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National Center and State Collaborative

NCSC Brief

Number 5 October 2015

Standards-based Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Students Who Participate in AA-AAS

Introduction

A standards-based Individualized Education Program (IEP) is one in which the planning team has incorporated the state content standards of the students' grade level in its development.[1] For students who are working toward grade-level achievement, goals are written to identify the skills and knowledge needed for the student to meet end of grade expectations. Needed accommodations are also planned. In the IEP process, teams determine how students will participate in the state assessment system. Those working toward grade-level achievement take the state's general assessments with or without accommodations.

Not all students with disabilities work toward grade-level achievement. For some students with significant cognitive disabilities, the IEP team will determine that the alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) is most appropriate. Although the student will work on the same grade-level content, expectations for achievement will differ in depth, breadth, or complexity.[2]

In a standards-based IEP for students in AA-AAS the team also incorporates standards of the student's assigned grade. Planning differs in that the team focuses on alternate achievement expectations rather than grade-level achievement expectations.

This Brief provides guidelines and examples from the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) resources to use when creating standards-based IEPs for students in AA-AAS.

IEP versus Curricula and Lesson Plans

In past decades, the IEP often defined the totality of what the student with significant cognitive disabilities would learn. That is, it functioned as the curriculum. With increasing understanding of what students can learn, it is no longer feasible to recreate an entire curriculum in an IEP.

Standards-based IEPs promote access to the general curriculum, which is the totality of the school experience. States have defined standards for students in core academic content areas. A standards-based IEP uses the standards for the student's assigned grade level for planning.

State standards are too numerous to list on an IEP or use as the basis for each goal. For example, the Common Core State Standards have over 50

[1] Holbrook, M. D. (2007). *Standards-based individualized educational program examples.* NASDSE Project Forum. Accessed September 15, 2015 from http://www.projectforum.org

[2] Quenemoen, R. F., & Thurlow, M. L. (2015, June). *AA-AAS: Standards that are the "same but different"* (NCSC Brief #1). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center and State Collaborative.

standards in English Language Arts for 6th grade alone.[3] It clearly is not feasible to have over 50 goals in ELA for a student. It also is not wise to write a goal and then hunt for a matching state standard because this may miss the point of the construct in the standard. When written well, an IEP goal will be applicable to multiple standards and evolve from deep review of the grade-level content.

When planning specific lessons, the teacher will be able to align objectives with a specific set of standards. For example, in the NCSC LASSI and MASSI plans,[4] there is a one-to-one correspondence between each objective of the lesson and one or more Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In contrast, it would not be effective planning to pull the objectives from all these, or any other sample plans, to develop an IEP. To do so ignores the individualized needs of the student *and* the purpose of the IEP. The IEP should help drive these adapted lessons rather than vice versa. For example, an annual goal for the student to use a graphic organizer to keep track of key information helps to shape how multiple English Language Arts lessons might be focused.

In addition to academic content of the general curriculum, students with significant cognitive disabilities may also need specially designed instruction in social, communication, life (functional), or foundational academic skills that do not have direct alignment with grade-level content standards. The IEP team should identify goals related to these additional needs without trying to force a connection to the academic content standards. At one time these specialized needs comprised the entire IEP for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Now these additional goals may continue to be a portion of the plan.

[3] www.corestandards.org

[4] LASSI = Language Arts Systematic Instruction; MASSI = Mathematics Structured Instruction. To locate these language arts and math plans developed for students in AA-AAS, see https://wiki.ncscpartners.org

Summary: The IEP is not the curriculum. The general curriculum reflected in state standards is. There will not be a one-to-one correspondence between an IEP goal and a state standard like there is in a lesson plan. Each goal on an IEP is written to help the student achieve multiple standards. The IEP may contain additional life, social, communication, or foundational skills goals that do not necessarily link to state standards for the assigned grade level.

Keeping The "I" In The IEP

Although the IEP will be standards-based, it also will be individualized. To be sure this focus is not lost, the team can follow longstanding sound principles of IEP development. The first is to involve the student and his or her parents in the planning process. Some students will be directly involved in helping to identify and write goals or even in leading their IEP meetings. Others may be more indirectly involved by expressing their preferences or attending their meeting.

Besides involving the student, identifying strengths and needs related to both the academic content areas (language arts, mathematics, science, social studies) and broader areas (communication, social, life, foundational skills) is key to an individualized approach. Parents are important partners in this process. Parents offer substantial knowledge about the student's strengths, needs, and preferences and can help the team consider needs of the student's current and future environments. Having a clear picture of the student's preferences, strengths, current and future needs for school, home, and the broader community, can be invaluable in setting priorities for the annual goals.

Consider the example of Jason who will enter 6th grade in a new middle school. Jason had excellent opportunities to learn academic content in his elementary school program,

demonstrating particular interest in, and aptitude for, mathematics. After considering his past achievements and talking with Jason, the team realized that he especially loves participating with classmates in grade-level mathematics instruction using a technology platform like a tablet or desktop computer. Although he is not performing at the same level of cognitive complexity as his classmates, with technology platforms, instructional adaptations, and peer supports, Jason can learn core concepts of the grade-level mathematics curriculum and apply them to real world problems. With accommodations and specially designed instruction, he will continue benefitting from challenging mathematics instruction in the regular classroom as he goes through middle and high school.

An annual goal for Jason that would build on his interests and abilities is shown in Table 1. Note how it addresses multiple standards because Jason might use his representations in finding area, summarizing data, or showing ratio.

In contrast, Jason has made minimal progress in becoming an independent reader and continues to struggle with most basic literal comprehension questions when text is read aloud to him. He is going to enter 6th grade lacking some of the essential skills needed to access grade-level content. He will need accommodations like read alouds, summarized texts, and picture supports. He also will need opportunities to cultivate language arts skills not only with the literature typical to 6th grade, but also with text related to his interest and using technology platforms. Table 2 provides an example of an annual goal related to these special needs and abilities.

Systems Level Supports For IEP Teams

Making the transition to a standardized-based IEP approach can be difficult for several reasons. Teachers may be confused about the curriculum, find the number of skills and concepts addressed challenging, and struggle to balance competing priorities like functional goals.[5] There are several steps that a planning team at the state and school system level could take to make this process more achievable for local IEP teams. These include the following:

- **Build Understanding of the Standards.** All states have websites listing their standards and most include background information for deeper understanding. All educators need to receive training on the standards for

Table 1. Example of an Annual Goal Related to a Student's Interest in Mathematics

Mathematics Individualized Annual Goal	Examples of Standards Addressed
Given access to mathematical software, Jason will represent 6th grade mathematical core concepts such as surface area and ratio and use these representations to solve at least three new types of problems during each six week period.	• Represent three-dimensional figures using nets made up of rectangles and triangles, and use the nets to find the surface area of these figures. Apply these techniques in the context of solving real-world and mathematical problems. (Example taken from CCSS, number 6.G.4.) • Summarize numerical data sets in relation to their context. (Example taken from CCSS, number 6.SP.B.5.) • Understand the concept of a ratio and use ratio language to describe a ratio relationship between two quantities. For example, "The ratio of wings to beaks in the bird house at the zoo was 2:1, because for every 2 wings there was 1 beak." (Example taken from CCSS, number 6.RP.A.1.)

[5] McLaughlin, M. (1999). Access to the general educational curriculum: Paperwork and procedure or redefining special education. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 12*(1), 9-14.

Table 2. Example of an Annual Goal Related to a Student's Interest in Language Arts

ELA Individualized Annual Goal	Examples of Standards Addressed
When given summarized text from 6th grade literature on a tablet read aloud by a peer or text-to-speech, Jason will highlight text to identify the central idea or theme.	• Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. (Example taken from CCSS, number 6.RL.1.) • Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments. (Example taken from CCSS, number 6.RI.2, although 6.RL.2 is similar.)

the grade levels in which their students are enrolled. Sometimes special educators who work with students with significant cognitive disabilities need resources with content relevant for their students. NCSC offers a set of Content Modules for special educators who seek to remediate understanding for core language arts and mathematics content and who seek examples for students who take AA-AAS. These cover topics such as exponents in mathematics and author's point of view in language arts.[6] Universally Designed Lessons also provide a model of how students with significant cognitive disabilities can access general education lessons.[7]

- **Provide Resources on How to Make the Standards Accessible to Students in AA-AAS.** Some states provide guidance for targeting alternate achievement of the standards. NCSC offers the Core Content Connectors.[8] In addition to alternate achievement targets, curricular resources can be useful like the Curriculum Resource Guides[9] and the Element Cards.[10] Both offer examples of how the content is addressed in general education and can be modified for students with significant cognitive disabilities. For example, the Element Cards on Data, Probability, and Statistics illustrate ways students may need to generate and analyze graphs across the grade levels. This can help the IEP team set a goal for how an individual student will work with the types of graphs typical for the grade level. An 8th grader with substantial support needs and limited vision who needs to learn to use scatterplots, might have a goal related to creating graphs with objects on a magnetized board. Over time, systems can develop additional resource banks of examples of how to make standards accessible. For example, a website might be used for teachers to share ideas and resources.
- **Provide Professional Development on Standards-Based IEPs.** As educators transition to incorporating state standards in IEP planning, they may need professional development that includes guidelines and examples. This Brief is offered as a resource to share with educators or use as a guide for developing a workshop or other support.

Guidelines for the IEP Team to Incorporate Grade-Level Standards

The following are questions IEP teams may use to guide their development of a standards-based IEP. Students and their parents should be included as partners with the educational team.

1. **What are the students' preferences and abilities?** To keep the "I" in the IEP, the team should begin the planning process by sharing

[6] https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Content_Modules
[7] https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/UDL_Instructional_Units
[8] https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Core_Content_Connectors
[9] https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Curriculum_Resource_Guides
[10] https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Element_Cards

information on what is most important to the student and his or her overall strengths. Many schools have used person-centered planning to support students to provide a summary of their preferences to open the meeting. Students may use assistive technology preprogrammed with information, share pictures they have chosen to represent their interests or needs, or prepare a written product that they have developed with supports in advance of the meeting. These can be developed as part of the classroom curriculum or planning tools can be provided to help families prepare with their student.

2. **What are the students' current strengths and weaknesses in each academic area? In other areas that affect current and future functioning?** Prior to the meeting, each team member should gather data on the student's current level of performance. What may be new for some teams is including information on the core academic content areas. As educators work with the standards and related resources on making them accessible it may be feasible to list skills needed to access multiple standards that can be used for planning for any student in that grade level.

   For example, a 10-step checklist of skills[11] needed to access seventh grade content such as summarizing text, developing reports, and using models for concepts in science and math can be used to summarize an individual student's strengths and weaknesses in each area to help generalize individualized annual goals. The Instructional Families[12] provided by NCSC offers a quick reference to standards within and across grade levels that might be used to generate similar checklists.

   The NCSC Curriculum Resource Guides offer performance examples of a subset of standards from each grade level. Teachers might use tasks similar to these to gather data on what the student currently does. Here is a performance example in mathematics on illustrating multiplication:

   Present a paper with the following printed on it and read it aloud: "Ms. Smith is an art teacher. She is preparing to teach an art lesson to five students. Each student will need four markers to complete the art activity. You need to find out how many markers Ms. Smith will need all together." Give the student 24 markers. "Use these markers to show me how five students would each get four markers. You may not use all the markers." If the student makes an error, model the correct answer and say "There should be five groups of four markers, like this." "How many markers does the teacher need all together?"[13]

   After watching Jorge try this task, the teacher had some data on Jorge's skills in numbers and operations. "Jorge created a set of five and counted them accurately. Because he has learned to add, he made another set of five and counted up to 10. Even with a model, he did not illustrate multiplication."

3. **What generalized skills will this student need to access the grade-level content?** Next the team reviews the standards for the grade level to develop annual goals in each academic content area. A "handful" per content area is reasonable. Setting 10 or more goals per content area, especially if there will be additional goals in other areas like social and life skills, is too many given that the teacher will have additional students to support. The challenge is for the team to translate 50+ standards in a content area into a few high priority goals and objectives. To do this, the team needs to identify broad, generalized skills that will help the student access multiple standards and that relate to

[11] Source: Jimenez, B., Browder, D. M., & Spooner, F. (2011). Standards-based IEPs and progress monitoring. In D. M. Browder & F. Spooner (Eds.), *Teaching students with moderate and severe disabilities.* New York: Guilford Press.

[12] https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Instructional_Families

[13] https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Curriculum_Resource_Guide:_Equations

the student's preferences and present level of performance.

For example, some of the generalized skills needed to address elementary writing standards are to: (a) select or generate text (e.g., type, highlight and select, write with pencil), (b) organize the writing (e.g., with use of a graphic organizer or writing template), and (c) use reference materials (e.g., use of Internet, summarizing). Anna is a third grader with emerging writing and reading skills. She likes working on the computer. Her annual goal might be:

> *Given a writing template, Anna will summarize a story or informational passage by selecting and pasting sentences in a logical order with at least one new writing component (e.g., introduction, summary, key detail) added each quarter of the school year.*

4. **What accommodations and specially designed instruction will the student need?** The IEP also articulates the specially designed instruction and accommodations that will be used to help the student reach these annual goals. NCSC Curriculum Resource Guides contain a section on how to incorporate Universal Design for Learning. Accommodations specific to the content are described in the guide for students who may have physical, behavioral, or learning challenges.

   Here is an example from the Curriculum Resource Guide on Informational Text for physical challenges:

   > *"Student scans an array of possible options and uses a switch to select the correct vocabulary word or answer to questions; use computer representation of word meanings that can be manipulated with switch; place response options on a slant board or eye gaze board; create a vocabulary matching exercise in the classroom that the student can walk or ride on in wheelchair to find the matching words and meanings (this can include picture clues or objects)."*[14]

   Computer switches, slant boards, eye gaze boards, enlarged materials that can be accessed by moving a wheelchair are all examples of accommodations.

   The Instructional Resource Guides[15] as well as the Element Cards provide many examples of specially designed instruction. For example the resource guide provides an example of how a task analysis and a system of least intrusive prompting might be used to teach a student to use a calculator or answer literal recall questions.

Summary

A standards-based IEP for a student the team identifies as participating in the AA-AAS will be organized in the major academic content areas and may also include areas related to needs outside the general curriculum (e.g., social, life skills, therapy needs). In each major academic content area, annual goals will be developed that address the student's needs, build on strengths and preferences, and promote learning in multiple state standards for that content area. To identify these generalized goals, the team needs to study the standards of the grade level and examples of how to make the content accessible to students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Sometimes it may be useful to generate a checklist of skills needed to access the standards (e.g., a way to access passages of text, a means to answer questions, a way to compare multiple text sources, a strategy to represent a mathematical problem) and then use these to identify individual student needs. These needs will lead to the annual goals. To keep the "I" in the IEP, the goals should build on that student's unique preferences and abilities as well as needs.

[14] See Section 6.2 of the Curriculum Resource Guide for Informational Text https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Curriculum_Resource_Guide:Reading_Informational_Texts

[15] https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Instructional_Resource_Guide

Frequently Asked Questions

How is the standards-based IEP organized?

Most IEP forms are organized by curricular area. For a standards-based IEP, the areas might be English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies and then other areas as needed for the individual student such as Communication, Social Behavior, Life Skills and therapy goals, such as Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, and so on. Sometimes the team may choose to combine the academic areas beyond ELA and Mathematics as Other Academic Content Areas. This "Other" category may also include the foundational academic skills like the word analysis a 7th grader who is still learning to read may need.

Are there tests I can use to describe the student's present level of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) in the academic content areas?

For students with significant cognitive disabilities, the best assessment of PLAAFP is the ongoing progress monitoring used in the context of instruction. Summary notes from this ongoing assessment will provide the specific detail needed. For example, in ELA, the PLAAFP may be something like this:

> *"Using both narrative and informational summaries based on the 9th grade level text, Ronalda has learned to answer literal comprehension questions by choosing a response from a four choice array. She can also summarize the text by sequencing a series of pictures. Ronalda does not yet answer questions that cannot be located directly in the text. She decodes and reads short passages written at a late first grade level. When asked a question, she will scan the text for familiar words to locate the answer. She becomes confused if asked to compare more than one text."*

Although the primary purpose of AA-AAS is for school accountability, some states provide information from the student's performance that can be used for summarizing PLAAFP. Ronalda's results showed she was unable to do any of the writing responses in the ELA section of her assessment, suggesting the need for an intensive focus on goals for this area of instruction.

How does our team plan for an older student who received almost no grade-aligned academic instruction and has only a few early, foundational academic skills?

Planning is complex for the older student who did not have the benefit of academic content instruction. This lack of past opportunity should not be confused with the student's potential to learn. Consider Ronalda whose PLAAFP was described above. Although in 9th grade, her ELA skills are well below those expected for her age. In high school, she should be focusing on text structure, analyzing the author's perspective, using multiple sources, and identifying inferences that can be made. The high school standards become accessible to Ronalda through the use of accommodations and adapted expectations. A

Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

goal might be for Ronalda to use her text scanning to determine whether something is in the text or not and then select the best inference from multiple choices. She might also learn to use technology to look at side by side passages to see what each contains and to begin selecting responses to create a written response. Students who do not yet scan or read any printed text, might listen for key words that reflect the author's perspective and use templates to code text structure.

Should the IEP have both annual goals and short term objectives (STOs) and if so, how are they formatted in a standards-based IEP?

States and LEAs have differing formats for how to write annual goals. In some, the goals are broad and overarching statements that may cover all objectives for the content area. In others, they are specific and measurable like the examples in this Brief. Whether the annual goal is broad or specific, the STOs show the progress expected at each reporting period (e.g., quarter) as the student moves toward mastery of the annual goal. Here is an example for Ronalda.

Annual Goal: Given a variety of narrative and informational passages adapted from 9th grade ELA to her listening level, Ronalda will determine whether the answer is "in the text," "can be inferred," or "cannot be answered" for 4 of 5 questions about at least three different passages.

STO 1: Given a variety of adapted passages one paragraph long, Ronalda will find the answer in the text or state it is not there for 4 of 5 questions and answer at least 1 of 3 inferential questions about the text.

STO2: Given a variety of adapted passages 2-3 paragraphs long, Ronalda will find the answer in the text or state that it is not there for 4 of 5 questions and answer at least 1 of 3 inferential questions about the text.

STO 3: Given a variety of adapted passages 2-3 paragraphs long and questions she helps to generate, Ronalda will classify questions as "in the text," "can be inferred" ("easy guess"), or "cannot be answered" for 4 of 5 questions. She will then answer both the literal and inferential questions.

NCSC Brief #5

October 2015

This Brief reflects the work of the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC). The author of this report is Diane M. Browder.

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Browder, D. M. (2015, October). *Standards-based individualized education programs (IEPs) for students who participate in AA-AAS* (NCSC Brief #5). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center and State Collaborative.

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NCSC includes five partner organizations (National Center on Educational Outcomes – NCEO – at the University of Minnesota; National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment – Center for Assessment, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, University of Kentucky, and edCount, LLC). NCSC is supported by a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (H373X100002, Project Officer: Susan.Weigert@ed.gov). The contents of this Brief do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and no assumption of endorsement by the Federal government should be made.

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