



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

## **Frequently Asked Questions about** **Annual Goals**

### **What are annual goals?**

According to federal and state special education laws, each child who is eligible for special education and related services must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The IEP must include measurable annual goals and short-term objectives and/or benchmarks to:

- meet your child's needs that result from the disability and enable your child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum, i.e., to help your child be part of and learn what all children of the same age are learning
- meet your child's other educational needs that result from the disability.

### **Why are annual goals important?**

Measurable annual goals provide a way for you and your child's teachers to decide which skills are most important for your child to learn during the upcoming school year.

Measurable annual goals also provide a way to determine whether the services and placement are appropriate to meet your child's needs and to enable your child to make effective progress.

### **What information is necessary to develop goals?**

Development of meaningful educational goals relies on up-to-date information about your child. This information is included on the IEP in the section entitled *Present Levels of Educational Performance*. Your child's present levels of educational performance are determined by the results of her/his evaluations, school work, and observations. This information is collected from many sources including you and must be accurate, complete and comprehensive.

In the *Present Levels of Performance* section, the Team describes the effect of your child's disability on his/her performance in all areas of education including academics (reading, math, etc.) and other, non-academic areas (socialization, behavior, daily life activities, mobility, participation in extracurricular activities, etc.).

Your child's level of performance helps the IEP team understand your child's strengths and needs. The knowledge and skills your student possess NOW are compared to what students are required to know and do according to developmental standards and the curriculum frameworks. Based on this comparison your student's needs are defined.

### **Who develops the goals?**

Goals are written at a meeting of the IEP Team. Members of the team include you—the child's parents or guardians, at least one regular and one special education teacher, an individual qualified to interpret evaluation results, individuals knowledgeable about the general curriculum as well as school programs and resources available, your child—if they are age 14-22 or earlier if appropriate, and others who know or have expertise about the child.

### **How should annual goals be written?**

The IEP Goals are NOT lesson plans or restatements of the curriculum content. Annual goals are statements in the IEP that describe outcomes, e.g., what your particular child can reasonably be expected to accomplish in a year's time in their special education program and in their participation in the life of the school.

### **GOALS ARE WRITTEN TO DEVELOP SKILLS IN...**

- READING
- WRITING
- MATH
- SOCIAL SKILLS
- VOCATIONAL
- TRAVEL TRAINING
- BEHAVIOR
- AND MORE

...SO THAT YOUR STUDENT IS ABLE TO ACCESS, PARTICIPATE AND MAKE PROGRESS IN THE CURRICULUM OF THEIR PEERS WITHOUT DISABILITIES.

It is important to write measurable annual goals that will help your student build skills. Ask yourself: "In one year's time...remembering your child's "vision for the future" ...what "SKILL" do you believe would make the greatest difference?"

Goals should focus on the aspect of your student's school world that will make the biggest difference in all areas of her/his school life. Sometimes it is difficult to tell what will make the biggest difference for the student. A goal that builds skills which enables your student to access, participate and make progress in the general curriculum and the life of the school always makes the biggest difference. These kinds of goals will lead to more and more independence in various environments and throughout the school day.

### **What kind of goals should be written?**

Goal focus should be determined by the greatest needs of your student. Ask yourself, "What skill would make the biggest difference for my child?"

Possible goal areas include: academic, behavioral/social/emotional, physical, orientation and mobility, travel training, communication, assistive technology, non-academic activities, extra-curricular activities,

vocational preparation, post-secondary preparation, self-advocacy training, IEP participation training, independent living/life skills, etc.

Important Reminder: There will be times when students need “life skills” goals, however they do not replace ‘academic’ or ‘life of the school’ goals. A student should not have ONLY life skills goals.

### **How many goals should be written?**

The Team decides the number of goals necessary to meet your child’s needs. Keep in mind that it is best to choose only the goals that will make the biggest difference. If there are too many goals it will be difficult for your student to make effective progress in each goal area.

A goal should not be written for each class or related service. Skill building goals can be addressed across all environments by all kinds of professionals.

### **What does a well-written annual goal include?**

A well-written annual goal will clearly describe:

- **TARGET BEHAVIOR** - The skill or behavior in need of change.
- Condition - Circumstances under which the target behavior is to occur.
- *Criteria* - Acceptable level of performance of the target behavior.

It should be easy for you to imagine what it will “look like” when your child reaches each goal.

### **What are objectives and benchmarks?**

Each goal must have written objectives or benchmarks. These are statements that describe observable steps or milestones your child is expected to accomplish within a specified time period. They both demonstrate progress toward the goal.

- **Objectives** break the Measurable Annual Goal into discrete components that are short-term, measurable, intermediate steps.
- **Benchmarks** break the Measurable Annual Goal into major milestones that your student is expected to reach within a specified period of time.

### **Which are better, objectives or benchmarks?**

One is not better than the other. Objectives fit some goal areas better than benchmarks; and benchmarks fit other goal areas better than objectives.

### **How can teachers and other school professionals be sure my student is making progress toward his/her goals?**

Teachers and other school professionals track student progress by recording scores and other data over the school year. By recording data, related to the goals and objectives/benchmarks, they can measure your student’s progress or lack of progress.

When the Team is writing the goals and objectives/benchmarks it is a good idea to ask:

- How will the school track your student's progress?
- What will be the source of the data?
- What will be the data collection schedule? (How and when will they record data for each goal?)
- Who will collect the data?

### **How will I be informed about my child's progress toward meeting the goals?**

You—the parent, must be regularly informed about your child's progress toward their annual goals. The school must issue written reports on progress made toward IEP goals and whether progress is sufficient for your student to meet that goal by the end of the IEP period. You should receive progress reports at least as often as parents of children without disabilities receive reports of their children's progress. Typically progress reports are sent out at the same time as report cards.

### **Can goals and objectives/benchmarks be changed without an IEP Team meeting?**

No. Goals and objectives/benchmarks can only be changed with the consent of the IEP Team as a whole. Any change to the IEP document requires your written consent.

### **What should I do if my student is not making effective progress toward her/his IEP goals?**

Schools must make a good faith effort to help your child meet the goals and objectives/benchmarks listed on the IEP. If you think your child is not making effective progress toward meeting his/her goals, it is important to ask for a meeting of the IEP Team to discuss this concern. Team members will review the goals and the services intended to help your child reach those goals. If changes need to be made, an addendum will be written to the IEP.

### **What are some examples of measurable annual goals?**

The following are two examples of measurable annual goals with corresponding objectives or benchmarks developed by the Massachusetts Department of Education.

#### Example 1

(Current Performance Level: Nadia is able to write three to four sentence paragraphs. All of her sentences are written using the subject/

verb/object format and include little or no detail. Nadia had difficulty writing introductory and conclusion sentences. She also has difficulty remaining on topic throughout her paragraph. Nadia is skilled at spelling and punctuation which are at grade level. Her paragraphs usually score 30 to 35 /50 on the district writing rubric.)

**MEASURABLE ANNUAL GOAL:** Nadia will WRITE A SIX SENTENCE PARAGRAPH using four types of sentences scoring 45/50 on the district writing rubric.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Given a list of sentences, Nadia will accurately label the four types of sentences.
- Nadia will be able to write acceptable examples of the four types of sentences when asked.
- Given a sample paragraph, Nadia will be able to consistently correctly label the components of a paragraph.
- Given a topic, Nadia will be able to write a paragraph using three out of the four types of sentences.

## Example 2

(Current Performance Level: With support from her IEP Team and according to her preferences, Jillian has obtained a job at the local YMCA. Transportation has always been provided up to this point. Jillian has never had the opportunity to use the bus system.)

**MEASURABLE ANNUAL GOAL:** Monday through Friday, Jillian will USE THE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM TO GET TO AND FROM HER JOB PLACEMENT, *independently arriving at work on time, for any five consecutive days.*

**BENCHMARKS:**

- By the end of the first quarter, accompanied by an adult, Jillian will walk to the bus stop, ride the bus to work, and get off at the correct work bus stop.
- By the end of the second quarter, Jillian will be able to identify the steps she will follow to independently travel to work.
- By the end of the third quarter, Jillian will independently walk to the bus stop, ride the bus to work and get off at the correct work bus stop.

**If I have a question that is not answered here, what should I do?**

Call us and ask for an information specialist at 1-800-331-0688.