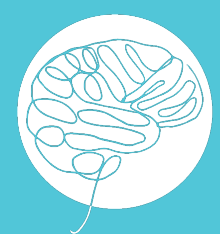




IEPs That Work

Common Pitfalls and Building Stronger Plans

with Stephanie DeLussey

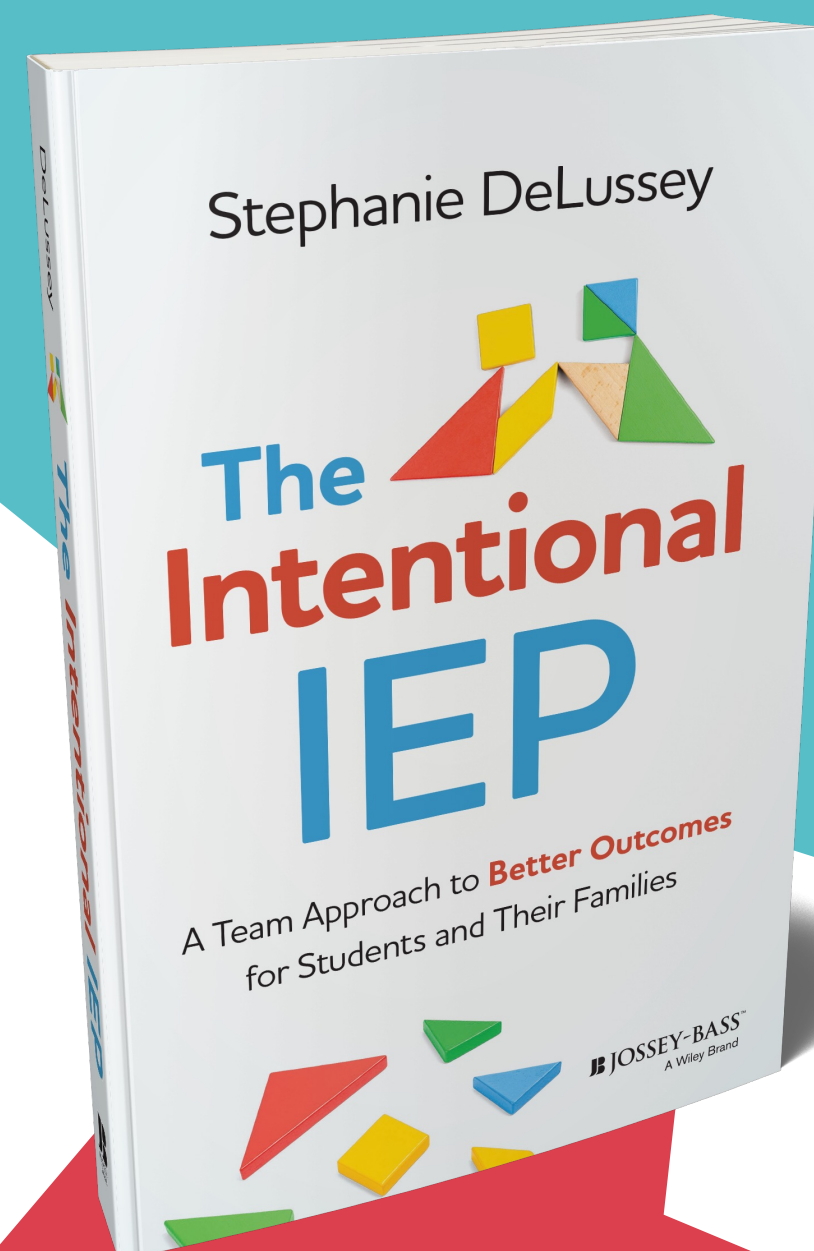


WHO IS STEPHANIE?

Dual-certified special
education teacher,
IEP Coach, BCISE

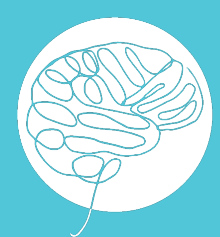
PA, VA, DE, TX, GA, FL

ESY Teacher – Severe Needs
ESY Teacher – Moderate Needs
Middle School Co-Teacher
K-8 Inclusion, Push-in Teacher
High School IST Facilitator
5th Grade Resource Teacher
1st-4th Self Contained Teacher



IEP Eligibility

- Must meet 2 requirements for eligibility:
 - (1) diagnosis of disability in 1+ of 13 disability categories outlined in the IDEA, and
 - (2) the child needs special education services to make progress in school and learn the general education curriculum.



Parts of an IEP

Student Info
+ IEP Team

Present Levels

IEP Goals
+ Objectives

Accommodations
+ Modifications

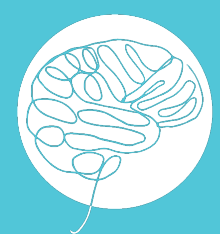
Related Services

Additional
Supports +
Services

Special Factors

Transition

LRE + Placement

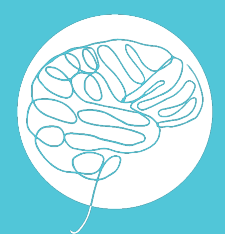


Present Levels

**IEP Goals +
Objectives**

**Supports +
Services**

**LRE +
Curriculum**



Mistake #1

**“...80% accuracy
is 3 of 4 trials.”**



S.M.A.R.T.

specific measurable attainable relevant,
results-oriented time-bound



IEP Goal Criteria

accuracy

duration

frequency

distance

7

rate

intensity

latency



IEP Goal Criteria

accuracy
percentage

duration
time

frequency
*number of times
something occurs*

distance
measures distance



rate
how quickly

intensity
uses a scale

latency
*time between two
behaviors (A to B)*



Choosing Appropriate Criteria

Baseline Data

- with supports
- without supports

Prior IEP Data

- average amount of progress in that goal area



Example

Student will remain on-task with 80% accuracy.



Example

~~Student will remain on-task with 80% accuracy.~~

During independent work, the student will remain on-task for 15 consecutive minutes with no more than 2 adult prompts, across 3 consecutive sessions, measured by duration recording.



Example

Given a text on the student's instructional level, Student will read the passage with 80% accuracy.



Example

~~Given a text on the student's instructional level, Student will read the passage with 80% accuracy.~~

From a baseline of 45 CWPM at 70% accuracy, the student will reach 85 CWPM with $\geq 95\%$ accuracy on three consecutive weekly 1-minute CBM probes.



Example

Given paper with straight and curved lines, the student will cut along the line within $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of the guideline on 4 of 5 trials across two consecutive weekly sessions, as measured by work samples and teacher checklist.



Example

Given direct instruction on how to use a given list of coping strategies, Student will use appropriate coping strategies 60% of the time.



Example

~~Given direct instruction on how to use a given list of coping strategies, Student will use appropriate coping strategies 60% of the time.~~

During problem situations, the student will independently select and use a taught coping strategy to return to baseline within 5 minutes in 3 of 4 incidents over 3 consecutive weeks, documented with ABC notes.



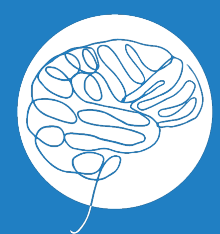
Example

Given a list of 10 previously untaught high-frequency words, the student will correctly spell 8 out of 10 words on a weekly spelling probe for three consecutive weeks, as measured by teacher-made spelling tests.

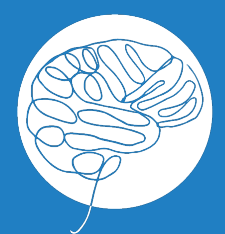


Mistake #2

Not Writing Functional Goals



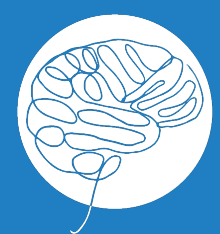
Functional skills are skills an individual needs to live as **independently** as possible.



Functional skills are skills an individual needs to live as **independently** as possible.

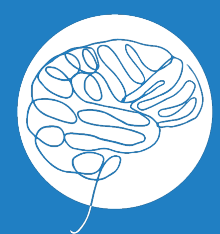
“...designed to meet [a student’s] unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.”

- IDEA Law



Communication
Choice making
Social Skills
Safety
Self care
Life Skills
Leisure
Recreation
Vocational Skills
Community Based Learning
Functional Academics
Time Management

***This list is not exhaustive.**



Examples

Example 1

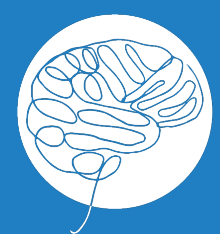
Standard: measurement, addition, elapsed time
Functional Skill: cooking

Example 2

Standard: listening and speaking
Functional Skill: conversations on the phone

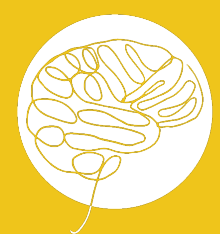
Example 3

Standard: money
Functional Skill: paying for a service, shopping



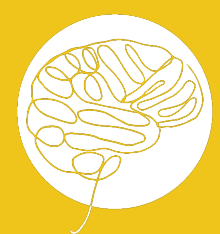
Mistake #3

**Copy/Pasting
Goals from
Another IEP**



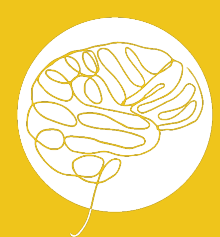
Signs of a Copy/Pasted IEP

- Wrong pronouns.
- Wrong name.
- Incorrect data, no data.
- No changes made.
- All students on a caseload have the same IEP goals.



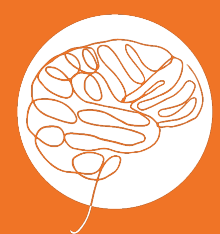
Solutions

- Use templates.
- Use goal banks.
- Use similar wording.
- Have someone read through the IEP first.
- Spellcheck and name check.



Mistake #4

Having Too Many Goals



Why It's a Mistake

- **Dilutes progress:** Student makes a little progress on many things, but mastery is slow.
- **Lacks priority of skills:** impossible to work on 12+ skills with the same intensity and consistency every day/week.
- **Burns out staff:** Impossible to collect meaningful data on every goal consistently.
- **Compliance risk:** Missed data collection → missed reporting → potential procedural violation.
- **Not always individualized:** Feels like a checklist instead of prioritizing what's most impactful.



Solutions

- **Prioritize high-impact goals:** Choose 3–5 that address the student's most significant barriers to accessing the curriculum or environment.
- **Leverage SDI & accommodations:** Not every need has to be a goal — some can be addressed through services and classroom supports.
- **Use benchmarks/objectives:** Break big goals into smaller steps rather than creating separate goals for every skill.
- **Collaborate with the team:** Get input from gen ed teachers, related service providers, and parents to decide what's truly most important this year.



Example

IEP has 11 separate goals (decoding, fluency, comprehension, spelling, writing sentences, paragraph writing, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, behavior).

IEP has 7 goals, some academic areas are combined, but still separate goals for each math operation.

IEP has 4 goals:

- Reading: Fluency with comprehension checks (includes decoding as objective).
- Writing: 3-sentence paragraph (includes spelling as objective).
- Math: Single-step word problems (includes addition/subtraction as objective).
- Behavior/SEL: Use of coping strategy.



Mistake #5

**Writing Too Many
Skills in One Goal**



Example

By the end of 36 instructional weeks, given flash cards, missing letter decks, and a phonics-based reading program, [Student] will be able to independently read, recognize, verbalize and spell, every 5 weeks, a new group of 15 high frequency sight words, with 80% accuracy.



Example

By the end of 36 instructional weeks, given flash cards, missing letter decks, and a phonics-based reading program, [Student] will be able to independently **read**, **recognize**, **verbalize** and **spell**, every 5 weeks, a new group of 15 high frequency sight words, with 80% accuracy.



Example

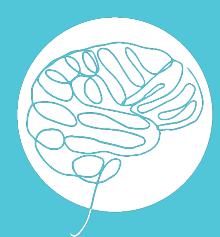
By the end of 36 instructional weeks, given flash cards, missing letter decks, and a phonics-based reading program, Student will independently read a new group of # high-frequency sight words with % accuracy, as measured by teacher-created probes across # consecutive weekly trials.

- Given a visual field of # words, Student will point to the named sight word with % accuracy across # consecutive weekly probes.
- Given flash cards, Student will verbally read # new sight words with % accuracy across # consecutive weekly probes.
- Given dictation tasks, Student will spell # new sight words with % accuracy across # consecutive weekly probes.
- When presented with grade-level text containing taught sight words, Student will read the words accurately in connected text with % accuracy across # consecutive opportunities.



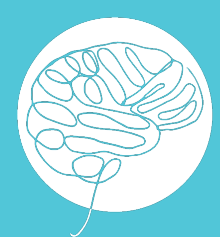
Mistake #6

Doing It All Alone



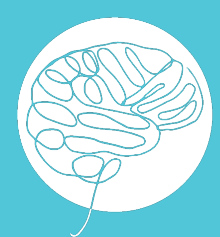
During the IEP Writing Process

1. Send input forms/questionnaires
2. Co-collaboration time
3. Set deadlines together for IEP writing, or
4. Write IEP goals together
5. Determine who will collect data, how often, and how



At the IEP Meeting

1. Describe how IEP goals will be co-managed, including progress monitoring
2. Share examples with family, as necessary

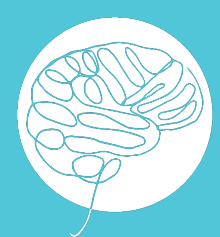


Throughout the School Year

1. Co-collaboration time
2. Share data frequently
 - One data sheet shared by all

Creating Shared Goals + Progress Monitoring

- What might this look like in different LREs?
 - General Ed, Mainstreaming, Inclusion
 - Resource
 - Self-contained



Example

Allows for a narrow focus and helps the student learn.

Example: Quinn will increase expressive language skills by labeling functional actions (a total of 10) with 90% accuracy, over 3 consecutive sessions.

Worked on with SLP during therapy sessions and supported by the teacher and/or classroom staff other days.

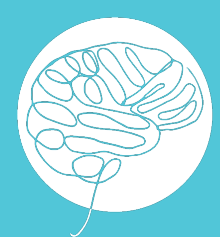


Example

Josef will engage in a cooperative leisure activity for a duration of 5 minutes, with no more than one prompt over 3 consecutive sessions.

SLP provides therapy in class: Direct instruction on targeted leisure activity: modified Uno, memory, etc.

Teacher or Classroom staff: Run a small group lesson weekly to generalize skills to a group.



Mistake #7

**Two Sentence
PLAAFPs**



Present Levels

Reading + Language Arts

Written Language

Mathematics

Communication (Listening Comprehension)

Communication (Oral Expression)

Assistive Technology

Gross + Fine Motor

Social Skills

Behavior Skills

Attention

Emotional Response

Vocational skills

Adaptive + ADLs

Health

Vision + Hearing

Student Strengths, Preferences, and Interests

Medical Concerns

Attendance

Parent Concerns + Vision Statement

Grades

Assessments (State-wide + Benchmarks)

Most Recent Evaluation Findings

Current IEP Goal Progress

Proposed Measurable Goals

Adverse Effects



Adverse Effects

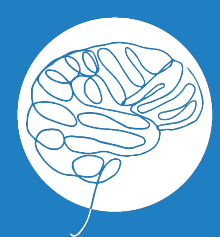
Questions to Ask Yourself:

- How will the child's deficits and/or struggles with this content area affect the child's learning?
- What will the child be unable to do without specific goals in this area?
- How will the child struggle in/with the general education grade level curriculum without specific instruction in this area?
- What are the student's challenges related to the disability?
- How will these challenges affect day-to-day life?



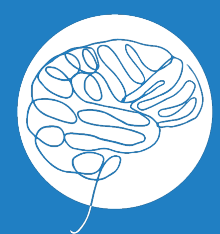
Mistake #8

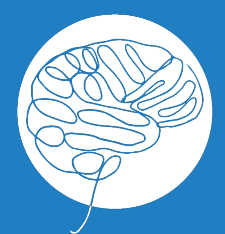
No Alignment Between Sections



If there is a need in the Present Levels, it needs to be addressed with:

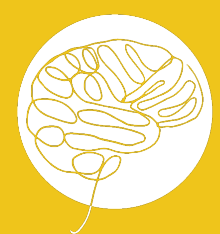
- an IEP Goal, or
- an IEP service.





Mistake #9

**Not
Individualizing
Supports**



Accommodations

Modifications

Adaptation

Accommodations are changes made in teaching or testing procedures in order to provide the student with access to information and to create an equal opportunity to demonstrate knowledge or skills (*the “how”*). This change does not change the skill being taught, the level of performance, or skill mastery.

A change in *what* the student is expected to learn and/or demonstrate. The course content is modified, but the curriculum remains the same.

Adaptations modify the lesson and materials to better suit the specific needs and learning styles of individual students or a particular group of students.

Examples

Accommodation or Modification:

Frequent Check-ins

@theintentionaliep

What that might look like:

Child checks in with the teacher every X minutes or period.

Child stops by at the beginning and end of the day.

Teacher has to sign off on a piece of paper at the end of each period.

Child checks in with teacher X times per day, week, month, or marking period.

Teacher stops by the student's class X times per day, week, etc.

Teacher takes data on a clipboard every time student does X or every X minutes/hours.

Accommodation or Modification:

Reminders to Stay on Task

@theintentionaliep

What that might look like:

A special visual or auditory signal only the student knows.

A flip card on the child's desk.

A verbal cue.

A token board or task sequence on the child's desk or in the child's workspace.

Peer mentor.

A gestural cue, like the teacher's hand on the desk.

Child seated near the teacher or peer mentor (i.e., proximity).

Digital or sand timers.

Accommodation or Modification:

Preferential Seating

@theintentionaliep

What that might look like:

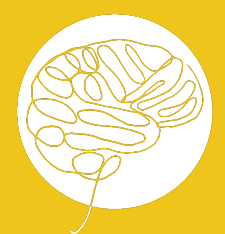
Seating near the teacher

Seating near the front of the classroom

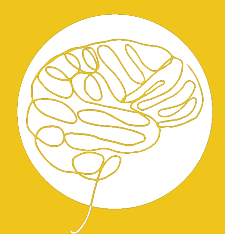
Seating near a peer mentor

Seating away from a specific student

Seating in a specific part of the classroom

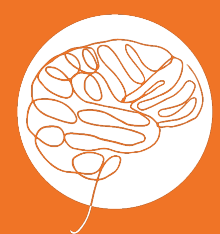


Examples



Mistake #10

Using Deficit-Only Language



Deficit-based language focuses solely on what the student cannot do, what they are lacking, or where they are behind. It often sounds negative and can make the IEP feel like a list of problems instead of a plan for progress.

Strengths-based language highlights what the student can do, their interests, abilities, and areas of progress, then identifies needs as opportunities for growth. It frames the IEP as a tool to help the student access learning and reach potential.



Examples

Deficit-Focused	Student often disrupts the class and struggles to follow directions.
Strengths-Based	Student benefits from clear, step-by-step instructions and frequent movement breaks.

Deficit-Focused	Student struggles with reading comprehension.
Strengths-Based	Student benefits from graphic organizers and visual supports to enhance her reading comprehension.

Deficit-Focused	Student is easily distracted and cannot stay on task during group activities.
Strengths-Based	Student thrives in structured environments + demonstrates focus during tasks that align with his interests.

Deficit-Focused	Student has difficulty completing writing tasks independently.
Strengths-Based	Student demonstrates strong verbal communication skills and benefits from dictating ideas before transferring them to writing.



Examples

Deficit-Focused	Student struggles with transitioning between activities.
Strengths-Based	Student benefits from consistent routines and responds well to visual or. Verbal cues to support smooth transitions.

Deficit-Focused	Student's writing is disorganized and below grade level.
Strengths-Based	Student benefits from structured templates and graphic organizers to help organizer her ideas when writing.

Deficit-Focused	Student self-isolates and does not interact with peers.
Strengths-Based	Student benefits from small group settings to build confidence in social interactions.

Deficit-Focused	Student frequently has outburst and tantrums when frustrated.
Strengths-Based	Student is developing the ability to recognize their own actions and benefits from strategies like sensory breaks and visual aids to support emotional regulation.



Mistake #11

Collecting Only
1-2 Types of Data



Types of Data

Direct	also called “direct measures”; collected by observing or assessing the student’s actual performance of a skill or behavior (teacher gets to see the skill in action); firsthand, tangible data that is highly reliable. Examples: work samples, performance, quiz + test scores, in-person observations on behavior
Indirect	also called “indirect measures”; gathering information about the student’s performance through secondary sources or reflective methods, rather than observing a direct demonstration of the skill; need multiple perspectives. Examples: rating scales, surveys, interviews, questionnaires, checklists
Formative	collected at regular intervals (e.g. weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) to gauge how well interventions or instruction are working; provides real-time feedback for both the teacher and the student and is the heartbeat of responsive instruction. Examples: running records, exit tickets, checklists, student self-monitoring logs
Summative	collected at the end of an instructional period or IEP cycle to evaluate overall outcomes and determine if goals have been met; often thought of as “outcome data” or end-point assessments. Examples: end of unit tests, end of year evaluation on goals, post-tests after interventions



Types of Data

Formal	comes from standardized or structured tests and tools that often have normative scores or established reliability; provides validated benchmarks and big-picture outcomes Examples: standardized achievement tests, psychological evaluations, or norm-referenced assessments
Informal	gathered through teacher-made or less standardized methods; typically more flexible and directly tied to daily instruction; offers immediate, specific insights into day-to-day progress. Examples: classroom quizzes, teacher observations, running records, homework performance, portfolios, or criterion-referenced checklists
Qualitative	descriptive, non-numerical information that provides context and insight into student performance or behavior; “tells a story”; helpful data for understanding context Examples: anecdotal notes, observation, input forms, quality of student work
Quantitative	numerical information that can be measured or counted, providing objective evidence of student performance; objective data; high degree of measurability Examples: test scores, frequency of behavior, how long behavior lasts, % of correct responses



Types of Data

Product	refers to the tangible outcomes of student work (re: the artifacts or work samples a student produces); useful for assessing quality and content of student work Examples: writing sample, a completed project, a test paper, or any student-created product that can be evaluated
Process	involves capturing how the student is performing a task or behavior as it happens, typically through observations or recordings of behavior over time Examples: observation notes, frequency counts, or timing how long a student stays on task
Baseline	the initial information collected on a student's performance before instruction or intervention begins; should be collected to show baseline with and without supports; shows the starting point; written into the Present Levels.
Progress Monitoring	the continuous, ongoing collection of data to track a student's advancement toward IEP goals; typically objective and numerical, allowing for frequent graphing and analysis; collected systematically and frequently (not just occasionally) so that trends can be observed; data used in progress reporting.





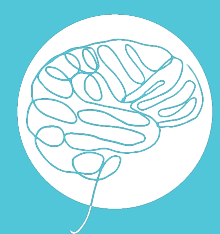
Data

Analysis +
©The Intentional IEP
Interpretation

Instructional
Decisions +
Recommendations



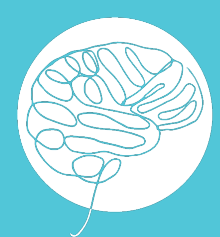
“Flawless”



When we talk about a “flawless IEP”, we don’t mean an IEP that is perfect forever, immune to changes, or written once and done.

A “flawless” IEP is:

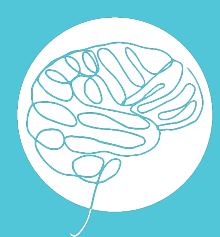
- **Accurate for the student right now** – it reflects their current strengths, needs, and baseline data.
- **Individualized and actionable** – it clearly connects needs → goals → services → accommodations.
- **Clear and measurable** – any team member can pick it up and know exactly what to teach, how to measure progress, and what success looks like.
- **Adaptable** – it’s written with the understanding that as we collect more data, we may need to revise goals, SDI, or supports.



Flawless doesn't mean perfect.

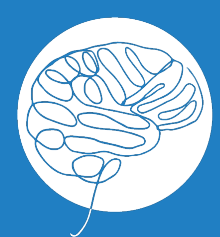
It means **appropriate, individualized, and well-aligned** for the student's needs at the time it's written — with the flexibility to grow and evolve as the student does.

We're aiming for a living document that grows with the student.

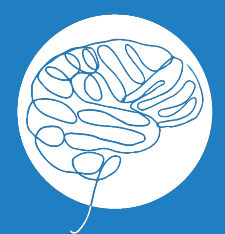


11 IEP Mistakes Recap

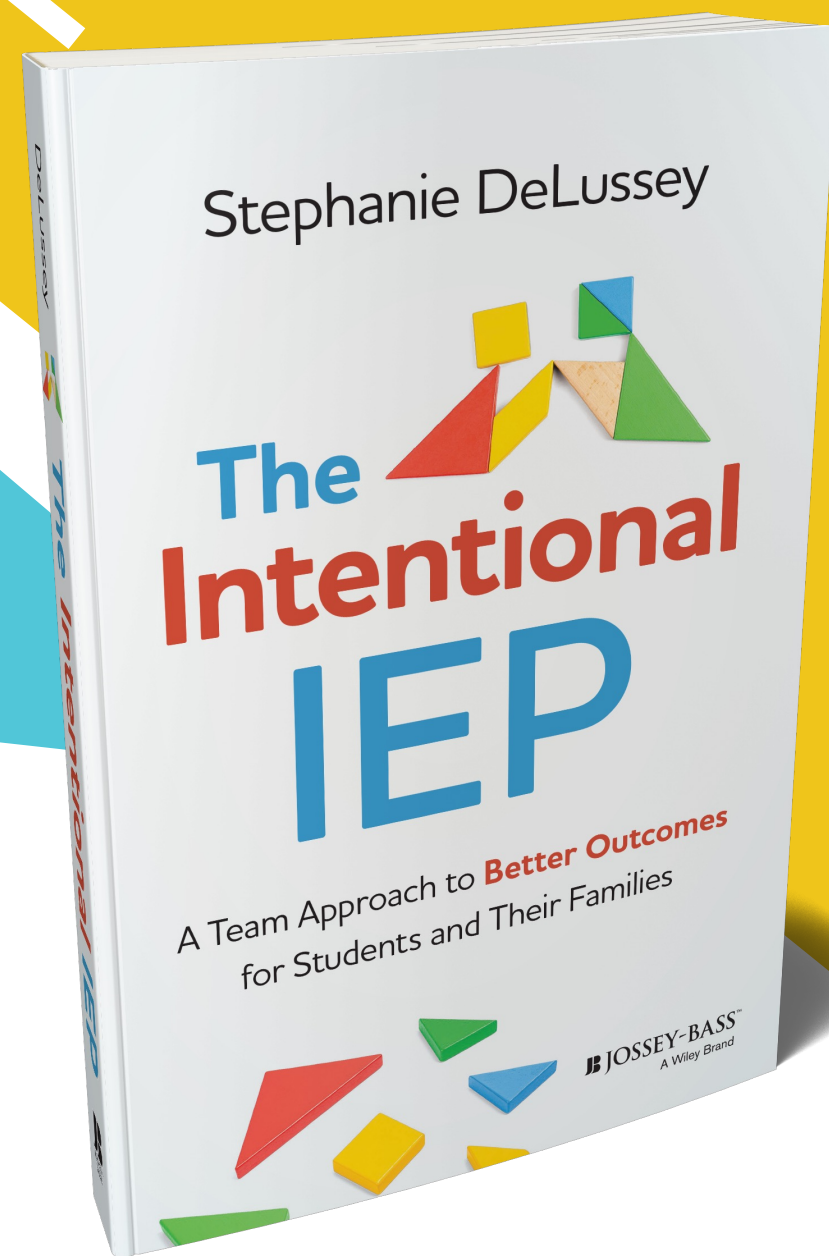
1. "...80% Accuracy in 3 of 4 trials"
2. Not Writing Functional Goals
3. Copy/Pasting Goals from Another IEP
4. Having Too Many Goals
5. Writing Too Many Skills in One Goal
6. Doing It All Alone
7. Two Sentence PLAAFPs
8. No Alignment Between Sections
9. Not Individualizing Supports
10. Using Deficit-Only Language
11. Collecting Only 1-2 Types of Data



Q&A



THANK YOU!



TII Podcast

support@theintentionaliep.com



@theintentionaliep

