From Common Core State Standards to Standards-Based IEPs: A Brief Tutorial

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Abstract

Clinicians can use the Common Core State Standards (2010) along with requirements in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) to create conditions that support standards-based goals and objectives in a student’s individualized education program (IEP). The IEP is the blueprint for speech-language pathology services provided to and on behalf of students with disabilities that allow them to participate in and make progress in the general curriculum (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2007). The IEP is written to meet the unique needs of the individual child and to delineate the specially designed instruction the child needs to make progress in meeting grade level or course standards. School-based speech-language pathologists are important IEP team members as educators move into a system that uses IEP development as a problem-solving tool rather than a listing of skills that will be taught to the student with disabilities.

Common Core State Standards

The standards-based education movement calls for clear, measurable standards for what all students should learn. The Common Core State Standards (2010) are the product of a state-led effort in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts to provide teachers and parents with common understanding of what students are expected to learn in English/language arts and mathematics from kindergarten through grade 12. The Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects includes grade level standards for reading for literature, reading for informational text, reading foundational skills, writing, speaking and listening, and language. Each of these areas is tightly intertwined with the student’s language learning system and proficiency with literate language; both of high interest to the school-based speech-language pathologist (SLP). The authors of the reading standards highlight the need for progressive development of reading comprehension and proficiency with increasingly complex text. Students are expected to write logical arguments based on claims they can defend, sound reasoning, and relevant evidence. In the areas of speaking and listening, students are expected to gain, evaluate, and present increasingly complex information, ideas, and evidence. In the area of language, students are to increase vocabularies through a mix of conversations, direct instruction, and reading. In addition, students determine word meanings, appreciate nuances of words, and steadily expand their repertoire of words and phrases.
Individualized Education Program Components

IDEA 2004 specifies the required components of each individualized education program (IEP): a document that captures the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance; a description of the student’s involvement and supports needed to make progress in the general curriculum; measurable annual goals; the anticipated frequency, location, and duration of special education and related services; program modifications including supplementary aids, services, and accommodations for instruction and testing; support for school personnel to assist the student in meeting IEP goals; explanation of the extent to which the child will not participate in class and extracurricular and nonacademic activities with nondisabled children; transition services; an extended school year if needed; and a description of how progress will be measured. The most basic and fundamental purposes of the IEP to identify and describe the child’s unique educational needs in the form of the present levels of performance, to determine what services are needed to address those needs, and to establish reasonable goals the student will be able to accomplish if the services are appropriate.

Standards-Based IEPs

Many states and local school districts are embracing a standards-based approach to IEP development so that the content of the IEP is linked to academic grade-level standards for the student’s enrolled grade. IDEA 2004 requires that to the extent possible, the student’s IEP is designed to ensure access to the general curriculum in the regular classroom. Many professionals and parents view standards-based IEPs as a best practice to create high expectations for students with disabilities to make progress in the general curriculum, as 20 years of low expectations resulted in low achievement for students with disabilities. In the past, the IEP lowered expectations for these students by essentially defining a separate curriculum, instead of providing a plan for supporting students with disabilities in accessing the general curriculum in the regular classroom. IDEA 2004, similar to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), is focused on accountability and assessments of how students with disabilities progress within the general curriculum.

Standards-based IEPs allow educators to shift from low expectations to high expectations for students with disabilities by clarifying the learning outcomes that can be measured. A standards-based IEP is a tool educators can use to support the curriculum, but it is not the curriculum. It spells out where educators want the student to be academically, where the student is relative to grade level standards, and the plan for how to support the student in accelerating learning to move from where he is to where he needs to be. There are seven steps in developing standards-based IEPs proposed in Project Forum (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2007).

Prior to developing IEPs, all IEP team members need to be familiar with the general education curriculum, including the common core state standards. SLPs need working knowledge of the speech and language complexity expected at each grade level as outlined in the Common Core State Standards, especially in the English Language Arts and Literacy Standards in the areas of Language, Listening and Speaking, Reading, and Writing (see Table 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
<th>Fifth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventions of Standard English</strong></td>
<td>Use frequently occurring nouns and verbs, regular plural nouns, question words, prepositions (to, from, in, out, on, off, for, of, by, with), and complete sentences in shared language activities.</td>
<td>Use common, proper, and possessive nouns; singular/plural nouns with matching verbs; personal, possessive, and indefinite pronouns; past, present, and future verb tenses; adjectives; conjunctions (and, so, but, or, because); articles; and prepositions (during, beyond, toward). Complete simple and compound declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences.</td>
<td>Use collective nouns, irregular plural nouns, reflexive pronouns, irregular past tense, and adjectives and adverbs. Produce, expand, and rearrange complete simple and compound sentences.</td>
<td>Explain function of nouns; pronouns; verbs; adjectives; adverbs; regular and irregular plural nouns; abstract nouns; regular and irregular verbs; verb tenses; subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement; comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs; and coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. Use simple, compound, complex sentences.</td>
<td>Use relative pronouns (who, whose, whom, which, that); relative adverbs (where, when, why); progressive verb tenses; modal auxiliaries (can, may, must); prepositional phrases; complete sentences and correct fragments and run-ons. Correctly use frequently confused words (to, too, two, there, their). Order adjectives within sentences. Explain the function of conjunctions, prepositions, and interjections. Form and use perfect tenses. Use verb tense to convey various times, sequences, states, and conditions. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense. Use correlative conjunctions (either/or neither/nor).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge of Language</strong></td>
<td>Compare formal and informal uses of English.</td>
<td>Choose words and phrases for effect.</td>
<td>Choose words and phrases to convey ideas precisely. Differentiate contexts for formal English &amp; informal discourse.</td>
<td>Expand, combine, and reduce sentences for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style. Compare/contrast varieties of English used in stories, dramas, and poems.</td>
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</table>
Seven Steps to Developing a Standards-Based IEP

Step 1: Consider Content Standards

The SLP should first consider the content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled or would be enrolled based on age. The SLP should ask the intent of the content standard and what the student must know and be able to do to meet the standard.

The third grade language standards (see Table 1) call for students to use simple, compound, and complex sentences. This means that by the end of third grade, students are expected to understand and use the skills that undergird the level of syntactic complexity used in complex sentences such as subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement; comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs; coordinating and subordinating conjunctions; and correct use of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, regular and irregular plural nouns, abstract nouns, regular and irregular verbs, and verb tenses. By the end of third grade, students are able to choose words and phrases for effect and use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase. In the area of semantics, third grade students demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances, distinguish shades of meaning among

| Vocabulary Acquisition and Use | Determine or clarify the meaning of words. Identify new meanings for familiar words (duck as a noun or a verb). Use inflections and affixes as clues to meaning (-ed, -s, re-, un-, pre-, -ful). Explore word relationships and nuances by understanding frequently occurring verbs and adjectives by relating them to antonyms and identifying real-life connections between words and their use and distinguishing shades of meaning among verbs by acting out meanings. | Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of the word or phrase. Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances by identifying real-life connections between words and their use; distinguishing shades of meaning among verbs differing in manner and adjectives differing in intensity by defining them or acting out the meanings. | Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of the word or phrase. Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances by identifying real-life connections between words and phrases in context; identifying real-life connections between words and their use; and distinguishing shades of meaning among closely related verbs (toss, throw, hurl) and closely related adjectives (thin, slender, skinny, scrawny). | Use context as a clue to the meaning of word or phrase. Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances by distinguishing literal and nonliteral meanings of words and phrases in context; identifying real-life connections between words and their use; and distinguishing shades of meaning among related words that describe states of mind or degrees of certainty (knew, believed, suspected, heard, wondered). | Use context as a clue to the meaning of word or phrase. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances by explaining the meaning of simple similes and metaphor; recognizing and explaining the meaning of common idioms, adages, and proverbs; and relating words to their antonyms and synonyms. | Use context as a clue to the meaning of word or phrase. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances by interpreting figurative language, including similes and metaphors, in context; explaining the meaning of idioms, adages, proverbs; and using the relationship between particular words to understand the words (synonyms, antonyms, homographs). |

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Determine or clarify the meaning of words.
Identify new meanings for familiar words (duck as a noun or a verb).
Use inflections and affixes as clues to meaning (-ed, -s, re-, un-, pre-, -ful).
Explore word relationships and nuances by understanding frequently occurring verbs and adjectives by relating them to antonyms and identifying real-life connections between words and their use and distinguishing shades of meaning among verbs by acting out meanings.

Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of the word or phrase.
Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances by identifying real-life connections between words and their use; distinguishing shades of meaning among verbs differing in manner and adjectives differing in intensity by defining them or acting out the meanings.

Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of the word or phrase.
Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances by identifying real-life connections between words and phrases in context; identifying real-life connections between words and their use; and distinguishing shades of meaning among closely related verbs (toss, throw, hurl) and closely related adjectives (thin, slender, skinny, scrawny).

Use context as a clue to the meaning of word or phrase. Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances by distinguishing literal and nonliteral meanings of words and phrases in context; identifying real-life connections between words and their use; and distinguishing shades of meaning among related words that describe states of mind or degrees of certainty (knew, believed, suspected, heard, wondered).

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Use context as a clue to the meaning of word or phrase. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances by interpreting figurative language, including similes and metaphors, in context; explaining the meaning of idioms, adages, proverbs; and using the relationship between particular words to understand the words (synonyms, antonyms, homographs).
related words, and distinguish literal and nonliteral meanings of words and phrases. Language skills in third grade allow the student to read and write increasingly complex text.

**Step 2: Examine Data**

The SLP should examine classroom and student data to determine where the student is functioning in relation to grade level standards. The SLP should work to develop a student profile that includes current assessment data, student work samples, the previous year’s IEP, and other information such as grades, discipline referrals, and attendance reports. When developing the profile, the SLP should ask a number of questions. Has the student been taught content aligned with the standard? Has the student been provided instructional scaffolding to achieve grade level expectations? Was the instruction evidence-based? Were the instruction and instructional materials aligned with grade level standards?

The SLP may choose to examine writing samples to determine whether the student uses a variety of sentence types including complete simple, compound, and complex sentences that match syntactical complexity with grade-level standards. At Step 2, both student work and instructional methods and materials are analyzed to determine if sufficient scaffolding has been provided for learning to use conventions of Standard English, language use, and vocabulary acquisition and use. The SLP should determine whether the student has received explicit instruction to learn all of the third grade language standards.

**Step 3: Determine the Student’s Present Performance Level**

Next, the SLP must develop the present level of academic achievement and functional performance. He or she should describe the student’s individual strengths and needs in relation to accessing and mastering the general curriculum. There are a number of important questions the SLP should ask. What progress monitoring data is available to show the student’s response to instruction? Have any successful interventions been provided? What other data is available to inform decisions? Are there assessment data available? If so, are there noticeable patterns in the data?”

The review should include clear descriptions of the student’s strengths and needs based on evidence, how the disability or skill deficits affect involvement in the general education curriculum, multiple current forms of assessment data, the status of prior IEP goals, and input from teachers, parents, and the student. The statement of the present levels of performance is the foundation for the other components of the IEP and should be clearly stated. The statement includes sufficient information to describe both the instructional level and the grade level, these two levels together allow the student to make progress in the general education curriculum while addressing the student’s individual needs.

An SLP conducted a review of Kelly, a student in third grade. Kelly’s written work in the student’s journal, science notebook, and personal narrative assignments during October 2011, along with a language sample taken in mid-October using a story retell task, indicated that Kelly’s language skills were within range for typical peers in the second grade. That is, he used simple and compound sentences with coordinating conjunctions, unelaborated noun phrases, and verb phrases. He was able to distinguish shades of meaning among closely related verbs and adjectives, second grade skills, though he had difficulty with third grade skills such as distinguishing shades of meaning among words that describe states of mind or degrees of certainty. Kelly was able to use sentence-level context as a clue to word meaning, a relative strength at the third grade level. The clinician analyzed Kelly’s language sample from the story retell task for syntactic complexity using the conventions of Standard English in the Language Standards. Number of Total Words (NTW) and Number of Different Words (NDW) were calculated and were within one standard deviation for second graders (Leadholm & Miller, 1992). His language and writing samples did not contain subordinating conjunctions, comparative or superlative adjectives or adverbs, or complex sentences, skills expected of typical peers in third grade. Finally, Kelly’s story was closer to a narrative typical of most
students in kindergarten than to a multiepisodic complete narrative with cohesion and story sparkle expected of third graders.

**Step 4: Develop Measurable Goals**

It is important for the clinician to develop measurable annual goals aligned with grade-level academic content standards. The SLP should analyze the student’s needs as identified in the present levels of performance in Step 3 and ask questions such as: Does the goal have a specific timeline? What can the student reasonably be expected to accomplish in one school year? Are the conditions for meeting the goal addressed? How will the outcome of the goal be measured?"

There are four critical components of a measurable goal.

- **Timeframe** identifies the amount of time in the goal period and is usually specified in the number of weeks or a certain date of completion. For example, in 36 instructional weeks, by the end of the 2011-2012 school year, or by May 15, 2012.

- **Conditions** specify the manner in which progress toward the goal occurs. Conditions describe the specific resources that are needed for a student to reach the goal. For example, a goal relating to reading comprehension may require the use of a graphic organizer. The graphic organizer is the condition.

- **Behavior** identifies the performance that is being monitored. It represents an action that can be directly observed and measured.

- **Criterion** identifies how much, how often, or to what extent the behavior must occur in order to demonstrate that the goal has been achieved. The goal criterion specifies the amount of growth that is expected (Education Service Center, Region 20 and Texas Education Agency, 2011).

Table 2 shows two examples of measurable goals.

**Table 2. Application**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In 18 instructional weeks</td>
<td>When provided with an action series depicted in four picture cards and prompted to tell a complete story</td>
<td>Kelly, a third grade student, will produce a story</td>
<td>That the story is a true narrative with all story grammar components and at least two episodes and that it includes complete simple, compound, and complex sentences with fewer than 5 errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By May 15, 2012</td>
<td>Given a fourth grade story prompt and 30 minutes to write</td>
<td>Kevin, a fourth grade student, will write a story</td>
<td>A three-paragraph essay using both compound and complex sentences and transition words in sentences and between paragraphs with 5 or fewer errors.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Step 5: Assess Progress**

It is important to assess and report the student’s progress throughout the year. The clinician should note how the student demonstrates what he/she knows on classroom, district, and state assessments; if a variety of assessments used to measure progress; and how the progress will be reported to parents.

The student’s IEP includes a “description of...when periodic reports on the progress the child is making toward meeting the annual goals (such as through the use of quarterly reports or other periodic reports, concurrent with the issuance of report cards) will be provided” (IDEA,
All parties working on the IEP must report progress in the same manner as the goal is measured. For example, if the goal states that the child will produce a writing sample with fewer than 5 errors, then progress reported must reflect how many errors or an average number of errors over a specified number of writing samples are contained in the student’s work. If the goal is written as a percentage correct, then progress must be reported as a percentage correct. If the goal states that the student will master a goal 4 out of 5 times, then the progress reported should reflect how many out of 5 times the student is able to accomplish the goal. Global statements such as “some progress,” “good progress,” or “minimal progress” are not adequate for reporting progress on a standards-based IEP.

**Step 6: Identify Special Instruction**

Next, the clinician should identify specially designed instruction including accommodations and/or modifications needed to access and make progress in the general education curriculum. The goal of the specially designed instruction is to accelerate progress and close the gap between the current level of performance and grade-level standards. The SLP should ask a number of important questions. What accommodations are needed to enable the student to access the general education curriculum? What accommodations have been used and were they effective? Has the complexity of material been changed in such a way that the content has been modified?

IDEA (2004) defines special education services as “specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (34 CFR §300.39 [a][1]). Further, specially designed instruction means adapting the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability. Accommodations are intended to reduce or eliminate the effects of the student’s disability, but do not reduce learning expectations. Modifications refer to practices and procedures that change the nature of the task or skill (Education Service Center, Region 20 and Texas Education Agency, 2011).

An assignment in a science class might require all students to label a diagram of a pig, naming the various systems and explaining their functions. To accommodate a student with a visual impairment, the teacher may use large print handouts or computer software that enlarges the image to complete the same assignment as other students. A modification for a student who has IEP-directed modifications for technical vocabulary might be for the teacher to use preprinted labels to identify the head, midsection, legs, and tail of the pig. In this case, the accommodations changed the language level for completing the assignment and reduced learning expectations.

**Step 7: Determine the Most Appropriate Assessment Option**

In order to determine the most appropriate assessment option, the SLP should ask questions such as: Has the student received standards-based, grade-level instruction? Was the instruction evidence-based? What was the student’s instructional level and how different is that level from typical peers? Can the student make progress on grade-level standards in the same timeframe as other students? Can the student demonstrate what he/she knows on the assessment option under consideration? The IEP teams determine which assessments provide the best opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

Kevin is a fourth grade student who has a learning disability in reading and a speech-language disorder. Kevin’s IEP team considered four points of data and decided that he could participate in the regular assessment program with accommodations.

- Instructional levels are approximately 1 year behind grade level and gaps are being closed using focused interventions.
• Kevin participates in grade-level instructional activities planned for all students.
• He makes progress on grade-level standards within approximately the same time frame as typical peers.
• He uses learning and organizational strategies to improve achievement.

Standards-based IEPs that are clearly stated, tied to grade-level standards, yet customized to meet individual needs based on the student’s disability blend the best of special education and standards-based education. Standards-based IEPs ensure that students receive specially designed instruction that is linked to the general education curriculum for their enrolled grade. School-based SLPs have an important role in designing standards-based IEPs that are linked to graded level expectations in the Common Core State Standards for students with communication disorders.

References


