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IEPs Smart IEPs



Peter W. D. Wright, Esq.

& Pamela Darr Wright, MA, MSW

S.M.A.R.T. IEP: Introduction

Confused about IEP goals and objectives? Learn how to write SMART IEPs.

Parents and teachers agree on one thing - that writing IEP goals, benchmarks and short-term objectives is confusing.

How should IEP goals and objectives be written? What makes goals “appropriate?” How do you know if a child is making progress?

What is a “good IEP?”

Goals & Objectives

When you master the information in this chapter, you will be able to:

List the five components of **SMART IEPs**.

Define, describe, and give specific examples of IEP goals, objectives, and benchmarks.

Write **SMART IEP** goals and objectives that address a child’s needs.

Use **SMART IEP** goals to track a child’s progress in special education.

Describe four common IEP problems, and give examples of each.

The SMART IEP is Your Roadmap

If you are like many parents, you feel confused and inadequate at IEP meetings. What do you know? What should you do? Say? What makes the IEP process so difficult?

Some parents assume that if they are not professional educators, they have little of value to offer in discussions about their child’s special education program. Other parents realize that their child’s IEP is not adequate, relevant or appropriate, but don’t know how to resolve these problems. Diane belongs to the second group:

I know my son’s IEP is not appropriate. The school’s IEP goal for him is “Commitment to academic success.” I know this goal is vague.

“Commitment to academic success” would probably be “appropriate” for

any student. If 'Commitment to academic success' is not an appropriate IEP goal for him, what should I propose?

I need to find some good IEPs to help me construct a model. How are measurable goals, objectives, and benchmarks defined? Can you point me to a source or site that has a model of a well-written IEP? (Diane, parent of 15-year-old special education student)

Diane represents countless parents who want to learn about "good IEPs." What is a "good IEP?" How are goals and objectives written in a "good IEP"? Is Diane correct when she says, "Commitment to academic success" is not an appropriate goal?

The SMART IEP provides a roadmap for the child's special education. When you use SMART IEPs, you know where you are, if you are making progress (moving forward, not backward), how much progress you've made (how far you've come), how far you have to go, and when you arrive at your destination.

The SMART IEP focuses on what the child will **learn** and **be able to do**. When you use the SMART IEP as your roadmap, you will know if the child is learning and mastering skills.

How? Because the SMART IEP includes clear descriptions of what the child **will be able to do**.

FIVE COMPONENTS OF THE "SMART IEP"

S	Specific
M	Measurable
A	Active, uses action words
R	Relevant and realistic
T	Time-limited

The "SMART IEP" is **specific measurable, active, relevant, and time-limited**. Let's examine each of these components.

Specific

The SMART IEP has **specific goals and objectives**. **Specific** goals and objectives specify and define each skill or behavior so it is observable and can be measured objectively.

Measurable

The **SMART IEP has measurable goals and objectives**. When you use **measurable** goals and objectives, you can assess the child's progress toward the goals and objectives.

Assume that you want to lose 25 pounds. You will use bathroom scales to measure your progress. When you use measurable goals and objectives, you know when goals are reached and when skills are mastered.

SMART IEP goals and objectives do not focus on attitudes or states of being (i.e., understanding, appreciating, participating) that cannot be measured objectively.

Active

The **SMART IEP uses active words** to describe skills that will be mastered. For example: "The child **will be able** to touch-type at 20 words a minute with no more than 5 errors on a five-minute timed test."

Relevant

The **SMART IEP** has goals and objectives that are **relevant and realistic**. **Relevant, realistic** goals and objectives are based on the **child's unique needs that result from the child's disability**. Relevant, realistic goals and objectives are designed to strengthen the child's ability to function in these areas.

Relevant IEP goals are **not** based on state or district tests, curricula, or other external standards.

Time-limited

The **SMART IEP is time-limited**. With **time-limited** goals and objectives, you use timelines to assess progress.

Assume that your child is learning typing or keyboarding skills. Here is how the SMART IEP could describe this goal so the child's progress will be measured at intervals:

At the end of the first semester, Mark will touch-type a passage of text at a speed of 20 words per minute, with no more than 10 errors, with progress measured on a five-minute timed test.

At the end of the second semester, Mark will touch-type a passage of text at a speed of 40 words per minute, with no more than 5 errors, with progress measured on a five-minute timed test.

Use SMART Goals and Objectives to Tackle Problems

Are you still confused about SMART IEP goals and objectives? Let's change the facts.

Assume that like many parents, stress and inactivity have caused you to gain weight. Your extra weight came on slowly and gradually -- so gradually that you didn't realize how much weight you'd gained until you went to the doctor for a checkup. When you weighed in, you'd gained 50 pounds since your last checkup three years ago. Fifty pounds!

Wait! Your doctor has more bad news. You have "borderline diabetes" and high blood pressure. If you don't lose weight and change your lifestyle, you are likely to develop serious health problems within the next few years.

When you go back to work, your appointment with the doctor is on your mind. What can you do? You've been on fad diets. You lost weight on these diets but the loss was always temporary. When you went off the diet, you gained even more weight. That wasn't the answer! You're worried and distracted. Fifty pounds!

Your office-mate Marie asks, "What's wrong?" You explain. Marie tells you that several of her friends have lost weight successfully on the Weight Watchers Program. She explains that Weight Watchers isn't a crash-diet or fad.

You hit the Internet and find the Weight-Watchers web site at www.weight-watchers.com!

You learn that the Weight Watchers programs are based on scientific principles. The site includes a list of medical advisors who are specialists in endocrinology, diabetes, nutrition, clinical and health psychology, and exercise physiology. You learn that Weight Watchers began in the 1960s - it isn't a fad!

Developing a SMART Weight Loss Program

You decide to use Weight Watchers as the basis of a **SMART Weight Loss Program** that is tailored to your unique needs as an overweight, stressed-out parent. You will design a SMART Weight Loss Program that is **specific, measurable, active, relevant, and time-limited**.

You are 5 feet, 5 inches tall and weigh 190 pounds. Your doctor says you need to lose 50 pounds. When you check the Height-Weight chart on the Weight Watchers site, you learn that you should weigh between 138-144 pounds. This is consistent with your doctor's advice to lose 50 pounds.

You use an independent objective measure to analyze your weight and health. Weight Watchers uses the Body Mass Index. When you plug your height (5 feet, 5 inches) and weight (190 pounds) into the Body Mass Index, your BMI is 32. You

read, “A number of 30 or more is considered obese — people in this range are at a great risk for disease.”

You Write Measurable Goals and Objectives

If you lose 50 pounds, you will weight 140 pounds. When you plug “140 pounds” into the Body Mass Index, the BMI Index is 23. Numbers between 20-25 are “in the healthy range for adults.” You’re on the right track.

You learn that Weight Watchers members use the “1-2-3 Success Plan.” With the “1-2-3 Success Plan,” your first goal is to lose 10% of your present weight in 12 weeks. This sounds like a good plan.

Long-term Goal: I will lose 50 pounds in nine months.

Short-term Objective: I will lose 19 pounds (10% of my present weight) in 12 weeks.

Are your goals and objectives **specific, measurable, active, realistic, and time-limited?** Yes!

You know it is important to measure progress objectively and often. You realize that you’ll need more structure and encouragement in the beginning. You decide to attend Weight Watchers meetings every week. At these meetings, a coach will measure your weight and teach you new strategies to help you meet your goals.

You Measure Progress Objectively

Assume you lose 19 pounds in 12 weeks. At the end of 12 weeks, you weigh 171 pounds. You need to lose 31 pounds to reach your goal of 140 pounds. If you continue to lose weight at the rate of 1.5 pounds a week, you will reach your goal in about 20 weeks. You revise your goal to reflect your present weight..

Long-term Goal: I will lose 31 pounds in 20 weeks.

Short-term Objective: I will lose 16 pounds in 10 weeks. At the end of 10 weeks, my weight will be 155 pounds.

Assume that you are successful. In 10 weeks, you weigh 155 pounds. To reach your goal of 140 pounds, you must lose 15 pounds. You revise your goal again to reflect your present weight:

Goal & Objective: I will lose 15 pounds in 10 weeks. At the end of 10 weeks, my weight will be 140 pounds.

Are your goals and objectives **specific, measurable, active, realistic, and time-limited?** Yes!

Your SMART Weight Loss Program included several components. You wrote goals and objectives that were specific and measurable. You measured progress objectively and often. As you lost weight, you revised your goals and objectives to reflect your progress. Your goals and objectives were time-limited.

Your SMART Weight Loss Plan did not include dozens of goals, objectives and benchmarks that ran several pages. You wanted to devise a clear, simple, effective plan, not a confusing plan.

Your SMART Weight Loss Program measured your progress objectively and often. The data sheets that you used to track your progress filled a small notebook

When you broke your long-term goal into short-term objectives, you gained a sense of control over the process. When you met your first objective of losing 10% of your body weight, you realized that you could complete your weight loss program successfully

You did it! You used **SMART IEP** principles to develop a SMART Weight Loss Program. Your SMART Weight Loss Program includes **specific, measurable, active, realistic, time-limited goals and objectives**.

Using Objective Data in Treatment Plans

Think about the last time your child was ill and needed medical attention. When you left the doctor's office, you probably had a treatment plan and an appointment for a follow-up visit. If your child's condition does not improve, the doctor will order more diagnostic tests, and will revise the treatment plan.

Unlike many educators, medical specialists understand the need to use objective data in treatment plans. In many respects, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is similar to a medical treatment plan.

The IEP should include information about the child's **present** levels of performance from **objective tests**. The IEP should include **measurable goals and objectives**. The IEP should describe the **services the school will provide** to address each of the **child's educational needs**. The IEP should describe where the child receives these services (i.e. placement) The IEP should include ways for parents and teachers to measure the **child's progress** toward the goals and objectives on a regular basis.

If the child does not make progress with this educational plan, the IEP team should meet. More diagnostic tests may be needed. The child's IEP may need to be revised.

Using Objective Data in IEPs

All decisions about a child's special education program are made by a group of people called the IEP Team. As the child's parent, you are a full member of the IEP team.

Before the IEP team can develop an individualized educational plan (IEP) for a child, the child's problems must be accurately identified and defined. The IEP team must gather information from different sources. This information includes observations of the child in different environments, including the home and classroom, and data from objective tests.

Objective tests are important because they describe the severity of the problems and provide ways to measure the child's progress.

Children grow and change rapidly. Children's educational needs also change rapidly. IEPs can and should be revised as often as necessary.

To learn how you measure progress, we'll look at a medical problem. Assume that your son John complains that his throat is sore. His throat is red. His skin is hot to the touch. He is sleepy and lethargic. These are your subjective observations. You take John to the doctor where his temperature is measured at 104. Lab work shows that John has an elevated white count. Based on these initial test results, the doctor orders a strep test. The strep test is positive.

Using information from subjective observations and objective tests, the doctor will develop a preliminary treatment plan that may include a course of antibiotics for the strep infection. When you take John back for a follow-up visit, you tell the doctor that John's temperature returned to normal within a few days and his throat is not red.

Your observations provide important information about John's condition. But your observations do not provide sufficient evidence that the strep infection is under control. John's doctor may order more tests. Why? Without information from objective tests, the doctor cannot know if John's strep infection is under control. Similarly, you cannot tell if a child has mastered reading, writing or arithmetic skills unless these skills are assessed on objective tests.

Why Educational Progress Should Be Measured Objectively

Jay is an eight-year-old boy who received special education services for two years, beginning in Kindergarten. Jay's parents observed that he was not learning how to read and write. When they shared their observations with the school staff, the principal and teachers assured the parents that Jay was "really making progress."

After Jay completed two years of special education, his parents took him to an educational diagnostician in the private sector for an evaluation. This evaluation showed that his abilities were in the average to above average range, but his reading and language skills were at the early Kindergarten level. Jay did not know how to read or write. In two years of special education, Jay made no progress.

Subjective Teacher Observations

When a teacher says a child is “making progress,” the teacher is offering an **opinion**. This opinion is based on the teacher’s **subjective observations**, not objective data. As Jay’s parents learned, opinions and subjective observations may not provide accurate information about a child’s progress.

Is your child making progress? How do you know? Do you have objective test data that shows your child is making progress?

If you have questions about your child’s progress, you should arrange to have the child’s reading, writing, arithmetic and spelling skills tested by an educational diagnostician or child psychologist in the private sector. Testing by an independent expert will tell you if your child is making progress.

“Passing Grades:” A’s for Effort

Assume your child receives passing grades -- or good grades. Can’t you rely on the child’s grades to measure progress? No!

Several non-academic factors affect the grades teachers give to their students including effort, attendance, behavior, and attitude. Grades do not provide objective information about the child’s progress. Grades may not reflect the child’s acquisition of basic reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic skills or subject matter.

Using SMART IEPs to Measure Progress

You say, “My child’s IEPs don’t include objective ways to measure progress. How should the IEP be written so I will know if my child is making progress?”

Mike Improves Fitness Skills

Let’s change the facts. Assume you have an eight-year-old son named Mike. Mike is upset because he didn’t pass the President’s Physical Fitness Test. He wants to pass the test next year and asks you to help.

You learn that there are specific criteria that children must meet to pass the President’s Physical Fitness Test. The children’s performance on specific fitness

skills is measured objectively. You check Mike's scores on these fitness skills. Mike ran the 50-yard dash within the specified time. He completed 12 out of an expected 25 sit-ups, but performed no pull-ups.

You and Mike know what he needs to do to qualify for the President's Physical Fitness Award. You help him design a SMART Fitness Training Program that includes goals and objectives in his areas of weakness (i.e. sit-ups, pull-ups) that will also maintain or improve his running ability.

When Mike takes the President's Physical Fitness Test, his performance on the tests will be measured objectively. His running speed over a specific distance will be measured with a stopwatch. His ability to complete the required numbers of sit-ups and pull-ups will be measured by counting. Because these measurements are objective, an independent observer will know if Mike meets the criteria for the Physical Fitness Award.

Kevin Learns Keyboarding Skills

Let's look at some real IEP goals and objectives. In the first goal, the child's progress is not measured objectively. We will revise this goal to make it a **SMART IEP goal -- specific, measurable, active, relevant, and time-limited**

The goal? Kevin will learn keyboarding (or typing) skills.

In the original IEP, Kevin's progress in keyboarding skills was to be "measured" by "Teacher Judgment," "Teacher Observation" and "Teacher-made Tests," with scores of "80%" as the criteria for success.

We will revise this goal to make it **specific, measurable, active, relevant, time limited**.

Our new SMART IEP goal says:

By the end of the first semester, Kevin will touch-type a passage of text at a rate of 15 words per minute with no more than 10 errors on a 5-minute test.

By the end of this academic year, Kevin will touch type a passage of text at a rate of 35 words per minute with no more than 5 errors on a 5-minute test.

Megan Learns Reading Skills

Megan is a fifth-grader whose reading skills were measured at the beginning second grade level on educational achievement tests. Megan's parents asked the school to provide special education services and remediate their daughter's reading problems. How will the parents know if Megan is benefiting from the special education program?

If Megan is receiving an appropriate education, her subtest scores will improve as she goes through the remediation process. After one year of remediation, Megan will begin to close the gap between her ability and achievement in reading skills. Her progress will be measured objectively on educational achievement tests.

The long-term goal is to “close the gap” between Megan’s ability and her reading skills. Here is Megan’s **SMART IEP** goal in reading:

After one year of specialized instruction, Megan will be able to read at the 4th grade level, as measured by her scores on the Reading subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson Reading Mastery Test.

In a few months, Megan’s IEP will be revised. Her present levels of performance will be updated to reflect her current reading levels. The goals and objectives will be revised.

NOTE: Although most parents and teachers are more comfortable with grade equivalent scores, we encourage you to use percentile rank or standard scores in IEPs. Why? When you use percentile rank scores, you can measure the child’s progress as compared to the peer group.

Let’s change Megan’s IEP to use percentile rank scores. Assume that Megan’s reading skills are at the 10th percentile level.

Here is Megan’s final **SMART IEP** goal:

After one year of special education, Megan’s reading skills will be at the 25th percentile level, as measured by the Reading subtest scores of the Woodcock-Johnson Reading Mastery Test.

When Megan’s scores reach the 25th percentile level, she has begun to close the gap between her ability and her reading skills. Although her reading skills are still below average, she is making steady progress. Her progress is being measured with standardized tests. Her reading scores are reported as percentile ranks.

JUNK IEPs

In the real world of special education, most IEP goals and objectives are junk. Here are four common problems that characterize junk IEP goals and objectives:

Goals and objectives that cannot be measured.

Goals and objectives that focus on attitudes and “states of being.”

Goals objectives that are irrelevant to a specific child and not tailored to the child’s needs.

Goals and objectives that are vague and meaningless.

Goals and Objectives That Cannot Be Measured

One common problem is goals that “sound good” but cannot be measured or assessed. Here is an IEP goal for a student who takes shop:

*The student will **understand** the workings of a gasoline combustion engine.*

How will you know if the student “understands” the workings of a gasoline combustion engine? What do you mean by “understand?” If you mean “fix,” the goal is to “fix an engine.” If you mean, “re-assemble an engine,” this is different. Let’s revise this goal so it is **measurable**.

*The student will **be able to** disassemble a gasoline combustion lawn mower engine, will replace the main bearings, will re-assemble the engine, will have no parts left over, and the machine will operate normally after re-assembly.*

After the student masters this goal, the student will be able to diagnose a malfunction, repair an engine, and will understand and be able to explain how a gasoline engine works.

Goals and Objectives That Focus on Attitudes & “States of Being”

Junk IEP goals and objectives often focus on attitudes and “states of being:”

The student will appreciate classical music.

The student will understand weather patterns.

The student will have a better attitude.

The student will develop commitment to academic success.

The student will develop a love of reading.

The student will respect authority.

These goals focus on intangible attitudes and “states of being” that cannot be measured. How do you **measure** a student’s “appreciation” of music?

How do you know if a student “understands” weather patterns? Do you want the student to be able to forecast weather, identify a tornado, or explain rising and falling isobars on a map?

How do you measure a “better attitude” or “commitment to academic success?”
How do you measure “love of reading?”

Let’s look at some intangible goals and identify the problems.

Goal: The student will **appreciate** classical music.

Problem: You can't measure "appreciation of classical music."

How will you measure "appreciation?" How will independent observers know if the student "appreciates" classical music?

Goal: The student will **develop a better attitude**.

Problem: You can't measure an attitude!

Independent observers cannot observe an attitude. An attitude isn't like body temperature - you cannot measure it to know when it gets "better."

A "better attitude," "commitment to academic success," and "love of reading" are all states of being that exist within an individual. You cannot measure states of being.

Irrelevant goals and objectives that are not tailored to the child's needs

Goal: The student will learn map-reading skills.

Problem: The student does not have a deficiency in map-reading skills.

Although the child did not have a deficiency in map-reading skills, the IEP team wrote a goal to improve his map reading skills. Why?

The district's standard curriculum and assessment required all ninth grade students to learn map-reading skills.

Because this child was in ninth grade, the IEP team wrote a map-reading goal. All ninth grade students with IEPs in this school district had map-reading goals.

SMART IEP goals are based on the **child's unique needs that result from the child's disability**. SMART IEP goals are not based on state or district curricula, tests, or other external standards.

Vague Goals and Objectives

IEPs often include a laundry list of vague, meaningless goals and objectives:

Johnny will improve his behavior 70% of the time.

Marie will improve her spelling skills 80% of the time.

Vague goals and objectives are not tailored to needs of the child. When districts use vague goals and objectives, you often find that all IEPs for special education children in a program are identical or nearly identical. Vague IEP goals do not include accurate information about a specific child's present levels of performance, nor do they include objectives ways to measure the child's progress.

These IEPs are designed to meet the school district's need to have an IEP in place for each child with a disability. There is no plan to measure the child's progress. There is no roadmap for the child's special education.

WRITING SMART IEPs

Present Levels of Performance

When you write a SMART IEP, you begin with the child's **present levels of performance**. You use recent data from tests and evaluations that describe the child's deficits or weaknesses in objective measurable terms.

The present levels of performance tell you what the child **knows** and **is able to do now**, in the present.

The IEP team should use a "variety of assessment techniques" to describe the child's **performance**. Pay close attention to the word "**performance**." **Performance describes what the child can do.**

Do you know your child's present levels of performance? Do you understand your child's scores on educational achievement tests? Do you understand standard scores, percentile ranks, grade equivalent and age equivalent scores? Do you know what these scores mean?

Measurable Annual Goals

Annual goals focus on performance. Using information about what the child **knows** and **is able to do now**, you decide what the child **will learn** and **be able to do**.

Goals and objectives should focus on **reducing** or **eliminating** the child's problems that result from the disability. IEP goals and objectives should allow your child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum. IEP goals and objectives should address other educational needs that result from your child's disability.¹⁵

Remember: Appropriate goals and objectives do not focus on intangible states of being, attitudes, or states of mind (i.e., understanding, appreciating). States of being cannot be measured objectively and are viewed differently by different observers.

Benchmarks and Short-term Objectives

SMART IEPs include benchmarks and/or short-term objectives that allow you to measure the child's progress objectively and often. When you measure performance, you can observe whether the child can perform a task.

SMART IEPs includes ways for you and the child's teachers to measure the child's progress or lack of progress (regression).

IEP PROCESS

The federal special education regulations include this description of the IEP development process:

In developing each child's IEP, the IEP team, shall consider

- (i) The **strengths of the child** and the **concerns of the parents for enhancing the education** of their child;
- (ii) The **results of the initial or most recent evaluation** of the child;
and
- (iii) As appropriate, the **results of the child's performance** on any general State or district-wide assessment programs.¹⁶

The IEP must include:

- (1) A **statement of the child's present levels of educational performance**, including
 - (i) **How the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum** (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children); or
 - (ii) For preschool children, as appropriate, how the disability affects the child's participation in appropriate activities...¹⁷

When you read Appendix A to the Code of Federal Regulations⁸, you learn that:

The IEP team's determination of **how each child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum** is a primary consideration in the development of the child's IEP.

In assessing children with disabilities, school districts may use a **variety of assessment techniques** to determine the extent to which these children can be involved and progress in the general curriculum, such as **criterion-**

referenced tests, standard achievement tests, diagnostic tests, other tests, or any combination of the above.

The **purpose** of using these **assessments** is to determine the child's present levels of educational performance and **areas of need arising from the child's disability** so that approaches for ensuring the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum and any **needed adaptations or modifications** to that curriculum can be identified."

Definitions of Goals, Objectives and Benchmarks

Your child's IEP must include "a statement of **measurable annual goals**, including **benchmarks** or short-term **objectives**" that relate to "meeting the child's needs that result from the child's disability..."²⁰

Benchmarks and short-term objectives should enable you to **measure the child's performance** objectively and often. When you measure performance, you observe whether the child has mastered a skill or can perform a task

Since goals, objectives and benchmarks are confusing, let's check the dictionary to define our terms.

Goal: ambition, aim, mark, objective, target.

Objective: something toward which effort is directed: an aim, goal, or end of action.

Benchmark: a point of reference from which measurements may be made; something that serves as a standard by which others may be measured or judged; a standardized problem or test that serves as a basis for evaluation or comparison. (*Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*)

Legal Definitions of Goals, Objectives and Benchmarks

How do the special education statute and regulations define these terms?

Objectives: Short-term objectives break "the skills described in the annual goal down into discrete components."²¹

Benchmark: A benchmark describes "the amount of progress the child is expected to make within specified segments of the year . . . benchmarks establish expected performance levels that allow for regular checks of progress within specified segments of the year."²²

"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 "²³

Appendix A

The federal special education regulations include “[Appendix A](#).” Appendix A contains 40 Questions and Answers about IEPs, the parental role, transition issues, and other important subjects.

When you read Appendix A, you learn that the IEP must include the “child’s present levels of educational **performance** and areas of **need arising from the child’s disability**.” Present levels of educational performance come from “criterion-referenced tests, standard achievement tests, diagnostic tests, or any combination of the above.”²⁴

Your child’s IEP must 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**.²⁵

The SMART IEP Tracks Progress

Why do the IDEA and federal special education regulations require IEPs to include “**measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives**”?

Measurable annual goals, including benchmarks and short-term objectives, are critical to the strategic planning process . . . Once the IEP has developed measurable annual goals for the child, the team. . .

- (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. . .²⁶

Measurable annual goals:

...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.²⁷

According to the IDEA and implementing regulations, the school must advise parents about their child’s educational progress several times a year:

The IEP is required to include:

A statement of -

- (i) How the child’s progress toward the annual goals . . . will be measured; and
- (ii) How the child’s parents will be regularly informed (by such means as periodic report cards), at least as often as parents are informed of their nondisabled children’s progress, of —
 - (A) their child’s **progress toward the annual goals**, and
 - (B) the extent to which that progress is sufficient to enable the child to **achieve the goals** by the end of the year.²⁸

The IDEA statute and regulations **require** IEP teams to meet at least once a year to “review the child’s educational progress.” If the child is not making “**expected progress** toward the annual goals . . . and in the general curriculum”²⁹, the IEP team must meet to revise the child’s IEP.

SMART IEPs: PRACTICE SESSION

Make a list of your child’s weaknesses. These weaknesses may be in academic skills (i.e., reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, processing speed) or in other areas that affect the child’s ability to learn (i.e., speech language, fine motor skills, behavior).

Using information or data from objective tests, list your child’s present levels of performance. This information will be reported as percentile ranks, standard scores, or grade or age equivalent scores. For example:

My child is able to read a passage of text orally at the 2.5 grade level as measured by the Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT).

My child is able to read a passage of text orally at the 1 percentile age level as measured by the Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT).

Sample SMART IEP Goal

Write one goal that you believe your child should be able to meet after one year of an appropriate special education.

By May 15, [one year later], my child will be able to read a passage of text orally at the 4.5 grade equivalent level [insert appropriate grade equivalent level], as measured by the Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT); or

By May 15 [one year later], my child will be able to read a passage of text orally at the 25th percentile level [insert appropriate percentile level], as measured by the Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT).

You used norm-referenced data to create your starting point and endpoint. Now what? How do you get from Point A to Point B? Your roadmap from Point A to Point B will include short-term objectives and/or benchmarks to keep you on track.

To learn more about IEP goals, objectives and benchmarks that are appropriate for children with different disabilities, you will need to read books and articles about the child's disability. With information and practice, you'll be able to write **SMART IEP** objectives and benchmarks that lead to appropriate annual goals.

Outcomes and Performances

Using paper or your computer, write a list of statements that describe what the child will be **expected to know** (knowledge) and what the child **will be able to do** (performance). When you write a goal, use words that describe the **intended outcome**.

Next write the **performances** that will show that the child has mastered the skill or goal. The goal should be **specific, measurable, active, relevant** and **realistic**, and **time-limited**. Here is an example:

The child will learn to read.

The child will learn to read at the fifth grade level.

After one year of individualized tutoring, for one hour a day, the child will read at the fifth grade level.

After one year of individualized tutoring in reading skills, for one hour a day, the child will read at the fifth grade level, as measured by the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test.

SMART IEPs are specific, measurable, active, relevant and realistic, and time- limited.

S	Specific
M	Measurable
A	Active
R	Relevant and realistic
T	Time-limited

Diane's Questions

At the beginning of this section, you read Diane's questions about IEP goals and objectives. Diane knew that "commitment to academic success" was not an appropriate goal, but didn't know what to propose. You have learned that "commitment to academic success" is not an appropriate goal because it focuses on an attitude or state of being and cannot be measured objectively.

Pete answers Diane: Get our article [Understanding Tests and Measurements](#). Read and re-read this article about 3 times. Your goal is to master standard scores, percentile ranks, subtest scores, etc. After this, read our companion article, [Your Child's IEP](#).

Diane responds: I went back through my son's file to find test scores and old IEPs. I only have a narrative version of testing with no scores to use as a frame of reference. I have no idea how to interpret what is reported. Maybe this has been the problem all along — I don't know where I started from, can't measure where I'm going, or how I'm doing along the way.

Pete answers: If you don't know where you started from, and how many miles to the next waypoint, it's hard to know how far you've come, how much farther you have to go, whether you are moving forward or backward, or when you get there.

Collecting data and knowing what the data means is the first step.

THE PARENT'S To Do LIST

1. Go to the Wrightslaw web site at <http://www.wrightslaw.com/> Download and study these articles:

[*Understanding Tests and Measurements for the Parent and Advocate.*](#)

You should expect to re-read this article several times.

URL: [http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/tests measurement.html](http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/tests%20measurement.html)

[*Your Child's IEP: Practical and Legal Guidance for Parents.*](#)

URL: [http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/ iep guidance .html](http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/iep%20guidance.html)

2. Subscribe to [*The Special Ed Advocate*](#), the free online newsletter about special education legal and advocacy issues.

URL: <http://www.wrightslaw.com/subscribe.htm>

The Special Ed Advocate newsletter includes links to articles about IEPs, evaluations, effective educational methods, decisions in special education cases, and Internet links.

When you subscribe to *The Special Ed Advocate*, you'll also receive announcements about new Wrightslaw publications, pre-publication discounts, and special offers.

ANNOUNCING -- WRIGHTSLAW: SMART IEPs

Wrightslaw: SMART IEPs by Peter W. D. Wright and Pamela Darr Wright will be published by Harbor House Law Press in 2001.

In Wrightslaw: SMART IEPs, you will learn how to use information from the child's present levels of performance to develop goals and objectives that meet the child's unique needs. You will learn how to write appropriate goals and objectives and how to assess the child's progress by performance.

Wrightslaw: SMART IEPs will teach you how to negotiate for services. You will learn how to use tactics and strategies to get better services. You will learn how to organize the child's file, write effective letters that address issues and concerns, how to handle yourself in meetings, and more.

Wrightslaw: SMART IEPs includes information about the parent's role in the special education process, use of modifications and accommodations, placement decisions, high-stakes testing, transition planning, assistive technology, and more.

If you want to be advised when **Wrightslaw: SMART IEPs** is available, subscribe to The Special Ed Advocate newsletter. Newsletter subscribers will receive advance notice when **Wrightslaw: SMART IEPs** is sent to the printer, and will be eligible for **special pre-publication offers and discounts**.

Wrightslaw: SMART IEPs will not be available for sale until all pre-publication offers have been filled.

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- ¹ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Introduction
- ² ² 34 C.F.R. § 300.346
- ³ 34 C.F.R. § 300.347(a)
- ⁴ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ⁵ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ⁶ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ⁷ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ⁸ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ⁹ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ¹⁰ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ¹¹ 34 C.F.R. § 300.347(a)(2)
- ¹² 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ¹³ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ¹⁴ 34 C.F.R. § 300.347(a)(7)
- ¹⁵ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Introduction
- ¹⁶ ¹⁶ 34 C.F.R. § 300.346
- ¹⁷ 34 C.F.R. § 300.347(a)
- ¹⁸ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ¹⁹ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ²⁰ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ²¹ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ²² 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ²³ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ²⁴ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ²⁵ 34 C.F.R. § 300.347(a)(2)
- ²⁶ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ²⁷ 34 C.F.R. Part 300, Appendix A, Question I
- ²⁸ 34 C.F.R. § 300.347(a)(7)
- ²⁹ 34 C.F.R. § 300.343(c)(2)