



IEP Questions and Answers

1. Should present levels of performance be a narrative or bulleted list?

There are no regulations regarding the format of the present levels of performance statements. The format is a personal or district preference.

2. Do we have to write a goal for every weakness identified in the present level of academic and functional performance (PLAFP)?

It is not required to write a goal for each concern in the present level of performance. The IEP team must identify the skill areas affected by the disability and develop a goal around the skill(s) the student can reasonably accomplish within a 12 month period. For example, if math is the skill area affected by the disability and the assessment has identified ten specific math skills the student needs to learn in the general curriculum to be at grade level, the team needs to target what skill(s) that student can reasonably accomplish in 12 months. The goal is developed around that specific math skill(s). Should the student meet that goal earlier than 12 months, the team will target a higher level skill in the PLAFP and develop a new goal. At least one goal should be developed for each skill area affected by the disability in the PLAFP.

3. Is it acceptable to put grade level in the goal statement?

There are no regulations that prohibit the use of grade level in goal statements. People have strong opinions as to whether including it or not conveys an appropriate meaning. When deciding whether to put grade level in a goal statement these important questions need to be considered:

- a. What do I want to convey by including the grade level that cannot be addressed without using grade level? For example: Do I need to write “The student needs to learn 2nd grade reading strategies” or can I say “Using phonological cues the student will read unfamiliar words” (which is a 2nd grade reading strategy)?
- b. If I am striving to teach a student the skills necessary to reach grade level standards is it necessary to put the grade level I perceive him/her to be functioning at, where I need to get him/her or do I need grade level at all?

4. Is it acceptable to put reading level in the goal statement?

When referring to reading level it will be extremely important to clarify exactly what you mean as there are many different definitions depending on how you are determining that level. Reading level can refer to test of basic lists of words, comprehension of text, oral

reading, fluency, grades or ages associated with text, accelerated reader or other reading programs, Lexile levels and the list goes on. As far as it is acceptable, please refer to the conversation regarding using grade level in the goal statement.

5. Are the standards addressed in the Body of Evidence on the Dakota STEP-A required to be goals on the IEP?

It is not required to write IEP goals for the standards selected for assessment on the Body of Evidence for the Dakota STEP-A. It is important however to plan for how you are going to address those standards throughout the year. The standards selected for the STEP-A should not be presented only during the testing window in February and March, but should be covered through instruction or directly in the students IEP throughout the year. Keep in mind that all grade level standards are addressed through the rating scale and select standard on the Body of Evidence.

6. What are the required components of an annual goal to meet state requirements?

Federal and state regulations require that a goal be a “measurable annual goal” and that you must indicate how progress will be measured. The following components must be included in an annual goal:

- a. **conditions** (i.e. procedures used to present information, i.e. when, where, how)
- b. **performance** (i.e. specific observable skill the student is expected to accomplish)
- c. **criteria** (i.e. how well must the skill be done and how often to acquire mastery)

7. Do all goals have to be connected to standards (academic, social and functional)?

It is not a requirement that all goals be connected to the standards. It is best practice to try to make that connection whenever possible. There may even be areas addressed on the IEP for which the state has not developed standards for example transition and behavior. It is important that goals are skill based and linked to functional assessment and present levels of performance.

8. If a student has a behavior that impedes learning, is a behavior goal required?

It is not required to have a goal for the behavior(s) identified in this section (such as not completing homework on time or being sassy to teachers). You must outline positive intervention strategies to address these behaviors but they can be in the special factors section of the IEP.

9. If a child has a BIP (Behavior Intervention Plan) do the strategies need to be goals?

If a student’s significant behavior issues result in the development of a BIP, it would be necessary to develop goals to address those concerns. These could certainly come from strategies identified on a BIP.

10. Do the standards that are connected to the IEP have to be the standards from the grade the student is enrolled?

The focus for students should be to work towards grade level standards. In considering the way South Dakota content standards are written, you can develop goals that are connected to the standard, but they may be at a lower performance level. Connecting goals to the standard does not mean the student is expected to perform that standard at the proficient level

(applying for alternate content), but may be working on the basic level (introducing or developing for alternate content). IEP goals may be pre-requisite skills necessary in order to work towards grade level proficiency. It may be necessary to look at off grade level standards to determine the continuum of skills needed to get the student to grade level, but the focus should always be to work toward grade level standards. Even for students working in the general content standard, it may be beneficial to use the alternate standards as a resource to help identify the pre-requisite skills to reach grade level standards.

11. How do you write a goal connected to the standard for a middle school/high school student working at an elementary level?

Please refer to the question above. It would be beneficial to use the skills identified at the different performance levels as a guide to the skills a student needs to work on to reach the grade level standard. This may not be appropriate for every skill area affected by the disability identified in the present level of performance, but whenever possible find the connection to the standards.

12. Do we have to put the standard number with the goal on the IEP?

It is not required to put the standard number with the goal. In some cases this may give the false perception that a student will be performing that standard at the proficient level. It is recommended to document somehow what standards you have identified as being aligned and to what standard. An example of a way to do this would be to refer to the Planning Worksheet posted on the Special Education website in the IEP section:
<http://doe.sd.gov/oess/specialed/IEP/index.asp>

13. Why do we have to write goals that connect to standards?

Federal and state regulations require that a student needs to be involved and make progress in the general education curriculum. IDEA and NCLB also require that students participate in statewide testing based on grade level standards. If IEPs are connected to the standards, it promotes consistency and inclusion school wide and across districts.

14. Do we have to address all the standards?

It is not a requirement to address all standards on the IEP. The IEP should reflect the student's skill areas affected by the disability. Specific skills identified under each area are prioritized and annual goals are developed. Those goals should connect to the standards to the extent possible. The expectation is that the student be exposed to all the standards through instruction throughout the year. To reach this expectation it is important for special educators and general educators to work closely together to ensure the student is receiving the appropriate instruction in the general curriculum to meet this expectation.

15. Can we write objectives for students even if they do not take the alternate assessment?

Students who work primarily in the alternate content standards and are assessed on the alternate assessment are required to have goals and objectives and/or benchmarks. For other students, it is up to the discretion of the IEP team how to best write goals and/or goals and objectives/benchmarks that clearly outline the educational program for the student.

16. What is the difference between a standard and a goal?

Standards are broad and all encompassing; goals need to be more skill specific and based on the student's present level of academic and functional and performance and linked to individual assessment.

17. Can the standard be written as a goal?

Goals should not be written directly from the standards. Standards are too broad, not measurable, and in some cases they cross grade level and could not be accomplished in a years time.

18. How do you define measurable?

Measurable means you can count it or observe it. When you are tempted to write unmeasurable words, stop and ask yourself, "What do I see the student doing that makes me make this judgment call?" What you actually see the student doing is the measurable content you need to identify in your present level. To make something measurable you can specify rate, (for example, 3 out of 4 times, 80% of the time, 5 minutes out of every 10, 75% success), grade or performance level. You can make student behavior measurable by defining the factors surrounding the behavior. These include precipitating events, such as, "when asked to work independently," or environmental factors, such as, "when dealing with female authority figures," or other patterns, such as "always after lunch," "in math class," "on the playground." It is also important to write goals that include the specific skill to be learned, and not just improve reading or teaching the accommodation or assistive device.

Additionally, perform these tests to determine if a goal is measurable and clear:

- a. **The Rock Test:** To determine whether a goal is measurable, pose this question: "Can a rock do it?" If the answer is "yes", then it does not pass the test. For example, suppose you wanted to target the behavior for "swears at peers" and came up with the target "does not swear at peers". This does not pass the test, because a rock does not swear at peers. A better way to write this would be "speaks to peers without swearing".
- b. **The Stranger Test:** This refers to goals and objectives described in a manner that a person unfamiliar with the student could read the description and understand it. Because various persons can interpret things differently it is important to apply this test. For example, if the student's goal is to "decrease hostility", a stranger may interpret this as hits, kicks, bite while the team meant to address verbal threats or profanity. A stranger might interpret this as all hostility, whether or not provoked, while the teacher wanted to first target unprovoked hostility. It is essential to make goals clear for any to interpret as they were intended.

19. Are the alternate standards only for students with significant cognitive disabilities?

The alternate standards are not only for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, but could be used as a resource for students in regards to ideas on the continuum of skills to reach grade level standards. Only students with significant cognitive disabilities who are taking the alternate assessment should be working primarily in the alternate content standards though. (refer to question 10)

20. How do I prove my goal is connected to the standard?

If you understand the connection your goal makes to the standards, then you will be able to convey that information if you are asked by parents, teachers or administrators. For example, if the standard in reading is: *Students are able to use knowledge of word categories and word parts to determine meaning of unknown words*, this could connect to a goal addressing learning short vowel word families. Learning word families is a pre-requisite skill a student may need to learn in order to understand word categories and word parts in order to determine the meaning of unknown words. Learning word families would be a skill identified in the student's present level of performance.

21. Do we put scores in the PLAFPS or not?

The names of specific tests and related scores do not need to be included in the PLAFP since they are documented in the evaluation report and eligibility determination. The PLAFP should not be a reiteration of the most current evaluation/reevaluation. The PLAFP needs to describe the skills or areas identified during the evaluation process that have the greatest impact on the child's educational performance. Consider what critical information you are trying to convey by including the test score and whether there is an alternative way to communicate this information. If it is necessary to use a test score, the score must be clearly defined including the interpretation of the score.

22. How do you write an IEP goal for students who get services on an as needed basis?

If there is not a need for specially designed instruction, then the team should consider exiting the student from special education services. If an IEP team determines that a student only requires the support of a special educator on an "as needed basis" for monitoring progress, then the IEP should reflect what skills or behaviors are to be monitored and the duration for the monitoring, such as one time per week. The team would also write a reintegration plan. If a student continues to require some accommodation in the regular classroom, a 504 plan could be considered. "Keeping up grades" and "passing the class" require specialized instruction as defined under IDEA, accommodations may be necessary to produce this outcome but it does not require an IEP.