



*in*Forum

*In Depth Policy Analysis*

## Standards-Based IEPs: Implementation in Selected States

by  
**Eileen Ahearn**

**May 2006**

Project Forum  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education  
(NASDSE)  
1800 Diagonal Road - Suite 320  
Alexandria, VA 22314



Project Forum at National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) is a cooperative agreement funded by the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education. The project carries out a variety of activities that provide information needed for program improvement and promote the utilization of research data and other information for improving outcomes for students with disabilities. The project also provides technical assistance and information on emerging issues and convenes small work groups to gather expert input, obtain feedback and develop conceptual frameworks related to critical topics in special education.

This report was supported by the U.S. Department of Education (Cooperative Agreement No. H326F050001). However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Department of Education, and no official endorsement by the Department should be inferred.

*Note: There are no copyright restrictions on this document; however, please credit the source and support of federal funds when copying all or part of this material.*



This document, along with many other Forum publications, can be downloaded from the Project Forum at NASDSE web address:

**<http://www.projectforum.org>**

To order a hard copy of this document or any other Forum publications, please contact Carla Burgman at NASDSE, 1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320, Alexandria, VA 22314  
Ph: 703-519-3800 ext. 312 or Email: [carla.burgman@nasdse.org](mailto:carla.burgman@nasdse.org)

This document is available in alternative formats. For details please contact Project Forum staff at 703.519.3800

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Methodology</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Background</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Relevant Requirements in Law .....	2
Basic Concepts.....	3
<i>Early approaches in IEPs</i> .....	3
<i>Changes in the IEP</i> .....	4
<i>Access to the general education curriculum.</i> .....	4
<i>Standards-based goals</i> .....	5
<b>Analysis of Interview Data</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Terminology.....	6
IEP Forms .....	7
State Standards on IEPs .....	8
Professional Development .....	9
Benefits of Involving State Standards in IEPs.....	9
Challenges to Involving State Standards in IEPs.....	10
<b>Observations and Conclusions</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Appendix: State Summaries</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Alabama .....	14
Arkansas.....	15
Arizona.....	16
California .....	17
Colorado.....	18
Connecticut .....	19
Florida.....	20
Hawaii .....	21
Iowa.....	22
Kansas .....	23
Massachusetts .....	24
Michigan .....	25

New York.....	26
Ohio.....	27
Pennsylvania.....	27
Virginia.....	28
West Virginia.....	28
Wyoming.....	29



## Standards-Based IEPs: Implementation in Selected States

### Introduction

Involving state content standards in the development of individualized education programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities—a practice most often referred to as *standards-based IEPs*—is a growing area of interest in special education. The Access Center, a federally funded technical assistance resource, (<http://www.k8accesscenter.org>) is dedicated to helping students with disabilities learn from the general education curriculum and it has included the topic of standards-based IEPs in some documents, discussions and technical assistance activities.<sup>1</sup>

Requirements in federal law to provide students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum first adopted in 1997 prompted the movement toward this new approach to IEPs. As would be expected, there is little in the way of relevant formal literature on this relatively new topic and most of what is available focuses on students with the most severe cognitive disabilities or on the development of curriculum (Browder et al., 2005). The most relevant information is available on the internet in state policy and/or training materials or technical assistance documents from organizations.

Much information about standards-based IEPs is being generated in special education practice by state and district staff. However, there has been little sharing of these new approaches to the IEP that are being created in the field. The data collected for this task confirmed the existence of significant policy changes in states and extensive investments in professional development. This document is an analysis of the most recent developments in some states that are implementing standards-based IEPs. It is written to further the recognition of this evolving movement and to stimulate additional sharing and conversation among states. Project Forum completed this task under its cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

### Methodology

Previous work by Project Forum related to this topic (summarized below) revealed that states were approaching the incorporation of standards into special education in many different ways. Therefore, Project Forum staff chose to interview state officials as the main data collection strategy for this initiative. All state directors of special education received an email inviting them to participate in an interview that would focus on their state's activity in planning or implementing changes in their IEP forms and processes to align them with state standards. A total of 18 responses were received and phone interviews were held with all 18 states. A protocol was developed to guide the discussion, but the content of the interviews varied in many ways. In most cases, interviews were with the state director of special education, but occasionally other member(s) of the state staff joined in the conversation or responded on behalf of the state

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Aligning IEPs with State Standards and Accountability Systems* and a related threaded discussion on its website. [www.k8accesscenter.org/training\\_resources/aligningieps.asp](http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/aligningieps.asp).

director. Interview information was entered into Atlas.ti, a software program that was used to assist in data analysis.

In addition, each state's website was reviewed to obtain a copy of relevant documents and some interviewees provided additional documents or other materials related to their policies and procedures for IEPs.

This document has three main sections. First, the background section presents a discussion of laws and issues related to the topic of standards-based IEPs. Then, major themes that emerged during the interviews are analyzed. The document closes with a section on observations and implications for the field. In addition, an appendix contains a summary of the information provided in the interviews by each participating state.

## Background

### Relevant Requirements in Law

The 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) added requirements related to access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. For the first time, such access became a mandated consideration in all aspects of evaluation and programming for students with disabilities. The law opened with the finding that *“over 20 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general curriculum to the maximum extent possible”* [P.L. 105-17 §601(c)(5)]. The following requirements added in the 1997 IDEA amendments are but two of many references throughout that law that reflected the growing attention to this topic in the mid-1990s:

- The IEP statement of goals must be related to *“how the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum”* [§614(d)(1)(A)(i)(I)].
- The IEP must contain a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child *“to be involved and progress in the general curriculum”* [§614(d)(1)(A)(iii)(II)].

Subsequently, the 2004 amendments to IDEA repeated the Findings statement above, updating the research reference from 20 years to 30 years and expanding the term access to the general education curriculum by adding *“in the regular classroom”* [P. L. 108-446 §601(c)(5)(A)]. Emphasis throughout the law on access for students with disabilities to the general education curriculum was continued and expanded.

Significant support for a relationship between IEPs and state standards arrived with the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) that tied the assessment of students with disabilities to state accountability systems. In compliance with this law, all 18



states interviewed<sup>2</sup> have now adopted grade-level content standards that drive the general education curriculum. Accountability assessments must be aligned with those standards, including assessments that are administered to all students with disabilities. The related requirements for access and universal assessment of achievement are having a profound effect on the instructional program for students with disabilities and it is logical that such driving forces would affect the planning process for IEPs.

In addition, the 2004 amendments to IDEA provide for a multi-year IEP pilot program to give 15 states an opportunity to engage in long-term planning by developing an IEP to cover a three-year period.<sup>3</sup> It is anticipated that projects included in that program will generate even more attention to strategies for linking IEPs to state standards.

## Basic Concepts

### *Early approaches in IEPs*

Prior to 1975, children with disabilities were either barred from attending their local public schools, minimally accommodated in a special class or living in institutions. It is commonly observed that the federal Education of All the Handicapped Act (P.L. 94-142) that established the guarantee of a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities focused almost exclusively on providing access to the public schools for this population. Public schools soon developed new programs for growing numbers of children. Meeting documentation requirements for the new programs and services contributed to the use of separate delivery methods for special education. Most commonly, students with disabilities received basic skills instruction and related services prescribed in their IEPs in a separate class or resource room. The approach was an “add-on” and special education had little effect on or coordination with general education. As a result, special education developed what is often described as a “parallel system” within the public schools.

In the initial implementation of the special education law, IEPs stressed a developmental approach that focused on attaining skills related to readiness and little attention was paid to chronological age in designing educational programs, especially for children with more severe disabilities. As described in the article by Browder et al. (2003, pp. 166-68), the developmental model arose to fill the curriculum void for this population, adapting the early childhood curriculum based on the mental age assessed for the child. This model was rejected in the 1980s with the adoption of the concept of normalization. At this point, interest shifted to a more functional approach with a focus on the ultimate goal of preparing students for life in the community with only minimal attention to academics. This was a significant change because the

---

<sup>2</sup> As will be explained later in this document, one state has not adopted standards at the state level, but each LEA in that state must assess its students on progress in local standards all of which have some consistent sections.

<sup>3</sup> The proposed requirements for the “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Multi-Year Individualized Education Program Demonstration Program” were announced in a December 19, 2005 Federal Register notice. The public comment period ended on March 9, 2006 and, at the time of this writing, a final program announcement is pending.

emphasis shifted at least in part to teaching chronologically age-appropriate skills. However, special education was widely considered to be “a place” where students with disabilities attended school and their IEPs prescribed a curriculum that was different from the general education for students at the same grade level.

### *Changes in the IEP*

At a steadily increasing pace through the 1990s, IEPs began to provide for students with disabilities to spend more time in general education settings during the school day. Part of the ‘social inclusion philosophy’ (Browder et al., 2003, p. 167), this movement, first called mainstreaming and then inclusion, started out with emphasis on having students spend time in regular classes such as art or music or non-academic activities such as lunch or physical education. The trend expanded and strengthened in the 1990s and moved toward integrating students with disabilities into the academic component of the regular education classroom. It culminated in the emphasis on providing access to the regular education curriculum for students with disabilities that first appeared in the 1997 amendments to IDEA and was reinforced in NCLB and the subsequent reauthorization of IDEA in 2004. A survey completed by Project Forum in 1999 and reported in the document, *Linkage of the IEP to the General Education Curriculum*<sup>4</sup> confirmed that many states were taking initial steps toward what was beginning to be called standards-based IEPs to provide alignment between the goals for students with disabilities and the standards that had become the basis of each state’s general education curriculum.

Although most of the research on these changing trends in curriculum philosophies focused on students with severe disabilities, the philosophical underpinnings influenced the provision of special education for all students with disabilities. Gradually, attempts to include students with all types of disabilities in general education classrooms drew attention to approaches for including them in the academic curriculum of the classroom. Current efforts are focused on aligning IEPs with the regular education curriculum and a knowledge base is being built regarding the alignment of instruction, curriculum and assessment to meet the mandates of both IDEA and NCLB. Significant attention is also being paid to strategies for developing alternate assessments aligned with the general education curriculum and recent research is focusing on making academics accessible for this population.<sup>5</sup>

### *Access to the general education curriculum*

There is no definition of ‘general education curriculum’ in IDEA 2004 nor what constitutes ‘access’ to it. As described in a Project Forum document (Ahearn, 2005), only four of the 32 states that responded to a survey reported that they had a definition of the term. Although the survey requested states to comment on their implementation of strategies to enhance access for

---

<sup>4</sup> This document is available at [www.projectforum.org](http://www.projectforum.org).

<sup>5</sup> See especially the work of the National Center on Educational Outcomes (<http://www.education.umn.edu/nceo/>) and the work of Browder and others cited in the reference list at the end of this document.

students with disabilities in the context of the major academic areas, no comments were made about how changes in the IEP would support the reported efforts being made to provide access. Yet, the IEP, often referred to as the heart of IDEA, can support changes in the philosophy of how students with disabilities should be educated. As stated in the Alabama training materials for standards-based IEPs, “Meaningful access to the general education curriculum cannot happen unless teachers have an understanding of the standards that make up the general education curriculum.” Such shifts in philosophy must be accompanied by changes in the process and content of IEPs.

### *Standards-based goals*

Using state standards as the framework for an IEP is a vastly different approach from what has traditionally been followed in special education. Before the introduction of a standards-based approach, the IEP process started with a focus on the skills the child had achieved and what needs have been revealed through evaluations of the student completed for the review of the IEP. Although academic areas would be included in the discussion, the emphasis would most often be on the child’s acquisition of basic developmental and/or functional skills unrelated to a specific academic area.

One IEP requirement is a statement of the child’s current levels of performance. Under a standards-based approach, discussion of present performance levels starts from a discussion of the state standards the student has achieved and concentrates on identifying the skills and knowledge the student has already acquired that will allow him/her to work toward standards for the current grade level. Then, the input from evaluations and other sources are used to identify the skills and knowledge the individual student needs to achieve the academic standards for the current or subsequent grade level. As stated in the California training materials, the IEP goals are “the plan for bridging the gap between where the student is and where the student needs to be in relation to the state or district content standards.”<sup>6</sup> The training materials go on to say: “By incorporating standards into our Individualized Education Programs, the IEP can now tie individual student needs to state standards and access and progress in the general education curriculum. This promotes Individualized Education Programs that allow general educators and special educators to speak the same language.”<sup>7</sup>

It is also important to acknowledge that, since each state’s standards are different from every other state’s, there are a number of factors that must be considered in applying standards to the IEP process and document. Some states have long lists of standards for each grade that are very specific or standards that may be further divided into benchmarks or other divisions. In such cases, there will probably not be an IEP goal that corresponds to each standard. In other cases, there may be more than one goal linked to a standard to reflect the student’s need for pivotal academic skills to access that standard.

---

<sup>6</sup> See [http://www.calstat.org/iep/3\\_reading.html](http://www.calstat.org/iep/3_reading.html)

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.calstat.org/iep/1\\_reading.html](http://www.calstat.org/iep/1_reading.html)

## Analysis of Interview Data

### Terminology

Confusion in terminology surrounding the topic of standards-based IEPs pervaded the process of conducting the interviews for this study. The lack of clear understanding of, and agreement on, the meaning of terms, especially as they apply to IEPs, is actually a significant finding and was discussed in most of the interviews.

The way in which the term ‘standards’ is used under current federal legislation has contributed to this confusion and misunderstanding. For example, under NCLB there are two types of standards:

1. *academic content standards*—the basis of the general education curriculum covering what all students are expected to know and be able to do. These standards apply to all types of assessment for NCLB including alternate assessments.
2. *academic achievement standards*—the degree of proficiency students demonstrate about what they know and are able to do in each of the content areas.

Then, there are three subtypes of academic achievement standards:

- a) *grade level* achievement standards;
- b) *alternate* achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (performance criteria for a small percent of students that must be aligned with the regular academic achievement standards); and
- c) *modified* achievement standards (performance criteria aligned with regular academic achievement standards for an additional group of students who can make progress toward grade-level achievement standards but may not reach them in the same timeframe as other students).<sup>8</sup>

There are other ways that use of the term ‘standards’ has added to confusion in the discussion of IEPs: it has been included with various meanings when used to refer to the revised type of IEP, (e.g., standards-based, standards-driven, standards-informed and standards referenced). In some cases, these terms are used to mean that academic content standards are discussed in the process of developing an IEP, but not used specifically in the written IEP content. For example, content standards might be part of the discussion of the child’s present level of performance or in ways the child will access the general education curriculum, but not as a specific determinant in the selection of goals for that child. So, the terminology used in each state has to be the starting point in understanding how standards can be incorporated into the IEP process.

The most frequently used term in states that are most involved in using the new approach to IEPs is ‘standards-based.’ Therefore, that term will be used throughout this document. This term and related terms are defined for this document as follows:

---

<sup>8</sup> A notice of proposed rulemaking for these standards was published in the Federal Register on December 15, 2005.

- *standards-based IEP*—a process and document that is framed by the state standards and that contains goals aligned with, and chosen to facilitate the student’s achievement of, state grade-level academic standards;
- *goal*—specific knowledge and/or skill the student can be expected to achieve during the period of the IEP based on what that individual student needs to progress. For standards-based IEPs, goals are chosen as the learning and skills that will facilitate the student’s achievement of a specific grade-level standard;
- *functional goals*—non-academic skills the student needs as confirmed by evaluation or prior progress that the students can be expected to achieve during the period of the IEP. For a standards-based IEP, most functional goals are those that the student needs to be able to access one or more grade-level standards (sometimes referred to as ‘access goals’)<sup>9</sup>; and
- *specially designed instruction*—the strategies and approaches the special educator will use in instructing the student when providing services on the IEP.

## IEP Forms

Not all states require that their districts use a consistent IEP form. Of the 18 states interviewed, the following conditions exist:

- Seven states have developed IEP forms that districts are required to use (Alabama, Arkansas, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia);
- One state is considering adopting a mandated form (Florida);
- Four states reported that, although not mandated, a single IEP form is used by all their districts with only minor variations (such as adding a logo). In two of these states, the form was developed by an intermediate agency (California and Iowa); the other two states have developed a form that is recommended for district use and is actually used by almost all districts (Colorado and Connecticut);
- Six states do not have a mandated IEP form, although one has developed a form that is used for training (Arizona, Kansas, Michigan, New York, Virginia and Wyoming).

Many interviewees described growth in the use of technology in the IEP process and document. In Arkansas, a web-based IEP system that was developed through a state contract is available to all districts. The contractor, Special Education Automation Systems or SEAS<sup>10</sup> also works with 1,500 districts in more than half of the states to provide web-based IEP services. In addition, the National Education Association has developed a free, web-based IEP program that incorporates state standards as part of a “Toolkit for Teachers.”<sup>11</sup> Some interviewees expressed concern about databases of goals developmentally tied to the curriculum that are often part of such web-based

<sup>9</sup> Note: Some special education practitioners and researchers maintain that students with severe disabilities have an ongoing need for functional life skills instruction and that some of these goals do not link clearly to standards. (For a discussion of this point see Browder & Courtade-Little, 2005, p. 24).

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.computerautomation.com/products.asp>.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.neateachertoolkit.com/TTK/Default.aspx?id=911>.

programs, but may not be the type of goals that reflect a student's individual needs to access state standards.

### State Standards on IEPs

Interviews with participating state staff provided examples of a wide range of ways that state standards are being incorporated into the IEP process and document. All the state staff interviewed indicated some level of attention to state standards or state curriculum aligned with their state's standards in the IEP process. The essential difference can be described as follows:

- Some states have adopted specific standards-based IEPs—they can be described as those that require IEP teams to select the grade-level standards that the student has not yet achieved and to develop goals on the basis of the skills and knowledge that the student needs to acquire to achieve those standards. (Some of these states also have developed extended standards aligned to the grade-level standards that are used for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.) Essentially, “A student’s goals and objectives on an IEP should not be a re-statement of a standard or a curriculum goal, but rather a statement that reflects the necessary learning that will lead to attaining a standard.”<sup>12</sup> In addition, related services usually do not have separate goals, but rather are designed as services to support achievement of the goals needed to reach one or more standards. Of the 18 states interviewed, the ones falling into this category are Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Iowa, New York, Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia and Wyoming.
- Interviewees that expect state standards and/or state curriculum based on the state standards to be considered in describing present levels of performance and in developing goals, but do not require specific identification of grade-level standards are Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

Some states with standards-based IEPs allow the IEP team to consider goals related to standards below the current grade level for the student, usually because that student has not had access to academic standards in the past. Such students are expected to make more than one year of progress through standards-based instruction because the needed skills are targeted by the teacher. Teachers scaffold instruction (i.e., provide supports as necessary) and prerequisite skills are used to work toward the grade-level standards. For example, a student who cannot read 6<sup>th</sup> grade materials may work toward a grade-level standard that calls for analyzing written materials. The cognitive processes associated with that higher level reading skill can still be taught while the student accesses the grade-level materials in a different way. Such a student may also have some lower level reading skills included as goals.

---

<sup>12</sup> New York guidance at [www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/iep/intro.htm](http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/iep/intro.htm)).

Most of those interviewed said that they will be updating their IEP forms and/or processes when the regulations for IDEA 2004 are finalized, although some said they have already made some changes based on the 2004 reauthorization.

### **Professional Development**

There was strong agreement among those interviewed that professional development related to the involvement of state standards in IEPs is a critical and ongoing need. For the most part, special education staff need detailed groundwork in the state standards and then targeted professional development on applying standards to the IEP process. Many of those interviewed stressed the importance of making clear the message that standards-based goals are not just the standard re-worded into a goal.

The involvement of general education staff was described by one interviewee as crucial because they are the experts in the general education curriculum, an area where special education staff may lack expertise.

Not only does professional development have to be delivered often, but its content must extend into many areas. One respondent emphasized the importance of providing clear information about how to assess a student's current performance in the context of state standards in order to support the development of standards-based goals.

A few states described electronic and Internet-based training strategies that have been effective. Some examples include:

- A number of states make copies of training materials available to the entire state by loading them on the Internet. Examples of this strategy include Alabama ([www.alsde.edu/html/sections/documents.asp?section=65&sort=16&footer=sections](http://www.alsde.edu/html/sections/documents.asp?section=65&sort=16&footer=sections)); Virginia (<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/sped/iep/presentation-sept-05.ppt>); and West Virginia (<http://wvde.state.wv.us/ose/StandardsBasedIEPs.pdf>).
- California makes available to “special education teachers and credential candidates, along with the college professors who instruct them”, a self-paced web training module on how to write IEP goals tied to standards that are student-focused and measurable (<http://www.calstat.org/iep/>). This training module is used extensively in the state.
- The circulation of a CD or a video is also an effective tool for dissemination of training. Examples include a video training provided to all regional centers by Arkansas, a Colorado CD that explains and demonstrates how IEP goals are to be developed and an Ohio CD entitled “Standards-Based Education in Ohio: Providing Access to the General Education Curriculum for Students with Disabilities” that covers the state standards and how they should be applied to the development of IEPs and special education programs.

### **Benefits of Involving State Standards in IEPs**

Those in states that have implemented a specific standards-based IEP were enthusiastic about the benefits of this approach. They said that it has eliminated the separate curriculum for students

with disabilities that has been part of special education for many years. They note that special education teachers are now teaching to standards and students with disabilities are achieving in academic areas at higher levels than previously anticipated. In one state, test scores in special education went up for every subject at every grade level in the current year and, while there is no proof that the use of standards as the basis for their IEPs made the difference, it is clear that special educators are teaching toward the standards and all assessments are aligned with those standards. In one state, many more students with disabilities have been able to pass the high school exit exam than had been expected. Anecdotally, special education teachers are saying that access to the general education curriculum supported by specific standards-based IEPs enabled their students to acquire the sequence of skills they needed.

A number of interviewees cited benefits to parents. Some parents have expressed pleasure at the change to a standards-based IEP because the information in their child's goals is more recognizable and less clinical.

Some general educators have welcomed the change in IEPs to a standards emphasis. One interviewee reported that "regular education teachers see a correlation between what they do and what is needed for students with disabilities and there is greater ownership because everyone is talking the same language."

Some materials designed for use by special education staff in developing standards-based IEPs are also being used by general education teachers. In fact, one interviewee said that the general education teachers like the special education curriculum guides better than any other materials they have available because it also helps their students who are not identified as having a disability.

### **Challenges to Involving State Standards in IEPs**

Barriers exist to the use of a standards-based IEP approach in some states. One interviewee said that whatever the state requires teachers to do must be clearly mandated in law or else it would have to be considered 'best practice' and could only be 'recommended.'

A few of those interviewed expressed an aversion to changing the current approach for fear of losing the focus on each child that is characteristic of special education's traditional approach. Some reject the use of the standards-based IEP because they feel that it violates the individuality that IDEA requires for each IEP. Some recommend a discussion of grade-level content standards in the IEP process, but reject the notion that the IEP is standards-based. One interviewee stated that "The IEP training and the language used in the training focuses on linking IEPs to state curricular standards rather than standards-based IEPs. This is because IEPs must always be built on the identified needs of the individual student and not on the curricular standards."

Professional development, as mentioned above, is an ongoing challenge for states. Turnover of district staff can have a significant effect on maintaining new approaches to IEPs. One interviewee shared that she was amazed to find that, because of the replacement of staff in a



small district, there was no implementation of the required standards-based approach despite extensive training that included providing materials to every district.

A few interviewees mentioned involving colleges and universities in revising their pre-service training programs as a problem. However, in Colorado, the teacher certification process provides an incentive for higher education programs to update their training content to meet the requirement related to the use of standards. Teacher preparation programs must apply to the state for approval and then anyone successfully completing an approved program is eligible for certification.

None of the state staff interviewed had carried out any formal evaluation of their revised approach to developing IEPs. The resources needed for a formal evaluation and the challenges of designing an appropriate study are daunting. However, all states include a review of IEP content when monitoring local districts.

Interviewees also cited the need to communicate better with parents about a change to standards-based IEPs. Although one interviewee said that parents can see the logic of the approach, she also cited the need to explain more clearly to some parents the benefits of an emphasis on academics, especially for those students who have not been in programs with an academic emphasis in the past.

### **Observations and Conclusions**

Debates about the appropriate outcomes to be achieved through public education are ubiquitous. Some maintain that academic progress is only one of the goals of the system and that the acquisition of life skills and self esteem are equally important. However, the current emphasis in the American public school system is focused on progress on academic standards and students with disabilities must be included in this pursuit of academic achievement in the general education curriculum. Those interviewees from states where the specific standards-based IEP has been implemented embrace this approach as the major ingredient to provide access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. For example, Alabama training materials conclude that “Developing an effective standards-based IEP is the cornerstone of access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities.”

As the interviews conducted for this task confirm, however, each state will ensure access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities in a different way. At this time, there are a number of states moving in the direction of implementing a standards-based IEP as the chief strategy, but the movement is not universal. Some professionals feel that strategies that have been successful for students with disabilities in the past will be lost if grade-level academic standards become the focus of the IEP. Some states are developing approaches to provide access to the general education curriculum without designating the alignment of some IEP goals to their curriculum as ‘standards-based.’ This may or may not be a semantic difference and any discussion of this topic is fraught with terminology problems.

Experts in the field point to some practices in the past as limiting the progress of students with disabilities because of low academic expectations. As Margaret McLaughlin, University of Maryland professor, observed in a recent professional development event, “We must understand that ‘ready means never.’ If we wait until students are ready to work on challenging standards by virtue of having mastered basic skills, they will never work on challenging standards.” The same point was made by Tom Hehir in describing a story told to him by a parent:

At his most recent IEP meeting, his mother asked what he was learning in science. She wanted to make sure he was being prepared to take the statewide assessment in grade four. The special education teacher responded, “We’re not doing science. We’re concentrating on fine motor development.” Again, like too many children with disabilities, his educational program concentrates inordinately on the characteristics of his disability at the expense of access to the curriculum (Hehir, p. 18).

The challenge to states is to find a way to grant access to the general education curriculum and to modify the IEP so it can become a facilitating tool to reach that end. One evolving strategy being implemented in a growing number of states is the standards-based IEP. It remains to be seen if it will be accepted more widely as an effective tool and if it can be demonstrated to produce the kind of changes intended in reaching toward better access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities.

## References

- Access Center (2004). *Aligning with state standards and accountability systems*. Downloaded April 2006 from: [www.k8accesscenter.org/training\\_resources/aligningieps.asp](http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/aligningieps.asp)
- Access Center (2006). *Teaching matters: The link between access to the general education curriculum and performance on state assessments*. Downloaded April 2006 from: <http://www.k8accesscenter.org/documents/TeachingMeattersBrief.doc>
- Ahearn, E. (2005). *Access to the general education curriculum*. Downloaded April 2006 from: [www.nasdse.org/publications/Acess%20to%20the%20General%20Education%20Curriculum.pdf](http://www.nasdse.org/publications/Acess%20to%20the%20General%20Education%20Curriculum.pdf)
- Browder, D., Sponner, F., Ahlgrim-Delzell, L., Flowers, C., Algozzine, B. & Karvonen, M. (2003). A content analysis of the curricular philosophies reflected in states' alternate assessment performance indicators. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 28(4), 165-181.
- Browder, D. M. & Courtade-Little, G. (2005). *Aligning IEPS to academic standards for students with moderate and severe disabilities*. Verona, WI: IEP Resources Attainment Company.
- Hehir, T. (Spring 2002). Eliminating ableism in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(1). Downloaded April 2006 from: <http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hepg/hehir.pdf>
- Hock, M. (2000). *Standards, assessments and IEPs: Planning for success in the general education curriculum*. Montpelier, VT: Vermont Department of Education.
- McLaughlin, M., (December 1, 2005 CEC Web Seminar) *NCLB, Access to the General Education Curriculum, and IEPs: Putting It All Together*. Downloaded April 2006 from: <http://www.cec.sped.org/pd/webseminar/McLaughlin.html>
- McLaughlin, M., Nolet, V., Rhim, L. M., & Henderson, K. (1999). Integrating standards: Including all students. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 31(3), 66-71.
- Miller, L. & Hoffman, L. (2002). *Linking IEPs to state learning standards: A step-by-step guide*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.
- Thompson, S. J., Thurlow, M. L., Quenemoen, R. F., Esler, A., & Whetstone, P. (2001). *Addressing standards and assessments on state IEP forms* (NCEO Synthesis Report 38). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. Available at [www.education.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/Synthesis38.html](http://www.education.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/Synthesis38.html)
- Walsh, J. (2001). Getting the big picture of IEP goals and state standards. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33(5), 18-26.

## Appendix

### State Summaries

The following are summaries of the phone conversations held with 18 state special education officials who volunteered to discuss the use of standards-based IEPs in their state.

#### Alabama

A standards-based IEP has been in use in Alabama on a voluntary basis since 2003. The state mandates use of a state-developed IEP form. State training efforts for the past two years have concentrated on how to assess for, and teach to, standards to identify the student's needs. Special education teachers are now teaching to the state standards. After a new statewide training is completed at the beginning of 2006, the use of standards in IEPs will be required.

A separate page of the Alabama IEP form (available on the website) is used for each goal. Alabama grade-level content standards contain about six to eight standards for each academic area at each grade level. The team is expected to enter the standard or part of the standard that the student has not yet achieved and then develop a goal that describes what the student can reasonably be expected to accomplish by the end of the period covered by the IEP. Then, the team is expected to develop SMART goals—specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented and time-bound. Training materials remind teachers that “The IEP goal is NOT the content standard.” Rather, a goal addresses the needs in relation to the content standard as noted in the individual student's present level of performance and makes the content standards specific for that student. If a student is below grade level, the team can go to the content at one grade level below and develop some scaffolding and supplemental support from some prerequisite skill areas. That student will be expected to make more than one year of progress because the missing skills will be targeted. Functional skills can also be added to the IEP, but they must be tied to a standard. The goals page also lists the type of service(s) to be provided and the type of evaluation that will be used for the goal. In addition, the IEP contains a list of eight “Special Instructional Factors” (e.g., Does the student have behavior which impedes his/her learning or the learning of others?) that the team must note as “yes or no” and must address in the goals or on a behavior plan.

The state has developed Curriculum Guides on the basis of the standards and they are used by general education teachers even more than by special education staff. The expectation has been set that all but about 1% of students (i.e., those who need extended standards and an alternate assessment) will work toward the general education standards. Extended standards have been developed and are also linked to the general education standards, but are reduced in scope and complexity for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Lesson plans aligned to state standards and other materials for teachers are also available on the Alabama Learning Exchange section of the state website (<http://alex.state.al.us/>).

The Alabama Department of Education website has numerous resources related to standards-based IEPs. Specifically, all related resources can be accessed through links at the top of the Alabama Special Education Division webpage;

([http://www.alsde.edu/html/sections/section\\_detail.asp?section=65&footer=sections](http://www.alsde.edu/html/sections/section_detail.asp?section=65&footer=sections)).

The Special Education Publications page available under the ‘Standards’ link

(<http://www.alsde.edu/html/sections/documents.asp?section=65&sort=16&footer=sections>)

contains PowerPoint presentations and other materials used in the current statewide training, information about the state’s Academic and Extended Standards and other earlier relevant materials such as “Getting Started with Standards-Based Reforms” and a glossary.

State planning and training efforts have had extensive involvement by institutions of higher education in the state. Emphasis has been placed on discussions about the changes needed in teacher preparation standards and content for both general and special education.

Although no formal evaluation aside from monitoring has been completed for the conversion to standards-based IEPs, state staff note that scores for students with disabilities increased for every subject at every grade level this year and more students with disabilities than expected have been able to pass the state exit exam. Anecdotal evidence is strongly positive from both general education and special education perspectives.

State officials report that the standards-based approach for IEPs is working well and has meant a significant change from the way things were done in the past. Although there are still challenges especially related to the development and ongoing delivery of necessary professional development, the new approach to IEPs is having a strong effect on breaking down the wall that existed between general and special education.

## Arkansas

Arkansas’ learning standards are defined in the *Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks*. These learning standards are discipline-based and clearly describe what students must know and be able to do in each academic content area. Within each academic area, there are strands (e.g., four in English Language Arts) and each strand has three-to-five broad standards. Each standard is further specified into goals for each grade level. The Arkansas state-mandated IEP is required to reflect the general education curriculum as derived from the *Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks* under each strand in each academic area at each grade level.

The current version of the Arkansas IEP form is available on the state website (<http://arksped.k12.ar.us/documents/policy/rulesandregulations/A3a.pdf>). This is under revision and will be re-issued after the IDEA federal regulations are finalized. A contract under the state’s General Supervision Enhancement Grant (GSEG) was awarded to develop an automated data-based linkage between the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks and IEP goals. This web-based IEP system now is used by all Arkansas school districts. It provides total IEP management, including tailored forms and goal banks aligned to state standards. The state special education office has worked closely with Computer Automation Systems, Inc., on the development of this web-based

program. In addition, the company has provided invaluable assistance to the districts in use of this program.

The broad goal stated in the IEP is based on a specific standard and indicates the student's expected performance level at the end of the projected IEP period. On the IEP form, separate columns are provided next to each goal to note progress toward attainment of the goal (mastery criteria level) and the evaluation procedure that will be used. A set of codes has been developed for use in entering this information. Functional goals stated in an IEP must also be linked to the curriculum. A Functional Instructional Activity Guidebook aligned to the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks was developed in 2003.

Professional development has been extensive and ongoing. Some of the professional development has been provided via videotape and made available in each regional education services center. The videotapes have been used to orient new staff as well as parents. To overcome initial resistance to this professional development by general education staff, the state education agency is now providing more generic training for all staff.

The incorporation of general education curriculum standards into IEPs has brought dramatic improvement in collaboration between general and special education. Intensive training on assessment of students with disabilities has also contributed to these improvements. This collaboration has led to an increase in the use of co-teaching across the state.

No formal evaluation as to the effectiveness of the new IEP approach has been undertaken. Complaints regarding this system have been minimal. The use of standards-based IEPs is still evolving and challenges remain; however, this approach is supporting increased academic achievement for students with disabilities.

## **Arizona**

Arizona state officials first began using standards as the basis for IEPs in 1997-98 and standards continue to be a required component of every IEP. The state feels it has been very successful in incorporating standards into the IEP process. There is no mandated IEP form, but there is a state-developed form that is used for training. The Exceptional Student Services page of the website contains a link to the state standards ([www.ade.state.az.us/standards/contentstandards.asp](http://www.ade.state.az.us/standards/contentstandards.asp)).

IEP teams are expected to identify the student's current functioning in terms of the standards and use that information as the basis for selecting the standards for the new IEP. Students who still need lower level skills (e.g., decoding at the sixth grade) will be expected to be working on sixth grade standards with added goals to cover the needed decoding skills. Such a student may need to be read to for some of the higher level English skills to be learned, but the decoding work will still be done. There are also workplace standards as well as standards in the areas of health and safety.

Professional development is carried out every year. This year it will emphasize the writing of goals without the use of objectives except for students in alternate assessment.

The involvement of general education staff has also worked well in Arizona. Regular education teachers see a correlation between what they do and what is needed for students with disabilities and there is greater ownership because everyone is talking the same language.

Before the use of standards, students with disabilities were assessed with different tests, but now they take the same state tests as all other students. Students with disabilities have scored higher on state assessments since the new approach began.

The state reports continuing work on alignment between special education and state standards. Some state standards are the same at multiple grade levels, but the level of expertise to be demonstrated is different. Training focuses on looking at performance indicators for that standard for the year and crafting a goal that is measurable for the individual student. The standard may be incorporated into the IEP with less depth or breadth, but the standard is the focus.

State officials feel that the use of standards is very powerful, but there needs to be continued oversight of implementation to ensure that new staff are appropriately trained. Using standards in IEPs is seen as affording students a “leg up” on access to the general education curriculum.

## **California**

In response to the 1997 amendments to IDEA, the California Department of Education adopted a new approach to IEPs that incorporated state content standards. The state designed a self-paced training program on the Internet to guide professionals through the challenge of writing IEP goals and objectives that are based on California's academic benchmarks and state standards. The training is available at <http://www.calstat.org/iep/>. It includes a pre-test, post-test and a certificate of completion for those who successfully absorb the information, as well as links to related resources. It provides guidance for writing IEP goals that directly apply to the mandates of IDEA, are tied to standards, are student-focused and measurable. This program has been immensely successful—more than 9,000 individuals used it in a six-month period. It is updated annually and is the result of a partnership with the field.

There is no mandated IEP form in California, but the State Special Education Local Plan Area organization (SELPA) has developed a set of forms that they have updated for the 2004 changes to IDEA. The state makes the availability of these model forms known to SELPAS and districts because it is a burden for every district to develop its own forms that meet all the compliance requirements. There is a state IEP Task Force with parents, general education teachers, institutions of higher education (IHEs), SELPAs and others who contribute to the work on this resource as well as other related activities.

The model forms refer to the use of general education standards. There is still some confusion over the content of goals, especially the use of the term ‘access’ and some problems about using the standard itself as a goal. Training tries to make clear that the standard is the target and the student’s goal is what that student needs to work toward that standard. The IEP goals are described in the training program as the plan for bridging the gap between where the student is and where he or she needs to be in relation to the standards. Standards provide a common language and help bridge the gap between special and general education. The IEP training module on the web addresses this issue directly. This IEP web module is updated to the IDEA 2004 statute and should be available in March 2006. Another resource, *The Goals and Objectives Handbook* for the mild to moderately disabled population is another tool that was developed with the collaboration of special education and general education teachers and administrators, program specialists, consultants and the California Association of Resource Specialists and Special Education Teachers. The updated 2004 version is available on the Internet at <http://www.carsplus.org/publications.php> and from the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA). The ACSA order form is available at [www.acsa.org](http://www.acsa.org).

The state staff members interviewed feel that NCLB has been a driving force in supporting the IDEA 1997 and 2004 requirements for access to the general education curriculum. The use of state academic standards in the IEP is an important component of ensuring this access.

## Colorado

Colorado adopted state academic standards in 1993 and a state task force appointed by the governor immediately began to address recommendations for all students to participate. They were particularly emphatic that students with IEPs be provided with support to attain state standards. Additionally, an advisory group convened specifically to plan for how students with IEPs would meet state standards began to think in terms of “access to the general education curriculum” well before the passage of the 1997 amendments to IDEA. This same advisory group took the position that students with disabilities must participate in the general education standards and not have separate standards. Expanded benchmarks to meet the standards were set up for all students with IEPs, and an alternate assessment was developed for those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities allowing them to participate in the accountability process.

The state has developed what it calls ‘standards-driven IEPs’ although the term ‘standards-based IEP’ is also used by the state. The characteristics include curriculum-based assessment information, current performance described in relation to standards and goals that address academic content and access skills. Extensive resources on this IEP are available on the internet at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/StuDis-Sub1.asp>. A fact sheet summary is available at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/FF-IEPstnds.pdf>. The state-developed training program has been made available to all districts on a CD.

The state has developed an IEP form that it recommends to districts, but it is not mandated. Districts can revise it and it is reviewed through state monitoring. The goals page of the



recommended IEP requires that the standard being addressed be entered and then specific key components and/or access skills the individual student needs to achieve to reach toward that standard become the goals and/or objectives. The term ‘access skills’ is used to address skills the student may need to reach standards but which might not generally be imbedded in instruction. Instead of addressing these compensatory skills as ‘functional skills,’ Colorado chose the terms ‘key components and access skills’ to intentionally link to state standards because the use of functional skills implies a curriculum separate from general education and a functional curriculum was all that students with disabilities had in the past.

One continuing challenge is working with IHEs to change their preservice and inservice to reflect the standards-driven IEP. Some have used the state training CD, but many do not. A committee has been formed and one impetus to addressing this problem is the state certification process. Teacher preparation programs apply to the state for approval and, if they meet requirements, then the program is approved and any student who completes that program is eligible for certification. This is a valuable motivation for IHEs to update their training content to meet the requirement related to state standards.

State officials feel that the standards approach allows a ‘hook-in’ for students with disabilities to the general education curriculum, especially for students with the most significant disabilities. When alternate assessment was first used, teachers said they were ‘genuinely surprised’ by what those students could do. A comment was made that they had previously been working in a ‘curriculum-free zone’ with those students before then.

Monitoring sometimes finds a district that is not using the standards approach. Checking usually reveals that there has been a large turnover of staff and the new staff did not even realize the training CD was available. The state intended that districts would use the CD for training all new staff, but there are still areas where that is not happening. One strategy used in monitoring that is helping to reinforce training on the use of standards is the Student Record Review. As a part of this process, the state trains district staff in records review and then that task is completed by district staff. Data are then compiled for the district to determine alignment with a standards-driven IEP, among other items.

## Connecticut

Standards in this state are contained in the *Connecticut Curriculum Frameworks*. Instructions for the new IEP form issued in January 2006 with the document, *IEP Manual and Forms*, state that “Specified annual goals and objectives should align with the grade level general education curriculum standards, functional performance requirements and the Connecticut Frameworks” (<http://www.state.ct.us/sde/deps/special/IEPManual.pdf> – p. 10).

The requirements related to least restrictive placement are prominent in everything done in the state in special education, and there is a basic message that goals in special education are not separate from the general education curriculum. There are frequent references in the new IEP forms to requirements for addressing academic areas. There is an expectation from the state that

the general education curriculum will be used, although no specific requirement exists about how that must be done or reflected in the IEP. So, although IEP directions prompt alignment with the state standards, the Connecticut IEP could not be described as ‘standards-based.’

However, the situation for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who take the alternate assessment (CMT/CAPT Skills checklist) is very different. The Checklist has been designed not only to comply with IDEA, but also to ensure that students eligible to take it are instructed and assessed on grade-level content. This test is designed to mirror the structure of the *Curriculum Frameworks* in reading, writing and math. Each item on the Checklist starts with a specific expected performance statement from the Framework. This is followed by an ‘essence’ statement which describes the most critical outcome of the standard. This, in turn, is followed by three ‘downward extensions’ that describe learner outcomes related to the ‘essence’ statement. These downward extensions provide the criteria for assessing student performance. Thus, the structure of the Checklist makes it possible to directly relate student performance to the grade level curriculum content as outlined in the *Curriculum Frameworks*. It is expected that, if the Checklist is thoroughly understood by both general and special education teachers, it will help them to identify appropriate grade-level related curriculum content for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

With the implementation of inclusion, special education staff are increasingly participating in grade-level training on the general education standard and alignment with special education instruction and IEPs. There is an expectation that special education staff will be familiar with the standards, but this is not directly checked out.

## Florida

Although state standards are sometimes used as a starting point for IEP development, the IEP team does not take the standards and develop goals from them. Rather, the team brings a knowledge of the standards to the table and the IEP is developed from that base. A primary outcome for each student is the attainment of a diploma. As part of the IEP process, a determination of the specific diploma a student will pursue will reflect the standards the student is expected to master.

Currently, there are Sunshine State Standards and Sunshine State Standards for a Special Diploma. The special diploma standards are significantly different in the level of expectation. They are aligned with the regular standards but modified greatly. They address all the core academic standards, but are modified and used for students with disabilities who take special courses using the modified goals assessed by the alternate assessment. The IEP team decides which diploma path a student will follow. There has been a significant shift to delay this decision as long as possible so that it is not made too early. Many districts keep the majority of students on a standard diploma track as long as possible. The emphasis on the standard diploma and curriculum has increased coordination between general and special education and it is anticipated that the implementation of the response-to-intervention approach will increase this coordination.

As a result of the emphasis from NCLB on one set of content standards, Florida has begun a major initiative to develop access points to the Sunshine State Standards to ensure access to the general curriculum in language arts, math and science for students with significant cognitive disabilities. These access points will restate the core intent of the standards and benchmarks at three different levels of complexity – independent, supported and participatory. Access points will reflect the highest learning standards possible for students with significant cognitive disabilities who meet criteria for alternate assessment.

A Florida IEP task force has recommended the use of a statewide, web-based IEP process. Task force membership includes general and special education teachers, parents, state officials, charter schools, project staff, etc.

Florida requires an academic improvement plan (AIP) for any student who falls below the 25% level on the FCAT. The standards are addressed more directly in the AIP and some districts combine the AIP with the IEP.

Professional development has been devoted heavily to writing measurable goals and objectives. Many of the goals and objectives in IEPs are more specific to the student than standards-driven. The challenge is not to move away from the individualization needed to meet student needs.

## **Hawaii**

The state has recently become more focused on having teachers look at grade-level standards and where the student is functioning and then develop goals based on that information. The focus is now centered on grade-level academic content. In the last year, the implementation of a new required standards-based report card in Hawaii has put this movement into high gear and standards-based learning for students with disabilities is now being discussed much more. As a result, goal statements on IEPs are more closely connected to standards. The state standards also include career and life skills, so they cover areas that had been previously considered functional skills before. Hawaii is studying the Massachusetts model and developing an approach similar to that state's *Curriculum Frameworks*.

Teachers who are using a more standards-based approach start with including standards in their discussion of the child's present level of performance. They see this information as more helpful in developing goals that the child needs to achieve. Often a discussion focuses on 'traits' within a standard to identify specific goals needed. A small group of districts has been piloting some IEP changes and a task force will be appointed soon to take this effort further.

Feedback from teachers includes the observation that, when they assess students with disabilities on the standards, they look at a different set of skills than they have considered for this population before. Support is growing for moving in the direction of involving state standards for all students.

## Iowa

Standards are established at a different level of authority within Iowa, i.e., they are not developed by the state. In Iowa, content standards are required by law to be established by local school boards. In order to meet the NCLB requirements, the Iowa Department of Education worked with the Iowa Testing Program to establish core content standards that Iowa districts must incorporate into their local standards. All local districts have devoted literally thousands of hours to the establishment of content standards to assure compliance with NCLB. Iowa uses the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (grades 3-8) and the Iowa Tests of Educational Development (grades 9-12). Local districts have used these tests for many years. The state department of education receives annual individual district, building and grade level scores from the Iowa Testing Programs. Results are published each year in the *Annual Condition of Education Report* prepared by the department.

Iowa has a statewide IEP and several other statewide forms that were developed by the Department in collaboration with the state's intermediate area education agencies (AEAs). The Iowa IEP is available in a printed form, an electronic version for stand-alone computers, and a web version. The web version was introduced in the Fall of 2005 and, as of January, 68 % of the IEPs developed were written using this form. The printed and electronic versions forms are distributed by the AEAs. All of the statewide forms and translations in Spanish, Bosnian, Vietnamese, Serbo-Croatian, and Laotian are available to all Iowa AEAs and local districts through the TransAct Eduportal.

During IEP meetings, standards are discussed throughout the development of the IEP. They are addressed as part of the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance discussion around the student's course of study development. Standards are addressed most explicitly on the goals pages of the IEP. The specific tie-in between IEP goals and standards was added to the IEP after the 1997 amendments to the IDEA. For each goal, the LEA standard and benchmark upon which that goal is developed must be entered. The state and AEAs provide professional development to teach IEP teams how to align the standard, benchmark and goal. Training also covers writing an effective goal: it must be meaningful, measurable and monitorable. Each goal must include —the behavior (what the student will do), conditions (when and how the student will demonstrate the behavior), and the criterion (that defines the acceptable level of performance).

State officials feel that the process of relating goals to standards has really helped parents and teachers in assuring the student's access to the general education curriculum. The alignment of standards and benchmarks with goals has helped IEP goals become more meaningful. This process has been institutionalized at this point although the AEAs provide annual professional development in the writing of high quality IEPs.

## Kansas

Kansas does not have a state-mandated IEP. The IEP form used in each LEA is reviewed during monitoring visits. Kansas has model curricular standards and extended standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, both of which use a Standard/Benchmark/Indicator format. They are the basis of the statewide assessment system. There is no state curriculum. School accreditation procedures require the alignment of local assessments with the state curricular standards.

Statewide IEP training of trainers for special education staff includes information regarding linking the IEP to the state curricular standards. The concept of linking the IEP to standards is based on the IDEA legal requirement to ensure students can access and have the opportunity to progress in the general curriculum.

The process of linking the IEP to curricular standards begins with the description of where the student is currently performing, the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance. One of the considerations within the Present Levels is to determine which set of standards is more appropriate for the student: the general standards or extended standards. Extended standards are a downward extension of the general standards.

The relationship between the curricular standards, benchmarks and indicators and the Present Levels should be a two-way street. The information in a student's Present Levels will help locate where a student is currently performing in the scope and sequence of the standards, benchmarks, and indicators. On the other hand, the Curricular Standards will help determine what kinds of information need to be collected about a student, in order to judge where he/she is in the sequence of curricular skills. This will also lead the IEP team to a discussion of how the scope and sequence of the Curricular Standards might be useful in developing appropriate annual goals for the student.

The curricular indicators are not sufficiently specific to be used as measurable goals without some significant addition of information, such as a more specific description of the behavior, conditions, timeframe and criteria. An IEP team would also need to have baseline data about how the student is performing the skill described within the indicator. However, an examination of how the indicators change across grade levels assists an IEP team in knowing the grade levels where certain skills get added into general education instruction and curriculum.

Many parts of the IEP link to standards – more than just the goals. The linkage to all the components of the IEP begins with an understanding about the student's Present Levels, and a consideration of the degree of match between the student's current skills and the grade-level standards. The IEP goals help to focus instruction. The bottom line is that all the components of the IEP should work together to provide the student the opportunity to access and progress in the general curriculum.

Some of the issues that IEP teams need to discuss with regard to linking to standards and ensuring the opportunity to access curriculum include the following:

- supplementary aids and services—for example, whether the inappropriate use of paraprofessionals might impair a student's access to instruction in the standards, whether the lack of provision of appropriate modifications and/or lack of differentiated curriculum interferes with access to instruction in the standards;
- accommodations—for example, whether the student is being provided with accommodations that will enable the student to access instruction in the standards in general education settings;
- related services—consideration of whether there is alignment of instruction between related service providers and classroom teachers; and
- service models and least restrictive environment—for example, whether pull-out models limit the student's access to content area specialists who can provide the best instruction in the standards.

When thinking about the link between the curricular standards and an IEP, it is most important to think about the link between the standards and instruction. One source of information for standards-based instruction is the reading standards for the student's instructional level (rather than grade level) for ideas about instruction to build skills toward the grade level indicator. For students working within the extended standards, there are clarifying examples for the extended indicators. These clarifying examples provide ideas about how the skill might be exhibited across the five domains of school, community, work, home and recreation/leisure.

The IEP training and the language used in the training focuses on linking IEPs to state curricular standards rather than standards-based IEPs. This is because IEPs must always be built on the identified needs of the individual student and not on the curricular standards.

### **Massachusetts**

Massachusetts content standards are entitled *Curriculum Frameworks*. The standards are a force in the process, but the state does not want the goals of the IEP to be simply a reiteration of the standards. The problems of terminology in the discussion of this topic were recognized.

The goal should state what the student is expected to be able to do by the end of the IEP period. The state wants goals to be skills-based and derived directly from the impact of the child's disability on performance in the standards. As a result, this may be considered a standards-driven IEP approach.

The IEP form developed by the state is mandated for use in all LEAs. The student's present level of performance must be reported in terms of how the disabilities affect progress in specific curriculum areas (English, history, science and math and in other areas of educational need such as behavior, communication, etc.) and what type of accommodation is necessary for the student to make progress.

The state has developed a *Resource Guide to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Students With Significant Disabilities* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/>). It provides a list of the learning standards as written with a presentation of the ‘essence of the standards,’ which is a restatement of the standard separated into its essential components. Then, possible entry points to the learning standard in terms of measurable and observable student outcomes are given—skills the student could demonstrate on a continuum from less complex to more complex.

The state began conducting professional development on this approach to IEPs in 2000. It was emphasized that training has to be ongoing because of constant new staff and students. Success in involving IHEs has been limited.

State officials have seen increased benefits to students from the change in emphasis in IEPs and assessments for students with disabilities especially driven by the required exit exam. Students who do not pass state assessments cannot graduate from high school. This has exerted pressure for access to the general education curriculum and for increasing performance of students with disabilities in curricular areas. The IEP with its connection to standards is a vehicle for that access. Many students with disabilities are now meeting academic standards that would not have been expected to in the past. Massachusetts’ graduation statistics demonstrate that students with disabilities can meet academic standards at high levels.

## **Michigan**

The state-developed IEP form is considered a prototype and is not mandated for use in districts. It is provided with an accompanying IEP Manual. The Manual identifies the statutory components of the IEP and suggests appropriate practice. The state is careful in distinguishing between statutory or regulatory requirements and suggested or effective practices.

The IEP prototype form and Manual will be revised as soon as the IDEA regulations are final. The goal of the revision will be to align the form with the new continuous improvement monitoring system and that will include alignment with standards and benchmarks. However, there is no reference to standards in the current IEP form or procedures.

A new electronic IEP is being piloted that is customized to the state prototype. When the federal regulations are finalized and the new state prototype and IEP manual are developed, the electronic IEP will also be revised. The electronic version is envisioned with ‘drop-down’ boxes to identify grade-level standards and benchmarks.

With the focus on student progress and achievement, it is important to measure against standards and benchmarks. The new state monitoring model (Continuous Improvement and Monitoring System or CIMS) encourages this approach. It uses a web-based workbook for district self-assessment and guides districts to align practice with state standards.

## New York

New York Learning Standards include learning standards, performance indicators and sample tasks a student is expected to know or demonstrate at different levels (alternate, elementary, intermediate and commencement). Standards should serve as the basis for developing instructional curriculum.

Members of an IEP team (Committee on Special Education in New York) will need to consider both the standards as well as the school-based instructional curriculum, which should be aligned to the standards. To develop IEPs that are linked to the standards, the Committee should review the content as well as the expectations for how the student will learn or demonstrate knowledge and skill in the content areas and identify the strengths and challenges for the student in relation to those expectations in the present levels of performance section of the IEP. New York state guidance on developing IEPs linked to the standards was published in 2002 (available at <http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/iep/intro.htm>). Annual goals should focus on the knowledge, skills, behaviors and strategies to address the student's needs.

Goals for the student do not have to reference a specific standard and indicator, but they must reflect the learning that will lead to the standards, i.e., work on what is preventing the student from accessing the information needed to achieve the standard. The focus must be on what the student needs to access and progress in the general education curriculum, but the goals are not to reiterate the curriculum. The question the IEP team should answer is "What skills does the student need to master the content of the curriculum?" and not "What curriculum content does the student need to master?"

New York is concerned that using the term 'standards-based IEP' may lead to a reiteration of the standards as goals in the IEP. The descriptors most commonly used in New York are 'linked to the standards' or "developed in consideration of the standards and curriculum."

The SEA-developed IEP form is not mandated, but many of the software companies that work with districts have adopted it. State officials see further need for training to build on the initial round under the new procedures that involved teams of general and special educators.

Although there has been no formal evaluation of parent perspectives on the process, anecdotal feedback from parents has been very positive. Parents use the guidance document for their information about what should be done and they express frustration when it is not followed.

The SEA does not encourage the use of goal banks by districts, but many of them have invested a lot of money in computer programs for their IEP. Although entries in the typical goal bank could be a tool for discussion, they must be tailored to address individual student needs.



## Ohio

The involvement of state standards in the development of IEPs is required in Ohio and the IEP form developed by the SEA must be used. Ohio has a state-adopted model curricula and an Instructional Management System (IMS) to assist all educators in providing a standards-based education.

For students with disabilities, a detailed trainers' manual, *Standards-Based Education in Ohio* (available on CD), was developed in 2003 under Ohio's General Supervision Enhancement Grant by the Great Lakes Area Regional Resource Center and is focused on training educators to connect the IEP to academic content standards. The specific purpose of the CD is to "assist educators in using Ohio's academic content standards to plan for effective instruction that will provide access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities."

The SEA has developed extensive training materials available on its website including a recently completed interactive training tool, *IEP Inter-rater Agreement Tool* ([http://www.ohioschoolleaders.org/iep\\_tool/index.htm](http://www.ohioschoolleaders.org/iep_tool/index.htm)). It provides examples of IEP goal statements with the opportunity for a user to identify strategically-designed statements that support improved student performance and distinguish such statements from others that are only minimally compliant or not compliant.

The SEA stresses that educators must know the Ohio standards well before developing an IEP. The IEP process is designed to develop goals that address the deficits that get in the way of the student's full access to the content standards. This approach was adopted in 2002 and training to assist districts in implementation is ongoing. State monitoring is designed to look at how districts are developing standards-based IEPs.

## Pennsylvania

Although there is no mention of state standards on the mandated Pennsylvania IEP form, the standards are considered the 'bedrock' of education for all students. The state has developed assessment anchors that represent the essence of the standards that are the basis of the state assessment. Extensive professional development has been done over a two-year period to ensure that the assessment anchors are embedded in IEPs.

The SEA is working across systems to implement a "standards-based" educational system, and expects that IEPs will be based on state standards and all professional development carried on in the state emphasizes standards. Standards help to focus the content of student IEP goals. It is important that special education re-focuses on academic standards to change the separate system that existed in the past. Future versions of mandated IEP forms will include reference to standards.

## Virginia

The Virginia SEA stresses that access to the general education curriculum is the guiding force in developing the content of an IEP. Students with disabilities are included in the state accountability system through participation in, and performance on, state academic assessments. State academic assessments are based on Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL), which are content standards in English/reading, mathematics, science and history/social science. All the assessments (alternatives and the alternate assessment) are aligned with the SOL. The SOL content is the basis for local curriculum and IEP content considers the academic and functional needs of individual students, described in the present level of performance, in relation to the demands of the SOL-based general education curriculum.

Professional development resources were designed to emphasize access to the general education curriculum through using the knowledge of essential skills needed for the SOL in the development of IEPs. The resource, *Standards-Driven Individualized Education Program*, is available on the state's Website at: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/sped/iep.shtml>. Mentioned in the *Standards-driven IEP* presentation is the importance of exposing students with disabilities to the grade-level SOL even if they have not yet completely mastered some basic skills. For example, the use of content enhancement routines and assistive technology allow students to access concepts that are beyond their independent reading skills.

It has been made clear that simply restating the SOL on an IEP is not the best way to communicate what an individual student needs to access the content. For example, achieving proficiency in the grade level SOL is the ultimate desired outcome, but it does not communicate what is preventing the student from accessing and making progress in the content area. Rather, IEP annual goals are composed of the skills and knowledge needed by the student to access the SOL. The IEP professional development resources were shared with Virginia's Parent Training Information Center (PTI) staff and feedback was positive. Parent representatives said the standards-driven approach gives families a common tool to communicate with school staff about access skills needed to make progress in school.

## West Virginia

The K-12 state instructional standards in West Virginia are called 'Content Standards and Objectives' (CSO). The SEA has been providing training on using them in IEP development since 2004. The document, *Connecting West Virginia Content Standards and Objectives to Individualized Education Program Development: A Technical Brief*, was prepared for that training and is available on the state website ([wvde.state.wv.us/ose/StandardsBasedIEPs.pdf](http://wvde.state.wv.us/ose/StandardsBasedIEPs.pdf)). The introduction notes that, historically, parallel programs or separate services have been developed for students with disabilities that were not necessarily consistent with what was going on in general education classrooms. State policy now requires that the IEP include an analysis of the student's performance with regard to grade-level content standards and the standards be considered in developing goals. Training materials include a presentation on the influence of NCLB on the IEP process (<http://wvde.state.wv.us/ose/NCLBinfluenceOnIEPprocess.ppt>) and a

matrix of grade-level CSOs, *A Resource Document for Developing Standards-Based IEPs*, which contains expectations by grade level (<http://wvde.state.wv.us/ose/CSOs.htm>).

West Virginia has had a mandated IEP form since 1997 and it will be revised again after the IDEA regulations are final. The conceptual basis of the state's process will not change, but additions will be made about alternate achievement standards. The issue of behavior problems will also be addressed in the revision.

Many parents are pleased that schools have higher expectations for students with disabilities now and that their academic growth is being valued. The issue of functional skills has been raised by some parents and discussion centers around how they can be connected to standards and how some of them need to and can be taught at home.

Training is critical to avoid having IEP teams just reword the standard as a goal. There are computerized IEP programs in some districts that are based on the CSOs, but some of the goals are still not appropriate. The SEA sees a need for information sharing among the states on how they are implementing standards-based IEPs especially training approaches and materials.

## Wyoming

Wyoming uses a standards-based approach to IEPs and requires that the team look at the standards for the child's grade level, consider the child's present level of performance and then develop goals for the IEP that would allow access to the grade-level standards. The state has a model form, but does not mandate its use. A training session on standards-driven IEPs was conducted in all districts in 2002 with the assistance of the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center (MPRRC). The state is planning to conduct a similar training as soon as the federal IDEA regulations are final. Because the standards have been revised since the previous training, a new program will have to be developed and the state plans to work with the RRC again. They will encourage attendance at these trainings by a team composed of both general and special educators.

Although there has not been a formal evaluation, SEA staff members interviewed believe that the increased percentage of students with disabilities now in the regular environment has been influenced by the change to a standards-based IEP.

One problem is the tendency for teams to look for boilerplates in both the present level of performance and goals to take the guesswork out of writing the IEP. There is a need to do a lot of work on functional goals because the application of this approach to students at that level is an important component.

The SEA believes that the key to using standards in IEPs is access skills. Teams need to understand what it takes for a child to access an academic standard. Better task analysis of pre-academics is needed to see the match and set goals appropriate to the student.