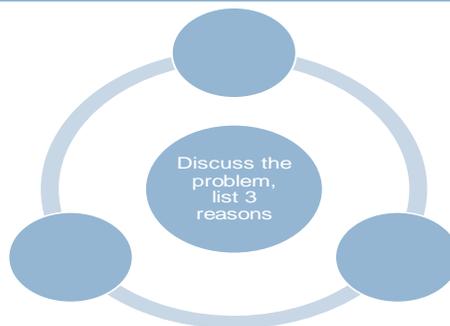
Special education team members need to have knowledge about the student, his or her academic and functional requirements, and how to support his or her learning in the classroom to write practical IEP goals (Sayeski et al., 2019). Being able to share and combine knowledge to build a complete student profile takes practice since each special education team member has a different experience with the special education student (Al-Shammari & Hornby, 2019).

So What's the Problem?

- □ Studies revealed that special educators have struggled with aligningoals that meet students' needs (Hoover et al., 2018; Hott et al., 2021).g

Inform participants that they will now get a chance to share their thoughts with each other and on the parking lot/table poster board provided.

BREAKOUT SESSION TIME!

Discuss the problem, list 3 reasons

Participants will use this 30-minute time to discuss the problem at their table, in their group. Participants will generate and list reasons for this problem and post their findings on the wall.

Special education team members shared their common experiences.

□ Insight requires an observation of the challenges and obstacles that prevent special education team members from writing active goals.

　　□ no time to effectively collaborate

　□ unique styles of learning and processing information

　□ need for relevant and personalized modes of training

　□ no time to practice, get feedback or follow-up sessions

Have an open discussion of the challenges and obstacles that participants believe prevents team members from writing active IEP goals. Write 'common experiences' on sticky notes and then place them on the wall.

Day 1 Closing Remarks

□ **"IF IT WERE EASY, EVERYONE WOULD DO IT!"**

Ask participants what they think about this saying. Does it mean that the task is hard?

Participants are reminded to check their packet for Day 2 professional development

schedule. Participants are thanked for their presence and active participation.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (DAY 2)

Reach for the (IEP) Goal!

Greet participants. Use the first fifteen minutes to allow participants to sign in, take a seat

access their packet (Remember; Three to four participants per table, to maximize

participant dialogue and participation).

(Note to self: Try to adhere to the time constraints. Use a timer if you need to.)

Please find the power sayings list and post up individual strips of the sayings on the walls

within the professional development training. If there are no immediate walls, create

large individual table strips of each saying.

Day 2 Morning Schedule

8:30-8:45	Participant Check-In
8:45-8:50	Remarks and Power Talk
8:50-9:05	A Quick Review of Day 1
9:05-10:10	Group Session: A Sufficient Method to Writing High-Quality IEP Goals
10:10-10:25	Break
10:25-11:25	Group Practice
11:25-12:00	Break-Out Session/Private Practice

After the first 15 minutes, began to discuss the morning topic, the learning target (To learn a sufficient method to writing high quality IEP goals). Tell the morning group that this is day 2 of the 4 morning trainings and the training times are from 8:30 am to 12:00 pm. Say, "You should have a copy of the morning schedules in your packets. Please review the morning schedule. If you need another copy, please let me know."

(Note to self: Try to adhere to the time constraints. Use a timer if you need to.)

REMARKS

Ask a few participants choose a 'power saying' strip from the table and explain how it can motivate them to always strive for writing high-quality goals.

("I WANT TO SEE WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T GIVE UP"

"IF IT WERE EASY, EVERYONE WOULD DO IT"

"DON'T STOP UNTIL YOU'RE PROUD"

"FIND YOUR FIRE"

"TRUST THE PROCESS"

"FORGET THE MISTAKE, REMEMBER THE LESSON"

"DO SOMETHING TODAY THAT YOUR FUTURE SELF WILL THANK YOU

FOR"

"BE PRODUCTIVE, NOT BUSY"

"IF NOT NOW, WHEN?"

"ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE, IF YOU'VE GOT ENOUGH NERVE"

"I CAN, AND I WILL"

"CRY MOAN WHINE SNIVEL LAMENT GRUMBEL COMPLAIN BUT NEVER

GIVE UP"

"THE BEST IS YET TO COME"

"BE STUBBORN ABOUT YOUR GOALS, AND FLEXIBLE ABOUT YOUR

METHODS"

"IF PLAN 'A' DIDN'T WORK, THE ALPHABET HAS 25 MORE LETTERS!

STAY COOL.")

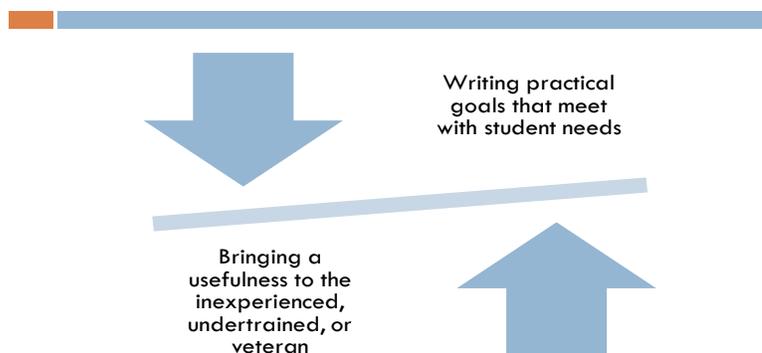Inform the participants that we will do a quick review of the main thought from day one.

Before you do, ask if anyone remembers any main thoughts from day one training.

So, What's the Problem?

- □ Studies revealed that special educators have struggled with aligning goals that meet students' needs (Hoover et al., 2018; Hott et al., 2021).
- □ According to a special education special education team members are not receiving the relevant pieces of training to write active IEP goals and objectives.
- □ One local special education coordinator stated that during the facilitaion of IEP meetings, she often noticed the disconnection between goals and student abilities.

(Ask for readers.) At this time, we will review the information/problem that was found at the local level and in current research.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Writing practical goals that meet with student needs

Bringing a usefulness to the inexperienced, undertrained, or veteran

I will use this time to talk about the project study that I completed.

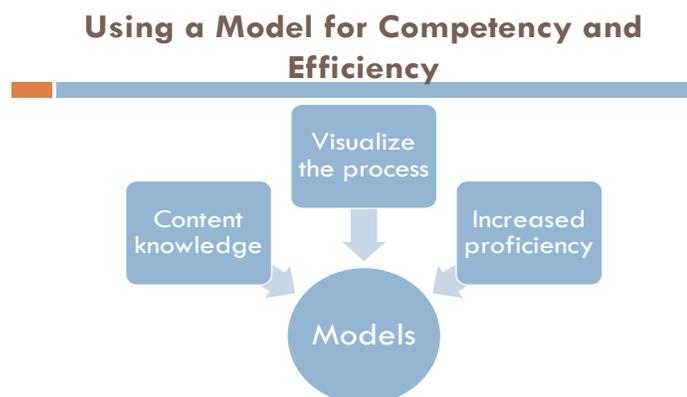## Using a Model for Competency and Efficiency

- In history, models have been used as a description to help visualize an object or systems (Jacobson & Booch, 2021).
- Miniature representations of the prototype have been used in various educational organizations to familiarize its members with the guidelines or rules.
- Implementing a model to help organizational members recall how a process works or the specific steps to take can increase competency.
  - PBIS
  - MTSS
  - RTI

Ask participants if they can think of any other models that are used to help visualize and remember a process or system.

Using a Model for Competency and Efficiency…

- Is a systematic way of helping special education team members target character traits that build a complete picture of the student, starting from what academic and functional behaviors the student displays
- Helps special education team members write IEP goals using relevant methods of collecting, analyzing, and evaluating student data
- Has successive components that bring a usefulness to the inexperienced, undertrained, or veteran special education team member in developing and writing goals that are rigorous and align to the student's needs

Ask for readers. Ask participants what models they have used before or are currently using to help and support writing high-quality IEP goals.

Using a Model for Competency and Efficiency

Visualize the process

Content knowledge

Increased proficiency

Models

Models are used to support the educators' ability to retain knowledge and practice specific skill sets (McMaster et al., 2021).

- Models can hold concentrated amounts of content knowledge that extends past professional development training.

- Using models can help the educator visualize the process and think about what steps to take to next.

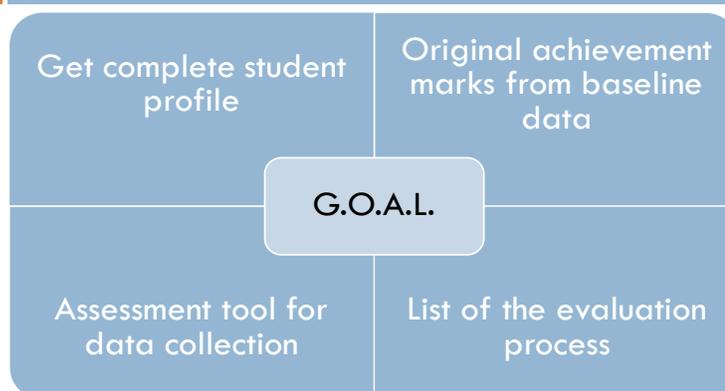- Educators' proficiency increases when they have the necessary tools to improve.
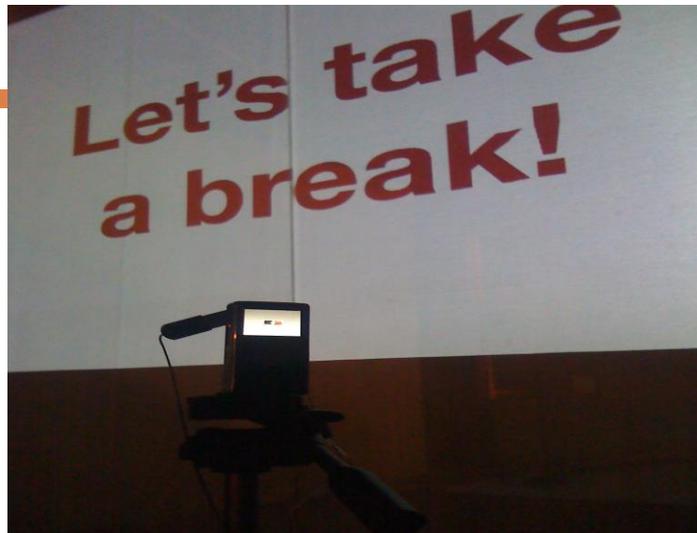
Participants are released for the 15-minute break and reminded that a timer is set to start promptly at the end of the 15 minutes.

Why Follow a Model?

- A personalized model to increase the scope of understanding and application means
  - a tool that supports writing high-quality IEP goals
  - special education team members can begin to collaborate more effectively because the information is generalized throughout schools
  - write better IEP goals that directly relate to the student and support improved classroom performance and perhaps IEP goal mastery

Ask for readers.

Guided by Model Acronyms

Get complete student profile	Original achievement marks from baseline data
G.O.A.L.	
Assessment tool for data collection	List of the evaluation process

Following/using the model's acronym template, as a guide, special education team members address each component, building a complete profile of the student, which includes the present level of performance. In sequential steps, special education team members continue to follow the acronyms to create relevant benchmarks, and

measurement tools. Lastly, special education team members assess the progress through a planned evaluation method.

Group Practice

Using the G.O.A.L. acronym, we will generate a complete profile of student 'A' listed in your packet together. We will also write one goal based on the student profile together.

Break-Out Sessions

□Group 1-Learn/Re-learn

□Group 2-Refresh

□Group 3-Review

At this time participants will be informed of three leveled break-out sessions to practice IEP goal writing. Participants in the 'review' sessions may be called upon to assist in the other two sessions per available trainers present.

"What did you take away from the meeting?"

Ask someone to stand a share what their 'take away' is. Or ask the participants to write it

on their note pad and place it on the table parking lot. Participants are reminded to check

their packet for Day 3 professional development schedule. Participants are thanked for

their presence and active participation. Participants are reminded to check their packet for

Day 3 professional development schedule. Participants are thanked for their presence and

active participation.

Day 3 Training	Re-learn Refresh Review
8:30-8:45	Check-In
8:45-9:00	Remarks (Read the last and final target of the professional development training; To identify, develop, and measure meaningful IEP goals. Inform the participants that the final two days will be spent practicing writing high-quality IEP goals, as a whole group, as a small group, and individually if needed. Tell them that on the last two days questions can be asked, hands-on coaching and personal feedback can/will be given, with ample opportunities for hand-on skill practice. Quick Review of Day 2-Using Models to Write High-Quality Goals (Day 2 should include a review the G.O.A. L. model step by step, implementing the example)
9:00-9:45	Writing High-Quality IEP Goals-Whole Group Practice (Two unidentified student narratives will be presented. As a whole group, create a brief PLAAF, and one goal using the G.O.A.L. model. Participants refer to the model printout.)
9:45-	Writing High-Quality IEP Goals-Small

10:50	Group Practice (Two unidentified student narratives will be presented. As a small table group, create a brief PLAAF, and one goal using the G.O.A.L. model. Participants refer to the model printout. When they are finished, have the group post it up on the wall parking lot)
10:50-11:00	Break (Participants are released for the 10-minute break and reminded that a timer is set to start promptly at the end of the 15 minutes.)
11:00-11:45	Writing High-Quality IEP Goals-One-to-One Practice (One unidentified student narratives will be presented. The participant will work one-to-one with the trainer, creating the PLAAF and goal, using the G.O.A.L. model.
11:45-1200	Question and Answer Period
12:00	End of Day 3 Participants are reminded to check their packet for Day 4 professional development schedule. Participants are thanked for their presence and active participation.

Day 4 Training (last day!)	Re-learn Refresh Review
8:30-8:45	Check-In
8:45-9:00	Remarks Quick Review of Day 2-Using Models to Write High-Quality Goals (Day 4 should include a review the G.O.A. L. model step by step, implementing the example)
9:00-9:45	Writing High-Quality IEP Goals-Whole Group Practice (Two unidentified student narratives will be presented. As a whole group, create a brief PLAAF, and one goal using the G.O.A.L. model. Participants refer to the model printout.)
9:45-10:50	Writing High-Quality IEP Goals-Small Group Practice (Two unidentified student narratives will be presented. As a small table group, create a brief PLAAF, and one goal using the G.O.A.L. model. Participants refer to the model printout. When they are finished, have the group post it up on the wall parking lot)
10:50-11:00	Break (Participants are released for the 10-minute break and reminded that a timer is set to start promptly at the end of the 15 minutes.)
11:00-11:30	Writing High-Quality IEP Goals-One-to-One Practice (One unidentified student narratives will be presented. The participant will work one-to-one with the trainer, creating the PLAAF and goal, using the G.O.A.L. model.)
11:30-11:45	Post Assessment (Participants are asked to locate and complete the post assessment. Retrieve all post assessments from participants)

11:45-12:00	Remarks, Question and Answer Time
12:00	End of Day 4
	Participants are thanked for their presence and active participation.

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Appendix B: Participant Invitation

Interview study seeks special education team members

The new study is called, "*Examining the Special Education Team Members' Ability to Write High-Quality Goals*." Your participation will be a valuable addition to the research findings. The purpose of this study is to examine the abilities of special education team members to write IEP goals that align with the needs of the student and bring awareness to the fundamentals that are needed to improve the process.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Sonya Holman, an EdD student at Walden University. You may ask questions or state any concerns before deciding to participate in the study.

About the study:
- A one hour recorded interview via a virtual platform or phone option
- To protect your privacy, data will be kept secure. No names or titles will be revealed in the interview, report write-up and publication of the research study. *Limitations to confidentiality will be explicitly explained in the confidentiality form and recognition of the researcher to report any harm or abuse to the vulnerable population.*
- Upon study completion, a transcript copy will be sent for your review. You will be given 3 to 4 days to contact the researcher with any comments.

Volunteer Requirements:
- Special education team member
- Experience (or knowledge) writing IEP goals
- Employed at a local school district

> **To confidentially volunteer contact the researcher:**
> **Sonya Holman (434) 709-0067 or**
> **sonya.durham@waldenu.edu**

Appendix C: Semistructured Interview Questions

1. What are your specific learning needs?

2. How important is it for you to have IEP goal writing proficiency?

3. What is your support to ensure IEP goal writing proficiency?

4. Where do you notice the most errors in the IEP goal writing process?

5. When your colleagues approach you with IEP goal writing inquiries what help do you offer them?

6. What steps do you take when you are unsure about an IEP goal procedure?

7. What was your most significant training in writing IEP goals?

8. How do special education teams collaborate to create rigorous IEP goals that support student academic and functional progress?