



# A DISABILITY COORDINATOR'S STORY

Dawn begins the conversation with Justin's parents by inviting them to tell her a little more about their son. Justin's mother explains that, in contrast to his older sister, Justin began using words only a few months before. Justin's father adds that Justin does not seem interested in playing with other children, including his sister. But they had not been overly concerned until Justin began to attend preschool a year ago. According to his former preschool teacher, Justin was unable to conform to classroom expectations, follow classroom rules, or participate in social activities. Justin's behavior often disrupted the classroom. He made loud noises during morning circle and refused to participate with the rest of the class.

This feedback caused Justin's parents a lot of stress as they sought the right preschool for their son. They decided to enroll him in Head Start because his sister had attended and had a wonderful experience.

During the home visit, Dawn meet Justin and observes his play. She notices Justin's limited speech, use of noises and gestures to get his way, and his inability to follow directions. Dawn asks his parents to share their perspectives about Justin's strengths and needs.

After determining that no referrals for special services had been made for Justin, Dawn assures his parents that she will help them find the right educational program for him. She also tells them that the Head Start program's education and family engagement staff will provide support for Justin and his family.

Dawn listens to the family's hopes, questions, and fears, and she and the family develop an initial game plan. Dawn then meets with Jenny to begin planning for Justin's smooth transition into his Head Start classroom.

Dawn helps the family get in touch with the Local Education Agency (LEA) to make an appointment for a comprehensive assessment to determine whether Justin qualifies for special education and related services. Based on the assessment results and consultation with Sophia, Justin's Head Start teacher, and Justin's parents, Justin is identified as having a significant developmental delay that makes him eligible for special education and speech language services.

Dawn meets with Justin's family to answer questions about Justin's qualification for services and to help them understand their parental rights and prepare them for the upcoming IEP meeting. [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/Disabilities/families-too/Parenting/disabl\\_fts\\_00044\\_081105.html](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/Disabilities/families-too/Parenting/disabl_fts_00044_081105.html)

Dawn also meets with Sophia to talk about the IEP meeting <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/Disabilities/Staff%20Support%20and%20Supervision/Orientation/IEPBasics.htm> and to discuss how she might work together with the LEA's early childhood special education (ECSE) itinerant team.

Dawn attends Justin's IEP meeting and facilitates communication and coordination among the LEA, the preschool program, and the family. She makes sure that Sophia and the family together create Justin's IEP learning goals and objectives and that the goals are aligned with Harrison East Head Start's school readiness goals and research-based curriculum (with appropriate accommodations). Once Justin's goals are identified, the team determines that Justin will continue in Sophia's classroom with weekly visits to the preschool classroom from Sean, the itinerant special educator. The LEA's speech language pathologist will also provide monthly consultation. All parties come away with a clear plan to work together to support Justin's learning.

After the IEP meeting, Dawn meets with Sophia and her classroom staff to help them understand and become aware of the specific goals on Justin's IEP. <http://depts.washington.edu/hscenter/day-life-disabilities-coordinator>

Dawn and Sophia are particularly concerned with ensuring that Justin gets enough opportunities to meet his IEP goals during daily classroom activities and routines. Dawn helps the team take a deeper look at Justin's IEP goals and break them down into smaller steps to make teaching more manageable. Sophia and her classroom staff meet again the next day and use an activity matrix (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/practice/ISS>)

to incorporate these goals into daily curriculum activities and to determine how to use staff to maximize Justin's engagement in learning (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/practice/ISS/zone.html>). Sophia and her team are prepared to meet with Sean and learn even more specialized teaching practices to help Justin make progress.

With the IEP in place for Justin and his family, Dawn attends the itinerant teacher's first visit to Justin's classroom. A new task is to develop a system to monitor Justin's progress regularly and make necessary adjustments to instruction <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/practice/ISS/plan.html>. Dawn helps Sophia and Sean work out a system both can use.

Sophia and her staff use a variety of methods—including the assessment tool associated with the program's curriculum—to gather ongoing information on children's learning. They use the same methods to document Justin's progress toward his IEP goals and share their data <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/practice/ISS> with Sean during his weekly visits. When the team reviews the data together, Sean offers suggestions for more specialized methods to help increase Justin's participation in classroom activities (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/Disabilities/Program%20Planning/Accessibility/AccommodatingALL.htm>). The team has already implemented recommendations that the speech language pathologist made based on her monthly visits.

Just before the program's mid-year checkpoint on progress toward school readiness goals, Dawn visits

Sophia's classroom to observe Justin and discuss his progress. Justin has adjusted well to his new preschool. In sharing the data collected so far, Sophia points out that Justin is better able to participate during circle time but that his behavior remains especially disruptive during classroom transitions. Dawn offers some recommendations of strategies Sophia might try to make transitions easier for Justin. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/practice/ISS/classroom-transitions.html>

Since Justin still has difficulty communicating with his peers, Dawn and Sophia discuss some specific questions that Sophia can ask the speech language pathologist on her next visit. Dawn also suggests that Sophia talk with Justin's parents about how they could collect and share information more systematically on Justin's speech and behavior at home. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/family-engagement-and-ongoing-child-assessment-081111-1.pdf> Sophia mentions that she and Sean had discussed using video as an effective way to share information with the family as well as the consulting speech language pathologist <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/practice/ISS/using-video.html> and that she would like to pursue this option.

During the school year, Justin becomes very involved and enthusiastic about his experiences at Harrison East Head Start. He participates in a variety of developmental activities tailored to his individual needs and interests as well as his social and communication skills.

Toward the end of the year, Dawn meets again with Sophia. The teacher reports that the classroom staff, the itinerant team, and Justin's family have been able to share information regularly through a combination of video and anecdotal notes and simple teacher-developed checklists. The team has seen slow but steady progress toward Justin's IEP goals. Curriculum modifications have made it easier for Justin to learn and participate in classroom routines. Thanks to the language facilitation strategies suggested by the speech language pathologist, Justin is also using more words to communicate and join in activities with his peers. Progress is also evident outside of the classroom. Justin's parents recently shared a short video of him playing with his sister and cousins during a family gathering!

Justin's family has also participated in kindergarten transition activities provided by Harrison East Side Head

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Start. Dawn sets up a meeting with Justin's parents, Sophia, Sean, and the LEA representative to make sure that Justin will continue to receive services in his new kindergarten classroom.

The team and family both recognize Dawn's distinct role of coordinating the services and supports needed to meet the unique needs of Justin and his family. Her efforts support both Justin and those who provide the services.

Dawn and Jenny also meet regularly to share information specific to disabilities services and to assist in documentation and record-keeping <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/Disabilities/Staff%20Support%20and%20Supervision/Orientation/GettingToKnowY.htm> Dawn helped Jenny keep up-to-date on numbers of children, services provided, status of referrals, and related needs of classroom staff and families.

At each of three school readiness checkpoints, Dawn helps Jenny disaggregate program-wide data to look more specifically at the progress of children with IEPs. Together, they study how the children with IEPs are progressing toward school readiness goals. They discuss the findings and shared ideas for program improvements related to children with disabilities.

At the middle checkpoint, Dawn and Jenny notice that progress for children with IEPs across the program is variable compared with their peers. Dawn concludes that she needs to visit the classrooms with the lowest scores more often. She notices that not all teachers have been able to work closely with the itinerant team and with children's families and that they need help developing a more systematic approach to collaboration. Dawn recognizes that she can take advantage of what has worked with Justin's team and use some of those methods in other classrooms.

Jenny and Dawn make some mid-year adjustments and develop a plan to provide all the teachers with professional development on curriculum modifications. <http://depts.washington.edu/hscenter/modules-curriculum-modifications>

By the end of the school year the progress gap narrows for children with IEPs. As follow-up to the professional development sessions, Dawn visits each teacher and shares tips for individualizing instruction. She also helps the teachers find time to talk with each other about what



had worked well in their classrooms. She is most pleased with her efforts to help the teachers schedule "make and take" sessions to prepare and share a variety of visual supports to help children understand classroom rules and expectations and build social skills. <http://depts.washington.edu/hscenter/teacher-tools#visual> Dawn is

pleased to see how Sophia and her staff had taken the initiative to share their experience with Justin and to invite other teachers to watch activities in her classroom. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/practice-based-coaching.pdf>

At the end of the year, Dawn and Jenny review the school readiness data and discuss how things have gone for Justin and all the other children with IEPs. Dawn reports on what sorts of professional development activities and adjustments to disabilities services have been successful and what else the teachers and classroom staff need to engage and teach children with IEPs so that they will make even more progress.