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This paper might be used as a guide and resource for stimulating ideas when developing your child's needs statement. Not all items will have to be covered. The detail and length of the needs statement may vary greatly with the character and specific needs of your child, particularly if she has multiple exceptionalities, such as being ADD as well as gifted; usually not more than two to three pages will be required.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT NEEDS STATEMENTS?

Every time a student is identified or reviewed, and at annual review time and when preparing an individual education plan, someone spends time writing "strengths and needs" statements about the student. The writer is often faced with a number of concerns: How to explain the situation clearly enough? What words will best serve the student?

Many times the strengths statements are considered the quickly and easy part. Some may even question the reasons for "strengths" statements. Yet these strengths statements reflect the heart and soul of the student. Strengths statements tell the reader where to look for aptitudes and skills, where to look for starting points and teaching points. They tell about talents to polish and self-esteem to build. They hint at interests and suggest leadership opportunities. In secondary school, strengths statements may support course selection and career direction. "Strengths" statements precede "needs" statements with good reason and we would do well to pay close attention.

Needs statements come from a completely different perspective. Often we write them with a focus on deficits. Too easily, a needs statement can become a list of negatives that state the obvious, but do not offer the potential for change or growth. The statement "needs to learn math facts" clearly establishes the problem, but makes no hint at its solution. More productive is a needs statement that responds to the question "What does the student need in order to make progress?".

Generally speaking, the student's needs do not change significantly over the years. There will be progress in skills and knowledge, but the nature of the abilities remain much the same. So, it is most productive to produce needs statements that endure and are portable from year to year, school to school, and teacher to teacher. Thus, needs statements are best written in generic terms, with the specifics (the "how to") listed under strategies.

For example, a student may have difficulty in copying from the blackboard. A needs statement would focus on the fact that a modification is necessary when transcription of notes is required. Strategies may change from teacher to teacher, from class to class. In science, a strategy might include photocopying another student's notes; in English, the teacher may provide note outlines. Generic "needs" statements allow the teachers flexibility to adapt their methodology to the needs of the student and the situation.

How then do we write “needs” statements which are positive and constructive, and which will be productive for both the student and the teacher? Begin with these questions:

If the world were fair, what abilities would she have that she presently does not have (attention span, rote, social skills)? What would she be able to do that she presently cannot (read, copy, spell, remember rote information)? Answering these questions can create a list of single words and phrases that become the focus for the next step.

What modifications, strategies, access, opportunities, alternatives and resources are necessary to enable the student to make the best possible progress, to meet the expectations of the academic situation, and to best demonstrate his/her potential?

Thus, a single "needs" statement might have a number of different strategies as a response. For example, strategies to develop accurate spelling might include: peer proofreader, poor speller's dictionary, electronic speller, word family spelling lists, spell checker, word recognition games, etc.

The “needs” statement becomes enduring and portable, and focuses not on what is “wrong”, but what can be done to help make things “right”, accessible, possible, and above all, fair in a less than fair world.

Developing a useful needs statement

It is up to the parents to gather as much relevant information as possible to ensure that the needs statement adopted by the I.P.R.C. describes their child's strengths and needs as thoroughly as possible. They should consider sharing the following with the I.P.R.C. members:

a) The pupil's strengths

These may include such information as innate abilities, talents, accomplishments, interests.

These need not all be based on cognitive or academic factors, but should also cover artistic, kinesthetic, psycho-social and any other talents.

Contrary to what some parents might believe, these factors are every bit as important for pupils whose identification will be in the area of some specific disability as those who are identified as gifted. In fact, for students with learning disabilities this information can provide the best direction for suitable program modifications, the development of coping and compensatory strategies and appropriate accommodation of their deficits. It is important to note that for pupils with learning disabilities average intelligence scores in several subtest categories should be listed in the strength area, since this information can also assist in programming.

b) The pupil's needs under the following headings:

Please note that this information is relevant for all exceptional pupils, whatever exceptionality they may have. While the primary discussion at the I.P.R.C. is likely to focus on the specific exceptionality that the

pupil has and the needs relating to that, no parent should go to an I.P.R.C. without having considered these factors:

- physical needs
- intellectual or cognitive needs
- educational or academic needs
- behavioural or emotional needs
- social needs
- cultural needs

It is important to recognize that the I.P.R.C. shall consider the results of an educational assessment and may consider or even ask for a psychological and/or health assessment. On the other hand, the members of the I.P.R.C. are not able to “diagnose” certain exceptionalities without there being an assessment carried out by a registered psychologist or an appropriate medical practitioner. Therefore, if such information already exists and it is relevant to the I.P.R.C. discussion and decision making process, then it makes good sense to provide it.

Components of physical needs:

- age chronological, functional, maturity level
- any visual impairments or problems
- any hearing impairments or problems
- any speech impediments or difficulties
- any motor difficulties - fine motor, gross motor) eye-hand co-ordination, sensory integration, co-ordination, etc.
- laterality, i.e. left handed, right handed or mixed dominance
- any involvement in sports
- observed activity level
- any medical issues, whether major or minor, e.g. medication, allergy shots, injuries, accidents
- is the pupil receiving any treatment or intervention for any of the above identified needs?
- are there any side effects arising from the treatment which may have an impact, whether regular or occasional on the pupil's participation in any of the activities of the classroom?
- which of the above needs should be included in the needs statement and should be referred to in the pupil's I.E.P.?

Components of intellectual or cognitive needs:

- stage of cognitive development e.g. concrete or abstract
- stage of language development, e.g. able to understand and utilize idiom, figures of speech, etc.
- any identified modality or learning style preference
- ability to deal with and apply generalizations
- ability to deal with sequencing tasks, with or without practicing level of adaptive behaviours
- any highly developed aptitudes, talents or interests

Components of educational or academic needs:

- academic achievement levels in reading, writing, spelling, maths, age appropriate, above or below expected level for age and innate ability
- knowledge base: academic and non-academic
- what subjects does he or she like in school?
- past academic progress
- school attendance
- ability to handle tasks independently in school or at home
- support required to achieve independent functioning
- ability to analyze and learn from past errors
- task commitment
- motivation
- coping strategies tried and that were successful
- compensatory strategies that were tried and proved to be successful
- accommodation strategies tried and successful
- is he or she computer literate?

Components of behavioural and/or emotional needs:

- motivation - internal or external
- locus of control - internal or external
- self concept
- ability or willingness to take risks
- attitudes to self, family, others

- any overt behavioural problems
- problems with attention
- impulsive
- aggressive
- any psychological concerns

Components of social needs:

- interpersonal relationships with adults, peers, family
- prefers the company of younger or older children
- most comfortable with adults
- loner
- active or passive in a group setting
- leader or follower
- level of social skill development
- good understanding of the consequences of his or her actions

Components of cultural needs:

- cultural background and the relevance of this for the current situation, e.g. cultural attitudes to disability
 - gender and its relationship to cultural issues
 - past and present educational experiences
 - parental and/or extended familial expectations
 - customs which may impact the situation, e.g. clothing, cultural social skill variances
 - personal attitudes to cultural issues
 - need for ESL support
 - if a recent immigrant, current state of acculturation
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