



# Creating Meaningful & Measurable Early Childhood Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Goals



## Frequently Asked Questions and Other Stuff

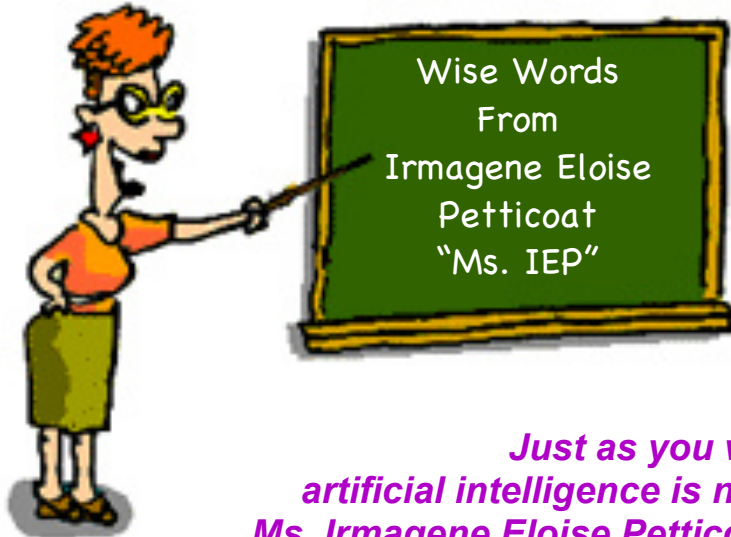
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## Frequently Asked Questions



*Have you been caught faking Carpal Tunnel Syndrome at an IEP meeting?*

*Does your mother routinely call you during IEP meetings when it is your turn to discuss measurable annual goals?*

*Just as you were beginning to realize that artificial intelligence is no match for natural stupidity, Ms. Irmagene Eloise Petticoat, aka "Ms. IEP", comes out of the Ivory Towers of Topeka to answer probing questions from early childhood special education professionals.*

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Dear Ms. IEP,

When I start this whole IEP process it feels like I am writing the same information over and over again (e.g., individual report, team evaluation report, PLAAFP). Is this really necessary?

Deja Vu

Dear Deja,

I'm reminded of similar feelings when faced with creating the annual family newsletter. While I have a very full and exotic life, reporting such extravagance begins to feel redundant. So, too, may the sage reader feel when asked to write information regarding evaluation. Heed the following advice from Ms. IEP:

The PLAAFP is different from the team evaluation report, and therefore should not be a reiteration of what has already been written. The team evaluation report includes all of the evaluation results and documentation concerning the eligibility of the child. The report is written by the evaluation team, which includes the parents. It is no longer necessary (or advisable) for individual professionals to write separate reports.

The PLAAFP does not include all of the evaluation results, it includes only the most pertinent information needed to develop an IEP. The PLAAFP describes performance in the general education curriculum, for preschool children this means performance in appropriate activities. It describes how the disability is effecting the child's performance and establishes a baseline from which measurable annual goals will be written. Other information can be included in the PLAAFP (i.e., strengths, concerns of parents) especially as it applies to the development of a good educational plan.

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Dear Ms. IEP,

Is it necessary to report test scores in the PLAAFP? Some people are telling me I should, and other people are telling me I shouldn't.

Gullible Gary

Dear Gary:

While I understand the puzzle you face, I feel compelled to ask the question, "Do you do everything other people tell you to do?" Alas, that information is for a different column. To include test scores or not include test scores, that is the question.

It is not necessary to report test scores in the PLAAFP. It is necessary to establish a baseline in the PLAAFP, but it is not mandatory for that baseline to be established with a specific test score. Baseline data can be established in a variety of ways. Structured observations, checklists, curriculum and criterion based measures could all be used to establish and report baseline data depending on the specific skill in question. If scores are reported from any of these methods they should be written in a manner that is understandable to all team members, including parents.

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Dear Ms. IEP,

What is the difference between short-term objectives and benchmarks? When should I use a benchmark instead of a short-term objective?

Puzzled Pat

Dear Pat:

Some have suggested to me that the confusion noted here is nothing more than a conspiracy created by paper companies to rule the free world. However, I am not as suspicious as some of my readers, and would offer the following explanation:

Since the reauthorization of IDEA 2004, IEP teams are no longer required to write short-term objectives or benchmarks for young children with disabilities who will not be taking alternative state assessments. Given that state assessments are not administered to this population of children virtually every IEP preschool age children would be exempt. However, short-term objectives and benchmarks are still considered best practice toward monitoring progress toward the overall goal, and therefore IEP teams should consider writing them as part of a quality IEP.

- Short-term objectives are discrete component skills of the annual goal, while benchmarks are statements of expected performance levels.
- There is no rule governing when a short-term objective should be written instead of a benchmark and visa versa.
- Short-term objectives and benchmarks are both used to measure intermediate steps towards the accomplishment of a goal.
- Short-term objectives and benchmarks both include a timeframe, conditions under which the behavior will occur, and a description of the behavior.
- Short-term objectives also include a criterion from which to gauge if the objective has been accomplished. Benchmarks do not.
- Short-term objectives may be written in sequential or parallel order and should be comprehensive. Benchmarks are written in hierarchical order.
- The underlying thought when writing a benchmark is, "Can the child do the skill or not?"
- It is important not to confuse IEP benchmarks with district benchmarks.

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Dear Ms. IEP,

If you put a weakness or concern in the PLAAFP, are you always required to write a goal?

Anonymous

*Dear Anonymous:*

*When I receive a question like yours, one cloaked with mystery, I am always intrigued. Some might worry that you, Dear Reader, have been concealing children's weaknesses so as not to write goals. However, I've noted your concern and understand how this may be, in fact, a gray area. Not to worry! I'm here to provide enlightenment.*

IDEA 2004 does not require that a measurable annual goal be written for each concern identified in the PLAAFP. However concerns not addressed through goals, **MUST** be addressed **SOMEWHERE** in the IEP.

The following is an example in which an IEP team decided to address a concern on another portion of the IEP and not as a goal. After they reviewed Jerry's PLAAFP (see below) they decided to address the concern in another portion of the IEP.

Jerry's PLAAFP: When asked to point to colors, Jerry is able to point to red and green consistently. He is unable to identify the colors yellow, blue, pink, orange, and purple like other children his same age.

Special Considerations Portion of Jerry's IEP: "The daily classroom routine and active-ties will provide opportunities for Jerry to learn the colors yellow, blue, purple, pink, and orange. The team feels no additional supports are necessary."

It is important to remember that in **most cases** the IEP team will address concerns identified in the PLAAFP by writing measurable annual goals. In the above example, the team decided against doing so. However, they could have written a goal if they had wished. **Such decisions are left up to individual teams.**

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Dear Ms. IEP,

What do they mean by prioritizing goals? If there are a lot of needs, shouldn't I write a goal for everything?

Meticulous Max

*Dear Max:*

*I suspect that you have engaged in a scientific breakthrough and have invented a way to increase the hours in the normal day from 24 to 38. As the rest of us in the field of education are not allowed the great fortune of*

*a 38-hour day, we must limit the number of goals we write. If you read further, you may come to understand that those of us on Earth prioritize what we write, allowing us to contribute to society, eat and even sleep - all within the 24-hour day we are allocated.*

There is a common misconception that for every need identified in the PLAAFP, an individual goal must be written. The truth is, high priority goals often address several needs in one statement. When the team writes the PLAAFP, they are setting the stage for prioritizing the most important skills for the child to acquire in the coming year. Those skills that will enable the child to be involved in and progress in appropriate activities. Only the most significant needs should be recorded in the PLAAFP, from which goals will be written.

Remember, the IEP is not a lesson plan. It is a document that provides guidance to the team, from which specific interventions and other planning can take place. It provides focus and accountability to the achievement of very specific goals; however, it does not preclude other learning that will invariably take place in the overall program for the child. In the course of a year, the child will learn a host of other things that may or may not be related to the IEP, but will occur as a result of participating in the curriculum.

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*Dear Ms. IEP,*

What assessment tools should I use for documentation on the PLAAFP?

Jupiter Aligned With Mars

*Dear Mars:*

*I am perplexed and wonder if you, Dear Reader, have been consulting astrological charts to determine your assessment strategies? While astrological charts may be helpful when identifying lottery numbers, they provide little information in the evaluation process.*

The focus of the PLAAFP is to identify the current functioning of the child within age appropriate activities, and to prioritize the special needs of the child to be used when writing goals. Therefore, information must be collected that will allow the team to establish a baseline within age appropriate activities. A variety of formal and informal measures are useful in this process. Examples include published curriculum based assessments or criterion referenced tests, structured observations, rating scales,

rubrics, portfolio assessments, work sample analysis, language samples, and checklists. Information collected using such methods will provide good baseline data from which measurable annual goals can be written.

A common mistake made by IEP teams is to use a standardized number produced from a published norm-referenced test as the baseline. Norm-referenced tools may be useful in answering eligibility questions, but are not sensitive enough to monitor growth in specific skills, especially for young children. Additionally, all the members of the team (including the parents) may not easily understand standard scores. They do not provide information regarding a child's functioning within the general curriculum, nor do they provide instructional guidelines from which to make educational plans. Therefore, norm-referenced tests are not the best tools to establish baseline information.

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Dear Ms. IEP,  
Should parent concerns be documented in the PLAAFP?  
Ima Mom 2

*Dear Mom:  
I delight in the opportunity to share from my very own familial fountain pen of knowledge. I will strive to help you put the "k" in "kwality". Read the following answer to your paternal conundrum.*

Teams must consider the concerns of the parents when developing the IEP. However, there are no clear rules where this information should be documented. The PLAAFP is a logical place for noting parent concerns since the IEP will be constructed using PLAAFP information.

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Dear Ms. IEP,  
If the PLAAFP and measurable annual goals are written in simple terms, will they be accepted?  
Ordinary Mary

*Dear Mary,  
I just love a simple mind, and it is clear that you are the proud owner of one. You would do well to heed the following advice.*

PLAAFPs and measurable annual goals that are written in simple terms, are not only acceptable, they are desirable. The law spells out that the PLAAFP must be stated in terms that are specific, measurable, and objective. Measurable annual goals must also be specific and measurable. In addition, they must be written so that anyone who is working with the child, including the parents, can use the information to develop appropriate instructional plans as well as assess the child's progress (e.g., pass the "stranger test").

Above all, goals should be meaningful. A goal is meaningful when it describes a behavior/skill that will have a real impact on the success of a child in current as well as future environments. If the PLAAFP and goal have these components they are acceptable.

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Dear Ms. IEP,  
Is using a criteria like "80% accuracy" sufficient when writing goals?  
Just Wondering

Dear Wondering:

Far be it for me to interfere with an educator's right to confuse the public and sound professional all in one statement. Nevertheless, I should remind you that the purpose of documenting criteria is to make the goal understandable and meaningful. I suggest that you commit the following rules to memory.

The criterion identifies how much, how often and to what standards the behavior must occur in order to demonstrate that the goal has been reached. "80% accuracy" identifies how much, but it does not identify to what standards the behavior must occur. Look at the following examples.

Example 1

Goal: In 36 instructional weeks, when asked to tie his untied shoes, Billy will tie his shoe with 80% accuracy.

How will the team measure the accomplishment of this goal? What does a shoe that has been tied to 80% accuracy look like? A percentage criteria is not sufficient in this example because the percentage doesn't provide useful information.

## Example 2

Goal: In 12 months, during personal sharing time at school, Kelly will respond to the topic and initiations of others appropriately (i.e., stay on topic, ask pertinent questions, make related statements) 80% of the time, as measured during 5 consecutive structured observations.

How will the team determine if this goal has been accomplished? The team will conduct timed observations during personal sharing time at school. They will count the number of responses Kelly exhibits within those timed periods, and indicate the percentage of positive responses to see if they reach or exceed 80%. Once Kelly exhibits positive responses for at least 80% of the time, the team will continue timed observations until she exhibits this percentage for at least 5 observational periods in a row. In this example information is provided to make the 80% meaningful to the accomplishment of the goal.

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Dear Ms. IEP,

Do I really have to rewrite the PLAAFP every year?

Really Busy

Dear Busy:

I am really curious as to what part of “present”, as in the phrase, “Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance”, you really don’t understand? I really feel compelled to remind you that the word “present” means “current, existing or latest”, implying that the PLAAFP is really written every time an IEP is written or updated. The word “present, in this context, really should not be confused with the word “gift” as in “gift of another year or two before I need to write a new PLAAFP”. Really now, if the child has not changed from last year to this year, should we really even be in this business? Better or worse is really a change and tells us what we are, or are not, really doing with the child.

The PLAAFP must include current information, not past performance, and therefore **must** be rewritten every year.

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## IEPs According to Dr. Seuss™

*If Dr. Seuss would have had to do IEPs, he might have written this.*

Do you like these IEPs?

I do not like these IEP's  
I do not like them, Jeeze Louise  
We test, we check  
We plan, we meet  
But nothing ever seems complete.

Would you, could you  
Like the form?

I do not like the form I see  
Not page 1, not 2, not 3.  
Another change,  
A brand new box. I think we all  
Have lost our rocks.

Could you all meet here or there?

We could not all meet here or there.  
We cannot all fit anywhere.

Not in a room  
Not in a hall  
There seems to be no space at all.

Would you, could you meet again?

I cannot meet again next week  
No lunch, no prep  
Please hear me speak.  
No, not at dusk and not at dawn  
At 4 p.m. I should be gone.

Could you hear while all speak out?  
Would you write the words they spout?

I could not hear, I would not write  
This does not need to be a fight.

Sign here, date there,  
Mark this, check that.  
Beware the student's ad-vo-cat(e)

You do not like them  
So you say  
Try it again! Try it again!  
And then you may.

If you let me be,  
I'll try again  
And you will see.

Say!

I almost like these IEPs  
I think I'll write 6003  
And I will practice day and night  
Until they say  
"You've got it right".

(Author Unknown)