

Joint Statement on Interprofessional Collaborative Goals in School-Based Practice

The purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is “to ensure all students with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living” (IDEA, 2004). Collaboration is a key component of IDEA, particularly in the development of a student’s individualized education program (IEP), which must be developed by a team. To achieve the standard of FAPE, parents/guardians, students, educators, related service providers, and other stakeholders must work together. The IEP team members must include:

- the student’s parent(s) or guardian(s)
- the student, when appropriate
- at least one of the student’s special educators
- at least one of the student’s general educators
- a representative of the local education agency (LEA)
- an individual who can interpret the impact of evaluation results on instruction
- other individuals with knowledge or expertise regarding the student, at the discretion of the parent or LEA.

Central to the IEP team’s work is the development of student-centered IEP goals and determination of how IEP team members will help the student achieve those goals. Working together, the IEP team sets the tone for collaboration throughout the implementation of the IEP. Collaboration is a process in which team members share their unique knowledge, expertise, and skills to identify and address the needs of students (Division for Early Childhood, 2016; Hanft et al., 2019). Interprofessional collaboration in education and practice leads to greater understanding of others’ roles and enhances outcomes (Interprofessional Education Collaborative, 2016). Collaborative goals can be defined as IEP goals written by IEP team members working together to engage in mutual problem solving and decision making to identify and prioritize student needs.

Using This Resource

This document highlights a process for IEP team members to collaborate to develop IEP goals to support students with disabilities in participation in school life. A group of occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs), physical therapists (PTs), and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) with extensive experience in school practice worked together to summarize considerations for collaborative goal writing. However, the information shared in this document was designed for use by any team of professionals developing collaborative IEP goals, and can be shared with administrators, families, IEP team members, and advocates to demonstrate the steps involved in this process.

Writing Collaborative Goals in School-Based Practice

The foundation for collaborative goal writing is a strong educational team where members articulate their scope of practice clearly, demonstrate their value, and understand the contribution of others. Establishing a process for implementing collaborative goals takes an investment of time; therefore, teams will need to identify strategies for joint planning and for building team skills. Initial steps include sharing information with educational teams and parents, identifying times/strategies for planning, and creating a timeline to begin the process. It may be pragmatic for teams to consider a gradual transition to a collaborative goals approach on a case-by-case basis.

Collaborative goal writing incorporates the best practices of goal writing as well as considerations for how multiple service providers can facilitate a student's achievement of the goal. This approach focuses on functional skills in typical school environments to facilitate participation throughout the school day.

IEP goals should (Doran, 1981; Hanft et al., 2019):

- have a clear focus on the area to be addressed
- include a description of measurable progress
- be achievable in the context of school routines
- connect to the student's overarching educational goals
- include a time frame or criterion for achievement.

The Collaborative Goal Writing Process

In designing collaborative goals for a student, the IEP team can consider the following process.



The table below captures a collaborative goal writing process applied to a sample case scenario. The first column pertains to educational impact, which describes how a student's difficulty affects their educational performance. The educational impact identifies the area to be addressed in the IEP goal. Consideration of educational impact and the student's strengths and needs can assist the IEP team in writing collaborative IEP goals. Having established collaborative IEP goals, IEP team members should work together to determine how to collect data on student progress and share how they plan to address the goal with the student.

Table 1. Example Collaborative Goal Writing Process

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| Educational Impact | Student is having difficulty independently completing more than 10% of a 1-page written assignment (e.g., 1 of 10 short answers or fill-in-the blank answers) |
| Present Levels (based on evaluation data) | Cannot sit up in a chair for more than 5 minutes without leaning on the desk due to low muscle tone and fatigue Decreased ability to write due to poor fine motor skills, inattention, literacy level, and working memory Difficulty following instructions and asking for help due to expressive and receptive language, short-term memory, and sequencing problems Busy classroom environment with music playing, students talking, and movement around the room |
| Collaborative Goal | Student will demonstrate improved participation in classroom activities with his peers by independently completing 50% of a written assignment in the same amount of time used by his classmates, at least 3 out of 4 opportunities per week, for 4 consecutive weeks as measured by teacher/service provider report, classroom observations, and work samples. |

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| <p>How is the Goal Being Addressed?</p> | <p>PT: provide adaptive seating, work with classroom teacher on incorporating core strengthening activities into daily movement breaks, collaborate with PE teacher on core strengthening exercises</p> <p>OTP: provide assistive technology support for using voice-to-text and other technology to promote work completion and demonstration of knowledge; work with student and teachers to integrate self-regulation strategies throughout the school day; provide visual supports for sequencing assignments and organizing materials; establish quiet spaces for working</p> <p>SLP: provide expressive and receptive language activities linked to the classroom curriculum and themes; coach in the use of compensatory strategies (e.g., lists for sequencing and short-term memory; create visual supports for assignment instructions)</p> <p>General Education Teacher: develop grade-level-appropriate activities; provide modification to only complete 50% of each writing assignment; use visual supports throughout instructional day; incorporate movement, self-regulation, and strengthening activities</p> <p>Special Education Teacher: implement specially designed instruction related to literacy development; collaborate with general education teacher to set expectations for modified assignments; integrate self-regulation and strengthening activities; instruct in the use of assistive technology; facilitate communication across team members</p> |
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Table 2. Frequently Asked Questions

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| <p>Does IDEA require discipline-specific goals?</p> | <p>Although IDEA requires a statement of the special education and related services that students require to work toward achieving their goals, it does not specify that each service provider writes discipline-specific goals. IEP goals are individualized to the student and do not belong to any specific discipline.</p> |
| <p>How does the IEP team document progress on collaborative goals?</p> | <p>Providers should collaborate to develop data collection and analysis systems to track progress and make informed decisions about interventions, service provision, and goal achievement. Examples of data collection systems include but are not limited to rubrics, checklists, and data sheets.</p> |
| <p>What about reimbursement?</p> | <p>Medicaid is regulated by state rules. Providers must follow their state-specific Medicaid requirements for guidelines related to medical necessity, referrals, and documentation (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.; Holahan, 2019; American Physical Therapy Association, 2009). Medicaid reimbursement does not determine how an IEP is developed or if occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech-language pathology services will be provided (Massachusetts Tri-Alliance of School Therapists, 2019).</p> |

Conclusion

The American Occupational Therapy Association, the American Physical Therapy Association, and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association are committed to and encourage interprofessional collaboration to maximize outcomes for clients across the lifespan. In school-based practice, one element of this may be the development of collaborative student-centered goals where interprofessional skills and knowledge are integrated to facilitate the student's access to and participation in their educational program. Interprofessional practice:

- Facilitates collaborative goal development by encouraging team ownership of goals
- Promotes the connection between the contributions of team members and academic and functional goals
- Fosters skill generalization through development of skills in goals across environments and with a variety of professionals

Strategies for dissemination:

- Schedule an in-service session (in-person or virtual) with school staff and parent associations to share how collaborative goals support student participation and outcomes
- Meet with school administrators to advocate and plan for the process of expanding or transitioning to a collaborative goals approach
- Share the document with related service and special education colleagues to consider how collaborative goal writing might work in your schools
- Talk with parents/guardians on an individual basis to explore how collaborative goals may benefit their student

Additional Resources

American Occupational Therapy Association <https://www.ota.org/practice/practice-essentials>

American Physical Therapy Association <https://www.apta.org/for-educators/interprofessional-collaboration>

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association <https://www.asha.org/practice/ipe-ipp/>

References

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American Speech Language Hearing Association. (n.d.). *Medicaid in the schools*. <https://www.asha.org/Practice/reimbursement/medicaid/Medicaid-Toolkit-Schools/>

Division for Early Childhood. (2016). *DEC recommended practices*. <http://www.dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices>

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