



Person-Centered Planning for Parents: MAPS Background and Action Steps

Person-centered planning is a strength-based technique that serves as a mechanism for securing the commitment of a collaborative team of individuals in supporting a focus person and his/her family. One example of a person centered planning tool that has emerged as particularly effective is the McGill Action Planning System (MAPS). MAPS is a strategy that brings together key players in a focus individual's life to create a "roadmap" for collaboratively working toward and achieving dreams and goals of the focus person. MAPS is different from some other planning tools because participants focus on what the student can do, instead of dwelling on weakness.

Through a series of questions, individuals and organizations using MAPS help the focus person (i.e., student with a disability) construct a personal history or life story based on personal milestones. After getting to know the focus person better and exploring his dreams for the future, the team begins to build a plan to move in the direction of the individual's dreams.

MAPS has an established framework of questions that address the focus person's history, identity, strengths, gifts, and the nightmares and dreams of the focus person and his/her family. The MAPS process identifies where that focus person currently is, what the person's goals are, and how the team will work together to help this person reach the goals. This information is then used to develop action steps for achieving the dreams and avoiding the nightmares.

To use the MAPS process, a team of key people in the focus student's life gather and talk in one, two, or three sessions. Among the people participating are the focus person/child, that person's parents, the child's classroom teachers (both regular and special education), and other school professionals such as counselors, therapists, or the school principal. Another person acts as the group's facilitator and keeps the group on task. The group should be completed with other members of the focus person's family (such as siblings or grandparents) and several of the focus person's friends (peers), who may be the most important component, especially if planning a child's inclusion at school. Persons attending the MAPS sessions should be committed to the process and be willing to step outside their current role to truly participate.

The MAPS process is *not* a brief meeting and can be somewhat more time intensive. In the case of a student with a disability, the IEP team may not want to use this kind of planning process at every IEP meeting, but rather at key transition times such as from infant/toddler services to preschool services, preschool to kindergarten, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and/or when transitioning out of high school into post-secondary options. The MAPS process can also provide a structured format that helps with the task of gathering information for a transition plan that is an integral part of the IEP for students age 14 and older.

When using MAPS to facilitate transitions, teams are encouraged to schedule a second planning meeting as the focused intervention phase concludes and a transition

is anticipated. When scheduling this follow up meeting, the team should consider new people to invite into the child's circle of support. If the new intervention team has been identified, it may be fruitful to invite them to participate in the meeting.

Step One: Develop the Positive Profile

The first step in the MAPS process involves creating a "Positive Profile" of the focus child. An initial meeting to develop the focus child's personal profile can be held separately several days before the actual MAPS meeting so the participants have time to reflect on what is shared. During this part of the process, parents/families and the focus child begin to create the **Positive Profile** for the focus child. This positive profile will be shared with all MAPS participants, so that they can add to it. Creating the profile usually involves the following tasks:

- Developing a history or personal life story of the focus child by sharing past events in the child's life including critical events, medical issues, major developments, important relationships, etc.
- Describing the quality of the focus child's life by exploring opportunities for social interactions, community participation, opportunities for choice making, etc.
- Identifying the focus child's personal preferences, including interests, likes and dislikes.
- Including information about specific areas of strength of the focus child.

Additional resources for developing a positive profile for a child are available at www.njcie.org.

Step Two: Hold the Person Centered Planning Session

At the beginning of the MAPS session, information from the personal profile submitted by the family (see *step one above*) will be reviewed and participants can make additional observations to be added. This is done to begin to answer the question "**What is the focus child's history?**". After this, each of the people present at the MAPS session will focus on answering the remaining questions that are included in the MAPS process:

- **Who is the focus child?** Everyone talks about what comes to their mind when they think of the focus child, and they express this in a few words. All participants should take a turn offering a positive description. Then, when the list is completed, the focus child's family members are asked to identify what they believe are three especially important descriptors.
- **What are the focus child's gifts?** The participants are asked to focus on what they believe the focus child can do, instead of (as happens so often) what he/she cannot do. They might look back on the ways they have described the child in answering the previous question for ideas.
- **What are the focus child's dreams and goals for the future?** As participants answer this question, they are encouraged to think about what they think the *focus child* wants. This is a question of not only short term goals but also of dreams and a long term vision. If enough people share the dreams/vision, they can work together toward making them a reality.
- **What are the nightmares?** Parents sometimes find this particularly hard to answer, for no parent likes to think of their child facing difficulties. But if the members of the

group can verbalize their nightmares and fears, they will have taken an important step in becoming committed to making sure the nightmares never occur.

- ***What are the focus child's needs?*** The parents' answers to this question might vary considerably from those of the focus child's teachers. When the list is completed, the group then decides which of the needs are top priorities in need of immediate attention.
- ***Optional Question: What would an ideal day at school be like for the focus child?*** Some find it helpful to answer this question by outlining an average school day for a typical child within the classroom, school or placement into which the focus child will be transitioning. After that, the team would think about the kinds of help that the focus child would need to truly achieve this "ideal day" in the receiving school/classroom.
- ***What is the Plan of Action (to achieve the dreams and avoid the nightmares)?*** The participants then use the answers to the previous questions to craft a plan of action. This plan will include the steps necessary to achieve the dreams/goals and also to avoid the nightmares/ fears. Action plans should identify specific strategies and action steps for implementing the vision as well as the circle of support that will help implement this plan. Be sure to include some action steps that can be completed within a short time to keep the momentum going.

Step Three: Identify Follow-up Meetings/Activities

Implementing the action plan can require persistence, problem solving, and creativity, so it will be important to periodically come together again to discuss what parts of the plan are working and what parts are not. Once more, identify what is to be done, who will do it, when the action will happen, and when you will meet again. Make sure that at each follow-up meeting the team:

- Establishes the list of participants with family and student input;
- Lists activities that have occurred as well as the barriers/challenges encountered;
- Brainstorms new ideas and strategies for the future;
- Sets priorities for the next agreed upon time period (6 months/12 months);
- Lists several concrete steps for each person to follow;
- Establishes the next meeting time; and
- ***Never forget to celebrate the successes—even the small ones!***

Additional MAPS Resources

Inclusion Press

<http://www.inclusion.com/PI-PERSON.C.PLANNING.html>

The Person Centered Planning Education Site

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/tsal/Enable/>

Pacer Center on Person Centered Planning

<http://www.pacer.org/tatra/resources/personal.asp>

Kansas Institute for Positive Behavior Support's Person +Centered Planning Resources

http://www.kipbs.org/new_kipbs/fsi/pcp.html#pcpkansas

Person Centered Planning: MAPS and PATHS to the Future
<http://www.ttac.odu.edu/Articles/person.html>

Common Sense Tools: MAPS and CIRCLES for Inclusive Education by Marsha Forest & Jack Pearpoint. <http://www.inclusion.com/artcommonsensetools.html>

Making Action Plans: Student Centered Action Transition Planning, Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities, Rhode Island College (2001).
<http://www.ric.edu/sherlockcenter/publications/MAPS.pdf>

Use of the MAPS Process, University of Kansas, Circle of Inclusion Project (2002).
<http://www.circleofinclusion.org/english/pim/seven/maps.html>

MAPS: Making Action Plans or McGill Action Planning Systems by David Beukelman
Augmentative and Alternative Communication Centers, University of Nebraska.
http://aac.unl.edu/drj/AAC_Assessment/tsld009.htm