



## The Maps Process: Seven Questions

As families, schools, and communities have taken more steps to fully integrate students who have disabilities into the schools, families and educators have worked to find ways to ease this process. One tool that has emerged as particularly effective is the McGill Action Planning System (MAPS).

MAPS is a strategy that was developed by Marsha Forest, Jack Pearpoint, Judith Snow, Evelyn Lusthaus, and the staff at the Center for Integrated Education in Canada. In recent years, researchers at the University of Minnesota have been encouraging various school districts around the country to try MAPS.

The MAPS process can help families, professionals, and a special student's peers find ways to fully include the student in school, in a classroom with classmates who are the same age. The MAPS process can help ensure the student and his or her peers will have positive learning experiences in that classroom. MAPS is different from some other planning tools because in it participants focus on what the student can do, instead of on his or her weakness.

To use the MAPS process, key people in the student's life gather and talk in one, two, or three sessions. In total, the sessions may take about three hours, and it is preferable to split that time up if the planning is for a very young child. Among the people participating are the student, the student's parents, the 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 leader or facilitator, and keeps the group on task. The group is completed with a couple of the student's peers, who are, perhaps, the most important component in the student's full participation at school, and other members of the student's family, such as siblings or grandparents.

First, the family members present answer the question "**What is the individual's history?**" Then, each of the people present at the MAPS session will focus on the remaining six questions that are included in the MAPS process.

1. "**What is your dream for the child?**"

As they answer this question, the people are encouraged to think about what they want for the student and what they think the student wants. This is a question of "vision," and, therefore, the people answering it shouldn't be bogged down with present-day realities. The team members should dream some

here and verbalize those dreams. If enough people share their dreams, they can work toward those dreams becoming a reality.

2. **"What is your nightmare?"**

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 this nightmare never occurs.

3. **"Who is the student?"**

Everyone talks about what comes to their mind when they think of the student, and they express this in a few words. Everyone takes a turn at the description; then, the people continue taking this idea around the circle until no one has anything else to add. People in the group can pass on their turn if they can't think of anything, but they are encouraged to try when it is their turn again. Then, when the list is completed, particular people in the group, such as family members, are asked to identify what they believe are three especially important descriptors.

4. **"What are the student's gifts?"**

The people in the circle might look back on the ways they have described the student in answering the previous question. The MAPS group members are asked to focus on what they believe the student can do, instead of, as happens so often, what the student cannot do.

5. **"What are the student's needs?"**

The parents' answers to this question might vary considerably from those of the student's peers or teachers. When the list has been completed, the group then decides which of the needs are "top priority," or demand immediate attention.

6. **"What would an ideal day at school be like for the student?"**

Some MAPS groups find it helpful to answer this question by outlining a typical school day for other children the student's age, who do not have disabilities. The team might think about how the needs outlined before could be met at school. After that, the team would think about the kinds of help a student would need to truly achieve inclusion at school.

Advocates of MAPS believe that the MAPS process and the IEP are interrelated. IEP teams can and should use the information gained from MAPS along with other assessment information to develop IEP goals and objectives, and to plan students' daily schedules. This process is quite time intensive. The team may not want to use this for every IEP meeting, but rather at key transition times such as from infant/toddler services to preschool services and from preschool to kindergarten.

Adapted from: [Kansas State Board of Education](#), (1992). *MAPS: A plan for including all children in schools*. Topeka, KS: KSBE.