



# Getting the Most Out of IEPs: An Educator's Guide to the Student-Directed Approach

By Colleen Thoma Ph.D., Paul Wehman Ph.D.



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Student-directed IEPs are quickly gaining momentum in schools across the country—the proven benefits include higher academic achievement, enhanced student motivation, and increased communication and self-advocacy skills for students with disabilities. Now for the first time, there's a book that gives elementary and high school educators in-depth how-to guidance on making student-directed IEPs work for students with a range of special needs.

Packed with practical advice, helpful examples, and IEP resources for students themselves, this cutting-edge guidebook finally puts into print the best ideas for developing meaningful student-directed IEPs while adhering to legal requirements and evidence-based practices. Teachers will learn how to support students—regardless of their current skills and abilities—as they increase their own level of direction across every facet of the IEP process:

- articulating strengths, needs, and legal rights
- setting clear goals and evaluating progress
- advocating effectively for themselves in formal settings
- determining and securing appropriate accommodations
- communicating preferences and interests
- accepting responsibility for areas where improvement is needed
- participating fully in discussions about post-school plans and needs

Destined to elevate future standards for the IEP process, this compelling and accessible book will help teachers ensure customized, highly effective educational plans for students of all ages. Teachers will empower students to take a lead role in directing their education, advocating for support, and shaping a bright, self-determined future.

Bring students into the IEP process with

- More than **100 quick tips** and practical strategies from teacher focus groups
- **Step-by-step guidance** for increasing student involvement at any level
- A wide range of **case studies** featuring students from ages 9–19
- **Helpful big-picture view of IEPs across 7 stages**—from school-directed to student-directed

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Makes me a believer that student-led IEPs are possible for students varying in age and support needs! . . . A serious guide for team members who want to make student-led IEPs a reality."

(Martha Snell, Ph.D.)

#### About the Author

**Colleen A. Thoma, Ph.D.**, earned her doctoral degree from Indiana University, where she began her research on self-determination in transition planning. She is currently Associate Professor in the Department of Special Education and Disability Policy and Director of Doctoral Studies in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond. She teaches courses on disability policy, transition and secondary education, curriculum and instruction, and characteristics of students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. Her research interests include preparation of teachers to support self-determined transition planning, student-directed individualized education program development, and the impact of student self-determination on transition and academic outcomes. She has mentored doctoral candidates at VCU (including her co-author, Dr. Christina Bartholomew) in their own research on self-determination, teacher preparation, and transition services. Dr. Thoma's scholarship, teaching, and service have focused primarily in the areas of self-determination, transition planning and services, and teacher preparation. She co-authored a book on transition assessment with Dr. Caren Sax, *Transition Assessment: Wise Practices for Quality Lives* (Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2002), and has authored or co-authored more than 40 peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and technical reports. She is a frequent presenter at major national conferences, with more than 100 peer-reviewed presentations over the past 10 years. She is the recipient of VCU School of Education's award for Distinguished Scholarship (2007). Her leadership in the field of transition services also included 5 years on the executive board of the Division on Career Development and Transition, a division of the Council for Exceptional Children, including 1 year as President.

Dr. Wehman is Professor of Physical Medicine with joint appointments in the Departments of Rehabilitation Counseling and also Special Education and Disability Policy at Virginia Commonwealth University. He serves as Chairman of the Division of Rehabilitation Research in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. Dr. Wehman has his Ph.D. in Behavioral Disabilities from University of Wisconsin-Madison.

As one of the original founders of supported employment, he has worked closely with business and industry since 1980 and has published over 200 articles and authored or edited more than 40 books primarily in transition, severe disabilities, autism, traumatic brain injury and employment for persons with disabilities. He has been the Principal Investigator on 41 million dollars in grants during his career.

As the father of two young adults with disabilities, he brings a strong parental as well as business perspective to his work. He is highly active in speaking to professionals, parents, advocates and businesses on transition

and employment for people with autism, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury and other developmental disabilities. On a daily basis he works with individuals with disabilities, communicates regularly with professionals in the world of business related to disability and diversity, and is active in teaching and mentoring medical students, residents, and doctoral students in rehabilitation medicine, special education, rehabilitation and psychology. A major focus of Dr. Wehman's work is on expanding the partnerships with businesses of all sizes so that more persons with disabilities can gain entrance into the workplace and retain employment successfully.

He is a recipient of the Kennedy Foundation Award in Mental Retardation in 1990 and President's Committee on Employment for Persons with Disabilities in 1992. Dr. Wehman was recognized as one of the 50 most influential special educators of the millennium by the *Remedial and Special Education* journal in December, 2000. He is also Editor-in-Chief of *The Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*.

**Christina C. Bartholomew, Ph.D.**, earned her doctoral degree from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond in December 2007. Prior to enrolling in the doctoral program, she worked as a special educator in the Commonwealth of Virginia. During her teaching experience, she worked with students with disabilities in both academic and employment settings. She has served as the student representative on the board of the Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Career Development and Transition and was awarded the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society Scholarship Award for VCU's School of Education in 2006. Dr. Bartholomew has worked on a statewide project promoting the instruction of self-determination skills in secondary settings and has created and implemented professional development seminars for middle school teachers in the areas of coteaching, collaboration, and assessment practices. Dr. Bartholomew has taught several graduate-level courses in secondary and transition programming, co-teaching and collaboration, instructional methods for individuals with intellectual disabilities, and trends and characteristics in special education. She has presented at numerous state and national conferences on self-determination, student-led individualized education programs, and linking transition to academic goals and instruction. She has conducted dissertation research in the area of teacher perceptions of school and classroom influences on their support for student self-determination, and she has coauthored articles for educational journals. She currently works in the field of special education as an adjunct instructor at VCU and as an educational consultant.

**Kimberly Boyd, M.T.**, received her master in teaching degree in special education from Virginia Commonwealth University and is currently a third-year doctoral student in the Department of Special Education and Disability Policy. Her professional areas of interest include working with students with intellectual disability (ID), postsecondary education for students with ID, and the improvement of transition services for all students with disabilities. Ms. Boyd currently works as a special education coordinator for a local public high school.

Mary Fisher is Assistant Professor, Teaching and Leadership Program, at Syracuse University. Mary Fisher has been a teacher for 20 years. Her research interests include facilitating children's friendships and designing naturalistic interventions in public school classrooms.

Elizabeth Evans Getzel, Ph.D., is Director of Postsecondary Education Initiatives with the Rehabilitation

Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports at Virginia Commonwealth University. She has extensive experience conducting research, evaluation, and training in the areas of transition planning for secondary students with disabilities, postsecondary education for students with disabilities, and career planning/employment for individuals with disabilities. She currently directs approximately \$3 million of grant-funded projects focusing on supported education in postsecondary education, career development for college students with disabilities, faculty professional development focusing on universal design principles, and secondary education transition services. Her research interests include secondary education transition planning, self-determination skills of college students with disabilities, and effective services and supports for college students with disabilities. Ms. Getzel serves as Associate Editor for the *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability* and is on the editorial boards for the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* and *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*. She has authored or co-authored journal articles and book chapters on transition, career development, postsecondary education, and employment. In addition, Ms. Getzel has presented extensively at state, national, and international conferences and at meetings on her projects and research areas.

**Carol Schall, Ph.D., Director, Virginia Autism Resource Center, Virginia Commonwealth University, Post Office Box 842020, Richmond, Virginia 23284**

Dr. Schall is Assistant Professor of Special Education and Disability Policy at Virginia Commonwealth University. She has been learning from and supporting individuals with autism for more than 25 years. Dr. Schall is involved in supporting individuals across Virginia through her work as the director of the Virginia Autism Resource Center. She is well versed in completing functional behavior assessments and using positive behavior supports to develop comprehensive plans for individuals from a person-centered approach. Dr. Schall is a nationally known speaker. In addition to her speaking engagements, she provides consultations to schools, families, and community services providers who support individuals with autism or related disorders. Dr. Schall's research interests include the use of psychotropic medication by individuals with autism spectrum disorders and training for parents and professionals who work with individuals with developmental disabilities. Dr. Schall is listed in the 2005 and 2006 editions of *Who's Who in America* and was honored by TASH with their Positive Approaches Award.

**LaRon A. Scott, Ed.D.**, received a bachelor of science degree in criminal justice, with a psychology minor, from Radford University in Virginia. He worked as a mental health/mental retardation case manager before completing a master's degree in education from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Qualified in special education and mental health, LaRon continues his career, which includes working with at-risk and children and adolescents with special needs by serving as an intensive in-home counselor and special education teacher. Mr. Scott teaches students with disabilities in both academic and community settings. He continues to guest lecture in graduate-level courses at VCU on universal design for learning and self-determination. He was recently named the special education department chairperson at the school where he is employed. In 2007, Mr. Scott received the Iva Dean Cook Teacher of the Year Award, given by the Division on Career Development and Transition of the Council for Exceptional Children.

**Ronald Tamura, Ph.D.**, earned his doctoral degree from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and is currently Associate Professor at Southern Connecticut State University in the Department of Special

Education and Reading where he teaches graduate courses in the areas of developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, collaboration and consultation, and secondary transition. His research interests include personnel preparation, self-determination, transition, and positive behavior supports. He was elected and served as a member of the Board of Directors for the Council for Exceptional Children. He is a former secondary-level special educator and has worked for the Connecticut State Department of Education in the Bureau of Special Education as an Education Consultant. He has contributed as coauthor on journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings in the areas of transition, instructional strategies, and self-determination.

**Pamela Sherron Targett, M.Ed.,** has worked in the area of disability and employment since 1986. For 22 years she oversaw the day-to-day operations of a fee-for-service supported employment program that assisted individuals with significant disabilities with going to work. During this time she also worked with schools to develop community-based vocational education programs. Her special interests include transition to work for youth with disabilities and individuals with significant support needs, such as brain injury and autism.

## Users Review

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