



# Core Concepts for IEP Goals

Best practices and frequently asked questions about annual goals  
and objectives for Individualized Education Programs

*A high quality Individualized Education Program lies at the center of ensuring that students with disabilities receive an education tailored to their needs. And the cornerstone of an IEP consists of individualized annual goals, aligned with each student's strengths and areas of need, that provide direction for appropriate instruction.*

*This guide includes core concepts, best practices and frequently asked questions around creating annual goals in your IEPs.*



The IEP must include measurable annual goals consistent with the student's needs and abilities, as identified in the student's present levels of performance.

## What are annual goals?

Annual goals are statements that describe what knowledge, skills and/or behaviors a student is expected to achieve within the year the IEP will be in effect. The IEP must include measurable annual goals consistent with the student's needs and abilities, as identified in the student's present levels of performance.

## What should annual goals include?

Annual goals should focus on knowledge, skills, behaviors and strategies to address the needs that are preventing the student from progressing in the general education environment.

Goals should not be a restatement of the general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for students without disabilities). Nor should they be a list of everything the student is expected to learn in every curricular content area during the course of the school year, or other areas not affected by the student's disability.

In developing IEP goals, the IEP team should select goals to answer the question, “What skills does the student require to master the content of the curriculum?” — not, “What curriculum content does the student need to master?”

For example, a student may be performing very poorly on written tests in global studies that require written expression. The IEP goal for this student should focus on developing written expressive skills (e.g., using outlines or other strategies to organize sentences in paragraphs) rather than a more curriculum-focused goal like writing an essay about the economy of a particular country. Generally, goals should address a student’s unique needs across the content areas, and should link to the state standards so that a student has the foundation or precursor skills and strategies needed to access and progress in the general education curriculum.



The annual goal should focus on what is needed for the student to learn and attain the curriculum standard.

## How should annual goals be linked to the state standards?

Annual goals must be aligned to the curriculum standards, when appropriate. Be aware that while the curriculum standards provide a guide in developing appropriate measurable annual goals for students accessing the general education curriculum, the standards themselves are generally not stated in measurable terms, and cannot be substituted for individually developed goals. Rather, the annual goal should focus on what is needed for the student to learn and attain the curriculum standard.

Goals should be related to the standards unless otherwise required by the student’s specific educational or functional needs. As such, students may have goals that do not directly correspond to the standards.



## Best Practice Tips:

- An IEP is an **individualized** education program — avoid the common pitfall of copying and pasting curriculum standards. Each IEP must be reviewed, and the goals and objectives specifically tailored to the student's present needs. Goals must address the skills needed for the student to be involved and progress in the general education curriculum.
- State goals clearly and simply. If you don't understand the goal, how can you expect a parent to? Avoid using jargon that parents may not understand.
- Be sure to develop goals that are measurable with relevant, observable data.
- When appropriate, include goals that address functional or non-academic skill areas. These include — but aren't limited to — social skills, communication skills, organizational skills, behavioral skills and study skills.
- Confirm whether or not the IEP team has concluded that the student requires the provision of related services. If so, be sure to include these in the IEP measurable goals for those providers to work toward and provide data about.
- Ensure all goals are student-specific. An annual goal that states, "The student will pass his English class" is not an appropriate goal, since it does not address the student's individual needs.

## What are short-term objectives and benchmarks?

*(Short-term objectives and benchmarks are not required in all states, except for students who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards. Please refer to the requirements in your state.)*

**Short-term instructional objectives** are the intermediate knowledge and skills that the student must learn to assist them in achieving the annual goal. Short-term instructional objectives break down the skills or steps necessary to accomplish an annual goal.

*For example, the sequential steps that one student must demonstrate in order to reach the annual goal to "read orally at 80-100 words per minute with 95% accuracy" might be as follows:*

1. Student will identify and record unfamiliar words prior to engaging in oral reading.
2. Student will make a prediction about the topic of the passage(s) he will read.
3. Student will self-monitor his reading fluency and accuracy on a daily basis.

**Benchmarks** are the major milestones that the student will demonstrate that will lead to the annual goal. Benchmarks usually designate a target time period for a behavior to occur (i.e., the amount of progress the student is expected to make within specified segments of the year). Generally, benchmarks establish performance levels that allow for regular progress checks. These coincide with the reporting periods for informing parents of their child's progress toward the annual goals.

*For example:*

- By November, Student will orally read 70-80 words per minute.
- By February, Student will orally read 80-90 words per minute.
- By April, Student will orally read 90-100 words per minute.



## What is the relationship between a student's present levels of performance and developing annual goals?

For each need identified in the present levels of performance, there should be at least one annual goal or supplementary aid or service related to addressing that need. The corresponding goals and objectives should be aimed toward acquiring the skills identified as a need in the present levels of performance.

The present levels of performance provide the baseline data of where the student is at the beginning of the year. The IEP goals project where the student should strive to be after implementing the special education services identified in the IEP.



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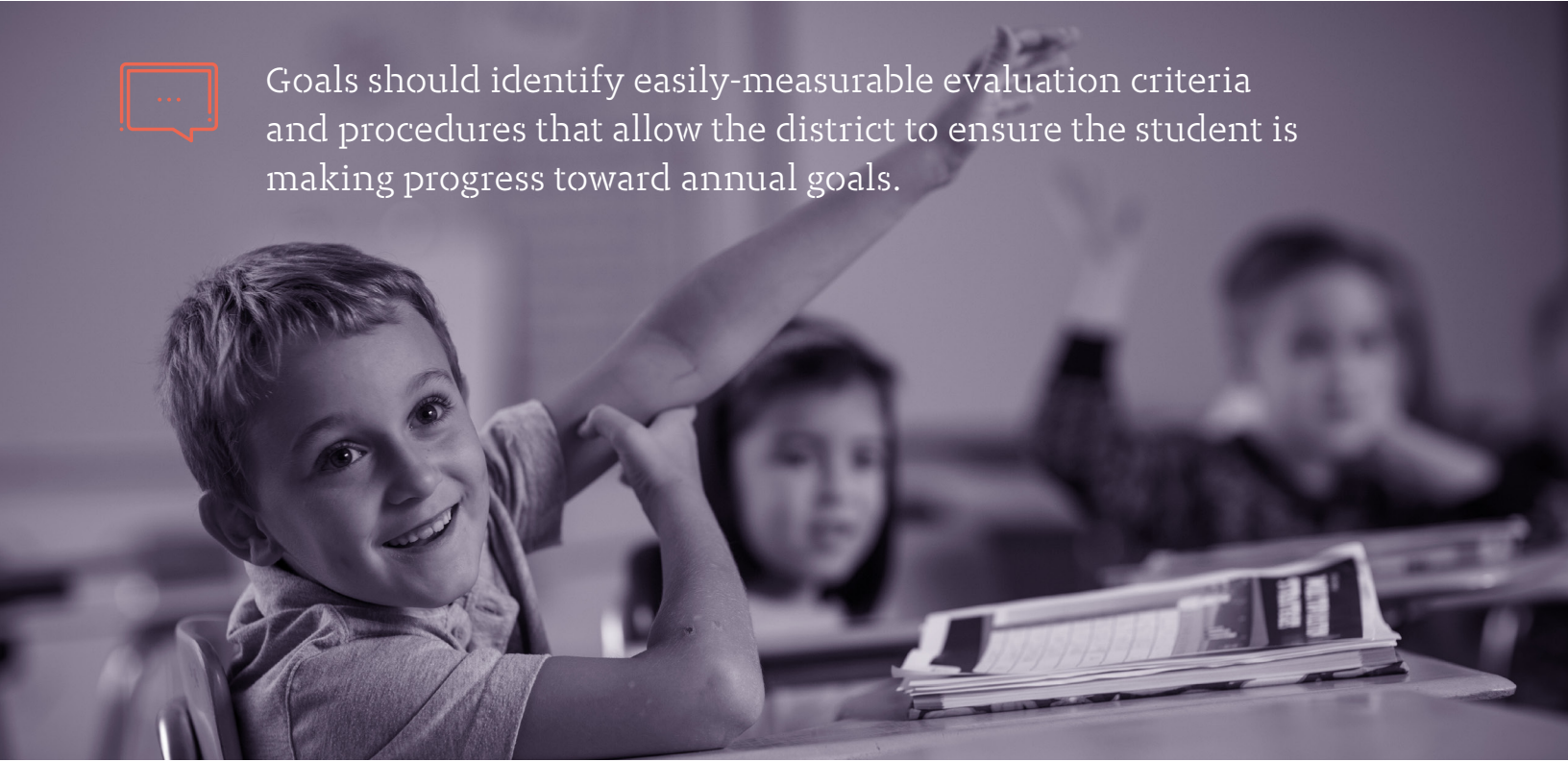


### Best Practice Tips:

- The IEP should include a goal for each need identified in the present levels of performance, as well as for any needs that correspond with modifications or accommodations.
- Do not add goals unless they address a stated need in the present levels of performance.



Goals should identify easily-measurable evaluation criteria and procedures that allow the district to ensure the student is making progress toward annual goals.



## How is progress measured?

### *Criteria for measuring progress*

Evaluative criteria identify the student's level of success in which the student must perform a skill or behavior in order to consider it achieved.

The student's level of success could be measured in terms such as:

- Frequency (e.g., 9 out of 10 trials)
- Duration (e.g., for 20 minutes)
- Distance (e.g., 20 feet)
- Accuracy (e.g., 90% accuracy)

### *Procedures for measuring progress*

Evaluation procedures identify the method that will be used to measure progress and determine if the student has met the goal. An evaluation procedure must provide an objective method in which the student's performance will be measured or observed.

- Recorded structured observations of targeted behavior in class
- Student self-monitoring checklist (only if age/skill level appropriate)
- Written tests
- Audio-visual recordings
- Behavior charting
- Worksheets
- Work samples

If at any time during the school year it appears that the student is not making adequate progress toward the goals, or has already met some of the goals set forth in the IEP prior to the next annual review, a meeting of the IEP team should be held to revise the student's goals.



## Best Practice Tips:

- Monitor progress and keep data regarding the student's performance. The IEP's goals and objectives are destinations; contemporaneous, accurate data regarding progress are spots along the way toward reaching those destinations. Districts are expected to accurately implement IEPs and measure progress. If a student is not making progress, a meeting should be convened to inform the parents and adjust or amend the goals and objectives.
- It is important that staff members responsible for implementing the student's IEP not wait until the end of the school year to raise concerns regarding the student's lack of progress toward annual goals and objectives.

*As always, please be sure to consult your own state's requirements for IEPs and special education for additional guidelines around writing annual goals, alignment to state standards and short-term objectives and benchmarks.*

*May the goals you write be instrumental in supporting powerful growth in your students!*