

# Standards-Based IEP Guide

## *A Resource for Local Educational Agencies*

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# Standards-Based IEPs

## What are Standards?

Standards are generalized statements of what students are expected to know or be able to do in each content area (such as reading and math) and at each grade-level. Used as a framework for teaching, standards tell teachers *what* to teach, not *how* to teach—this distinction allows for differentiated instruction for all students.

## What is a Standards-Based IEP?

A standards-based Individualized Education Program (IEP) is directly linked to and framed by the state content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled. Standards-based IEPs directly reference student performance within the general education curriculum and are based upon the student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) statements. Standards-based IEP annual goals also describe how the student will access the general education curriculum.

Standards-based IEP goals are **not simply restatements of the standards**; rather, standards-based annual goals outline the essential skills and knowledge a student needs to acquire in order to master grade-level content standards. When properly implemented, standards-based IEPs provide students with the opportunity to receive specifically designed instruction that is linked to the general educational curriculum along with appropriate accommodations to support achievement of grade-level expectations.

## What are DC's Standards?

The District of Columbia, along with 45 other states, has adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS provide statements of outcomes all learners should achieve and provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn. The standards:

- Are evidence-based and aligned with college and work expectations;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills; and,
- Are informed by other top performing countries, so students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society.

Standards-based IEPs should reflect the CCSS to ensure that students develop college and career readiness skills, and are prepared to achieve proficiency on state standardized testing. For more information on the CCSS, visit [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org) and [www.learndc.org](http://www.learndc.org).



## A Paradigm Shift—Connecting Academic Standards and IEPs

Prior to the current emphasis on accountability, IEP teams often focused on identifying a student's current skills and the next developmental skills the student needed to achieve. Unfortunately, this discussion was often unrelated to the academic learning expectations for students at the same grade-level. This approach resulted in goals that may not have been directly related to grade-level learning expectations for students. The lack of a direct relationship between grade-level content or curriculum and IEPs leads to lowered expectations and increasingly lower academic achievement for students over successive years in school.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees every student with a disability access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

IEPs must contain:

- A statement on the student's present levels of **academic achievement and functional performance**, including how the student's disability affects the student's involvement and progress in the **general education curriculum**;
- A statement of **measurable annual goals**, including academic and functional goals, designed to meet the student's needs and enable the student to be **involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum**; and,
- A statement of the **special education and related services and supplementary aids and services** that will be provided to enable the student to advance appropriately toward attaining annual goals and **making progress in the general education curriculum**.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the IDEA also require each state to ensure that all students with disabilities are included in all general state and district-wide assessments with appropriate accommodations, as indicated in their IEPs.

### Assessment and Common Core State Standards

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is tasked with developing a common set of K-12 assessments in English and math anchored in what it takes to be ready for college and careers.

The National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) is tasked with developing an alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

These will assess the full range of the Common Core State Standards, including standards that are difficult to measure.



## Aligning IEPs with the Common Core State Standards

What is the difference between a traditional IEP and a standards-based IEP?

Traditionally, IEPs have focused on helping students develop basic academic and functional skills with little connection to a specific academic area or grade-level expectations. In contrast, standards-based IEPs are directly tied to content standards; both the student's present level of performance and annual academic IEP goals are aligned with and based on the CCSS, creating a program that will assist the student in reaching greater academic proficiency.

### Determining goal and standard areas of focus

An important part of the IEP decision making process requires teams to prioritize the skills and knowledge a student needs to access grade-level content. The number of goals for all students should be based on individual need. Some general guidelines to keep in mind are:

- Be logical—select early developing behaviors and skills first;
- Be sensible—select behaviors and skills that the student has a reasonable chance of learning in a year; and,
- Be wise—select behaviors and skills that will make a significant and meaningful difference in the student's life to achieve college and career readiness.

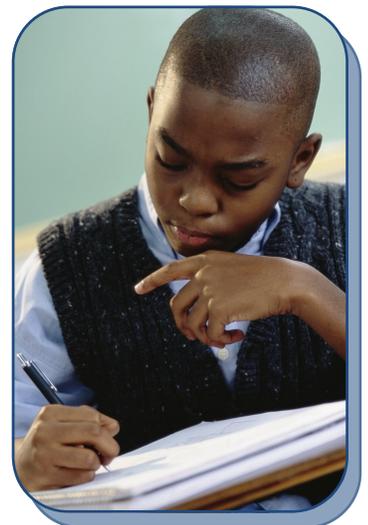
### Developing standards-based IEPs for students who are not on grade-level

When choosing goals, the starting point should always be the child's grade-level curriculum when developing a standards-based IEP. Even though the student may not be on grade-level in a specific content area, the student should be working toward meeting grade-level expectations and receiving grade-level content instruction. Teachers can scaffold instruction and use prerequisite skills to work toward grade-level standards. For more information on scaffolding see [http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/chang/research\\_practice/documents/nabe\\_Nov2002\\_chang.pdf](http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/chang/research_practice/documents/nabe_Nov2002_chang.pdf).

The IEP should address the accommodations and supports the student will need to access the grade-level standards. For example, a student who cannot read 6<sup>th</sup> grade materials may work toward a grade-level standard that calls for analyzing written materials. The cognitive processes associated with that higher level reading skill can still be taught using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles while the student accesses the grade-level materials in a different way.

## Tips for Educators

- Be familiar with the CCSS for the grade-level you are teaching.
- Carefully consider the entire standard and decide priority skills the student needs to master.
- Analyze data to determine the student's present level of performance relative to the standards for his enrolled grade.
- Define the student's strengths and needs in terms that translate directly into instructional intervention.



## Aligning IEPs with the CCSS, Continued

### Incorporating CCSS for pre-Kindergarten students

The District's Early Learning Standards crosswalk to the Common Core can be found at <http://osse.dc.gov/publication/district-columbia-common-core-aligned-early-learning-standards>. When developing pre-Kindergarten standards, use this document to ensure that IEP goals incorporate the aligned standards.

### Creating a grade-level standards-based IEP for students that are ungraded or over 18 years old

For students that are over 18 and receiving a **high school diploma**, the student's grade-level is determined according to the number of Carnegie Units he or she has completed. Refer to the District of Columbia graduation requirements to make promotion determinations.

For students that are receiving a **certificate of completion**, the student's IEP contains non-academic, functional, and transition goals in that are not required to identify align with CCSS grade-level standards.

### Creating a standards-based IEP for students who participate in DC CAS-Alt Testing

The current standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities are the DC-CAS Alternate Achievement Standards. The standards are arranged by grade-level and located at <http://www.osse-dccasalt.pearson.com/index.cfm?a=cat&cid=2081>.

When writing IEP goals for a student that participates in the DC CAS-Alt, SEDS links directly to these standards. Once "Alternate Assessment" is selected, manually enter the appropriate standard into the open textbox.



### Tips for Educators

- Develop a deep understanding of general education subject matter content, and understand how the curriculum is organized so students can access the curriculum throughout the year.
- Assess the student in relationship to the grade-level content demands. Think about the key units of instruction coming up and how you will need to differentiate instruction and provide modifications and accommodations so a student can access the curriculum.

## Aligning IEPs with the CCSS, Continued

### Using data to drive standards-based IEP goals

To determine the child's educational needs, the IEP Team should gather evidence based upon a variety of assessment tools and strategies. Current assessment data can incorporate both formal and informal assessments including: state assessments, classroom assessments, eligibility data, student work samples, previous IEPs, grades, observations, and other data. An analysis of the data will reveal the specific challenges a student encounters in his or her grade-level setting, and lead teams to identify the skills required for success. A thorough data analysis will help the IEP team tie student needs to priorities and goals while developing the IEP.

### Addressing IEP goals that aren't ELA or Math

All academic IEP goals should be aligned with state standards. In addition to adopting the Common Core State Standards, the District of Columbia has adopted challenging learning standards in other content areas. Currently, the SEDS system does not incorporate these standards in the same manner as it does with the CCSS. When writing IEP goals for content areas other than ELA or Math, IEP teams may manually enter the corresponding standard in the IEP.

These standards can be found at [osse.dc.gov/service/dc-educational-standards](https://osse.dc.gov/service/dc-educational-standards). Please note that there are no state standards for adaptive, functional, behavior, social-emotional, or speech goals.



### Tips for Educators

- Document all data sources used to develop the student's present level of academic achievement and functional performance.
- Use ongoing assessments to figure determine what needs to be continued or changed in order to allow the student to access the content.
- Focus on the specific impact of the student's disability on achievement of the standards.
- Make IEP goals curriculum-based, rather than deficit-based.

### Remember:

IEP goals should not simply restate the state standards. Academic content standards state what all students should know and be able to do. Standards-based IEP goals list specific content standards the student will focus on, ensuring that the student will receive instruction at grade-level.

## Seven Steps to Creating a Standards-based IEP

*The following process aids IEP teams in developing IEPs that are aligned with grade-level content standards. Consider the guiding questions for each step in making data-based decisions.*

**Step 1: Consider the grade-level content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled or would be enrolled based on age.**

- What is the intent of the content standard?
- What is the content standard saying that the student must know and be able to do?

**Step 2: Examine classroom and student data to determine where the student is functioning in relation to the grade-level standards.**

- Has the student been taught content aligned with grade-level standards?
- Has the student been provided appropriate instructional scaffolding to attain grade-level expectations?
- Were the lessons and teaching materials used to teach the student aligned with state grade-level standards?
- Was the instruction evidence-based?
- Do we have enough information, or are there gaps in what we know about this student?

**Step 3: Develop the present level of academic achievement and functional performance.**

Describe the individual strengths and needs of the student in relation to accessing and mastering the general curriculum.

- What is the student's response to academic instruction (e.g., what does the progress monitoring data show)?
- What programs, accommodations (classroom and testing) and/or interventions have been successful with the student?
- What have we learned from previous IEPs and student data that can inform decision making?
- Are there assessment data (state, district and/or classroom) that can provide useful information for making decisions about the student's strengths and needs (e.g., patterns in the data)?
- Do we have enough information, or are there gaps in what we know about this student?

Consider the factors related to the student's disability and how they affect how the student learns and demonstrates what he or she knows.

- How does the student's disability affect participation and progress in the general curriculum?
- What supports does the student need to learn the knowledge and attain the skills to progress in the general curriculum?
- Is the student on track to achieve grade-level proficiency within the year?
- Do we have enough information, or are there gaps in what we know about this student?

## Seven Steps to Creating a Standards-based IEP, Continued

### **Step 4: Develop measurable annual goals aligned with grade-level academic content standards.**

- What are the student's needs as identified in the present level of performance?
- Does the goal have a specific timeframe?
- What can the student reasonably be expected to accomplish in one school year?
- Are the conditions for meeting the goal addressed?
- How will progress toward, and the outcome of the goal be measured?

### **Step 5: Identify specially designed instruction including accommodations and/or modifications needed to access and progress in the general education curriculum.**

- What accommodations are needed to enable the student to access the knowledge in the general education curriculum?
- What accommodations have been used with the student and were they effective?
- Has the complexity of the material been changed in such a way that the content has been modified?

### **Step 6: Determine the most appropriate assessment option**

- What types of assessments are offered in my state and what types of responses do they require?
- What are the administrative conditions of the assessment? (i.e., setting, delivery of instructions, time allotted, etc.)
- What accommodations are allowed on the assessment(s) and in the classroom?
- Has the student received standards-based, grade-level instruction?
- What is the student's instructional level?
- How different is the student's instructional level from the level of typical peers?
- Can the student make progress toward grade-level standards in the same timeframe as typical peers? (If no, consider modified academic achievement standards)
- What can be learned from the student's previous state assessment results?
- Can the student demonstrate what he/she knows on the assessment option under consideration?

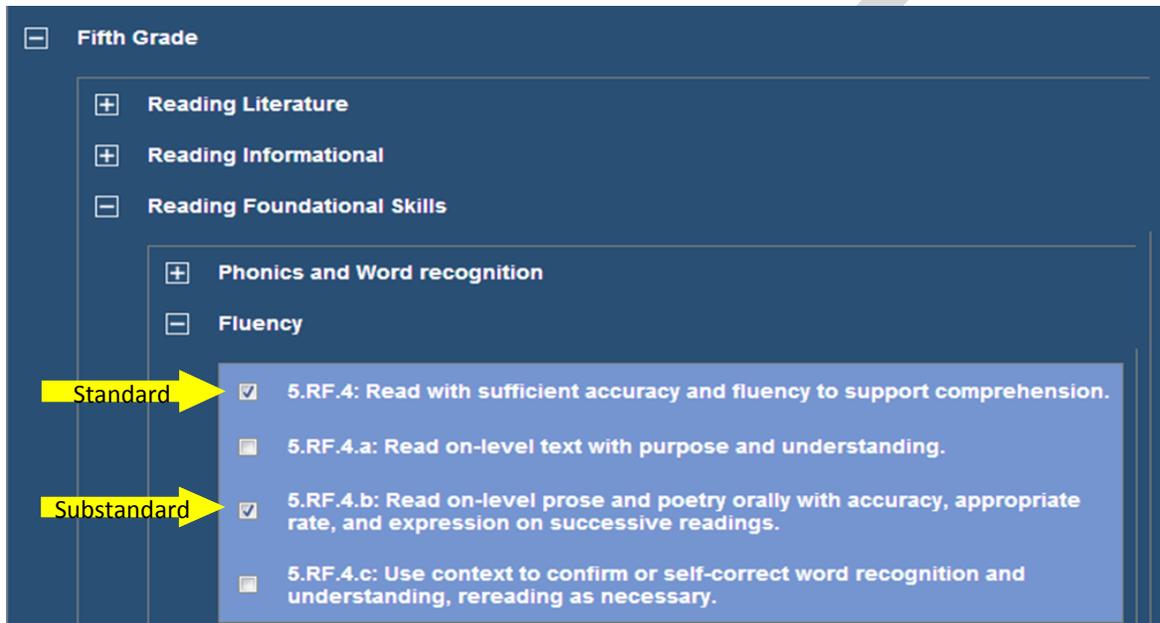
### **Step 7: Assess and report the student's progress throughout the year.**

- How does the student demonstrate what he/she knows on classroom, district and state assessments?
- Are a variety of assessments used to measure progress?
- How will progress be reported to parents?

## Aligning IEP Goals to Common Core State Standards in SEDS

While drafting a student's IEP within SEDS, the IEP team must now select specific CCSS that align with the student's academic IEP goals.

Within SEDS, the CCSS are organized by subject area and grade-level. When writing an academic goal, the IEP team should select standards that are based upon the student's grade-level and that align with the IEP goal. IEP goals should not repeat the CCSS; rather, goals should assist students build skills that help them work toward mastery of the CCSS.



The screenshot displays the SEDS interface for Fifth Grade. The navigation menu on the left includes 'Fifth Grade', 'Reading Literature', 'Reading Informational', and 'Reading Foundational Skills'. Under 'Reading Foundational Skills', there are subcategories for 'Phonics and Word recognition' and 'Fluency'. A list of standards is shown on the right, with checkboxes for selection. A yellow arrow labeled 'Standard' points to the checkbox for '5.RF.4: Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.'. Another yellow arrow labeled 'Substandard' points to the checkbox for '5.RF.4.b: Read on-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.'.

- 5.RF.4: Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
  - 5.RF.4.a: Read on-level text with purpose and understanding.
  - 5.RF.4.b: Read on-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.
  - 5.RF.4.c: Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

Please note that if a certain standard has substandards, SEDS requires selection of the standard in addition to selecting one of the substandards listed.



## What Are the Benefits of a Standards-Based IEP Approach?

Aligning a student's special education program with the learning expectations for all students helps ensure that students with disabilities will benefit from school accountability and improvement activities just as all other students.

### Students will:

- Receive specially designed instruction linked to general education curriculum for their enrolled grade;
- Receive appropriate accommodations designed to support their achievement at grade-level; and,
- Be better prepared to earn a regular high school diploma and enjoy success beyond secondary school.



### Parents will:

- Have a better understanding of what is expected of all students in their child's grade;
- Find IEP goal language more understandable and less clinical; and,
- Be able to support their child's learning at home.

### General and Special Education teachers will:

- Have higher expectations for students with disabilities;
- Have a better understanding of what students with disabilities need to achieve grade-level proficiency; and,
- Eliminate the use of separate curriculum for students with disabilities.

### Schools will:

- View students with disabilities as capable of achieving grade-level proficiency; and,
- Prioritize time for general education and special education teachers to collaborate and support student learning.

## Additional Resources

- Learn DC website: [www.learndc.org](http://www.learndc.org)
  - ◆ Sponsored by OSSE, Learn DC offers resources, information, and opportunities for engagement to help parents, students, teachers, and school leaders learn about the standards and put new ideas into action.
- Student Achievement Partners' (SAP) Professional Development Modules: [www.achievethecore.org](http://www.achievethecore.org)
  - ◆ SAP has created seven professional development modules designed to support district and school leadership in their transition to the Common Core.
- Common Core Lessons for Teachers: [www.teachingchannel.org](http://www.teachingchannel.org)
  - ◆ The Teaching Channel features over 100 free videos related to Common Core instruction. These independently-developed videos provide an overview of the ELA/literacy and mathematics standards, specific lesson ideas, and demonstrations of teaching practices.
- *Parents' Guide to Student Success*: [www.pta.org/parents](http://www.pta.org/parents)
  - ◆ National PTA created the guides for grades K-8 and an ELA and math guide for grades 9-12. The guide includes key items that children should be learning and activities that parents can do at home to support their child's learning.
- *Universal Design for Learning*: <http://www.cast.org/udl/>
  - ◆ Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals opportunities to learn through flexible approaches to instruction that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs.

## References:

- Virginia Department of Education. (2010). *Standards-based Individualized Education Program (IEP) Guidance Document*. [www.doe.virginia.gov/special ed/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special%20ed/index.shtml).
- Holbrook, M. (August 2007). *In forum: Standards-based individualized education programs examples*. Project Forum. National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). Alexandria, Virginia. [www.projectforum.org](http://www.projectforum.org).
- Ahearn, E . (2006). *Standards-based IEPs: implementation in selected states*. Project Forum. National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). Alexandria, Virginia. [www.projectforum.org](http://www.projectforum.org).
- Cortiella, C. (2008). *Understanding the Standards-based Individualized Education Program (IEP)*. National Center for Learning Disabilities. [www.ncl.org](http://www.ncl.org).

## Appendix: Case Studies

The following pages illustrate creating standards-based IEPs for sample students. These case studies are meant to be used as a guide to aid in developing IEP goals aligned to the Common Core State Standards. They are a snapshot of a student and are not meant to be a comprehensive IEP for a particular student. We have developed case studies for the following sample students:

- Pre-Kindergarten
- 5th Grade Writing
- 6th Grade Math
- 10th Grade Reading

The case study highlights the student's demographic data, present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, the Common Core State Standard to which the IEP goal is aligned, and an annual IEP goal with quarterly short-term objectives or benchmarks that will aid the student in achieving his or her annual goal.

Please check back with us regularly because we hope to expand the number of case studies to additional grades and disabilities.

