

Special Education Academy

Part 6 of 10: Writing SMART
IEP Goals



February 9, 2025

Presented by:

Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund



Presenter

Angela Haynes

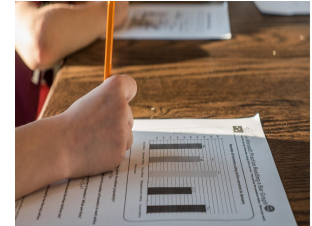
Education Advocate

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

- 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.
- PTIs receive funding from the U.S. Department of Education
- 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 (Email)



Expectations

What we WILL talk about today:

- SMART Goals
- How to write a SMART goal in the IEP
- Advocacy strategies

What we WILL NOT do 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.
- In Part 5, we reviewed the IDEA requirements for goals and potential goal areas for students with disabilities from preschool through transition age, especially on self-advocacy at each step of the way.
- NOW, let's learn how to write an IEP goal that works and that is ambitious, but allows your child to make progress at school.

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

...THEN we talk about placement!

Where Do We Begin? The Present Levels Page in the IEP!

The Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance Statement in the IEP must:

- Describe a student's need in an academic and/or functional area (speech/language, fine/gross motor, health, vision, hearing, etc.)
- State the impact of the student's disability on her involvement in the general education curriculum
- Document the student's current levels of performance, ***which will serve as BASELINE DATA*** to measure their subsequent progress
- Inform the annual goals and the appropriate special education services and supports required to meet those goals
- The baselines for all goals should come from the Present Levels!

Each Goal Starts with a MEASURABLE Baseline

- Baselines must match what is being measured in the goal
- Assessment results from triennials or annual testing (SBAC) are **not** appropriate baseline data
- Baselines must have REAL DATA about the skill in the goal, not a test result

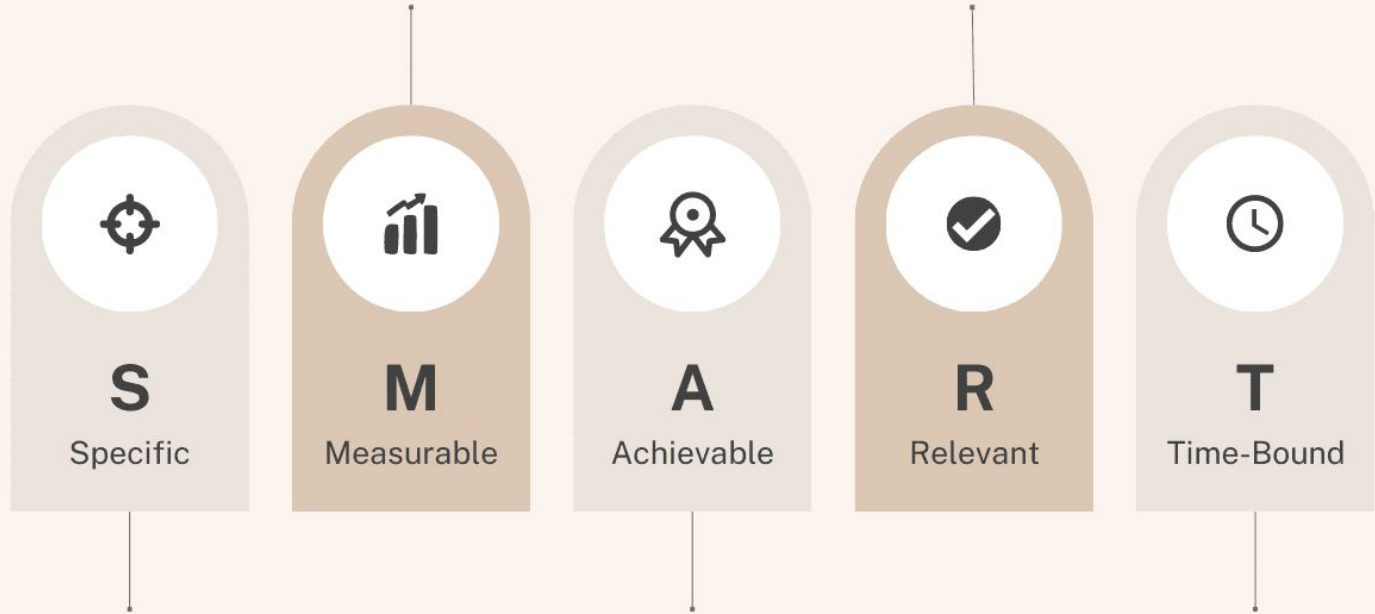


SMART is an Acronym

Image
from [A Day
In OUR
SHOES](#)
SMART
Goals.

- How will I measure my progress?
- How I know if my goal is achieved?

- Is this goal related to my overall success?



- Who is involved?
- What do I want to achieve
- When do I need to achieve this?
- Why is this goal important?

- Will it be clear when the goal is complete?
- Is it reasonable to complete the goal in the time allotted?

- How long should it take to accomplish his goal?
- When will I check in on whether or not the goal has been completed?

The Magic Formula For IEP Goals:

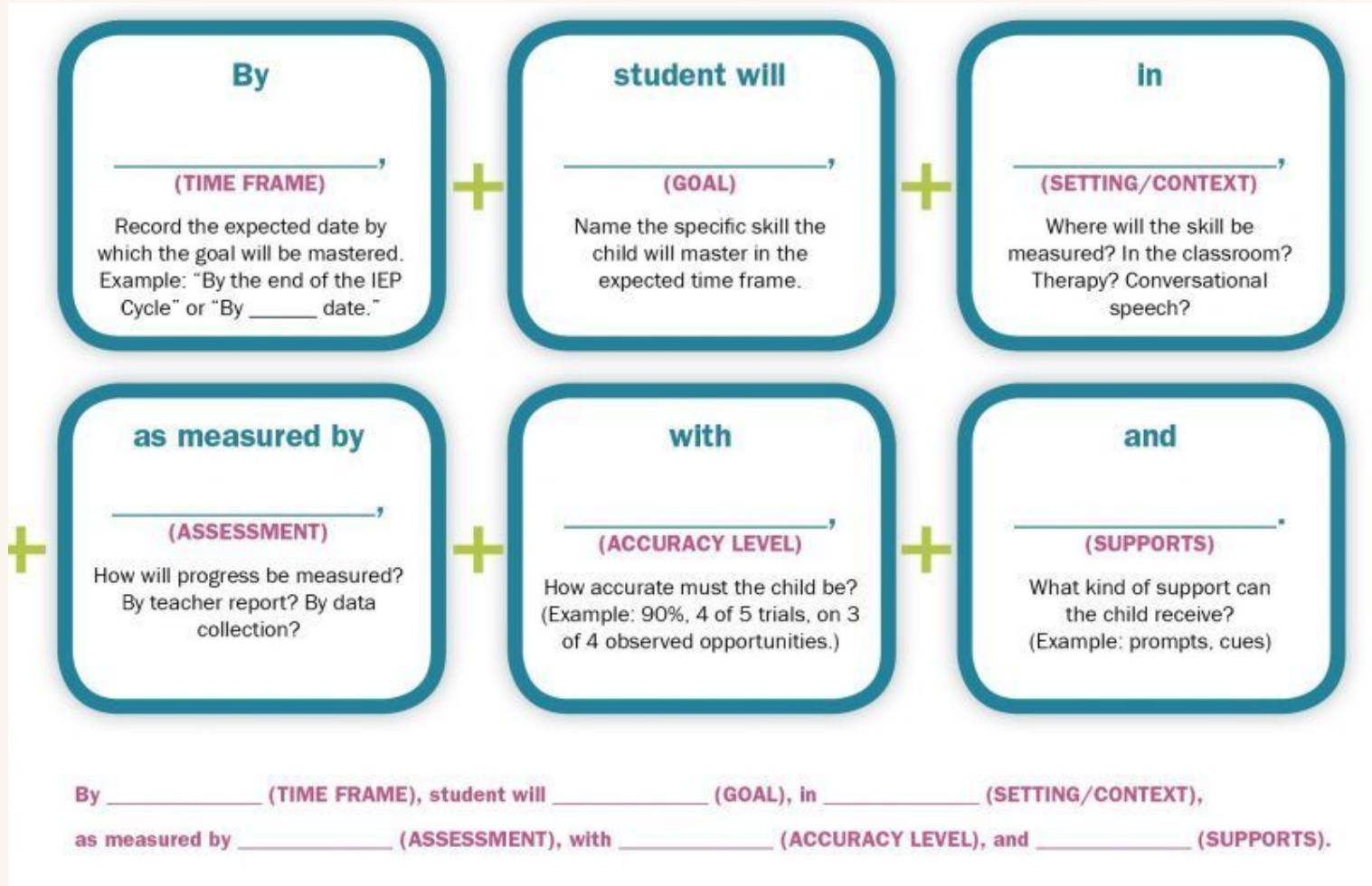


Image from Speech and Language Kids by the SLP Solution:

<https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/write-iep-goals-guide-parents-professionals/>

With the magic formula, what is a good goal?

By March 12, 2026, after listening to a grade-level passage read out loud, Maria will identify the topic of the text when using multiple-choice response options 80% of the time as measured by student work samples and teacher observation in the general education classroom.

Is it **Specific?**

Is it **Measurable?**

Is it **Ambitious and Appropriate?**

Is it **Relevant?**

Is it **Time-bound?**

Setting Students Up for Success:

Students don't magically meet their goals on their own - how are we giving them the skills to meet the goals?

- “With social skills training/modeling...”
- “With access to a pre-drawn model/scribing/notes/...”
- “Using a visual schedule ...”
- “With access to the wellness center/a preferred adult....”

Consider:

- What is the level of prompting required to meet the goal? Fade to independence as much as possible!
- What accommodations are needed to achieve the goal? Are they written into the goal? (Think of Maria's multiple-choice responses)

Remember: Goals Close the Gap Between the Student's Present Levels and the General Education Curriculum!

The General Education Curriculums are Online / Available to the Public

- California Common Core Math Standards:

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/ccssmathstandardaug2013.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:

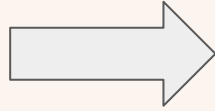
https://media.zaner-bloser.com/hw21summit/public/Written-Language_Production_Standards.pdf

More About Goals:

- **Best practice:** Include short-term objectives for **all** goals as opportunities to “benchmark” progress more than once a year: Is your child on track to meet the goal?
- Progress Monitoring is important: Families should receive progress updates on IEP goals at each short-term objective date, and with each general education progress report or report card
- Goals should be jargon-free: Do you understand what is being measured by the goal? If not, ask for clarification! Do not consent to a goal if it’s unclear.
- Ask yourself and the team: When next year’s teachers, therapists, and other professionals implement this goal, will they know what we expect of the student and how to measure it?

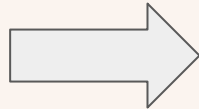
Turning the Goal into a SMART Goal:

By 11/2/21, Student will write an essay at 5th grade standards.



By 11/2/21, when given a 5th-grade writing topic and graphic organizer, Student will write two five-sentence paragraphs including correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization with 75% accuracy. Each paragraph will contain a topic sentence, sentences with supporting details, and a conclusion sentence.

By June 2024, Student's social interaction with peers and adults will improve.



By June 2, 2024, provided with Michelle Garcia Winner "Thinking About You, Thinking About Me" social skills curriculum and instruction, Student will demonstrate pro-social skills with adults and peers by initiating positive conversation with adults and peers at least 2 times each day; measured by daily data collection.

Area of Need: Executive Functioning - Planning & Prioritization

Baseline: As of Fall 2020, [redacted] completes all of his assignments with the assistance of a para educator who assists [redacted] with breaking down assignments and meeting deadlines. [redacted] will need to develop planning and prioritization skills in order to independently complete assignments in a timely manner. At this time, [redacted] demonstrates 0% accuracy with independence; he is not able to independently break assignments into smaller parts, estimate the time it will take to complete an assignment or part of an assignment, assign due dates, or track assignments.

Measurable Annual Goal #: 1 by 5/7/2021

By 05/07/2021, when given a short or long-term assignment and with support of pre-taught tools and strategies [redacted] will break the assignment into smaller parts, estimate the time it will take to complete each part of the assignment, prioritize the order in which he will work on each part, assign due dates for each part, track each component as it is completed, and hand in upon completion and generalized across settings (school, home, after school, learning hub, etc.) with 80% accuracy across all given opportunities as measured by teacher charted observation and student work samples.

as measured by: Teacher observation & Student work samples

- Enables student to be involved/progress in general curriculum/state standard
- Addresses other educational needs
- Linguistically appropriate
- Transition Goal: Education Training Employment Independent Living

Person(s) Responsible: RSP, paraprofessional, & GE Teacher

Short-Term Objective: By February 7, 2021, when given a short or long-term assignment and with support of pre-taught tools and strategies and adult prompting and support, [redacted] will be able to break the assignment into its smaller parts.

Short-Term Objective: By March 7, 2021, when given a short or long-term assignment and with support of pre-taught tools and strategies and adult prompting and support, after [redacted] has broken an assignment into its smaller parts, he will be able to estimate the amount of time it will take him to complete each part of the assignment.

The *Andrew F.* Standard: An “Appropriately Ambitious” IEP

- From the *Andrew F.* Decision:
“[The IEP] must be appropriately ambitious in light of his circumstances, just as advancement from grade to grade is appropriately ambitious for most children in the regular classroom.”
- From ED FAQs About *Andrew F.* (December 2017):
“If a child is not making expected progress toward his or her annual goals, the IEP Team must revise, as appropriate, the IEP to address the lack of progress.”
- From ED’s Grade-Level Standards Guidance (November 2015):
“In a situation where a child is performing significantly below the level of the grade in which the child is enrolled, an IEP Team should determine annual goals that are ambitious but achievable. ... The goals should be sufficiently ambitious to help close the gap.”

When Goals Aren't Met:

Do we know why the goal wasn't met?

- Was the appropriate amount of intervention provided?
- Was the intervention provided by people with the appropriate credential and/or specialized training?
- Was the intervention provided in the appropriate setting?
- Were the student's accommodations implemented appropriately?
- Do we need to adjust the services, accommodations, etc?
- Do we need to adjust the learning environment?

Should you ask for Compensatory Education?

- Aka "Comp Ed"

Next month, on **March 9, 2026**, please join us for Part 7 to talk about how we determine the services and accommodations in the IEP that support the goals, and support our children in reaching their goals and making progress through their IEP. We are now getting to **the Offer of FAPE.**

Before you go, check out these advocacy tips to use this week:

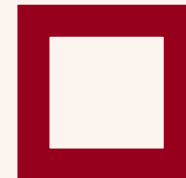
Strategies for Advocacy and Communication in IEPs

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 up when submitting complaints or raising awareness.
- Review family/student handbook for any information about procedures, policies, and contact information before taking action.
- Are there additional resources in the district or County Office of Education that 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.
- If appropriate, make sure your child can join the IEP meeting and contribute to the discussion. Students should understand their disability, how it affects them, and know their rights as well. The IDEA ensures their right to attend the IEP meetings, too.



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?
- Can my child join the IEP meeting? Can my transition-age child help facilitate the IEP meeting?

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?