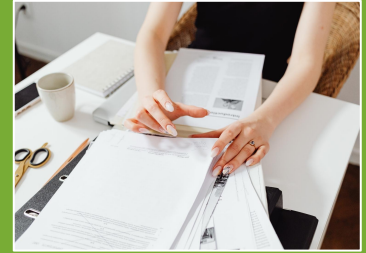


# Special Education Academy

Part 5 of 10: The Importance  
of the IEP Goals



**January 12, 2025**

Presented by:

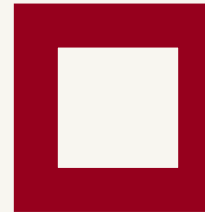
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund



# Presenter

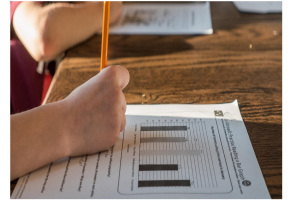
## **Andrea Yu**

Education Advocate  
Disability Rights Education &  
Defense Fund



# Today's Agenda

- Introductions
- Identifying All Areas of Need
- Turning Needs into SMART Goals
- Questions



# Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund **DREDF**

- Unique alliance of people with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities.
- National law and policy center dedicated to protecting and advancing disability civil and human rights.
- Disability rights are civil rights.
- **Vision:** a just world where all people live full and independent lives free of discrimination.
- Educate legislators and policy makers on affecting rights of people with disabilities.

# Parent Training and Information Centers

- PTIs help families understand and use the education rights of their children with a disabilities.
- PTIs offer **free** trainings for parents of children with disabilities, youth and community members.
- There is a PTI in every state and territory in the United States.
- To find a PTI near you, visit the: [Center for Parent Information Resources](#)
- The PTI at DREDF now serves the North Coast Region!

To Contact us:

- 800-348-4232 (toll free)
- 510-644-2555 x5227 (voice)
- [iephelp@dredf.org](mailto:iephelp@dredf.org) (Email)



# Expectations

What we WILL talk about today:

- What the IDEA says about goals
- Potential goal areas for students with IEPs
- Advocacy strategies

What we WILL NOT talk about today:

- Provide a magic solution or quick fix - the process takes time!
- Provide legal or therapeutic advice: We are lay advocates.
- We are not attorneys, licensed therapists, or social workers.

# How We'll Proceed

Please help us keep to the topic and agenda.

- We will take **general questions at the end**. Be kind, courteous and respectful when asking questions.
- Assume positive intentions
- We all have something to learn from each other and what we share is valuable
- This is a collaborative, judgement-free zone.
- We will do our best to use plain language and explain unfamiliar terminology. Use the chat to ask about a new word or phrase.
- All acronyms will be explained (remind us if we forget, please!)

## Why we use “Disability,” and not “Special Needs”

- “Special needs:” not a term developed by disabled people or the Disability Community.
- Everyone’s needs are valid; there is nothing “special” about having equal access.
- “Special needs” erases the expertise of disabled adults who find the phrase infantilizing and inappropriate.
- It is not a term defined in law. “Disability” has a specific legal definition and meaning.
- It does not cover all disabled people; not all disabled students are in special education classrooms or receive special education.
- Parents may worry about labeling or stigmatizing their child, but “disability” brings rights, services, and access.

## “Special Needs” Quote

“Special needs gives the impression that the rights of people with disabilities are ‘special’ or ‘extra.’ We have the same rights as everyone else. How we access those rights may differ, but disability rights are fundamentally the same civil rights as all people. When you imply that the act of accessing our rights is “special” it gives the rest of the public a pass to treat us as though our rights are a special privilege, and then we get harassed for it.”

- Rebecca Cokley, Disability Policy Expert and Thought Leader

# Overview of Series

- In Parts 1 and 2, we talked about the foundations of the IDEA, and parents' and students' rights in the process.
- In Parts 3 and 4, we talked about the importance of evaluations in the special education process. We also talked about how to understand the assessment reports as part of the evaluation to understand how we find the areas of need, or what our students need at school.
- Now, we look to the accountability measures in the IEP: The annual goals that ensure our students make progress from year to year. After all, the goals should be based on the areas of need that shown by the assessment reports and the overall evaluation.

| NEEDS   | GOALS   | SERVICES  |
|---|---|---|
| <p><b>DATA-DRIVEN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessments</li> <li>• Grades</li> <li>• Test Scores</li> <li>• Behavior Reports</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Independent Service Providers</li> </ul> | <p><b>ALL AREAS OF NEED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic</li> <li>• Social-emotional</li> <li>• Behavior</li> <li>• Daily Living Skills</li> </ul> <p><b>SMART GOALS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific</li> <li>• Measurable</li> <li>• Achievable (yet Ambitious)</li> <li>• Relevant</li> <li>• Time-Bound</li> </ul> | <p><b>INDIVIDUALIZED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accommodations</li> <li>• Adult Support</li> <li>• Related Services and Therapies</li> <li>• Specialized Academic Instruction</li> <li>• Counseling</li> <li>• Consultation with Outside Service Providers</li> </ul> |

**...THEN we talk about placement!**

# Why Are Goals So Important?

- Goals enable student to be involved in and make progress in the General Education curriculum (and aligned to Common Core Standards)
- They address each educational need of the student that result from the disability (regardless of the disability category)
- Meet the student's unique needs in an individualized manner
- Measure student growth and success
  - Did the student get to their expected destination one year later?
  - Did the IEP provide meaningful educational benefit?

# What Does the IDEA Say?

(§300.320(a)(2)(i)-(ii))

The IEP must include:

(2)(i) A statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals designed to—

(A) Meet the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum; and

(B) Meet each of the child's other educational needs that result from the child's disability...

(ii) For children with disabilities who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate academic achievement standards, a description of benchmarks or short-term objectives

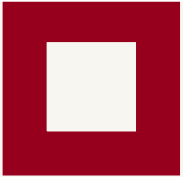
# It Also Says

(§300.320(a)(3))

The IEP must include:

(3) A description of:

- (i) How the child's progress toward meeting the annual goals described in paragraph (2) of this section will be measured; and
- (ii) When periodic reports on the progress the child is making toward meeting the annual goals (such as through the use of quarterly or other periodic reports, concurrent with the issuance of report cards) will be provided [to parents].



# Goals Are Tied to General Education, Always

- The law requires it!
- This is why a general education teacher must be present for the full IEP meeting (unless excused in writing by the parent, or the student is outside general education setting 100%).
- The general education teacher must be able to help explain how the IEP goals will help the student make progress in the general education curriculum!
- This is a very big part of how students with disabilities get access to their education.

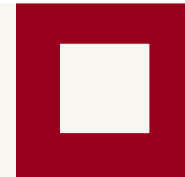
# What is the General Education Curriculum? Can I Find It?

They're online, and available to the public!

- California Common Core Math Standards:  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/ccssmathstandarداug2013.pdf>
- California Common Core ELA Standards:  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/finalelaccsstandards.pdf>
- California Dyslexia Guidelines:  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/ac/documents/cadyslexiaguidelines.pdf>
- California PE Content Model Standards:  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/pestandards.pdf>
- Zaner Bloser Written Language Production for Handwriting and Typing:  
[https://media.zaner-bloser.com/hw21summit/public/Written-Language\\_ProductionStandards.pdf](https://media.zaner-bloser.com/hw21summit/public/Written-Language_ProductionStandards.pdf)

# Progress Reports

- Progress reports must be sent to parents (or the educational rights holder) periodically through the IEP year. These progress reports show the student's quantitative progress on the IEP goals
- In California, there should be 3 progress reports sent to parents each school year, leading up to the next annual IEP meeting to review progress and determine the next appropriate goals.



# Takeaway

- The IDEA requires measurable goals in the IEP in each area of educational need.
- Not only must there be measurable goals in each area of need, but all goals must help the student access their grade's general education curriculum as appropriate.
- AND, the school has to report on the student's progress on the goal throughout the year so the parent-part of the IEP team, remember-can tell if the student is on track to meet the goals.
- TIP: There is no limit to the number of goals in the IEP. The number of goals is determined by the student's needs.

# Academic and Functional Goals

The IDEA requires school districts to offer goals in each of the student's areas of need.

## Examples of Academic Goals:

- Reading comprehension
- Reading fluency
- Decoding
- Math calculation
- Handwriting (spacing and placement)

## Examples of Functional Goals to Support Educational Access:

- Speech / Language
- OT (fine motor/pencil grip/typing)
- OT (sensory needs/toileting)
- PT (Sitting on floor/at desk, physical stamina in navigating school/using playground equipment)

# Have All Areas of Need Been Assessed?

## ***EXECUTIVE FUNCTION***

- Planning and Prioritization
- Task Initiation
- Time Management
- Organization
- Emotional Regulation and Impulse Control
- Flexible Thinking
- Goal Setting and Self-Monitoring
- Stamina and Perseverance

## ***SELF ADVOCACY***

- Asking for help
- Coping strategies
- Metacognition

## **OTHER AREAS TO CONSIDER:**

- Health-related, incl. Mental Health
- Technology Use
- Self Care
- Behavior
- Social Emotional

## Potential Preschool and Elementary School Areas of Need

- **Navigating the School:** going up and down stairs; navigating sensory challenges in hallways, cafeteria, and playground
- **Organization Skills:** putting a backpack/jacket/lunchbox/water bottle in a cubby; getting papers to and from school
- Attention/Following Directions/Staying on Task
- **Class Participation:** answering questions, asking questions, working with peers
- **Ability to Self-Monitor:** knowing when to use the bathroom, knowing when to put on or take off a jacket
- Self Advocacy: asking for help, asking for accommodations, asking for a break
- **Relationships with Peers:** taking turns, sharing, communicating

## Potential Middle School Areas of Need: Exec Function

- **School/Class Attendance:** getting to class on time, getting materials from locker between classes, navigating sensory and social challenges in hallways
- **Organization Skills:** organizing a backpack/desk/locker/binder, using a planner
- **Planning and Time Management:** identifying steps within an assignment/project, developing a work completion plan, breaking big projects down into manageable chunks, initiating work independently, transitioning between tasks/locations

## Potential Middle School Areas of Need (continued)

- **Work Completion:** managing homework across multiple classes, turning in class assignments and homework on time
- **Class Participation:** staying on task, answering questions, asking questions, participating in group projects
- **Ability to Self-Monitor:** using a planner, editing/revising work, staying on top of assignments across multiple classes/teacher expectations
- **Self Advocacy:** asking for help, asking for accommodations, asking for a break

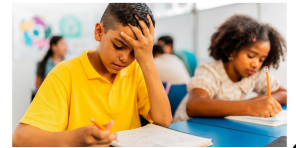
# Potential High School Areas of Need: Eye on Adulthood

- **Metacognition:** understanding disability; understand accommodations/modifications, understanding IEP
- Workforce Development: understanding, requesting and accessing accommodations
- **Independent Living**
- **Using Public Transportation:** to navigate the community
- **Financial Literacy/Budgeting**
- **College Prep:** Research, Applications/Personal Statements, Financial Aid, etc
- **Executive Function Skills**

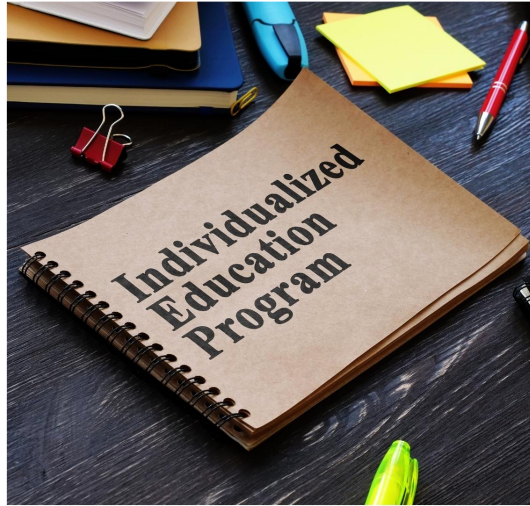
# Potential High School Areas of Need: Eye on Adulthood (continued)

- **Ability to Self-Monitor**
- **Self Advocacy**

All of these areas must be explored in a student's transition plan by age 16, and the student should be a big part of the transition planning process, if not leading it.

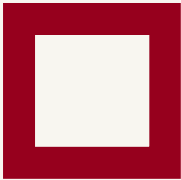


# Coming Soon!



Join us next month on February 9, 2026 when we talk about the goal “formula,” how to write strong goals in the IEP, and what happens when the goals are not met.

Be sure to bring your child’s IEP to Part 6!



# Strategies for Advocacy and Communication in IEPs

## UNDERSTAND THE PEOPLE AND THE PROCESS:

- Get a copy of the contact list and organization chart for the district you are working with, and follow the chain of command. Review family/student handbook.
- Are there additional resources in the district you can access, such as ADR, collaborative conferences, or Facilitated IEP meetings?
- Assume best intentions of staff and ask questions (examples in two slides)

# Strategies for Advocacy and Communication in IEPs (continued)

- **Learn** the policies and California Education Code
- Remember: The IDEA, ADA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and all other federal laws **supercede** state and local code—and school district policies.
- This is a marathon, not a sprint. Navigating special education takes patience, persistence, time, and lots of documentation.



# Strategies for Advocacy and Communication in IEPs (continued)

## DOCUMENT:

- If you didn't put it in writing, it didn't happen.
- Create a "2025-2026 IEP Journal" to document the good and bad each week
- Over-communicate with all members of the team
- Request all student records in 5 business days (including incident reports)
- Request IEP meeting in writing as soon as IEP concerns arise

## CONTINUED: Strategies for Advocacy and Communication in IEPs

- Email the school that parent/guardian will **audio record the IEP meeting with at least 24 hours' notice**. (Use voice memo on smartphones or Otter.ai app to record and transcribe.)
- Keep a **hard copy of all IEPs, assessments, forms, etc. in labeled folder** or binder (or rubber band/clip) in reverse chronological order and by school year:  
<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/how-to-organize-your-childs-iep-binder>
- If you have a computer, **label all documents the same way** (e.g. “2025.03.24 Annual IEP” and “2025.03.24 Triennial Speech Report”) and organize folders by IEPs, Evaluations, Communications, etc.

## How to Ask Questions so School Staff Can Answer:

- Can you please help me understand....
- Why are you proposing that service / accommodation / goal / etc?
- Have we considered (xxxx) as an area of need/service? Why or why not?
- How does (xxxx) help my child meet their goals?
- How does (xxxx) address the need we identified in our present levels discussion?
- Can you please show me a copy of that policy?
- How will that be implemented and by whom?
- What are we doing to address (xxxx) concern that I (or the teacher, therapist, etc) have raised?

# How to Ask Questions so School Staff Can Answer (continued)



Also:

- Please send that to me in writing after this meeting.
- Please send me timely Prior Written Notice in response to my request.

**Questions?**