

## **UNM CDD Educator Voices**

### **11 Considerations**

#### **Patrick Blevins**

Hello and welcome to the New Mexico Autism Project podcast for educators. These podcasts, as well as our online training series, have been developed by the University of New Mexico Center for Development and Disability in collaboration with the New Mexico Public Education Department as a resource for educators who would like to learn more about evidence based practices for working with students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, we hope that you enjoy this series, and if you have any questions about these resources or how we may support your school district through the NM PD Autism Project, please contact me, Patrick Blevins, at the email address shown on the slide, or call the UNM/CDD 505-272-3000.

#### **Maryann Trott, UNM CDD**

Welcome to this podcast from the UNM center for Development and Disability, the Autism Program school team. Today we'll be talking about some important administrative concerns the eleven considerations for students with autism spectrum disorder that are a part of the IEP meeting. Joining me today is Loretta Vega from the Las Cruces Public Schools. She has worked for many years with students with autism, and has really been instrumental in Las Cruces in working to ensure high quality education for students with autism. Loretta, would you please introduce yourself and then let us know what you're currently doing in Las Cruces before we go on?

#### **Loretta Vega, Las Cruces Public School District**

Yes. Thank you. As she mentioned, my name is Loretta Vega. I am the autism instructional specialist here for the Las Cruces Public School District. I've actually been on the job for just about a year now, so it's still a learning process as we're going along. Prior to this position I was a special education teacher over at Hermosa Heights Elementary, and I was there for eighteen years. Ten out of those eighteen years, was specifically autism only for DD preschool students - three to five years of age -. So going into that program, I really learned a lot through the UNM Intensive Mentorship Program. You guys came and saved the day and helped me really learn my way around through the ins and outs of autism and really made my program a huge success and kind of gave me the courage to apply for the position that I'm in now. Thank you so much for that,

#### **Maryann Trott**

Thank you for the plug, and for those of you listening in,

if you would like the school team to come to your classroom and work with you, there's a tip sheet that goes along with this podcast, and the contact information is included on that. And, you know, I've got to say, I had the privilege to visit Loretta's classroom back in the day when we could actually visit classrooms, and what a joy it was, Loretta, to see how your classroom operated.

### Loretta Vega

Thank you so much, I really do miss my students, but it's wonderful to see my students who have moved on and still get to visit them and help them and their families as well. So that's has been great.

### Maryann Trott

Well, I so appreciate you doing this with us. And for this podcast, as I said, we're talking about the eleven considerations. I am going to remind us all of what the considerations are and I'm going to just say what they are as presented in the PED, Autism Spectrum Disorder Training manual that can be found online. If you'd like to take a look, you can just put in NM PED Autism Disorder Training Manual and it will come up. Actually, several training manuals will come up. So, Loretta, after I mentioned what those considerations are, I'd like you to comment on how each of the considerations may be discussed in an IEP meeting and how they're helpful for school staff as well as families. The first one is extended educational programming, and that, of course, includes extended school year or, things over breaks, school services over breaks. Let's talk about that one a little bit.

### Loretta Vega

This one is super important, especially for new teachers coming in a lot of the questions that I normally get when it comes to extended school year are how do we know they qualify? When are they going to qualify? And the response I give back is usually that's kind of an IEP team decision. And having it as one of the considerations is especially important to talk about, because you're really looking at the growth and development that your child has had throughout the school year, and especially important as it's our favorite word for everybody, it's that data word, we have look at the data. We have to see what the numbers are telling us. Really important for the team to get together and talk about what you're seeing as far as the growth and what we're seeing not only at school, but at home, and really including the family in that conversation, because we want all these skills that we're teaching our kids to be generalized across all environments. Making sure that we bring our families into these conversations and talking about so and so is doing this at school and have you seen that at home and over Christmas break or holiday breaks? Things that we might have done and asking if they

still doing it? Because not only do we want those skills happening at school, we want them happening at home. So really talking to your team about the importance of these skills and looking at your data is going to be huge for this consideration.

Maryann Trott

And I'm so glad that you mentioned the data because it's easy for those of us who work with kids with autism to just assume that they're going to qualify for extended school year, but there are some very specific questions, and criteria to be met regarding their ability to participate in extended educational programming. So, I really appreciate you. You mentioning that one.

Loretta Vega

Definitely, yes

Maryann Trott

Consideration two is daily schedules and we've had long conversations about daily schedules, so tell me how you put that again, specifically in an IEP meeting.

Loretta Vega

So looking at daily schedules, it's super important to see where the needs of your students are going to be, and again, discussing with your team. That's going to pretty much hit with every consideration that we talk about, discussing with your team and discussing with your families what they see going on. Are students having difficulties with transitions? Are they having difficulties with going on the bus to get to school? Where are we seeing these areas of need, these areas of concerns? And how can we help out with them? And by incorporating these daily schedules where they need to be, we can really set up our students for success to be independent in these transitions, which is our goal for all of our students, is to have independence. We don't want them to need us to help them get on the bus to help them transition, depending on grade levels, if they're middle school or high school, transition from class to class. We want them to be able to do this on their own. So by being able to incorporate these daily schedules that are appropriate for each ones, of course, our younger ones starting off with object and picture schedules, moving on up to our upper grades where we have checklists and different kinds of more appropriate schedules for them to follow. We want them to be able to do these on their own. And again, a lot of people get really concerned when we say schedules. We want them to be independent. And a lot of people don't really understand that these daily schedules help them with that independence. And an example I give to a lot of people is I live and die by my calendar, and that's my schedule. If I don't have my calendar on me, I don't know what's happening for the day.

And same goes with our students. They need to have some kind of daily schedule to help them get through their day independently, and it will vary student by student, need by need depending on their age. But it's super important to really talk about what's going to be the appropriate type of schedule to have in place and when and where it's going to be needed. Is it going to be needed at home? Is it going to be needed in general education? Will it be needed in the special education classroom? Will it be needed in all of these areas to show success for our students? Those are conversations you're going to want to have with your families and teams to see what's going to be best appropriate to meet this consideration.

### Maryann Trott

That's great and I'm glad, and you said it a number of ways, and I really appreciate it; one size does not fit all. gain, you have to have that assessment data. You have to know your students well, and you have to get input from families in order to know what's going to work to help the student be independent, which is, of course, always the goal of a schedule; that is really an important one.

I know that consideration three sometimes leads to a little bit of confusion. Consideration three is in home and community-based training. If you could define for us what that's talking about? And then again, also as you talk about it in the IEP.

### Loretta Vega

Ok so, for in home and community-based training for consideration three realistically, in my eyes, the way I explain this one is how can the student adjust to new environments and new settings? When we're looking at our students, especially our older students who are going to be getting to that age of maturity, and they're going to be getting out of their IEPs and going into the communities, looking at those community settings, the DVRs that are going to be coming in. How are we going to start involving these community resources early into their IEP so that they're familiar with this transition phase and how they're going to adapt to the community is kind of how we see this consideration going on. Who are we contacting? Who are our base contacts for these so that the families can start building those relationships before they head out into the community, so that we can start bringing them in early on, so that families are really comfortable with the next step. It's a huge area of trust, especially when you have a student with any disability. When you're leaving a group of people that you've trusted with your child for such a long time, and you're taking that next step, whether it be from preschool to kindergarten, up to middle school to high school, and then out into the big world of the community. Being able to establish these relationships and get these things set for them early on. So that the families have that built up trust with everybody before they let their child out into the big world.

Maryann Trott

And it really is so important to think about those things earlier on. I just was noticing in the PED manual, it does have links, interagency linkages and transition services as part of the things that need to be talked about at the IEP meeting in regards to this consideration.

Loretta Vega

Yes, and just making sure, of course, again, we talked with any consideration, talking to your families, what do they envision for their students talking to the student themselves? What do you want to do? What kind of services? What kind of things can we get set up for you as we start getting ready to transition you into a new environment? Because that's going to have a lot to do with what specific services that you're looking for as well.

Maryann Trott

And of course, you've mentioned a number of times, and I don't think it can be said too often, is what we're after is independence. And that's going to look different for every student.

Loretta Vega

Yes.

Maryann Trott

Consideration four, and I know this one is near and dear to your heart, is positive behavior support strategies. We get confused a little bit, at least in my experience, teachers sometimes get confused in thinking that we're talking just about those students who might have a functional behavior assessment and a behavior intervention plan. But these positive behavior support strategies are to address every student in the school. And how do you talk about that then in regards to your students with autism?

Loretta Vega

Great so, for this one I really like to look at it as you had mentioned before, as in teaching you skills, really setting up our students for success. And that's how I look at the whole consideration when I talk to teachers as well, this is really just a plan for success. Yes, there are guidelines, and by making sure that we look at each of these considerations, we're really setting our kids up for success. Making sure that we're talking to our students, talking to our families and looking at data to see where our kids are really going to need the support the most, making sure that we have routines set for our students, that we're offering breaks. One big thing that I do talk to a lot of teachers about always making sure, in the area of positive behavior reinforcement, support

strategies, making sure that we tell our students the behaviors that we expect them to see. A lot of the times we hear don't do this, don't do that, and okay, well, what do I do? We really need to look at how we rephrase the way that we're speaking to our students and talk to them about the things that we expect them to see, find them doing good things, let them know what they're doing well, and really find ways to work those into our IEP so that we can set them up for success. And again, like we said, that independence coming through and having that reinforcement component built into the IEP as well. What types of reinforcement are we using? When will it be used? Who's going to be using it? Who's going to be teaching it to the staff and the family? Because we want that to be consistent across all boards with reinforcement as well.

### Maryann Trott

Right, and I know this is important because I've been in your classroom to actually help teachers help their students to practice some of the things in terms of school wide rules or the way you walk to the cafeteria, or whatever, to have opportunities to practice that. And of course, our students are going to need some more practice and possibly some additional prompts to be able to do that. And, it is so important to remember, as you said, to tell them what they can do, not what they can't do, and then to help them really practice, and as you said, be reinforced for those positive behaviors.

### Loretta Vega

I'm glad you brought up the modeling again to a lot of the things that we use in our classroom. We, of course, break things down into many schedules so that we could have it visually for our students. One of the huge things that our students really enjoyed the last couple of years was I was there was the video modeling; they really loved the video modeling. I think the biggest one that was super helpful for us was actually picture day. You don't realize how much picture day will actually interrupt your schedule for the day; it's a really hard day. We were very fortunate to have picture day go on a couple days at our school. I went up to the guy at the camera and explained our situation and said: Do you know that picture day is coming. I really need to just practice and we record me so we can get these steps and get this done? It was really helpful because I was actually able to use that video modeling for a couple years. I really saw a difference because I could play it a week or two weeks before picture day and tell the kids: "Here's our icon for picture day, picture day is coming". It was on our schedule and I played that video over and over for them. It was so great to see them because we practiced going where the pictures were being taken, they had watched the video, they had their mini schedule, and those kids went up and did it.

### Maryann Trott

That's a great example of using evidence-based strategies. The eleven considerations are all about what is evidence based, what are good evidence-based strategies for kids with ASD. That is just a beautiful example of that so to be able to watch. It's always motivating for kids to be able to watch their teachers or themselves or other kids.

### Loretta Vega

And I think the big key component, especially to be using these positive behavior supports is really talking to your team. As a teacher, my aids and I. I always felt that we had a very strong team and a very strong connection. And we'd sit down after the kids left and we'd eat lunch together and we would have a daily staff meeting and we'd say "What went really well today?" What didn't go well today, and how are we going to fix that? Those were the topics that we talked about. Picture day was not good today. How are we going to fix that? And we would write those notes down. Those are things that we would do. I'm modeling videos looking at other areas where some of our kids were struggling a bit and how we were going to fix those and talk about different strategies. So really making sure that you sit and talk with your team about these things is super important and it was super beneficial for me in my classroom as well.

### Maryann Trott

That's such an important reminder to make sure that we include everyone, families and school staff, people who are working with kids. I know that you've had some similar experiences as well where even perhaps the custodian or some of the personnel in the lunchroom can be really helpful for our students and can help remind them of how to go about things in a positive and an independent way.

### Loretta Vega

Yes, I will say that was one thing I was very grateful for at the school that I worked at. Our staff was very welcoming of anything that we asked them to do if we were working on greetings, if we were working on anything, I could just send an email to the teachers and they knew what we were doing and our kids could practice any skill we needed in the halls with the kids or teachers. I was very appreciative of the staff that we had there that was willing to jump in and help us out whenever we needed it.

### Maryann Trott

And that's really another thing and We'll get to staff training in a little bit, though thinking about staff training, not only the staff that's working directly with the student with autism, but also the rest of the school staff, because you and I know that some well-meaning teacher who sees a kid crying in the hall is just going to try to help them you know, be

happier and figure out where they go, when all along it may have been part of a plan to let that student pull him or herself together and then come back independently. Staff training about that and really incorporating you know, your school staff, no matter who they are, is a really good consideration.

Consideration number five is future planning, and it makes a point of saying beginning at any age. This is something one of many things that are near and dear to my heart is that thinking about the transition to adulthood begins with that three-year old in your classroom. Would you talk a little bit about what we are talking about in terms of future planning and how you go about that with an IEP at any level? I know most of your experience is elementary, but thinking about how you go about that at the other levels as well.

### Loretta Vega

For future planning, we're really looking at living skills to be fully functional individuals out in our community. And again, starting this at three years old, a lot of the times on IEPs we'll see the N/A portion marked on this; this is something we really tell teachers, it's okay to start planning now. We ask typically developing three-year old children. What do you want to be when you grow up? And they want to be a firefighter, some of them want to be unicorns, and that's okay. We can mark that down. You can ask families, at first, what do you see your child being, especially, if we have some students who are nonverbal coming into our school system; families know their interests, they know what they're good at doing. They might have an idea. You know what? They really likes to experiment in the kitchen. Maybe he/she could be a chef one day. Those are great aspirations for them to put down. It's really nice because you can see that develop as they get older.

Starting at that base level when they're in pre-K and then watching it as it grows up, did those change? Did that stay the same based off those skills? Those are great ways to get your reinforcements set up for yourself in your classroom, knowing what they're interested in and what they're willing to work for are really beneficial as well. Making sure that you're talking to your students, if they're able to speak to you, and let them know what their interests are, especially going into middle and high school, asking the caregivers as well. What do you hope for your child? What do you see for your child in their future? That is super beneficial as well.

Once they get into middle school and high school, once we have these questions answered, this really gives you an idea of what community resources you're going to need to start looking for these students. What kind of resources do you need to start linking to them so that we can make this available for them, so they can get some experience in this before they get out into the world so they can determine if cooking is

something I really wants to do or do I have a passion for music now? Getting these ideas and talk to the parents, talk to families, caregivers, talk to your team to see what additional resources are going to be available for them in order to have these experiences and so that they can do this when they get out into the community.

Maryann Trott

Those are great examples. I was amused at you mentioning that some kids want to be a unicorn because even unicorns have to use the potty independently.

Loretta Vega

Exactly!

Maryann Trott

It's a great way place to start. I did notice as we were talking, it says in order to address this consideration, it's helpful to ask the following question. Does the student need assistance with resources to transition to post-secondary environments? That is ordinarily what we think of in terms of transition and/or daily living skills within the community. Those daily living skills within the community are those skills that we start out on just as soon as we possibly can.

Loretta Vega

Yeah, just always having that question in your head. What's happening after high school in this child's life? That will help guide you through this consideration.

Maryann Trott

Right, and I always remind both families and teachers the things that I reminded myself of as a parent, that twelve years is a really long time, but it's not at all, or twelve or fifteen years even, it is not a long time at all. We have to really make sure we make the most of those years while we have them.

Loretta Vega

Yes.

Maryann Trott

Consideration six is parent and family training and support. How do you use that one? How do you help families and parents get the training and support that they need?

Loretta Vega

For this one, in terms of parent and family support, we always want to make sure that our families have access to community resources. We have a variety of them here in

town. We want to make sure that they're linked up to these resources so that they have these trainings available to them in their home to help students with ABA services that can go into the home and help. We also do provide support. We used to do lunch groups here in Las Cruces where families could meet together. Day care was provided for some of the families who did need some help for their younger children. The families could get together and discuss issues and talk about things like what doctor are you seeing. I need an audiologist. I need to get blood drawn. These things that we don't normally think about that our families really struggle with.

Since we can't be getting together anymore, we do have two online Facebook groups. We do link all of our trainings for community virtual trainings on these Facebook groups for our families so they have access to them. We post additional resources that families need. Families can still post questions that myself and a couple of other people in the district are administering over so that we can get them linked to the correct resources that they need. We also have an autism lending library in our district where we're able to provide families and caregivers with printed visual schedules that they may need. We will print them, laminate them and Velcro them and get them ready for them to use in the home. We can provide training for them on how to use those at home, and also if there are ABA therapists at home, they can also model that training for them, since they are the ones that are able to go to their homes due to COVID.

This is how we are providing some of our supports. The Autism Library also provides books and pamphlets and videos of different resources that families may request and they can check out for free, and they're able to check out about up to five materials that they need, and return those when they're done. Then can also request some additional materials to take home, especially over the summer since some of the kids may not be in an extended school year, and some of the families may need additional materials to help rotate to keep interest going at home. This is a great resource that we can provide for them as well.

### Maryann Trott

Those are really great points, and it's just so cool that Las Cruces has those kinds of resources, and I know in large part due to your efforts and those of some of your colleagues. I really appreciate the way that you talked about making referrals for this consideration for family training and support. I think sometimes we get confused thinking that you know, it's talking about teachers going into the home and providing the training themselves. It's not to say that that may not happen on certain occasions, but it's referring families to the help that they need if it can't be provided within the school.

Loretta Vega

Yes, that is true. This consideration has probably been a big red flag for me now, especially since we're in the COVID situation that we're in. We've been doing a lot of our learning virtually. This has really made myself and our team aware of how important caregiver training really is, because we're counting on our caregivers to do what we do in the classroom. A big component, especially that we've been hitting hard now, is training the caregiver via zoom as their student is sitting next, as their child is sitting next to them and walking them through the steps of everything that we're discussing today on how to teach their child to do specific things, especially with new skills and how to maintain these skills. This situation that we're in now has widened our eyes on the importance of teaching your caregiver.

Maryann Trott

I'm glad that you made that point about the online training and the things that we're trying to do which we could not do without that family support. Helping them know how to help us is really an important thing.

Loretta Vega

Yes.

Maryann Trott

Consideration seven is staff to student ratio. I think this one sometimes needs a little extra explanation because it's often used to think about kids that maybe need one to one assistance at all times. We think about that in different ways and need to help families understand that that may not always be the best way for their student to get what they need. So, how do you talk about the staff to student ratio?

Loretta Vega

When we're talking to teachers about the staff to student ratio, we're trying to tell them, I want you to look at your students, stay and see where it is that they're needing additional help during that day. Are they needing additional help when it may come to a transition? Are they needing additional help if they have a medical need and need to get to the nurse? Things like that, and seeing where we're going to really need to look at the ratio from the staff to the student to keep safety in mind for the student at all times. Are they going to need additional help if there's a fire drill? If there's an evacuation? Things like that is what we're looking at, because you need to have that smaller setting due to a behavior that may be occurring during that particular time in the day. Having the staff look at any kind of data that they may have for any portion of the student day and figuring out where that area of need is going to be, and how can staff be there to

support that area to make it more successful so that we can lead towards independence, so that they don't need us anymore. We want to work on fading ourselves out during those times.

Maryann Trott

So, would you agree that it's really more about looking at the specific times and activities where that student may need a little closer support versus someone there all the time?

Loretta Vega

Yes, exactly, we don't want to have the students get accustomed to having somebody there all day, every day; that's not independence. That's not what our goal is for our students. Stepping in areas where your student needs a little bit more assistance, and then once you see them starting to be more independent, then fading that adult back and pulling back so that the student can really grow in that area. That's when you say, okay, I no longer need this adult. Where else can this adult be needed? Because we've done our job and this student is successful in this area. We have done our job with him and it's time to use that adult either with another student or maybe in another classroom who may be needing some assistance as well.

Maryann Trott

Such a good feeling to be able to work yourself out of a little piece of a job anyway.

Loretta Vega

Back in the day, when we were in normal classrooms, I used to send my students into Head Start to get some general education time. We started going in just for a few minutes, we started small. We're going to go and do Hello Song and then we will leave and come back in and do Hello and Calendar, then we will leave. We ended up actually staying through centers. I told my assistants to only go in if you need to intervene if you need to. I remember one of my assistants came back one day and she said that that was the longest hour of my life. I was so bored in that class because I just sat there. Then we did our job, that's amazing because he doesn't need you anymore. I said congratulations, feel good about that.

Maryann Trott

That's a really great story, I love it. So, consideration eight is communication interventions. And I know you've spent lots of time with us and other people and are so great at communication interventions. But tell us how you talk about this particular consideration.

### Loretta Vega

So, for this consideration, I feel it's super important to have your speech language pathologist involved because this is their area of expertise. I tell them I'm not a speech language pathologist. I try my best, but always making sure that you're involving your family and your SLP in this conversation, trying to see what kind of assistive technology you might need. Is the assistive technology going to help with any behaviors that you might be having? Will it increase any behaviors we're having?

We need to look at that and take some data on those types of things. What type of assistive technology are we using? Are we using AEC devices? Are we using an iPad? Are we using pictures? Have we even used pictures yet? Can they discriminate between the pictures? Asking a lot of these questions when you're looking at what kind of communication devices that you may be using. Asking parents what they might have used or tried at home that may have worked for them and what didn't work for them, and why? Is the why because they weren't properly trained in it? Do we need training in these types of interventions that we're going to be using? And if we are doing training, who's going to train? Will it be the teacher? Will it be your community support? Is it going to be your ABA therapist at home? Will it be the speech therapist? There are a lot of varying questions that go along with this consideration that need to be addressed when you're discussing these things with your team.

### Maryann Trott

Absolutely, and communication is such a broad area and I'm so glad that you brought up the importance of making sure that you are involving a speech language pathologist, applied behavior analyst, if you have that person available to you, because those are areas that they focus on. We need their help to understand how best to do that.

Consideration number nine is social skills, also a hugely broad area; if you could tell us how you address that area?

### Loretta Vega

This is another area that I always like to bring in an additional person from your team, which is your social worker. This is their area of expertise here as well. Looking at social skills, observation is going to be huge for your data collection. So really watching your students, getting to know your students and their interests when they're young, wanting to know what they're willing to work for, what they're going to do, because you start really young with those skills and getting to work on those back-and-forth reciprocal communication skills. If you look at the older kids and asking them: How is it going at school for you? How are your friends? What do you like to do with your friends? Are they saying they have friends? Do they feel like they have friends? Do we

need to work on making friendships? Those types of skills that can really come up through conversations with your students, and then also asking the families, how is it going at home? How are they at home with the neighbors? How are they?

Because those are skills that your in-home services can help you with as well. You want them to make those connections, especially with individuals in their neighborhood, because these are people that they go to school with from kindergarten all the way through high school and graduate with. You want them to form those connections, because those are the people that you see day in and day out. You see them on the bus, you see them on the playground, you see them at McDonald's, and you want them to be able to build those friendships and be able to help support them to build those friendships so that they can see them out in the community and have conversations and do things that friends do with their friends.

#### Maryann Trott

So glad that you mentioned all sort of the nitty gritty things in terms of social skills.

Our last considerations, ten and eleven are put together and they are professional educator or staff support, and teaching strategies based on peer review and/or research-based practices. And you have already mentioned so many of those strategies, talk to us a little bit more about this professional educator staff support and teaching strategies-based on peer review or research-based practices.

#### Loretta Vega

OK so, for this consideration is where I come along with my new position on a lot of the IEPs. They're going to have some connection with somebody who can help them with resources that the staff is going to need. Do they need training in picture communication exchange? Do they need training in pivotal response? What strategies did we determine that this individual student is going to need and what training do we need to make it successful for them? We really want to make sure that anything that we're using is up to date, consistent information across all settings so that the training that the staff is getting is correct. We want to know that the family is getting this training. We want to know that in some instances siblings are getting this training because they're going to be a part of everyday interactions with our students as well.

So, making sure that our EA's are trained in what we're doing, because as a teacher you want to make sure that you can feel confident leaving your classroom for an IEP or even a sick day and know that things are going to get run, that data is going to get taken, that our discrete trials are going to get done. Things are going to get done the way they would if you were there. That's what you want your classroom. So, making sure that we document a plan and say this is the training we're going to get. This is

when it's going to get done. Making sure that you describe in detail what trainings you need to be done for that specific student or students so that we can set them up for success. Making sure that everybody's on board for the training and that everybody understands the training as well, always making sure that you check back for understanding like we do with our students. We need to check back for understanding with our staff and families to make sure that these strategies are being implemented appropriately.

### Maryann Trott

That's, that's great. Thank you so much. And kind of thinking about communication and social skills, which are so important for kids with ASD that may include, you know, as you mentioned, the speech language pathologist. It may include the social worker, people who, while it is their job, may not have familiarity, particularly with students with autism that have some very important core deficits that that need to be addressed in very specific ways. And they really need and always want that, that training.

Um, so I think that pretty much completes our discussion of the eleven considerations. Is there anything that's just that you're really thinking about that needs to be mentioned that hasn't been mentioned yet. Loretta?

### Loretta Vega

I would just like to say one thing. I, I do have a brother with disabilities, and so I've, I've had IEPs around my life for as long as I can remember. You know, he's thirty-eight years old now. So he's out in the community now. But I remember when I became a special education teacher, and one thing that my mom said that really stuck to me and even sticks to me as we go through these considerations. Whenever you're thinking about asking questions to a parent in the IEP, always make them aware of what questions. If you can send the questions home early. Send the questions home early so they have time to think about it. That's one thing my mom said to me that really stuck in my head was she always felt put on the spot when the teacher would ask her a question, and she's sitting there in front of all these professionals, and her mind would just go blank, and she would just tell me, if I only had these questions early, I would have time to think about it in a room at home where I'm comfortable and I could write everything down that my kid can do. And that's just been one thing that has stuck with me.

So even any questions that we usually tend to ask, especially pertaining to the eleven considerations, I would always email the parent or write on a piece of paper and send it home and say, hey, we're going to ask these at the IEP, sit down with your family and think about the things that that make your student that make your child shine. Let us

know about him. Give. This is his story. Tell me his story and really giving the family time to do that, um, I think was a was just very beneficial.

And I told my mom, I'm going to do that for every kid, mom, because I know that's something she really struggled with at every IEP. And that's something that I did with all of my families. And there was quite a few times that I've I've got the thank you saying, I don't know if I could have answered those questions in the meeting, so thank you for sending that home. And that's just been something that I wanted. I did and I wanted to share because we really don't think about how much we do put parents on the spot, especially in an IEP meeting where it's a team of professionals and, you know, they they may feel a little put off at some times, and we want them to know that their input and what they have to say is just as important as what anybody else has to say.

Maryann Trott

Well, I'm so glad that you made that point, because we talk about, um, you know, kind of person-centered planning and we talk about strength-based planning, and you can't do that unless you really, um, you know, help the families communicate with you, uh, where the what things are important to them and the things that they know about their child that, you know, the school is not going to know, or at least not going to find out until May.

Loretta Vega

Exactly.

Maryann Trott

If they don't know it from the parent. So, I'm so glad that you made that point. Thank you, Loretta, for talking with us about the eleven considerations. I just I want to hop in my car and run right down to Las Cruces now and visit your classrooms again, but I know that's not going to happen for a while.

Loretta Vega

We can do something virtually.

Maryann Trott

Exactly. Thank you so much for talking with us today about the eleven considerations.

Loretta Vega

Yes. Thank you so much I appreciate it.

## **IEP Considerations for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders**

1. Extended Educational Programming - Extended School Year (ESY) services or programs offered when school is not in session and/or the extension of the school day.
2. Daily Schedules reflecting minimal unstructured time and active engagement in learning activities - Developing a schedule dependent on the students individual functioning including short blocks of time or the use of more organized arrangements during unstructured times.
3. In-home and Community-Based Training or viable alternatives that assist the student with acquisition of social/behavioral skills - Teaching in "real world" environment where social/behavioral skills are needed.
4. Positive Behavior Support Strategies - Modifying environments to help students learn new and appropriate behaviors and the prevention of problem behaviors through Behavior Intervention Plan.
5. Futures Planning (beginning at any age) - Having an end goal in mind and in each grade level build skills to reach long-term goals.
6. Parent/Family Training and Support - Providing training and support by personnel with experience in ASD.
7. Staff-to-Student Ratio - Providing the number of staff members needed in classroom and out of the classroom to provide appropriate identified activities that are needed to achieve social/behavioral progress at the student's developmental and learning level.
8. Communication Interventions - Including language forms and functions that enhance effective communication across settings such as assistive technology.
9. Social Skills Supports - Providing strategies based on social skills assessment/curriculum and provided across settings.
10. Professional Educator/Staff Support - Ensuring staff have general training about autism and strategies to implement an IEP for students with ASD.
11. Teaching Strategies based on peer-reviewed, and/or research based practices - Considering various teaching strategies, visual supports, augmentative communication, or social skills training.

