

# Benchmarks or Short-Term Objectives

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## **Alert! Alert!**

Because NICHCY's website will only remain online until September 30, 2014, most of its rich content has moved to a new home, the **Center for Parent Information and Resources** (CPIR), where it can be kept up to date.

The new address of *Benchmarks or Short-Term Objectives* at the CPIR is:

<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/benchmarks/>

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In the past, **benchmarks or short-term objectives** were required elements in every child's IEP. No longer, however. Now, benchmarks or short-term objectives are required **only** for children with disabilities who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards.

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## IDEA's Exact Words

Here's the verbatim requirement for this component of the IEP.

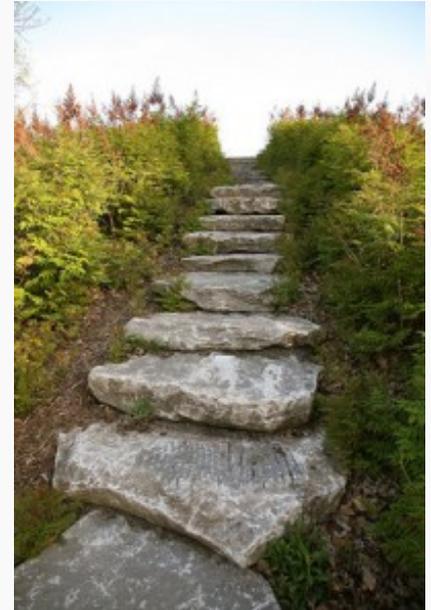
(ii) For children with disabilities who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards, a description of benchmarks or short-term objectives... §300.320(a)(2)(ii)

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## The Purpose of Benchmarks and Short-Term Objectives

One of the changes made by the 2004 Amendments to IDEA concerns the requirement for benchmarks or short-term objectives in IEPs. Previously, benchmarks or short-term objectives were required to be developed in correlation with a child's annual IEP goals. While this requirement changed in the 2004 reauthorization, their general purpose has not.

Benchmarks indicate the interim steps a child will take to reach an annual goal. They also serve as a measurement gauge to monitor a child's progress and determine if the child is making sufficient progress towards attaining an annual goal. Using a roadmap analogy, benchmarks and short-term objectives are used to divide the



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trip to the final destination into concrete, smaller steps.

### **An Example**

Here's an example of an annual goal with short-term objectives for a student named David. The IEP team developed David's reading goal and objectives by looking at the information in his **present level** statement. Then they determined the skills that David needs to learn in order for him to be able to read at a 5th grade level.

*Annual Goal: David will achieve a reading score at the 5th grade level or above, as measured by the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI).*

#### *Short-term Objectives*

- 1. By October, when given a list of 20 unfamiliar words that contain short-vowel sounds, David will decode them with 90% accuracy on each of 5 trials.*
- 2. By October, when given 20 unfamiliar words that contain long-vowel sounds, David will decode them with 90% accuracy on each of 5 trials.*
- 3. By December, David will correctly pronounce 20 words with 90% accuracy on each of 5 trials to demonstrate understanding of the rule that where one vowel follows another, the first vowel is pronounced with a long sound and the second vowel is silent (ordeal, coast).*
- 4. By December, David will correctly separate 20 words by syllables with 90% accuracy on each of 5 trials to demonstrate understanding of the rule that each syllable in a word must contain a vowel (les-son).*

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## **For Whom Are Benchmarks or Objectives Required?**

As was said above, **now benchmarks or short-term objectives are required only for children who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards** (e.g., an alternate, non-standard curriculum). Alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards are intended for children with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

While this type of alternate assessment must be linked to grade-level content, it typically does not *fully* represent grade-level content, only a sampling of it. Moreover, this type of alternate assessment may be linked to "extended content standards" that a state develops, standards that may restrict or simplify grade-level content in order to make it accessible to children with the most significant cognitive disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. 18). The state may define these content standards in grade clusters (e.g., grades 3-5).

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## **And for Other Children? At a State's Discretion**

Interestingly, states may still choose to use benchmarks with other children, but this is a matter left up to local discretion, as the Department of Education (2006) states:

Benchmarks and short-term objectives were specifically removed from...the Act. However, because benchmarks and short-term objectives were originally intended to assist parents in monitoring their child's progress toward meeting the child's annual goals, we believe a State could, if it chose to do so, determine the extent to which short-term objectives and benchmarks would be used. However, ...a State that chooses to require benchmarks or short-term objectives in IEPs in that State would have to identify in writing to the LEAs located in the State and to

the Secretary that such rule, regulation, or policy is a State-imposed requirement, which is not required by Part B of the Act or the Federal regulations. (71 Fed. Reg. at 46663)

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## References

Rebhorn, T. (2009). Developing your child's IEP. *A Parent's Guide*, 12, 1-28. Available online at: <http://nichcy.org/publications/pa12>

U.S. Department of Education. (2006). Analysis of comments and changes. *Federal Register*, 71(156), 46540-46752. Available online at: <http://nichcy.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/IDEA2004regulations.pdf>

U.S. Department of Education. (2007, April). *Modified academic achievement standards* [non-regulatory guidance draft]. Washington, DC: Author. Available online at: [www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/nclb/twopercent.doc](http://www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/nclb/twopercent.doc)

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## Would you like to read about another component of the IEP?

If so, use the links below to jump there quickly.

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### Present Levels

How is the child currently doing in school? How does the disability affect his or her performance in class? This type of information is captured in the "present levels" statement in the IEP.

### Annual Goals

Once a child's needs are identified, the IEP team works to develop appropriate goals to address those needs. *Annual goal* describe what the child is expected to do or learn within a 12-month period.

### Benchmarks or Short-Term Objectives (you're already here!)

Benchmarks or short-term objectives are required only for children with disabilities who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards. If you're wondering what that means, this article will tell you!

### Measuring and Reporting Progress

Each child's IEP must also contain a description of how his or her progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured and when it will be reported to parents. Learn more about how to write this statement in this short article.

### Special Education

The IEP must contain a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the child, or on behalf of the child. This article focuses on the first element: a statement of the special education that will be provided for the child.

### Related Services

To help a child with a disability benefit from special education, he or she may also need extra help in one area or another, such as speaking or moving. This additional help is called *related services*. Find out all about these critical services here.

### Supplementary Aids and Services

Supplementary aids and services are intended to improve children's access to learning and their participation

across the spectrum of academic, extracurricular, and nonacademic activities and settings. The IEP team must determine what supplementary aids and services a child will need and specify them in the IEP.

### **Program Modifications for School Personnel**

Also part of the IEP is identifying the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided. Read more here.

### **Extent of Nonparticipation**

The IEP must also include an explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and in other school settings and activities. Read how this connects to IDEA's foundational principle of LRE.

### **Accommodations in Assessment**

IDEA requires that students with disabilities take part in *state or districtwide assessments*. The IEP team must decide if the student needs accommodations in testing or another type of assessment entirely. In this component of the IEP, the team documents how the student will participate.

### **Service Delivery**

When will the child begin to receive services? Where? How often? How long will a "session" last? Pesky details, but important to include in the IEP!

### **Transition Planning**

Beginning no later than a student's 16th birthday (and younger, if appropriate), the IEP must contain transition-related plans designed to help the student prepare for life after secondary school.

### **Age of Majority**

Beginning at least one year before the student reaches the age of majority, the IEP must include a statement that the student has been told about the rights (if any) that will transfer to him or her at age of majority. What is "age of majority" and what does this statement in the IEP look like?

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