

## Understanding an Effective Individualized Education Program (IEP): *How to Know if Your Child is Making Progress*

Families often struggle with the issue of whether or not their children are making progress on their special education goals and objectives. They also ask how the goals relate to the general education curriculum. CPAC has developed this toolkit to help families work through these questions. There is a tool for each step in the development and monitoring of an effective program.

The toolkit can be used in many ways. For someone just starting out it may make sense to just look at one area of need at a time. For others, it may be possible to look at all areas of need through each step. **CPAC staff are available to assist or answer your questions.** Our services are free and our phone number is toll free. Additional resources with information related to each step are also provided.

Using these tools will help families be more prepared to participate in discussions about their children's learning. It is not our intention that families become experts in writing the IEP. This toolkit provides the opportunity to practice the skills needed to more effectively participate in team meetings and decision making.



*Developed by Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), 2010.*

*CPAC is the federally funded Parent Training and Information Center under IDEA for Connecticut. Statewide services include: training for families, schools and community groups, information and referral and phone consultation.*

*All of our services to families are free.*

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## **Steps to Success**

**Step One. Describing your child's strengths and needs**

**Step Two. Recognizing measurable goals and objectives**

**Step Three. Monitoring progress to ensure success**



### **STEP ONE: Describing Your Child's Strengths and Needs**

It is very important that you are able to describe what you know about your child. What is your child good at, or what does your child struggle with? This is important in the academic as well as functional areas (some examples: dressing, organizing, walking, handwriting, feeding, speaking). Using a disability label or diagnosis does not provide individualized information about the child's unique needs. It is important to specifically describe how the disability affects your child and your child's ability to learn.

Example: "Tony's low muscle tone makes it hard for him to sit upright without support for more than 5 minutes" provides a clearer description than "Tony has Cerebral Palsy."

The first tool is designed to walk you through various areas in which your child may struggle and identify where he or she is now – this is called a baseline. If your child does not have issues in a specific area you may skip it and move on to the next area of need. Make sure all of your concerns are included as this information is the foundation of how your child's program will be developed. From there, goals can be set, progress can be monitored and one can decide if expectations are being met.

Have your child's school records available while working with these tools.

#### **GO TO THE TOOL: "What I Know About My Child"**

*Additional resources are available at the back of this packet.*



# Step One:

## What I Know About My Child

It is important to be able to describe what your child's strengths and needs look like in detail. Use these questions as a guide to be able to share what you know about your child in a meaningful way.

Have your child's school records (evaluation reports, IEPs, report cards, disciplinary records, etc.) available while using this tool. Functional skill areas are on the other side of this page.

| Academic Skills        | Is your child performing at grade level?<br>(as measured by grades, test results, classwork, etc.) | IF NOT - where is your child performing on these skills?<br>(as measured by grades, test results, classwork, etc.) | What strengths does your child show in this area?<br>(ex. A student may have trouble decoding words but has good comprehension, or a student may be highly motivated in a certain area, despite low performance) | What are your specific concerns or questions in this area? Why is this important to your child's learning? |
|------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Reading                |  |  |  |  |
| Writing                |  |  |  |  |
| Math                   |  |  |  |  |
| Other Academic Areas   |  |  |  |  |
| <i>Example Reading</i> | <i>No</i>  | <i>10/40 words on Preprimer word list<br/>25%</i>  | <i>Wants to read, likes books</i>  | <i>How many words should he know?</i>  |

# Step One Continued:

| Functional Skills   | Do you feel your child's skills are age appropriate?<br>Is he or she able to demonstrate success in this area? | If NOT - what do your child's skills/issues look like?<br>Describe them here  | What are your specific concerns or questions in this area? Why is this important to your child's learning?   |
|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Communication</b><br>(what they say and understand)  |  |   |  |
| <b>Social</b><br>(limited friends, poor relationships with peers, doesn't understand social expectations) |  |   |  |
| <b>Behavioral</b><br>(distractible, withdrawn, disorganized, defiant, disruptive, frequently in trouble)  |  |   |  |
| <b>Vision and Hearing</b>   |  |   |  |
| <b>Fine and Gross Motor</b><br>(trouble with walking or handwriting/ keyboarding issues)                  |  |   |  |
| <b>Activities of Daily Living</b><br>(dressing, toileting, eating)  |  |   |  |
| <b>Example Communication</b>  | No   | <i>She cannot participate in small group activities without getting into trouble with her peers. She is frequently being removed because of arguing and fighting.</i> | <i>It is important that she learn to work with others. Her grades are affected by the lack of participation in these projects. She is missing time in the classroom.</i> |

For students over the age of 15, additional information related to transition planning is available from CPAC.  
If you need help in completing this tool, please call CPAC at 1-800-445-2722. Date Completed: \_\_\_\_\_

## STEP TWO: Recognizing Measurable Goals and Objectives

Once an area is identified as a concern or weakness, then a program support should be put in place to help your child learn. Most often, these are measurable goals and objectives, or an accommodation. Goals and objectives are statements that describe what a child with a disability can reasonably be expected to accomplish within a year. They should be specific, measurable and related to the general education curriculum standards and/or functional performance expectations. In order to create a measurable goal, you must go back to the first tool, look at the baseline, and compare that to the expected outcome, or where you want your child to be.

Use the second tool to become familiar with the parts of a goal or an objective and practice writing a measurable goal or objective based on your child's identified area of need. A measurable goal or objective should tell what will be done, how it will be done, to what extent it will be done, and by when it will be done. For example: *Dillon is beginning second grade, he knows most of his letter sounds in isolation and he has a sight word vocabulary of 10 out of 40 words.* A measurable objective might be: *Dillon will increase his sight word vocabulary by mastering the 40 pre-primer words with 100% accuracy by the close of the 1st marking period.* [Dillon will increase his sight word vocabulary (what?) by mastering the 40 pre-primer words (how?) with 100% accuracy (to what extent?) by the close of the 1st marking period (when?)] \*Again, the purpose is not to make you a goal writing expert, but help you understand your child's program!



Compare this information to your child's current IEP goals and objectives. Do they match? Are your child's goals measurable? Do you know what is being taught? Are all areas of need being addressed?

### **GO TO THE TOOL: "Designing a Program to Improve my Child's Skills"**

*Additional resources are available at the back of this packet.*

## STEP THREE: Monitoring Progress to Ensure Success

The last step is to ensure that what is being done to support your child is really working. You can do this by monitoring your child's progress. It is easier to judge progress if you review the data being collected on a regular basis. The IEP provides information about what data is collected and how frequently it is collected. This information can be found on the goal pages of your child's IEP. Your child is making progress if there are measurable gains toward meeting their IEP goals and objectives. In order to know if there are measurable gains, you must first know what is being measured and what assessment is being used to measure it. Use the third tool in this kit to review your child's IEP goals and objectives. Several things help determine if a student has really made progress:

- Clearly stated present levels of performance
- Appropriate and measurable goals/objectives
- Effective instructional methods, and
- Continuous progress monitoring

Sometimes parents and schools have different ideas about whether progress is being made or how quickly it's happening. Use the third tool to identify questions you may have for the teacher or the team. Talk to the teacher about your concerns. If you are still worried and believe your child is not making progress, then ask for a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting to review and revise the IEP as needed.



### **GO TO THE TOOL: "Monitoring Progress to Ensure Success"**

*Additional resources are available at the back of this packet.*

# Step Two: Designing a Program to Improve My Child's Skills

Complete this tool using the baseline information collected in Step One. This tool will help you understand your child's IEP goals and objectives and determine whether or not they need revision.

## Areas of Concern or Need

This information can be taken from the tool "What I Know About My Child." It is similar to the information found on the IEP, pgs 4-5 - Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance

*Example 1: Dillon can only read 10 out of 40 of his grade level sight vocabulary words*

*Example 2: Jaden gets into trouble every time her class does a small group project, gets removed from the classroom and gets failing grades on the projects.*

## Where would you like the student to be at the end of the school year? Grade/age level expectations?

*Example 1: Dillon will master all 40 of last year's sight vocabulary words as well as the primer and first grade lists*

*Example 2: Jaden will appropriately participate in small group activities in all subjects/classes and get passing grades*

## Practice writing a measurable goal or an objective for a specific area of need.

It should tell what will be done, how it will be done, to what extent it will be done, and by when it will be done.

*Example 1: Dillon will increase his sight word vocabulary (what?) by mastering the 40 pre-primer words (how?) with 100% accuracy (to what extent?) by the close of the 1st marking period (when?).*

*Example 2: Jaden will increase her positive social interaction with peers (what?) by demonstrating cooperative behavior in group activities (how?) with 100% accuracy (to what extent?) by midyear (when?)*

## Questions or comments for the Planning and Placement Team (PPT)



# Step Three:

## Monitoring Progress to Ensure Success

It is essential to have ongoing assessments in order to determine if appropriate progress is being made. Your child is making progress if there are measurable gains toward the achievement of their IEP goals and objectives. In order to know if there are measurable gains you must first know what is being measured and what assessment is being used to measure it. You may need to ask your child's case manager or teacher to help you identify the items below.

| List objectives from the IEP here:          | What will be used to measure my child's progress?<br><small>(See Evaluation Procedure)</small> | How will I know if my child has mastered this skill?<br><small>(See Performance Criteria)</small>                     | How often will this skill be measured?               | Is progress being made?<br><small>(What does the data say?)</small>   |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| <i>Increase sight words</i>                 | <i>Dolch word lists</i>  | <i>40 pre-primer words (100% accuracy)</i>  | <i>Weekly?<br/>Monthly?</i>                          | <i>10/40 is baseline in August<br/>15/40 in Sept.<br/>20/40 end of Sept.<br/>30/40 in Oct.<br/>(Yes, improvement is noted.)</i> |
| <i>Increase positive social interaction</i> | <i>Pre and post baseline data</i>  | <i>Cooperative behavior = remaining in class, participates in group assignments and takes a role in group project</i> | <i>As often as small group projects are assigned</i> | <i>3 projects/1st marking period removed for all<br/><br/>Unlikely to meet goal - time for team discussion</i>                  |
|   |  |   |  |   |
|   |  |   |  |   |

**Questions or comments for the Planning and Placement Team (PPT)**

# Resources

## For Grade Level Expectations:

[Connecticut's Curricular Frameworks](#) (outline what a child should be learning and when):  
[CMT/CAPT Skills Checklist](#)  
[School Counselor Curriculum for Social Emotional Issues](#)

## For Disability Specific Information:

[CT State Guidelines for Identification and Education of Students with Specific Disabilities](#)

(These are available for Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, Emotional Disturbance, Learning Disability, and a Taskforce Report on ADHD)

[National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities](#)

The National Technical Assistance and Dissemination Center has information on disabilities in children and youth as well as research-based information on effective teaching/educational practices for children with disabilities.

## For Information Specific to Writing Measurable Goals and Objectives:

An online article: [Frequently Asked Questions about Annual Goals](#), Federation for Children with Special Needs, Boston, MA.

A book available from the CPAC lending library, call CPAC at 1-800-445-2722 to borrow:

*Better IEPs How to Develop Legally Correct and Educationally Useful Programs*, Bateman, Barbara and Linden, Mary Anne. Longmont, CO. 1998.

## For Information Related to Monitoring Student Progress:

[National Center on Response to Intervention \(NCRI\)](#)

A center dedicated to the implementation of scientifically based student progress monitoring funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

An online article: [How Can Parents Tell If Their Child is Making Progress?](#)

## For Students Planning for Life After High school: (start as early as possible but at least by age 15)

[Life After High School Transition Toolkit](#), Pacer Center, Minneapolis, MN.

[National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center](#)

A national technical assistance and dissemination center to help youth with disabilities and their families achieve desired post-school outcomes.

[Building a Bridge: A Resource Manual for High School Students](#), Connecticut Transition Task Force, 2009.

## Additional Reading:

[Introducing Your Child to the School Community Using a "Student Snapshot" Format](#), PACER Center, Minneapolis, MN.

Check out our [Lending Library](#) for additional information.