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Present Performance Levels: Understanding Your Child's IEP

Your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) should reflect who they are, what they can do now, and what support they need. The present levels section gives the team this starting point. Understanding it helps you and the school plan goals and supports that fit your child.

What are present performance levels?

Present levels describe your child's current learning and everyday skills. The full name is Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance, sometimes called PLAAFP. Academic skills include areas such as reading, writing, and math. Functional skills help your child take part in daily activities. These may include communication, behavior, social skills, movement, organization, and self-care.

This section should describe your child's strengths, interests, and needs. It should also explain how their disability affects learning and participation in school. For preschool children, it describes how the disability affects participation in age-appropriate activities.

Your child's team uses information from evaluations, classroom observations, work samples, progress reports, and input from you and your child. Together, these sources help create a fuller picture than a test score or grade alone.

Clear present levels describe specific skills. For example, "Sam struggles with reading" does not tell the team much. "Sam answers two out of five questions after reading a short passage independently" gives a clearer starting point.

Why are present performance levels important?

Present levels are the foundation of the IEP. They help the team decide which goals, instruction, services, and supports your child needs.



A clear starting point, sometimes called a baseline, helps everyone understand what progress will look like. If your child currently answers two out of five reading questions, the team can use that information to plan a goal and check growth over time.

Present levels also help your child's team look beyond school subjects. Your child may understand a lesson but have trouble getting started, asking for help, or managing frustration. Those needs can affect learning and should be considered when planning support.

The information should be current and updated as your child grows. It should show what your child can do independently, what they can do with help, and which supports make a difference.

What is my role on the IEP team?

You bring knowledge about your child that school staff may not see. Share your child's interests, strengths, and hopes, along with concerns about learning and daily activities.

Everyday examples are helpful. You might explain how your child handles homework, follows directions, gets ready for activities, communicates needs, or plays with others. Describe what happens, how often it happens, and what helps.

Your child's voice matters, too. Depending on their age and needs, they can share what they enjoy, what feels difficult, and which supports help. They may attend part of the meeting, write a short statement, or share their ideas with a trusted adult beforehand.

Before the meeting, ask for available reports and an agenda so you can prepare. During the meeting, work with the team to make sure the present levels reflect your child accurately. If home and school observations differ, ask the team to explore those differences together.

Questions to Ask

- What does my child do well, and what interests help them learn?
- Does this section describe all areas of need?
- How does the disability affect learning and everyday school activities?
- What information shows my child's current skills, and when was it collected?
- How will these needs connect to goals, services, and supports?
- Does this section include input from my child and me?

Parent tips

- **Prepare a few examples.** Write down strengths, concerns, and supports that help at home. Bring work samples or notes if they help explain your observations.
- **Look for a clear starting point.** Ask for specific examples of what your child can do now so you can understand and follow their progress.
- **Include everyday skills.** Discuss communication, organization, behavior, self-care, or other needs that affect participation and independence.
- **Review the connections.** Ask how the needs described in present levels will be addressed through goals, instruction, and support.
- **Stay connected.** Share new information during the year. Discuss changes in your child's needs and celebrate progress together.
- **Watch the companion learning session.** This brief is part of the IEP Journey learning series from South Dakota Parent Connection which can be found at **https://bit.ly/4kLhSg9**.

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