

Educational Goal Setting

Your child qualifies for an Individual Education Program (IEP), what is the next step? You will meet with your IEP team to set goals for your child. The IEP team consists of education professionals, school personnel, parents, students (age 14 or older), and others who have special knowledge of your child.

What Is a Goal?

A measurable annual goal is a statement of what the IEP team agrees is appropriate for a child to try to accomplish during the year in a given area where the child has needs. Goals can be written to measure progress in both academic and functional performance. Because the goal is written for your child's specific needs, the team has great flexibility in determining what those goals will be. You, as a parent, also play a very important role in creating these goals.

Steps to Goal Setting

Content: A measurable annual goal is made up of:

1. The Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP), and
2. The annual goal.

Your student's present level of performance is key in making sure these goals speak to the academic and functional needs of your student. For students who take alternate assessments, the goal must also include benchmarks or short term objectives (STOs), which are smaller steps to help the student reach the goal. The following information shows the process taken in this major part of the IEP, educational goal setting.



Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)

Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) are based on the evaluation data and should be specific as to how the disability of the student affects academic and functional progress. The PLAAFP should answer these questions:

- What are the student's strengths and functional needs?
- How does the child's disability affect participation and progress in the general curriculum (core curriculum) (or appropriate activities for preschool age children)?

- What are the parent’s concerns and how do they relate to the child’s academic or functional needs?
- How does the child respond to their environment (home, school)?
- If the child is 14 years of age or older, what are the student’s postsecondary interests?

In order for the PLAAFP to serve as a bridge between the data and the written goal, the data must be measurable, so that the progress of the student can be measured.

Information provided by promotingprogress.org

Short-Term Objectives (STO) or Benchmarks

Short-term objectives (STO) or benchmarks are only required for students who take alternate assessments. They can, however, be used any time a team feels like it would benefit the student. These Short-term objectives break down the specific skills and into smaller steps necessary to accomplish the annual goal.

Short-term objectives and benchmarks are helpful because they:

- Describe what the student is expected to learn in a particular area within a specified time.
- Determine the amount of progress the student is making toward meeting the goal.

What should your child’s IEP include?

- **Measurable Annual Goals**

Measurable annual goals describe a skill or behavior the IEP team would like the student to learn or improve. The goals must be measurable and describe what a student can reasonably be expected to learn within 12 months.

- **Measurable Postsecondary Goals**

Transition IEPs are also required to have measurable postsecondary goals. They are often written in the student’s own words.

- **Educational Goals**

Writing measurable annual goals (and short-term objectives or benchmarks for students who take alternate assessments) is a major part of the IEP process. Annual goals are concerned with meeting the needs of a child who requires special education and related services. The goals are directed towards:

1. Closing the gap between the child’s indicated ability and present level of academic achievement and functional performance.
2. Helping the child to increase in ability.

Annual goals (and short-term objectives or benchmarks) represent how efforts will be directed to address the student’s needs as listed on the IEP. They focus on reducing the problems which result from the student’s disability and interfere with learning or educational performance.

Types of Educational Goals

Most educational goals fall into one or more of the following areas:

- Academic – reading, written language, spelling, math, science
- Self-Help – eating, dressing, shopping, traveling, safety, budgeting
- Motor Skills – riding a bike, jumping, handwriting, buttoning and zipping
- Social/Emotional Skills – sharing, making friends, trying new things, smiling, responding to teasing
- Vocational/Pre-vocational Skills – following directions, completing jobs, using tools, making change, appropriate social skills in a job setting
- Behavioral – dealing with aggression, staying on task, following instructions, appropriate classroom conduct, dealing appropriately with emotions
- Speech/Communication – learning sign language, speech pronunciation, and verbal memory.

Evaluation data is used to determine the areas of need. Appropriate goals and services on the IEP should lead to an appropriate placement or location where the child’s IEP will be serviced. After writing the goals and deciding on the needed services, the team should ask, *‘Where can the student best receive these services in the least restrictive setting?’*

General Education and the IEP

The need for accommodations and modifications in the general education program should be addressed in the educational goal setting process and they **may be included in the IEP**.

Accommodations and modifications pertain to instruction in the general curriculum as well as, to state and district assessments. **In order for a student to be able to use accommodations in state and district assessments, the accommodations must be written in the IEP and used in the classroom on a regular basis.**



Accommodations are the changes in the how—the way things are usually done in school/class/assessment, in order to provide the student an equal opportunity to participate. The changes do not fundamentally or substantially change or lower the school, district or state standards. The student is learning the same material (general curriculum) as other students.

Examples of Accommodations

- Break assignments into segments of shorter tasks. Give frequent reminders.
- Increase the amount of time to complete assignments.
- Give tests orally. Increase time for test completion.
- Give the student a copy of the class notes. Use graphic organizers for note taking.
- Seat the student in an area free from distractions. Use mics and speakers in the class.
- Provided texts in an alternate format such as Braille or audio.

Modifications

Modifications fundamentally or substantially change or lower the standards or requirements. They change what the child is learning. Modifications could include adapted programming, content or instruction.

Examples of Modifications

- Reduce and simplify materials, assignments, homework, school projects, or tests.
- Grade on Pass/Fail option if grade falls below a “C” grade. Grade on corrected work.
- No homework or reduced homework requirement for a subject.
- Change the class behavior expectations for the student (based on the disability and Behavioral Intervention Plan)

Postsecondary Goals and the IEP:

When a student reaches the age of 14, the IEP team can start addressing Postsecondary goals with input from the student. These goals state what the student would like to do or achieve after high school. These goals should also include the child’s desires for the future including employment, education and skills for independent living. Postsecondary goals, however, may look more vague for a student in middle school and more detailed with specific goals being addressed during high school. As time goes on, modifications may need to be made to reflect the student’s changing interests.

Examples of Goal Areas

- Vocational training (e.g., learning a trade)
- Postsecondary education (e.g., college or other schooling)
- Jobs and employment
- Independent living

How Many Goals Should My Child Have?

If an IEP has too many goals, it can be confusing or frustrating for everyone. It is important to have realistic expectations about how many things the student can work on. Try to keep the number of goals manageable. Often it is enough to set one goal for each major area of concern. For example, you could have a goal for math calculation, reading comprehension, basic reading skills, behavior, and adaptive PE.

The school is required to use assessments that measure progress in the core curriculum, or the curriculum that is required by the state for all students. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) also emphasizes that children with disabilities should have access to the general curriculum. Often, it is possible to choose goals in the areas of the core curriculum (general curriculum) that your child will be studying. Even if your child will not be able to work at the level of typical students, you as a parent may still wish to encourage aligning your child's goals with the core curriculum. This will help your child to have access to the core curriculum, and over time to make progress in it. However, the priority should always be on the things your child needs most.

What Is Your Role In Your Child's IEP?

Parents play an important role in this process. You know your child best! The picture you paint of your child's routines at home, daily activities, strengths and weaknesses, will be valuable information to the team and will help them in writing meaningful goals for your child. Your child's IEP team wants to hear from you and you may wish to address the team with your valuable information. Prepare for the meeting by asking yourself some of the following questions:

- What can my child do and not do now? What is the current level of skill or knowledge? (This will be stated in the PLAAFP.)
- How is this need of my child related to the child's disability?
- What do I want my child to know or be able to do at the end of this year? Is this a reasonable expectation?

- Why can't my child do this now? What is it about the disability that interferes with achieving the goal? What needs to be addressed?
- What would be the starting point for my child?
- Is the goal something that can be measured? How will we know when the goal has been completed? Is what we are looking for observable and measurable?
- Do we need intermediate steps such as short term objectives or benchmarks to achieve the goal? (For the students who take alternate assessments, these are required.)
- If we are using short term objectives or benchmarks, how can they be measured? Are they clear, observable steps that will advance the student from the PLAAFP to the measurable annual goal?
- School personnel should know how to write appropriate measurable annual goals. It is not necessarily the responsibility of the parents. However, having a good understanding of how the process works and what makes a good goal can help parents to be more knowledgeable participants in the process and to monitor the student's progress. Parents have every right to expect that the child's goals will match the child's needs and be calculated to help the child be successful.

