



You Asked!

Q24: My student is not performing at grade-level in certain areas. I'm being told by the IEP team that IEP goals have to be aligned with grade-level Common Core State Standards. Is this correct?

A: A standards-based IEP is one in which the IEP team has aligned grade level **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)**¹ in its development of the IEP and IEP goals.¹

In November 2015, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) released a guidance letter that included the following:

To help make certain that children with disabilities are held to high expectations and have meaningful access to a State's academic content standards, we write to clarify that an individualized education program (IEP) for an eligible child with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) must be aligned with the State's academic content standards for the grade in which the child is enrolled.²

In a situation where a child is performing significantly below the level of the grade in which the child is enrolled, an IEP Team should determine annual goals that are ambitious but achievable. In other words, the annual goals need not necessarily result in the child's reaching grade-level within the year covered by the IEP, but the goals should be sufficiently ambitious to help close the gap. The IEP must also include the specialized instruction to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability necessary to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the state academic content standards that apply to all children in the State.³

What does this mean?

Whenever it is reasonable to do so, goals should reflect grade level CCSS. However, if the child's present level of performance in a certain area is well below their grade level, then the IEP team can write goals at the grade level that would be appropriate. That is, goals can also be written to align with **CCSS at a level below the grade level in which the child is enrolled.**⁴

Based on your student's area of need, goals can be written to scaffold down to a lower grade level Common Core State Standards*.

Based on your student's area of need, goals can be written to scaffold down to a lower grade level Common Core State Standards*. For example, if a 7th grade student requires a decoding goal, the student can have goals that align with 5th grade CCSS. Here are a few 5th grade California CCSS and examples of aligned goals:

Grade 5 CCSS

English Language Arts Standards
(CCSS. ELA)

Sample Goals:

Phonics and Word Recognition:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.5.3

Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

By (*date*) when given a list of (*#*) (*Student*) will accurately decode regular and irregular unfamiliar grade level multisyllabic words [2 or more syllables], comprised of various combinations of all six syllable types [i.e., closed, vowel-consonant-e, open, consonant -le, r-controlled and double vowel] with 90% accuracy as measured by teacher charted running records and informal assessments.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.5.3.A

Use combined knowledge of all letter-sound correspondences, syllabication patterns, and morphology (e.g., roots and affixes) to read accurately unfamiliar multisyllabic words in context and out of context.

By (*date*), (*Student*) will demonstrate understanding of the applicable syllable-division rule, the syllable type, and the consequent vowel-sound through both verbalization and marking (*# of words*), with 95% accuracy as measured by teacher charted running records and informal assessments.

Fluency:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.5.4

Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

By (*date*), when given (*#*) grade-level passages, (*Student*) will read aloud fluently with appropriate intonation and expression an average of (*# of words*) words correct per minute [WCPM] as measured by teacher running records and informal assessments.

Helpful tip: [Read Naturally table](#) shows oral reading fluency based on grades and avg. weekly improvement.

¹ Common Core State Standards Educational standards describe what students should know and be able to do in each subject in each grade. In California, the State Board of Education decides on the standards for all students, from kindergarten through high school. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/>

² OSEP's [Dear Colleague Letter on Free Appropriate Public Education](#), p. 1, released November 16, 2015.

³ *Ibid.*, p5.

⁴ “Such a practice flies in the face of the purpose and goals of the IDEA, which require the district to develop an individualized program with measurable goals. While some children attending 9th grade and requiring special education are capable of meeting the state 9th grade goals with help, others, like M.S., are so far below grade reading level that expecting them to reach the state goals, even with help, is unrealistic.” *E.g., Jefferson County Board of Educ. v. Lolita S.*, 581 Fed Appx. 760 (11th Cir. 2014)

*Students that have below grade level IEP goals may still participate in the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). Only eligible students may participate in the administration of the *California Alternate Assessments*

(CAAs). Any student identified for alternate testing takes the alternate versions of all tests. Individualized education program (IEP) teams “shall determine when a child with a significant cognitive disability shall participate in an alternate assessment aligned with the alternate academic achievement standards.” (Title 1, Part A, Subpart 1, Sec. 1111(b)(2)(D)(ii)(I)—Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015) <https://www.calstat.org/publications/pdfs/2014winterSpringedge.pdf>

Local educational agencies (LEAs) are required to notify the California Department of Education if they believe that they will exceed 1 percent of its total assessed student population taking California Alternate Assessments; however, there are no repercussions to LEAs for exceeding this threshold.

The 1 Percent Threshold on Alternate Assessments

Authored by: Lori Chang, Parent Advocate/non-attorney advocate

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