

## Including Reading in the IEP

When your child has a disability and requires special education services, he is eligible to receive a individualized education program (IEP). An IEP spells out educational goals and the plans for how to reach them, including accommodations to help your child learn. Parents, teachers, and others with educational expertise develop the IEP together so that all have the opportunity to give input and help with decision-making.

Literacy activities and instruction should be a part of your child's school experience—and, therefore, his or her IEP—unless the child functions as a typically developing child in the area of reading. Unfortunately, in the past, the general belief was that a child must have specific skills before he could benefit from reading instruction; for example, a child might have been expected to recognize all of the letters of the alphabet. However, many students with disabilities have “scattered” skills and skills may not be learned in the usual sequence in which other students learn. Therefore, written language activities and experiences **should not be withheld** until speech, language, motor, or other skills are at age or grade level.

Reading and literacy instruction are required to be connected to State Standards. North Carolina began implementing new State Common Core Standards in the 2012-2013 school year replacing the NC Standard Course of Study. These standards describe what students from Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade are supposed to know and be able to do in order to meet the standards. The IEP should include goals and objectives based on Common Core Standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled—no matter the student's disability or functioning level. The IEP should be designed to reflect the student's progress in achieving the standards-based goals. Students with disabilities are general education students first and need access to grade-level curriculum and quality classroom instruction. Instruction can take place in a special education or general education classroom, or both.

### Present Level of Educational Performance (PLP)

When developing an individual educational program (IEP) for students with disabilities, teachers and other professionals will meet with you to determine what kind of outcomes might be expected for each child and how to achieve the desired outcomes. When planning the IEP, it is important that an accurate Present Level of Performance (PLP) be determined. The PLP is the foundation of a quality IEP; you need to know where the child is BEFORE you decide how far he can go.

IDEA '04 defines PLP Present Level of Performance (PLP) as: *A statement of the child's present levels of present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, including*

- 1. How the child's disability affects the child's involvement, and*
- 2. The child's progress in the general education curriculum.*

Therefore, the Present level of Performance (PLP) should include the following items:

- A description of the academic and functional areas affected by the child's disability
- A description of what the student is doing (strengths) and not doing (needs) in the area(s) affected
- A description of why accommodations, adjustments and special services are needed
- Information about assessments and testing of each of the components of reading
- Assessments of language abilities for students with more significant disabilities
- Suggestions for Assistive Technology devices that can assist the child's learning

The Present Level of Performance (PLP) describes your child's abilities, performance, strengths, and needs. In other words, the PLP is based on information and data previously collected and known about the child, and should take into account your student's overall strengths, your concerns as a parent and

special factors. Test and assessment scores should be explained, and should be stated in clear and understandable language.

The following are examples of Present Levels of Performance (PLP) statements and how they can lead to an annual goal:

Following is an example of a PLP for Michael.

**Based on Michael's PLP:**

Michael has 100 sight words but cannot phonetically sound out two-syllable words. He is inconsistent in any use of phonics.

**An appropriate annual IEP goal might be:**

In daily classroom reading assignments Michael will accurately sound out 8 out of 10 one-syllable words using consonant sounds, vowels, and consonant blends.

An example for Mary Beth would include different goals according to Mary Beth's abilities.

**Based on Mary Beth's IEP:**

Mary Beth understands that a book communicates a "story". She is able to scan each page, identify objects and turn pages when prompted. She does not recognize that a word means an object.

**An appropriate annual IEP goal might be:**

With verbal and visual prompts by the teacher during classroom reading opportunities, Mary Beth will correctly identify and retrieve 5 objects in the classroom corresponding to words being read in a book; such as frog, spoon, dog, cow, horse

The IEP team will discuss which data collection strategy (testing method) will be used to measure the progress toward reaching this goal. The IEP Team should include someone knowledgeable about reading.

**Modifications and Accommodations**

Modifications and accommodations refer to adjustments, supports and services that a student with special needs may require in order to successfully access the general curriculum and demonstrate their learning. They should be described in detail in the IEP. A child with special needs should have access to regular reading instruction in addition to proper modifications and accommodations that are chosen based on the specific needs of that child and her reading difficulties. Assistive technology services and/or devices that could help the child learn or function better should also be considered.

To summarize, IEPs should...

- Be based on the child's specific needs.
- Be connected to the general curriculum.
- Have meaningful goals that can be accomplished in 12 months.
- Provide for special education and related services, as well as other aids and services, based on good research.
- Reflect high expectations!

Adapted from Literacy Resource Kit for Parents: Families Helping Children Become Better Readers, Tennessee State Improvement Grant and Language Arts Instructional Strategies Transition for Special Education Teachers and All Teachers, Lisa Campbell, Ed.D, Hamilton County Educational Service Center, April 2012