

Elements of an IEP

Although IEP forms vary in format and vocabulary from district to district, each contain certain required elements.

Present Levels of Performance

The IEP should contain information describing the students current functioning in the following areas:

- **General intelligence:** usually given as IQ scores
- **Social/emotional:** includes info on relationships with peers and adults, interpersonal issues and behavior
- **Academics:** includes info on strengths and weaknesses in various academic subjects as well as info on any processing problems and/or preferred learning styles/instructional methods
- **Health:** includes info from the school's vision and hearing screenings as well as concerns about fine and gross motor skills and any physical conditions or medications
- **Communication:** includes strengths and/or weaknesses in areas such as articulation, syntax, volume and fluency
- **Other:** could contain prevocational or vocational info or info on any other area of strength or weakness not addressed elsewhere

Goals and Objectives/Benchmarks

After the IEP team has examined the student's present levels of performance, they choose several (usually around 5) specific issues on which to concentrate. A goal will be set for each area chosen and then objectives (or benchmarks) will be developed to describe how those goals will be met. The objective should address:

- a **measurable and observable behavior** such as completing assignments, reading a specific number of new word, following staff directions
- the **condition** in which the behavior will be assessed such as "in the classroom", "given a passage written at a _____ reading level", "at recess"
- a **criterion** for measuring success such as "with a maximum of ___ errors", "with ___% accuracy". The criterion should include both an accuracy level and the number of assessments expected for determining success (how many times should Johnny read the word list with 90% accuracy before you count this objective as mastered?) ***

Examples:

1. Given the first 25 words of the Dolch Word list, Jane will pronounce 90% of the words correctly on 3 consecutive trials.
2. In the classroom setting, John will refrain from throwing objects with a maximum of 3 errors per week for 4 of 5 weeks.

***Please note that, in order to set an appropriate criterion for a behavior, the team must know at what frequency or duration the behavior is presently occurring. If the behavior to be improved is reading Dolch Words, the team needs to know how many words the student can currently read. This is called a **baseline**. Without an accurate baseline, a team can't determine whether the student has actually made any improvement or not.

Related Services

If a student requires services such as counseling with the school psychologist, speech/language services, transportation, occupational or physical therapy or social work services in order to meet his/her goals and objectives, this information must be included in the IEP. The same is true if the student requires assistive devices such as a computer or language board though this is usually written in a different section of the IEP.

Behavior Intervention Plan

Some students with serious behavior problems may have a Behavior Intervention Plan in their IEP. If the IEP team believes, based on the student's past performance, that the student is at risk for being suspended or is being suspended for a specific behavior, a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) must be developed to address the problem.

To write a BIP, the team should first perform a **functional assessment** of the behavior to discover what need the inappropriate behavior is fulfilling for the student. It is also important to determine under what conditions the behavior occurs so that the problem can eventually be avoided.

The BIP should include:

- -a measurable and observable description of the targeted behavior
- -a description of information discovered during the functional assessment
- -a description of the new behavior the team wants to replace the targeted behavior with (replacement behavior)
- -a description of the types of positive reinforcement and instructional interventions that will be used to encourage the student to use the replacement behavior and/or reward the student can earn for not engaging in the targeted behavior
- -a description of the consequences that will be used if the inappropriate behavior is displayed by the student (particularly if the interventions are restrictive in nature)
- -a description of how and when progress will be reviewed and evaluated
- -a description of how the family will be involved

The Transition Plan

All students 14 years of age and older are required to have a transition plan in their IEP. This plan is developed by the student and the IEP team. The purpose of the plan is to determine what the student (and his/her parents) wants to achieve through his/her educational process. Does he/she want to go to college or be an electrician or open a small business? Does he/she want to live independently or in a group home setting? Does he/she want to be able to handle his/her finances, sign up for community recreational activities or use public transportation?

Once it has been developed, the Transition Plan becomes the document which will guide the IEP. If a student wants to go to college or be an auto mechanic or work in a sheltered workshop, then the IEP should target behaviors and skills that will allow the student to meet that goal.

The Signature Page

Once the IEP has been written, everyone on the team will sign the signature page. It is important to note that by signing the IEP, an individual is not affirming agreement with the contents of the document. Each person is merely acknowledging his/her participation on the process. If an individual does not agree with the IEP, he/she has the right to formally dissent. For more information on this, see your Special Education Director.

Updates

Although the IEP is written cover 1 calendar year, it should be reviewed and the parents informed of the student's progress at least as often as the performance of general education students is reviewed (usually whenever grade cards are done). If the student is not making the expected progress towards completion of his/her goals and objectives, a new IEP meeting should be called so that revisions can be made.

© Project STAY, 1999