

Developing Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance Statements

The statement of a child's Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) is the cornerstone of the individual education plan (IEP). The PLAAFP not only drives the IEP; it links all of the IEP components together. The purpose of the PLAAFP is to identify the child's needs and establish a baseline of the child's performance in appropriate activities (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008). Identifying specific needs and establishing a baseline begins the process of developing meaningful and measurable goals.

The PLAAFP statement is a brief and understandable narrative accurately describing the child's performance in all areas of education and functional activities that are affected by the child's disability. It is an objective synthesis of all information relevant to the child's development and educational performance, and serves as a bridge between the evaluation process and the measurable annual goals. It is important to remember that the PLAAFP is not a full repeat of the evaluation team report. A PLAAFP statement must contain, at a minimum: information about the child's current functioning and information about the impact of the child's disability in relation to appropriate activities. In addition, the IEP must contain measurable baseline date, which may be reported in the PLAAFP or in another location on the IEP. By summarizing the data, and establishing a baseline, a solid framework is established from which measurable annual goals can be created.

The PLAAFP Should

Be stated in terms that are specific, measurable, and objective;

Describe current performance, not past performance;

Describe the effect of the disability on the child's progress in appropriate activities;

Prioritize and identify needs that will be written as goals;

Identify strengths as they relate to possible interventions;

Provide baseline data for each need; and

Set the measurement method for each goal.

The PLAAFP must also include statements, as appropriate, regarding health, vision, hearing, social-emotional status, general intelligence, educational performance, communicative status, motor abilities, and developmental status (Kansas State Department of Education, 2011). Parental concerns may also be addressed in the PLAAFP at the discretion of the IEP team. There must be documentation that the concerns of the parents were considered when developing the IEP, but this information does not necessarily have to be written in the PLAAFP (K.S.A. 72-987(d)).

Appropriate Activities

"Appropriate activities" are defined as those activities that children of the same age would take part in if they were enrolled in preschool, child care, mother's day out programs, or in their home with their family. Such activities may include emergent literacy and math, listening to stories, dramatic play, participating in small and/or large groups, playing with friends, interacting with adults, singing songs, constructing buildings with blocks, coloring and painting, etc.

Under current regulations, the IEP team must describe in the PLAAFP how the child's disability affects their involvement and progress in appropriate activities. By identifying how a child's delay affects his or her ability to progress in appropriate activities, the IEP team can easily identify and prioritize needs from which to create goals. For example, if Suzie's delay in expressive language is keeping her from making friends (Suzie is unable to verbally initiate, respond to and, maintain social interactions) this need could be identified as a priority since the ability to make and keep friends is a critical skill for young children.

The Relationship Between the PLAAFP and Measurable Annual Goals

There should be a direct relationship between the PLAAFP and the measurable annual goals. Each area of need identified in the PLAAFP must be addressed somewhere in the IEP. Most needs will be addressed as measurable annual goals, but needs may also be addressed in other ways.

Some needs identified in the PLAAFP may be addressed within routine classroom activities without additional intervention or support. In such cases, the team would include a statement in the "special considerations section" of the IEP, and thus, not need to write a goal. However, in most cases, needs identified on the PLAAFP are addressed by writing measurable annual goals and anyone reading the IEP should see a direct relationship between the goals that were selected and the needs outlined in the PLAAFP.

Describing Child Performance

Early childhood professionals will find it difficult to describe a child's performance in appropriate activities if they have not collected enough information during the evaluation process. Many teams spend large amounts of time assessing children using published norm-referenced instruments. These instruments assess child performance within developmental domains (e.g., cognitive, social/emotional, self-help, motor, and com-communication) and describe that performance relative to peers of the same age.

Items from norm reference tests represent a wide range of content, and are not specific to a particular curriculum or activities. In addition, scores recorded on norm-referenced tests reflect a band of scores (standard error of measurement) not an exact score. For example, if the standard error of measurement is 6, and a child receives a standard score of 65, that means 95 times out of 100 when given the same test, the child will receive a score somewhere between 60 and 70. For these reasons scores produced using norm referenced instruments are not specific or sensitive enough to be used for baseline data.

Norm referenced tests help answer the question, "Is there a delay in the child's development?". Although this is important information and may help establish eligibility, it is only one piece of the evaluation process. The second question to be answered is, "If a delay exists, how is that delay affecting the child's ability to participate and progress in appropriate activities?". This question will be answered through other methods of assessment.

To assess how a delay affects a child's ability to participate in appropriate activities, the team must use evaluation measures that examine a child within authentic activities. The team can use a variety of formal and informal measures, such as published curriculum-based assessments or criterion-referenced tests, structured observations, rating scales, rubrics, portfolio assessments, work sample analysis, language samples, and checklists. Information collected using such methods will provide good baseline data to be used in the PLAAFP. In addition the tool or method used to establish PLAAFP baseline data will later be used to measure the overall accomplishment of the goal.

Establishing a Baseline in the PLAAFP

The PLAAFP helps to establish the baseline for measurable annual goals. A baseline is a starting point from which to measure progress. Without good baseline data, it is difficult for parents and staff to evaluate the effectiveness of the educational plan. Therefore, teams should choose their baseline data wisely. Baseline data should be stated in clear and concise terms. If test scores are used in the PLAAFP to establish baseline, they should be written in understandable terms, free of jargon and relate to developmental outcomes. The same criteria used to report baseline must be used to measure progress toward the annual goals. The following are some examples of baseline data statements:

During large group activities, Cindy is able to sit and attend to the speaker of the group for 3 minutes. Typically children of this age are able to sit and attend to the speaker, and participate for group activities lasting 15 minutes.

Stacie uses physical gestures and one-word statements to make her wants and needs known (mine, want, drink) as reported in language samples and classroom observations.

Max is able to sort objects from a group according to some physical attributes (color, shape, size) with full assistance from an adult or peer as measured on the AEPS (Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System). When Max is given a prompt (adult/peer points where object should go), he is able to sort an object by color, 1 out of 3 trials.

Example PLAAFPS

Katie is an outgoing 4-year old girl who has motor delays. She is above average intellectually and is very verbal. Katie has many friends at home and at school, and is described by her teachers as very motivated to learn new things. Katie enjoys preschool and spends time in all of the learning centers. During classroom activities, Katie is able to hold crayons, markers and other writing utensils in her fist, and make scribbles on paper. She paints using downward strokes only with a paintbrush, as noted in structured observations and work sample analysis. Typically, children of the same age hold writing utensils between their thumb and forefingers and can copy lines, circles and simple figures. They are able to make up and down strokes as well as circular patterns with a paintbrush. Katie's fine motor abilities keep her from being able to create representational artwork like that of other children her same age.

Sally enjoys listening to stories individually, with an adult, and is able to maintain her attention from the beginning to the end of a story. Structured observations conducted during large-group activities (lasting 15 minutes or more) indicate that Sally is able to maintain her attention to the speaker of the group for 2 minutes without physical or verbal support from staff. After the 2-minute time frame, staff must physically redirect Sally back to circle time as Sally frequently tries to leave the group to play with other toys in the classroom. Typically, children of the same

age will attend to a group activity for approximately 10 minutes with minimal verbal redirection. Sally's attention span interferes with her ability to gain new information from group activities such as story-time.

Joe has many friends, and enjoys participating in group activities. Joe is easy to work with, maintains good eye contact, and follows directions well. During playtime activities, Joe is unable to communicate his wants and needs easily. In a 100-word sample of spontaneous speech, Joe had a whole-word accuracy score of 23%. Joe has difficulty describing things and events to his peers and adults when those items or events are not immediately present. In these situations Joe is unable to use his strong non-verbal communication to help others understand him.

Emily uses single words, signs, and a few 2-3 word combinations to communicate her wants and needs at home and at school. She initiates social interactions with her peers and labels objects in her environment. Typically, children Emily's age use 4-5 word sentences to communicate wants and needs. During a 20-minute play period with peers, Emily used 18 single word utterances (5 utterances also included a sign) and 2 word combination (my shoe). When 2 word combinations were modeled for Emily, she initiated only the last word of the phrase. Emily's parents report that they have a difficult time understanding what Emily wants or needs.
