Strategies for Setting Data-Driven Behavioral Individualized Education Program Goals

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February 2020

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Introduction

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

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

## What is the purpose of behavioral progress monitoring?

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

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

Why is setting goals important?

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

What Is DBI?

DBI is an ongoing, systematic process that integrates assessment and instruction.
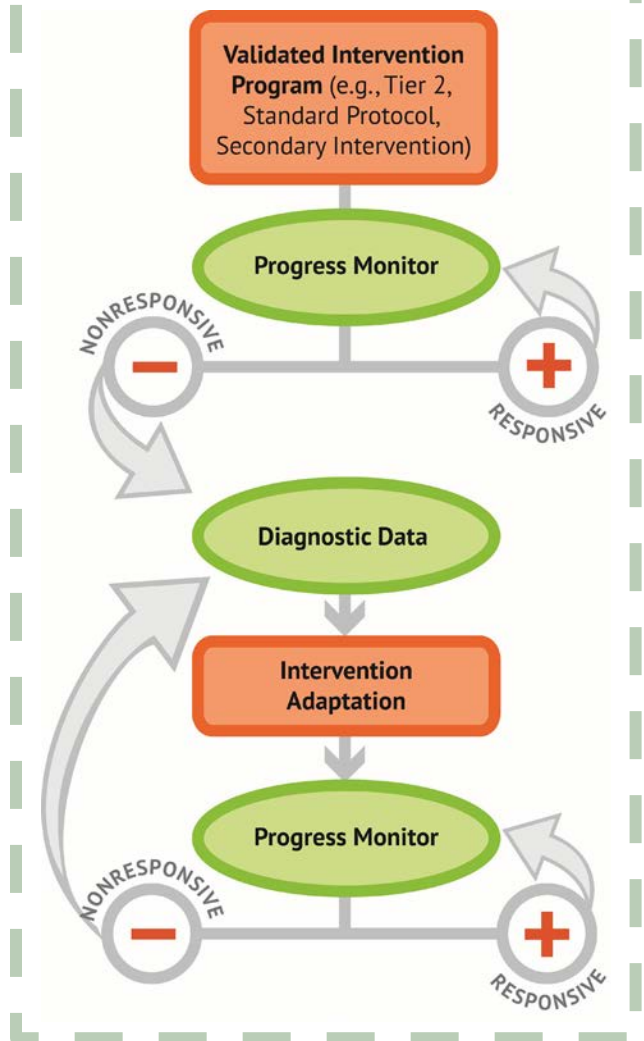
What Do Quality Behavioral IEP Goals Include?

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

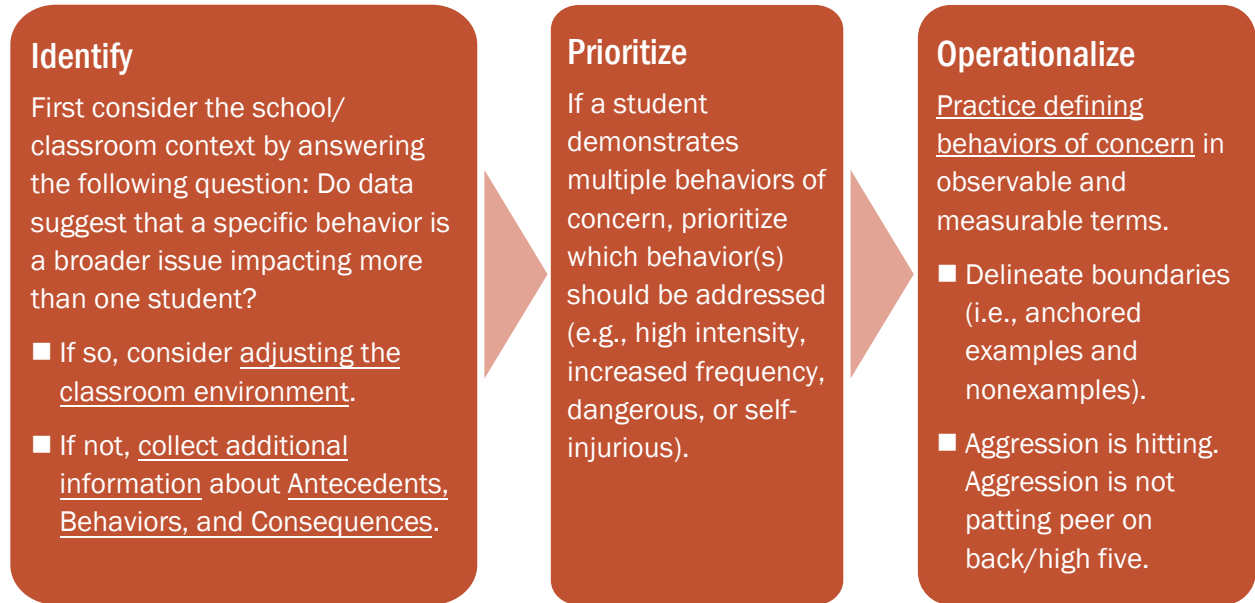[a]Always check with your state or district regulations, policy, and/or guidance first.

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

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

- The behavior should be observable, measurable, and amenable to change.

- The goal should focus on student behavior, not educator behavior.

- The goal should address the present levels of academic and functional performance identified through data collection (i.e., Antecedents, Behaviors, and Consequences [A, B, and C] checklists; target behavior interviews; classroom observation).

- The goal should focus on a skill the student needs to master.

The steps that follow outline how we can ensure that our IEP goals appropriately address student needs.

Identify, Prioritize, and Operationalize Behavior(s)

Identify

First consider the school/ classroom context by answering the following question: Do data suggest that a specific behavior is a broader issue impacting more than one student?

■ If so, consider adjusting the classroom environment.

■ If not, collect additional information about Antecedents, Behaviors, and Consequences.

Prioritize

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

Operationalize

Practice defining behaviors of concern in observable and measurable terms.

■ Delineate boundaries (i.e., anchored examples and nonexamples).

■ Aggression is hitting. Aggression is not patting peer on back/high five.

Identify the Function of the Student's Behavior

■ Why is the student engaging in the behavior?

- Is it to get something (e.g., attention from peers/ teacher)?

- Is it to avoid something (e.g., difficult task)?

- Is it because the student doesn't have the necessary skills (e.g., academic, functional, or social-emotional)?

■ Consider these Common Problem Behaviors and Some Usual Suspects for Functional Antecedents and Consequences.

Identify and Operationalize a Functionally Relevant Replacement Behavior That Can Be Taught and Progress Monitored

■ Replacement behaviors are observable and teachable behaviors.

■ Replacement behaviors address the same function as a student's behavior of concern but in a more socially acceptable way.

■ Replacement behaviors are measurable.

- This may require operationally defining the replacement behavior (including creating anchored examples and nonexamples).

Remember!

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

Important Reminders!

■ IEP goals should focus on the replacement behaviors.

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

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

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

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

What About the Behavior(s) of Concern?

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

How Do We Set Goals and Progress Monitor?

Determine the Measurement

■ Tool/approach (e.g., observation, DBR)

■ Scale for measurement (e.g., 1–10 rating, frequency count, percentage of time)

■ Frequency of data collection (e.g., hourly, daily, weekly)

■ Context for assessment (e.g., setting, individual responsible)

■ Decision/evaluation rules (i.e., how will we know if the student is responsive? And by when?)

Tool Highlight: Direct Behavior Rating (DBR)

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

For more information, see https://www.dbr.education.uconn.edu/ assessment.

Direct Behavior Rating (DBR) Form: 3 Standard Behaviors

Establish Baseline of Student Performance

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

Collect at least
5 data points
PRIOR
to intervening

Set a Measurable and Realistic Goal

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

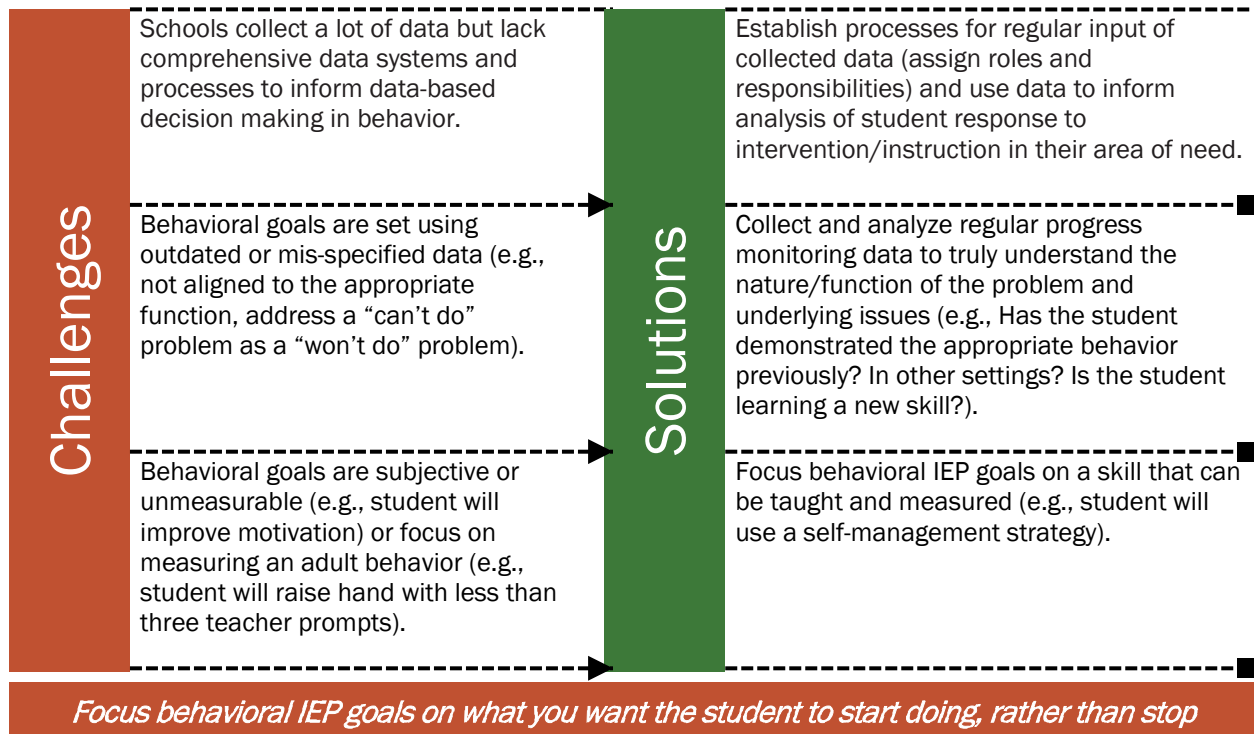| Increasing Academically Engaged Time	Decreasing Frequency of Aggressive Behavior
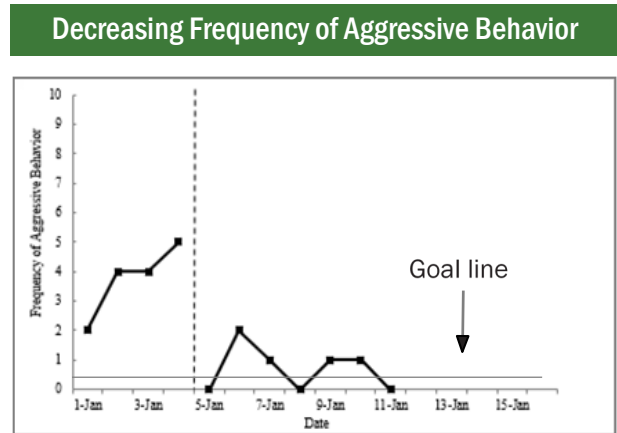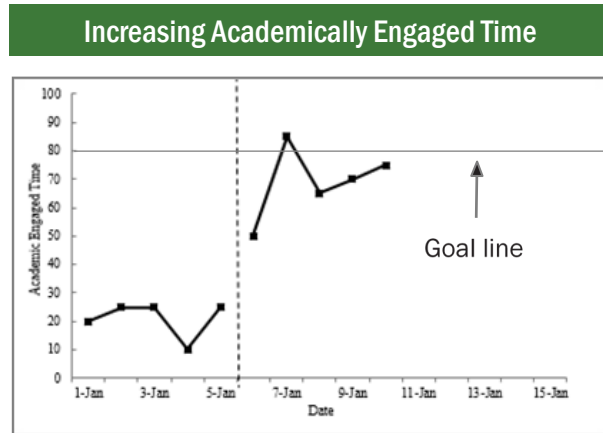
*Always include a **goal line** on the graph to help you visualize progress!*

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

Evaluate Progress Using Graphed Data

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

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

- If the student is meeting his or her goal consistently at the initial review date, consider

  - gradually increasing the goal, or

  - gradually fading supports but continuing to collect data.

- If the student is not making adequate progress toward his or her goal, consider the following:

  - Review data to adapt or intensify instruction/intervention.

  - Change the reinforcer or increase the schedule of reinforcement.

  - Revisit A, B, C data to ensure the intervention is addressing the correct function.

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

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

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

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

Resources and Tools

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

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

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

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

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

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

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Systematic Direct Observation. The process of watching a person or environment for a period of time and systematically recording behavior.

Target Behavior. In an IEP goal, the behavior identifies the performance being monitored and reflects an action that can be directly observed and is measurable.

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

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

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

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