

EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT REVIEW PROCESS:

A Reflective Process to Examine the Quality of IEPs

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has more than 814 procedural requirements, yet there is little evidence that meeting procedural compliance will result in student achievement (U.S. Department of Education: Office of Special Education Programs, 2002).

In 2002, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education reported that IEPs are more often a means for legal protection and not a guide for instructional planning for students with disabilities (Lynch & Beare, 1990; U.S. Department of Education: Office of Special Education Programs, 2002). Lynch and Beare (1990) found that IEPs had become little more than an administrative task and that there was very little relationship between the IEP and the actual instruction of a student with disabilities. The commission's report emphasized the need for a shift in how IEPs are used from one of procedural compliance to one of an instructional framework for the delivery of effective instruction for students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education: Office of Special Education Programs, 2002; Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006).

Assessing whether an IEP has any educational benefit is difficult. There is no clear guidance for the term 'appropriate' when it comes to IEP's and whether they have been designed and implemented in a way that provides educational benefit to the student.

The purpose of the Educational Benefit Review Process is to provide a structured, reflective process to assist districts in assessing whether IEPs are reasonably calculated to provide meaningful educational benefit to the students for whom they are written. This process is NOT intended to be evaluative, rather the intent is to reflect on current practices, procedures and policies to determine whether they are designed in ways that provide educational benefit to students.

The Educational Benefit Review Process:

Getting Ready

- This process takes approximately 4-6 hours to complete.
- Districts select records of students who have been in that district for three years or more. These records should be a general representation of the kinds of IEP's the district or school typically develops. In other words, for training purposes, it is not recommended to use student files with complicated services or a significant number of goals.
- The district assembles a team comprised of administrators, general educators, special educators, student support services personnel, and others who participate in the development of IEP's. Parents could be incorporated into this process at the district's discretion. It works best to have teams of 4-6 people.
- The district uses a specific protocol and forms to capture the discussions and outcomes of the process. Specific information from the IEPs is recorded on the forms or on larger chart paper.
- After each step in the process, teams should discuss the highlights of the reflection and record the learnings in terms of practices to keep and practices to change.

Steps of the Process

1. Review and record, on the charts, information reflecting what was found in the Evaluation Report and the three consecutive IEPs.
2. Examine the alignment between the evaluation report, present level descriptions, goals, services and progress reports for each individual year.
3. Examine the development of the IEP from year to year and whether progress (or lack thereof) has been considered and reflected in the next year's IEP.
4. Discuss whether the student's IEPs have been designed to provide educational benefit year to year. Provide a rationale for your decision, based on what was written over the 3-year cycle. Look for quality in the information provided as compared to the decisions made from year to year.
5. Reflect and Analyze Next Steps from a district or school perspective.

Step 1 - Record Information that is listed in the documents.

How and what to record on the charts:

- Information gleaned from the evaluation that is relevant to the child's eligibility and the adverse impact of that eligibility.
- Information from the Present Level of Academic Achievement & Functional Performance that defines baseline data and adverse impact statements that describe involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.
- Areas of need that require specially designed instruction or related services.
- Goals and objectives
- Accommodations/Modifications
- Services/Special Considerations
- Progress on Goals

Form 1: The Educational Benefit Review Process Chart					Year 1
Student Name:			School:		
IEP Date:		Birth Date/Age:		Grade:	
Evaluation Data	Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance Data	Areas of Need (Requiring specialized designed instruction)	Goals & Objectives	Services, Accommodations and Modifications, and Special Considerations	Progress on Goals
Any assessment data in evaluation report that supports eligibility and adverse educational impact.	Any current data defining baseline levels of performance and any impact statements regarding involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.	Specific areas of need that require specially designed instruction.	Goals and objectives aligned to disability related needs	Record all services and service locations; any accommodations and modifications provided; and any special considerations.	Indicate goal progress: Met = M Not Met = NM Undetermined = ?

Step 2 - Analyze the relationships between the evaluation report and the parts of the IEP for individual years.

Do all the pieces align with each other for each individual year (year 1, year 2, year 3)? Alignment is the direct relationship between two components and is demonstrated by drawing a line from one area to another to show the association. For example, the analysis of the results of the evaluation, including the information gained from the assessments, should align with information in the present level of achievement/functioning that identifies the needs, which will drive the specific goals/objectives and accommodations/modifications, which will drive the type and amount of services.

How to record on the charts:

- Draw circles around the areas that align and draw arrows between the circled items to designate alignment.
- Draw empty circles to designate areas where alignment has not occurred or gaps in the alignment are noted.
- Helpful hint: Use markers to record information that all relate to the similar content area in the same color, such as all reading blue and all math red.

IEP Annual Review Date: Juan Carlos- 16 yrs. Page #: ____ of ____ School: HS Grade: 11

Present Level of Academic Achievement & Functional Performance, Including Strengths & Interests and Transition Assessments	Concerns/ Needs Requiring Specially Designed Instruction	Impact on Involvement & Progress in the General Education Curriculum	Goals & Objectives/ Accommodations & Modifications	Services & Placement/ Sites	Progress on Goals &
Academic/ Cognitive Language Arts: Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement: Broad Reading: 80 Broad Written Language: 86 Literacy Lab Assessments: 6th grade level academic functioning in reading & writing. Speaks Spanish at home and receives English language learner support in school. Successfully participates in general education classrooms with Resource Specialist support.	+ Reading Comprehension vocab. recalling & remembering info read.	+ Juan's difficulty with comprehension skills impacts his ability to independently access content materials in class, work & community settings.	+ By end of 2nd MP, after reading a grade level story and/or text, Juan will verbally summarize the content with (5) key details from a text, and (3) inferences in 4/5 trials as measured by teacher-charted records. - use evidence from the text in explicit & inferential analysis - write in a graphic organizer while reading text - read with peer and highlight text evidence to be used for future analysis.	Resource room 1 period per day	+ S
Behavior/Social/Emotional Good social skills in 1:1 interactions. Compliant with teachers and authority figures. Not actively involved in extracurricular activities; tends to stay at home versus socialize with peers in outside activities.	0 Uncomfortable with Group participation resulting in lack of extracurricular activities	0 Juan's inability to work in group situations resulting in lack of his ability to interact in classroom, work & community settings.	0 Given a group situation Juan will actively participate in the learning experience evidenced by classroom rubric. - enroll in a series of art classes at the high school and/or vocational training program in the community to further his art skills and develop group interaction skills.	General Ed for all academic classes	- S
Vocational/Transition: Informal interview with Juan & his family at their home school is a struggle but he wants a high school diploma. Talented and capable in drawing and art. Interested in art as a possible future career.	-	0	0 Given various research techniques, Juan will investigate his career option to determine his strengths and needs. - Investigate career on O*NET to determine skills needed - visit local art store to learn more about job market & specific skills needed.	Community 2 hrs./wk.	0 M

Step 3 - Compare to Prior Year

The team compares progress from year 1 to year 2 and year 2 to year 3 to determine if subsequent changes to the present level and goals and services were made based on the results of progress.

How to Record

Compare the first IEP to the second IEP and determine group consensus for increase or decrease of complexity and progress for each component. Determine if there was a change from the previous IEP to the next IEP. Record in the blank columns in between each section with the following notations:

- 0 = No change from prior year
- + = Increased complexity of goals/objectives, time with non-disabled peers, or progress
- - = Decreased complexity of goals/objectives, time with nondisabled peers, or lack of progress

Repeat the process to compare the second IEP to the third IEP.

Form 1: The Educational Benefit Review Process Chart

Year 2

Student Name:			School:					
IEP Date:			Birth Date/Age:			Grade:		
Change from prior year: 0 : No change from prior year + : Increased level of difficulty of goals, increased time with non-disabled peers, or forward progress - : Decreased level difficulty of goals, decreased time with nondisabled peers, or lack of progress								
Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance	Change from prior year	Areas of Need (Requiring specialized designed instruction)	Change from prior year	Goals & Objectives	Change from prior year	Services, Accommodations and Modifications, and Special Considerations	Change from prior year	Progress on Goals
Data defining baseline levels of performance and impact on involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.		Specific areas of need that require specially designed instruction.		Goals and objectives aligned to disability related needs		Record all services and service locations; any accommodations and modifications provided; and any special considerations.		Indicate goal progress: Met = M Not Met = NM Undetermined = ?

Step 4 - Review of Quality and Determination of Educational Benefit

When analyzing to determine whether the student was provided educational benefit, a review of the quality of the information that was used in writing these IEPs is important for understanding what practices and procedures may need to be changed within your district or school.

Use the questions below (also found on the Step 4 Form) to discuss the quality of what was written in the IEP.

Key questions to ask:

- What specific strengths or quality components did I see in the IEPs reviewed today?
- What specific concerns or areas for improvement did I see in the IEPs reviewed today? (Use the following questions to guide this discussion)
 - Did the IEP use the same standards and expectations articulated in the general education curriculum?
 - Did the IEP address the gaps and the unique needs of the student?
 - Did the IEP reflect quality use of specially designed instruction?
 - Were the goals and objectives written in observable (can be seen and heard) and measurable (can be counted) language?
 - Was the need for the accommodations/modifications listed articulated or made clear in the body of the IEP somewhere?
 - Was data collected and analyzed to determine the exact progress a student made on each goal and objective?
 - What questions would I have for the team that drafted this IEP?

The team needs to analyze and discuss the student's IEPs for alignment among the components and the increase in complexity and progress over time. The overall analysis of the process is to determine if the IEPs were reasonably planned to result in educational benefit.

Key Questions to Ask:

- Was there a clear relationship between the identified needs, goals and services that carried through all three years?
- Did the IEP increase in complexity and move towards more inclusive environments relative to the student's progress and the demands of the general education curriculum and activities?
- Was the student's program reasonably planned to deliver educational benefit?

Step 5 - Reflection and Next Steps

All teams come together to reflect on what they learned and identify important recommendations at both the individual and system level.

Discussion is held regarding program needs and next steps. These can be viewed from a building level or a district system level. What professional development is needed for staff? What policies, practices or procedures need to be changed? Refer to the Step 5 form.