

Infusing IEPs with Content

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Overview

Since the passage of the first special education law in the 1970s, special and general education teachers have worked to meet the challenge of providing equal access to the general education curriculum for all students, with and without disabilities. Access is especially critical in helping students with disabilities close the achievement gap and succeed in school. Almost 30 years of research and experience have demonstrated that two efforts—holding high expectations for these students and ensuring them access to the general education curriculum in the general education classroom, to the maximum extent possible—go far toward helping them meet the developmental goals that have been established for all children.

According to Larry Gloeckler, Executive Director of the Special Education Institute at the International Center for Leadership in Education, “The vast majority of students identified as needing special education—about 80–85 percent—are in categories that by definition involve at least average intellectual capability. Given this population, there appears to be no reason why academic performance is so low, other than the low expectations that prevail in the systems that serve them, the limited opportunities provided to them to be challenged, and the strategies that have been used to meet their educational needs.” While the legal obligation to focus on improved performance for these students is persuasive, Gloeckler notes, the world of work provides an equally strong reason for doing so: “In fact, the

average income for an adult identified as Learning Disabled is \$20,000/year; less than 5% of individuals with disabilities own their own home; and the unemployment rate is 60% compared to 6% overall.”¹ And Michael Hock, Program Associate at the Northeast Regional Resource Center, writes, “Doesn’t it make sense to design IEPs [Individualized Education Programs] that help students meet standards so they can do their best on standards-based assessments, pass from grade to grade and eventually graduate, and in the process help prove that their schools and teachers were indeed accountable?”² There is no reason why students with disabilities should not be given the same opportunities to learn—and be supported in learning—the same general education content as their chronological peers. The legal and moral mandates for helping struggling students in the short term (to do well on tests) and in the long term (to advance in their education so that they become employable and self-supporting) have led teachers and administrators to link IEP goals for these students to the state’s content standards and thus promote access to the general education curriculum.

The IEP team has a serious responsibility to take into account exactly how

a child will access and make progress in the general education curriculum when developing the student’s educational plan. A well-designed IEP ensures access, helps a student make progress, sets high standards, and measures student outcomes; it defines and documents how students with disabilities will participate and progress in the general education curriculum, and it describes exactly how they will participate in statewide assessments. Specifically, linking standards to the IEP accomplishes the following:

- Aligns IEPs to grade-level standards
- Gives students with disabilities access to standards-based curriculum and to grade-level subject matter and skills
- Focuses instruction to meet challenging (grade-level) goals
- Involves collaboration between general and special education teachers

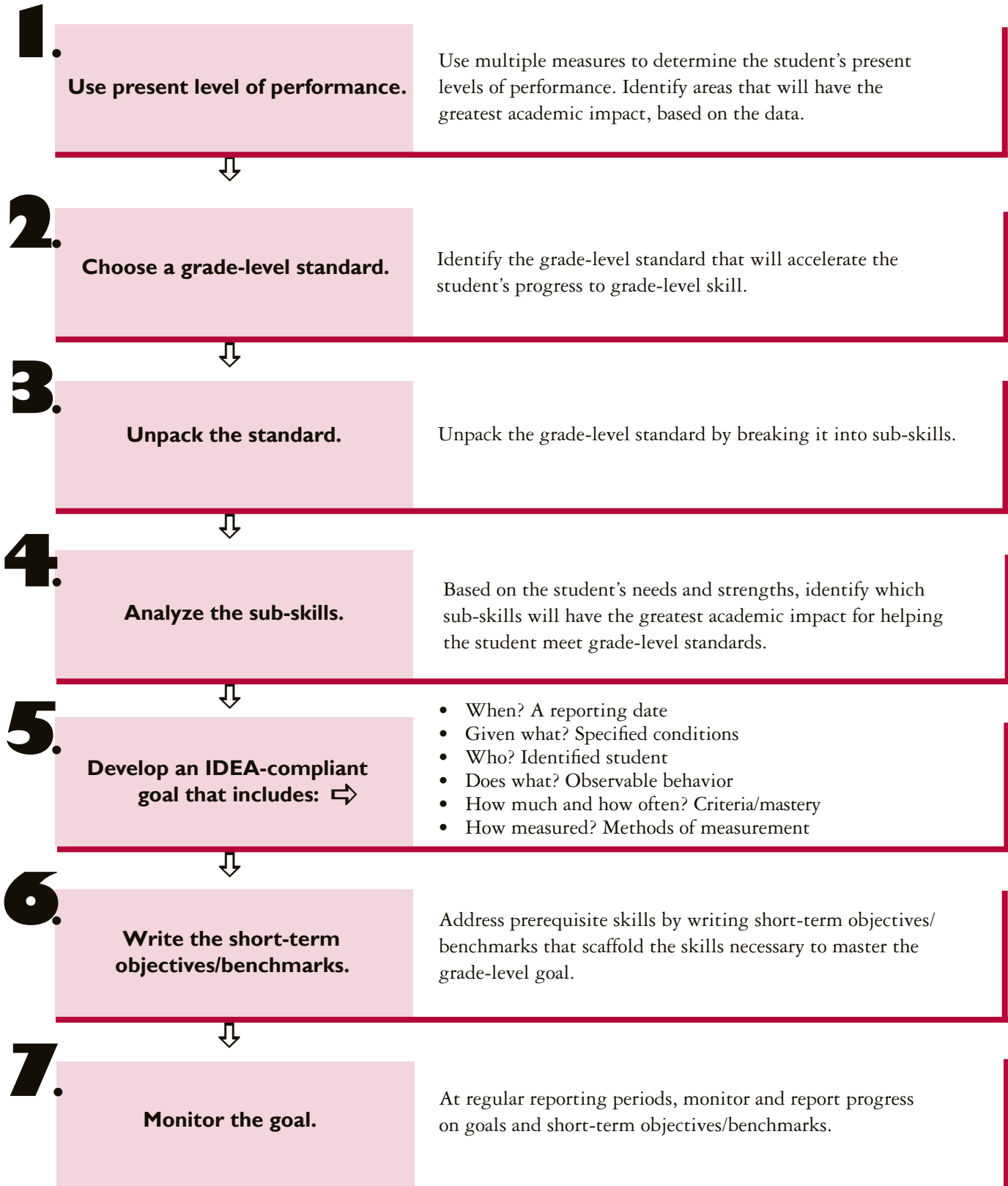
A carefully thought-out IEP will ensure students’ appropriate access to school curriculum and to participation and progress in the California content standards and in the general education curriculum. This practice unquestionably improves student outcomes. It helps close the achievement gap for students with disabilities. And it helps them move into their future as adults with improved possibilities and greater promise.

The following three pages are designed to give teachers and parents a clear overview of how standards-based goals and objectives are written for the IEPs of students with disabilities. A flow-chart is followed by specific examples of goals and objectives written for students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. ♦

1. In *Improving Performance for Special Education Students*, 2005; available at www.leadered.com/pdf/Improving%20Spec%20Ed%20excerpt.pdf.
2. In “Ten Reasons Why We Should Use Standards in IEPs,” 2000; available at www.k8accesscenter.org/documents/iep/MichaelHockArticle.pdf.

Steps for Developing Standards-Based Goals

This flow-chart demonstrates the process for writing grade-level, standards-based goals. All goals are based on a student's present levels of performance, as seen in student assessments and data. The standards that will have the greatest academic impact are selected for the IEP goals. Those standards are broken down into sub-skills for goal development and then analyzed to determine which sub-skills will accelerate student progress in meeting grade-level standards.



Developing Goals: What It Looks Like

Elementary Student: Jane

1. Use **present level of performance**: Jane has been receiving special education services since kindergarten, when she was identified as an individual on the autism spectrum. She is currently in fourth grade and demonstrates deficits in auditory processing, which has been affecting her reading comprehension and written-language skills. On the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA), she scored at the second-grade level for reading comprehension, with weaknesses in both literal and inferential questions, while scoring at the fourth-grade level on the decoding subtests. On the district's third-grade writing assessments last year, she scored 1, 2, and 1 on a 4-point rubric for content. Jane is a native English speaker and receives speech- and language-related services.

The Data: Assessment data show that concentrating on Reading Comprehension and Writing Strategies, with an emphasis on organization and focus, would do the most to accelerate Jane to grade-level ability. The grade-level, standards-aligned curriculum will address all other areas of her academic weakness.

2. **Choose the standard:** Jane's teacher examines the California English Language Arts Standards for Reading Comprehension and Writing Strategies and identifies the standard that will accelerate Jane's learning toward grade-level skills. The teacher selected the following standard:
Reading Comprehension: Structural Features of Informational Materials: 4.2.1. "Identify structural patterns found in informational text (e.g., compare and contrast, cause and effect, sequential or chronological order, proposition and support) to strengthen comprehension."

3. **Unpack the standard:**

- Identify compare-and-contrast patterns.
- Identify cause-and-effect patterns.
- Identify a story sequence or chronological order pattern.
- Identify the author's proposition.
- Identify statements that support a proposition.

4. **Analyze and identify sub-skills based on Jane's needs and strengths:**

- Completes a graphic organizer using a compare-and-contrast pattern
- Completes a cause-and-effect graphic organizer
- Completes a story sequence graphic organizer

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- Lists the statements that support the proposition
- Explains an author's proposition orally or in writing

Components

Of an IDEA-Compliant Goal

<i>When?</i>	By October 8, 2010,
<i>Given what?</i>	given grade-level passages,
<i>Who?</i>	Jane
<i>Does what?</i>	will list statements from the text that support the author's proposition
<i>How much?</i>	with a minimum of six correct statements from each text passage
<i>How often?</i>	on regularly scheduled
<i>How measured?</i>	curriculum-based reading comprehension assessments.

5. **Develop the goal:** "By October 8, 2010, when given grade-level passages, Jane will list statements that support the author's proposition with a minimum of six correct statements from each text passage on regularly scheduled, curriculum-based reading comprehension assessments."

6. **Write the short-term objectives/benchmarks:**
"By January 15, 2010, when given grade-level passages, Jane will identify the author's proposition from the text correctly in four out of five attempts, as measured by classroom discussion, daily reading journal entries, and work samples."

"By June 8, 2010, when given grade-level passages, Jane will identify and highlight statements within a text that support the author's proposition, with a minimum of four correct statements for each text passage during daily reading assignments."

7. **Monitor the goal:** At regular reporting periods, monitor and report progress on goals and short-term objectives and benchmarks.

Middle-School Student: Davey

1. Use Present Level of Performance.

Davey has a specific learning disability that impacts his performance in math. He is a seventh-grade student who has been receiving special education services since fourth grade. On the Diagnostic Online Math Assessment (DOMA), Davey had partial mastery of eight of the fourteen pre-algebra skills assessed. He showed mastery or partial mastery of the following: integer operations, estimating and rounding, ratios and proportions, interpreting data, simple probability, simple geometry, and linear functions and number patterns. These strengths show that Davey has a fairly strong conceptual knowledge of math constructs, but he struggles with functional math, such as fraction and decimal operations, including converting and comparing, evaluating exponents, and simplifying expressions. Davey is an English language learner at a CELDT¹ level 3.

The Data: A focus on the goal of *Algebra and Functions* would have the greatest academic impact on accelerating Davey to grade-level skill. This focus requires a concentration on equations, as this skill incorporates the functional math skills that Davey will need to continue to develop his mathematical competency. The grade-level, standards-aligned curriculum will address all other areas of weakness.

2. Choose the Standard: *Algebra and Functions*.

7.1.0 Students express quantitative relationships by using algebraic terminology, expressions, equations, inequalities, and graphs:

7.1.2 Use the correct order of operations to evaluate algebraic expressions, such as $3(2x + 5)^2$.

3. Unpack the Standard.

- Identify the order of operations
- Evaluate algebraic expressions involving +
- Evaluate algebraic expressions involving –
- Evaluate algebraic expressions involving x
- Evaluate algebraic expressions involving /
- Evaluate algebraic expressions involving parenthesis
- Evaluate algebraic expressions involving exponents

4. Analyze the Sub-Skills.

Analyze and identify sub-skills, based on Davey's needs and strengths.

5. Develop the Goal.

"By October 8, 2010, when given a calculator, Davey will solve algebraic expressions involving +, -, x, /, parenthesis, and exponents with 70-percent accuracy in six out of eight common assessments."

6. Write the Short-term Objective/Benchmarks.

"By January 15, 2010, when given a calculator, an order of operations chart, and a mnemonic, Davey will correctly solve expressions involving parenthesis, x, and / with 70-percent accuracy on weekly, curriculum-based measures."

"By June 8, 2010, when given an order of operations chart and a calculator, Davey will correctly solve expressions involving +, -, x, /, and parenthesis with 70-percent accuracy on weekly, curriculum-based measures."

7. Monitor the Goal.

Tenth-Grade Student: Evelyn

1. Use Present Level of Performance.

Evelyn is a tenth-grade student who has been receiving special education services since fifth grade. She has specific learning disabilities that have impacted her decoding and reading comprehension skills, as well as her skills in written expression. On the DORA she scored at the mid third-grade level for decoding and near the fourth-grade level for comprehension. She has been receiving intensive reading intervention services for the past two years. She has gained three years of growth in reading since that time. However, she struggles with understanding content in her reading and benefits from audio text to support her comprehension of grade-level materials.

The Data: A concentration on *Reading Comprehension*, especially informational material, would have the greatest impact to accelerate Evelyn to grade-level skill, since her core content classes focus on informational text. Her intervention reading program and the grade-level, standards-aligned curriculum of the core content will address all other areas of weakness, including her decoding difficulties.

2. Choose the Standard: *Reading Comprehension*.

10.2.0 Reading Comprehension

10.2.6 Demonstrate the use of sophisticated learning tools by following technical directions (e.g., those found with graphic calculators and specialized software programs and in access guides to World Wide Web sites on the Internet).

3. Unpack the Standard.

- Follow technical directions for electronic devices
- Follow technical directions for software programs
- Follow directions on World Wide Web sites
- Access technical directions via the World Wide Web
- Effectively use sophisticated learning tools
- Effectively use electronic devices
- Effectively use specialized software

4. Analyze the Sub-Skills.

Analyze and identify sub-skills based on Evelyn's needs and strengths.

5. Develop the Goal.

"By October 8, 2010, given text-to-speech software, Evelyn will use sophisticated tools to annotate Web-based and electronic text to improve reading comprehension of core content curriculum, as evidenced by obtaining a grade of 'C' or better in content-area classes on quarterly progress reports."

6. Write Short-term Objectives/Benchmarks.

"By January 15, 2010, given text-to-speech software, Evelyn will navigate and operate the software applied to Internet-based and electronic text, as evidenced by demonstrating step-by-step procedures independently on daily classroom reading assignments."

"By June 8, 2010, given text-to-speech software and access to the Internet, Evelyn will access technical directions and other information pertinent to her core content classes, as evidenced by obtaining a grade of 'C' or better in her content area classes on quarterly progress reports."

7. Monitor the Goal.

1. California English Language Development Test