



Individualized Education Program Development: Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
IDEA Requirements.....	3
Purpose of the PLAAFP	5
Elements of a PLAAFP	6
Baseline Data and Data Sources.....	6
Description of Area(s) and Subarea(s) of Need.....	7
Adverse Impact Statement	8
Connecting the PLAAFP to the Least Restrictive Environment	10
Connecting the PLAAFP to FAPE.....	10

Individualized Education Program Development: Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to support individualized education program (IEP) teams in developing a present level of academic achievement and functional performance statement that supports both the compliance and the substantive obligation of providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE), under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA).

Developing a clear, concise, and comprehensive PLAAFP statement that describes a student's unique educational needs and the adverse impact those needs have on the student's ability to be involved in and make progress in the general curriculum, is the most important aspect of developing an IEP that is reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the student's circumstances. A reasonably calculated IEP provides a student with a disability a meaningful educational benefit. *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017).

The PLAAFP statement is the foundation upon which the IEP Team builds the remainder of the IEP. United States Department of Education, *Analysis and Comments*, 71 Fed. Reg. 46,662 (2006).

This guidance does not impose any requirements beyond those required under applicable laws and regulations.

IDEA Requirements

In 1975, when Congress enacted the IDEA, it did so to ensure that students with disabilities receive a FAPE alongside their nondisabled peers in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

34 CFR §300.101 of the IDEA, states:

A FAPE must be available to all children residing in the State between the ages of 3 and 21, inclusive, including children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school, as provided for in 34 CFR §300.530(d).

(b) FAPE for children beginning at age 3.

(1) Each State must ensure that—

(i) The obligation to make FAPE available to each eligible child residing in the State begins no later than the child's third birthday; and

(ii) An IEP or an IFSP is in effect for the child by that date, in accordance with 34 CFR §300.323(b).

(2) If a child's third birthday occurs during the summer, the child's IEP Team shall determine the date when services under the IEP or IFSP will begin.

(c) Children advancing from grade to grade.

(1) Each State must ensure that FAPE is available to any individual child with a disability who needs special education and related services, even though the child has not failed or been retained in a course or grade and is advancing from grade to grade.

(2) The determination that a child described in paragraph (a) of this section is eligible under this part, must be made on an individual basis by the group responsible within the child's LEA for making eligibility determinations.

34 CFR §300.114 of the IDEA states:

(a) General.

(1) Except as provided in §300.324(d)(2) (regarding children with disabilities in adult prisons), the State must have in effect policies and procedures to ensure that public agencies in the State meet the LRE requirements of this section and §§300.115 through 300.120.

(2) Each public agency must ensure that—

(i) To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and

(ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

A comprehensive PLAAFP statement will inform the IEP Team of the type and level of supports necessary for the student to receive a FAPE in the Least Restrictive Environment. Consistent with 34 CFR §300.320 of the IDEA, an IEP must include a statement of the student’s present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, including the following:

- How the student’s disability affects the student’s involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled students).
- For preschool children, as appropriate, how the disability affects the child’s participation in appropriate activities.

Preschool activities may include learning basic skills, such as using scissors, coloring, grouping things, learning letters, and playing children’s games. Therefore the “present levels” statement for a preschooler will describe how the child’s disability affects their participation and success in the preschool environment.

Purpose of the PLAAFP

The PLAAFP is a crucial component of the IEP as it describes the student’s unique educational needs, including behavioral needs, grounded in current data from multiple sources compared to grade level peers. The PLAAFP describes the adverse impact the student’s unique needs have on the student’s ability to be involved in and make

progress in the general curriculum. A PLAAFP statement must be updated annually with present level information, including data and progress on most recent goals and objectives.

Elements of a PLAAFP

The IEP Team must develop an IEP that demonstrates consideration of the academic, functional, and developmental needs of the student.

To develop a clear, concise, and comprehensive PLAAFP, the IEP Team should include the following elements:

- **Baseline Data and Data Sources**
 - What information (observations, attendance, behavior records, state, district, or classroom assessments) is available about the student to demonstrate the student's current level of performance?
 - What are the sources of that information?
- **Description of Area and Subarea of Need**
 - What is it that the student can and cannot do at this time?
 - What are the student's needs resulting from the disability?
- **Adverse Impact**
 - How does the student's disability impact their performance?
 - What is it about the disability that is keeping the student from progressing in the general education curriculum?

Baseline Data and Data Sources

Baseline data is critical to the development of the PLAAFP. Baseline data informs the IEP Team of the student's current skill level and identifies the skills the student needs to develop to progress in the general education curriculum or perform commensurate with same age peers.

The IEP Team will use a variety of formal and informal assessments, observations, attendance, behavior records, provider logs, state, district, or classroom assessments, or

behavioral assessments, etc., to gather information related to the student's current level of performance or ability. This information informs program decisions and the development of an appropriate IEP.

Baseline data must:

- Be objective and include descriptive language based on data or observation.
- Be written in plain language, so every member of the IEP Team, specifically the parent, understands what the data means relative to the student.
- Include the student's current level of performance, which is the student's starting point for academic instruction or functional performance. This may include descriptive and/or quantitative information.

Description of Area(s) and Subarea(s) of Need

Student needs are based on the data collected. As a result of the student's disability, the IEP Team identifies the needs of the student in the following areas:

- An academic subject area, such as math, reading, writing, social studies, science.
- A functional area, such as self-care, social skills, behavior, other areas of adaptive functioning.
- An additional area of need, such as motor functioning, vision, hearing, etc.

The area(s) and subarea(s) of need of the student should be developed in consideration of the following:

- Results of the student's most recent individual evaluation(s).
- Student's strengths.
- Student's results on State and district-wide assessments.
- Parents' concerns for enhancing the education of their child.
- The results of age-appropriate transition assessments and the student's strengths, preferences, and interests as they relate to transition from school to post school activities.

When identifying resulting needs, the IEP Team may need to conduct a gap analysis to measure the difference between the student's current levels of performance and the grade-level and/or age-level expectations in each identified area of need.

Questions the IEP Team might want to consider when developing the resulting needs are:

- Where are the greatest gaps for the student, preventing the student from making progress in the grade-level content standards and/or age-appropriate functional performance expectations?
- Are there student-specific characteristics affecting the student's ability to learn? Examples include distractibility, difficulties with processing information in specific ways, organizing materials/time, completing written tasks, or with problem-solving. This list is not exhaustive.
- Which student-specific characteristics need to be addressed and/or supported?
- What skills need to be taught explicitly for the student to demonstrate proficiency on grade-level content standards and/or age-appropriate functional expectations?
- Which skills/knowledge can be acquired in the general classroom with an accommodation or support/assistive technology/related service?

Using the information gathered, analyzed, and described in the PLAAFP statement, the IEP Team will determine what supports, specially designed instruction, services, and programs are required for the student to have access to and make progress in the general education curriculum. Each area of need, identified in the PLAAFP, must be addressed in the IEP or the district must provide notice with reasoning in accordance with 34 CFR §300.503.

Adverse Impact Statement

The PLAAFP must include a description of the adverse impact the disability has on the student's:

- Involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.

- Attainment of postsecondary goals, beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the student turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team.

Questions the IEP Team may consider when determining the adverse impact of the student's disability:

- Why is the student not making sufficient progress in meeting grade-level standards and/or age-level expectations?
 - What are the academic achievement and functional performance concerns impacting the student's progress?
- What is the relationship between the student's disability and student behavior which is interfering with the student's learning or the learning of others?
 - Is the student's behavior consistent across different school settings?
- How is this student's performance different from their same-aged peers?
 - Is the student able to keep pace with the rest of the class and understand instructions given by the teacher?
 - Does the student retain material from one lesson to the next?
- How does the student's disability interfere with their ability to access the general curriculum?
 - How does the student respond when the work becomes too time consuming, or the difficulty increases?
 - Can the student comprehend the material being read or taught?
 - Can they complete assignments independently?

Two students with the same disability can look very different in the classroom. The impact statement describes what is unique about the student and how the specific characteristics inhibit the student's access to the general education curriculum.

When crafting an adverse impact statement, it is not sufficient to simply state the student's disability is interfering with learning.

Connecting the PLAAFP to the Least Restrictive Environment

The PLAAFP is a foundation on which the rest of the IEP is built. The description of need included in the PLAAFP informs the identification of the special education and related services a student with a disability needs, in order to receive a FAPE in the LRE. The IDEA presumes the LRE for all students to be general education and therefore the development of a clear, comprehensive, concise, and accurate PLAAFP plays a significant role in identifying supports necessary for a student with a disability to be educated in the general education setting with their nondisabled peers.

The IDEA is clear that placement decisions for students with disabilities need to be made by a group of persons, including the parents and other persons knowledgeable about the student, the meaning of evaluation data and the placement options according to 34 CFR §300.116(a). When making these placement decisions there must be consideration of the baseline data, description of area(s) of need, and adverse impact found in the student's PLAAFP. Consideration of this information will help district ensure compliance with LRE requirements under 34 CFR §300.114, including ensuring to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities, including students in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with students who are nondisabled; and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of students with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Connecting the PLAAFP to FAPE

The PLAAFP statement is the foundation upon which the IEP Team builds the remainder of the IEP. United States Department of Education, Analysis and Comments, 71 Fed. Reg. 46,662 (2006).

Students who are eligible for special education programs and services are entitled to FAPE, which according to 34 CFR §300.17 means special education and related services:

- Are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge.
- Meet the standards of the Michigan Department of Education, including the requirements of the IDEA.

- Include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the State involved; and
- Are provided in conformity with an IEP that meets the requirements of 34 CFR §§300.320 through 300.324.

The purpose of IDEA is to ensure all students with disabilities have available to them a FAPE that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. 34 CFR §300.1(a)

In *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017), the Supreme Court noted the following:

- A school must offer an IEP reasonably calculated to enable a student to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances.
- An IEP is not a form and so must be constructed only after careful consideration of the student's present levels.
- The IEP must focus on the individual student, the unique needs of the student, specially designed instruction and an individualized program.