

# Developing a Long-Term Vision: A Road Map for Students' Futures

Hedda Meadan | Debra L. Shelden | Kelli Appel | Rebecca L. DeGrazia

*When considering developing educational programs for students with disabilities, one often thinks first of the annual goals and short-term objectives that are included in the individualized education program (IEP). It is important, though, to connect the short-term objectives (the "now") to long-term goals and dreams (the "future"). Making that connection involves a process of defining those long-term goals and dreams and planning backward to develop short-term objectives as well as other educational activities. During this process, parents and teachers often find themselves asking questions such as: "How can we develop a long-term plan for our child/student?" "What do we need to do in order to reach the dreams and goals for our child/student?" "How can I support my students and their families in developing a long-term plan?" Person-centered planning and developing a long-term vision for students with disabilities provides structure to this process.*

## **Person-Centered Planning and Long-Term Vision**

The idea of *person-centered planning* (PCP) emerged as an alternative to the traditional "systems-centered" approaches to special education, which focused on the placement of individuals with disabilities into the special education system. In contrast, person-centered planning is focused on the wants, hopes, concerns, and dreams of individuals with disabilities and their families (Keyes & Owens-Johnson, 2003; Kim & Turnbull, 2004; Renzaglia, Karvonen, Drasgow, & Stoxen, 2003). Although PCP typically has been used with students with low-incidence disabilities, it can benefit all students with disabilities and their families.

PCP involves a team that includes the person with a disability, family members, professionals, and others involved in the life of the individual (e.g., friends and community members). Team members collaborate, using a problem-solving approach, to develop a holistic long-term vision and plan for the individual with a disability. The process can be directed by

the individual with a disability or by someone who has the student's best interest in mind. A facilitator can also participate and direct the process.

The *long-term vision* is a descriptive statement of the desired outcomes for the student in 3 to 5 years. The statement should be holistic (i.e., addresses school, home, community, social, and other outcomes), positive, and reflect high and enviable outcomes. The vision statement incorporates input from the entire team, with emphasis placed on the input from the student and family members. The vision statement guides the rest of the planning process; it serves as a destination for which a road map of learning experiences, supports, and services the learner and family may need in the next 3 to 5 years is developed.

It is important to note that PCP was not developed to replace the IEP. Instead, development of the IEP is informed by PCP events that occur prior to the IEP meeting. The IEP focuses on the students' educational needs now, in the present, whereas the long-term vision focuses on the future





and includes nonacademic areas such as hobbies, interests, health and well-being. The IEP includes annual goals and short-term objectives that address the students' needs that result from the disability. After a PCP team develops a long-term vision and identifies obstacles a student may have to achieving the long-term vision, the IEP team can identify annual goals that address those obstacles. Although this individualized process may seem in conflict

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with the recent emphasis placed on all students meeting academic content standards, it can actually serve to support that goal in several ways. Using a PCP process should result in a team process in which more people are willing to assume responsibility for supporting the student's movement toward the vision, including people outside of school personnel who may support student development toward

the vision outside of school hours. Having a clearly defined vision also allows the team to define the relevance of academic content in terms of that vision, which may increase motivation for academic progress for some students. Finally, by clearly articulating the skills and competencies needed to achieve the vision, both academic and functional, the student's team can more effectively identify ways to integrate the individualized functional

needs into academic content. These two goals—facilitating progress in the general education curricula and providing a vision-oriented individualized curricula—can complement each other.

Using PCP processes, which facilitate ongoing collaboration and positive relationships among the learner, the family, and professionals, can have numerous benefits. Because these processes address the values, con-

cerns, and priorities of the family and proactively seek learner and family input throughout the planning, students and family members may feel empowered and have more control over important aspects of their lives. In addition, these more family-centered approaches have been found to be related to more positive parent control characteristics (e.g., locus of control and self-efficacy) and more positive parent and child outcomes (e.g., parent satisfaction and child development; Dempsey & Keen, 2008). In addition, developing a vision statement and using it to guide program development eases the transition of students from one classroom/teacher to another because the information about the students can be shared and teachers can communicate about students' vision and hopes for the future. Although the use of the PCP process and the development of a long-term vision are recommended and have numerous benefits, it is important to note that schools are not legally required to engage in these activities. There are different approaches/



**Table 1. Approaches to Person-Center Planning**

Process/Tool	Description	Steps
Circle of Friends (Perske, 1988)	Circle of Friends is an approach for accessing informal sources of support for students with low-incidence disabilities.	<p>The process elaborates the types of relationships an individual has for developing a support system. A student at the center begins by drawing four concentric circles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>First circle</i>—Circle of intimacy: those most closely connected and important to the student.</li> <li>• <i>Second circle</i>—Circle of friendship: good friends of the student.</li> <li>• <i>Third circle</i>—Circle of participation: people, organizations, and networks with whom a student is involved.</li> <li>• <i>Fourth circle</i>—Circle of exchange: people paid to provide services to a student.</li> </ul>
Choosing Outcomes and Accommodations for Children (COACH; Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1998)	COACH is a planning tool design to identify the content of a student's educational program and strategies for implementing this program in general education settings and activities.	<p>COACH is meant to assist in educational planning by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying family-centered priorities.</li> <li>• Identifying additional learning outcomes (e.g., general education).</li> <li>• Identifying general supports to be provided to or for the student.</li> <li>• Identifying priorities into IEP goals and objectives.</li> <li>• Summarizing the educational program as a "program-at-a-glance."</li> <li>• Organizing the planning team to implement the program.</li> <li>• Scheduling participation in general education classes/activities.</li> <li>• Planning and adapting lesson plans to facilitate learning.</li> <li>• Evaluating the impact of educational experiences.</li> </ul>
Group Action Planning (GAP; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1992)	GAP provides the opportunity for an individual with a severe disability to be supported by a unified, reliable alliance that includes the individual, family members, friends, and professionals.	<p>The process includes the following steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inviting people from an individual's natural network to help with the planning process.</li> <li>• Choosing a facilitator.</li> <li>• Engaging an individual person and their family as much as possible.</li> <li>• Highlighting information based on personal knowledge in contrast to professional "knowledge."</li> <li>• Fostering dynamic dreams for the future.</li> <li>• Brainstorming to arrive at solutions based on everyone's input that are driven by high expectations.</li> <li>• Unrelentingly celebrating progress made by the team.</li> </ul>
Making Action Plans (MAPs; Forest & Lusthaus, 1990)	MAPs is a collaborative planning process that brings together key actors in a student's life. It involves a student and his or her peers, family, and teachers to aid in the identification of that student's goals and dreams and the educational and community resources for making them come to fruition.	<p>MAP is designed to graphically depict future visioning and plan accordingly. The process involves answering eight essential questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is a MAP?</li> <li>2. What is the person's history or story?</li> <li>3. What are the dreams?</li> <li>4. What are the nightmares?</li> <li>5. Who is the person?</li> <li>6. What are his/her gifts, strengths, talents?</li> <li>7. What are his/her needs?</li> <li>8. What is the plan of action?</li> </ol>
Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH; Pearpoint, O'Brien, & Forest, 1993)	PATH is an extension of the MAPs process. PATH uses information gathered during a MAP session to develop a more definitive plan of action. PATH addresses both long- and short-term planning and is an 8-step process intended to provide a concrete path to guide the MAPs process.	<p>PATH's eight steps include</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify "the dream."</li> <li>2. Create short-term goals.</li> <li>3. Describe current status.</li> <li>4. Enroll supportive people to assist.</li> <li>5. Recognize the "cost" of participation and gather commitment.</li> <li>6. Visualize the progress that will have happened in 3 months.</li> <li>7. Visualize the progress 1 month from now.</li> <li>8. Identify the first thing to be done.</li> </ol>



**Table 2. Interview Questions for Student and Parents**

Questions for Parent	Questions for Student
What are your hopes and dreams for your child?	What do you want to do when you are grown up?
X will be in X (e.g., middle school, high school) in the next 3 to 5 years. What do you envision for him/her then in the domains of academics, social, independent living, vocational, community, and leisure?	What kinds of things do you want to do in 3 to 5 years when you are in X (e.g., middle school, high school)? In school? At home? In the community?
What are X's interests? What about his/her dislikes?	What activities do you like to do? What activities you do not like to do?
What are some of X's strengths? What about some of his/her weaknesses?	What are you really good at? What do you want to be good at?
What are your concerns for X in the future?	Is there anything you are scared about in the future?

processes/tools for PCP, including (see Table 1) Making Action Plans (MAPs; Forest & Lusthaus, 1990), Group Action Planning (GAP; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1992), Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH; Pearpoint, O'Brien, & Forest, 1993), Choosing Outcomes and Accommodations for Children (COACH; Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1998), and Circle of Friends (Perske, 1988).

Although each of these processes/tools have unique features, they do share some common components and steps (Callicott, 2003; Chambers & Childre, 2005). PCP usually includes (a) organizing and preparing a team meeting where the individual with a disability is the center of the planning process; (b) developing a personal profile of the individual with a disability, including strengths, interests, and dreams; (c) constructing a long-term

### Tips for Successful Family Interviews

Be sensitive to each family's preference as to when and where to hold a meeting.

Parents may feel uncomfortable meeting at school; it may seem too "formal" for a relaxed interview. Offer to meet *at their home or another location* that is comfortable for them.

- Meeting in the home allows teachers to see the home environment, conveys respect of the family's culture, and minimizes the need for child care.
- Other families may prefer meeting at a local restaurant, library, or other child-friendly area.

Some parents prefer the child to be present and others do not.

Meetings will often need to be held in the evenings or on a weekend, and usually take about 1 hour. Some teachers work with their school to arrange release time on inservice days or conduct interviews prior to the school year.

It may be helpful for parents to have the list of the questions in advance so they can think through them or discuss them with other family members prior to the meeting.

Consider identifying the most important information to ask in the interview and designate other information as more possible to leave as a questionnaire or follow-up letter or e-mail.

vision; (d) developing action steps toward the long-term vision; (e) providing support; and (f) evaluating progress toward the goals. This process assists individuals with disabilities, their families, and their teachers to envision best possible outcomes and helps bring their vision to a reality. PCP team members make a commitment to accomplish, monitor, and adjust those goals that provide continuous, ongoing support to the individuals with disabilities and their families.

### Case Studies

To illustrate the development and use of long-term vision we present two case studies of children with disabilities: "Kayla," a 6-year-old girl with Down syndrome, and "Martin," a 13-year-old boy with specific learning disabilities. To develop the long-term visions for Kayla and Martin, we observed both students in their classrooms and interviewed them about their dreams, likes, and dislikes. We based Martin's interview questions (see Table 2) on the tools described in Table 1. Martin had the option of writing his answers or verbally answering the questions. To interview Kayla, we used a similar list of questions, but next to each question there were a few pictures presenting possible answers. We read the questions to Kayla, named each picture, and Kayla circled the picture of her choice. In addition, we interviewed Kayla and Martin's parents about their hopes, dreams, and concerns (see Table 2), as well as the students' current teachers. To collect data from parents, teachers can send a list of these types of questions home and ask the parents to answer them, interview them over the phone, or meet with the parents. A face-to-face interview allows the teacher to gain more information than other interview options. Teachers need to be sensitive to each family's preference as to where and when a meeting is held (see box, "Tips for Successful Family Interviews").

### Kayla

Kayla is currently in first grade. Her vision statement (see box) reflects her



parents' values regarding inclusion: They emphasized the importance of Kayla not simply being placed in a general education classroom but also being fully integrated and included within the classroom activities and with her peers. They value independence, social relationships, and safety. Kayla receives special education services based on her intellectual disability. She has limited expressive language and currently is included in a general education classroom with the support of a one-on-one aide. Kayla has limited interactions with her peers and is typically working on different activities.

**Kayla's long-term vision:** *In 3 to 5 years, Kayla will spend most of her day interacting with and learning alongside her peers. She will have some social opportunities without family members and will participate in a sport of her choice. Kayla will be safe in and out of school and work well with others. Kayla will communicate effectively. Kayla will become independent with her morning routine and begin taking care of more of her personal needs.*

Based on the difference between her current activities and her vision statement, Kayla's team can identify curriculum priorities and support needs for the next several years. For instance, the general education curriculum should be augmented so that she is receiving instruction on her social and communication needs within the general education classroom. Kayla's team also can identify activities she might participate in outside of the general education classroom, as well as what instruction the school can provide to support those activities. For example, Kayla's vision includes participating in a sports team of her choice. The team might identify steps that are taken outside of school in order to achieve this goal (e.g., Kayla's parents can find out which sports are available through the local park district, they can support Kayla by observing several sports,

Kayla can choose which is of greatest interest to her). The team also could identify skills that could be developed in school to support that involvement (e.g., her speech and language professional and teacher might work on social skills related to playing a sport, such as following directions and having conversations with teammates).

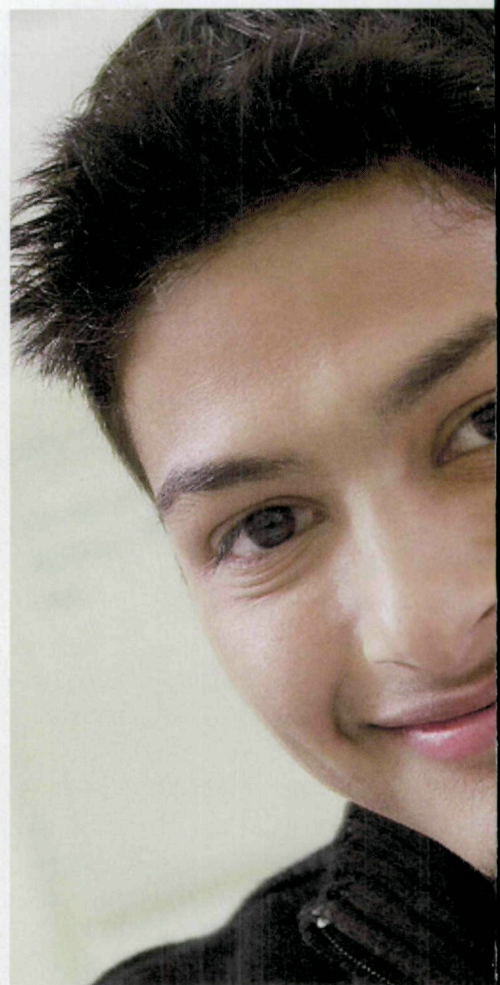
Kayla's teacher might also work more closely with her physical education teacher to identify adaptations that will help Kayla participate more meaningfully in physical education activities. Kayla's team can use her long-term vision statement as a starting place for identifying alternative supports that might assist her in being more fully included in the classroom.

### **Martin**

Martin is currently in seventh grade. His vision statement (see box) reflects input about Martin's and his parents' educational values. Their longer range plans for Martin include continuing his education at a college or university. He and his parents believe it is important for him not only to succeed academically, but also to be responsible and show leadership skills in order to be successful in college. Martin receives special education services based on his specific learning disability.

**Martin's long-term vision:** *In high school, Martin will be an A/B student who independently organizes and completes his homework, working toward enrollment in a college or university after high school. He will advocate for himself, participate in extracurricular activities of his choice, and have friends that he plans social activities with. He will spend time in family activities, complete his household responsibilities, and hold a summer job.*

Using the vision statement as a starting point for backward planning, Martin and his IEP team can now discuss curriculum needs and activities for the next several years. Martin communicates well and knows that he has



a learning disability. Based on his vision statement, his team might decide to augment his curriculum by providing instruction on self-awareness and self-advocacy, including how the learning disability affects him, what accommodations best support him, and how to request those accommodations. They might decide to provide instruction on self-management of school responsibilities. Because education is highly valued, they may also decide to further assess Martin's study skills. Although Martin may not require instruction or IEP goals related to extracurricular activities, family activities, and household responsibilities, Martin's parents can provide support and encouragement on these activities outside of school, and his teacher might work with him and his parents to explore how instruction on self-management and organizational skills in school can be generalized to these activities outside of school.





### Parents' and Teachers' Perspectives

To understand parents' and teachers' perceptions of the process of developing long-term vision, we interviewed Kayla's and Martin's parents, as well as three teachers (i.e., one kindergarten teacher, one elementary school teacher, and one middle school teacher) who use the PCP, about the process. Parents explained the process of developing the vision provided them with time and guidance to reflect on the goals and dreams they have for their child with a disability. Kayla's mother said, "I think it is important to have goals for your child. We have always had high expectations for Kayla and I believe that is why she is where she is." Parents mentioned that they usually think about the everyday needs of their child, the "here and now," and rarely have the opportunity and time to think about long-term goals and plans. The process of developing a long-term

vision not only helps them think about the future, it also makes them consider and plan the steps that need to be accomplished for achieving the vision. As Martin's mother said, "I like it, just having you sitting here asking me about it starts to make me think about other things I haven't thought about yet." Parents feel empowered because they believe their voices are heard and their values are reflected in the IEP.

### Parents feel empowered because they believe their voices are heard and their values are reflected in the IEP.

As one of the parents described, "It allowed the parents to feel more a member of the team, feel respected by the team, and feel prepared."

Teachers reported that the development of a long-term vision provided them with information that they wouldn't otherwise have (e.g., dreams

and values that are not related to the academic areas).

The process gives us information that we would not have been aware of without this format. It gives us insight into family dynamics. It gives us a better understanding of family expectations and where we are headed as a team.

In addition, teachers reported that the long-term vision gave them directions for appropriate and needed goals and objectives for the IEP. The vision assists in confirming that the student's curriculum is individualized and meaningful. Teachers also discussed that beginning IEP meetings by sharing the vision statement changes the overall tone of the meetings to be more positive and constructive.

### Recommendations

Developing a long-term vision for a student with a disability can positively affect the student, family members, and teachers. There are specific elements or guidelines that help the process go more smoothly; the following recommendations are derived from literature related to PCP processes and from our own experience of working with students, parents, and teachers on developing a long-term vision:

- ✓ *Choose or modify tools that will help with the development of a long-term vision.* Teachers should consider using a structure to guide the process of developing a long-term vision—either using one of the tools described in Table 1 or modifying/combining existing tools to match their needs. It is important for teachers to have knowledge of different tools and adapt one(s) that they can use comfortably.
- ✓ *Identify a leader.* One person needs to lead the process, plan for the meetings, guide the meeting, and



follow up after the meeting. The leader of the process will need to take ownership before, during, and after the meeting and allow the voices of all stakeholders to be heard.

- ✓ **Support and guide parents.** Parents need to receive support prior to their first meeting. Someone will need to explain the process to them, why it is needed, and how it is different from an IEP meeting. Parents will also need support during and after the meeting.
- ✓ **Develop a long-term vision.** Summarize the information gathered from all stakeholders and develop a long-term vision that is holistic (i.e., addresses all domains of life), positive, and reflective of high and enviable outcomes. Ask for confirmation from the family and the individual with a disability and make changes as needed.
- ✓ **Share the vision at the IEP meeting.** Start the IEP meeting with the vision statement and use backward planning to reach the vision. Services, goals, and objectives identified in the IEP should all support movement toward achieving the vision.
- ✓ **Revise and update the vision.** PCP is an ongoing process; therefore, the long-term vision will need to be updated and revised. Discuss with parents progress in relationship to the vision statement and share with them how the vision and their input influences the day-to-day activities in school. PCP may not need to be fully implemented each year, but should be modified to update and revise the vision as necessary.

The use of the PCP process and the development of a long-term vision can have many benefits; however, there are sometimes barriers to implementing these activities. For example, one person needs to take the lead and oversee the process; materials (e.g., interview questions for the parents, tools to collect information from the students) need to be developed or modified; times for collecting data, analyzing

data, and conducting team meetings need to be identified. To address these possible barriers the team needs to work together and share individual experiences, knowledge, and tools. The information provided in Tables 1 and 2 is a good starting place for learning about the processes and developing tools.

## Final Thoughts

Developing a long-term vision for a student can be beneficial for students with disabilities, their families, and their teachers. Backward planning and PCP tools that focus on breaking the vision down into concrete actions and skills will naturally become the next step in developing a meaningful, personalized curriculum. This vision can be used as a road map for students' futures to guide the development of goals and activities. Though yearly progress is an important facet of special education, a long-term vision allows for continuity, creativity, and caring for children with disabilities.

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- Hedda Meadan** (Illinois CEC), Assistant Professor; **Debra L. Shelden** (Illinois CEC), Associate Professor; and **Kelli Appel** (Illinois CEC), Undergraduate Program Coordinator, Department of Special Education, College of Education, Illinois State University, Normal. **Rebecca L. DeGrazia**, Special Education Teacher, Schaumburg High School, Schaumburg, Illinois.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Hedda Meadan, College of Education, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790 (e-mail: hmeadan@ilstu.edu).

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