

Addressing Every Area of Need

One way to think about the IEP document is as a roadmap. It begins with the present level of academic and functional performance (PLOP), which outline all areas of need that must be addressed by the school division. Every section that follows the PLOP serves the purpose of addressing the unique needs of your child. Keep this in mind when you are preparing for an IEP meeting and as the IEP team works to draft the IEP document. The areas of the IEP that focus on the appropriate services for your child are:

- Annual goals
- Accommodations/Modifications
 - Testing accommodations
 - General accommodations
- Related Services and
- Transition services (if appropriate)

Annual goals outline the core function of the IEP. The annual goals tell every person working with your child how to make education accessible to him or her. The annual goals must be specific and measurable. In other words, each annual goal must say:

- What area of need it is written to address
- How the area of need impacts your child's access to education
- What strategy will be used to address the area of need and
- How progress will be measured

The next area of the IEP that addresses your child's needs are the accommodations or modifications. An accommodation is assistance to make it possible for a child to access education. Some examples of accommodations include:

- Extended time for classwork or tests
- Use of a word processor for writing assignments
- Shortened assignments to demonstrate mastery

A modification is a change in curriculum or some other established modality to make it possible for a child to access education. A modification grants your child access to education by altering the curriculum or some other component. An example may be:

- Modifying grade level work to make it accessible to a child with academic functioning on a lower grade level

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Related services cover areas in which your child may need support but are not directly academic. Related services can include:

- Transportation (as needed)
- Occupational therapy (need determined through evaluation)
- Physical therapy (need determined through evaluation)
- Assistive technology (need determined through evaluation)

Transition services are a required component of the IEP in the year your child will turn 14 years old.

Each of the areas discussed above work together to provide a picture of what a school division must do to provide your child with a free appropriate public education. When you attend the eligibility meetings to discuss your child's unique needs and how to address them in the IEP, be aware of all of these areas. Remember to have your notes outlining what you see your child's needs are in relation to each of these areas. One final note to remember is, "an effective advocate is a prepared one."