

Case Study: Jacob

Jacob is a seventh-grade student who loves to tell stories and contributes relevant ideas to classroom conversations. He has grade-level auditory comprehension ability and math skills, but his reading and writing skills are several years below grade level. Jacob was first identified with a learning disability during the middle of fourth grade. While listing a number of strengths, Jacob's IEP focuses on challenges in reading, writing, spelling, handwriting, and organizational skills. When he has access to a scribe, to whom he can dictate his thoughts, he performs adequately. However, increasingly, Jacob seeks to be independent at home (with homework), as well as when asked to complete in-class assignments. When he completes writing assignments, they lack structure, descriptive detail that he can otherwise provide orally, complete thoughts, rich vocabulary, and legibility (when completed by hand). Because of his poor spelling, he often omits words rather than asking for assistance and/or relies on the words he believes he can spell.

Jacob's recent move to seventh grade has added further stress to the writing process. Ms. Simons, his language arts teacher, is reinforcing the stages of the writing process, expecting Jacob and his peers to demonstrate a capacity in prewriting (e.g., identifying ideas, organizing thoughts), drafting, revising, editing, and finally publishing. Whether it is limited ideas, lack of knowledge of or comfort with the steps, trouble with the mechanics of writing, legibility, or all of the above, the writing demands for the seventh-grade year are creating stress and anxiety for Jacob, his parents, and his teachers. To further complicate matters, Jacob is still adjusting to the middle school environment, lockers, the change of classes, multiple teachers, and increased academic demands. Unlike the wrap-around supports of the elementary school (e.g., consistent teachers for special and general education), middle school presents a different, more complicated, environment.

The move to seventh grade has also meant additional social demands. For example, Jacob often went to the resource room or an in-class paraprofessional when he struggled with an assignment in the past. Not wanting to appear different from his new peer group, Jacob is increasingly avoiding the resource room and any additional adult support.

Despite all these new challenges, one of the highlights within Jacob's life is his interest in computers, games, and technology in general. Because of this interest, Jacob is eager to try anything that involves technology, especially if it will increase his independence and decrease the assistance that he receives in the classroom. Fortunately, his classroom has access to a mobile laptop cart, and his parents recently upgraded their computers at home.

Here we have a struggling student who finds middle school fraught with additional challenges. However, we also have an individual with an IEP who is in need of specialized instruction, facing a new school that alters the previous supports but has a strong interest in and willingness to try technology-based solutions.