



# IEP Implementation: Communication and Collaboration

## Competency

As a member of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) implementation team, the educator uses communication and collaboration strategies to increase student support toward established goals. All students, with and without disabilities, deserve coordinated support from their team so they can reach their goals.

## Key Method

To successfully implement an IEP, the educator creates and uses a plan that includes all stakeholders, shared instructional strategies, related services, and a feedback process.

## Method Components

The IEP team identifies shared goals and uses negotiation skills to address the needs of students with disabilities.

Members of this team should include:

- Parents and guardians
- The student (when appropriate)
- Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP)
- General education staff
- Other support staff
- Special education staff
- Administrators

Strategies for Collaboration:

## Collaboration, Consultation, and Teamwork

When members of the IEP implementation team collaborate effectively, the focus shifts away from labels and programs and toward the individual student. Rather than seeing a student as belonging to one teacher, the team shares responsibility for the student's success. The student becomes our student, and all educators work together to support their growth and achievement.

This approach helps integrate IEP goals into daily instruction rather than treating them as separate tasks added onto general education requirements. As a result, goals become more meaningful, relevant, and aligned with the student's overall educational experience. When educators provide consistent support and instruction together, learning becomes more coordinated and effective.

Effective collaboration on an IEP team requires active listening, open communication, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to student success. Team members contribute their unique expertise while working toward common goals. Establishing clear expectations, defining roles and responsibilities, respecting diverse perspectives, and striving for consensus help ensure that all students—whether disabled or nondisabled, multilingual or monolingual—receive the comprehensive support they need to thrive.

## Models of Collaboration to Support Students

There are many models and strategies that can be put into place in order to meet the goals of an IEP. As a member of the IEP team, educators need to understand them.

### **Self-Contained**

A self-contained classroom is a special education setting in which students with disabilities receive most or all of their instruction from a special education teacher in a separate classroom. This placement is used when students need intensive support, specialized instruction, or significant accommodations that the general education classroom can't provide for most of the day. Students may still participate in general education classes, specials, lunch, or extracurricular activities when appropriate. The IEP team should be mindful of how race, disability, and language can influence placement decisions, and avoid unnecessary segregation.

### **Push-In**

Push-in services occur when a special education teacher, related service provider, or specialist enters the general education classroom to provide support within the student's regular learning environment. The student stays with peers while receiving accommodations, modifications, targeted instruction, or behavioral support. Push-in services promote access to grade-level curriculum and inclusion with nondisabled peers.

### **Pull-Out**

Pull-out services occur when a student leaves the general education classroom for a designated period to receive specialized instruction or related services in a separate setting. These services may include reading intervention, speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, or specialized academic instruction. Pull-out services are used when a student's needs can be more effectively addressed in a smaller or more focused environment.

### **Co-Teaching**

Co-teaching is a collaborative service delivery model in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher share responsibility for planning, instructing, and assessing students within the same classroom. Both teachers work together to support all learners, including students with disabilities. Common co-teaching models include one teach/one assist, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching. Co-teaching promotes inclusion and helps ensure that IEP goals and accommodations are integrated into daily instruction.

In addition to the above models, many students receive support from special service providers, such as OT/PT, speech, counseling, medical, and psychology. These providers will perform their treatments in spaces that are conducive to students reaching their goals.

These service delivery models represent different ways that special education services can be implemented based on a student's individual needs. The IEP team determines the most appropriate placement and supports by considering how to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the student's Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) while ensuring access to meaningful educational progress.

### **Parent/Family Engagement**

Parents and caregivers are an invaluable source of information about their child's past experiences and skills in settings other than your classroom. Talk with families one-on-one to learn more about their child's goals, strengths, and support needs. Ask them for specific ideas on how your team might successfully include their child in the IEP process, and then incorporate their suggestions.

Parents and caregivers are full and equal members of the IEP team (34 CFR 300.322) because they have unique knowledge of their child's strengths and needs. They have the right to be involved in meetings about identification, evaluation, and IEP development, to ask questions, dispute points, and request modifications to the plan, just like other IEP team members. Sometimes, systems or officials treat some families' voices - especially families of color or multilingual families - as less authoritative. IEP teams must actively counter this by honoring every family's expertise and legal rights.

## Student Engagement

As appropriate, students with disabilities should be included in the IEP process. Many students are able to advocate for themselves, and by including them in the process, you give them a voice and empower them to advocate for their educational needs.

Key IDEA provisions related to student attendance at IEP meetings include:

- The child with a disability should be at the IEP meeting “whenever appropriate.”
- The child must be invited to attend the meeting “if the purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of the postsecondary goals for the child and the transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals.”
- Until the child reaches the age of majority under State law, unless the rights of the parent to act for the child are extinguished or otherwise limited, only the parent or legal guardian has the authority to make educational decisions for the child under Part B of the Act, including whether the child should attend an IEP meeting (71 Fed. Reg. at 46671).

Proper IEP implementation focuses on strong communication, collaboration, and teamwork among IEP team members to support students with disabilities. Families, educators, specialists, administrators, and students set shared goals, clarify roles, and use effective negotiation and problem-solving strategies. Consultation, active listening, and mutual respect ensure that responsibility for student success is shared. This includes meaningful parent and family engagement, recognizing families as equal partners with legal rights in decision-making. A unified, student-centered approach to IEP implementation reduces stigma and strengthens educational outcomes.

## Communication across the IEP Team

As part of an effective IEP team, each member is responsible for understanding the whole picture of their students' education as well as their own role within it. This micro-credential focuses on the creation and use of a communication plan across the network of personnel involved. When all adults on the IEP team across roles and backgrounds stay in communication, students experience consistent support rather than fragmented services.

Team members—including general education teachers, special education teachers, service providers, administrators, and families—share information about progress, challenges, and successes throughout the year.

Team members review present levels or performance, understand priority growth areas, and ensure IEP goals connect to daily classroom instruction and activities. The team should have a process to communicate with involved parties about actions taken, accommodations, modifications, behavioral supports, and interventions, which allows educators to coordinate services and ensure that responsibilities are defined.

Effective communication may occur through team meetings, progress reports, shared documentation systems, emails, phone calls, communication logs, and informal check-ins. Communication should be timely, respectful, data-informed, and focused on supporting the student's academic, behavioral, social, and functional success.

## Supporting Rationale and Research

Elser, C. (2017). The power of team in IEP meetings. Retrieved from Electronic Theses and Dissertations, University of Northern Iowa, 419:  
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/etd/419>.

Friend, M., Cook, L., Hurley-Chamberlain, D., & Shamberger, C. (2010). Co-Teaching: An Illustration of the Complexity of Collaboration in Special Education. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, (20)1, 9-27. DOI:  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10474410903535380>

Nolan-Spohn, H. (2014). Increasing Student Involvement in IEPs. *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*, (28)3. Retrieved from  
<https://www.mwera.org/MWER/volumes/v28/issue3/v28n3-Nolan-VOICES-FROM-THE-CLASSROOM.pdf>

## Resources

Collaboration

[When Special and General Educators Collaborate, Everybody Wins](#)

[What is Online Collaboration?](#)

[Teacher Collaboration as the Key to Our Students' Futures](#)

[Collaborating with General Education Teachers: A Guide for Special Education Teams](#)

Parent and Family  
[Boosting Family Involvement in IEPs](#)

[Family Involvement in Special Education | EBSCO Research Starters](#)

[Maximizing Parental Involvement in Developing the IEP](#)

Student Engagement  
[Transition Suite, a series of nine resource pages](#)

[Students Get Involved!](#)

Technology Assistance  
[How to use Dropbox shared folders](#)

[Get started with docs, G Suite Learning Center](#)

Template for Artifact Assignments

[Communication and Collaboration Plan Template](#)-Sample Only

[Communication and Collaboration Plan Template to use: It will make a copy](#)

## Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

*To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3, and receive a proficient score for all components in Part 2.*

### Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

#### **250–500 words**

Please answer the following contextual questions to help our assessors understand your current situation. *Please don't include any information that identifies you to reviewers.*

1. Describe the students you regularly work with, the learning environment in which you teach, and the students impacted by your work on this micro-credential.
2. What are the typical communication patterns between the adults (and students, when appropriate) on the IEP team?
3. Describe current strengths and barriers in communication and collaboration with the IEP team, including your ability to have difficult conversations, and how these impact your daily practice.

**Passing:** All questions are answered completely and clearly identify the students and learning environment the educator works with, the typical communication patterns among IEP team members, and the educator's current strengths and barriers related to communication and collaboration with the team.

## Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential, please submit the following **three artifacts** as evidence of your learning. *Please don't include any information that identifies you or your students to reviewers.*

All three artifacts should be completed on the provided templates. Clicking on the link in each artifact description will show you the template; you can download it by clicking the "Use template" button.

To submit, **please download a PDF of the document** (File → Download → PDF) after completing all sections so that you remain anonymous to the assessors.

### **Artifact 1: Student Plan Document**

Template: [Artifact 1: Student Plan Members and Roles](#)

Create a list of IEP team members to better understand the current state of communication and collaboration at your site. Choose team members from different roles and backgrounds to get a fuller picture of communication patterns. Identify one student needing multiple services (do not include identifying information) and generate a communication and collaboration list using the template provided in the resource section. Complete all sections of the plan to include:

- Initials of team members
- Their role
- Services names and frequency
- Models used (See Method Components)
- Communication plan: How do the team members currently communicate and what are the barriers?

## **Artifact 2: Communication and Collaboration Analysis**

Template: [Artifact 2: Communication and Collaboration](#)

Using Artifact 2 (page 2 of the template), analyze the current process of communication across the team. Over a period of 20 to 30 school days, document **your role and actions** with the student from Artifact 1, as well as on the process used to communicate with the rest of the IEP team. Note the time frame of your entries. *If other members share information with you, record that interaction on the same document.*

Summarize the process:

- What success did you experience with communication and collaboration with other IEP team members?
- What were barriers to communication and collaboration?
- What changes would you make to communication and collaboration and why?

## **Artifact 3: Feedback from IEP Team Analysis**

Template: [Artifact 3: Feedback from IEP Team Analysis](#)

Ask two IEP team members for feedback from two members of the IEP team to determine how communication and collaboration has worked, how it can be improved, and the impact on student success.

- How has team communication and collaboration supported students' attainment of their goals?
- What should the team's next steps be regarding communication and collaboration?

Next, analyze the feedback and answer the follow-up questions:

1. How has the current communication process supported the student's progress toward their goals?
2. How might the communication and collaboration process be improved across the team?
3. What are some immediate next steps that you can implement to improve communication and collaboration across the IEP team?
4. What are some barriers that could be addressed to improve the current process at your school or site?

## Part 2. Rubric

|                                                                 | <b>Proficient</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Basic</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Developing</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| <b>Artifact 1:<br/>Communication and<br/>Collaboration Plan</b> | <p>All parts of the template are completed.</p> <p>Plan notes all critical members (using initials and role only) and clearly defines their roles and the model of instruction.</p> <p>Shows clarity and evidence of the frequency of communication with specific IEP team members.</p>                                                                                                          | <p>Plan is missing one or two of the required components.</p> <p>Plan is missing one or two critical members, or isn't clear in defining their role(s).</p> <p>Lacks evidence of frequency of communication with specific IEP team members.</p>                                                                                                                                                       | <p>Plan is missing three or more required components.</p> <p>Plan is missing three or more critical members, or isn't clear in defining their role(s).</p> <p>Lacks evidence of frequency of communication with specific IEP team members.</p>                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Artifact 2:<br/>Documentation of<br/>Effectiveness</b>       | <p>Includes 3–6 entries over 20–30 days, with complete information that clearly explains the communication and collaboration process (and may include communication from other team members).</p> <p>Documentation directly relates to the student's IEP and goals.</p> <p>Summary analysis clearly describes successes, at least one barrier, and a well-thought-out change with rationale.</p> | <p>Includes 3–6 entries over 20–30 days, with information that explains the communication and collaboration process, but some entries lack detail or completeness.</p> <p>Documentation relates to the student's IEP and goals, but the connection is not always explicit.</p> <p>Summary analysis describes successes and at least one barrier, but the proposed change lacks a clear rationale.</p> | <p>Includes fewer than 3 entries or entries spanning fewer than 20 days, with information that is incomplete or does not clearly explain the communication and collaboration process.</p> <p>Documentation has limited or unclear connection to the student's IEP and goals.</p> <p>Summary analysis identifies successes or barriers, but not both, and does not include a proposed change or rationale.</p> |

### Exceptional Learner

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| <b>Artifact 3:<br/>Feedback<br/>from IEP<br/>Team</b> | <p><b>The feedback doesn't need to be shared, but should be referenced in the analysis.</b></p> <p>Feedback analysis is well written and answers all four questions thoroughly with information from the feedback shared. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-A specific example related to an IEP goal</li> <li>-Suggestion(s) for improvement from the team members' feedback</li> <li>-Suggestion for an immediate next step for the communication process</li> <li>-Barriers that could be addressed to improve the current process at the school or site</li> </ul> | <p><b>The feedback doesn't need to be shared, but should be referenced in the analysis.</b></p> <p>Feedback analysis answers all four questions with information from the feedback shared. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-A general example related to an IEP goal</li> <li>-A suggestion for improvement, but it's not clear that it's from a team members' feedback</li> <li>-Suggestion for a next step is shared, but isn't clearly able to be put into place</li> <li>-Some barriers that could be addressed but isn't specific to the feedback</li> </ul> | <p><b>The feedback doesn't need to be shared, but should be referenced in the analysis.</b></p> <p>Feedback analysis answers some of the four questions but doesn't reference feedback from other team members. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-A general example related to an IEP goal</li> <li>-A suggestion for improvement, but it's not clear that it's from a team members' feedback</li> <li>-Suggestion for a next step is missing or very general</li> <li>-One barrier that could be addressed but isn't specific to the feedback or the process</li> </ul> |
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### Part 3. Reflection

(300–500 word limit)

Use the word count as a guide when writing your personal reflection on this micro-credential. For tips on writing a good reflection, review the following resource:

[How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?](#)

*Please don't include any information that identifies you to reviewers.*

1. Reflect on the communication and collaboration process with IEP team members and explain how you'll adjust your practice moving forward.
2. What specific, actionable changes will you implement to communicate and collaborate with IEP team members?
3. How do you expect these changes to impact student outcomes?

**Passing:** Reflection provides evidence that this activity has had a positive impact on both educator practice and student success. Specific examples are cited directly from personal or work-related experiences to support claims. Also included are specific actionable steps that demonstrate how new learning will be integrated into future practices.