Supporting Students with Behavioral Challenges Through the Individualized Education Plan

Think of a student or child you are currently working with who is struggling with a behavioral skill...

What behavior is of most concern? Why? Is this behavior socially significant? Does it impact the student’s independence? Their ability to communicate and/or to learn? Is it a safety/quality of life concern?

What behavior is of most concern to the family? To the student? Why?

If the behaviors of concern for the family and/or student do not match with those raised by the others (e.g., school, family, and/or student), list what you might consider to help address the concerns and any differences. Discussion? Data?

Focus on one behavior at a time. Tell us more about this behavior.

1. What does it look like (observable and measurable)?

2. When/where is the behavior occurring? How about not occurring?

3. Does the behavior occur at school, at home, in the community?
4. What is the frequency, duration of the behavior, etc.?

5. What is the expected behavior?

---

**Expected Behaviors (we will focus on increasing expected behaviors in the IEP)**

**Let’s define the Expected Behavior with Examples and Non-examples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of the Behavior</th>
<th>Non-examples of the Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can come from your problem behavior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Expected Behavior Critical Skills - Circle one behavior to focus on.**

1. Using the chart above, what is a critical skill the student needs to know to perform the expected behavior?

   How do we know whether the student is performing this skill?
   - When does the student experience challenges?
   - What does the behavior of concern look like (specific, observable, measureable)
   - What changes as a result (antecedent, behavior, consequence)

2. Is the student performing the critical skill for the expected behavior (Acquisition)?
3. How frequently, for what duration, etc. do we expect the student to engage in the critical skill for expected behavior? What is the frequency, duration of the critical skill for expected behavior (fluency)?

4. If the student is already performing the critical skill for the expected behavior, does the behavior maintain over time, or does it have to be retaught (maintenance)?

5. Where/when is the student expected to perform the critical skill for the expected behavior? What about outside of school?

6. If the student is already performing the critical skill for the expected behavior, does the student perform the behavior in multiple settings with multiple teachers, at different points in time (generalization)?

How will you assess the critical skill over time to measure progress and the appropriateness of the IEP?

Look at the above questions to consider the stage of learning for the student and where the student should be within one year? What type of system of measurement is necessary for progress monitoring?

Circle all that apply, does the student need to perform the skill
- accurately,
- more fluently,
- without reteaching, or
- in more settings/times of day/teachers?

How will we assess progress being made for that skill?

Let’s write our IEP Goal. Goals and Objectives should contain:
1. Conditions
2. Student
3. Behavior
4. Criteria (matches your system of measurement)

Example:

Write a goal that sets out the critical skill and how to assess it. Does your goal cover the four components? Does it reflect the student’s stage of learning?

Accommodations/Modifications

Does the student need any accommodations or modifications to support their ability to perform the skill? List out individual accommodations or modifications that match the student’s need and help support their ability to achieve the targeted critical skill.

List any relevant accommodations/modifications
IEP Resources

An Overview of Endrew F.

Supporting Students with Disabilities in a Classroom

Strategies for Setting Data-Driven Behavioral IEP Goals

Developing High Quality IEP’s Module
https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/iep01/#content

Overview of High Quality IEPs
https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/iep01/cresource/q1/p01/

IEP Process Common Errors

Monitoring Process Toward IEP Goals

How administrators can support the development of high quality IEPs
https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/iep02/
Strategies for Setting Data-Driven Behavioral Individualized Education Program Goals

Authors: Teri A. Marx, PhD, and Faith G. Miller, PhD
Strategies for Setting Data-Driven Behavioral Individualized Education Program Goals

Teri A. Marx, PhD
National Center on Intensive Intervention at the American Institutes for Research

Faith G. Miller, PhD
University of Minnesota–Twin Cities

The authors would like to thank Dr. Chris Riley-Tillman and Dr. Mitchell Yell for their helpful feedback on this guide.

February 2020
Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 1

What Do Quality Behavioral IEP Goals Include? ................................................................. 2

How Do We Know Which Behavior(s) to Address Through an IEP Goal? ......................... 2
  Identify, Prioritize, and Operationalize Behavior(s) .......................................................... 3
  Identify the Function of the Student’s Behavior ................................................................. 3
  Identify and Operationalize a Functionally Relevant Replacement Behavior That Can Be Taught and Progress Monitored ................................................................. 3

What About the Behavior(s) of Concern? ............................................................................. 4

How Do We Set Goals and Progress Monitor? ................................................................... 4
  Determine the Measurement.............................................................................................. 5
  Establish Baseline of Student Performance ..................................................................... 5
  Set a Measurable and Realistic Goal ............................................................................... 6
  Evaluate Progress Using Graphed Data ........................................................................... 6

What Are the Common Challenges and How Can We Address Them? .............................. 6

Resources and Tools ........................................................................................................... 6

Glossary .................................................................................................................................. 8
Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of behavioral progress monitoring and goal setting to inform data-driven decision making within tiered support models and individualized education programs (IEPs).

The 2017 Supreme Court decision Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District highlighted the importance of monitoring students’ progress toward appropriately ambitious IEP annual goals and making changes to students’ educational programs when needed. The process for setting an IEP goal should be closely tied to progress monitoring, a valid and reliable method for providing frequent, ongoing assessment of a student’s performance.

What is the purpose of behavioral progress monitoring?

- To collect frequent, repeated, and ongoing information regarding student performance to support timely and defensible data-based decision making about behavioral supports.

- Helps ensure links between assessment and instruction/intervention within data-based decision-making processes, including data-based individualization (DBI).

Why is setting goals important?

We can’t determine if what we’re doing is working if we don’t know what success looks like and track progress across time!

What Is DBI?

DBI is an ongoing, systematic process that integrates assessment and instruction.

![DBI Flowchart](image)
What Do Quality Behavioral IEP Goals Include?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components*</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Sample goal language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time frame</strong></td>
<td>When mastery will be obtained</td>
<td>By the end of the academic year, . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment condition</strong></td>
<td>Task material/tool</td>
<td>When presented a difficult task, . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade level</td>
<td>During whole group math instruction, . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Setting/timing</td>
<td>During social skills instruction, . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target behavior</strong></td>
<td>Observable, functionally relevant replacement behavior</td>
<td>Student will use a learned strategy to de-escalate . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student will appropriately ask for help . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student will appropriately seek peer attention . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supports needed (if applicable)</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Independently . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reminder</td>
<td>With no more than two reminders needed . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prompt</td>
<td>When prompted . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of proficiency/timeline</strong></td>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>From 50% accuracy to 80% accuracy . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>At least 80% of the instructional period . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of trials</td>
<td>During 8 of 10 peer interactions, . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Measurement</strong></td>
<td>Direct observation</td>
<td>As measured bi-weekly, 20-minute systematic direct observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct behavior rating (DBR)</td>
<td>As measured by DBR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency counts</td>
<td>As measured by daily frequency counts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Always check with your state or district regulations, policy, and/or guidance first.

How Do We Know Which Behavior(s) to Address Through an IEP Goal?

Setting behavioral IEP goals for a student with a disability often poses a challenge for educators because behavior(s) of concern may change more frequently than reporting and/or goal review requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). As a result, the following recommendations may support behavioral IEP goal development:

- The behavior should be observable, measurable, and amenable to change.
- The goal should focus on student behavior, not educator behavior.
- The goal should address the present levels of academic and functional performance identified through data collection (i.e., Antecedents, Behaviors, and Consequences [A, B, and C] checklists; target behavior interviews; classroom observation).
- The goal should focus on a skill the student needs to master.

The steps that follow outline how we can ensure that our IEP goals appropriately address student needs.
Identify, Prioritize, and Operationalize Behavior(s)

Identify
First consider the school/classroom context by answering the following question: Do data suggest that a specific behavior is a broader issue impacting more than one student?
- If so, consider adjusting the classroom environment.
- If not, collect additional information about Antecedents, Behaviors, and Consequences.

Prioritize
If a student demonstrates multiple behaviors of concern, prioritize which behavior(s) should be addressed (e.g., high intensity, increased frequency, dangerous, or self-injurious).

Operationalize
Practice defining behaviors of concern in observable and measurable terms.
- Delineate boundaries (i.e., anchored examples and nonexamples).
- Aggression is hitting. Aggression is not patting peer on back/high five.

Identify the Function of the Student’s Behavior
- Why is the student engaging in the behavior?
  - Is it to get something (e.g., attention from peers/teacher)?
  - Is it to avoid something (e.g., difficult task)?
  - Is it because the student doesn’t have the necessary skills (e.g., academic, functional, or social-emotional)?
- Consider these Common Problem Behaviors and Some Usual Suspects for Functional Antecedents and Consequences.

Identify and Operationalize a Functionally Relevant Replacement Behavior That Can Be Taught and Progress Monitored
- Replacement behaviors are observable and teachable behaviors.
- Replacement behaviors address the same function as a student’s behavior of concern but in a more socially acceptable way.
- Replacement behaviors are measurable.
  - This may require operationally defining the replacement behavior (including creating anchored examples and nonexamples).

Remember!
Behaviors are not just problematic to others, like disruptive behavior. They also include behaviors that are problematic to the student, such as internalizing/withdrawing; social skills, organizational, or attention deficits; or a lack of engagement.
Important Reminders!

- IEP goals should focus on the replacement behaviors.

  **Example:**
  Miranda will increase the frequency of raising her hand in class.

  **Nonexample:**
  Miranda will decrease the frequency of loud outbursts in class.

- Why is this a nonexample? Although we certainly want loud outbursts to decrease (and can continue to measure this target behavior), an IEP goal should focus on what we want the student to learn and be able to do after a skill/replacement behavior is taught to the student.

- Some behaviors (e.g., escape/avoidance) may be reduced or eliminated solely by addressing academic deficits. In these instances, a team may determine that monitoring academic performance on the IEP is sufficient.

What About the Behavior(s) of Concern?

A behavioral IEP goal should focus on an observable replacement behavior, but we can simultaneously monitor the student’s behavior of concern to determine if/when a change to the student’s program is needed. Collecting data on both behaviors of concern and replacement behaviors also allows the IEP team to provide more timely information to parents and families.

How Do We Set Goals and Progress Monitor?

**Determine the Measurement**

- **Tool/approach** (e.g., observation, DBR)
- **Scale for measurement** (e.g., 1–10 rating, frequency count, percentage of time)
- **Frequency of data collection** (e.g., hourly, daily, weekly)
- **Context for assessment** (e.g., setting, individual responsible)
- **Decision/evaluation rules** (i.e., how will we know if the student is responsive? And by when?)

**Tool Highlight: Direct Behavior Rating (DBR)**

- DBR is an evidence-based and feasible method for collecting data on student behavior that merges a rating scale approach and direct observation.
- DBR is used repeatedly to represent behavior that occurs during a specified period of time (e.g., 4 weeks) and under specific and similar conditions (e.g., after first period).

For more information, see [https://www.dbr.education.uconn.edu/assessment](https://www.dbr.education.uconn.edu/assessment).
Establish Baseline of Student Performance

Unless there is an ethical reason to begin immediate intervention, we should collect at least five data points to establish baseline performance. Ideally, these data should be stable; highly variable data may suggest a need to collect additional baseline data and revisit the operationally defined behavior(s) and anchors for accuracy.

Set a Measurable and Realistic Goal

We should set a long-term goal (e.g., an annual goal in an IEP) at approximately 80%–90% accuracy/frequently (for behaviors we want to increase) or 10%–20% (for behaviors we want to decrease)—or at a rate/level that is commensurate with typical peers’ performance. We may start with measuring progress at a lower rate/level (e.g., 60%) and increase the goal because the student consistently demonstrates that he or she is meeting the goal at a lower rate/level. Goal changes should be communicated with the student’s team, including the student and his or her parent/family.

- The goal should be monitored with enough frequency to determine progress and make timely instructional/intervention decisions.
- The goal should be measured using an objective, valid, and reliable measure (e.g., DBR, systematic direct observation) rather than a more subjective measure (e.g., teacher anecdotal notes).
- The goal should be realistic, yet ambitious.
  - If peers aren’t expected to perform with 100% accuracy/frequency, we shouldn’t expect that rate from students with disabilities.
  - In many cases, setting a goal at 50% accuracy/frequency is basically saying that the behavior will happen by mere chance alone. We need to raise expectations for student performance to a rate commensurate with peers.
### Evaluate Progress Using Graphed Data

- If you are trying to decrease the rate of a problem behavior (e.g., aggression, hitting, kicking), we should expect to see the behavior decrease at a rate/level commensurate with how peers are performing. No student is perfect 100% of the time.

- If it is a behavior that we are trying to increase (e.g., use of a coping strategy, academic engagement), we should expect to see the behavior increase at a rate/level commensurate with how peers are performing.

- If the student is meeting his or her goal consistently at the initial review date, consider
  - gradually increasing the goal, or
  - gradually fading supports but continuing to collect data.

- If the student is not making adequate progress toward his or her goal, consider the following:
  - **Review data to adapt or intensify instruction/intervention.**
  - **Change the reinforcer or increase the schedule of reinforcement.**
  - Revisit A, B, C data to ensure the intervention is addressing the correct function.

- Interpret student responsiveness to intervention by analyzing graphed data (postintervention comparison to baseline performance) for variability, level, and trends.

### What Are the Common Challenges and How Can We Address Them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools collect a lot of data but lack comprehensive data systems and</td>
<td>Establish processes for regular input of collected data (assign roles and responsibilities) and use data to inform analysis of student response to intervention/instruction in their area of need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>processes to inform data-based decision making in behavior.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral goals are set using outdated or mis-specified data (e.g.,</td>
<td>Collect and analyze regular progress monitoring data to truly understand the nature/function of the problem and underlying issues (e.g., Has the student demonstrated the appropriate behavior previously? In other settings? Is the student learning a new skill?).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not aligned to the appropriate function, address a “can’t do” problem as a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“won’t do” problem).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral goals are subjective or unmeasurable (e.g., student will</td>
<td>Focus behavioral IEP goals on a skill that can be taught and measured (e.g., student will use a self-management strategy).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve motivation) or focus on measuring an adult behavior (e.g.,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student will raise hand with less than three teacher prompts).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Focus behavioral IEP goals on what you want the student to start doing, rather than stop*
Resources and Tools

NCII Behavior Progress Monitoring Tools. The National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII) has developed tools charts that are published to assist educators and families in becoming informed consumers who can select academic and behavioral progress monitoring tools. These charts display expert ratings on the technical rigor of assessments. The submission process is voluntary, and reviews of all eligible submissions are posted on the chart.

Monitoring Student Progress for Behavioral Interventions. This module focuses on behavioral progress monitoring within the context of the DBI process and addresses (a) methods available for behavioral progress monitoring, including but not limited to DBR, and (b) using progress monitoring data to make decisions about behavioral interventions.

Recommendations and Resources for Preparing Educators in the Endrew Era. In this webinar, Drs. Mitch Yell and David Bateman provide an overview of Endrew’s impact on individualized instruction for students with disabilities and share six recommendations for preparing educators to meet the clarified requirements under Endrew. Drs. Tessie Bailey and Teri Marx illustrate how NCII resources and technical assistance supports can assist states, local agencies, and educators in addressing these recommendations and improve the design and delivery of individualized instruction in academics and behavior.

Behavior Support for Intensive Intervention. This course content is designed to support faculty and professional development providers with instructing preservice and in-service educators who are developing and/or refining their implementation of behavior support in intensive intervention. Module 6 is particularly helpful in describing how to define, measure, and monitor behavior, whereas Module 7 explains how to use that data to inform decision making in the classroom.

IRIS Module: IEPs: Developing High-Quality Individualized Education Programs. This module details the process of developing high-quality IEPs for students with disabilities. The module discusses the requirements for IEPs as outlined in the IDEA, with implications of the Supreme Court’s ruling in Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District.

IRIS Module: IEPs: How Administrators Can Support the Development and Implementation of High-Quality IEPs. This module is designed for school administrators and offers guidance on how to support and facilitate the development and implementation of high-quality IEPs, including the monitoring of student progress.
Glossary

**Annual Goal.** In the IEP, annual goals are “academic and functional goals designed to meet the child’s needs that result from the child’s disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum” [Sec. 300.320(a)(2)(i)(A), IDEA Regulations, 2006]. An annual goal generally includes three parts: conditions under which the goal will be achieved, the behavior that will need to be demonstrated, and the criteria for mastery of the goal.

**Condition.** This specifies the setting, accommodations, and description of the assessment method or the manner in which progress toward the goal is measured.

**Direct Behavior Rating (DBR).** A method for measuring a student’s behavior that involves rating the behavior following a specified observation period.

**Function.** The purpose that the behavior serves for the individual (e.g., obtaining or avoiding something).

**Goal Line.** A line on the student’s progress monitoring graph that connects the data point representing the student’s baseline performance to his or her goal.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP).** A written document that is developed, reviewed, and revised per IDEA that outlines the special education and related services specifically designed to meet the unique educational needs of a student with a disability.

**Level.** The average value of a set of scores or ratings. You want to see an increase/decrease (depending on the measured skill) in a behavior and between the baseline intervention phases.

**Present Level of Academic and Functional Performance (PLAAFP).** The PLAAFP is a statement in the IEP that describes “how the child’s disability affects the child’s involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children)” [Sec. 300.320(a)(1)(i), IDEA, 2017] and includes baseline data for the annual goals.

**Progress Monitoring.** Progress monitoring is repeated measurement of student performance used to inform instruction of individual students in general and special education.

**Reliable.** Reliability is the extent to which scores are accurate and consistent.

**Replacement Behavior.** The behavior the educator wants the student to engage in.

**Systematic Direct Observation.** The process of watching a person or environment for a period of time and systematically recording behavior.
**Target Behavior.** In an IEP goal, the behavior identifies the performance being monitored and reflects an action that can be directly observed and is measurable.

**Trend.** The direction or slope of the data path, which must be considered in light of the target behavior (i.e., increasing engagement is good; increasing disruptiveness is not). When analyzing graphed data for trends, you also may consider the steepness of the trends—or how quickly data are increasing or decreasing.

**Validity.** The extent to which scores represent the underlying construct. In other words, the extent to which the score means something (i.e., measures what it purports to measure).

**Variability.** Spread or consistency of the data helps determine if performance is stable or variable. Highly variable data may indicate that your tool isn’t accurately measuring the student’s skills, there are implementation fidelity issues, and/or that the behavior you selected to measure isn’t appropriate.
About the American Institutes for Research

Established in 1946, with headquarters in Washington, D.C., the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance, both domestically and internationally, in the areas of education, health, and the workforce. For more information, visit www.air.org.

1000 Thomas Jefferson Street NW
Washington, DC 20007-3835
202.403.5000

This document was produced under U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Grant No. HH326Q160001. Celia Rosenquist is the OSEP project officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service, or enterprise mentioned in this publication is intended or should be inferred. This product is public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted. Although permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, the citation should be: Marx, T. A., & Miller, F. G. (2020). Strategies for setting data-driven behavioral individualized education program goals. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, National Center on Intensive Intervention.