



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



Guided Practice

KSDE IEP modules and training materials
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Guided Practice



Chris is able to build simple block structures. He can cut on a line when assisted with hand placement on scissors and copy a line (vertical and horizontal) though he switches the writing utensil in his hands frequently, during all activities.

Measurable Annual Goal

In 36 weeks, Chris will improve his fine motor skills within the daily classroom routine to a more age appropriate level by meeting the listed benchmarks.

Benchmarks

Copy a circle using tripod or adapted tripod grasp & writing utensil.

Copy a cross, using tripod or adapted tripod grasp & writing utensil.

Copy a square, using tripod or adapted tripod grasp & writing utensil.

What do you think about this PLAAFP?

Chris is able to build simple block structures. He can cut on a line when assisted with hand placement on scissors and copy a line (vertical and horizontal) though he switches the writing utensil in his hands frequently, during all activities.

1. Does it tell us what Chris can do now, not what he did in the past?

Yes. We know Chris is able to build simple block structures, cut on lines when assisted with hand placement on the scissors, and copy lines (vertical and horizontal) though he switches his hands frequently.

2. Is it stated in terms that are specific, measurable and objective? Can you see it, hear it or count it?

Yes. The description in this PLAAFP provides us with information that we can see and count. Specifically, we know that Chris switches hands when holding onto a writing utensil. He does this frequently and across all situations. We also know that Chris can cut on a line when someone helps him put his fingers around the scissors correctly, but he is unable to do this on his own.

3. Does it describe the effect of the disability on Chris's progress in appropriate activities?

No. There is no statement regarding what this is keeping Chris from being able to do within age appropriate activities. An easy way to correct this portion of the PLAAFP would be to include a statement regarding what children his age are able to do. This sets the stage to illustrate exactly what Chris isn't getting to do and how it is affecting his ability to participate and progress in appropriate activities. The following example could be inserted to help correct this portion of the PLAAFP: "*Children of the same age are able to copy a circle, cross, and square in their drawings. A delay in this area prevents Chris from being able to engage in prewriting activities.*"

4. Does it identify and prioritize specific needs that will be written as goals?

Yes. Information is provided in a straightforward manner, making it easy to identify needs as well as indicate what skills are priorities for this child.

5. Does it identify strengths as they relate to possible interventions?

Yes. Chris is able to build simple block structures, cut on lines with assistance, and draw lines to some degree. While this PLAAFP doesn't list these skills specifically as strengths, they are things that Chris is able to do. It isn't mandatory to write strengths in the PLAAFP section, however, information regarding a child's specific or relative strengths can be valuable in helping the team determine what skills are a priority. Information regarding strengths may also prove useful when identifying specific interventions.

6. Does it provide baseline data for the need?

Yes. A baseline has been established, but it could have been written with more information that would make the next step of writing goals easier. In this example we are still missing information regarding the conditions in which the behaviors were observed (i.e., during paper and pencil, art, or direct instruction activities) or the specific method in which the data was collected (i.e., when asked to draw a line on a piece of paper after watching a model). By including the conditions and methods of data collection in the PLAAFP, goal writing will be easier since it is necessary to include that information in the goal.

Measurable Annual Goal 1

In 36 weeks, Chris will improve his fine motor skills within the daily classroom routine to a more age appropriate level by meeting the listed benchmarks.

Is this goal measurable? Does it contain all the required information?

Timeframe:	in 36 weeks	Yes
Conditions:	within the daily classroom routine	Yes
Behavior:	will improve his fine motor skills to a more age appropriate level	No
Criterion:	by meeting the listed benchmarks	No

This example is not a measurable goal. In this goal, the behavior and criterion are not specific, observable or measurable. The behavior, “improve fine motor skills to a more age appropriate level” does not provide a clear picture of what this child will be doing in 12 months as a result of intervention. It is not specific enough to be measurable.

Another problem is the statement “as measured by the listed benchmarks”. All the necessary information must be included in the goal. In this example the necessary information is listed in the benchmarks. Thus the goal does not pass the “stranger test”. Without seeing the benchmarks the reader would have no idea what to expect of this child in a year.

In this example the only intervention needed for Chris to improve his skills in this area is to participate in the daily curriculum of the preschool program (perhaps with adaptive equipment). The team may feel this does not illustrate a high priority need and could elect to address it in another portion of the IEP. For example, they might indicate that adaptive equipment will be provided throughout the preschool day to address his fine motor needs, and record this information in the services section of the IEP, rather than including it as a goal.

Remember, needs identified in the PLAAFP must be addressed somewhere in the IEP. In most cases they will be addressed as goals, in some cases they can be addressed somewhere else on the IEP.

Benchmarks 1

Copy a circle using tripod or adapted tripod grasp & writing utensil.

Copy a cross, using tripod or adapted tripod grasp & writing utensil.

Copy a square, using tripod or adapted tripod grasp & writing utensil.

Do the benchmarks contain all the required information?

No. The benchmarks listed do not include the time. They do, however, include all other elements (e.g., behavior, conditions)



Sammi achieved an age equivalent score of 35 months on the auditory comprehension portion of the Language and Comprehension Preschool Scale. She scored 38 months on the expressive communication portion of this test and overall scored in the moderately severe range of communication.

Measurable Annual Goal

In 36 instructional weeks, Sammi will increase her speech and language skills to age appropriate levels with 80% accuracy.

Short-term objectives

In 9 weeks, Sammi will produce // in all positions in words, phrases and sentences with 80% accuracy.

In 18 weeks, Sammi will produce // in all positions in spontaneous speech with 80% accuracy

In 27 weeks, Sammi will use pronouns appropriately in spontaneous speech with 80% accuracy.

What do you think about this PLAAFP?

1. Does the PLAAFP tell us what Sammi can do now, not what she did in the past?

Yes. It does appear that the data is in reference to the latest assessment information.

2. Is it stated in terms that are specific, measurable and objective? Can you see it, hear it or count it?

Yes/No. While age scores are provided in the PLAAFP, the description of the behavior is not specific enough to understand what Sammi is really able to do. All we really know is the score the child achieved on this instrument. We do not have detailed information regarding specific skills. In addition, age scores are not easily understood providing even less information from which to build on later in the process.

3. Does it describe the effect of the disability on Sammi's progress in appropriate activities?

No. We know that Sammi's scores fell in the moderately severe range of communication, but we do not know how that affects Sammi's ability to progress in appropriate activities.

4. Does it identify and prioritize specific needs that will be written as goals?

No. Information provided was too general. Not enough information was provided from which specific needs could be identified and goals written.

5. Does it identify strengths as they relate to possible interventions?

No.

6. Does it provide baseline data for the need?

No. Age scores are not good measures to use in monitoring progress over a short

period of time. Not enough information was provided to establish a baseline.

Measurable Annual Goal 2

In 36 instructional weeks, Sammi will increase her speech and language skills to age appropriate levels with 80% accuracy.

Is this goal measurable? Does it contain all the required information?

Timeframe:	in 36 instructional weeks	Yes
Conditions:	*****	No
Behavior:	will increase her speech and language skills to age appropriate levels	No
Criterion:	with 80% accuracy	No

This example is not a measurable goal. The behavior is not specific enough to fully understand what Sammi will be doing this time next year (e.g., increase her speech and language skills to age appropriate levels). In addition the criterion is not tied to anything (e.g., 80% of what?). This goal is also missing information regarding the conditions in which the behavior will be observed (i.e., during free choice and center time activities). Finally, this goal does not pass the “stranger test”, and is, therefore, not meaningful. This is an unacceptable goal.

Short-term objectives 2

In 9 weeks, Sammi will produce /l/ in all positions in words, phrases and sentences with 80% accuracy.

In 18 weeks, Sammi will produce /l/ in all positions in spontaneous speech with 80% accuracy

In 27 weeks, Sammi will use pronouns appropriately in spontaneous speech with 80% accuracy.

Do the benchmarks contain all the required information

Timeframe:	in 9, 18, 27 weeks	Yes
Conditions:	*****	No
Behavior:	will produce /l/ in all positions in words, phrases, sentences, etc.	Yes
Criterion	with 80% accuracy	No

The criterion statement is ambiguous because the goal is missing the statement of the conditions in which the behavior would be observed.



Sample Measurable Annual Goals

- ❖ In 12 months, Timmy will follow 2-step directions, during large group activities (i.e., groups of 6 or more children), 1 time per observation period, across 5 consecutive group times.

- ❖ By November 1, 200X, when given a verbal direction by an adult, Robin will begin to comply with the direction within 10 seconds, 3 out of 4 opportunities, for 3 consecutive days.

- ❖ In 12 months, while at school, Bobbie will use the toilet independently when necessary, for a period of at least 3 weeks without an accident.

- ❖ In 36 weeks, Misty will establish and maintain proximity with peers and cooperatively play with partners during child-directed free choice activities for at least 5 minutes, one time per observation period, across 5 consecutive free choice activities.

- ❖ In 36 weeks, Vera will use scissors to cut out simple shapes with curved lines when presented with scissors, and paper with printed shapes (at least 3 inches in diameter). She will cut out the shapes within 1/4 inch of the line, 4 out of 5 trials.

- ❖ In 36 weeks, during conversations with peers or adults, Terry will use words to describe attributes of toys or foods (e.g., shape, size, color, texture, and spatial relationship), 2 times per observation period for 3 consecutive days.





Measurable Annual Goals



Using the information you have learned in this packet, re-write the following goals:

1. In 12 months, Garrett will improve his personal-social skills by 6 months according to the Battelle Developmental Inventory.
2. Samantha will increase her adaptive skills by six months by improving toileting skills with 40% accuracy.
3. Brett will improve his cognitive skills by 6 months by working on his perceptual discrimination skills with 90% accuracy.
4. Heather will increase her ability to complete a variety of daily living skills by completing the following benchmarks with 100% accuracy.
5. Cody will improve his stability and mobility to improve his classroom participation by accomplishing 100% of the stated benchmarks, by October 20, 200x.





Dr. Phil on Prioritizing IEP Goals



Okay... I admit it. I'm a Dr. Phil junky. He seems to have a no-nonsense way of telling folks how to cut to the chase and just do something. People flock around him to hear, what I consider to be, *common sense with pizzazz*.

Recently, Ol' Doc Phil has agreed to take on the national problem of obesity. I haven't read his book, but I bet he will help the masses cut through the enormous amount of magazine articles, medical journals, and specialized diets to tell us the key points we all should be working on to acquire that perfect figure.

It's almost as if Dr. Phil is on a mission to develop a grown-up version of an IEP, tailored to move each of us toward the healthy weight and lifestyle we should all be experiencing. I wonder... if Dr. Phil were counseling early childhood teachers and support staff, could he as easily help us identify and prioritize IEP goals for young children with special needs? Could he "cut to the chase" and identify those "big dang deal" goals worth writing on the IEP? What words of wisdom would Dr. Phil have for teachers and support staff trying to identify and prioritize IEP goals?

Here is how I imagine a Dr. Phil show might go if he were talking with an early childhood disabilities teacher on the topic of prioritizing IEP goals.

*How's That Working for You? **

Miss Nelly, an early childhood disabilities teacher from Somewhere, Kansas, is sitting in the hot seat next to Dr. Phil. Dr. Phil leans a little closer to Miss Nelly and speaks in that pleasant Texan drawl.

Dr. Phil: "I hear you are having a little trouble identifying IEP goals for a preschool student in your class. I also hear that this is a common problem. Your colleagues tell me that you have a tendency to write a whole lot of goals on every IEP that passes your way. Let me ask you Miss Nelly, how do you go about selecting IEP goals for a given student?"

Miss Nelly: "Well Dr. Phil, I look at the evaluation information and then I write down every possible need I can think of given that information. In Johnny's case, there are a lot of needs, so of course I have a lot of goals."

*Dr. Phil: "And how's that working for you?"**

Miss Nelly: "Actually, it's pretty hard to keep track of everything I am supposed to be working on. It is very difficult to monitor progress as often as I would like, so I don't do much of that. Truth is, I don't pay much attention to what's on the IEP except when I send out progress reports, and of course when it is time to write a new IEP at the annual review. You must remember, Johnny's IEP isn't the only plan I am working on. It's just so much to remember!"

Dr. Phil: "So what you are saying is that you write a whole lot of goals, but it's hard to keep track of them? So I ask you again, Miss Nelly, is what you are doing now working for you? Is it working for Johnny? If the cat's in the kitchen, then you had better give him some yarn."

I'm not sure what point Dr. Phil was attempting to make with the cat metaphor. The reality is Dr. Phil loses me sometimes. However, I believe he did make a strong case for Miss Nelly to rethink how she identifies goals on the IEP. Obviously, identifying everything that was noted in the evaluation as a goal wasn't working for Miss Nelly or Johnny. This strategy made the IEP unmanageable and, therefore, ineffective.

You Have to Name it Before You Can Claim It *

Miss Nelly is becoming a little nervous. She has no clue what Dr. Phil might be asking her to do, and is still wondering what the cat has to do with IEP writing. She gathers up the courage to speak to this Cowboy of Conundrums.

Miss Nelly: "Dr. Phil, you must understand that the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) has made it very clear that any need identified in the Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLAAFP) must be addressed somewhere on the IEP. Like I said, in Johnny's case there is a long list of needs, so it seems necessary to make a goal to address each of them. Isn't that what I am supposed to do?"

Dr. Phil: "The problem is that you think every need is a high priority, and I'm here to tell you that just ain't true, Miss Nelly. The fact of the matter is if an alligator steals your earring, you had better let him have it. "

Miss Nelly: "If an alligator...wait, I'm not sure..."

Dr. Phil: "Don't interrupt me here, darlin, I'm trying to make a point. It seems to me that there is a little confusion on the topic of prioritizing goals. It just so happens that I have asked my top notch staff to do some research about the rules and regulations regarding IEP writing in Kansas and I have found some interesting points that just might help you out.

You are right in stating that needs identified in the PLAAFP must be addressed somewhere on the IEP; and you are also right that, in most cases, those needs will be written on the IEP as goals. Here is where the rubber hits the road, Miss Nelly. It isn't necessary to write down every need identified in the evaluation on the PLAAFP, but only those needs that will require specially designed instruction AND will help the preschool child participate and progress in appropriate activities. Needs that were identified in the evaluation that will be addressed just through the experience of participating in a preschool classroom (without specially designed instruction) need not be listed on the PLAAFP, and, therefore, will not need to be addressed as goals.

Sure, it's a good idea to include other stuff, like the strengths of the child, and an even better idea to include the concerns noted by the parents. Shucks, that last one is a no-brainer. Can you think of a better way to help prioritize a goal than to address the concerns of the parents?

The bottom line is, if you write an appropriate PLAAFP, you will have a much easier time of identifying and prioritizing high priority goals. Write down those needs you think will have the biggest impact on the life of this child and his family. From that information you will be able to write high priority goals. They will both be better in content and less in number, therefore a win-win for everyone. You have to name it (high priority goals) before you can claim it (effective IEP)."

Once again, Dr. Phil hit the nail right on the head. There is a direct relationship between the needs identified on the PLAAFP and the measurable annual goals. In order to identify really meaningful goals, the PLAAFP should first identify those needs, which if addressed, will make the most positive difference for the child and his/her family.

Pretti-Frontczak and her colleagues also recommend choosing skills that are:

- Functional, usable, observable and measurable
- Not likely to develop without intervention
- Developmentally appropriate/match child's developmental level
- Address multiple areas and are generalizable
- A priority to all team members, including parents
- Enhance participation in appropriate activities
- Realistic and achievable as a means to prioritizing meaningful and measurable IEP goals.

Would You Rather Be Right or Happy? *

As the show comes to an end, Miss Nelly shares her final thoughts with Dr. Phil.

Miss Nelly: "So you are saying that it is okay to write only those goals that the team, including the parents, believes will make the biggest impact on the life of the child and that I don't need to worry about writing a whole bunch of goals? Does that mean I will only be teaching Johnny a few things since I have only a few goals?"

Dr. Phil: "Dagnabbit, Woman! If a kangaroo hops on your radiator, don't you think it would be a good idea to turn off the car?"

Miss Nelly: "Huh?"

Dr. Phil: "Of course you will be teaching Johnny many things that are not specifically written out as goals. Through the course of the preschool day, he'll be engaging in planned activities built from your classroom curriculum. Many of the skills that were identified in the evaluation, but not identified as needing specialized instruction, will be addressed through the course of the preschool program. Johnny will participate and be supported in those activities just like all the other children. Since you are not doing anything different for Johnny in this part of the program, there is no need for the intensive level of monitoring that is required for an IEP goal.

So, Miss Nelly, given all that I have taught you, tell me now, would you rather be right or happy?"

Miss Nelly: "Well, in this case, Dr. Phil, if I follow your advice, I believe I will be right and happy at the same time. I will be focusing on high priority goals for Johnny – goals that really will make a difference. By writing only the highest priority goals, Johnny's IEP will be more meaningful and more manageable."

*Dr. Phil: "Gosh I'm good! That's all for today, folks. And remember: you either get it or you don't."**

This satirical account of the Dr. Phil Show is purely fictitious and should not be interpreted as a factual account of a previously aired episode. Quotes followed by an * were taken from excerpts of the Dr. Phil Show; however, the ideas and opinions expressed in this article are entirely that of the author, Misty Goosen, Ed.S., KITS.