

Humanity Anchors in the IEP

Creating the IEP as a document of connection, not just a compliance checklist for our most vulnerable learners

Presenter: Sara Vank, M.S., SLP-CCC/ **Conference:** OSSPEAC | Oct. 11-13, 2026

Scan for Slides & Resources <https://bit.ly/4rEtN2H>



Core Definition: An intentional practice involving words, actions and/or strategies to anchor a person in their Humanity, not just their label. — which is often entrenched in disability/services/institutions.- S.Vank

The Core Paradigm Shift

- **Identity Over Deficit:** Reframing Present Levels (PLAAFP) around characteristics as well as strengths, interests, and communicative preferences rather than a checklist of missing skills.
- **Relationship and Rapport Building:** Recognizing that emotional/physical regulation, psychological safety, and trust are non-negotiable prerequisites for active authentic learning.
- **Humanity Over Compliance:** Designing goals that foster reciprocity, and meaningful participation rather than standard task execution. Humanity anchors promote slowing down our approach to the workload and allowing critical and meaningful thinking and support for students with complex accessibility needs.

Humanity Anchors

1. **Wholistic Approach & Multimodal Communication-** Considering comfort and navigation of physical needs and accessibility for all modes of communication
2. **Center the Student's Voice with their Humanity, not just what they can “do”**
 - *Practice:* Incorporate direct student input, non-verbal indicators of joy or distress, and student-identified preferences and likes/dislikes. Document what is **unique** to this student's humanity in their reports and in your practice. Practice respectful guessing with humility.
3. **Protect Regulation & Sensory Needs**
 - *Practice:* Explicitly document sensory, environmental, and relational supports. Dignity first actions and decisions.

Implementation Checklist for IEP Teams

- [] **Present Levels:** Does the profile read like a multidimensional human being, highlighting strengths/*characteristics*, interests, and regulation profiles?
- [] **Goals:** Do objectives measure functional communication, connection, and self-advocacy instead of prompt-dependent compliance? Do the goals elevate conditions for connections (ex. Multiple settings, multiple partners etc..) Are the goals written in a way that encourages conditions where that student can integrate into the rhythm and pattern of that school community.
- [] **Multimodal Access:** Is the entire team clear on how total communication is honored throughout the school day?