

Person-Centered Planning Tool: McGill Action Planning System (MAPS)

As families, schools, and other organizations have taken more steps to fully integrate individuals with disabilities into the community, families and educators have worked to find ways to streamline this process. Person-centered planning is a strength-based technique that serves as a mechanism for securing the commitment of a collaborative team of individuals in supporting a focus person and his/her family through this process. In general, person centered planning use graphic recordings (usually words, pictures, symbols on chart paper) and group facilitation techniques to guide the team. A facilitator is responsible for setting the agenda, assessing equal opportunities for all to participate, handling conflict when necessary, and maintaining the group's focus.

One example of a person centered planning tool that has emerged as particularly effective in planning inclusive opportunities is the McGill Action Planning System (MAPS). MAPS is a strategy that was developed by Marsha Forest, Jack Pearpoint, Judith Snow, Evelyn Lusthaus, and the staff at the Center for Integrated Education in Canada. In recent years, researchers at various universities across the country have been encouraging school districts to try MAPS.

MAPS is a person-centered planning process that brings together the key players in a focus individual's life to identify a "roadmap" for working toward and achieving dreams and goals for the focus person (Forest & Lusthaus, 1989; Vandercook et al., 1989). MAPS has an established framework of questions that address the child's history, identity, strengths, gifts, and the team's nightmares and dreams for the child. The MAPS process identifies where that person currently is, what the goals are, and how the team will work together to help this person reach the goals. This information is then used to develop action steps for achieving the dreams and avoiding the nightmares.

The MAPS process can help families, professionals, and peers find ways to fully include the student in school, in a classroom with classmates who are the same age. The MAPS process can help ensure the student and his or her peers will have positive learning experiences in that classroom. MAPS is different from some other planning tools because in it participants focus on what the student can do, instead of on his or her weakness.

To use the MAPS process, key people in the student's life gather and talk in one, two, or three sessions. In total, the sessions may take about three hours, and it is preferable to split that time up if the planning is for a very young child. Among the people participating are the student, the student's parents, the classroom teachers (both regular and special education), and other school professionals such as counselors, therapists, or the school principal. Another person acts as the group's leader or facilitator, and keeps the group on task. The group is completed with a couple of the student's peers, who are, perhaps, the most important component in the student's full participation at school, and other members of the student's family, such as siblings or grandparents. The MAPS process is most effective when the team has a general idea of what the goals are for the focus individual (i.e. inclusion, more friends, etc) (Kincaid & Fox, 2002; Pearpoint et al., 1993).

The MAPS Questions

First, the family members present answer the question "***What is the individual's history?***" Then, each of the people present at the MAPS session will focus on the remaining questions that are included in the MAPS process:

➤ *What are the focus person's dreams and goals for the future?*

As participants answer this question, they are encouraged to think about what they think

the *focus person* wants. This is a question of "vision," and, therefore, the people answering it shouldn't be bogged down with present-day realities. The team members should dream some here and verbalize those dreams. If enough people share their dreams, they can work toward those dreams becoming a reality.

➤ ***What are the nightmares?***

Parents sometimes find this particularly hard to answer, for no parent likes to think of their child facing difficulties. But if the members of the group can verbalize their nightmares and fears, they will have taken an important step in becoming committed to making sure this nightmare never occurs.

➤ ***Who is the focus person?***

Everyone talks about what comes to their mind when they think of the focus person, and they express this in a few words. Everyone takes a turn at the description; then, the people continue taking this idea around the circle until no one has anything else to add. People in the group can pass on their turn if they can't think of anything, but they are encouraged to try when it is their turn again. Then, when the list is completed, particular people in the group, such as family members, are asked to identify what they believe are three especially important descriptors.

➤ ***What are the focus person's gifts?***

The people in the circle might look back on the ways they have described the student in answering the previous question. The participants are asked to focus on what they believe the focus person can do, instead of, as happens so often, what he/she cannot do.

➤ ***What are the focus person's needs?***

The parents' answers to this question might vary considerably from those of the focus person's peers or teachers. When the list has been completed, the group then decides which of the needs are "top priority," or demand immediate attention.

➤ ***What would an ideal day at school be like for the focus person? (optional question for focus individuals who are also students)***

Some MAPS groups find it helpful to answer this question by outlining a typical school day for other children the student's age, who do not have disabilities. The team might think about how the needs outlined before could be met at school. After that, the team would think about the kinds of help a student would need to truly achieve inclusion at school.

➤ ***What is the Plan of Action (to achieve the dreams and avoid the nightmares)?***

The participants then use the answers to the previous questions to craft a plan of action. This plan will include the steps necessary to achieve the dreams/goals and also to avoid the nightmares/fears. Action plans also should identify the circle of support that will help implement this plan.

MAPS and the Focus Student's IEP

Advocates of MAPS believe that the MAPS process and the IEP are interrelated. IEP teams can and should use the information gained from MAPS along with other assessment information to develop IEP goals and objectives, and to plan students' daily schedules. This process is quite time intensive. The team may not want to use this for every IEP meeting, but rather at key transition times such as from infant/toddler services to preschool services and from preschool to kindergarten.

The Follow Up Meeting

Families are encouraged to schedule a second planning meeting as the focused intervention phase concludes and a transition is anticipated. The format of this meeting is flexible and should be determined by the family, contingent upon their needs and accomplishments at a given time. The family should be guided to consider what new people might be invited into the child's circle of support. If the new intervention team has been identified, it may be fruitful to invite them to participate in the meeting.

Helpful Websites

Inclusion Press

<http://www.inclusion.com/PI-PERSON.C.PLANNING.html>

Person Centered Practices

<http://www.reachoflouisville.com/person-centered/whatisperson.htm>

The Person Centered Planning Education Site

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/tsal/Enable/>

Pacer Center on Person Centered Planning

<http://www.pacer.org/tatra/resources/personal.asp>

Kansas Institute for Positive Behavior Support's Person +Centered Planning Resources

http://www.kipbs.org/new_kipbs/fsi/pcp.html#pcpkansas

Person Centered Planning: MAPS and PATHS to the Future

<http://www.ttac.odu.edu/Articles/person.html>

Illinois Home School Community Tool

http://www.kipbsmodules.org/Word-PDF-PPT/FY07_HST.pdf

Additional References

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Forest, M. & Lusthaus, E. (1989). Promoting educational equality for all students: Circles and Maps. In S. Stainback, W. Stainback, & M. Forest (Eds.), Educating all students in the mainstream of regular education (pp. 43-57). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Holburn, S. & Vietze, P. (1992). Person-centered planning: Research, practice, and future directions. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Kincaid, D. & Fox, L. (2002). Person-centered planning and positive behavior support. In S. Holburn & P. Vietze (Eds.), Person-centered planning: Research, practice, and future directions (pp. 29-49). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.