

Person-Centered Practices in Schools: Lessons from New Jersey

Questions

Q: I see its being used for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Do you use these processes with students who receives special education for other reasons?

Jill: PCAST can be used for “All Humans” it provides a life plan with input from people who care or have an interest in your success.

Michael: We recognize that person-centered planning and supports is applicable and appropriate for all people. This means all students in all schools regardless of disability or other label. It is really more a question of the system’s capacity to provide this type of planning and support and where a given school may choose to prioritize their efforts.

LaPrice: Yes. Person-centered planning is offered to all students with an IEP. It’s been my experience that it benefits students who need another platform to communicate.

Q: Since PCP is not a new concept in that it has been around for some years now, what do you think is the reason for the lag in getting these practices into play and move away from the institutional/[medical] model- e.g.: I know what is best for you and I can fix you

LaPrice: Just simply not knowing, having folks buy in to the idea and the data to show that its beneficial to all involved.

Michael: Throughout time our systems have been structured on hierarchal and patriarchal models. These systems reward the concept of the “expert” and power tends to move upward. There is ongoing resistance to engaging in the kind of power-sharing represented in person-centered practices, however we have seen increasing appreciation and acceptance over time. Some feel that increasing our efforts in schools with hasten our movement toward a tipping point where the demands of people with disabilities for their civil and human rights will be met and those who have been ignorant to this struggle will ally themselves in support.

Jill: The process requires dedicated time, we have started creating dedicated periods for the staff to work on the development of the plans. Multiple staff need to be trained so if one person leaves the program/plan does not fall apart. Ensure that everyone is aware of the plans so they can implement them. Communication is Key.

Q: What other agency personnel (service provider agencies and or human service providers) beyond the school district might be involved? Are Service Coordinators from the Regional Centers invited to this meeting?

Michael: Ideally the student is supported in inviting those closest to them to their meeting. They also invite key allies that will be needed to support he implementation of person-centered

planning. In schools we see every type of staff participating depending on the student and their relationships. For instance, paraprofessionals and fellow students are routinely invited to planning meetings.

LaPrice: Students determine invitees to their meeting. If they want their supervisor at the local grocery store to attend their person-centered planning meeting, then they can be invited. As long as there are no legal issues or other foreseeable issues with having a particular person attend the meeting, then all are welcome.

Q: Is this[person-centered planning] held during IEP meetings? Does this take the place of the IEP or add to the IEP?

Jill: At this time we are not holding meetings during the IEP but we do incorporate some of the ideas.

LaPrice: Person-centered planning does not take place during IEP meetings. It takes 2-3 weeks to complete. It adds to the students' IEP.

Michael: Every school varies on how they implement person-centered planning. We introduce and teach a very different approach to plan facilitation and development so that educators can glean various tools, skills, and techniques and impeded them into the existing processes including the IEP. Some schools routinely use both processes. The IEP is required by law and so it makes sense that our vision be that every student have a person-centered IEP. The danger as always is that our systems will dilute person-centered approaches and use the language without maintaining the integrity of the processes we know work.

Q: How are students linked to community providers based on their wants, needs and desires on their personal choice?

Michael: That is a question better directed to those working in the adult service and support world. What we can say is that having a well-developed person-centered plan puts the person and their family in a position of presenting that plan to a provider and asking them what they can do to support the person in making it happen. This contrasts with the provider presenting a menu of services and determining whether the person "fits" or is "appropriate" for their agency.

LaPrice: Students and families receive a transition survey to complete at home and in school for the purpose of comparison. Of the results, students are then linked to community providers, state approved DVRS vendors or other source.

Jill: Our Transition team reaches out to companies and good old fashion word of mouth.

Q: Will you go into more detail about the Jamboards or how technology enhanced the experience?

Michael: Many schools use Jamboard and other apps to create more interactive and collaborative methods of teaching person-centered and other lessons. Learn more here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbytD_LNVNM
<https://jamboard.google.com/>

Q: What services are offered to students after they leave school and how are they funded through the state?

LaPrice: Students 18-21 years-old are offered support, post-graduation, in the areas of, but not limited to Transition Planning, DDD[Division on Developmental Disabilities], DVRS [Division on Vocational Rehabilitation Services], NJ Access Link, Division of Motor Vehicle (NJ State ID), Travel Training, Community Based Learning/ Internship, etc.

Michael: This would depend on the student and the state. In New Jersey, students who are eligible for adult services may receive them through the New Jersey Division on Developmental Disabilities, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services or another agency. It is worth noting that this approach to planning is aligned with waiver requirement for the adult system and plans developed in our schools help support a more seamless transition to adult life by providing a thoughtful and accurate plan a transitioning adult can use to instruct adult providers on the supports they want and the life they are trying to build.

Q: Is there a school to work program through the local vocational rehabilitation program or the Home Community Based Wavier to help with Personal-Centered Planning?

Michael: We encourage the use of the person-centered in all aspects of the person's life especially community-based instruction, job sampling, vocational training, and work. When a student who is eligible for community services ages out of their educational entitlement, they choose a support coordinator who is required to develop a person-centered plan with the person and their team.

LaPrice: I do not believe that person-centered planning is included in the intake process for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services Pre-Ets [employment and transition services], however the Division of Developmental Disabilities support coordinators do include person centered planning/thinking in their intake process.

Q: Is this program based on the Person-Centered Therapy developed by Carl Rogers?

Michael: Person-Centered Planning is not therapy and has been developed over time by practitioners listening to people with disabilities and their families and changing the lens through which we plan to that of a strength-based process. The process puts the person at the center of their planning and facilitates a deeper discovery process which informs the development of a shared vision for the future linked to actions that work to realize that vision. This contrasts with supports that are driven by system needs and the "deficits" of a given person. There certainly is alignment in that person-centered facilitation and support promotes empathy, always maintains unconditional positive regard and creates an environment that is genuine and helps participants see and better understand themselves through the eyes of others.

Q: I am a grandmother of an Autistic 11year old and he tells me that he wants to make his own decisions do you think he is too young to sit in on his IEP?

Jill: I am so excited that he is advocating for himself, please allow him to sit in and contribute.

Michael: IEP Meetings can vary greatly from place to place and person to person. The best advice we can give is that it depends on the meeting. If there has been an intentional effort to change the format and facilitation of the IEP process and meeting to one that is collaborative and person-centered then the answer may be yes. It is not so much whether the student is appropriate for the meeting, but whether the meeting is appropriate for the student. That is why teaching facilitation skills that serve to welcome and include all stakeholders in an equitable and respectful way is so critical.

LaPrice: Students can never be young to sit in on their IEP planning meeting. If your grandchild can communicate his wants and needs, then he absolutely should be involved. In my experience, students who are included in their planning meetings are more successful at achieving their goals because the accountability piece is there.

Resources

Rutgers Boggs Center PCAST page: <https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/training/pcast.html>

New Jersey Department of Education PCAST page:

<https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/transition/person.shtml>

fStudent-Directed IEP Bringing Person-Centered Practices to Schools and Beyond [NCAPPS webinar from October 27 2020]: <https://youtu.be/DKgocrdryNg>

The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices <https://tlcpcp.com/>

New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education/PCAST:

<https://www.state.nj.us/education/specialed/transition/person.shtml>