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SPEAKERS

Lani Jennings-Hall, Derek Henderson, Kyla Bishop, Ally Thomlinson, Mollie Hernandez



Lani Jennings-Hall 00:02

Good evening, I'm Lani Jennings-Hall and you're listening to speak up Arkansas on KABF 88.3 FM. Disability Rights Arkansas is proud to be a part of KABF weekly speak up Arkansas program to encourage dialogue about the issues that matter most to people with disabilities, their families, and caregivers, and educate the public about these issues to make Arkansas a truly inclusive state where everyone's personhood and contributions are valued. This show is pre recorded, so we won't be taking calls but we always welcome your questions and comments, you can give us a call at 800-482-1174 or you can find us online on our website at www.disabilityrightsar.org. We're also on Facebook @DisabilityRightsAR and you'll find us on Twitter @drArkansas. This is an important time of year for parents, students and educators alike. It's back to school. It can also be a frustrating and scary time trying to navigate your child's Individualized Education Program or IEP. In today's episode, I'm joined by a panel of experts to discuss the parent and child's role in the IEPs adding transition services into the IEP and a new proactive curriculum coming out to aid you in your IEP journey. I'm excited to be joined by Ally Thomlinson, Director of Arkansas Alliance for Disability Advocacy, Derek Henderson, attorney at Disability Rights Arkansas and former educator, Mollie Hernandez, an advocate here at Disability Rights Arkansas, former educator, and transition services extraordinaire. And finally Kyla Bishop attorney a Disability Rights Arkansas. Thank you all so much for joining me today. We have a lot to cover. So let's dive right in. Ally, I'm gonna start with you. Can you talk a little bit about your role at Disability Rights Arkansas, as well as the IEP curriculum that you and your team have been working on?



Ally Thomlinson 01:58

Yeah, definitely. Thank you so much for having me. Lani as everyone heard, my name is Ally Thomlinson, and I'm the Director of the Arkansas Alliance for Disability Advocacy. And we are funded by the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, and with Disability Rights Arkansas, our program trains self advocates, family members and allies and advocacy, leadership, voting and public policy, just anything that they need anytime they want it. So this means that we do everything that we can to ensure that each Arkansan has the education and the tools that they need to create a life and estate powered by inclusion, equity and respect. So

what we try to do is ensure that each person has the tools that they need, by creating what the people of Arkansas say that they need, and through surveying the people of our state, and looking at the calls that come in to our protection and advocacy agency, we have found that we need a more comprehensive, and really a straightforward resource for those that are in the trenches of special education. So the Alliance with the help of many great partners, I'm gonna say that, and I mean that because we couldn't have done this without them. But we've created a robust resource guide to help family members and students with IEPs. And understand just really how to, you know, take a proactive approach in the IEP process.

L

Lani Jennings-Hall 03:22

Oh, that is a that is a lot. So can you tell us a little bit what you're wanting to accomplish with the curriculum?

A

Ally Thomlinson 03:28

Definitely. So um, when I say the IEP trenches, I really mean that I'm a parent of a child that has been on an IEP since they were in kindergarten. And there's no way to really prepare yourself unless you have someone set you down and try to prepare you for it. And even if then you're really not prepared. I think that all of us working. And in IPs, we really know that right? And so what we're trying to do is give parents the tools that they need to be involved. So legally, a parent is an active team member. Parents do not take their concerns to an IEP team, what they are, they're an active team member of the IEP team. So what we want them to be able to do is be actively involved and ready to take action whenever needed. So whether they're bringing concerns whether they want to help with data, tracking anything that they want, we want them to be ready and want them to be able to take a proactive approach to the IEP process. Instead of taking a reactive approach. We want to make sure that parents and students ally are really successful in the entire process so students can grow to their maximum potential.

L

Lani Jennings-Hall 04:40

You mentioned that parents you know being at the table. I want to throw it over to Derek for just a minute. Derek, you have a unique perspective, being in the special education world and now being at DRA. Well, you touched a little bit about parents. Do they have a hard time being active members of the IEP team?

D

Derek Henderson 04:57

Absolutely. That can be difficult. It can be intimidating for a peer Aren't when they come to an IEP meeting, and there could be five or six representatives from the district, maybe more in some cases, and that can feel kind of overwhelming. It can make parents feel like their input is not as valued as other other people, it can present the idea that it's a panel decision, and it's up for a vote. And it's not, it's supposed to be what Ally described. It's a collaborative process. And so that can be difficult for parents to understand their role, and that they are equal and valued members of that team.

L Lani Jennings-Hall 05:39

Let's pause just a minute on this curriculum. Let's talk about our IEPs just a little bit. We were talking about this curriculum, and I just to give our listeners a little bit a little bit more of an insight. Mollie, Kyla, do one of y'all want to talk about what an IEP is, and how DRA can really, you know, assist in this process?

K Kyla Bishop 05:58

Sure. So an IEP stands for, you know, an Individualized Education Plan. And so this plan is going to lay out all the support services, and interventions that a child or a student might need to access, you know, his or her education on Laney, you made a good point earlier about how, you know, the parent is, you know, legally part of the team. And, you know, I think it's important to stress that, you know, an IEP is a legal document, it is, you know, document created by federal statute, and it legally binds the district of provide those supports and services outlined in the IEP, like Derek was saying, it is a collaborative process. And the decisions are made by the IEP team. So if an IEP team makes a certain decision, you know, a principal or superintendent can't, you know, unilaterally overrule it, so to say, so I think that's really important to stress. I think it's important to also remember that as your child grows and changes throughout their years in public education, their their IEP is also going to change. And there's going to be different components that come in there, such as a transition plan, which we're going to look at a little bit later. So just remember, you know, it's something it's a living, breathing document that's going to be very unique to your child and change to the needs and goals of your child.

L Lani Jennings-Hall 07:28

Yeah, I love you had living and breathing and I know also very, very thorough. Can you talk about why it needs to be so thorough?

K Kyla Bishop 07:36

You know, an IEP needs to be thorough, because it's supposed to address all aspects of the child's education, you know, pursuant to the statute. You know, it's the IEP supposed to include students' present level of, you know, achievement and functional performance, how their disability affects how they progress in the general ed curriculum, what their goals are, how they're going to achieve those goals, and, and what time, so it really needs to be thorough, so it can account for all aspects of the child's education so that whoever receives that document knows what to do with it all outlined in there.

A Ally Thomlinson 08:15

Kyla, I'm so glad that you brought that up. And we actually addressed that in the curriculum. And I think that that's very important for parents to know, I think that sometimes especially when the IEP process is going very well, that we sometimes get complacent in writing things

into the IEP, which makes it very hard to pass the Stranger Test. So that document is supposed to be so thorough, we sometimes don't write everything in it, that we're supposed to write in it, or that we need to write in it to be able to hand that off, do we? Or do you all see that? Sometimes?

K Kyla Bishop 08:49

Yes, we often see, you know, for example, maybe a, you know, a behavior plan that is not as thorough as it should be. And that through a lack of an appropriate behavior plan, you know, a child is removed from school, or in some cases even restrained. And so those are the things that need to be so detailed, so that we can avoid them. But absolutely, Ally, yes, a lack of detail can be a nail in the coffin.

A Ally Thomlinson 09:17

I definitely can agree, especially with the parents that we work with in the Alliance, we see that a lot and the students that come to us, we, unfortunately have not gained the momentum with the younger students yet, but we're always working on that, you know, we want to create advocates out of anyone, we want to make sure that anyone has the tools, especially young young individuals, right, the younger you get the tools to be a self advocate, the more powerful you'll be, you don't have to go back and backtrack. And so we definitely want to be able to reach out and gain that momentum with younger individuals. But what we're seeing is parents who have a great relationship with these teachers or with these therapists or these therapists. Some teachers that have a great relationship with a student, that educator knows that student, they know that they need this pencil gripper in English, or they know that they need a 15 minute break after lunch, they know them so well that they give that to them. But when we have a substitute come in, or if that teacher retires, those things are not written into the IEP. So that's a disservice to that student. Yes, those are the exact things that we want to address in this curriculum. Because when you are, like we said earlier in those trenches, those are the little things that you're not thinking about, those things are going right, those things are going wrong. So we're not thinking about that. So we can't emphasize that to our parents and to the students are actively involved in their IPs, we want to make sure that that is on their radar, that we do want to have those things written down. That is a success. For me, that is something that's working for me, I want it to continue to work for me. So I need it written into the IEP.

K Kyla Bishop 10:56

Right. And and you know, Ally, to your point, I think the IDEA contemplates exactly that, you know, at I believe it's a 16 or 14, you know, the child, you know, has to be included in the IEP meetings and back to Mollie's point, especially when it comes to transition, when we're trying to figure out okay, what's next? You want to go to school? Do you want to learn learn a trade? Okay, well, how are we going to get that child from a high school to whatever is next. And so as they get older, they become a lot more involved in especially during the transition process.

L Lani Jennings-Hall 11:35

So question. Mollie. how often do you see students involved in IEP process before it's legally

So question, Mollie, how often do you see students involved in IEP process before it's really necessary for them?

M

Mollie Hernandez 11:42

Not often enough, you know, or they're present, but not engaged. And that engagement is what is so key, you know, within the disability community, we really promote Nothing about us, without us. And at the IEP meeting at that table, that is a safe place for these students to begin to exercise their, their rights, their knowledge, they're just all of the self advocacy, advocacy skills that we want them to have as they go out on their own into the community. So it more than just voicing their wants their needs, it's giving them that practice of here I am at the table. This is my voice. You all may be here to assist me, but you're not my voice. You're my megaphone. Okay. So I want to make sure that, you know, when parents and teachers know that we want those students at the table, we want them there to practice those skills and to be powerful self advocates as they step out into the world.

L

Lani Jennings-Hall 12:44

I love that. Derek, coming from the special education side, what was the impact that you saw, like the importance of this, this collaboration, this teamwork?

D

Derek Henderson 12:53

Well, it's huge, because I'll go back to what Mollie said that this is, for a lot of kids in their families, this is something that spans 10 or 12 years, it's a really long and difficult process in some ways, and you have to be in it for the long haul, you have to understand that there are some growing pains, there's some trial and error. And so it's interesting, and it's fun to see over time how students develop into self advocates, I always love seeing that as we're getting into later High School. Hopefully, you have students running their IEP meetings, essentially, and telling the team what they need, and what's going to help them be successful and giving feedback on what has not been successful. And so it's it's huge to empower families and students. And it can be difficult for the schools, I'll say, because it, it does introduce an element of uncertainty. But again, you have to fall back on the fact that this is a collaborative process. And so kids early on when they first start participating, yeah, it's a little different. Because they may think, wow, you know, I can just get anything here. And I can make this into whatever I want it. And when you're 12, what you want is to not do your schoolwork and things like that, but they become more engaged reasonably, and they come to understand that process over time. And you just have to trust that it's a team decision, and what's going to come out of it is going to be better for that student.

L

Lani Jennings-Hall 14:33

I think that's so powerful, like the way you phrase that you see them turn into their own self advocates. I think that's so powerful, but it doesn't sound like this is necessarily always that easy process. Ally, It sounds like this curriculum that you guys have been working on will really be a wonderful resource to ensure this. Can you talk a little bit more about the curriculum about what it is, what you can learn.

A

Ally Thomlinson 14:56

Definitely, and I'd like to definitely circle back to just Derek And while you were saying a moment ago, it is definitely not an easy process, there's definitely going to be things that have to be changed in that, you know what I mean? There's we're gonna have to circle back, this is not a one IEP meeting a year type thing, you know, we we want to meet as many times as we need to, to make sure the student is successful. Um, we look at individuals in the school district, the students in the school district that do not have disabilities that are not on an IEP, and they make decisions for themselves all the time. And they have that dignity of risk, right. And so when we start bringing students in before they legally have to be in their own IEP meetings, because that's what we want want them brought in as early as possible. So they can start using that self determination, they can start using those self advocacy skills. And we want to give them that dignity of risk, we want to respect them enough to show them that they can make decisions. And then they can handle those consequences, whatever they might be, you know, you've got a choice to turn in your homework, or you'd have a choice to not turn in your homework. And here are the two consequences, what are we going to do today, this is the outcome of that their peers have that they should have that too. And so we're going to trust them with that, and we're going to set them up for success, whatever that might be. And then they're going to make that final choice on that. And so we are going to set them up to succeed in the real world. And we're going to let them practice that in a safe place while they're in school. And so I think Derek said it wonderfully. And I just wanted to elaborate on that how, you know, we are going to set them up for success. And we're going to show them all the avenues that they can take. But we really hope that this curriculum is wonderful. And if it doesn't turn out to be wonderful the first time we're going to tweak it. And we're going to turn around the second time, because this every process is a collaborative process. And we're going to work with our parents, and we're going to work with our students. And we're going to do everything that we can to support them. But what I know from my own experience, and this experience of the parents and of the students that we have worked with in the alliance is you can never be prepared enough for your first IEP meeting. Right? It is so scary. It is the scariest thing Derek described it when you come into a room and you're supposed to be a part of a team. But really, you feel like you're sitting on one side of the table, and there's eight other people sitting on the other side. And you're just talking to a lot of people that feel like you're just one vote and they can outvote you, whether that's supposed to be how it is or how it's not supposed to be it doesn't matter. That's that's the internal feeling. But what we want to do is we want to give everyone enough information or enough resources to feel empowered to feel ready. So we're going to start with the history of special education, we want to let them know what it was like for children before ours. And before before you as a person with a disability, we're gonna set you up with that education, we're going to let you know what it was like before you and what it is like now, we're going to tell you things and what they mean such as FAPE. So what is free appropriate public education, what is the Individuals with Disability Education Act, not the legal term, but in a term in a way that you can understand it, and you can use it, that's important, we do not want to just be shouting lol to you. But we want to give this to you in a way that you can actually understand and use it and give it to someone else. And we want to let you know what a least restrictive environment is and what that means to you. We're going to tell you what a referral is, how to initiate a referral, what to expect when this all stars and then what your legal rights are. We want, Kyla mentioned this earlier, but we're going to tell you what a present level of performance is, and how this is the cornerstone of the entire IEP process. And that actually has an a longer term that you're going to actually see within the IEP. But we want parents and students to understand what accommodations and modifications are, why they're

helpful, and how to utilize these to reach to reach your goals and to make things possible for students and how this really just equalizes your playing field within schools that don't make things easier for you. They make things possible for you. And then we're going to go over related services, the benefit, how to utilize them how to implement these things, and in a successful Right, right down to the location and the times these related services are taking place. We're also going to break down the parent input statement as a part as we're guardians and parents a lot or an equal part of the IEP team, such as therapists such as general education teachers, anyone else that might have a spot in the IEP to give updates so does the parent so does the parent and we would never let anyone from the district just skip out on giving us an update I skip out on telling us what's going on, the parent should not either the parents should not either. So that means the parent should never skip out on the parent input statement, they should always be filling this out as an actual part of the team as a legal team member. So we're going to show you how to do this and a professional way, we're going to show you how to do this in a respectable way, we're going to show you how to do this without being emotional, which is hard, which is hard, because we are parents, and we're guardians, but you're a professional part of the team. So we're actually going to train you how to do this and be factual and be professional, then we're going to go to goals and data, we're going to tell you how to read data, we're going to teach you how to track data, and we're going to tell you how this has to be done. It's not a choice, it's mandatory. And what this means for the parents, we're also had to have a thorough pre K section, we're going to teach you why there should be an emphasis and the importance on a communication plan with the schools. And we've actually developed a communication law within this curriculum, there is a transition section. And we'll actually let Molly talk about that later. And the importance of this. And the reason why it should start before the legal age, there is a behavior section, which we are very, very proud of. And we partnered with Charles Byrd on this and we could have the best information for our Kansas to be able to support students across Arkansas, we have a discipline section and inclusions occlusion section, as self advocacy section apart, see ages birth to three a dispute resolution, I mean, it just goes on and on. But we want this to be thorough, we want it to be in a comprehensive language to where it any person everyday individual can pick this up, understand it and use it anytime they need to. So we're really proud of it.

L

Lani Jennings-Hall 21:48

I think that's what's really going to set this resource apart is the plain language that, you know, like you said, anyone can pick this up and understand and and kind of go, you know, what are my next steps, and I can see this and follow through with that. I do want to highlight two of the things that you talked about. You talked about your training parents, but you're going beyond that, right? You're not just training with the curriculum. Can you talk about the parent support groups?

A

Ally Thomlinson 22:14

Yes, definitely. So you know, I've said this multiple times that we want this to be a proactive tool and not as a reactive tool. And so with that we want parents to start before they need it before they get to the point that it's awful the student is struggling. We don't know what to do, we don't know where to go. And we're having to reach out to different organizations that specialize in special education, like maybe dispute resolution or something like that. We want to start before we need it. So what we're going to do is we're going to focus on eight different

communities, we're going to focus on eight parents that really want to organize within their community. So we're looking for those leaders, those individuals who are raised, take the next step in their advocacy and activism journey. And what we want to do is we want to train them within this curriculum. Like I said, we had amazing partners, that what they covered, this is what they do every day. So we have Mollie Hernandez here, and she does transition work every day. This this is this is what she does. But this is this is her baseball. This is she's the LeBron James of transition services, right? This is her basketball. And so we knew we had to have her because where we do advocacy, we do not just solely pinpoint transition, that's what we want for these communities is we want these individuals who want to organize, and we're looking for support group leaders, we want support groups that focus on IEP s, we want parents to meet monthly, we want them to be going over their IEP journeys, we want them to be able to call upon each other if they need someone should go to an IEP meeting with them and take notes if they need them to go for support, whatever it is, but they also have a monthly meeting. And we are going to help them be successful in that. We're going to train them on how to hold a successful meeting, how to organize a meeting, how to call and guest speakers for their meeting, not all of those are going to be around IEPs, their guest speakers, their organization skills, everything like that. We want to make sure that these parents are passing out IEP resources at all times. And their community members know where to go to get that and so, Mollie is here today, Kyla is here today. They were both involved in creating this curriculum. And these two were roped into being some of the guest speakers for these communities. So congratulations to those communities.

L

Lani Jennings-Hall 24:43

And I'm super excited to see where this goes. And you are able to sign up to be a parent leader, correct, on the website for the support groups and we will drop a link to that in the show notes. And you had mentioned dispute resolution. Can you talk a little bit got that from someone who is not as familiar, what is a dispute resolution, what are the dispute resolution options? Can one of you talk about that a little bit?

K

Kyla Bishop 25:07

The IEP is a collaborative process. And so when you have a lot of people at the table, you know, disagreements will naturally occur, it's best if you have any concerns to first address them with the IEP team. But you know, oftentimes, parents when they come to us, they've, you know, they've already done that. And so parents do have a few options for dispute resolution, you know, one of the first things I can do is request a facilitated IEP meeting. And so that's when a neutral third party comes into to facilitate an IEP meeting. Whenever you know, there are some challenges about maybe communicating what a student needs and then at the end of this meeting in IEP is developed, this should be requesting a facilitated IEP should be a proactive choice, if a parent anticipates that there might be a difficult meeting coming up, or maybe they need to review something anticipate conflict than a facilitated IEP meeting might be a good option. Another thing they can request is mediation, free voluntary, and it is confidential dispute resolution, meaning it just stays between the parents and the district, I would suggest that parents make a request for mediation if they're unable to reach an agreement with the IEP team about an issue. And so a mediator is another, you know, neutral third party that, you know, would come in and work with both the district and the parents to problem solve. After the meeting, there is a written agreement that's signed by everyone is enforceable. So that's

another option. So facilitated IEP meetings and mediations. They're, you know, free. And so, you know, if parents find that those don't work, they can file a state complaint with the Arkansas Department of Education, or due process. So first, I'll go into what a state complaint is. And so a state complaint has to allege a violation that's occurred within one year of filing. And the dispute resolution section of the Arkansas Department of Education will conduct an investigation and issue findings that's done within I believe, like 60 days. And then a due process complaint alleges violations that have occurred within two years of filing. So parents kind of have a bigger window, they can go back a little farther, the parent and the school district have a right to be represented by an attorney, the parties will have a period, a resolution period where they can try to, you know, resolve the complaint before going to a hearing, which is kind of, I think, is a unique aspect of the due due process hearings, just so that parents and districts can save and not only on a full hearing, but if the parents and the district are unable to, you know reach a resolution then it moves to a full hearing. So you know, we have a parents can request you facilitate IEP meetings and a mediation, they're not as scary as filing a complaint. And then you know, if those don't work, they the parent can't file a state or due process.

A

Ally Thomlinson 28:35

Now this all seems like it could be very intimidating for a parent this part of it. Derek, you mentioned that parents can be intimidated right off the bat, I guess this can definitely go into go for Kyla and Derek, that intimidation level on this because it is taking it to an extreme breaking it and bringing in more individuals. Do you feel like parents can be intimidated not to do this, even if they think that it's the right thing to do? Are they fear of retaliation or anything like that?

K

Kyla Bishop 29:07

Absolutely. Parents are often afraid of retaliation, if they file complaints are even asked for mediation or facilitated IEP. When parents present these concerns to me, what I tell them is you are the best advocate for your child. You're the only one that is able to file this complaint on their behalf. And so obviously, we want to do everything we can to avoid reaching that point.

D

Derek Henderson 29:33

I totally agree, Kyla, that it is intimidating for parents. And what I've noticed is parents sometimes feel like if they do this, then it's an escalation and that they are sort of bad guys here and there are no bad guys here. This is parents advocating for their kids and asserting their kids' rights. And that's not anything to feel bad about this. Districts understand that even. Districts understand parents look out for their kids. And so I tried to tell parents that, yeah, it does feel different, it can be a little tough to finally make that call and say, I'm ready to take that step. But we will be here with you on that.

A

Ally Thomlinson 30:21

That's very interesting that you said that, like, we are asserting your children's rights. And I love that that is a very powerful statement because our students, our children do have rights

love that that is a very powerful statement, because our students, our children do have rights. And so that's what we're doing. We're looking at on their best interests, we're looking out for their rights, we're making sure if they can be successful for their next part of their life, this is a we're trying to build them a strong foundation, right. And sometimes, we have to make sure that everyone is walking in that same direction to be able to do that, to build that strong foundation for the next chapter. Kyla, I want to ask you something. And this is going to be especially for the individuals that don't know what's happening or have never experienced this. It's may come as a shock to them. But I want to ask you a little bit about restraint and and seclusion in the state of Arkansas for our students, is this still legal?

K

Kyla Bishop 31:09

So legally, children may be restrained at school if their behavior poses an immediate threat to themselves or others. But in the context of a child with a disability, that is not the end of the discussion. If a child with a disability is you know, exhibiting such behaviors that the district deems necessary to restrain them, then that is a very serious red flag that shows that whatever behavior supports and interventions that the team has in place, is not working. And, you know, when we, when we use restraints, that it is traumatic for a child. And so, when, when a child is restrained by a person who is in a position of trust, so on a teacher they see every day, that can also affect their educational performance going forward. And so while it is legal, to restrain a child, it's not the end of the discussion, the IEP team has to address his behavior in the IEP. Repeated restraints are a clear clear sign of of a due process violation in that regard.

A

Ally Thomlinson 32:38

So you can you describe me what a restraint looks like? Are we talking about a five year old that is being held against their will by a 250 pound individual? Can it be that can it can it be that I'm asking because there's going to be a lot of individuals that are listening to us right now that have never experienced this that didn't know that this was happening in schools? So can you actually describe to us what a restraint is, what it looks like how they restrain individuals, and how often that this happens in school, just any information that you have. Because where we work with this every single day, there's going to be a lot of individuals that didn't even know that this is happening right now.

D

Derek Henderson 33:24

The way I think is defined in the statute is restriction of movement of a limb, Head, neck or the torso. So sometimes what I've noticed is districts don't even think they've done a restraint, or they tried to say, we haven't done a restraint, because they believe, well, we didn't do something that was within this proprietary system, or whatever we were trained in. And so the statute is very broad, that anything that's done to restrain movement of the kid that's going to be restrained. As far as the, the systems, what does that look like? What does that feel like? I would say, first of all, as someone who's trained in that you, you have that done to you when you're trained in it, and you have to understand that it is always a forceful process. And it should only and I think this is borne out in the statute, it should only ever be done when it's the lesser of evils when there really is imminent harm that's going to occur if if it's not done and so

yeah, it's it's very forceful, to have your your use of your arms taken away from you and then you know, all of those systems go to more progressive restraints, if you know the the lowest levels not working.

K

Kyla Bishop 34:55

you know, in in our in our work and what you know, we've Experienced, districts are supposed to use a certain type of restraint to provide the least amount of harm to the child, this maneuver, you know, "handle with care" is not always used. So, you know, we'll see children being maybe picked up by their, by their upper arms and you know, lifted and kind of like dragged that way. Or we can see, you know, what are called physical escorts which not necessarily rise to the level of restraint, but it still involves a, an adult, physically placing their hands on a child and attempting to control their movement. So really, what you should be talking to your child about is, you know, has anyone ever put their hands on you, and that's really what will get the conversation started. And something you know, I talk about with my parents, you know, it can be, you know, that simple because a child will tell you about it.

A

Ally Thomlinson 36:11

Oh, so this is actually something that our parents need to be discussing with the children, because this might be something that they don't know is inappropriate, or something that they should just be coming home and telling their parents.

K

Kyla Bishop 36:24

Unfortunately, what I've seen with my clients is that they do not tell their parents voluntarily, because they think they deserved it, which is, it's unbelievably heartbreaking. And so it, you know, if you're a parent with a child who may have who has some more, maybe intense behaviors, definitely bring up restraint to the IEP team, and make sure that there are some guidelines in the IEP on you know, what we need to do in order to avoid the child being restrained.

A

Ally Thomlinson 37:05

So this is also where behavioral supports can come in? If I'm not mistaken, please correct me if I'm wrong.

K

Kyla Bishop 37:14

Absolutely. So this is one, you know, a functional behavior assessment would be useful, a behavior intervention plan, you know, behavior supports at our, you know, in place in the classroom, you know, may, if the child needs to leave and take a break, they can do that. Go off cooldown for five minutes, just things that, you know, in, in the reason we mentioned, you

know, a functional behavior assessment is because, you know, what works for one child is not going to work for every child. And so you really have to drill down and determine, Okay, what what are the students triggers? And how, how do we how do we avoid that behavior?

A

Ally Thomlinson 37:58

It is not like a lot switch, a light switch, these things are not just happening out of nowhere, we can actually see a build up. And if we can support these students, from the very beginning, we may not get to the point that the students feel out of control in their own selves, we can support them and whatever they need, because if a let's say, an educator feels like it's out of control for them, we, I mean, just imagine what the student feels like.

K

Kyla Bishop 38:26

Exactly, you know, that behavior is not random, it does serve a function. And so you know, we need to, we need to drill down, you know, why? What does this child need? Is it a sensory issue, because, you know, we know that if a child's sensory needs are not being served, that can result in behavior. So it really needs to be a comprehensive look at what the child needs.

A

Ally Thomlinson 38:52

Well, I do want to say that in our curriculum, Charles Berg did an amazing job supporting us with the behavior chapter. And we really learned a lot he explained to us about the dead man test, we do not want any student just doing in the classroom, what a dead man can do. And we want them to be able to be positively engaged and be successful, and be active within any activity, any curriculum, and have the tools to do so also. So I'm very impressed and all the information that we received from him. And he also allowed us to really understand how any behavior can be observed, and any behavior can be tracked. And that's how we can support the student. And so I'm really, I'm just in love with that chapter of the curriculum. It taught me so many things, and I really stand on that pillar. I've never been too intelligent to learn something new. And I wish that I would have had that 10 years ago, when my son started school. Oh, and we started on our IEP journey. And I think that I would have been able to support him more, and I would have been able to be a more crucial, active role in the IEP team. So I'm really, I'm really excited to get that out to parents, especially because of that behavioral and I really hope that it can support some of our students that are that are having to endure this, this restraint, these restraints that are going on in the state of Arkansas. So I guess I want to ask you, Derek and Mollie, from being on both sides of this because Mollie, you were a teacher, correct?

M

Mollie Hernandez 40:35

Yes, I was a teacher. In fact, I've worked in education in different capacities. My very first job in education, I was a one on one paraprofessional for two school years to a child with a significant disability. And then from there, I became a regular classroom teacher, I was a second grade teacher, I moved on from that and worked in literacy intervention, just power providing those strong intervention services to help students who were struggling readers. So I've served in several capacities in the world of education. And, yeah, I've been on both sides of the table.

And I've seen a lot, a lot of things. But I also want to highlight the fact a lot of this sounds scary, but so much good comes from these meetings. So I know the intimidation factor is there. But this is also just that one of the stepping stones is a scaffold for your child to achieve great and amazing things. So you might be intimidated, but also be excited. You know, this it's it's not all bad stuff. Right?

A Ally Thomlinson 41:38

Definitely. That's that's a great highlight to have also, yeah, we're kind of bringing the Doom, aren't we? Well, you you both have such unique perspectives being on both sides of that table there, Derek and Mollie, I want to ask you with, Because we do know that that intimidation is there, we will pump it up here in just a second, we will pump it up. But I want to ask, do you feel like that that prohibits some of the students actually being able to be involved in their IEP meetings, like maybe some of the parents might be white-knuckling it just trying to make it through these meetings, they feel like they get so chaotic, sometimes, if they don't feel like it is a safe place to be able to bring their child into.

D Derek Henderson 42:20

I think so and especially at the earlier ages, I think again, we go back to people don't, well, children aren't involved in their IEP meetings early enough schools don't encourage it enough. And parents probably have their own trepidation about that. And so I think that that is where I see it is eventually they're gonna get in there. But parents are a little nervous about having them in there at an early age. And yes, the student is not going to fully understand it at first, and they're not going to fully get the gravity of it. But they never will if they they can't just eventually pull that band aid off and be in there. And that's, I think, what has to happen. And that is difficult. I think for parents, especially when you've had you've had an IEP since early in school, and there maybe has been some contention and disagreement with the district. And some history of just difficulties there. Yeah, that's difficult for parents to want to bring kids into. But I think that's where it's really crucial to do it.

A Ally Thomlinson 43:31

And Mollie, what has been your experience in that? You know, I think that it's good to get everyone's experience, especially because these are individualized plans, these are individualized programs. So all of us are going to have different experience, what's been your experience in that?

M Mollie Hernandez 43:43

Definitely. So you know, you can see different sides to it, I can understand the trepidation of parents, especially in those early years, just knowing how much to let your child be involved. And parents know their children more than anyone to know how much a child would want to be involved or absorbed. So maybe you can gradually introduce them to a meeting. They don't have to be in for the entirety of it, but be a part of it. These people that are attending the meeting should be familiar to the child. There are also other ways to introduce your child to the

process. Maybe it's not the IEP meeting, but parent-teacher conferences still happen. Bring your child to the parent teacher conference, you know, let let them discuss that what's happening in the classroom and their and their grades. So there are things like that that you can do in those early years. But as the years move on, and the children get older, it's one of those things that and I'm a mama I've got teenagers, there comes a point when you have to know they can handle this let's let them in and let's let's hear their voices. Let's allow them to lead this and it's hard to let go. I know it is. I also want to talk a little bit about just making sure we've talked some about when the IEP begins in those first meetings in Kindergarten, you know, sometimes IEPs happen as a result of being in school and maybe sometimes specific learning disabilities start to reveal themselves in school, other disabilities may happen throughout adolescence through acute injury or accident, or there are just some issues that reveal themselves later on. As with myself, I'm blind, and the red flags didn't start to show up until my teen years. So I like the idea of this curriculum and making sure that a parent can step in at any time Not everyone's born with a disability, not everyone is going to have that anticipation of kindergarten's coming, we need to equip ourselves, you know, I love that this curriculum is going to be there for any parent, any student at any age, to give them that knowledge of okay, you know, this is something we've got to do, but we're not going to have to do it alone. And, you know, to have that knowledge, I think, not only gives the parent confidence to walk into a meeting, but it's also going to build the confidence of those students that whatever age, you know, knowledge is power. So I've loved being a part of this project.

A

Ally Thomlinson 46:05

I think that's very important to remember also, that just what you're saying is that every single person's walk is going to be different. And we have to make sure that each person and their journey is supported in whatever way that we can in whatever way that they need it. So I think that's very important. Mollie, since you are on such a roll with so many great topics, I just really want to pack some transition, because it seems like every topic that we've landed on has had a little bit of a transition focus. And it's really because we're building to that, right, we're building to what the student is going to become. So can you really let us know what transition is and what the purpose of that is?

M

Mollie Hernandez 46:42

Exactly. The point your child walks through those doors headed off to pre K or kindergarten, that ultimate goal is graduation. And what comes after graduation, you know, being a part of an IEP team is getting your child to that goal. So it's, it makes sense along the way to think about what comes next. And pre employment transition services are a coordinated set of activities that are to lead to that ultimate goal of employment, you know, what, what everyone wants is, you know, to be successful, to be engaged in part of their community. And employment is a huge part of that. So when we're talking about pre employment transition services, early as age 14 is when that plan should be implemented, oftentimes, you're going to hear things like well, maybe age 16, well, possibly, but if your child has a significant disability, or maybe they're at risk of dropping out, they just don't see the point of it anymore. It's been a struggle since day one, they're just through with it, that's when you need to get those supports in as early as age 14, to look at where we're going next. You know, don't give up, there's a point to all this, you know, something's going to come next. But sometimes you might hear age 16. And, occasionally, that's appropriate. But my background is in intervention. So I like the earlier the

better, you know, so let's get that going. All right, now, I want to talk a little bit about the five things you should keep an eye out for as part of your child's pre employment transition plan, you're going to see activities in career exploration, you know, maybe that's just some interest inventories, looking at what your child likes, and what they may want to do, and start exploring those career pathways. What's out there, what's available, it may just come down to discussions, when you're out in the community with your child, look at that job. That looks fun. I wonder how you would get a job like that, what would be the path to that. The second thing you're going to see is going to be some work based learning experiences. These can happen inside your child's school, they can happen outside it can be paid or unpaid internships, could even be a summer work experience program or some job shadowing. So those are things that while your child is still in school can be happening concurrently, stuff that can be going on inside the school building outside the school building. You also want to look out for counseling on post secondary comprehensive transition programs. These are schools or technical programs that your child can participate in after school. So we're talking University stuff here and that counseling can involve anything from career days at different universities going and visiting universities. It can be counseling your child on okay, if you want to go to a university, you may need to take the ACT or SAT let's look at what accommodations you might need to take these exams and to be college ready. So there's a lot of different stuff that can go into to that that element of counseling on comprehensive post secondary education opportunities. Then you might be looking at work readiness skills, the soft skills, I've got teenagers at home, those soft skills, we all need them I think I still need You know that that can look at just your competence in social situations, or maybe some financial literacy training or using public transit to get where you need to when you're no longer within that school setting. And then finally, we want to see that the students are trained and self advocacy. And we've brought that up a lot. And self advocacy is using your voice, use it and achieve self determination, achieve those goals, but also to make sure you are safe in a work setting. So you know, self advocacy is so important. And that begins. It's so so early, and that I know, that's a lot of stuff, but I just want parents to know what they need to be on the lookout for. And then to make sure that they are aware that we have state vocational rehabilitation services that need to be involved, contact Arkansas Rehabilitation Services for the Division of Services for the Blind, whichever is appropriate for your child's needs, and ask for them to be a part of your child's IEP team.

A

Ally Thomlinson 51:04

Molly, what if they aren't already signed up, like the school district has not already signed up with Voc Rehab?

M

Mollie Hernandez 51:10

Anyone who's a member of the IEP team can request that a vocational rehabilitation counselor needs to be a part of the team. Ideally, I like for it to be the parent, because when that when your child graduates, that relationship with Voc Rehab will continue. So if you're a parent, and your child is not already receiving services, with vocational rehabilitation, reach out to them, oftentimes, I hear that they like to come into play senior year. Again, I like it before.

A

Ally Thomlinson 51:40

I back up just a second, I was so sorry. But I want to make sure that our listeners really

understand that a parent can actually request that before the legal age, they can start getting those transition service and can actually help their students inside the district.

M

Mollie Hernandez 51:54

Okay, so the way it will work is some of the services will be provided through the school. So some of these pre employment transition services, they can even be conducted in a group activity, like career exploration. But there are certain services that if we're getting those pathways laid, that would fall more under voc rehab, and this is where it's going to get fun with these acronyms we've been talking about an IEP, as your child goes towards that world outside of the school, it's going to be an individualized plan of employment, and IPE. So depending on the service might depend on the source of funding. So for instance, maybe your child is still in high school, but they're wanting to do some different college prep sort of stuff, or maybe concurrent enrollment, something that might need funded after the fact. So that's where you want to have that plan in place with Voc Rehab, so that they could provide services that might extend outside of school, maybe it's a blind student who would need orientation and mobility services. So some specific navigational training on a college campus or on a tech at a technical training center. That might be something that's appropriate to ask from vocational rehabilitation, because they'll be following that student to the next place. Does that make sense?

A

Ally Thomlinson 53:18

It does. Thank you so much for explaining that to our listeners. I really appreciate that just to make sure that we can clear it up and make sure that they have the resources that they need to reach out and start these things for their spouse or children ensure that they're successful along the way,

L

Lani Jennings-Hall 53:19

Which is speaking of great sources, that's another great resource that is coming out from Disability Rights, Arkansas. Both Mollie and Jen had both been a huge help. We're creating just a resource chock full of information specific to transition services. I'm really excited for that to go live.

A

Ally Thomlinson 53:48

Awesome. Before we go, we are going to ask you a series of rapid-fire questions from Lani and Ally just to make sure that everyone can start off this school year on the right foot, especially within the IEP process. So I hope you're ready. And I hope you have your thinking caps on so we are going to start with you Kyla, what can families, guardians, or self-advocates do if someone is having trouble making friends within the school district if they're really struggling with that, and we know that socialization is a key point, just within the school process. We want to make sure that people can do that and take those skills outside of school into their career and just post secondary school, whatever it might be. What can someone do?

K Kyla Bishop 54:29

Yes, so the IEP team can actually provide, you know, social emotional learning skills to the child to better equip them and interacting with their peers.

A Ally Thomlinson 54:39

Awesome. So I can actually request that in the IEP?

K Kyla Bishop 54:42

Yes, that can be a related service in the IEP.

L Lani Jennings-Hall 54:45

Wonderful. Thank you so much. Okay, Mollie. We have talked a lot about transition. We talked about IEP services, how can DRA get involved? How can we help you with these?

M Mollie Hernandez 54:54

If you have a child that is approaching or is transition aged and you are fearful that they are not receiving the appropriate services reach out to us, we can connect you with Arkansas rehabilitation services or the Division of Services for the Blind. And we can also help you understand, you know, what that transition plan should look like. And make sure that your child is receiving those correct services.

A Ally Thomlinson 55:18

I want to ask you about bullying. So kind of like if a student is suffering through bullying within the district? Is that something that the IEP team can address?

K Kyla Bishop 55:29

Absolutely, you know, if a child is being bullied, and you know, it's causing him or her to miss school, skip classes, bringing down their mental health, that's absolutely something that needs to be addressed by the IEP team. And you know, what related services can be given with, you know, maybe a therapist mental health therapy, maybe going back to those, you know, social emotional skills. And then Arkansas also has an independent statute on what schools can and should do when they receive a report bullying.

A Ally Thomlinson 56:06

Wonderful, thank you so much. Now, Mollie, I do want to ask you this question. This will be our final question. Anything on self-advocacy that the IEP can address? Is this something that can actually be addressed by the teachers, and that can be worked on with the student in the curriculum?

M

Mollie Hernandez 56:22

certainly, and there are specific curriculums available for instruction and self-advocacy. So if you feel like that is something you need to address with your child. And I'm here to say, that is something you need to address with your child, bring it up to the IEP team and look at what's available and how it can be incorporated into their classroom.

A

Ally Thomlinson 56:43

Wonderful. Thank you all so much for being here with us today. And sharing all this great stuff. We know that we've covered many, many topics, very broad variety, but we think that it's really needed and we want to make sure that everybody can start the school year on a great foot and then as soon as we get this curriculum out, that they'll be able to take it and they'll be able to use it.

L

Lani Jennings-Hall 57:03

Yes, thank you so much for joining and sharing all this information in great resources. We hope that our listeners will be better prepared to take on their IEP journey. I do want to remind our listeners that this radio broadcast will also be published on our website alongside the show notes with any links mentioned in today's show. Make sure to check it out. Thank you for listening and remember to Speak Up Arkansas