

Reyna's IEP meeting

Reyna Alvarez is a 2 ½ year old Hispanic child who attends a half-day community early childhood (EC) program 3 days a week. Reyna's teachers, Darlene and Terri, shared with her parents that Reyna was not talking much during her time at EC program, except to use one or two words, mainly to get her needs met. She would say "ater" at snack time or point to the water pitcher to indicate that she wanted more water. She sometimes would initiate interactions with the teachers or other adults in the classroom, but rarely interacted with her peers. Often she approached her teachers by holding out a toy or book. The teachers would comment about what she brought to them, and without saying anything, Reyna would go off and play in one of the classroom areas. Although she was very quiet and seemed shy, she did not seem unhappy while she was at the EC program.

The teachers asked Reyna's parents if she spoke more at home, using her native Spanish. The Alvarez's said that Reyna was also quiet at home, and spoke very little in either Spanish or English. They had noticed that she seemed to be talking much less than many of the other children in their extended family and less than some of their friends' children. They noticed this especially during family events and other get-togethers with friends. Reyna's teachers provided her parents with information about how to contact the school district to request an assessment.

The school district they were in was the same one in which the EC program was located. Reyna was scheduled for an assessment at the public school, and one of the speech therapists also came out to the EC program to observe Reyna in that setting.

A few weeks later, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting was scheduled at the EC program. The speech therapist who had observed Reyna, the speech therapist who had completed the assessment at the school, Reyna's parents, Reyna's EC teachers, and the EC program director, Anne, attended the IEP meeting.

The speech therapist who had completed the assessment led the meeting, going over the results of the assessment, and also going through the goals for Reyna that were written on the IEP. Reyna's assessment had been done in English, and the speech therapist felt that her receptive language skills were OK. She explained to Reyna's parents that Reyna's difficulties seemed to be in articulating certain sounds, and not so much in understanding language. Reyna qualified for speech services and could start the next week by coming to the public school building for her sessions. Reyna would still attend the EC program. The therapist asked the EC teachers if they had noticed any changes in Reyna, and Darlene, the lead teacher, said that even over the past few weeks Reyna seemed more comfortable and was beginning to talk a bit more and even initiate some interactions with some of the other children who had similar interest as her.

The Alvarez's asked questions throughout the meeting, and clarified the kinds of things that they could do at home. All the people attending the IEP meeting signed the forms. As the meeting was wrapping up, Anne, the EC program director, said to Reyna's parents,

If you would like for us to have a copy of the IEP, we can work to incorporate some of the goals throughout out the day for Reyna. If she is working on certain sounds, Darlene and Terri can find songs that use that sound, or books, or just do some fun nonsense rhyming or words.

The speech therapist who had been leading the meeting quickly responded,

Well, since they are the EC program, we are not required to provide them with a copy of the IEP, but as parents you have the choice to give them a copy.

After the meeting, Terri asked, “Why don’t the EC teachers get a copy of the IEP, even though we were at the meeting and they had us sign all those forms?” Darlene said, “Well at least we were at the IEP – that doesn’t happen all that often. Sometimes we don’t even know if a child has an IEP, unless a parent happens to mention that they are getting services somewhere”. Anne commented,

I do get frustrated sometimes because in most cases, children are with us many more hours than they are at the school district programs for their services, and we don’t often get asked our opinions. Parents just need to know that they can provide us with the IEP, and we just have to keep showing them that we can help to work with children when they have special things they are working on. Believe it or not, today’s meeting was progress! We were not only there, but they came to our place and now one more family has a little more information. Not too bad!

Discussion Question:

What do you think about Terri’s, Darlene’s and Anne’s ending comments?

What are some potential strategies for changing the fact that it is still not “typical” for EC teachers and programs to be invited, involved, or consulted about children’s development once they get into the special education system?