

WRITING EFFECTIVE

IEP

GOALS

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR
NEW-TO-SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS



01. INTRO

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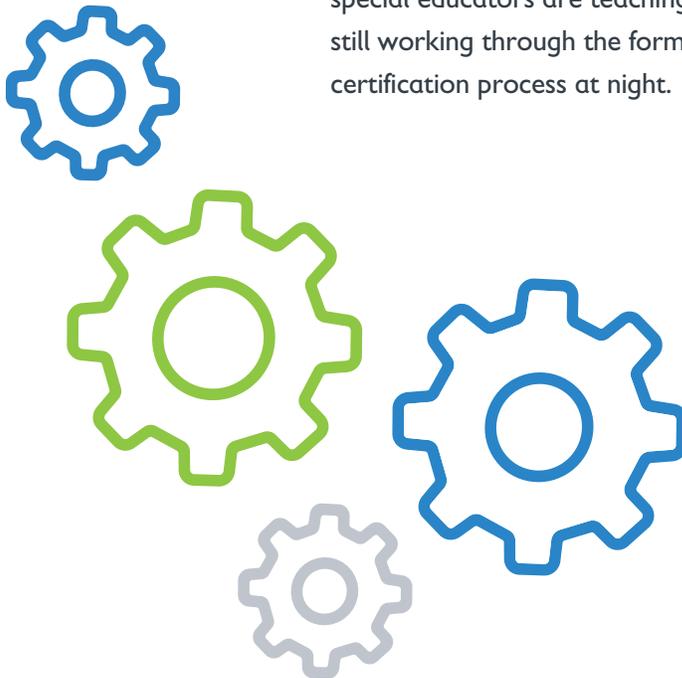
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AS WE CONTINUE TO NAVIGATE THE REALM OF HEIGHTENED STAFF

SHORTAGES, special education departments today look slightly different than they did a decade ago. If you were to ask a Special Education Director who makes up their team, they would likely reply that it hosts a mix of teachers who are fresh out of college, or who have transitioned from general education or an inclusion classroom into a self-contained setting. To the surprise of many, a Special Education Director may even tell you that some of their special educators are teaching while still working through the formal certification process at night.

Without seasoned classroom experience for many given today's teacher retention climate, special educators that are newer to the profession may find tasks like writing an [Individualized Education Program \(IEP\)](#) to be challenging. Hey, even veteran teachers have room to increase the effectiveness of the IEP goals they write. *As educators, we are always learning!*

All of that to say, regardless of staff headcount or years of experience, there is still an urgency (and federal mandate!) to uphold the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) for our student population.



This guide is designed to help new-to-the-field special educators define best practices for writing effective IEP goals that will drive students down a path of academic and personal success.

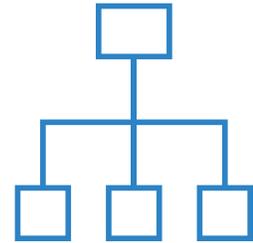
02. TEAM

BUILDING AN IEP TEAM

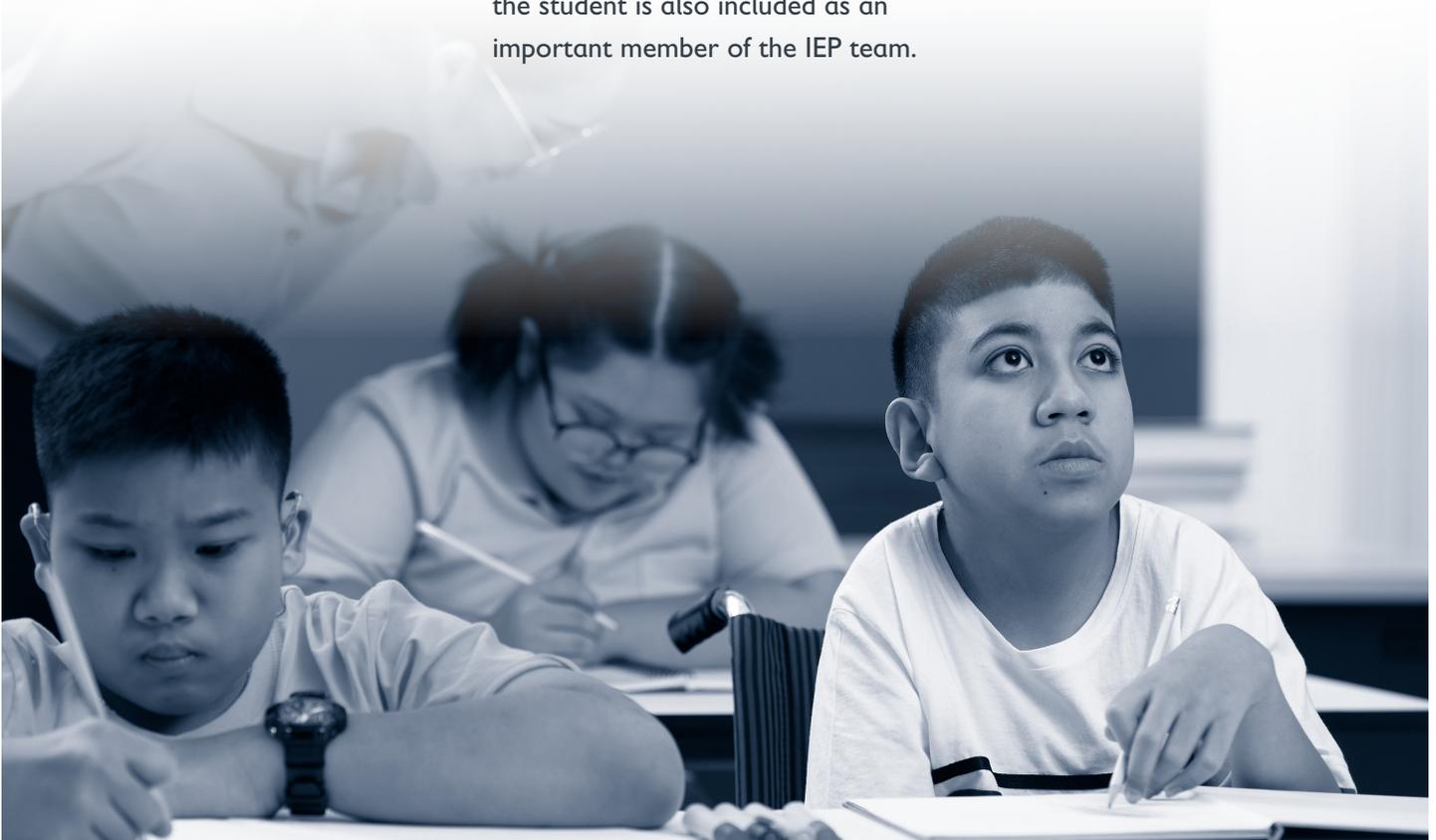
When it comes to building an IEP team, it is important for anyone involved in your students' education to be an active participant. For example, the general education teacher who spends time with your student has the same right to participate in the IEP process as your student's speech therapist, and so on.

IDENTIFY YOUR TEAM:

First things first—you'll want to clearly define who participates on the IEP team. IDEA outlines who must be part of the [IEP team](#) as well as participants who may be included. Typically, the IEP team includes a special education teacher, a general education teacher, school administrator, psychologist or other professional who can interpret evaluation results, parents/guardians, and any other professional who plays a role in your student's progress, such as a paraprofessional or speech therapist. When appropriate, the student is also included as an important member of the IEP team.



First things first—you'll want to clearly define who participates on the IEP team.



03. CALENDAR

REVIEW THE IEP CALENDAR

SET A TEAM MEETING:

An IEP meeting should be scheduled around the same time annually. For example, if your student's annual IEP meeting took place on October 1, 2022, the next annual meeting must take place no later than October 1, 2023. If it occurs later than this date, the team is out of compliance (which we'll get into in more detail in a bit) because the team must meet, at a minimum, once per year (or possibly more often if there is reason to do so).

When scheduling, be sure to schedule during a mutually agreed upon time to hold the IEP meeting. You'll want to ensure you provide plenty of advance notice in order for all team members to attend. *Raise your hand if you like receiving calendar invites for meetings that you've had no time to prepare for? Crickets...*

By law, [parents/guardians](#) are required to attend IEP meetings. In the instance that a family member can't attend, the meeting would need to be rescheduled, unless otherwise agreed on.

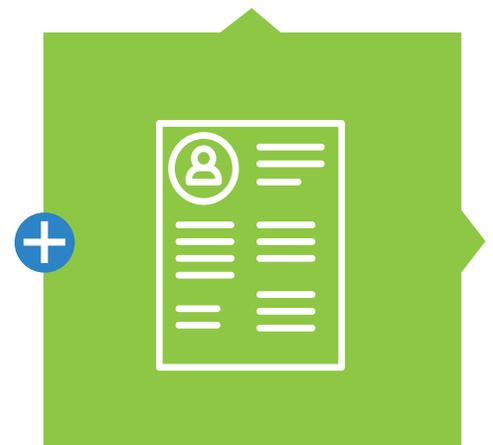


WHAT TO DO AHEAD OF TIME:

Before the meeting takes place, you'll want to review any current information that pertains to your student. This can include information about your student's disability, how they have historically performed academically, as well as where they are at currently.

From there, create an agenda for all members of the IEP team to discuss during the meeting. Provide the agenda in advance so IEP team members can come in ready to contribute.

Hint: the structure of the IEP itself is a great way to structure the agenda! Look at the headers of each section and use those as bullet points for your agenda. Your agenda could look something like this:



- Introductions
- Discuss purpose of meeting
- Review evaluation results (if applicable)
- Discuss present level of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFPs)
- Share proposed IEP goals
- Determine classroom-based accommodations
- Discuss testing accommodations and information
- Determine the schedule of services and classroom placement
- Summarize meeting
- Sign for attendance and agreement



DURING THE MEETING:

Encourage collaboration among the IEP team during the meeting. It's important that all voices are heard, recognized and focused on the progress of your student. Make sure you take detailed notes throughout the entire IEP meeting. These notes will be shared with all members of the IEP team, including parents/guardians, and they will also be entered into the special education data system as supplemental documentation to the IEP. Remember, what you discuss will be incorporated into your student's IEP—a *federally mandated, legally binding document*.



AFTER THE MEETING:

Overly communicate with the IEP team after the meeting takes place. It's key that **all** team members are well aware of the role they play in helping the student meet their educational goals. It is especially important to touch base with the other service providers on the student's IEP team who may not have attended the meeting. For example, consider a student who receives specially designed instruction in the areas of reading, writing, and math as well as related services for a speech and language impairment. At the IEP meeting, it may be the case that the ELA special education teacher attended and the speech and language pathologist attended, but the math special education teacher did not attend. This is permissible under the law—remember, only one special education teacher is required to attend, but it is still critical that the math special education teacher understand exactly what the final outcome of the meeting was.

04. CONTENTS

CONTENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE IEP

An effective IEP should be tailored to meet the unique needs of your student(s). For example, if your student has difficulty working with others in a group, setting measurable goals that foster and enhance social skills would be appropriate.

If your student is performing above grade-level with certain math skills, you would want to create standards-aligned goals that challenge your student, but are still achievable, as well.

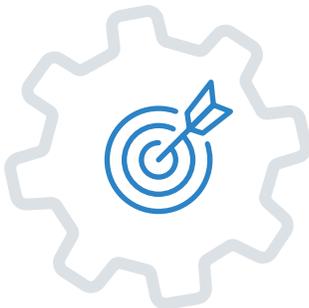
To create an effective IEP that supports academic and personal growth, the following steps can be helpful:



ASSESS THE STUDENT'S NEEDS:

Consult multiple sources of data to gather information about your student's current academic performance, including any relevant evaluations or assessments and any information related to the student's disability.

Having a clear understanding of what your student can currently do will be key in helping you define your student's [present levels of academic achievement and functional performance \(PLAAPF\)](#) in the IEP.



SET CLEAR AND MEASURABLE GOALS IN EACH IDENTIFIED AREA OF NEED:

Develop specific, measurable and achievable goals for the student.

More on this in the next section! (Note: you only need to write IEP goals for the areas of need. If a student does not require specially designed instruction in math, they do not need to have math goals on their IEP).



IDENTIFY ACCOMMODATIONS/MODIFICATIONS:

Determine what accommodations and modifications your student needs to be successful—both in and out of your classroom. For instance, document that your student with a specific learning disability needs additional time to complete class and/or homework, this way that extra time is required by law.



PROGRESS MONITORING:

Establish a system for regularly monitoring your student's progress towards their goals and make any necessary adjustments to their IEP. If you are continuously reviewing the IEP and updating the progress notes with data throughout the year, achieving goals and planning for the next year will go smoothly.



CONSIDER THE STUDENT'S STRENGTHS AND INTERESTS:

Make sure the IEP reflects the student's strengths and interests and provides opportunities for them to build on their skills and develop their passions. If your student has expressed interest in becoming a chef one day, make sure there are opportunities for your student to master functional skills as they pertain to preparing food.



INVOLVE THE STUDENT:

Encourage your student to be an active participant in the IEP process and involve them in goal-setting, to the maximum extent possible. Self-determination and self-advocacy are important skills for students with disabilities. Creating opportunities for active participation in the IEP process is an excellent way to develop these skills.



COLLABORATE WITH ALL TEAM MEMBERS:

Encourage collaboration and open communication between all IEP team members. Everyone involved in your student's learning journey needs a seat at the table. And remember, it's best practice to communicate early with the other members of the IEP team. Don't wait until the week of the meeting to gather their input and ask for work samples. Everyone is busy, including your colleagues!



REVIEW AND UPDATE REGULARLY:

Regularly review your student's IEP to ensure it continues to meet your student's changing needs and supports their growth and development. Make changes as necessary, and of course, annually as required.

05. SMART GOALS

SMART GOALS

POP QUIZ! Which example of a goal sounds more achievable?

Example 1:

This year, I want to take a vacation.



Example 2:

Each month for 6 months, I am going to set aside \$250 from my paycheck and place it into a vacation savings plan. After 6 months, I will have \$1,500—enough to book my vacation!

Example 2 showcases a SMART goal, providing you with an intentional plan to set and accomplish objectives.

Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound objectives = SMART Goals

When writing an IEP, IEP teams commonly use SMART Goals to help students reach academic and personal goals.

SPECIFIC:

The goal should be clearly defined with no room for confusion.

Example: Student will add two-digit numbers with no regrouping.

MEASURABLE:

The goal should be tracked to ensure progress can be monitored.

Example: The student will be evaluated on weekly quizzes with 5 questions to monitor progress.

ACHIEVABLE:

The goal should be within reach given your student's current level of academic progress.

Example: Student will add two-digit numbers with no regrouping with 80% accuracy in 4 out of 5 trials on weekly quizzes to support progress towards multi-digit computation.

RELEVANT:

The goal should be practical and relevant in helping your student thrive in education and beyond.

Example: The student will master two-digit addition with no regrouping with 80% accuracy to support progress towards multi-digit computation, as well as to help with future instruction and in a community setting.

TIME-BOUND:

Include a specific timeframe within the SMART goals you set. This will help create consistent checkpoints and a defined end goal during the process.

Example: The student will master two-digit addition by March 1, 2023.

Example of the final IEP SMART Goal:

By March 1, 2023, **student** will add two-digit numbers with no regrouping with 80% accuracy in 4 out of 5 trials on weekly quizzes to support progress towards multi-digit computation, as well as to help with future instruction and in a community setting.

06. DATA-DRIVEN GOALS

HOW CAN DATA DRIVE IEP GOALS?

When it comes to making progress on student IEP goals, consider data your new BFF. Take data at the beginning of the process, at different points along the way, and of course as you begin to bridge the gap toward meeting these goals. Here are a few pieces of data you'll want to collect to help drive your student's IEP goals:

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE:

Any data around your student's current grades, test scores, class/homework completion will be helpful in creating and meeting IEP goals.

The more information you can reference here, the more you'll be able to fine tune IEP goals and meet your students where they are at.



ASSESSMENTS:

Review all of your student's evaluations and [assessments](#) to identify strengths and areas of weakness that need more focus.

OBSERVATION:

Take notice of things like socialization, or challenging or appropriate behaviors, and document what you learn through observation. This, too, will help you navigate points of interest and areas of focus pertaining to IEP goals.

FEEDBACK:

While general data may be your BFF—feedback (data-related or not) is a close runner up. Stay in constant communication with your student's parents/families, as well as their other teachers and support staff. What others are noticing with your student may be different than what you are seeing.



Having the full picture will go a long way in supporting your student and their goals. When you have the data to support the goals you are working toward, data-based decisions will help drive your student's learning and progress.

07. COMPLIANCE

STAYING IN COMPLIANCE

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with documented disabilities who are found eligible for special education services are required to have an IEP. If an IEP is not followed or upheld, districts can and will be held accountable.

Here are a few tips that you can follow to help ensure you stay in compliance:



IMPLEMENT THE IEP:

Once the IEP is finalized, be sure to implement it exactly as it's written.

For example, if a student's IEP says the student requires 2.5 hours per week of specially designed instruction in math, the student must have 2.5 hours per week of specially designed math instruction. Since an IEP is a legally binding document, it must be followed to a T. If not, your school can be held liable.



CONSISTENTLY REVIEW THE IEP:

Make it a habit to frequently review your students' IEPs. This will help you and your students stay on track toward meeting specific academic and personal goals. If you notice adjustments that need to be made, propose an amendment to the IEP. Amendments allow you to make needed changes that will help boost progress throughout the year.



MONITOR:

Continue to monitor your students' progress regularly. This will be key in adjusting the IEP as necessary to ensure your student is meeting their goals.



COMMUNICATE:

Communication. Communication. Communication. Encourage an open door communication policy with your student's families. Ongoing dialogue is critical to support your student's goals and progress.



DOCUMENT EVERYTHING:

Make sure all of your records pertaining to your student's IEP are kept up-to-date. You'll want to be able to accurately reference any decisions, updates and conversations that are had when necessary.



UNDERSTAND THE LAWS:

Know the ins and outs of special education laws, like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The first step in staying in compliance is recognizing what requirements need to be met. If you're not yet an expert on IDEA, that's ok. It takes time! Lean on your special education coordinator or director for help, especially in cases involving questions of compliance. And then do your part by staying organized, planning ahead, and participating in continuing education around special education laws, compliance, and IEP development.



ASK FOR HELP:

Don't be afraid to ask for support when needed. If you have questions about your student's IEP, check in with the IEP team, your school administrator, a mentor, etc. Working together for the greater good will only benefit the success of your student.

Ultimately, everyone involved in IEP creation and implementation has the same goal—providing a meaningful education experience for your student(s).

08. CONCLUSION

There are laws in place that require you to wear a seatbelt when you're riding in a moving car. Why is that? *To protect your safety.* What happens when you get pulled over and you don't have a seatbelt on? *You receive a citation.* Why? Your safety is **important**.

Similarly, there are laws in place to protect our student population and their right to a free and appropriate education. What happens when those rights are violated (ie: their IEPs not being upheld)? *Schools are met with legal liabilities.* Why? Our students' rights are **important**.

Whether you're a newer special educator or a seasoned educator looking to freshen up your skills—writing effective IEP goals (and upholding them!) are a major piece, and a very important piece!, of your job. Understanding the process can be half the battle.

Each of your students is unique and has individual strengths, weaknesses and needs. Creating an IEP that promotes your students' access to an adapted curriculum, like [enCORE](#), or interventions, like [TeachTown Basics](#), will help support their school and post-secondary school goals.

*Now, let's get to work—
happy IEP writing!*





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