

**College and Career Ready
Standards and Individualized
Education Programs:
Information for Parents**



Introduction

Ensuring that each student is ready for college and employment after graduating from high school is an increasing priority across the country. To accomplish this goal, many states are adopting “college and career ready standards*,” which are a set of high expectations for all students, including students with disabilities.

This document provides parents and other family members with information about the Standards and explains their importance during the development and implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). By learning about the Standards, parents will be more prepared to support their children’s schooling and play an active role in decisions about their children’s educational programs.

Students with Disabilities and the Standards

How will the Standards affect the education of students with disabilities?

Many states and local districts throughout the country have been updating their curricula and reviewing their teaching and testing practices to align with the Standards. The education of students with disabilities may be affected in the following ways:

Increased Access to the General Education Curriculum

Students with disabilities have been included in the Standards initiative as a means of encouraging high expectations for all students and providing access to the general education curriculum.

**Many states have adopted the “Common Core State Standards,” while others have developed their own state-specific standards. This document uses the general term “the Standards” to refer to either type of academic standards for students.*

“Students with disabilities must be challenged to excel within the general curriculum and be prepared for success in their post-school lives, including college and/or careers. These common standards provide an historic opportunity to improve access to rigorous academic content standards for students with disabilities.”

<http://www.corestandards.org/assets/application-to-students-with-disabilities.pdf>

Individualized Education Program

To support standards-based instruction for all students, the Standards should serve as the starting point for the development of IEPs in the areas of English and math. While the basic requirements for IEP development are the same (e.g., IEP participants, timelines, components), it is important that IEP meetings focus on each student having access to, being actively engaged in, and benefiting from Standards-based instruction. IEPs should also address the student’s participation in state assessments and procedures for monitoring student progress throughout the school year in relation to the Standards.

Statewide Assessments

Each state decides whether it will continue to administer its current state assessment, revise its assessment, or participate in one of the new assessments being developed at the national level. These statewide assessments, also known as large-scale assessments, will provide one measure of student progress.

The groups developing the new assessments at the national level are Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and SMARTER Balanced Assessment

Consortium (Smarter Balanced). States that joined one of the two national assessment groups are scheduled to administer new assessments during the 2014-2015 school year. It is expected that the majority of students with IEPs will participate in the same assessment as their nondisabled peers. These groups have published documents describing accessibility features and accommodations for students with disabilities.

States also have the option of selecting one of the two nationally developed alternate assessments that are being developed for a small percentage of students with disabilities, particularly those students with significant cognitive disabilities. The Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Alternate Assessment Consortium and the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) are the two groups responsible for the development of these assessments.

Connecting IEPs to the Standards

What are Best Practices for Developing Standards-Based IEPs?

In order for students with disabilities to make progress toward meeting the Standards, each English and math component of the IEP should be developed in relation to age-appropriate, grade level benchmarks. A Standards-based IEP may benefit a student by:

- Helping parents and teachers to understand and communicate about how the student is performing in comparison to grade-level standards;
- Identifying the specialized instruction, supports and services, and assistive technology the student may need to access and benefit from grade-level curricula and instruction; and
- Focusing on skills and routines that will help to narrow or close the gap between a student's performance and grade-level expectations.

Standards-based IEPs should also address the additional individual academic and functional needs of each student, as determined by the IEP team.

1. Identifying Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)

The Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance includes key information about how the student is currently performing and how the student's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. It is very important to develop an accurate description of the student's current levels of performance for English and math in relation to the Standards. In middle school and high school, the teacher most familiar with these Standards and the general curriculum will often be the grade-level general education teachers of a specific subject. Parents may want to request these teachers' participation in the annual IEP meeting.

In some instances the student will be new to special education, and the IEP is being developed for the first time. For other students, the IEP is being developed as part of the annual review process. In both instances, it is important to collect and use assessment information that is directly related to the English and Math Standards' knowledge and skills.

There are several factors that the IEP team may discuss when preparing the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance. It is helpful to begin the IEP meeting by focusing on a student's strengths and then consider the impact of the disability on the student's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.

Student's Strengths

- What are the Standards-based skills and knowledge that the student can demonstrate correctly and independently?
- What are the Standards-based skills and knowledge that the student can demonstrate correctly with teacher assistance or other types of instructional support?
- What positive learning qualities has the student demonstrated that led to academic progress in the past?

- What instructional supports, services, and assistive technology have provided access to the general education curriculum in the past?
- What instructional supports, services, and assistive technology helped the student make academic gains and demonstrate academic progress in the past?

The following data sources may be used to provide information about students' areas of academic strength and need:

- standardized tests
- ongoing curriculum-based assessments
- other types of classroom assessments
- teacher and parent observations
- student input
- student work samples

Impact of Student's Disability

- What are the student's learning and instructional needs that result from his or her disability in the areas of English and math?
- What learning characteristics have interfered with the student making progress in English and math?
- What basic skills has the student had difficulty learning that are critical for progress to occur toward meeting the Standards?

2. Setting Instructional Goals and Short-term Objectives

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that the IEP include a statement of measurable annual academic and functional goals. In some cases (when required by the state or if a student takes alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards), short term objectives or benchmarks must also be included in the IEP.

In a Standard-based IEP, goals and objectives should be written to support the student's attainment of grade-level English and Math

Standards and be based on the student's Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance. A student's IEP will also likely include goals and objectives in communication, social, behavioral, sensory, health or physical areas based on the student's unique needs and instructional program.

When determining goals and objectives, the following issues should be discussed among the IEP team members, including the parent or guardian:

- What are the Standards-based skills and knowledge the student has been taught in the past that he or she cannot perform independently?
- What are the Standards-based skills and knowledge the student will need to be taught directly with opportunities for repeated practice?
- What are the Standards-based skills and knowledge for which the student will require specially designed instruction, including supports, services, and assistive technology?
- What other educational needs does the student have, that are related to his or her disability, which must be part of instruction, in order for the student to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum?

3. Selecting Needed Special Education, Related Services, and Supplementary Aids and Services

In order for students with disabilities to access the Standards and demonstrate their knowledge and skills in English and math, their IEPs must include appropriate special education supports and services, including any needed assistive technology. Decisions about the specific special education supports and services that are needed should be based on the student's strengths and needs described in the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance and the selection of IEP goals. The IEP team should determine the types of support needed and how often

they should be provided to enable the student to make progress toward the age-appropriate, grade level Standards.

Some students with significant cognitive challenges may need substantial supports and accommodations to have meaningful access to the general education curriculum and certain Standards. However, the specially designed instruction should enable students with disabilities to learn within the same high expectations framework as their peers.

IDEA provides for a variety of services and supports that a student may require in response to unique educational needs that are related to his or her disability. These include:

- Specially designed instruction;
- Related services;
- Supplementary aids and services;
- Accommodations and modifications; and
- Supports for school staff.

Decisions about the specific special education services supports, and accommodations must be made on an individual basis. Questions that the IEP team may need to discuss in order to select the appropriate supports, services, and accommodations that will help the student's progress in the English and Math Standards include:

- Is assistive technology needed?
- Does the student need modified or accessible instructional materials?
- Are specialized instructional techniques and strategies required?
- Does the student need support from a special education teacher, instructional aide, or a peer?
- Does the staff need support (e.g., professional development, consultation with a specialist)?

4. Evaluating and Reporting Student Progress

It is important to describe in the IEP how the student's progress will be measured and reported to parents and the youth when appropriate. For the English and Math Standards, there are several key issues that should be considered when planning the collection, analyses, and reporting of student progress. Some issues relate to annual state assessments, and others relate to how a student's progress will be measured at different points in the school year.

State assessments are one component of the larger accountability system focused on student progress toward college and career readiness. All students, including students with disabilities, are required by federal law to participate in state assessments to measure their progress in achieving state standards.

In order to have an accurate picture of what the student has learned and the progress that has been made, some students with disabilities will need testing accommodations. Accommodations do not change the knowledge and skills being measured. Accommodations are changes to the test materials or testing procedures that allow the student to demonstrate the knowledge and skills he or she has learned. Some examples of test accommodations are use of a Braille version of the test, extended time, or breaks during testing. It is important that the student use the accommodations throughout the year, not only in the state assessment, so that the student can be familiar with and benefit from the needed accommodations.

In addition to participating in the state assessment, the progress of students with disabilities toward meeting the Standards will be monitored throughout the year. The assessments should provide information about:

- The skills and knowledge the student has learned;
- Whether the student can demonstrate the knowledge and skills independently or with instructional support; and
- The effectiveness of instructional strategies, materials, assistive technology, and other supports.

The following best practices for progress monitoring can serve as a guide to the IEP team:

- Use evidence-based assessment approaches that are a direct measure of what has been taught in relation to the Standards (e.g. curriculum-based procedures, classroom assessments, analyses of a student’s work);
- Assess on a frequent basis, using several methods to determine progress;
- Determine the degree of accuracy and level of independence demonstrated by the student;
- Use approaches that can identify large and small patterns of growth over time;
- Use assessment accommodations that will result in an accurate picture of what the student has learned;
- Report findings in a manner that is understandable, using visual displays, such as charts and portfolios.

All decisions regarding the participation of students with disabilities in **state assessments** should be made on an individual basis. These decisions include the following:

- Does the student need accommodations to participate in the state assessment?
- Does the student meet the state’s criteria for participating in the alternate assessment?

Some of the most important issues that IEP teams need to consider when determining how to assess a student’s progress toward **individualized instructional goals** are:

- How and when will the student’s progress be assessed?
- What assessment accommodations, if any, are needed to make sure that an accurate picture of student progress is obtained?
- How and when will student progress be reported to the student’s parents?

Conclusion

The development of College and Career Ready Standards is part of the larger educational accountability movement that aims to provide a quality education for all students. The Standards initiative offers both opportunities and challenges for parents and educators responsible for the design and delivery of educational programs for students with disabilities. It is important to have **high expectations** for all students and work toward positive outcomes during their K-12 school years and transition to the adult world. Through effective partnerships, families and educators can continue to work toward the goal of children and youth with disabilities achieving productive and meaningful lives.

Additional Information and Helpful Resources

Parents can learn more about their state's adoption of the Standards and selection of statewide assessments by contacting their state department of education or parent center (<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/>).

College and Career Ready Standards

- College and Career Ready Standards:
<http://www.ed.gov/k-12reforms/standards>
- Common Core State Standards Initiative:
<http://www.corestandards.org/>
- Parents' Guide to Student Success:
<http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583>

IEP Planning

- A Place to Start: Understanding the Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance Statement:
<http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c186.pdf>
- Understanding the Special Education Process:
<http://www.pacer.org/publications/pdfs/ALL17.pdf>

State Assessments

- Partnership for Assessment for Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) — Resources for Parents:
<http://www.parcconline.org/for-parents>
- Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium — Resources for Parents:
<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/parents-students/>

Progress Monitoring

- Progress Monitoring in an Inclusive Standards-based Assessment and Accountability System:
<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/nceo/onlinepubs/synthesis53.html>

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