Welcome to *IEPs: Writing Quality Individualized Education Programs, 3rd Edition*

We designed this guide for anyone involved in the special education of students with disabilities. It is useful for parents, preservice and inservice education professionals, and others who support families or provide services to these students. We know that many of you regularly serve, or will serve, on teams that provide educational services to students with disabilities, and you will likely be responsible for contributing to the development of individualized education programs (IEPs). This guide will facilitate your collaborative work on these teams.

Our goal is to help you write quality IEPs. Since the IEP is a legal document that guides the education of students with disabilities, it is critical that you gain the skills and knowledge to create IEPs that meet the standards of the law. To help you gain a deeper understanding of this process, we have organized this guide with several helpful features:

- Summary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) 2004 in language that is easy to understand
- Organization of the IEP process into seven manageable steps
- Explanation, modeling, practice, and feedback for each step
- Brief procedural summary at the end of each step

We have also added several new features:

- Emphasis on standards-based IEPs aligned with core curricula
- Writing standards-based goals for students achieving well below grade level
- Role of response to intervention (RTI)
- New sample IEPs for four students with varying disabilities and ages, including transition planning
- Alignment with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act
- A personal guide, Ms. Mentor, to provide comments, directions, and suggestions as you read and complete each step in the guide
Assumptions Behind This Guide

In developing this guide, we have assumed that you and the rest of the school team have completed the identification, referral, evaluation, and classification processes for your students with disabilities. This guide begins at the point when your team is ready to develop students’ IEPs.

Parameters for This Guide

This guide does not address planning for students without disabilities who struggle in school. Students whose primary language is not English or whose learning difficulties are caused by environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantages, or those students who have not received appropriate instruction are not eligible for special education and therefore do not need an IEP unless they also have a disability. These students may be served by other programs such as bilingual education, Title 1, or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Legal Basis for This Guide

Federal law mandates the special education process, so we have structured this guide in accordance with federal law and regulations, and we use terminology from the federal law throughout the text. Individual states must meet the requirements of the federal law, but each state may also add specific state policies and procedures. You should consult your state and district regulations for their specific policies, procedures, and terminology.

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—GSG and TTD
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Step 1 Describe the Student’s Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) requires that the individualized education program (IEP) include a statement of the student’s present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP). Stating a student’s PLAAFP is the first step in the IEP process because this information is the basis for selecting reasonable goals for the year’s improvement.

What is a PLAAFP statement?

A PLAAFP statement is a brief but detailed description of a student’s achievement and functional performance at the time the IEP is created. This description is derived from formal and informal assessments conducted by the team, from the student’s level of progress on the previous IEP goals, and from consideration of the student’s grade-level curriculum standards. The PLAAFP statement must address all areas affected by the disability. For example, because Ricky’s emotional disturbance affects his school behavior and his progress in the general curriculum, his PLAAFP statement addresses both functional behavior and academic achievement. Let’s take a look at the terms academic achievement and functional performance.

Academic achievement refers to gaining requisite skills and knowledge for success in school. The most important academic skills students learn are reading, writing, and math because these skills are foundational for achievement in other academic areas such as science, health, and social studies.

Functional performance can be defined as applying knowledge and skills to meet daily needs. Included are social skills such as engaging in healthy relationships and meeting school behavior expectations, as well as adaptive skills such as feeding and dressing oneself, participating in recreational activities, shopping for groceries, and applying and interviewing for a job.

Why differentiate between academic achievement and functional performance?

Academic achievement and functional performance are differentiated for students depending on their age and on the effects of disabilities on their learning. Most students’ education will focus primarily on the general curriculum, so their PLAAFP statements will center on academic achievement. Other students will need to gain functional living skills along with academic skills; therefore, their PLAAFP statements will describe both functional performance and academic needs.

Generally the larger the gap between a student’s academic or functional performance and age-appropriate core curriculum, the more likely the student’s IEP will address functional skills. For example, a 5-year-old child who does not correctly identify colors may have an academic goal for obtaining this skill. However, an 18-year-old student who does not correctly identify colors might have a more functional goal to prepare for adult living, such as sorting dark and light colors for laundry.
Why are PLAAFP statements important?

PLAAFP statements provide a starting point for all decisions regarding a student’s individualized education. Teachers must understand what students know and can do before planning the next steps. For example, if a teacher asks a student to read from *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss, but the student is unable to decode simple words, the result will be frustration and failure. Knowing the student’s reading skill level guides the teacher toward an appropriate starting point.

How does my team obtain information for developing a PLAAFP statement?

Obtaining the necessary information requires three steps: review the curriculum standards for academic achievement, determine the student’s current academic strengths and limitations, and assess the student’s current functional strengths and limitations. We describe these below.

1. **Review the curriculum standards for academic achievement.**
   Access your state’s curriculum standards, and review the requirements for the student’s grade level. Because an IEP must provide goals and attendant services required to help the student engage and progress in the general curriculum, the team should use the grade-level curriculum standards as guideposts to determine the student’s goals for improvement.

   For example, the math Common Core standard for numbers and operations in base 10 states that a third-grade student should “use place value understanding to round whole numbers to the nearest 10 or 100” (CCSS.Math.Content.3.NBT.A.1). This standard will serve as a later example for crafting a PLAAFP statement.

   The term standards-based IEP refers to PLAAFP statements and associated annual goals developed according to a state’s academic curriculum standards. States can either create their own grade-level standards for academic subjects or adopt the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).
2. **Determine the student’s current academic strengths and limitations.**

Multidisciplinary teams use both formal and informal assessment to determine student academic achievement. Formal assessment is typically used to determine eligibility for special education; informal assessment is used to guide daily instruction.

**Formal Assessment**

Formal assessments are standardized tests, meaning that the assessor follows a prescribed administration protocol for each student, or they are norm-referenced tests, which compare student achievement to a similar population based on age or grade level, or both. Formal assessments include tests of intelligence and tests of academic achievement. Intelligence tests broadly measure cognitive aptitude, indicating a student’s ability to process information as required for learning, and yield an IQ score.

Common standardized cognitive tests include the *Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children*, the *Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales*, and others. Common tests of achievement include the *Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery*, the *Wechsler Individual Achievement Test*, the *Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement*, and others. Standardized tests of specific skill areas include *Key Math*, *Woodcock Diagnostic Reading Battery*, and others.

**Informal Assessment**

Informal assessment may include criterion-referenced tests, curriculum-based assessments and measures, and teacher or parent checklists. Criterion-referenced tests compare student achievement to set criteria, such as the *Brigance Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills*, *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (DIBELS), some core curriculum tests designed by state offices of education, and alternate assessments designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Curriculum-based assessments measure student performance directly from the current curriculum, such as placement tests for a math program, and curriculum-based measures, such as teacher-made tests to check systematically progress toward mastering math facts.

Classroom teachers can provide observational anecdotes, skills checklists, and student work samples to help the team understand a student’s strengths and needs. Teachers are also good sources of information about student behavior and interpersonal relations with other students.

Parents or other caregivers are valuable sources of information. They know the student better than the school does and can give insight into interests, hobbies, and talents. Parents can complete behavioral or functional living checklists, and they can also enlighten the team regarding a student’s history of success or failure and strategies that have worked well in the past.

Returning to our third-grade Common Core math example, a team member can use data from a recent formal test or from an informal test with several sample problems to measure a student’s ability to use place value understanding to round whole numbers to the nearest 10 or 100. If results show that the student can round to the nearest 10 but not to the nearest 100, then the team will note this performance gap in the PLAAFP statement.

3. **Assess the student’s current functional strengths and limitations.**

Similar to determining a student’s academic performance, the team uses formal and informal assessment along with parent input to identify a student’s functional strengths and
limitations. Formal assessments of adaptive functioning include norm-referenced tests such as the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales, Scales of Independent Behavior, and the Adaptive Behavior Scale. Other formal assessments measure students’ prosocial or maladaptive behavior, such as the Behavior Observation Sequence and the Behavior Assessment System for Children. These assessments are usually completed by classroom teachers, school psychologists, and/or parents.

Informal assessment involves criterion-referenced tests that compare students’ functional skills to set criteria, such as the Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development, Checklist of Adaptive Living Skills, and state or district alternate assessments designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

**TEACHING FUNCTIONAL SKILLS**

Collaboration with parents is critical when assessing functional skills. Skills that are functional at school may not be functional at home, and vice versa, so school professionals and parents must work closely together to describe students’ present levels of functional performance across environments.

The team summarizes relevant data from these various sources to describe the student’s present levels of academic achievement and functional performance in areas affected by the student’s disability. These data are useful for determining the gap between the student’s current achievement and relevant standards.

**How does my team create a PLAAFP statement?**

IDEA requires your team to do the following when creating a PLAAFP statement:

1. Describe how the disability affects the student’s academic achievement and functional performance in the relevant skill areas.

2. For elementary or secondary students, describe how the disability affects the student’s involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.

3. For preschool students, describe how the disability affects the student’s participation in appropriate activities.

In practice, teams often include a statement of the student’s strengths as well as the effects of the disability on the individual’s achievement or functional performance. This strengths-based approach more accurately portrays the student’s functioning by stating what he or she has mastered within the curriculum. The common format for this type of PLAAFP statement has three parts, focused in reference to relevant standards:

1. A description of the student’s academic or functional strengths, sometimes referred to as “can do.”

2. A description of the student’s academic or functional limitations, or “cannot do.”

3. A statement of needed improvement to progress in the general curriculum, or “needs to.”
A well-written PLAAFP has sufficient detail to provide descriptive and logical cues for writing the accompanying annual goals.

What if the demands of the general curriculum are too high for some students?

IDEA recognizes that a few students’ disabilities are likely to prevent them from meeting grade-level standards in the general curriculum, even with appropriate accommodations and modifications (34 CFR §300.320[a][2][ii]). All students are required to take state assessments to meet accountability standards of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. However, NCLB states that up to 2% of a state's or district's students (approximately 20% of students with disabilities) may take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards (34 CFR §200.13[c][2][ii]). IEP teams decide which students will take standard assessments, with or without modifications or accommodations, and which students will take alternate assessments. You will learn more about this in Step 6.

Alternate achievement standards, sometimes referred to as extended standards, are created and adopted by individual states. NCLB requires states to link alternate standards to the grade-level core standards; they may be reduced in breadth or depth, but they must be appropriately challenging. For example, Dynamic Learning Maps Essential Elements (EE) (University of Kansas, 2010) alternate standards indicate that, where the first-grade Common Core requires students to decode regularly spelled one-syllable words (RF.1.3), students with significant cognitive disabilities will, with guidance and support, recognize familiar words that are used in everyday routines (EE.RF.1.3; Utah State Office of Education, n.d.). Alternate achievement standards are the reference for developing academic PLAAFP statements for these students.

What does a PLAAFP statement look like?

Here is the PLAAFP statement for reading from eighth-grade student Jameelah’s IEP:

Informal passage fluency measures (1/21/__) show Jameelah has mastered oral reading standards to the fifth-grade level but cannot read sixth- or seventh-grade passages fluently. Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement (1/28/__) indicate she has mastered passage comprehension standards to fifth-grade level, but she cannot comprehend accurately at the sixth-grade level or beyond. To progress in the eighth-grade general curriculum, Jameelah needs to read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 6 to 8 text complexity band independently and proficiently (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.10).

Does Jameelah’s PLAAFP include the necessary elements?

Yes it does, but let’s take a closer look at the statement to see how it includes the necessary elements:

1. It describes how the disability affects the student’s academic achievement and functional performance in the relevant skill areas.

   Jameelah has mastered oral reading standards to the fifth-grade level but cannot read sixth- or seventh-grade passages fluently. Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement (1/28/__) indicate she has mastered passage comprehension standards to the fifth-grade level, but she cannot comprehend accurately at sixth-grade level or beyond.
2. It states how the disability affects the student's engagement and progress in the general education curriculum.

   To progress in the eighth-grade general curriculum, Jameelah needs to read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 6 to 8 text complexity band independently and proficiently (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.10).

3. If this IEP were for a preschool student, it would state, as appropriate, how the disability affects the student's participation in appropriate activities.

   This does not apply to Jameelah because she is in the eighth grade. If she were a preschool student, it might state that she is able to participate in parallel play with other children but is not ready for contexts requiring student interaction.

May I see another example?

Sure. Here is the math PLAAFP statement from Angelica's IEP, which does not reference the Common Core curriculum because she is beyond high school age and is one of the few students whose significant cognitive disabilities are best addressed with an alternate curriculum:

**MATH:** Informal assessment (April 6) indicates that Angelica can use a calculator to compute addition and subtraction problems, but she cannot compute to four digits with more than 65% accuracy or compute two-digit multiplication and division problems with more than 50% accuracy. When asked, Angelica can give the names and values of coins, but she cannot count pennies beyond 20 cents or use the “dollar more” strategy to values beyond $10. She can use a debit card when purchasing items, but she cannot use it independently with more than 25% accuracy. She can read time on a digital clock, but she cannot follow her daily schedule with more than 50% accuracy. Angelica needs to use the commutative, associative, and distributive properties to add, subtract, and multiply whole numbers (EE.N-CN.2.a; alternate curriculum); count coins to $1.00 and currency to $25; use her debit card with 75% accuracy; and tell time to follow her daily schedule with at least 80% accuracy.

Does Angelica's example include the necessary elements?

Yes it does, but let's look closely at the statement so you can see how it includes the necessary elements for a student with significant cognitive disabilities whose needs fall within an alternate academic curriculum:

1. It describes how the disability affects the student's academic achievement and functional performance in the relevant skill areas.

   Angelica can use a calculator to compute addition and subtraction problems, but she cannot compute to four digits with more than 65% accuracy or compute two-digit multiplication and division problems with more than 50% accuracy. When asked, Angelica can give the names and values of coins, but she cannot count pennies beyond 20 cents or use the “dollar more” strategy to values beyond $10. She can use a debit card when purchasing items, but she cannot use it independently with more than 25% accuracy. She can read time on a digital clock, but she cannot follow her daily schedule with more than 50% accuracy.
2. It states how the disability affects the student’s involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.

   Angelica is learning an alternative curriculum suited to her functional needs rather than the general curriculum.

3. If this IEP were for a preschool student, it would state, as appropriate, how the disability affects the student’s participation in appropriate activities.

   This does not apply to Angelica since she is in the 12th grade.

What about PLAAFP statements for students with behavioral needs?

Behavioral expectations are not usually listed as hierarchical standards the way that academics are, so team members must identify and define student behaviors that are and are not appropriate and productive in various settings. Teams use observation data summarized as detailed descriptions of behavior to create appropriate PLAAFP statements. Observation formats describe behaviors, such as in seat, out of seat, talking out, hitting, and noncompliance with teacher directives, and record frequency, duration, and/or latency data.

Teams must use multiple observations over different days, times, and environments to determine if student behavior is pervasive, contextual, or just an occasional bad day. IEPs should address measurable behaviors that consistently interfere with the student’s progress in the general curriculum or interfere with the learning of other students.

Having a few bad behavior days is not the same as having serious emotional disturbance. Sometimes things just don’t go well for students, but that doesn’t mean they have a disability.
May I see an example?

Sure. Let’s look at Ricky’s PLAAFP statement, which addresses his behavior:

During three 30-minute classroom observations (9/15/__, 9/17/__, 9/23/__) and three 15-minute cafeteria observations (9/16, 10/18), Ricky refused to comply with teacher requests or directives an average of seven out of seven times and pushed reading materials away or off his desk an average of three out of three times. During two 30-minute cafeteria observations (9/16, 10/18) Ricky had two instances each of pushing students out of line, cutting in the food and tray deposit lines, and verbally refusing an adult’s reminders that these behaviors are against the rules. Ricky needs to decrease behavior outbursts in the classroom and cafeteria and to increase compliance with teacher directives to interact appropriately with others to progress in the general curriculum.

Notice that Ricky’s PLAAFP describes these behaviors:

- Refused to comply with teacher requests or directives
- Pushed reading materials away or off his desk
- Pushed students out of line
- Cut in the food and tray deposit lines
- Verbally refused an adult’s reminders that these behaviors are against the rules

The IEP also includes how the behavior was measured:

- During three 30-minute classroom observations (9/15/__, 9/17/__, 9/23/__)
- During two 15-minute cafeteria observations (9/16, 10/18)

It notes the number or degree of occurrences:

- An average of seven out of seven times
- An average of three out of three times
- Two instances each

And it includes a “needs to” statement:

Ricky needs to decrease behavior outbursts in the classroom and cafeteria and to increase compliance with teacher directives to interact appropriately with others to progress in the general curriculum.

Now it’s your turn.

Here are assessment data for Samuel, a fourth-grade student with intellectual disabilities who is learning in the general curriculum. Your task is to summarize the data into a brief but descriptive PLAAFP for Samuel’s IEP. When you have finished, check your PLAAFP with our suggestion in the appendix.
Achievement Testing

- **Math Calculation**: 9/10 one-digit addition and subtraction correct; 0/10 two-digit and one-digit without renaming correct; 0/5 multiplication and division correct.

- **Written expression**: Dictates simple sentences when given a subject, 5/5 correct; writes simple sentences when given a subject, 0/5 correct.

Functional Skills Assessment

- **Self-Help Skills**: Correctly selects his backpack in a group of others but does not place school materials in the backpack without prompting. Uses the restroom independently but does not fasten pants or wash hands without reminding.

- **Socialization**: Starts, joins, and maintains a conversation with peers but does not end a conversation without prompting; interrupts others in their conversations.

PLAAFP for Samuel:

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Common Errors

Here are errors that are common in writing PLAAFP statements:

1. Writing a statement with vague descriptions of achievement or performance
   
   “Sophia is earning a C– in math.”
   “Emma’s reading standard score is 84,”
   “Mason can’t control his behaviors in public.”

2. Writing a statement that is not related to the student’s curriculum
   
   “Ava is very helpful at home.”
   “Maya is a conscientious teacher assistant.”
   “Noah eats his breakfast without assistance.”

3. Writing a statement that is not related to the student’s disability
   
   “Luis [with a reading disability] has excellent grades in band and chorus.”
   “Yulia [5-year-old with a speech fluency disorder] knows her colors and shapes.”

4. Writing a “can do” statement but no “cannot” or “does not do” statement
   
   “Leilani knows her letter names and sounds and can sound out simple words.”
“Sangeetha behaves appropriately in a well-structured setting.”
“Billi has learned to ride the bus independently.”

5. For a preschoofer, writing a statement that does not indicate how the disability affects the student’s participation in appropriate activities

“Francesco [3 years old] is unable to state his birth date.” (Most 3-year-olds cannot do this so it is not an appropriate activity.)
“Cyrus [4 years old] cannot sit for more than 30 minutes to listen to the teacher read a story.” (Four-year-olds are not expected to sit and listen for 30 minutes so this is not an appropriate activity.)
“Quon [4 years old] is unable to match upper- and lowercase letters on a worksheet.” (Four-year-olds generally do not use worksheets, and the task is too complex for her age, so this is not an appropriate activity.)

Now you try some.

For each incomplete or poorly written PLAAFP statement below, indicate the common errors. Check your answers with ours in the appendix.

PLAAFP statement: “Kingston [14-year-old boy] initiates and sustains conversations with peers and can call his friends on the telephone.”
Error:

PLAAFP statement: “Evangeline [9-year-old girl with specific learning disabilities in reading] writes all uppercase and lowercase letters in isolation and in words. She does not form closed letters correctly. Her penmanship skills inhibit her progress in the general writing curriculum.”
Error:

PLAAFP statement: “McCoy [6-year-old boy] is often out of control and is unhappy with school.”
Error:

Let’s review the elements of a PLAAFP statement.

A PLAAFP statement must include these three elements:

1. A description of how the disability affects the student’s academic achievement and functional performance in relevant skill areas
2. For K–12 students, a statement of how the disability affects the student’s involvement and progress in the general education curriculum

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3. For preschool students, an explanation of how the disability affects the student’s participation in appropriate activities

In practice, the PLAAFP may include these elements and references relevant standards:

1. A description of the student’s strengths, sometimes referred to as “can do”
2. A description of the student’s limitations, or “cannot do”
3. A statement of needed improvement to progress in the general curriculum, or “needs to”

The statement should look like this for a student with academic needs:

Duncan [second grade] can say all letter names and sounds. DIBELS testing of 1/21 shows that he cannot read second-grade oral reading passages at the midyear benchmark of 72 words correct per minute (wcpm). He cannot answer literal or inferential reading comprehension questions from DIBELS oral reading fluency passages. He needs to read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension to progress in the general curriculum. (CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.RF.2.4)

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU HAVE COMPLETED STEP 1. LET’S MOVE ON TO STEP 2, WRITING MEASURABLE ANNUAL GOALS.

1. Describe the student’s present levels of academic achievement and functional performance.
2. Write measurable annual goals.
3. Measure and report student progress.
4. State the services needed to achieve annual goals.
5. Explain the extent, if any, to which the student will not participate with nondisabled students in the regular class and in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities.
6. Explain accommodations necessary to measure academic achievement and functional performance on state- and districtwide assessments.
7. Complete a transition plan for students age 16 and older.
References


You have learned that statements of a student’s present levels of academic achievement and functional performance describe how the disability affects involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. In this section, you will learn that measurable annual goals designate what the student is expected to achieve within one year to address the effects of the disability. Present levels reflect present conditions; annual goals describe future achievement.

**What are measurable annual goals?**

Measurable annual goals are the individualized education program (IEP) team’s best estimate of what the student can accomplish in the next year. A statement of measurable academic and functional performance goals must do the following:

1. Meet the student’s needs related to the disability that may interfere with his or her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum
2. Meet the student’s additional educational needs resulting from the disability
3. Be measurable

**What is the general education curriculum?**

The general curriculum is established by a state office of education and is implemented in individual schools under the direction of school districts. Some states provide curricula consisting of a general scope and sequence for each grade level, while others use more specific measurable outcomes for each subject area in each grade. Most states participate in the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which is the reference for the sample goals in this chapter. It is important to know that students with disabilities are entitled to have access to and progress in the general curriculum like their peers without disabilities.

**What are “additional educational needs resulting from the disability”?**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) requires IEP teams to consider a student’s academic, developmental, and functional needs. Because the designation general education curriculum refers mainly to academic subjects, additional educational needs refers to the student’s developmental and functional needs that result directly from the disability. The term developmental refers to a predictable sequence of growth. Therefore, a student with developmental difficulties may fall considerably behind peers in areas such as self-care, language, or motor skills. Functional refers to applying knowledge and skills to meet everyday needs such as eating, dressing, communicating, and accessing transportation. The curriculum for a preschool child with severe disabilities may focus on developmental growth, whereas the curriculum for an adolescent with severe disabilities may focus primarily on functional living skills.
What does measurable mean?

The term measurable means the behavior stated in the goal can be observed and measured to determine when it has been achieved. For example, a goal to understand addition is not observable or measurable because it does not specify how the student will demonstrate understanding. You cannot watch a student understand; you can only see evidence of understanding in some observable form. Stated in measurable terms, the goal might be “write correct answers to addition problems” rather than “understand grade-level addition.” You can observe written answers and easily measure their accuracy.

How does the IEP team set goals that are important to the student and the family?

The team sets goals that are important to the student and the family by inviting and considering their desires and opinions. You’ll remember that the IEP team includes the parents or guardians, relevant school professionals, and the student when appropriate. Each team member contributes necessary perspectives toward setting appropriate goals, and parent and student perspectives are very important. Let’s look at each team member’s contributions.

Parents. Parents know much about what the student can reasonably accomplish, based on their child’s history in the home and at school. Thus, IEP teams must consider and include parent perspectives in goal setting. Too often parents are marginalized in the goal-setting process by school personnel who are more concerned with having the student fit in with existing curricula and convenient routines than with what is actually most appropriate.

Regular classroom teacher. The regular classroom teacher understands the general curriculum and can guide the team to align IEP goals with it.

Special education teacher. The special education teacher can break down the general curriculum standards or instructional tasks in the areas affected by the student’s disability in order to write reasonable goals for achievement within the year.

Related service providers. Related service providers include professionals such as speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school psychologists, and school social workers. These professionals provide assessment information in their areas of specialty to help the team develop goals for improvement in the specialty areas they represent.

Individual(s) who can interpret evaluation results. A teacher or related services provider who can explain test results should be included so that team members can understand the results and apply them in selecting appropriate goals. For example, a special education teacher can interpret achievement test results, a school psychologist can explain psychological test results, and an occupational therapist can explain the results of fine motor skill assessment.

Local education agency (LEA) representative. The LEA representative verifies the availability of resources necessary to achieve the goals. The LEA representative may be the principal, assistant principal, other school administrator, or a designee.

Other individuals with special knowledge or expertise. At the discretion of the parent or the school, participants in goal setting may include a family advocate, a cultural/linguistic interpreter, an after-school care provider, or other individual who has relevant knowledge of the disability or of the child as an individual.

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Student. Student participation in goal setting helps the team understand personal likes, dislikes, and goals for the future, particularly when the IEP team begins to plan for the student’s transition to adult life. Students should be invited to take part in the IEP planning when they are able to contribute.

**How do I write grade-level goals when the student’s achievement is well below grade level?**

When the student is achieving well below grade level, the team might write goals using a bilevel approach. The bilevel approach means that one or more goals address the student’s grade-level standards, and one or more goals address necessary skill improvements at a lower level. For example, for a student who cannot read at grade level, the team may consider the student’s strengths that can contribute to grade-level goals without requiring reading skills the student does not have. On a lower level, subsequent goals can address the skill deficits within the same standard (Yates, 2014).

**Can I see examples of bilevel annual goals?**

Sure. Let’s look at Jameelah, who is in eighth grade. Reading goal 1 states given stories, dramas, and poems of eighth-grade complexity read aloud to her and weekly opportunities to practice, Jameelah will say or write answers to literal and inferential questions about theme, characters, and events with at least 90% accuracy on two samples of each text type, as measured by teacher observation records and informal written work (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.10). The Common Core standard actually requires students to “read” and comprehend, but Jameelah cannot read eighth-grade-level material. Therefore, her first goal addresses comprehension through listening to the passages and then answering questions. This grade-level goal still addresses the comprehension requirement, but it does not rely on reading. Goals 2 and 3 require a lower level of skill because they address skill deficits for reading fluency and reading comprehension required to meet the standard.

Remember, the PLAAFP statement includes “can do,” “cannot do,” and “needs to” statements. The “needs to” statement identifies the grade-level standard, and the “cannot do” statements indicate skill deficits that need improvement. Therefore, begin by writing a goal for the “needs to” grade-level curriculum standard and then write goals to address the “cannot do” skill deficit(s). Let’s look at the reading example from Jameelah’s IEP.

**PLAAFP**

Informal passage fluency measures (1/21/__) show Jameelah has mastered oral reading standards to the fifth-grade level but cannot read sixth- or seventh-grade passages fluently. Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement (1/28/__) indicate she has mastered passage comprehension standards to fifth-grade level, but she cannot comprehend accurately at the sixth-grade level or beyond. To progress in the [eighth-grade] general curriculum, Jameelah needs to read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 6 to 8 text complexity band independently and proficiently (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.10).

**Goal Indicators**

**Needs to.** To progress in the eighth-grade general curriculum Jameelah needs to read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 6 to 8 text complexity band independently and proficiently to progress in the general curriculum.
1. **Annual Goal**  
   Given stories, dramas, and poems of eighth-grade complexity read aloud to her and weekly opportunities to practice, Jameelah will say or write answers to literal and inferential questions about theme, characters, and events with at least 90% or greater accuracy on two samples of each text type, as measured by teacher observation records and informal written work (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.10).

   **Cannot do.** Jameelah cannot read sixth- or seventh-grade passages fluently.

2. **Annual Goal**  
   Given reading passages at seventh-grade level from fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and weekly opportunities to practice, Jameelah will orally read each text type at 100 or more words correct per minute with at least 95% accuracy in four of five opportunities as measured by progress monitoring and teacher observation records.

   **Cannot do.** Jameelah cannot comprehend accurately at a sixth-grade level or beyond.

3. **Annual Goal**  
   Given reading passages at the seventh-grade level from fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and weekly opportunities to practice, Jameelah will read the passages and say or write answers to literal and inferential comprehension questions with at least 80% accuracy for four of five passages as measured by teacher observation records.

Notice the bilevel nature of the goals. The first annual goal addresses the grade-level standard, but it requires listening comprehension rather than reading comprehension. The third annual goal requires Jameelah to read and comprehend but at a more reasonable level of two grade levels above her current achievement level. Given appropriately intensive instruction and practice, it is not unreasonable for Jameelah to gain two grade levels in reading achievement.

**What are the components of a measurable annual goal?**

IDEA does not specify the wording for writing a measurable annual goal. The law requires only that annual goals must address progress in the general curriculum, address other needs caused by the disability, and be measurable. IEP teams usually use a format established by the school or district. In addition, best practice suggests that a truly measurable goal has at least the following four elements:

1. **The student’s name.** Including the student’s name personalizes the goal and ensures that anyone accessing the record knows whose needs are addressed.

2. **A description of the conditions under which the behavior will be performed.** Conditions may include instructional personnel, materials, settings, and specific instructional cues. The conditions for Jameelah’s second annual goal are “given reading passages at the seventh-grade level from fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and weekly opportunities to practice.”

3. **The specific observable behavior to be performed.** This designated behavior should come from the PLAAFP statement. Observable behaviors are those the teacher can see or hear. For example, the behavior for Jameelah’s third annual goal is to “orally read each text type.” The teacher can hear Jameelah read but would not be able to observe how she understands, thinks, or feels about reading simply by listening. *Understands, thinks, feels, and knows* are not observable behaviors; therefore, these terms should not be used in writing annual goals. Similarly, the phrase *be able to* is not appropriate for the annual goal, for two reasons. First,
students may be able to engage in certain behaviors but be prevented from doing so by
conditions, such as lack of access to materials, insufficient time to complete tasks, or unwillingness to complete the task (yet having the skills to do so). For example, Davida, a 10-year-old girl who has an intellectual disability, can tie her own shoes. But when she is asked to do so, she often refuses. Writing a goal for her to “be able to tie her shoelaces” is not appropriate because she already has the skill; the skill deficit that she needs to work on is following teacher directions. Second, the wording is imprecise: The word will is more active and direct.

4. **The criterion to indicate the level of performance at which the goal will be achieved.**
The criterion for Jameelah’s third goal is “with at least 80% accuracy for four of five passages.” This means that she will answer at least 80% of comprehension questions correctly from at least four of five assigned reading passages. Criteria must be related to the behavior. There are many ways to set criteria:

- **Percentage** is appropriate where the number of trials differs from time to time, such as opportunities to engage in peer play.
- **Number correct or number of allowable errors** is used when the number of trials remains constant, such as 20 spelling words each week.
- **Rate** refers to speed and accuracy, such as the number of words read correctly in 1 minute or the number of math facts written correctly in 1 minute.
- **Frequency** is a measure of the number of times a behavior occurs in a set time frame, such as the number of verbal outbursts in a class period.
- **Latency** measures the time lapse between a stimulus and the desired student response. For instance, the criterion may require a student to respond to a peer’s greeting within 15 seconds.
- **Duration** indicates the length of time a behavior continues, like the number of minutes a student hits the desk before stopping.

The appropriate criterion measure for a goal is an important choice. For example, a teacher once collected frequency data on student screaming that showed that the student cried only twice per day: once from 8:00 a.m. until lunchtime, and once more from lunch until 3:00 p.m. The teacher quickly realized that duration data were more appropriate.

**Consider adding two components to the annual goal.**

1. **A statement of generalization indicating additional conditions under which the behavior will be performed to criterion.** Generalization criteria ensure that the student can perform the task under various circumstances, including:
   - with different people
   - in various environments
   - with varied instructional cues
   - at different times of the day
   - with different materials

For example, one of Angelica’s math benchmarks requires her to follow her schedule “in at least three different settings.” This is important because some students learn to perform tasks in one area, such as following a school schedule, but struggle to carry over their skills to different situations, such as following work and home schedules.
2. A statement of maintenance indicating the student will perform the task to criterion for a specified period of time. This is appropriate when the skill needs to be performed accurately over a period of time in order to ensure mastery. For example, a student may count to ten accurately on Friday, but be unable to do so on Monday. The student may need more opportunities to practice the skill with high levels of accuracy to ensure retention. Maintenance data do not need to be collected daily once the student has reached mastery criterion. Teachers may measure maintenance by probing, or collecting data, on a weekly or monthly basis. For example, the maintenance statement for one of Angelica’s math benchmarks requires her to “maintain this skill when probed weekly for at least 4 weeks,” which will demonstrate that she has both mastered and retained it.

Why does best practice include these elements for annual goals?

These elements ensure that all team members understand and agree on the specific learning or behaviors expected of a student. This is essential for three reasons:

1. Teachers use well-written goals to plan accurate instruction and learning activities for students. Nebulous or nonspecific annual goals are too likely to lead to undirected instruction and wasted learning time.

2. Teachers use these elements to design and administer accurate assessments of student progress toward the annual goals. Continual monitoring guides teachers to make changes in curriculum and instruction if a student is not progressing.

3. Team members refer to the components of well-written annual goals to verify the student’s final achievement.

May I see examples of poorly written annual goals?

Certainly. Here are two examples that omit important elements.

Example 1: Edgar will understand how to write accurately.

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

- [ ] a statement of conditions in which the behavior will be performed
- [ ] a statement of observable, measurable behavior
- [ ] a statement of criterion for mastery
- [ ] a statement of generalization
- [ ] a statement of maintenance
Now it’s your turn.

1. Here is an annual goal for Maddie. Write the phrase from the goal next to the matching element in the list below. Then check your answer with our suggestions in the appendix.

   **Annual Goal**
   When given a grocery list with five or fewer items and a $10.00 bill, Maddie will select and purchase all the items on the list with fewer than five prompts in three different grocery stores over a 3-week period.

   **Conditions:**

   **Behavior:**

   **Criteria:**

   **Generalization:**

   **Maintenance:**

2. Here is one part of a PLAAPF statement for Suraj, a second-grade boy. Your task is to write an annual goal to address this need, making sure to include all five elements. Check your answer with the suggestions in the appendix.

   **PLAAPF Statement**
   When directed by the teacher to be seated, Suraj yells defiantly and refuses to sit at his desk 80% of observed instances across settings.

   **Annual Goal**

   **Conditions:**

   **Behavior:**

   **Criteria:**

   **Generalization:**

   **Maintenance:**

   Each IEP team might create annual goals that differ from the goals written by other teams, based on the team’s knowledge of the student’s preferences and capabilities and the demands of the educational environments in which the student is served. So the goal we suggest in the appendix serves only as an example of what a team might decide is appropriate for Suraj.

**Does the IEP team need to include benchmarks or short-term objectives for annual goals?**

This requirement varies. Previous versions of IDEA required that all annual goals include benchmarks or short-term objectives. Now the law requires these provisions only for students who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards.

**What does this mean for the team?**

The IEP team must determine a student’s need for alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards and then add benchmarks or short-term objectives to the annual goals. Alternate standards and alternate assessment procedures apply only to the small percentage of
students whose disabilities inhibit them from progressing comparably to their peers without disabilities in the general curriculum; these students cannot be judged by the same standards.

What are benchmarks and short-term objectives?

Benchmarks and short-term objectives are two ways to break down annual goals into smaller, measurable parts. They enable teachers to monitor student achievement in intervals and report progress to IEP team members more than once per year. The two terms are often used interchangeably, but we see benchmarks and short-term objectives as different ways to describe expected progress.

**Benchmarks**, which are concerned with a single skill, have three components:

1. They break down one skill into major milestones to be achieved throughout the year.
2. They describe levels of increasing performance for the target skill, such as accuracy, fluency, or difficulty.
3. Many of them include dates by which students are expected to meet the milestones.

For example, traveling from your home to your school requires that you proceed to the first turn, continue to the second turn, and so on, until you drive into the school parking lot. Your goal is to travel from your home to the school, and the turns represent benchmarks that must be met accurately and sequentially.

**Short-term objectives** describe multiple, related but distinct and nonsequential skills necessary to achieve the annual goal. For example, preparing to travel from your home to your school might require you to dress, fix your hair, and eat breakfast. These tasks are related to preparing to leave, but they need not be completed in a particular sequence.

Would you explain the terms and accompanying processes in more detail?

Certainly. We provide descriptions, examples, and figures to help explain the differences between benchmarks and short-term objectives.

**Benchmarks**

Benchmarks set out major milestones to achieving an annual goal. These goals can be broken down into benchmarks in a variety of ways, including performance, assistance level, task analysis, generalization, and a combination. Here are some sample phrases from benchmarks showing these four ways to break down annual goals.

*Performance.* The goal can be benchmarked according to within-child factors like the level of accuracy, fluency, difficulty, or quality required to ensure that the student has acquired the skill or knowledge.

- Sort three types of kitchen utensils at least 67% correctly by October 31 (accuracy)
- Read 50 words correctly per minute by January 31 (fluency)
- Put on shoes; then put on shoes and fasten Velcro; finally, put on shoes, then tie shoe laces by April 30 (difficulty)
- Drill holes in key rack with uniform depth and diameter by May 15 (quality)
**Figure 3.** Benchmarks Performance.

This example shows the “needs to” portion of a present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) statement, followed by the annual goal divided into benchmarks with projected achievement dates and with three criteria for increased accuracy throughout the school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmark 1</th>
<th>Benchmark 2</th>
<th>Annual Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased accuracy, fluency, difficulty, or quality</td>
<td>Increased accuracy, fluency, difficulty, or quality</td>
<td>Increased accuracy, fluency, difficulty, or quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 2.5-grade-level fiction and nonfiction text with 40% accuracy</td>
<td>Read 2.5-grade-level fiction and nonfiction text with 60% accuracy</td>
<td>Read 2.5-grade-level fiction and nonfiction text with 80% accuracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assistance level.** The goal can be benchmarked according to the level of outside assistance needed to complete the task. An example of this progressive assistance level follows:

- Use computer mouse with *full physical* prompting in 10 weeks.
- Use computer mouse with *only verbal prompting* in 15 weeks.
- Use computer mouse with *no prompting* in 20 weeks.

**Figure 4.** Benchmarks Assistance Level.

This example shows the “needs to” portion of a present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) statement, followed by the annual goal divided into benchmarks with projected achievement dates showing four ways to provide decreasing levels of assistance throughout the school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmark 1</th>
<th>Benchmark 2</th>
<th>Annual Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full prompt</td>
<td>Partial prompt</td>
<td>No prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete dressing tasks with <em>full physical prompting</em> by October 1.</td>
<td>Complete dressing tasks with <em>partial physical prompting</em> by December 1.</td>
<td>Complete dressing tasks with <em>no prompting</em> by April 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>Complete dressing tasks with <em>modeling</em> by February 1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Task analysis.** The goal can be task-analyzed: broken down into components to be mastered sequentially in order to accomplish the complete goal. For example, the goal of counting to 100 could use the following benchmarks:

- Rote count 1 to 10 in 5 weeks.
- Rote count 1 to 20 (requires -teen numbers) in 8 weeks.
- Rote count 1 to 100 (uses the same pattern after 20) in 15 weeks.

**Figure 5.** Benchmarks Task Analysis.

This example shows the “needs to” portion of a present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) statement, followed by the annual goal divided into benchmarks with projected achievement dates showing four sequential steps necessary to meet the annual goal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Goal</th>
<th>Benchmark 3</th>
<th>Benchmark 2</th>
<th>Benchmark 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill 3</td>
<td>Dry clothes.</td>
<td>Skill 2 Wash clothes.</td>
<td>Skill 1 Sort clothes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill 2</td>
<td>Wash clothes.</td>
<td>Skill 1 Sort clothes.</td>
<td>Skill 1 Sort clothes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill 1</td>
<td>Sort clothes.</td>
<td>Skill 1 Sort clothes.</td>
<td>Skill 1 Sort clothes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLAAFP “Needs to” Statement</td>
<td>Student needs to sort, wash, dry, and fold clothes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Generalization.** A goal can be benchmarked by increasing the areas of generalization to other cues, materials, people, times of day, or environments. For example, the IEP team may choose to benchmark an IEP goal to care totally for toileting needs with the most salient form(s) of generalization:

- Totally care for toileting needs when reminded by the teacher by October 15. (cue)
- Totally care for toileting needs using a urinal by March 30. (materials)
- Totally care for toileting needs while other students are in the school restroom by November 1. (people)
- Totally care for toileting needs before lunch by February 28. (time of day)
- Totally care for toileting needs using restrooms in the community by April 1. (environment)
Figure 6. Benchmarks Generalization.

This example shows the “needs to” portion of a present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) statement, followed by the annual goal divided into benchmarks with projected achievement dates showing three ways to generalize the skill across the school year. It also shows the annual goal broken down into two, rather than three, benchmarks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmark 1</th>
<th>Benchmark 2</th>
<th>Annual Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Person, environment, cue, time, and/or material</td>
<td>3 Different persons, environments, cues, times, and/or materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase food in fast-food restaurant by November 1.</td>
<td>Purchase food from street vendor by May 1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student needs to purchase food in fast-food restaurants, in sit-down restaurants, and from street vendors.</td>
<td>Purchase food in sit-down restaurant.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These criteria are not mutually exclusive. You may decide to combine two or more of them in writing benchmarks for annual goals.

Figure 7. Benchmarks Combination of Performance and Assistance Level.

This example shows the “needs to” portion of a present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) statement. The annual goal is divided into benchmarks with projected achievement dates and with increasing criteria for accuracy combined with levels of decreasing assistance throughout the school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmark 1</th>
<th>Benchmark 2</th>
<th>Annual Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased accuracy, fluency, difficulty, or quality Follow picture-based directions, 60% accuracy, full physical prompts, by November 1.</td>
<td>Increased accuracy, fluency, difficulty, or quality Follow picture-based directions, 70% accuracy, partial physical prompts, by February 1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased accuracy, fluency, difficulty, or quality Follow picture-based directions, 80% accuracy, peer modeling, by April 1.</td>
<td>Increased accuracy, fluency, difficulty, or quality Follow picture-based directions, 80% accuracy, no assistance, by June 1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These criteria are not mutually exclusive. You may decide to combine two or more of them in writing benchmarks for annual goals.
How many benchmarks must the team write?

The law uses the plural terminology “a description of benchmarks or short-term objectives”; thus, there must be at least two benchmarks for each annual goal.

May I see an example of a goal with benchmarks?

Here is an example of benchmarks for Angelica using task analysis.

Annual Goal
When in a social setting with peers, Angelica will initiate conversation and discuss a range of at least five different topics with at least five-word sentences and/or phrases over at least 50% of observed occurrences, and maintain this skill when probed weekly for at least 4 weeks.

Benchmarks

a. When with a new friend or an acquaintance and using a picture prompt, Angelica will initiate conversation in at least 50% of observed occurrences and maintain this skill when probed weekly for at least 4 weeks.

b. When with a new friend or an acquaintance and using a picture prompt, Angelica will discuss a new topic in at least 50% of observed occurrences and maintain this skill when probed weekly for at least 4 weeks, on at least five different topics.

c. When with a new friend or an acquaintance and using a picture prompt, Angelica will discuss a topic using at least five-word sentences and/or phrases in at least 50% of observed occurrences and maintain this skill when probed weekly for at least 4 weeks, on at least five different topics.

Angelica’s benchmarks are task-analyzed to occur in sequence and can be illustrated as follows:

Figure 8. Angelica’s benchmarks task analyzed.
May I see examples of incompletely written benchmarks?

Here are two examples of incompletely written benchmarks:

1. Demetri will cook a frozen meal in a microwave oven without burning it.

   YES ☐ NO ☑
   a statement of conditions in which the behavior will be performed

   YES ☑ NO ☐
   a statement of observable, measurable behavior

   YES ☑ NO ☐
   a statement of criterion for mastery (“without burning it”)

   YES ☑ NO ☐
   a statement of generalization

   YES ☑ NO ☐
   a statement of maintenance

2. When Olivia’s nose is runny and her teacher asks her to wipe it, Olivia will wipe her nose.

   YES ☑ NO ☐
   a statement of conditions in which the behavior will be performed

   YES ☑ NO ☐
   a statement of observable, measurable behavior

   YES ☑ NO ☐
   a statement of criterion for mastery

   YES ☑ NO ☐
   a statement of generalization

   YES ☑ NO ☐
   a statement of maintenance

Time to Practice

Write two benchmarks for Benjamin’s annual goal, using each of the given methods. When you finish, compare your answers with our suggestions in the appendix.

Annual Goal
When presented with 10 items and asked to count them, Benjamin will point to and count the items orally and correctly with no prompts.

Performance
1. Benchmark ________________________________
2. Benchmark ________________________________

Assistance Level
1. Benchmark ________________________________
2. Benchmark ________________________________

Task Analysis
1. Benchmark ________________________________
2. Benchmark ________________________________

Generalization
1. Benchmark ________________________________
2. Benchmark ________________________________
Short-Term Objectives

Short-term objectives describe multiple, nonsequential, distinct, yet related skills necessary to achieve the annual goal. Short-term objectives are determined by listing the individual skills that must be mastered to accomplish the annual goal. Like benchmarks, short-term objectives describe the conditions, the behavior, and the criteria for mastery. They may also include statements for generalization and maintenance.

Figure 9. Short-Term Objectives Distinct Skills.

This example shows the “needs to” portion of a present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) statement. The short-term objectives describe three nonsequential, distinct, yet related skills necessary to meet the annual goal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAAFP “Needs to” Statement</th>
<th>Short-Term Objective 1</th>
<th>Short-Term Objective 2</th>
<th>Short-Term Objective 3</th>
<th>Annual Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student needs to cover mouth when coughing or sneezing, rub lotion on dry skin, and put lip balm on dry lips.</td>
<td>Skill 1: Cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.</td>
<td>Skill 2: Rub lotion on hands and arms.</td>
<td>Skill 3: Apply balm on dry or chapped lips.</td>
<td>Skills 1–3: Cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, rub lotion on hands and arms, apply lip balm on dry or chapped lips.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let’s look at a math example for Spencer.

Annual Goal
When assessed on the state alternate assessment at the end of the school year, Spencer will increase his math skills to a 1.6 grade level in at least 80% of the tested subdomains (EE.2.MD.7; EE.1.OA.1; EE.2.G.1).

Short-Term Objectives
a. When given a clock, Spencer will tell the time to the hour, the half hour, and 15-minute increments (using his communication device or verbally) with at least 80% accuracy, with at least two different types of clocks (digital or analog), and maintain the skill when probed weekly for 2 weeks.

b. When given addition and subtraction problems within 20, Spencer will solve the problems with at least 80% accuracy, under three different conditions, and maintain this skill when probed weekly for 2 weeks.

c. When asked to draw a shape (e.g., triangle, quadrilateral, pentagon, hexagon), Spencer will draw the identified shape with at least 80% accuracy, under three different conditions, and maintain this skill when probed weekly for 2 weeks.

We had better practice this.

Write two short-term objectives for Benjamin’s annual goal. When you finish, check your answers with our suggestions in the appendix.
Annual Goal
When presented with 10 items and asked to count them, Benjamin will point to and count the items orally and correctly with no prompts.

1. Short-term objective:

2. Short-term objective:

Let’s summarize the elements of measurable annual goals, benchmarks, and short-term objectives.

1. Measurable annual goals describe the conditions, the behavior, and the criteria for achievement. They may also contain statements of generalization and maintenance.

2. Benchmarks break down annual goals into smaller, measurable parts at designated time intervals.

3. Short-term objectives break down annual goals into nonsequential, distinct skills without reference to specific time intervals.

EXCELLENT! YOU HAVE PRACTICED THE SECOND STEP FOR QUALITY IEPs. NOW IT’S TIME TO LEARN STEP 3.

- Describe the student’s present levels of academic achievement and functional performance.
- Write measurable annual goals.
- Measure and report student progress.
- State the services needed to achieve annual goals.
- Explain the extent, if any, to which the student will not participate with nondisabled students in the regular class and in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities.
- Explain accommodations necessary to measure academic achievement and functional performance on state- and districtwide assessments.
- Complete a transition plan for students age 16 and older.
References