



## **When it comes to electronic IEPs, don't sacrifice individualization for convenience**

In July 2022, the Connecticut State Education Department's Bureau of Special Education released a new electronic IEP as it launched its Connecticut Special Education Data System. The CT-SEDS is an electronic data management system aimed at simplifying the data collection process and promoting more accurate reporting of student data.

"The format of the IEP itself has changed dramatically," said Pete Maher, a school attorney at Shipman & Goodwin LLP in Hartford, Conn. "Every section has been redesigned, so it's visually an adjustment after looking at the same document for decades. It's striking a balance between efficiency and individualization, which IEP teams have always had to do. Special educators are used to adapting and learning new things and finding multiple ways to teach others new things. There's a lot of positives. It just requires a lot of training and practice and explaining to parents."

Now that the electronic IEP and data management system have been in place for more than six months, IEP teams may want to consider some issues that emerged if they are transitioning to a new IEP document in their own districts. Glean tips from a school attorney on why you should make sure you are prioritizing individualization and parent participation if you're adopting a new electronic IEP.

### **Prioritize individualization**

If your state or individual district is making the switch to a new electronic IEP, ensure your team continues to individualize each section for each student, Maher said. The new Connecticut IEP combines the present levels and goals into the same section to underscore their relationship. With this structure, teams may be less likely to carry over a previous present level of performance or duplicate a goal from a previous IEP or another student's IEP.

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"The old form had a section for all present levels and then you went to the goals separately," he said. "Now, you have a language arts present level and reading goals or a math present level and math goals."

### **Eliminate delays in notification**

Make sure your team can provide prior written notice to parents in a timely manner with sufficient detail, Maher said. The Connecticut IEP no longer contains a prior written notice; the PWN is a separate document.

"I think it's a good development," he said. "It's much easier now to provide prior written notice on the spot, while it may take a few days to finalize the actual IEP. It also allows for a little bit more flexibility in the format. Now you can really explain the actions you're proposing or refusing and why."

### **Help parents understand changes**

Recognize that parents may be used to the previous IEP and need to be walked through the changes, Maher said. Connecticut's special ed bureau offers several training modules on its website for staff members and parents to learn more about the new IEP. You may want to offer similar resources. The CT-SEDS data management system also features a parent portal where parents can find information and sign documents electronically.

Consider having a roll-out of changes over time to allow parents to adjust if the changes to the IEP are drastic, Maher said. "When there's a wholesale shift, it's going to take some time," he said.

### **Plan for technical assistance**

Ensure your team can contact the vendor of the new IEP if they have technical issues with navigating the form, Maher said. Maher said some in Connecticut have had difficulty with moving from one section of the IEP to the next even if they filled out the latter portion appropriately. "In some cases, the next section won't get unlocked until you complete the section before it," he said. "So when you're drafting an IEP, you can only get to certain sections after completing previous sections. It's just a lot of prompts

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and reminders about what needs to be included. But when those don't work properly, it prevents you from moving on in an IEP and getting that finalized."

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