

# **“I Have All These Skills, Now Why Don’t They Just Listen?”**

**Sandra Blumenreich, Carole M. Boccumini, Jan G. Zager**

## **Scenario 1**

John is 11 years old and in 5th grade. He has been a student with an IEP since he was in third grade. He has been designated as speech and language impaired, but has numerous learning and health issues. He has severe allergies and attentional issues. His failures in learning have usually been attributed to his speech and language issues because that is his IDEA designation. He is not doing well in his regular classroom and his teacher is frustrated. His mother has been his advocate since he entered the school district and is very involved in his education. She frequently comes in to the school and talks to staff without making previous arrangements or appointments. She gives staff, especially the classroom teacher and occupational therapist, a lot of direction.

Who is at the table?

IEP team chair (Director of Special Education)

Classroom Teacher

School Nurse (briefly)

Occupational Therapist

Speech and Language Therapist

School Psychologist

Mother

Parent Attorney/Advocate

# **“I Have All These Skills, Now Why Don’t They Just Listen?”**

## **Sandra Blumenreich, Carole M. Boccumini, Jan G. Zager**

### **Scenario 2**

A 3<sup>rd</sup> grade girl, Angela, recently had a cancerous tumor removed from her brain, and returned to school on Phenobarbital. Prior to her illness, she showed no signs of learning difficulties and received good grades. She and her identical twin were active in their school chorus and were being groomed for the gymnastics team. Her identical twin continues to succeed in school and these extracurricular activities, but Angela is now doing less well in school and hasn’t been able to resume her extracurricular activities. She is too tired to get up an hour early to get to the school chorus rehearsal and has not been medically cleared for gymnastics. She has been classified as OHI.

Her parents are divorced and her father, at the meeting at which she was classified asked, “when is she going to get over this and get back to normal.” He sees her every other weekend though he has missed quite a bit of time with her because of her illness. He has been able to spend that time with Angela’s sister, however.

According to her mother, Angela comes home from school and falls apart.

Homework time is a time of crisis with meltdowns and sibling battles. Only at night just before bed is there calm. In these quiet moments before she falls asleep Angela has told her mother that she doesn’t want to be “like this” and that she “sometimes thinks about opening the car door as she is riding along and just falling out underneath the car’s wheels”.

Deleted:

## **“I Have All These Skills, Now Why Don’t They Just Listen?”**

**Sandra Blumenreich, Carole M. Boccumini, Jan G. Zager**

The mother is at odds with the staff as she keeps saying her daughter is not learning at the school because she can’t read or do any of the homework as she doesn’t remember anything from the day’s work. According to the teacher she is calm, is learning in class and although sluggish at times is doing well. There is no evidence of what mom describes occurs at home. The school thinks mother is the problem and she thinks they don’t care about her daughter.

### **Scenario 3**

An 8<sup>th</sup> grade male, continually suspended for the same behavior, was referred to the IEP Team, found eligible for special education and placed in a small class. After three weeks, no changes in his behaviors were seen and he was declassified. He again refused to comply with a teacher directive and swore at the principal. At that point, the principal expelled him from school. Since he was declassified, the school’s position is that he is no longer entitled to a Manifestation Hearing. The last time he was disciplined, he was classified and the Manifestation Hearing ended in a finding that there was a nexus between his behavior and his then disability.

He has a diagnosis of Major Depression and receives therapy from a mental health provider in the community. Recently, the family has suffered the loss of the father due to domestic violence. Their income has decreased. The student often has

difficulty getting to sleep and attending school. The district had called Child Protective Services on the family which led to some positive community interventions. However, he was perceived as angry at the world, often did not attend school and had trouble with his peers. The staff saw him as willful, continuously making poor choices and refusing to accept the teacher's help. Some believed that he might learn his lesson if he remained on home instruction for the remainder of the year. He would have an opportunity for a fresh start in the fall.

**“I Have All These Skills, Now Why Don't They Just Listen?”  
Sandra Blumenreich, Carole M. Boccumini, Jan G. Zager**

**Scenario 4**

A high school sophomore, male classified as seriously learning disabled had deficient graphomotor skills as per district evaluations since 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. He has many supports in school, but is failing despite his IQ of 120. His mother is so frustrated with the district that she seeks help from an advocate. For several years, his IEP included resource room, and the use of a scribe, but now there is a proviso that he must write at least two paragraphs of an assignment before he may have any scribing done in school. He is constantly scolded for refusing to do or hand in any homework which he must write by hand. According to his mother and the student himself, the resource teacher constantly tells him he is just lazy and manipulative. When allowed to give an oral response, his work shows excellent comprehension of the material presented in class and his answers show thought, good recall, inferential learning. He also demonstrates an excellent grasp of language use. His

written work when done is illegible and minimal in quantity and quality. He is discouraged and angered by the way he is treated in the school. He also felt humiliated at his last IEP Team Meeting and his mother was livid about the negativity expressed towards her and her son at that time. How will you handle this meeting to keep it from becoming a contentious affair and allow for the development of an IEP that is “reasonably calculated to afford the student the opportunity to derive educational benefit” from his program?