Writing Measurable Goals and Objectives/Benchmarks

Writing Measurable Annual Goals

Measurable annual goals are statements that describe what a child with a disability can reasonably be expected to accomplish within a 12-month period in the child's education program. There should be a direct relationship between the measurable annual goals and the needs identified in the PLAAFP. Measurable annual goals must be related to meeting the child's needs that result from the child's disability, thus enabling the child to be involved in and progress in appropriate activities. Every need identified in the PLAAFP must be addressed somewhere in the IEP. Most often, these needs will be addressed as annual goals. Well-written goals are meaningful and measurable. Meaningful and measurable goals can be easily monitored, and therefore are useful to teachers in making educational decisions.

Writing Meaningful Goals

A goal is meaningful when it describes a behavior/skill that will have a real impact on the success of a child in current, as well as future environments. Therefore, the IEP team should select goals that are not likely to develop without intervention. Goals are meaningful when they enhance and address multiple areas in a child's life, when they match a child's developmental level, and are based on the progress a child can reasonably be expected to achieve within 12 months.

A good way to determine if a goal is meaningful is to apply the "so what" test. Ask yourself, "What will the ability to achieve this goal do for the child?" The following is an example of the "so what" test:

Goal

In 12 months, during personal sharing time at school, Kelly will appropriately respond to the topic and initiations of others (i.e., stay on topic, ask pertinent questions, make related statements) 80% of given opportunities, as measured on 5 consecutive, structured observations.

So What?

Kelly will be able to gain appropriate information, maintain positive relationships with peers and adults, and function appropriately in group activities.

In this example, there are many benefits to Kelly in accomplishing the goal. The answers to the "so what" test indicate this is a useful skill for Kelly, and therefore the goal is meaningful. Had the team been unable to provide a good answer to the "so what" test, then the goal would not be functional and another goal should be selected.

A second test used by teams to identify the appropriateness of a goal is the "stranger test". Goals should be written so that anyone who is working with the child, including the parents, can use the information to develop appropriate intervention plans and assess

the child's progress.

Writing Measurable Goals

The word measurable implies that something can be observed and/or counted in some manner. Behaviors such as walking up the stairs unassisted, asking a friend to play, and pretending that a block is a phone are observable, and therefore measurable. Final products that are a result of attained goals are also measurable. To make a goal measurable, the following components must be included:

Timeframe: This is usually spelled out in the number of weeks or a certain date for completion of the goal.

In 36 instructional weeks…

By November 19, 20xx…

Condition: This specifies the setting, accommodations, and description of the assessment method and/or the manner in which progress toward the goal is measured.

During small group activities…

When given a directive…

When asked to complete a 4-piece puzzle

Behavior: This clearly identifies the performance being monitored, and reflects an action that can be directly observed and is measurable.

Sally will look at the speaker of the group.

Rex will follow a one step direction.

Emily will spontaneously use 15 or more two-word combinations to express her wants and needs.

Criterion: This identifies how much, how often, and to what standard the behavior must occur in order to demonstrate that the goal has been reached.

For 10 minutes, 4 out 5 consecutive observational periods…

Within one minute, 3 times a day, for 2 weeks…

5 times during a 20-minute time period…

In 6 out of 10 trials…

To write measurable goals, start with the baseline data provided in the PLAAFP. What do you know about what the child can do? In the first PLAAFP example, we know that Katie is able to hold crayons, markers and other writing utensils in her fist, and make scribbles on paper. She paints using down strokes only with a paintbrush. Given the baseline information we also know that a typically developing child of the same age holds the same types of utensils between the thumb and forefingers. These are all observable behaviors and can therefore be measured. We also know from the PLAAFP that Katie's inability to hold the writing utensils between her thumb and forefingers is keeping her

from being able to create representational artwork like that of other children her same age. We could hypothesize that without intervention, Katie will improve in her ability to draw because she doesn't avoid these types of activities in school, and has the cognitive skills necessary for this skill. However, we also know that Katie's peers will be improving at a much faster rate. Without intervention, the gap between Katie's skills and her peers will continue to get larger. Given this information we could write a measurable goal as follows:

In 12 months, when provided with writing utensils (crayons, markers, pencils), Katie will create representational artwork while holding writing utensils between her thumb and forefingers on 4 out of 5 consecutive opportunities.

It's worth repeating

- **Annual goals must reflect observable behavior that can be measured objectively.**
- **Goals must contain objective conditions and criteria for success.**
- **Goals must be based on appropriate standards.**
- **Goals using participation as a criterion or focus on a one-time event are not appropriate.**

Example Annual Goals

The following are examples of measurable annual goals. They contain a timeframe, condition, specific behavior and criterion.

In 12 months, Timmy will follow 2-step directions, during large group activities (i.e., groups of 6 or more children), 1 time per observation period, across 5 consecutive group times.

By November 1, 200X, when given a verbal direction by an adult, Robin will begin to comply with the direction within 10 seconds, 3 out of 4 opportunities, for 3 consecutive days.

In 12 months, while at school, Bobbie will use the toilet independently when necessary, for a period of at least 3 weeks without an accident.

In 36 weeks, Misty will establish and maintain proximity with peers and cooperatively play with partners during child-directed free choice activities for at least 5 minutes, one time per observation period, across 5 consecutive free choice activities.

In 36 weeks, Vera will use scissors to cut out simple shapes with curved lines when presented with scissors, and paper with printed shapes (at least 3 inches in diameter). She will cut out the shapes within 1/4 inch of the line, 4 out of 5 trials.

In 36 weeks, during conversations with peers or adults, Terry will use words to describe attributes of toys or foods (e.g., shape, size, color, texture, and spatial relationship), 2 times per observation period for 3 consecutive days.

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