

ROAD MAP TO SUCCESS

by Calvin and Tricia Luker

All students can succeed in the future if their potential is maximized today. They can be involved in their communities, have friends, and contribute to the wider adult community. These goals do not change because of a disability. Each child's school career is a journey with a beginning and a destination. The journey's destination or goal is to prepare the student to meet the following needs:

- ◆ Academic
- ◆ Employment
- ◆ Civic
- ◆ Physical
- ◆ Cultural
- ◆ Social

The vehicles for reaching this destination are learning communities that emphasize the lifelong skills and knowledge necessary to:

- ◆ become independent
- ◆ develop lasting friendships
- ◆ continue learning
- ◆ solve problems
- ◆ use information and technology effectively
- ◆ enjoy productive employment
- ◆ meet citizenship obligations
- ◆ interact with others successfully

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Although the destination for each child attending school is the same, the travel time and route taken will vary. The route any child will take *might* be mapped out. However, for the child with a disability, an individual route *must* be mapped out through the Independent Educational Planning Committee [IEPC] process. The journey's vehicles are fueled by the knowledge and assessment of the student's gifts, talents, unchallenged or under recognized abilities, and learning styles. This fuel is produced by:

- ◆ asking the central people in the student's life, ideally the parents and family;
- ◆ observing the student outside of school as well as in school; and
- ◆ measuring and recording what does and does not work for her.

The IEP is the educational road map for the student with a disability. The following principles should guide the development of the IEP:

- ◆ All children belong in and to the community where they live;
- ◆ The goal of education is to enhance the pursuit of a meaningful life;
- ◆ The child's success is built in part on the family and community support systems;
- ◆ Teams working through collaborative relationships are essential to ensuring that each child's educational experience is a success;
- ◆ Team planning must embrace trust and respect for each person's experience, which supports flexibility and adaptability;
- ◆ Parents have dreams for their children and the children have their own dreams. School personnel must understand a family's background and culture in order to understand these dreams.
- ◆ Using problem-solving methods and proactive services promote the success of long-term goal planning for children; and
- ◆ Special Education is the process of designing services and supports for a specific child; it is not a place to which children are assigned.

In order to reach the destination, everyone needs to follow the map – that is to implement the IEP – in the spirit in which it was developed. Families and schools, working together, should be on the look out

for unexpected curves in the road and remember that the journey is continuous, requiring constant reviewing and updating. Formal reporting to parents should follow the natural schedule of the school.

The teacher's plans should reflect the individual child's road map, taking into account the diversity of the school community.

Traveling together will go smoothly, if everyone agrees to:

- ◆ Work together as part of a team;
- ◆ Focus on the strengths and gifts of each student;
- ◆ Build relationships with each other;
- ◆ Adapt the curriculum to meet each child's individual needs;
- ◆ Vary teaching methods; and
- ◆ Be flexible and willing to take risks.

PREPARE FOR EMERGENCIES OR HAZARDS:

- ◆ Understand that not everyone may agree on the year's destination or travel route;
- ◆ Expect that your commitment to working together may be challenged;
- ◆ Anticipate that you may need additional information, resources, or roadside assistance; and
- ◆ Accept that detours or delays may result when the road ahead becomes bumpy or impassable.

WRITING INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATIONAL PLANS

The IEP development process – planning the trip and drawing out the road map – contains five sequential steps and requires seven considerations to produce the written IEP document. The process answers the following questions:

◆ **Where have we been? [*Long term vision for the child*]**

Review the results of the evaluation team report and/or the current IEP and any new information. Talk about what strategies worked well this past year and about those that didn't work so well. Ask everyone on the team about his or her sense of how things are going, where the child is doing well, and where additional help is needed.

◆ **Where are we now? [*What she knows and does well*]**

Determine the area(s) of the child's needs as well as his/her strengths and interests. Review what techniques and strategies have worked best. Learn about the child's life outside of school, and his/her role as a family and community member. This information helps to gain a better understanding of the child's present levels of educational performance, and to outline those present levels on her IEP.

◆ **How far we can get this year? [*This year's annual goals and objectives*]**

Write goals and objectives that will have value to the child, build on his/her strengths, and help him/her reach his/her long-range goals. Start with standards for regular education students and design modifications and interventions to accommodate his needs. Determine how progress will be evaluated in an effective and meaningful way.

◆ **How will we get there? [*What services will be provided?*]**

Determine what special education and related services will be needed to implement the goals and objectives. Describe these specific services on the child's IEP. Document modifications and accommodations needed by the child for her to be successful in the general education classroom.

◆ **What route will we take? [*Where services will be provided?*]**

Assume the child will be in general education classes with his same-age peers. Talk about modifications and services needed to make that successful. Only remove the child from the general education classroom for times when the team agrees that his needs cannot possibly be met there. Develop a plan that is as natural as possible, understanding that for very young children, home and/or a community preschool might be the most appropriate setting in which to meet the child's needs.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The IEP is a plan of education tailored to the needs of a special student. It describes a child's or student's educational needs, identifies learning and developmental deficiencies, and proposes a set of achievements for the student. It is a guide to the professional staff responsible for implementing it or supervising its implementation.

The value of an IEP depends on the quality of its communication. Poorly written objectives pose problems for the teacher who must implement the plan and for the administrator who must justify the plan to State IEP auditors. That is why well written goals and objectives are crucial to IEP success. Attempting to evaluate student progress toward unclear objectives is a futile task.

We frequently use the terms "goal" and "objective" loosely and interchangeably to indicate purpose or intent as:

- ◆ My goal is to get a good job, save some money and travel.
- ◆ Our objective is to increase customer satisfaction while maintaining profits.
- ◆ My primary objective is to finish college.
- ◆ The goal of most people is to achieve happiness.

In education "goal" and "objective" define anticipated or hoped-for-learning by a student. They spell out what a student is expected to accomplish, to develop, to be able to do, to improve. It is common in the teaching profession to use "objective" instead of the more precise term, "behavioral objective." Throughout this session we will use the terms "goal" and "objective."

GOAL: A general statement of the intention to overcome a deficit in a specific area. It is based on a need identified through an evaluation process.

OBJECTIVE: A specific skill, development, ability, or change within the goal area which the student is expected to achieve.

Since the time frame of an IEP is usually (though not necessarily) one school year, we will assume that time frame. All goals and objectives to be achieved within the designated time should appear in a student's IEP.

WRITING GOALS FOR IEPS

A goal statement indicates a clearly defined area of learning or development. It does not have to be observable but it should be limited in its scope. For instance, “Improve in spelling” or “Increase fine motor control” designate limited areas of learning.

Within each goal there are specific skills which may be broken out. A goal is achieved for the year when the student shows that he or she can regularly perform a set of such preestablished skills.

The same goal wording may be used for students of widely differing abilities. The goal “Increase vocabulary” covers a large range.

For instance, a K-12 curriculum might have 10 or 20 or more vocabulary “levels.” A first grade student might be expected to achieve level #2 while a high school senior could be expected to master level #18. Yet the IEPS for both of these students could have the goal to “Increase vocabulary.”

Therefore, when applying a goal to a student we consider:

- (a) the age of the student;
- (b) the present level of the student’s learning ability; and
- (c) the disability or limitations the student has to cope with.

GOOD IEP GOALS:

- ◆ Focus on and flow from the child’s needs;
- ◆ Share the family’s and the school’s agreement and commitment;
- ◆ Promote valued activities and set standards that are typical of others who are the same age as the child;
- ◆ Support school and community membership; and
- ◆ Facilitate achieving the child and family’s long-range goals.

SAMPLE GOAL STATEMENTS

ACCEPTABLE

Read with comprehension
Appreciate music
Learn to swim
Improve writing skills
Increase fine motor control
Calculate with decimals
Increase carpentry skills
Improve public speaking
Improve research skill
Reduce aggressive behavior
Improve test taking skills

UNACCEPTABLE

Improve his school work
Show progress in classes
Increase in development
Learn more about the world
Become a better person
Behave himself
Develop normal attitude
Study hard
Pay attention in class
Show interest in class
Learn her math

ROAD TIP: **Avoid wording which describes what will be done to or for the student. The following are not appropriate as part of goal wording since they do not describe the student behavior:**

“Jessica will be taught to . . . “

“Help in reading will be provided . . .”

“Student will receive special assistance in math . . .”

“Student will be counseled to . . .”

“Student will be guided in . . .”

WRITING OBJECTIVES FOR IEPS

An “objective” as used in education is a shortened form of the term “behavioral objective” which clearly defines a behavior which a student will learn.

An objective can be thought of as a capability, a demonstrated achievement, or a visible action. The intended learning has occurred when the student regularly exhibits the defined behavior.

ROAD SIGN: An “objective” which cannot be observed or measured is not an objective.

If you set a goal of “Learn to swim” for a student, you might define a final level of performance for the year as any of the following:

- “Do the ‘dead man’ float for three seconds,” or
- “Dog-paddle for five feet,” or
- “Crawl-stroke for the length of the pool without stopping,” or
- “Float without assistance or flotation gear for 15 minutes.”

Without such description of expected performance, you cannot be sure the goal has been achieved.

In most cases an IEP goal will have a set of several objectives which represent either:

- (a) a sequential development of skills, or*
- (b) a cluster of closely related but non-sequential skills*

EXAMPLE:

Jessica, a sixth grade student, has an assigned goal of “Improve calculation with whole numbers.” The teacher and his parents will need to know his initial level or proficiency in this area. Based on past performance and her known ability, they can determine which specific skills Jessica can be expected to learn within the year.

In Jessica’s case the objectives within the topic of whole numbers might be the following set:

- “Add two 3-digit numbers without any ‘carrying’”
- “Add two 3-digit numbers with ‘carrying’”
- “Add three 3 digit numbers with ‘carrying’”
- “Subtract 2-digit numbers without ‘borrowing’”
- “Subtract 2-digit numbers with ‘borrowing’”

An objective describes an *observable* performance

A statement of an objective at a minimum, must contain:

SKILL: Behavior which can be seen, counted, or otherwise measured.

CRITERION: The level of skill performance as a quantity: score, measure, count, timing, etc.

SKILL	CRITERION
Speak audibly	every time he responds in class
Subtract fractions	with 70% accuracy
Broad jump	4 feet
Type	20 words per minute
Clean up her work area	at the end of every class
Spell the 3rd grade list	with 90% accuracy
Pay attention	as soon as the bell rings for class
Mop a section of the floor	without leaving puddles

ROAD SIGN: An objective must include a skill.

SKILLS

Learning skills are traditionally divided into three general types of domains.

COGNITIVE: The usual academic aspects of learning:

- ◆ understanding
- ◆ remembering
- ◆ calculating
- ◆ spelling
- ◆ recognizing
- ◆ reading

AFFECTIVE: The usual affective aspects of learning:

- ◆ attitudes remembering
- ◆ feelings
- ◆ socialization
- ◆ social behavior

PSYCHOMOTOR: The control of the body and its parts, including:

- ◆ large and small muscle control
- ◆ manipulation
- ◆ walking
- ◆ eye-focusing
- ◆ swallowing
- ◆ toilet-training

DESCRIBE SKILLS BY ACTION VERBS

The action word in an objective is, of course, a verb. *Any verb used in an objective must define an action which can be seen, heard or otherwise detected.*

Selecting good verbs for IEP objectives takes a little practice. A suitable verb must meet *at least one* of these tests.

Test #1: Can I see this action?

- ◆ Did it occur or not?

Test #2: Can I measure it?

- ◆ Test score?
- ◆ Count the number of times?
- ◆ Time its duration?

Test #3: Can I put it on a scale or range?

- ◆ More or less intense?
- ◆ With or without bad language?
- ◆ What degree of provocation?
- ◆ Faster than before?

ROAD TIP: If the verb you are considering for an objective fails all three of these tests . . . throw it out!!

POWER VERBS FOR LEARNING

accept	endure	match	show
accumulate	enunciate	multiply	shop
acquire	examine	operate	sign
act	exhibit	organize	signal
adapt	explain	pair (items)	sing
adopt	express	perform	sit
apply	extend	pick	skip
arrive	extract	play	sound
assemble	fall	point	speak
associate	find	prepare	stand
attend	fold	present	state
avoid	follow	pronounce	stay
balance	furl	protect	step
bend	gesture	prove	study
calculate	grasp	pull	suppress
clean	hit	push	sweep
climb	hold	put	swing
communicate	hop	raise	tell
compete	hum	read	throw
compute	identify	recite	tolerate
compress	indicate	recognize	translate
cook	inform	remain	tumble
correct	inspect	review	tutor
count	jump	revise	twist
crawl	leap	roll	unfold
demonstrate	lengthen	review	unfurl
display	lift	rotate	use
distinguish	list	run	utilize
divide	listen	say	vocalize
elaborate	locate	select	walk
eliminate	manipulate	serve	write
employ	make	shorten	

ROAD SIGN: An objective statement must include a criterion.

CRITERIA

A criterion (the singular of 'criteria') is the measure of performance in an objective. It must be specific enough for other people to be able to verify it. Its wording should clearly indicate at least one of the following:

- ◆ A count of how many times an action occurs
- ◆ A test score: *raw, percent or normed*
- ◆ Placement on a scale
- ◆ More or less than a known level
- ◆ Increase or decrease from an established performance level
- ◆ Duration of action
- ◆ An interval between actions
- ◆ Consistency
- ◆ Physical measure of distance, volume, weight, time, speed, etc.
- ◆ Progressive/regressive change at specified intervals

ACCEPTABLE CRITERIA:

- ◆ . . . Every time
- ◆ . . . 90th percentile
- ◆ . . . 3 times out of 4
- ◆ . . . at least half the time
- ◆ . . . 50% reduction in cuts compared to last year
- ◆ . . . 60% on a written test
- ◆ . . . 100 yards in 20 seconds
- ◆ . . . every day
- ◆ . . . never on Monday
- ◆ . . . at most two times per week
- ◆ . . . at least five times in 30 seconds
- ◆ . . . twice a week

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION FOR PERFORMANCE

For the special education student additional factors may have to be considered due to his or her ability. The ability of the student to demonstrate an objective may require additional accommodations, assistance, or arrangements. Any such essential conditions to performance must be included in the wording of the objective.

Example: Consider the differences between the following pairs of objectives:

Swim 10 feet with assistance

OR

Swim 10 feet without assistance

Essential conditions include any special assistance, physical setting, equipment, or modifications in procedure, which are necessary and appropriate to the student's performance. For instance, the student's disability may require:

- ◆ prompting
- ◆ extended time allowance
- ◆ required stimulus
- ◆ Braille copy
- ◆ special assistance
- ◆ individual/small group/large group situation
- ◆ structured/unstructured setting
- ◆ adaptive equipment
- ◆ large print materials
- ◆ visual/auditory/tactile cues
- ◆ models/diagrams/checklists

ROAD TIP: Do NOT include obvious or extraneous factors as:

- ◆ Write cursively while sitting at a desk
- ◆ Pronounce vocabulary words while standing or sitting
- ◆ Brush teeth using a toothbrush and toothpaste
- ◆ Add fractions using a pencil

EVALUATION OF AN OBJECTIVE

For many skills, the method of determining whether they have been achieved or not is obvious and implicit. A skill as “Count aloud to 10” implies that the teacher will request it and hear the student perform.

An objective such as “Identify sets of objects with common characteristics with 90% accuracy” would require specification of how this measurement will be made.

Certain actions may have a variety of ways in which the achievement can be measured. To measure a student’s vocabulary skill level a teacher might use a vocabulary list from a textbook, state syllabus, or a teacher-made list.

If an objective is to be measured using a test it will probably be necessary to specify what kind of test or a particular test as:

- ◆ Metropolitan Achievement Test
- ◆ criterion-referenced test
- ◆ teacher-made test
- ◆ textbook test
- ◆ oral quiz
- ◆ Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Test

ROAD SIGN: A criterion in an objective should identify the evaluation or instrument if it is not readily apparent.

ROAD TIP: In determining whether an objective has been achieved, it should never be necessary to resort to ambiguities such as:

I think she . . .

She seems to . . .

We believe he can . . .

I feel that . . .

Such expressions indicate

- a) unclear objective statements, or
- b) inept evaluations
- c) fuzzy thinking!

OBJECTIVES FOR ATTITUDES AND EMOTIONS

It is far more challenging to verify changes in students' attitudes than to measure changes in math, or gym, or reading skills. The teacher must be more creative and insightful in designing or selecting appropriate observable behaviors which reveal internal feelings and attitudes.'

Example: Does Jessica appreciate art?

Can we observe Jessica's attitude about art? Obviously not. Is it enough indication if we merely hear her say "I really like art?" Again, no. We need more substantial evidence that she possesses this quality which we cannot see by itself.

However, people we know who do "appreciate art" show it in various concrete ways. If we make up a list of those actions and see if Jessica participates in any of them, we may evaluate her "appreciation " or lack of it.

The more of those activities which we observe her perform or take part in freely the more apparent it becomes that she "likes" or "appreciates" or "is interested in" art.

Does Jessica . . .

Visit art museums?

Take books on art from the library?

Take lessons in drawing?

Buy art works for her room?

Read about art and artists?

Discuss art and artists with her friends?

Enroll in art courses?

Major in art in school?

Subscribe to art magazines?

Sketch or paint?

Write papers on art?

If the answer is "yes" to several of these questions, it indicates some probability that Jessica's attitude reveals some appreciation of art. The more "yes" answers, the stronger the likelihood that she truly does "appreciate art."

Goals for improving emotional difficulties also must be defined by visible behaviors. Evaluating progress in overcoming an emotional problem means having some before-and-after data on the student's observed behavior.

POSITIVE OBSERVABLE ACTIONS include smiling, offers of help, touching, patting, laughing, sharing, spatial proximity, and a variety of “body language” postures and movements.

NEGATIVE OBSERVABLE ACTIONS which reveal emotions include frowning, striking, shouting, kicking, pushing, avoidance, refusal, hoarding, bad language, and hostile or withdrawal postures.

Occasionally, a proposed “objective” within the area of emotional development is, in fact, a “goal.”

Example: “Exhibit a more positive attitude toward school” is not an objective because you cannot *observe* an attitude directly.

However, used as a *goal* it might be defined by a *set of objectives* dealing with the number of times a student:

- ◆ . . . was tardy
- ◆ . . . was absent
- ◆ . . . disrupted the classroom
- ◆ . . . cut class
- ◆ . . . was referred for disciplinary action,
- ◆ . . . failed to complete homework assignments

A record of such observable behaviors can provide a profile which reveals a student’s internalized feeling toward school, or toward a teacher, or subject, or situation. Such counts are normally available in school or teacher records.

ROAD TIP: An objective such as “reduce incidence of outbursts in class” will probably require the teacher to initiate a system for counting, remembering and recording outbursts for this student. This could become burdensome. Before deciding on this kind of objective, consider how easily it can be evaluated later on. Avoid selecting an objective whose evaluation will be too demanding of the teacher’s time and attention.

OBJECTIVES FOR GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES

If everyone in a course has the same set of objectives, their programs are certainly not “individualized.” Therefore, standardized course objectives are inappropriate for an IEP.

However, it makes sense for a student’s IEP to include the course objectives for a regular class in which he or she is included if they are modified to reflect his or her needs.

Examples:

- ◆ a visually impaired student may be enrolled in a math course but may be excused from such requirements as “use a ruler to measure distance to the nearest 1/16 of an inch.”
- ◆ a student with a speech impediment may be excused from stressful course expectations such as making oral reports to the class.
- ◆ a student who uses a wheelchair taking a shop class may be excused from such activities precluded by his or her disability as “pace off the dimensions of a room to estimate its area.”

Replacement course objectives should be included in the IEP where suitable to make use of his or her special abilities to demonstrate knowledge and advance within the class.

To facilitate inclusion it may also be necessary to identify special study materials or instructional methods to be incorporated for the student enrolled in a course. For instance, an interpreter may be provided for a hearing and visually impaired student, along with Braille or large-print textbooks. A drafting table may be provided to accommodate a student who uses a wheelchair.

ROAD SIGN: Because an IEP by definition must be individualized, personalized, and tailored to the student’s identified needs, course objectives are appropriate for an IEP if they have been modified to adapt to a student’s limitation or disability.

REVIEWING THE IEP

Reviewing the IEP at least once a year, helps each member of the team reexamine current practice, refocus on the strengths and needs of the student and recommit to fulfilling the goals and dreams of the student and her family.

SIGNPOSTS:

- **Has everyone who supports the student been invited to the IEP?**
- **Has the student been invited?**
- **Is the IEP review meeting scheduled at a time and place that is convenient and welcoming for all team members?**
- **Have you considered new information about the student's performance in school, at home, or in the community?**
- **Has each IEP goal and objective been reviewed and discussed?**
- **Has progress toward meeting goals and objectives been documented in a way that everyone can understand?**
- **If the student is failing, or is likely to fail to achieve her objectives, is this due to an interruption of services? If so, is the need for extended school year discussed?**
- **If new goals and objectives have been developed, did all team members contribute? Were goals and objectives based on the vision for the student?**
- **Have all the goals of the parents and child been central to the development of the IEP?**

When coming to an intersection or interchange it is important to determine if you are still heading in the right direction, or if a change in the route is needed. Remember, when you work together, no destination is unreachable.

And the journey continues . . .