

# **Writing IEPs That Align to Common Core Standards**

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## INTRODUCTION

Expectations for increased student outcomes abound in the world of public education. No Child Left Behind presumes students with disabilities, like their peers without disabilities will progress toward predetermined growth targets. While the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is still pending, it's safe to assume high expectations and accountability systems are deeply embedded in public education policy.

Many questions still exist as to how best to include students with disabilities in accountability systems. While researchers, politicians and bureaucrats sort this out, practitioners continue to meet the challenges of providing students with disabilities meaningful access to the general education curriculum. The Individual Education Program (IEP) is the mechanism that should guide school personnel in how best to do that for individual students. However, the IEP is only as meaningful as the team's approach to its development and implementation.

Positive results for students, their parents and educators can be realized when sound strategies are implemented including:

1. Collecting and synthesizing multiple sources of information prior to writing the IEP.
2. Analyzing skills necessary to access the general education curriculum.
3. Writing compelling and instructionally relevant present level statements and measurable goals.
4. Monitoring student progress frequently and adjust instruction as appropriate.

## STRATEGY #1

### Collecting and synthesizing multiple sources of information prior to writing the IEP.

The IEP document (the product) is only as strong as the collaborative process used and the relevant information considered in its development. However, due to time constraints and lack of clarity on roles, IEPs are often times developed by the special educator in isolation from other key stakeholders. It is common practice for the special educator to present a “draft IEP” at the meeting and ask other team members to review it and suggest revisions.

What message is sent when a special educator commits time to preparing a draft and requests feedback after it is completed? How might this sequence actually result in longer rather than more efficiently managed meetings? While this may lead to some efficiency, consider it may, in fact, thwart the intent of the collaborative process.

Special educators should develop the “draft IEP” based on information obtained as a result of collaboration prior to drafting the IEP. In this way, team members can review a draft that already reflects their input.

There are multiple sources of information about students to be considered in developing the IEP. Certainly, people who know the student must contribute information – the student, the parent, the teacher and related service providers. In addition, assessment and observational data from the previous year must be organized and analyzed in order to keep the IEP relevant and timely.

#### **Connecting with People Prior to the IEP Meeting:**

By incorporation input from team members prior to the IEP meeting, everyone can feel their voice is heard and considered in drafting the plan. It is assumed that special educators are in constant discussion with students, parents and teaches throughout the year. What is typically missing is the documentation of these conversations. The documentation is important so that a record is available should the student move or be assigned to a different special educator. It also serves as a “memory aid” when the special educators is developing the “draft IEP”. If time for face to face collaboration is scarce, surrounding oneself with the written input of other team members may be the next best thing!

The following information should be collected:

1. Input from the student on:
  - His or her priorities for the upcoming school year (and beyond).
  - His or her interests and preferences (effective motivators).
  - Accommodations he or she finds useful.
2. Input from the parents on:
  - Their concerns for the upcoming year (and beyond).
  - Their child’s approach/reaction to school work at home.
  - Effective accommodations they use at home.
  - Their child’s interests and preferences (motivators).

3. Input from the classroom teacher(s) on:
  - Expectations for students (e.g., math, science) for the upcoming year.
  - How the student is currently performing in these areas.
  - Ways the student's disability affects performance.
  - Accommodations or modifications that offset the impact of the disability.
4. Input from related service providers on:
  - Overlapping goals.
  - Functional performance.
  - Necessary accommodations.

Sample questionnaires are provided in the next few pages. Select and adapt templates that best represent what information you want from stakeholders and create a system to obtain input. Using a backward planning process can help identify the lead time necessary to distribute and gather completed forms in order to develop the draft IEP.

**Try This:**

1. The special educator will distribute the forms 6 weeks prior to IEP due date, along with a cover letter explaining the importance of the recipient's input and directions for completion. Follow up with a phone call to parent to inquire if they would prefer to discuss the information by phone rather than provide written response.
2. Certain school structures lend themselves to team collaboration. For example, the middle school special educator can schedule time during a grade level team to verbally review the template and get team consensus on the classroom teachers' perspectives to include in the IEP.
3. Consider asking students and parents to complete the forms at the beginning of the year as a way to get to know them. Maintain their responses and ask them to review and update these responses a month prior to the IEP meeting,

**Connecting with Data Prior to the IEP Meeting:**

Districts collect significant amounts of data on students. Maintaining and strategically using all this information can be challenging. It requires that team members understand different assessments provide different types of information. Making sense of multiple data points will help provide the most comprehensive profile of the student. The following types of formal and informal data needs to be synthesized.

5. Review initial and 3 year special education evaluations:
  - Learning style, strengths, and areas of need
  - Information on the student's disability
  - How the disability impacts performance
  - Accommodations and instructional strategies
  - Relationship of data to large-scale assessment data
6. Review recent state assessment data:
  - Current skill acquisition

- Generalization of skills
  - Information on test-taking
7. Review current classroom and curriculum-based measurements (MAPS, DIBELS, etc.):
- Current skill acquisition.
  - Baseline information.
  - Error analysis.
  - Validation of generalization of skills.
8. Review classroom observations:
- Behavioral data (baseline).
  - Information on functional performance.
  - Information on environmental supports or barriers.
  - Information on social relationships.
  - Adherence to school routines.

Try This:

1. As new assessment and observation data becomes available throughout the year, maintain a “cheat sheet” that provides a brief summary of the assessment findings and implications for instruction. This will allow the special educator to draft the IEP from a summary sheet rather than original assessment reports.
2. Consider the creation of “**data binders**”. These binders can catalog new information collected each year that will contribute to the development of the next IEP. As students move from one service provider or building to another, it’s an efficient way to communicate the essential information needed to “hit the ground running”.

## STUDENT PROFILE

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_ Date Completed \_\_\_\_\_

1. I'm interested in:

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2. I want to learn:

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3. I'm best at:

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4. I need most help with:

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5. Suggestions I have about working with me:

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6. My most important goal for this year:

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7. When I leave high school as a young adult, I expect:

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Adapted from material by Harley Tomey, Virginia Dept. of Education

## Student Accommodations Request Form

Student:  
Teacher:

Date:

1 When you need extra help in class, which of these are most likely to help you?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recorded lectures                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Extra time on assignments  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Class notes                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Recorded textbooks         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Using a word processor            | <input type="checkbox"/> Altering tests/assignments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asking questions during a lecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Joining a study group      |

2 When preparing for a test or exam, which of these accommodations would be most helpful to you?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asking for extra time on the test       | <input type="checkbox"/> Asking to read my answers into a tape recorder |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asking to have the test read to me      | <input type="checkbox"/> Asking for writing assistance                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asking to take the test in another room |   |

3 If you have difficulty reading, which of these are most likely to help you?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Having the textbooks recorded | <input type="checkbox"/> Having someone to read to me        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Using study guides            | <input type="checkbox"/> Enrolling in a reading skills class |

4 If you have writing difficulties, which of these are most likely to help you?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Using a computer for word processing | <input type="checkbox"/> Giving oral reports |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dictating written work to someone    | <input type="checkbox"/> Recording lectures  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Having a note-taker                  |  |

5 If you have math difficulties, which of these are most likely to help you?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asking for additional explanations              | <input type="checkbox"/> Listing steps of a process in my notes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Using graph paper                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Using a calculator                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Setting up time to work 1-to-1 with the teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> Using manipulatives                    |

6. If you have trouble with organization, which of these are most likely to help you?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asking for a syllabus/course schedule | <input type="checkbox"/> Breaking large assignments into parts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Keeping a calendar of assignments     | <input type="checkbox"/> Getting assignments ahead of time     |

Source: Unknown

## Parent Questionnaire - IEP Review

Dear Parent:

We are looking forward to meeting with you to discuss your child's new IEP. Please take a few minutes to review these questions. Your input will be invaluable to the Team.

Please return this form by \_\_\_\_\_ so I can include your input in the draft IEP. You can also call me at \_\_\_\_\_ if you prefer to discuss your input by phone.

Thank You,

My child is interested in: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

My child is best at:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

My child needs the most help with:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Special concerns I have about my child:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Suggestions I have about working with my child:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I would consider this a successful school year for my child if:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date Completed \_\_\_\_\_

Adapted from material by Harley Tomey, Virginia Dept. of Education

## **Questions that Can Help Guide the IEP Planning Process for Both General and Special Educators**

- **What are the key goals or performance indicators associated with this grade/course/subject matter?**

Examples include being able to read specific text independently and answer questions, being able to accurately estimate size and measurement in a variety of daily situations, and being able to write a minimum of four paragraphs that logically develop an idea.

- **How is this student currently performing in these areas?**

Look at classroom evidence regarding the key areas. Decide where the student falls on a continuum of competence on the standards or broad curriculum goals as well as skills they use for learning.

- **In what ways are the student's disabilities impacting the performance?**

In addition to specific skill deficits such as in reading or math, educational assessments should consider such things as attention or focus, memory, organizational skills, and communication as well as other learning processes.

- **What accommodations and supports will the student need to offset the impact of the disability?**

For example, will they need memory aids, communication assistance, specific organizational strategies, more intensive instruction in certain areas, and so forth?

Adapted from:  
**Accessing the General Curriculum.** Nolet & McLaughlin. 2ed.

**Advanced Planner for the General Educator:  
Preparing for the IEP Meeting**

**Student:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher:** \_\_\_\_\_

Identify the expectations for students in this grade/course:

Identify essential skills, habits or behaviors necessary to meet these expectations:

**Learning Environment** – Identify components that work best for this student:

**Methods of Instruction:**

- |  |  |                                       |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lecture           | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual work | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Class discussions | <input type="checkbox"/> Group work      |                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worksheets        | <input type="checkbox"/> Peer tutors     |                                       |

**Materials/Media:**

- |   |                                       |   |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Study guide      | <input type="checkbox"/> Taped text   | <input type="checkbox"/> Assistive technology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Partial outline  | <input type="checkbox"/> PowerPoint   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Highlighted text | <input type="checkbox"/> Digital text |   |

**Assignment Format:**

- |   |   |                                       |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oral presentation  | <input type="checkbox"/> Project-based Activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Written assignment |   |                                       |

**Assessment Format:**

- |  |  |                                       |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple choice | <input type="checkbox"/> Fill in blank | <input type="checkbox"/> Matching     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Short answer    | <input type="checkbox"/> Essay         | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

**Grading Strategies:**

- |  |  |                                       |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assignments/tests | <input type="checkbox"/> Homework      | <input type="checkbox"/> Attendance   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Effort            | <input type="checkbox"/> Participation | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

**Class Environment:**

- |                                       |  |                                       |
|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet        | <input type="checkbox"/> Structured    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lively       | <input type="checkbox"/> Independently |                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured | <input type="checkbox"/> With peers    |                                       |

**Management Strategies:**

- |   |   |                                       |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Verbal praise        | <input type="checkbox"/> Contracts              | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preferential seating | <input type="checkbox"/> Posted classroom rules |                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rewards              |   |                                       |

Source: Unknown

**Assessment and Observation Analysis**  
**School Year: \_\_\_\_\_**

<b>SOURCE</b>	<b>IMPLICATIONS FOR IEP</b>
<b>STATE ASSESSMENT</b>	
<b>MAPS</b>	
<b>DIBELS</b>	
<b>SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT</b>	
<b>CLASSROOM OBSERVATION</b>	
<b>BEHAVIORAL DATA</b>	

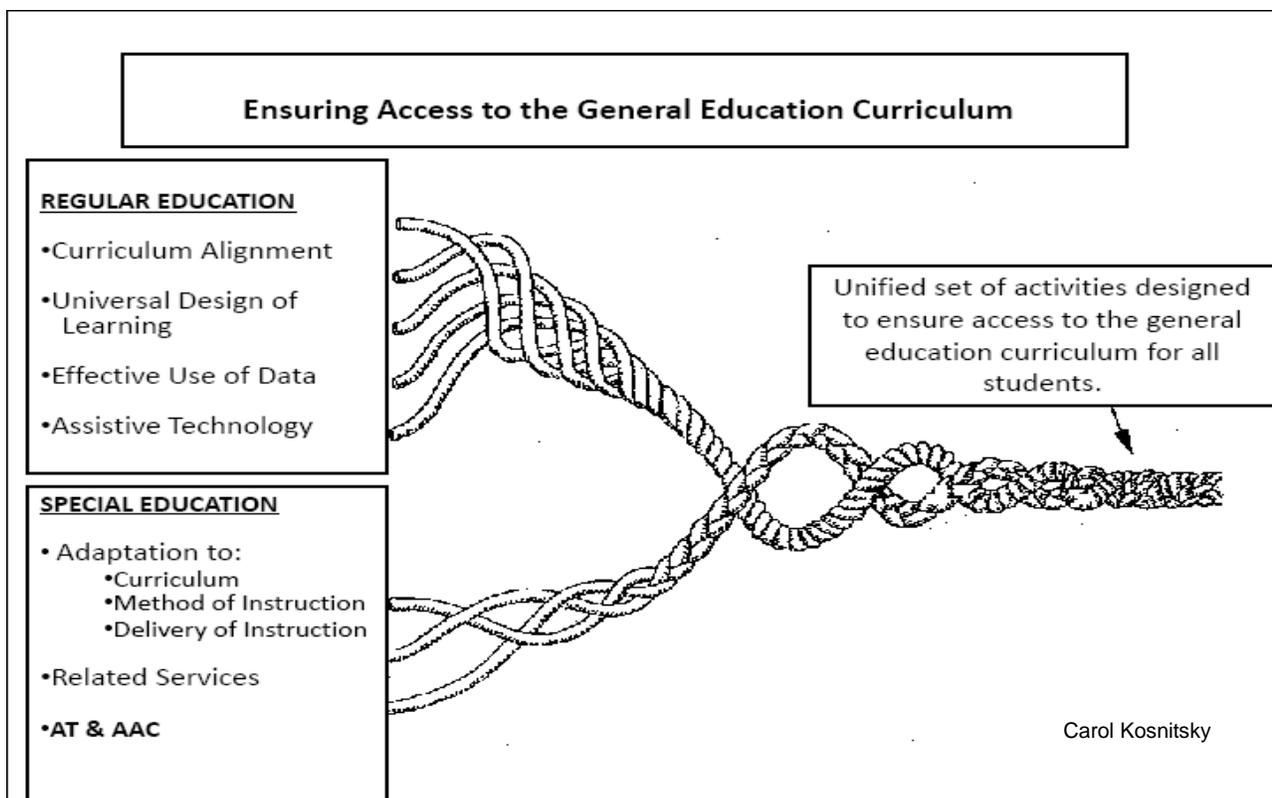
## STRATEGY #2

### Analyzing Skills Necessary to Access the General Education Curriculum.

Working with state standards was traditionally considered the work of general educators. Since the enactment of IDEA 1997, IDEA 2004, and No Child Left Behind it is clear that special educators need a working knowledge of state standards. Most recently, the adoption of Common Core State Standards provides the responsibility and an opportunity for special educators to refine their skills in making meaningful connections between a student's IEP and the general education curriculum.

#### Importance of Aligning IEPs to Standards

- Supports access to the general education curriculum
- Focuses instruction on more challenging content and skills
- Promotes a unified system of education for all students
- Promotes collaboration between general and special educators
- Promotes making "least dangerous assumptions"



Special educators are well poised to make meaningful connections between the IEP and standards. The process begins with identifying the student's long term goals or vision.

Following the model of good post-secondary transition planning, begin with the end in mind. The vision statement will anchor all subsequent decisions and guide the Team as they establish priorities for the year. Consider the following:

- What does the student expect to be doing in the next five or 10 years?
- What skills and behaviors does the student need to move toward this vision?

Next the special educator must analyze relevant standards in order to:

- Determine the specific skills and knowledge necessary to meet or make progress toward the standard, and
- Establish priorities for the specific student.

Special educators can take a lesson from general education literature<sup>1</sup> on prioritizing standards. While it is difficult for content specialists to agree on the most important standards, it is accepted that not all standards are equally important, given the available time for students to learn. Essential questions to consider are:

- **Endurance:** Will this standard provide students with knowledge and skills that will be of value beyond the present instructional setting?
- **Leverage:** Will this standard provide knowledge and skills that will be of value in multiple disciplines?
- **Preparation for next level:** Will this standard provide students with essential knowledge and skills necessary for success in the next grade or level of instruction?

The Team must select and address skills and knowledge aligned with the most “powerful” standards for the student – those that will provide the student greater access to the general education curriculum and move the student closer to his or her long-term vision.

Once a particular standard is selected, the team must “drill down” further to identify several components, such as:

- What is the standard saying the student must know and be able to do?
- What is the intent of the standard?
- What is key vocabulary?
- What are the pre-requisite skills?
- How does the student’s disability affect progress in this standard?
- Is the standard addressing a skill? (Look for hierarchical access point).
- Is the standard addressing content or knowledge? (Look at degree of difficulty and complexity).

Consider the range of skills and processes necessary to meet a standard, such as language, executive skills, and memory. For example, in looking at a standard is syntax, retrieval, semantics, or being strategic required? By “peeling the layers” of the standard, the team can focus on the skills and behaviors that are “goal worthy” for the upcoming school year. This analysis is not about “content”; rather it is about the skills and behaviors required to access the content.

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<sup>1</sup> Reeves, D. B. (2002). *The leader's guide to standards: A blueprint for educational equity and excellence*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

Try This:

1. Don't reinvent the wheel. Many districts have engaged in a systematic approach to "drilling down" to understand the skills, knowledge and processes involved with state standards. Special educators should start with these documents to determine how certain disabilities will affect movement toward reaching standards.
2. Document all this work. The standards will not change from year to year. Start slow, and over time, your department will create its own curriculum maps that show the progression of essential skills.
3. Don't overlook the work your state has done on Alternate Assessments. They, often times, include examples of drilling down to the "big idea".

### **IEPs for Students with Moderate to Severe Needs**

The Team has the authority to make individual student decisions that may include goals on a range of skills and behaviors that are not traditionally considered "the general education curriculum". Functional life skills should also be balanced with serious consideration to those aspects of the general education curriculum that can be relevant to the student and "make the least dangerous assumptions".

Some additional questions<sup>2</sup> to consider when selecting relevant standards for students with significant needs are:

1. **Self-determination:** Self-determination is making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life free from undue external influence. How can the core curriculum be used to teach self-determination skills? What skills can promote learning of the general curriculum while fostering the acquisition of skills with lifelong benefits?
2. **Assistive technology:** How can the use of assistive technology enable the student to engage in the task more independently?
3. **Personal relevance and functionality:** How can real-life activities make the standard meaningful for the student?

The challenge for the IEP team is to create the proper balance between standards and the unique needs of the individual student. Key factors to keep in mind include:

- The standards are useful in framing levels of attainment, realizing there are many different levels in each area of competence.
- Use of standards should not be tied to age levels or time. While they set common expectations, students may reach them at different times.
- Within limits, there should be choice to decide appropriateness (challenging yet attainable).

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<sup>2</sup> Courtade, G., & Browder, D. M. (2011). *Aligning IEPs to the Common Core State Standards for students with moderate and severe disabilities*. Verona, WI: Attainment Company.

## Application to Students with Disabilities

### Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards articulate rigorous grade-level expectations in the areas of mathematics and English language arts. These standards identify the knowledge and skills students need in order to be successful in college and careers

Students with disabilities —students eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) - must be challenged to excel within the general curriculum and be prepared for success in their post-school lives, including college and/or careers. These common standards provide an historic opportunity to improve access to rigorous academic content standards for students with disabilities. The continued development of understanding about research-based instructional practices and a focus on their effective implementation will help improve access to mathematics and English language arts (ELA) standards for all students, including those with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are a heterogeneous group with one common characteristic: the presence of disabling conditions that significantly hinder their abilities to benefit from general education (IDEA 34 CFR §300.39, 2004). Therefore, *how* these high standards are taught and assessed is of the utmost importance in reaching this diverse group of students.

In order for students with disabilities to meet high academic standards and to fully demonstrate their conceptual and procedural knowledge and skills in mathematics, reading, writing, speaking and listening (English language arts), their instruction must incorporate supports and accommodations, including:

- supports and related services designed to meet the unique needs of these students and to enable their access to the general education curriculum (IDEA 34 CFR §300.34, 2004).
- An Individualized Education Program (IEP)<sup>1</sup> which includes annual goals aligned with and chosen to facilitate their attainment of grade-level academic standards.
- Teachers and specialized instructional support personnel who are prepared and qualified to deliver high-quality, evidence-based, individualized instruction and support services.

Promoting a culture of high expectations for all students is a fundamental goal of the Common Core State Standards. In order to participate with success in the general curriculum, students with disabilities, as appropriate, may be provided additional supports and services, such as:

- Instructional supports for learning— based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)<sup>2</sup> —which foster student engagement by presenting information in multiple ways and allowing for diverse avenues of action and expression.
- Instructional accommodations (Thompson, Morse, Sharpe & Hall, 2005) —changes in materials or procedures— which do not change the standards but allow students to learn within the framework of the Common Core.

<sup>1</sup> According to IDEA, an IEP includes appropriate accommodations that are necessary to measure the individual achievement and functional performance of a child

<sup>2</sup> UDL is defined as “a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that (a) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (b) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains

- Assistive technology devices and services to ensure access to the general education curriculum and the Common Core State Standards.

Some students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will require substantial supports and accommodations to have meaningful access to certain standards in both instruction and assessment, based on their communication and academic needs. These supports and accommodations should ensure that students receive access to multiple means of learning and opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, but retain the rigor and high expectations of the Common Core State Standards.

### **References**

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 34 CFR §300.34 (a). (2004).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 34 CFR §300.39 (b)(3). (2004).

Thompson, Sandra J., Amanda B. Morse, Michael Sharpe, and Sharon Hall. "Accommodations Manual: How to Select, Administer and Evaluate Use of Accommodations and Assessment for Students with Disabilities," 2nd Edition. Council for Chief State School Officers, 2005

<http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/AccommodationsManual.pdf> . (Accessed January, 29, 2010).

"high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient." by Higher Education Opportunity Act (PL 110-135)

## Common Core State Standards - English Language Art

K	2	4	6	8	9-10
<b>Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</b>	<b>Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.</b>	<b>Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</b>	<b>Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</b>	<b>Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</b>	<b>Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</b>
<p>a. Sort common objects into categories (e.g., shapes, foods) to gain a sense of the concepts the categories represent.</p> <p>b. Demonstrate understanding of frequently occurring verbs and adjectives by relating them to their opposites (antonyms).</p> <p>c. Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., note places at school that are <i>colorful</i>).</p> <p>d. Distinguish shades of meaning among verbs describing the same general action (e.g., <i>walk, march, strut, prance</i>) by acting out the meanings.</p>	<p>a. Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., describe foods that are <i>spicy</i> or <i>juicy</i>).</p> <p>b. Distinguish shades of meaning among closely related verbs (e.g., <i>toss, throw, hurl</i>) and closely related adjectives (e.g., <i>thin, slender, skinny, scrawny</i>).</p>	<p>a. Explain the meaning of simple similes and metaphors (e.g., <i>as pretty as a picture</i>) in context.</p> <p>b. Recognize and explain the meaning of common idioms, adages, and proverbs.</p> <p>c. Demonstrate understanding of words by relating them to their opposite (antonyms) and to words with similar but not identical meanings (synonyms).</p>	<p>a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., personification) in context.</p> <p>b. Use the relationship between particular words (e.g., cause/effect, part/whole, item/category) to better understand each of the words.</p> <p>c. Distinguish among the connotations (associations) of words with similar denotations (definitions) (e.g., <i>stingy, scrimping, economical, unwasteful, thrifty</i>).</p>	<p>a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g. verbal irony, puns) in context.</p> <p>b. Use the relationship between particular words to better understand each of the words.</p> <p>c. Distinguish among the connotations (associations) of words with similar denotations (definitions) (e.g., <i>bullheaded, willful, firm, persistent, resolute</i>).</p>	<p>a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.</p> <p>b. Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.</p>

*Common Core State Standards (English Language Arts) National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington D.C. 2010*

## **AN IEP Process: Looking at State Standards**

**What is the desired outcome for this student?**

- Three to four years from now.
- Student's desired post-school outcome.

**What are the skills and knowledge essential to meeting the desired outcome?**

**What are the expectations of the general curriculum relative to the student's age/grade?**

- Content.
- Expectations for learning and demonstration of learning.
- Extracurricular activities or events available.

**How do skills and knowledge essential to meeting the desired outcome compare with the general curriculum, including content and expectations for learning?**

- Where are the similarities/connections?
- Where are the differences?
- Where within the general curriculum, including extracurricular, are the opportunities for learning the needed skills and knowledge?

**What are the student's present levels academic achievement and functional performance?**

- What skills and knowledge does the student already possess?
- What other strengths does the student present?
- What are the areas of challenge?
- What accommodations, modifications, or other supports have proven beneficial for this student?

**Given all the information we have discussed thus far, what do we think are reasonable goals for this year?**

- What are the program implications for each goal?
- What instructional accommodations are needed?
- What modifications to the general curriculum are needed?
- How will progress be reported and how often?

**Given the information we have discussed thus far, how will the student participate in state and district-wide assessments?**

- With peers as given.
- With peers and with accommodations.
- Alternate assessment.

Carol B. Massanari, Ph.D.  
Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center. Used by permission.

**IEP – STANDARDS PLANNING SHEET**  
C. KOSNITSKY

<b>Standard:</b>	
<b>Present Level-Can do:</b>	<b>Needs to do:</b>
<b>Classroom Teacher will do:</b>	<b>Special Educator will do:</b>
<b>Progress will be measured by:</b>	<b>Progress will be measured by:</b>

## STRATEGY #3

### Writing compelling and instructionally relevant present level statements and measurable annual goals.

Once all information has been collected and synthesized, the team is ready to develop the present level statement(s). A good present level statement provides both the rationale for selecting an area of need and developing a subsequent goal. The present levels should connect all the dots – the student’s strengths, needs, impact of disability and annual goals.

Present level statements should be compelling descriptions of students; providing an accurate and objective description of the the student. Well written present levels provide parents with the knowledge they need to support the team; provide teachers with the knowledge they need to support the student, and provide students with the confidence to “own” their plan.

A suggested protocol is provided below. It is accompanied by an advance organizer designed to assist the IEP writer.

#### Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance

1. **Describe the skills the student demonstrates.**

Present an accurate picture of what the student can do and his or her strengths that can support growth in the stated area of need. Describe the highest skill level the student demonstrates in the area of need so the teacher will know where to begin instruction. Think beyond academic scores when identifying a student’s strength. For example, a student with a specific learning disability in written expression may also exhibit great creativity and imagination. A student with low reading comprehension may exhibit strong auditory comprehension.

2. **Describe how the student performs compared to expectations in the general education curriculum (how wide is the gap).**

Identify expectations in the grade level curriculum. Analyze the critical skills, knowledge or behaviors required to meet them and the gap(s) that may exist between those expectations and the student’s present level of performance. The gap in skills, knowledge or behaviors is what will be addressed in the IEP.

3. **Describe the skills the student needs to learn this year in order to narrow/close the gap.**

Having analyzed the gap, identify the skills to be taught during the IEP cycle. In other words, what skills or behaviors will the student demonstrate to narrow or close the gap and what can be realistically achieved in the coming year?

4. **Describe how the student performs in the classroom/school environment.**

Describe the “impact” of the student’s disability on participation and performance in the area of need. By doing this, the stage is set to help classroom teachers understand how critical implementation of accommodations will be for the student. Be sure to include information about the impact across school courses and environments. For example, a reading disability will impact the student in every class, not just in reading class.

6. **Describe effective accommodations that support this student.**

Provide specific information on effective strategies and accommodations in the present level. Typically, accommodations are listed in another section of the IEP, but they rarely describe the need for the accommodations in direct relationship to the “impact” of disability.

**5. Describe the student’s interests and preferences that are motivators.**

A clear description of the student’s interests and preferences provides a balanced picture of the student and meaningful information on what will motivate the student. Knowing a student loves animals can be useful information when trying to engage him in a reading or writing activity. Describe the student’s personal attributes which may support growth. A student may have difficulty reading, but she shows great determination in facing challenging tasks.

**7. Identify what you will measure to assess progress and collect baseline**

**(measurable/observable data).** Identify an observable skill or behavior that can “change” as a result of the instruction being provided. If you can observe something, you can count it. And once you can count it, after a period of time you can count it again! Change in the target skill is what you will count to evaluate if your interventions has been successful! Collect baseline data by quantifying the degree to which the skill or behavior currently occurs (baseline data).

**Baseline Date**

A measurable goal cannot be written without the prior collection of baseline data. The component parts of a baseline statement should include:

- a clear description of the observable “target” skill or behavior
- the condition under which target skill was observed
- current performance criteria

**For example:**

***When observed for 5 consecutive recess periods (30 minutes each), Sam engaged in reciprocal play (sharing ball and taking turns) for 3 minutes each session.***

The baseline is, in essence, the present tense of the goal statement. Once you develop the baseline, you can now project how many more minutes Sam will engage in reciprocal play at the end of the IEP cycle and if the interventions were successful (future tense).

**Measurable Annual Goals**

IEP goals must be specific, observable and measurable. A legally compliant goal includes the following information:

1. **By when:** Annual goals are written for the equivalent of one school year or approximately 180 days, regardless of when in the school year the IEP begins. Goals are time-bound and must be both challenging and attainable within the specified period of time.
2. **Who:** IEP goals are always about expectations for what the student will do. While it is appropriate to identify what others will do to support the student, this information should be

included in other sections of the IEP that list accommodations or the supports and services personnel will need to assist the child in making progress.

3. **Will “do” what:** The “target” skill or behavior defines a skill or behavior that can be changed, observed and measured (i.e., increase number of words read correctly, increase in-seat behavior, increase correct punctuation). Ask yourself the following question: “What will I see if he/she meets this goal”? It is not about what instruction will be provided, rather what will be measured. This “target” skill or behavior was determined when the baseline data was collected.
4. **Under what condition:** This describes the condition that must be present each time progress monitoring data is collected. The condition may describe the assessment level (i.e. “Given a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level reading passage...”); the degree of support provided (“Given visual schedule...”) or the environment (“In an unstructured setting...”).
5. **The level of performance:** This quantifies the anticipated degree of change the student will achieve by the end of the IEP cycle. Factors that influence performance criteria include:
  - the student’s present level (baseline),
  - the degree to which the disability impacts progress (normative data),
  - the intensity of resources (amount of support/services allocated) and
  - the length of time for interventions.

**How progress will be measured:** Describe how progress will be measured, including what tool or methodology will be used; who will collect data; when it will be collected, and if appropriate, where it will be collected. Here is an example:

### **Objectives and Benchmarks**

In 2004 Congress eliminated the federal requirement that IEP goals include objectives or benchmarks for all but those students taking alternate assessments. The rationale for shifting emphasis from objectives to measurable outcomes is captured in Senate Report #108-185 issued in 2003.

While benchmarks and short-term objectives are thought by some to help track the child’s progress, their inclusion in IEPs contributes greatly to the paperwork burden on educators and parents, ***and often bears no relationship to the nonlinear reality of a child’s development. Special education practice via short-term objectives too often focuses on achieving only small incremental improvements in student performance to the detriment of more effective longer-range planning.*** Short-term objectives and benchmarks can focus too much on minor details and distract from the real purpose of special education, which is to ensure that all children and youth with disabilities achieve high educational outcomes and are prepared to participate fully in the social and economic fabric of their communities.

States have chosen different approaches in response to statutory change, however most current practices include objectives and/or benchmarks in IEPs for all students. There is value for districts to explore the rationale of moving from measuring small incremental steps toward

greater emphasis on the measurable outcomes. In doing so, teams will have increased options in goal writing and progress monitoring.

**Objectives** refer to the component parts that make up a skill or behavior and this represents the traditional way of writing IEPs – the use of mastery measurement. A goal is broken down into component parts, performance criteria established for each skill, the skill is taught and then assessed until mastery is reached. This can be an effective way to measure progress for certain skills.

For example, if Sally’s goal is to “independently wash hands,” there is an empirical connection in knowing that she can independently rinse soap from her hands and the progress she is making toward the goal. One can determine the progress this child makes toward the goal as any of these objectives are reached:

- By September, Sally will independently rinse soap from hands ...
- By October, Sally will independently rub soapy hands together ...
- By December, Sally will independently create lather in both hands ...
- By January, Sally will independently pick up bar of soap and wet ...
- By February, Sally will independently wet her hands under running water ...
- By March, Sally will independently turn on faucet ...

This is an example of the sum of the parts (the hierarchy of instructional objectives) equals the whole (goal). When this equation exists, instructional objectives make sense.

However, not all skills/behaviors are learned in this hierarchical approach. Therefore, measuring acquisition of the individual sub-skills may not accurately reflect what progress the student is or is not making.

**Benchmarks** refer to the performance criteria the student will demonstrate at designated times throughout the IEP cycle. The focus switches from what the student will be taught to what the student will do as a result of the intervention provided. For example, if the goal is to increase the student’s ability to control his behavior resulting in more in-class time, the benchmark identifies the amount of additional time the student will spend in class at pre-established time periods. For example, if the student is currently able to remain in class as a result of appropriate behavior for 200 minutes/day and the goal is for the student to remain in class for 300 minutes per day, benchmarks would indicate the amount of additional time the student is able to spend in class as a result of increased appropriate behavior.

**Annual Goal:** By June 2011, provided instructional time in the classroom, Billy will participate (remain in class) for 300 minutes per day for eight out of 10 consecutive days.

- By quarter one, Billy will participate in class for 225 minutes/day...
- By quarter two, Billy will participate in class for 250 minutes/day...
- By quarter three, Billy will participate in class for 275 minutes/day...
- By quarter four, Billy will participate in class for 300 minutes/day...

Benchmarks keep the focus on how much closer the student has progressed to the anticipated outcome (goal).

In summary, it is helpful to think of the IEP as both an instructional and accountability blueprint. A lot of time and energy is spent in detailing what will be taught during the IEP cycle. Beyond the details of what will be taught, attention must be directed to the thoughtful selection of a few but very important goals with intense focus on monitoring progress.

Try This:

1. Use the IEP Checklist to develop compliant and instructionally relevant present level statements and measurable goals. There should be an explicit connection between the present level statements and what is being measured in the goal.
2. Whether your state requires the continued use of objectives/benchmarks, practice writing goals that must stand alone without any objectives or benchmarks. This will require them to focus on the target skill or behavior to be measured.

## IEP Checklist

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal \_\_\_\_\_

CURRENT PERFORMANCE LEVEL		DESCRIPTION
1	Describe skills the student currently demonstrates in area of need	
2	Describe the expectations for the general education curriculum	
3	Describe the skills to be addressed this year	
4	Describe student performance in classroom (impact of disability)	
5	Describe effective strategies and accommodations	
6	Describe students interests, preferences and vision	
Baseline	Describe the observable skill to be measured (passes "Stranger Test") and collect baseline data	
MEASURABLE ANNUAL GOAL		
1	By when	
2	Under what condition	
3	Skill or behavior student <u>will do</u>	
4	Performance criteria	
5	Measured by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How</li> <li>• When</li> <li>• Who</li> </ul>	
BENCHMARK or OBJECTIVES		
1	Determine if it is more appropriate to use benchmarks or objectives	Carol Kosnitsky

## Example - IEP Checklist

Student: SALLY

Goal - Math

CURRENT PERFORMANCE LEVELS		DESCRIPTION
1	Describe skills the student currently demonstrates in area of need	Sally can add and subtract single digit problems without regrouping. She demonstrates grade level math concepts w/ calculator.
2	Describe the expectations for the general education curriculum	4 <sup>th</sup> graders can add, subtract, and multiply multi-digit numbers.
3	Describe the skills to be addressed this year	Instruction will focus on addition and subtraction with regrouping and multiplication without regrouping.
4	Describe student performance in classroom (impact of disability)	Sally's working memory problems will interfere with fluency with number facts and processes.
5	Describe effective strategies and accommodations	Extended time for instruction <u>and</u> practice. Effectively utilize math manipulatives when asked to independently compute.
6	Describe students interests, preferences and vision	Sally is a hard worker. Engagement is increased when real life applications are used.
Baseline	Describe the observable skill to be measured (passes "Stranger Test") and collect baseline data	Number of correct answers on mixed operations calculation problems. Currently: 4 correct answers out of 20 problems on 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade level mixed operations worksheet.
MEASURABLE GOALS		
1	By when	By June 2010...
2	Under what condition	Given untimed third-grade level math problems
3	Skill or behavior student <u>will do</u>	Sally will correctly answer _____ mixed math operations
4	Performance criteria	16 out of 20 problems
5	Measured by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How</li> <li>• When</li> <li>• Who</li> </ul>	Mixed operations math test Weekly Special Educator
BENCHMARK or OBJECTIVES		
1	Determine if it is more appropriate to use benchmarks or objectives	Carol Kosnitsky

**Student Name: SALLY**

## **MATH**

### **Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance:**

Sally, a fourth-grader, is able to add and subtract two-digit numbers without regrouping which are beginning second-grade level computation skills. Fourth-graders are expected to do multi-digit multiplication with and without regrouping and double digit division. She is able to perform at grade level on concepts such as time, money, basic geometry and word problems. This year, the focus of Sally's specially designed instruction will include multi-digit addition, subtraction with regrouping and multiplication without regrouping which are 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level computation skills. When given a third-grade probe of mixed math operations (+, -, x), Sally answered six out of 20 problems correctly.

Sally's working memory weaknesses interfere with her fluency in math facts as well as memorizing steps in the procedures. However, she is a hard worker and continues to show interest in learning math. Any connection that can be made to real life applications and models are motivating to her. Her mother reports Sally enjoys cooking and tries to apply various math operations during cooking time. She has shown improvement and shows evidence of using a variety of learning strategies to assist her computation. These include use of math models and written checklists of process steps. These should always be made available to her during math instruction. She will also need extended time to learn new facts and processes, requiring repeated practice opportunities. She is allowed to use a calculator when being asked to demonstrate knowledge of concepts and applications.

*By June, 2010, given a third-grade level mixed math operations worksheet, Sally will correctly answer 16 out of 20 problems, as measured by weekly tests given by the special education teacher.*

**Student Name: Jason**

## **TIME MANAGEMENT**

### **Present Level of Academic Achievement and Present Functional Performance:**

Jason, a 10<sup>th</sup> grader, is a well rounded and engaged learner. Jason reports that most of his classes are interesting and he contributes often and effectively in spontaneous class discussions and activities. However, Jason has not developed any consistent strategies to estimate, plan and execute successful completion of homework and long term projects. He has recently shown more willingness to develop strategies to address this as his post-secondary goals for college have come into focus. Jason recognizes that better management of his time is important in raising his current grades and making a smooth transition to college. He is able to tell time and follow a schedule when developed by someone else. Jason has a learning disability that affects his executive skills primarily in planning and time management. By the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> grade, students are expected to plan and execute assignment and project completion with minimal prompts. However, late and incomplete assignments have contributed to Jason receiving low grades which do not accurately reflect his content knowledge.

At the end of each day, with the help of the special education teacher, Jason will write a daily plan that identifies the work to be completed, estimates the amount of time he anticipates it will take to complete the task and follow the schedule to completion. Each morning, Jason will meet with his teacher to review how the plan was executed. Currently, when comparing estimated time to actual time taken to complete homework, Jason took 90-100% more time than estimated to complete the task for 5 consecutive days.

As he is learning these strategies, he will require consistent reminders to use the tools he is learning. As it will take time for him to learn and integrate these strategies he should have the opportunity to negotiate extended due dates with teachers during the 1<sup>st</sup> semester.

*By June 2011, given a daily planning tool for time management, Jason will complete task within 20% or less of time estimated for 2 consecutive weeks. Jason will meet daily with teacher to review planning tool and chart % of time estimated compared to actual time to complete task.*

## STRATEGY #4

### Monitoring student progress frequently and adjust instruction as appropriate.

Progress monitoring is the systematic process for collecting data. Once the measurable goal is developed, a plan must be put into place to progress monitor on a regular basis in order to:

- Assess the student's academic, social and/or behavioral performance, and
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention.

Because the needs of students on IEPs are so diverse, special educators must have a deep tool box of strategies and tools for measurement. This should include curriculum based measurements, qualitative measures such as rubrics and checklists, and readily available data collection tools for observations.

#### Basic Academic Goals

Special educators have long relied on teacher-made tests to assess basic academic skills. There will always be a place in the tool box for these. Another set of tools to consider are Curriculum-Based Measurements (CBM). These researched based tools can provide teachers with quick, easy-to-administer and reliable "probes" to assess acquisition of basic reading, math, spelling and writing skills.

CBMs are curriculum independent. They measure a narrow set of skills that are "indicators" of a more complex set of skills students need in order to make academic progress. They serve as a "temperature check"; as the students skills increase as measured by the CBM, there is a strong correlation to their overall improvement that might be measured on a more comprehensive, lengthier assessment.

CBMs also allow the formative assessment to be embedded directly into the goal. For example:

- In 36 weeks, given a \_\_\_\_ grade level passage, the student will read \_\_\_\_ correct words with no more than \_\_\_\_\_ errors in one minute.
- In 36 weeks, given a story starter, the student will write \_\_\_\_ correct word sequences in 3 minutes.

As schools implement "response to intervention" models, CBMs are used for universal screening and progress monitoring. It is only logical that these same tools be considered for progress monitoring for some IEP goals.

To learn more about curriculum-measurement check out this website:

<http://www.rti4success.org> and click on "Resources".



## Behavioral Goals

In addition to basic academic skills, IEPs address social, emotional, communication, and executive skills and behaviors. Many educators find it challenging to write measurable goals in these areas.

In order to effectively address these areas in an IEP, teachers first must be able to: 1) define the skill or behavior they are trying to change; and 2) describe it in observable terms. **Once you can observe something, you can count it. Once you can count something, you can measure if it changes.**

Many behaviors can be measured through one of the following data collection strategies:

1. **Duration recording** – measure of how long a behavior lasts.
  - For example – the amount of time the student can remain on task.
2. **Frequency recording** – measure of how often a behavior occurs.
  - For example – the number of times the student raises hand and waits to be called on by teacher.
3. **Latency recording** – measure of the length of time between stimuli and response behavior.
  - For example – the time it takes for student to begin work on assignment after teacher gives directions.
4. **Interval recording** – measure of the estimated percentage of time a behavior occurs.
  - For example – percentage of time student is rocking.

Educators face many challenges as they become more data-driven in their decision-making. Once they have the training and the tools, finding time to progress monitor may still be an obstacle. As Mark Shinn describes, staff members must know what best practice is and then focus on what is “feasible” to do within the reality of their jobs. Time for staff to schedule additional data collection tasks is necessary. If the goal is to improve IEPs and student progress, this last critical step can’t be overlooked.

### Try This:

1. Embed data collection into direct service provision whenever possible (Student receives 45 minutes of daily small group reading instruction – weekly reading probe administered during that time).
2. Coordinate with classroom teacher to progress monitor as part of learning stations.
3. Consider whether paraprofessionals can be trained to collect data.
4. Engage classroom teachers for suggestions on ways they can collect data.
5. Use existing sources of data (tardy slips, office referrals, etc.).
6. Use a floating substitute to free up staff to do observations/data collection in “real time”.

## Resources

### Useful Web sites:

[www.rti4success](http://www.rti4success.com) – Information on RTI and progress monitoring.

[www.interventioncentral.org](http://www.interventioncentral.org) – Information on creating academic probes and behavior charts and graphs.

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