

8 Signs Your IEP Isn't Good Enough

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Your child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a crucial document. Generally speaking, it spells out where your child is right now educationally, where he or she needs to be, and how we are going to bridge that gap. It is essentially the blueprint for your child's educational program and it can sometimes be confusing; **what looks good, may actually not be**. Here are eight warning signs that your IEP might need more work:

1. Cut and Paste IEPs

Read over your child's IEP and make sure it states your child's name throughout. Almost sounds ridiculous, right? Although some use the student's name in each and every goal, other IEPs say something like, "the student will." This is probably okay, but it lets you know the goal was likely chosen from a software program dropdown menu. This is not a violation, but the goal may not have been individualized to meet your child's needs. Make sure all parts of the document apply to your child. One of the biggest offenses is when the IEP actually includes another child's name. If your child's name is Gary, and the IEP says, "Christopher will greet his peers," then you can be pretty sure that someone has just *cut and pasted* goals and objectives from another student. Again, it may be possible that two students are working on the same goal – and we can't blame anyone for taking shortcuts. Just make sure it is a goal upon which you and the IEP team decided to work.

hand cutting scissors



Another area common to the *cut and paste* is the PLAAFP (Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance). This portion of your IEP should include a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of your child. It should not include a *cut and paste* of the evaluation conducted, and it certainly should not include an evaluation from last year, the year before, or the year before that! After reading the PLAAFP, the teacher should have a good idea of your child, what he or she can do, and what needs to be worked on. Also, each "need to work on" item should be addressed with a goal in the IEP. Evaluations can be presented and read separately from the IEP; there is no need to cut and paste them

into the PLAAFP.

2. Poorly Written Goals

Do the goals meet the SMART IEP goal requirements? [Click here to read a post](#) explains how the goals should be written to ensure that they are SMART goals. There should be at least two to three goals per area, unless there is some clear explanation as to why they are not necessary.

3. The Criteria Will Not Lead to True Mastery

Every goal has a criterion for mastery and should answer the following question: How will you know that this skill has been achieved? Look at each goal and the criterion that your child must reach for it to be considered mastered. Is 75% acceptable for any skill that your child needs to learn? What about the goal of looking both ways before crossing the street? Is it okay if that's considered mastered at 75%? The percentages chosen should be relevant to the task. **All**

safety goals should have an accuracy rate of 100%. It is never okay to say that a child will independently respond to a fire alarm 75% of the time. It might be okay to say that he or she will independently put on a shirt facing in the correct direction 75% of the time. No one ever got hurt by having their shirt on backwards or inside out.

red dart on dart board



It's not just safety concerns that require higher levels of accuracy. Reading skills that are considered mastered at 75% or even 80% may set your child up for failure. If your child doesn't have a good foundation for reading, he or she will struggle as the reading becomes more complex. Criteria for academic skills should minimally be set at what the curriculum requires. If you don't know what that is, ask.

When is 10 minutes actually 7.5 minutes?

Goals that have criterion linked to a percentage related to time or number of opportunities should also be closely scrutinized. For example: Let's say Mary will engage in on-task behaviors during each academic program for a minimum of ten minutes. You would think ten minutes means ten minutes. But if the criterion then says 75% of the time, then this diminishes the 10 minutes to 7.5 minutes. Or depending on how you apply that 75%, it may mean that data will only be collected 75% of the time. It would then be easy to not take data during math when your child struggles the most, but this won't reflect in the progress notes. If there is already a criterion within the goal, goals such as this should be written with a mastery of 100%.

Parents are often told that your child won't or can't learn on the same level as is expected of his or her peers. Our children must master basic skills at the same levels to build upon them later. Without a good foundation, the skill will crumble.

4. Prompts Are Obstacles to Independence

If the goal or criterion states that your child will complete the skill with prompts, faded prompts, or less than 3 prompts, this is a problem. Good assessments should lead the IEP team to write goals that the child can complete **Independently**.

Example: Janine will stop at the curb and look both ways before crossing the street with 1 verbal and 1 gestural prompt, 100% of the time. Even with 100% as a criterion, we need to look more closely at this goal. First, Janine will stop with 1 verbal prompt – which means someone must be there to say “Janine stop!” Second, with 1 gestural prompt, someone must be there to gesture for Janine to look both ways. Isn't the goal of Janine stopping at the curb 100% of the time most important when no one is right next to her to say, “STOP”? The stimulus control (the curb) should be the signal to STOP, not the words of another person.

notepad that says goals 2017



5. No Requirement to Generalize to Different Environments

Does the goal state where it should be achieved? Does it read “in a school environment” at the end of the goal? If it does, your child only has to learn that skill in the school setting. How useful is any skill if it can only be done in school? Even math skills are needed at home—minimally for homework—and more functionally to pay for items at the store.

Maybe the goal says, “various settings.” This is still not an indication that the child must generalize the information learned to the home or community setting. “Various settings” can be the school hallway, lunch room, bathroom, etc. If this is a skill that your child must generalize to settings outside of the school (*can you think of one that isn't?*), then generalization should be addressed.

6. Inappropriate Goals

When asking why certain goals have been included that seem inappropriate, parents are often told that the goals must align with Common Core. For example, you may see an IEP of a 17-year-old with a goal that reads: “Gary will understand citizenship and the process of voting.” However, according to the IEP and evaluations, at this time Gary reads on a first-grade level and is unable to be in the community without constant supervision. Common Core may state that students must learn about certain topics, but modifications are necessary. Science and Social Studies goals must be appropriate for the individual. Perhaps Gary needs to learn about his community, the stores and places he likes to go to, where they are on a map, or more personally his relation to those in his family, like a family tree. **Make sure all of the goals in the IEP meet your child's needs.**

7. No Goals for Specials

Why does your child attend specials? For the mere exposure to other environments? Or to learn or maintain skills learned in the classroom? Some will tell you it is a requirement if they are in the public-school setting. Specials are an opportunity for students to be exposed to new experiences, such as art, music, gym, etc. This is wonderful if your child is interested or excels in these subjects, but that is not always the case. Specials are often a setting where our children struggle. There is less structure and less repetition. There may be sounds or smells that they don't like. There should be goals in your IEP that are specific to these environments. For

example: *"Will independently sing the lyrics and conduct the gross motor movements to three songs that will be sung at the annual holiday party."* These IEP goals should also be written for generalization in these settings. For example: *"Will independently follow instructions in gym from a peer during an organized sport such as soccer, 'kick it to me,' or 'I'm open.'"*

Without goals for learning, this setting is a waste of time, and we don't have time to waste.

8. Repetition Year after Year

Annual goals are to be met *annually*. Goals should not be repeated year after year. There may be an occasional goal where gains were made and the goal was carried over to the next year before mastery. This should not be the norm. Good assessments lead to appropriate goals that are met within the year and before the next IEP meeting.

Get It in Writing

This is a lot of information to take in. Sometimes the items mentioned above may be acceptable, but make sure that it makes sense. The IEP is a legal document that ensures your child's education is appropriate. Like any contract, it has to be specific about what will or will not be included or addressed.

Any assurances you receive in an IEP meeting must be written into the IEP document, or there is no guarantee it will actually happen. Ask for thorough explanations of the choices made. Be sure you understand and agree to those choices before you sign the IEP as your signature will be seen as your agreement with its contents. Remember that if you don't sign the IEP for whatever reason, it will still go into effect in 15 days unless you notify the district of your disagreement in writing within that 15-day period.

You are your child's best advocate. Review all you can about the needs of your child, and how to make sure this document meets those needs. Go over to our [Resources](#) section for additional insights, guidelines, and advice.

child holding a crayon





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