Chapter 6 - Measurable Annual Goals (Including Academic and Functional Goals)

The term "individualized education program" or "IEP" means a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with this section and that includes

(II) a statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals, designed to

(aa) meet the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum

(bb) meet each of the child's other educational needs that result from the child's disability (IDEIA, 2004)

Definition
Annual goals are statements that identify what knowledge, skills and/or behaviors a student is expected to be able to demonstrate within the period of time beginning with the time the IEP is implemented until the next scheduled review. Annual goals must be identified that meet the student's needs, as identified in the present levels of performance.

A goal is a measurable statement that describes what a child is reasonably expected to accomplish from the specialized educational program during the school year.

Explanation

The academic and functional goals should focus on the learning and behavioral problems resulting from the child's disability and be aligned with state and district performance standards. They should address the needs that are summarized in the statement of the child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance. For those students taking alternate assessment, there should be at least one goal, with corresponding objectives or benchmarks, for each area of need.

The goals and objectives or benchmarks provide a mechanism for determining whether the child is progressing in the special education program and the general education curriculum, and whether the placement and services are appropriate to meet the child's identified educational needs (IDEIA; 20 USC 1414 d 1 A i II).
Individual need determinations (i.e., present levels of performance and individual needs) must provide the basis for written annual goals. The IEP must list measurable annual goals, consistent with the student’s needs and abilities to be followed during the period beginning with placement and ending with the next scheduled review by the Committee (effective dates of the IEP).

For each annual goal, the IEP must indicate the benchmarks and/or short-term instructional objectives and evaluative criteria, evaluation procedures and schedules to be used to measure progress toward the annual goal.

The benchmarks or short-term instructional objectives must be measurable, intermediate steps between present levels of educational performance and the annual goals that are established for a student with a disability.

The measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives, must be related to:

- meeting the student’s needs that result from the student’s disability to enable the student to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum (or for preschool students, in appropriate activities); and
- meeting each of the student’s other educational needs that result from the student’s disability.

Measurable annual goals set the general direction for instruction and assist in determining specific courses, experiences, and skills a student will need to reach his or her vision. Goals also are descriptions of what a student can reasonably be expected to accomplish within one school year.

A goal must be meaningful, measurable, able to be monitored, and useful in decision making. The annual goal is meaningful if it specifies a level of performance and an expectation that is reasonable; the skill or knowledge the goal represents is necessary for success in school and post-school activities; and the family believes the accomplishment of the goal is important. The goal is measurable if it reflects performance or behavior that can be measured or observed.

A goal is able to be monitored it there are multiple increments in performance between the present levels of performance and the criteria stated in the goal. The goal should be written so that it can be monitored frequently.

Finally, the goal is useful in making decision regarding the student’s education and the effectiveness of the student’s IEP.

To meet the requirements of this part, the IEP team reviews and analyzes the present levels of educational performance and then writes an applicable annual goal for each area of need described. Goals must be written to enable the student to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum and to advance in other areas of educational need.
The IEP team writes annual goals that:

- show a direct relationship to the present levels of educational performance;
- describe only what the student can reasonably be expected to accomplish within one school year or the 12-month term of the IEP;
- are written in measurable terms;
- prepare the student for his or her desired post-school activities, when planning for the school-to-adult life transition; and
- The goal must include at least three parts:
  1. expected change in performance—specifies the anticipated change in performance from a baseline and usually reflects an action or can be directly observed;
  2. proposed area of change—identifies skill, knowledge, understanding or behavior; and
  3. proposed criteria—specify the amount of growth, how much and how frequent, or to what standard or level of proficiency.

**Principles of Formulating Goals for a Student’s IEP**

When formulating goal statements, use the following guidelines:

- Goals should be general statements that focus on deficit skill areas.
- Goals should be designed to address the needs identified in the statement of the child's present level of academic achievement of functional performance.
- Goals should be challenging and describe what a child can reasonably be expected to accomplish during the school year.
- All members of the IEP Team should easily understand the language of the goals.
- Goals should be written to increase the child's successful participation in the general education curriculum and allow for inclusion in the general education environment to the maximum extent appropriate, or for preschool children, to participate in appropriate activities with non-disabled peers.

Goals should be stated so they are meaningful. Helpful questions to ask include:

- Is accomplishment of the goal necessary for success in current and future environments?
- Does the family believe the accomplishment of the goal is important?
- Does the goal specify a level of performance and expectation that is reasonable?
- Goals should be measurable; they must reflect behavior that can be measured.
- Goals should be written so they can be monitored frequently and repeatedly.
- Goals should be written to enhance decision-making. Monitoring the goal provides data that can be used to determine the effectiveness of the child's educational program.
- Goals should reflect transition needs, if appropriate.
Step-by-Step procedures for determining Measurable Annual Goals

Step A: Determine the Skills the Student Requires to Master the Content of the Curriculum

Annual goals should focus on the knowledge, skills, behaviors and strategies to address the student’s needs. A student’s needs generally relate to domains such as, but not limited to, reading, writing, listening, organization, study skills, communication, physical development, motor skills, cognitive processing, problem-solving, social skills, play skills, memory, visual perception, auditory perception, attention, behavior, and career and community living skills. The goals on a student’s IEP should relate to the student’s need for specially designed instruction to address the student’s disability needs and those needs that interfere with the student’s ability to participate and progress in the general curriculum.

Goals should not be a restatement of the general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for students without disabilities), or 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 the IEP goals, the Committee needs to select goals to answer the question: "What skills does the student require to master the content of the curriculum?" rather than "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 the curriculum goal that the student will write 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 standards so that a student has the foundation or precursor skills and strategies needed to access and progress in the curriculum.

Step B: How Far ... By When?

From information in the present levels of performance, the Committee has identified which need areas must be addressed and where the student is currently functioning in each of those areas. The next step is to identify what the focus of special education instruction will be over the course of the upcoming year. The annual goals will guide instruction, serve as the basis to measure progress and report to parents and serve as the guideposts to determine if the supports and services being provided to the student are appropriate and effective.

An annual goal indicates what the student is expected to be able to do by the end of year in which the IEP is in effect (i.e., the period beginning with placement and ending with the next scheduled review by the Committee). The annual goal takes the student from his/her present level of performance to a level of performance expected by the end of the year.

To be measurable, an annual goal should, in language parents and educators can understand, describe the skill, behavior or knowledge the student will demonstrate and the extent to which it will be demonstrated.
Examples: One year from now,

*Jim will write 10 sentences with correct punctuation.*

*Terry will ask questions about the instructions or materials presented to ensure comprehension.*

*Tom will use a datebook for appointments and assignments.*

*Terry will solve multi-step word problems.*

*Brianna will stand at least two feet away from the other person while conversing.*

*Lisa will walk 10 feet independently.*

*Mackenzie will speak in complete sentences.*

*Ron will point independently to pictures described.*

*Jose will use word prediction software to write essays.*

Terms such as "will improve…," "will increase…." and "will decrease…." are not specific enough to describe what it is the student is expected to be able to do in one year. To be measurable, a behavior must be observable or able to be counted. In general, it is recommended that goals describe what the student will do, as opposed to what the student will not do.

Example:

*The student will ask for a break from work versus The student will not walk out of the classroom without permission.*

**Step C: Determine Short-term instructional objectives**

For each annual goal, the IEP must include short-term instructional objectives or benchmarks. The instructional objectives or benchmarks must include evaluative criteria, evaluation procedures and schedules to be used to measure progress toward the annual goal. Short-term objectives and benchmarks should be general indicators of progress, not detailed instructional plans, that provide the basis to determine how well the student is progressing toward his or her annual goal and which serve as the basis for reporting to parents.

Generally, one annual goal would not include both short-term objectives and benchmarks. Whether short-term objectives or benchmarks are used for a particular annual goal is at the discretion of the Committee.

Short-term objectives are the intermediate knowledge and skills that must be learned in order for the student to reach the annual goal. Short-term objectives break down the skills or steps necessary to accomplish a goal into discrete components.
For example, the sequential steps that one student must demonstrate in order for him to reach the annual goal to "remain in his reading class for the entire period and ask for help when the reading work is difficult for him" are as follows:

Grant will be able to identify what upset him after a behavioral disruption.

Grant will be able to state the physical signs he is feeling when reading work gets difficult and leads to a behavioral disruption.

Grant will raise his hand for assistance when he begins to experience those physical signs.

**Step D: Determine Benchmarks**

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 expected performance levels that allow for regular checks of progress that coincide with the reporting periods for informing parents of their child’s progress toward the annual goals. For example, benchmarks may be used for this same student for this annual goal as follows:

*By November, Grant will remain in his reading class for 15 minutes without disruptions.*

*By February, Grant will remain in class for 25 minutes without disruptions.*

*By April, Grant will remain in his reading class for 35 minutes without disruption.*

*By June, Grant will remain in his reading class for 45 minutes without disruption.*

**Writing short-term instructional objectives and benchmarks**

The following template may assist in the writing of short-term objectives or benchmarks:

*Student will (do what) – (to what extent) - (over what period of time) or (by when) as evaluated through ______________ on the following schedule: ______________.*

*Examples:*
  
  S. will wait his turn in group games for 3/5 turn-taking activities over three consecutive days as evaluated through teacher charting of the targeted behavior every 4 weeks.
  
  K. will highlight and/or underline important concepts in reading materials on 4 out of 5 trials over a two-week period as evaluated through corrected work in class every 2 months.
  
  By December, J. will initiate his class work when prompted by the teacher within 3 minutes over 10 consecutive trials as evaluated by structured observations of the targeted behavior once a month.
  
  L. will use appropriate phrases to request toys or activities during free play on 5 trials over a 2-
week period as evaluated by structured observations every 8 weeks. 
D. will wait until all directions are received before beginning activities or assignments as evaluated through teacher charting of the targeted behavior every 4 weeks. 
By January, M. will independently remove himself from the situation on all occasions when he is teased by peers during recess as evaluated quarterly by daily self-monitoring checklists.

**Short-term objectives or benchmarks:** The short-term objectives or benchmarks derive from the annual goals but represent smaller, more manageable learning tasks a child must master on the way to achieving the goals. The purpose of short-term objectives and benchmarks is to enable families, children, and teachers to monitor progress during the year and, if appropriate, revise the IEP consistent with the child's instructional needs. They describe how far the child is expected to progress toward the annual goal and by when. In most cases, at least two objectives or benchmarks should be written for each annual goal. Progress on each short-term objective or benchmark should be documented.

*Short-term objectives* generally break the skills described in the annual goal into discrete components. *Benchmarks* describe the amount of progress the child is expected to make in a specified segment of the year. Benchmarks establish expected performance levels that allow for regular checks of progress that coincide with the reporting periods for informing parents of their child's progress toward achieving the annual goals.

Objectives and benchmarks must be measurable; they must use language that will allow a count of what a child does (i.e., *The child will write, The child will read*). Do not use phrases such as: "The child will understand," or "The child will appreciate").

**Step E: Determine the Evaluative criteria**

Evaluative criteria identify how well and over what period of time the student must perform a behavior in order to consider it met.

How well a student does 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 (90% accuracy)

The period of time a skill or behavior must occur could be measured in terms such as:

- number of days (e.g., over three consecutive days)
- number of weeks (e.g., over a four week period)
- occasions (e.g., during Math and English classes, on six consecutive occasions)
Step F: Determine Evaluation Procedures to Measure the Student’s Progress

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

Examples: structured observations of targeted behavior in class; student self-monitoring checklist; written tests; audio-visual recordings; behavior charting; work samples.

Step G: Determine the Evaluation Schedules to Measure the Student’s Progress

Evaluation schedules state the date or intervals of time by which evaluation procedures will be used to measure the student’s progress toward the objective or benchmark. It is not a date by which the student must demonstrate mastery of the objective.

Examples: by March 2003, in three months, every four weeks, at the end of the term, quarterly

Short-term objectives and benchmarks should include the following three components to ensure that they can be evaluated:

Objective Criteria that enable progress to be monitored and allow for determination of the point at which the objective has been accomplished, such as:

95% accurate
fewer than 5 times per day
50 correct responses in one minute
4 out of 5 trials correct on three consecutive days

Evaluation Procedures to be used, such as:

teacher observation
written performance
oral performance
criterion referenced tests
parent report
observation
time sample
teacher-made tests

3. Schedules to determine how often the objective will be measured, such as:

one-two weeks
twice a week
once a month
six weeks
nine weeks
each semester
annually
Some examples of possible short-term objectives are listed below. Each objective has numbers corresponding to the three components: (1) objective criteria, (2) evaluation procedure and (3) schedules.

To read a 300 word article in the newspaper (1) in two minutes with 95% accuracy (2) as observed and recorded by the resource teacher (3) once a week.

To create (1) fewer than 5 disruptions per day for three consecutive days (2) as observed and recorded by the teacher's paraprofessional (3) each day.
To achieve (1) 95% accuracy (2) on a teacher made spelling test of seventh grade words as checked by the resource teacher (3) on a weekly basis.

To compose three-paragraph themes comprised of fifteen or more sentences using a word processing program with a spell checker (1) with 80% or better accuracy in the use of spelling, punctuation and grammar over 5 consecutive trials (2) as recorded by the resource teacher (3) weekly.

**Step H: Determine How Progress Toward Annual Goals will be Measured**

In accordance with the procedures, methods and schedules to measure a student’s progress toward the annual goals, school personnel need to establish a reporting and recording system that ensures that a student’s progress is objectively assessed. This information is necessary for reporting progress to parents and for the Committee to review the student’s IEP.

**FAQ about Annual Goals**

**For each identified present level of performance, must there be annual goals?**

Yes--For each identified present level of performance, there must be at least one annual goal specified. These goals and subsequent objectives form the basis for the curriculum and specially designed instruction provided to the student. They are, therefore, written in terms of what the student will achieve. They should not be written in terms of what a parent or service provider will provide to the student.

Annual goals state the anticipated achievement expected within a 12 month period of time, although they can be written for a shorter period. In developing annual goals the present level of educational performance must be considered. Annual goals must not be a restatement of the present levels of performance. Yet anyone reviewing the IEP should be able to clearly determine the direct relationship between the two.

Measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives, are critical to the strategic planning process used to develop and implement the IEP for each child with a disability. Once the IEP team has developed measurable annual goals for a child, the team (1) can develop strategies that will be most effective in realizing those goals and (2) must develop either measurable, intermediate steps (short term objectives) or major milestones (benchmarks).
that will enable parents, students, and educators to monitor progress during the year, and if appropriate, to revise the IEP consistent with the student’s instructional needs.

The strong emphasis ... on linking the educational program of children with disabilities to the general curriculum is reflected in 300.347(a)(2), which requires that the IEP include: a statement of measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short term objectives, related to – (i) meeting the child’s needs that result from the child’s disability to enable the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum; and (ii) meeting each of the child’s other educational needs that result from the child’s disability.

**Must the measurable annual goals address all areas of the general curriculum or only those areas in which the student’s involvement and progress are affected by his/her disability?**

Areas of the general curriculum that are not affected by the student’s disability do not need to be specifically addressed in the IEP. Annual goals should address areas of the general curriculum that are directly affected by the student’s disability. Accommodations and modifications may be needed for the student to participate in other areas of the general curriculum.

The school district ... is not required to include in an IEP annual goals that relate to areas of the general curriculum in which the student’s disability does not affect the child’s ability to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum. If a child with a disability needs only modifications or accommodations in order to progress in an area of the general curriculum, the IEP does not need to include a goal for that area; however, the IEP would need to specify those modifications or accommodations.

School districts often require all children, including children with disabilities, to demonstrate mastery in a given area of the general curriculum before allowing them to progress to the next level or grade in that area. Thus, in order to ensure that each child with a disability can effectively demonstrate competencies in an applicable area of the general curriculum, it is important for the IEP team to consider the accommodations and modifications that the child needs to assist him or her in demonstrating progress in that area.

**What are short term objectives or benchmarks?**

Short term objectives or benchmarks are measurable, intermediate steps between an individual’s present level of performance and the annual goal. Objectives should be based on a logical breakdown of the annual goal and reflect advancement toward that goal. They therefore must be provided for each area in which present levels of performance and annual goals have been stated.

...each annual goal must include either short-term objectives or benchmarks. The purpose of both is to enable a child’s teacher(s), parents and others involved in developing and implementing the child’s IEP, to gauge, at intermediate times during the year, how well the child is progressing toward achievement of the annual goal. IEP teams may continue to develop short-term instructional objectives, that generally break the skills described in the annual goal down into discrete components. The revised statute and regulations also provide that, as an alternative, IEP teams may develop benchmarks, which can be thought of as describing the
amount of progress the child is expected to make within specified segments of the year. Generally, benchmarks establish expected performance levels that allow for regular checks of progress that coincide with the reporting periods for informing parents of their child’s progress toward achieving the annual goals.

An IEP team may use either short term objectives or benchmarks or a combination of the two depending on the nature of the annual goals and needs of the child.

Can short term objectives or benchmarks be changed without initiating another IEP meeting?

No. If either a parent or the school district believes that a required component of the student’s IEP should be changed, the school district must conduct an IEP meeting if it believes that a change in the IEP may be necessary. Since short term objectives, benchmarks, and annual goals are required components of the IEP, a meeting must be held with all required team members if any of these are going to be changed. The team will then make the needed changes in the IEP and thus a new IEP will have been developed. There is no such thing as an addendum to an IEP allowed under IDEA.
### Measurable Annual Goals and Short-Term Instructional Objectives/Benchmarks

**Annual Goal:**
Kevin will accurately interpret graphs and charts to solve grade-level mathematical problems.

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<tr>
<th>Instructional Objectives or Benchmarks:</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Criteria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kevin will use manipulatives to reproduce graphs and charts to solve math problems.</td>
<td>4/5 times over 2 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kevin will highlight the large print graphs and charts to increase the contrast between the various parts of the graph, in order to solve math problems.</td>
<td>4/5 times over 2 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kevin will verbally describe the material presented on graphs and charts to the teacher, in order to solve the problem.</td>
<td>4/5 times over 2 weeks</td>
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### Annual Goal:
Kevin will use graphic organizers to write a three-paragraph essay using correct sequencing of sentences including topic sentence, supporting sentences and conclusion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Objectives or Benchmarks:</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevin will use graphic organizers to write a three-sentence paragraph using correct sequencing of sentences including topic sentence, supporting sentences and conclusion with assistance by November.</td>
<td>Criteria: 5/5 times over 2 weeks, Procedures: Writing sample, Tests, Classroom assignments, Schedule: Every 6 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kevin will use graphic organizers to write a five-sentence paragraph using correct sequencing of sentences including topic sentence, supporting sentences and conclusion with assistance by January.</td>
<td>Criteria: 4/5 times over 2 weeks, Procedures: Writing sample, Teacher observation, Classroom assignments, Schedule: Every 6 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kevin will use graphic organizers to write a two-paragraph essay using correct sequencing of sentences including topic sentence, supporting sentences and conclusion without assistance by March.</td>
<td>Criteria: 4/5 times over 2 weeks, Procedures: Writing sample, Teacher observation, Schedule: Every 6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin will use graphic organizers to write a three-paragraph essay using correct sequencing of sentences including topic sentence, supporting sentences and conclusion without assistance by June.</td>
<td>Criteria: 4/5 times over 2 weeks, Procedures: Writing sample, Tests, Classroom assignments, Schedule: Every 6 weeks</td>
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