2000). Appendix A provides a listing of some of the legal foundation from IDEA pertaining to this discussion.

Program

First, within this context, the term *program* is used to refer to the content, or the *what,* of a student's education rather than where it is provided or by whom. Program broadly consists of two major components, learning outcomes and supports. *Learning outcomes* refer to a clear statement of what a student will be expected to learn during the school year.

All learning outcomes are based on individual student needs identified through nondiscriminatory evaluation designed to "gather relevant functional and developmental information" (IDEA, 1997, § 1414 (b)(2)(A). The evaluation data are used to ascertain a student's present levels of performance, needs, interests, strengths, and learning characteristics in relevant domains. This information is designed to assist teams in selecting appropriate learning outcomes that are reasonably attainable within a year and reflect an appropriate level of difficulty while seeking to establish high standards that provide sufficient challenge for the student.

In part, learning outcomes include the student's annual goals and corresponding short-term objectives or benchmarks. The goals and objectives are meant to reflect individually determined learning priorities based on a student's unique needs arising from a disability and assist in providing access to the general education curriculum (Bateman & Linden, 1998; Hehir, 1997). The IEP team (e.g., parent, student, special educator, general education teacher, local education agency representative) determines the goals and objectives and documents them in an IEP.

Students with disabilities pursue many other learning outcomes in school that are not, and need not, be documented as detailed IEP goals and objectives (Bateman & Linden, 1998, pp. 12, 45). Yet, from an educational perspective, it is important for team members to know the scope of these other learning outcomes (Giangreco & Doyle, 2000). Therefore, the term *program,* as used here, also includes this broader set of additional learning outcomes, extending beyond IEP annual goals, that are targets for instruction during the school year. Typically, these additional learning outcomes come

from the general education curriculum at various levels and may come from other, more specialized sources that extend the scope of the general education curriculum, such as functional life skills that typically are not included in general education curricula.

Additional learning outcomes as described here are not a requirement of an IEP; therefore, teams have flexibility in how they choose to document them. Explicitly identifying additional learning outcomes can help clarify the breadth and scope of a student's overall educational program, assist in determining a classroom teacher's curricular and instructional responsibilities, help identify areas in need of supports and services, and provide parents with a more complete understanding of their child's educational program.

The second major program component is supports. Unlike learning outcomes through which an observable change in student behavior can be seen, *supports*

There is wide spread agreement in the professional literature that identifying the components of a student's educational program (i.e., learning outcomes and supports) logically precedes making decisions about services or placement (Bateman & Linden, 1998; Giangreco et al., 1998; H. Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000; Yell, 1998a, 1998b).

Placement

In this context, *placement* includes two primary

years without specialized supports may need services from an orientation and mobility specialist during his or her first semester in high school because the environment is different, larger, more complex, and requires more transitions throughout the school day. These examples demonstrate that knowing about the characteristics of the location where the student will be educated provides fundamental contextual information that can have a substantial impact on determining what services are necessary to enable a student with disabilities to receive an appropriate education.

Services

Services refer to primarily related services that "are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education " (Code of Federal

nonetheless significant threats to the development and provision of an appropriate education for students with disabilities when applied in a strict linear fashion.

Existing data suggest that the sequence in which professionals consider a student's program, placement, and services may interfere with developing an appropriately individualized program in the least restrictive environment. For example, evidence suggests that many professionals make decisions about the type and frequency of related services in isolation and that these decisions frequently are made prior to knowing the educational program components (e.g., annual goals, extent of participation in the general education curriculum, supports), thus making the educational relevance and necessity of such services unknown (Giangreco, Edelman, & Dennis, 1991). In some instances, professionals have reported recommending the placement of students in a special education school so they could gain access to related services, also prior to knowing the educational program components. Both of these scenarios violate IDEA procedures and reflect questionable logic because they are potentially based on presumed disability characteristics rather than individually determined educational needs.

The following are ineffective planning sequences:

1. Placement–Program–Services
2. Placement–Services–Program

Problems With Sequences 1 and 2: Such scenarios clearly violate IDEA. In any scenario where placement precedes program and services (in either order), consideration is not given to the individual learning needs of students because they are not known prior to the placement decision. When placement decisions are made first, too often they have been based on categorical labels assigned to students, which automatically lead to unnecessarily restrictive educational settings without due consideration of less restrictive options (e.g., all students with multiple disabilities go to the special education school or regional special education classroom). A team cannot determine the least restrictive environment in which to pursue a student's education if they do not first know the components of the student's individualized educational program and extent of participation in the general education curriculum.

3. Services–Placement–Program
4. Services–Program–Placement

Problems With Sequences 3 and 4: In any scenario where the determination for services (e.g., related services) precedes program and placement (in either order), it is impossible to ensure that the services are educationally relevant and necessary. If services are determined first, they cannot be referenced to participation in the educational program or access to the identified educational placement. This renders such services parallel rather than educationally related services. Furthermore, when services are determined first, there is a danger that students with disabilities will be placed in unduly restrictive educational placements so that they can gain access to a congregated set of professionals (e.g., therapists). Such an approach may put the needs and convenience of professionals above the needs of students and families to access their local schools, thus ignoring the fact that nearly all services are portable. Students do not go to school to receive specialized services; rather, they are provided with individually determined specialized services so that they can attend and participate in schooling.

The fifth planning sequence variation, program–services–placement is also problematic for many of the same reasons presented for Sequences 1 through 4, though it may have a surface appearance of validity. The Code of Federal Regulations (1999) stated that "The child's placement is based on the IEP" (§ 300.552). In part, the IEP includes program and service components as defined in this article (e.g., annual goals, related services). Therefore, it is quite understandable that IDEA commonly has been interpreted in a manner that suggests the appropriate sequence of activities is somewhat linear, starting with the student's program first (e.g., annual goals), services second (e.g., related services), and placement last (Bateman & Linden, 1998, p. 33). Yell (1998b) supported this interpretation by stating, "In determining a student's special education, therefore, questions of what educational services are required must precede questions of where they should be provided" (p. 73).

Yet IDEA does not explicitly require a strict linear sequence. The language of IDEA regarding placement (e.g., "Each child's IEP forms the basis for the placement decision") is not necessarily the equivalent of a strict linear sequence, of program and services followed by placement. Bateman and

Linden (1998) stated: "In many instances the lines between the IEP process . . . and the placement decision are substantially blurred with no detrimental effects" (p. 33). The interactive conceptualization presented in this article suggests that IEP services be contextually grounded. It provides a way for teams to think about interactive aspects of IEP planning and actively plan IEP services within the existing legal parameters of IDEA to develop appropriate education for students with disabilities. Interactive educational planning could be conducted as follows:

1. Determine the Student's Educational Program
   a. Learning Outcomes: What a student will learn (e.g., annual goals; short-term objectives; additional learning outcomes, such as those from the general education curriculum)
   b. Supports: What will be done to or for the student (e.g., personal needs, physical needs, sensory needs; see categories of general supports, pp. 342–343
2. Initial Proposed Placement Considerations
   a. Placement is reviewed at least annually
   b. Placement is congruent with the student's educational program
   c. Placement follows least restrictive environment requirements (e.g., regular class with necessary supports is the first option considered; close to home)
   d. Placement considers the type of placement (e.g., regular class)
   e. Placement considers characteristics of the specific location (e.g., building characteristics; student and staff characteristics)
   f. Determine the nature and extent of the general and special education services associated with the placement
3. Determine Services Needed to Support the Initial Proposed Placement
   a. Determine whether there is a need for non-specialized support services (e.g., additional paraprofessional support services)
   b. Determine whether there is a need for any specialized related services (e.g., speech–lan-

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ning for the student's educational program will be disjointed and ultimately ineffective. Either of these scenarios detracts from our collective mission to provide appropriate and quality education for students with disabilities. Although in this article I have offered a way to think about the interactions among program, placement, and services, IEP teams also must consider the practical implications of the proposed conceptualization. First, this approach has implications for the design and use of IEP forms. Schools may improve their planning by ensuring that their IEP forms and corresponding directions for completion are compatible with both the federal requirements of the IEP and a process that makes sense to the IEP team. It is recommended that the order in which items are on an IEP form match an educationally logical planning sequence.

Second, this approach has implications for the manner in which related services providers contribute their input to the IEP planning process in terms of both assessment and recommendations for service provision. In many situations, related services evaluations are conducted in a parallel fashion, with recommendations based on discipline-specific assessments rather than referenced to the educational program and placement. Therefore, for related services recommendations to be educationally relevant and necessary, service providers must become aware of educational program and placement characteristics as well as the potential involvement of other service providers in an effort to make appropriately coordinated decisions (Giangreco, 1996).

Third, the plans made during the IEP planning process have implications for service provision, interaction among team members, and other implementation aspects of the educational program. Although IEPs sometimes get filed away, resulting in their potential left unrealized, by using this approach, teams have the opportunity to ensure that planning is highly relevant and that it is applied in ways that help students learn.

Finally, the planning sequence proposed in this article can increase the likelihood that students with disabilities will have opportunities to be educated with peers who do not have disabilities (as intended by IDEA) and will have the necessary supportive services to access and participate in their individually determined educational program. This can have a significant impact on families, students, and school staff as they build a shared understanding of student needs, shared expectations, and responsibilities.

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