Part I:
About GO/Bs
(Goals and Objectives/ Benchmarks/ Progress Markers)

IDEA 2004

Since 1975 one federal law has guided every aspect of special education services in the United States. This law, most recently amended in 2004[1], is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, commonly called IDEA. IDEA provides many benefits and protections to every eligible child who has a disability, and to his or her parents. The detailed framework of IDEA provides for full and individual evaluations, independent evaluations, the provision of special education and related services, individualized placement decisions within a continuum of placement options, protections in disciplinary actions, and much more. The major purpose of IDEA is to make a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) available to every child who has a disability.

The heart of IDEA is a written document called an Individual Education Program (IEP). While all benefits and protections are important, it's the IEP process, with parents as full and equal participants with the school personnel, that determines what services the child will actually receive. These services, as spelled out in the IEP, constitute FAPE. Thus the IEP determines what happens in the child's education. The IEP is the "make or break" component in FAPE for every IDEA child.

The IEP document must include certain elements for all children plus two additional for students sixteen and older. The first three components of the IEP are key, and they are what this book is about:

1. The child's present levels of performance;
2. Measurable annual goals (and measurable benchmarks or objectives some students)[2], and
3. A statement of needed special education and other services.

Just as the IEP is the heart of IDEA, these three items are the heart of the IEP. Together, they are the key pieces of the whole law and of the child's education.

1. Statutory references are to IDEA 2004, regulations cited are the 1999 IDEA regulations.

2. Prior to IDEA 2004, objectives or benchmarks were required for all students. Now they are required only for certain students, as discussed below.

A three-fold inquiry determines these key pieces of the IEP:

1. What are the child's unique needs?
2. What services will the school employ to address each need?
3. What will the child be able to accomplish as a result of the services?

This three-fold inquiry translates directly into three critical elements of the IEP: The present levels of performance (PLOPs), goals, and a statement of the special education services which will move the child from the PLOP to the goal. This book is about the heart within the heart, shown in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1

The IEP is the heart of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and measurable goals and objectives/ benchmarks/progress markers are the heart of each IEP.

When IDEA was amended by the U.S. Congress in 1997 and even more so in 2004, new importance and emphases were placed on:

1. Special education students making more progress;
2. Special educators accurately and objectively measuring student progress; and
3. That progress being accurately and meaningfully reported to parents.

GO/Bs Redefined

Prior to July 1, 2005, IDEA required that all annual IEP goals have measurable short-term objectives or benchmarks. Short-term objectives were defined as breaking "the skill described in the annual goal down into discrete components" while benchmarks were described as "the amount of progress the child is expected to make within specified segments of the year" (IDEA 1999 Regulations, Appendix A, Question 1).

Part III: Sample Best Practice PLOPs, Objectives, Goals

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge the work of graduate students in Dr. Herr's summer, 2002 Law & Special Education class in developing the PLOPs, goals and objectives that are included in the following section.

Matrix of PLOPs/Objectives/Goals

	Early Childhood/Preschool Developmental ages 0 - 5	Primary/Elementary Developmental ages 6 - 11	Middle School/High School/Post School Developmental ages 12 - 18
Access to General Curriculum	43	6, 12, 37, 74, 75	14, 30, 33, 49, 54, 62, 74
Reading (decoding, fluency, comprehension)	17	1, 2, 7, 15, 26, 48, 51,74	3, 74
Mathematics	29, 39	4, 22, 23, 39, 46, 50, 52	
Written Language	32	32, 36, 44, 53, 58, 72	30, 31, 49, 57, 64, 73
Behavioral/Social	43	6, 8, 12, 19, 37, 41, 71	33, 41, 62
Expressive/Receptive oral/aural Language	5, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 35	13, 26, 35, 40	27
Physical (fine, gross motor)	11, 24, 25, 28, 38, 47, 55	42, 45, 56, 63, 66	
Vocational & Pre-vocational			20, 21, 31, 49, 57, 61, 65, 67, 69, 72
Special Education Curriculum (including self-help and functional academics)	11, 18	4, 22, 23, 45, 56, 59, 66, 71	31, 34, 60, 61, 68, 70, 72, 73

Note: Numbers reflect sample PLOPs, objectives and goals, #1-75, on which subjects in left column are addressed.
Items may appear in more than 1 category on age/grade column.

Present Levels of Performance

Jay is a non-reader who knows no sound-symbol relationships. In print, he recognizes his name and the words "Coca Cola" and "Nike."

Objectives

1. Given vowels, consonants, digraphs, and 5 common diphthongs, Jay will say the correct sounds at 30 sounds per minute with no more than 2 errors.

2. Given the 200 most common sight vocabulary words, Jay will read them aloud at 110 wpm with only random error.

3. Given first grade material, Jay will read a passage orally at 50-80 wpm with no more than 5 errors.

Goal

Given first grade material, Jay will read a passage orally at 110-130 wpm with only random errors.

Present Levels Of Performance

Given third grade material, Walter reads 50-70 wpm with 4-6 errors.

Objectives

1. Given third grade material, Walter will read 110 120 wpm with 1-3 errors.

2. Given fourth grade material, Walter will read 70-100 wpm with 1-3 errors.

3. Given fifth grade material, Walter will read 70-100 wpm with 1-3 errors.

Goal

Given fifth grade material, Walter will read 120 wpm with only random error.

Present Levels of Performance

Given 3 paragraphs of expository reading material, Emily can decode fluently and accurately (at least 100 wpm with random error) but is unable to state or write the main idea and two supporting details for each paragraph.

Objectives

1. Given 3 paragraphs of expository reading material which Emily can decode fluently and accurately (at least 100 wpm with random error), she will state or write the topic sentence of each paragraph.

2. Given 3 paragraphs of expository reading material which Emily can decode fluently and accurately (at least 100 wpm with random error), she will state or write the main idea of each paragraph.

3. Given 3 paragraphs of expository reading material which Emily can decode fluently and accurately (at least 100 wpm with random error), she will state or write the main idea of the paragraph and one detail for each paragraph.

Goal

Given 3 paragraphs of expository reading material which Emily can decode fluently and accurately (at least 100 wpm with random error), she will state or write the main idea and two supporting details for each paragraph.

Comment: Students should not be expected to comprehend written material unless they can decode the material easily and accurately.

Present Levels of Performance

Carol does not tell time.

Objectives

1. Given pictures of clock faces with the short hand pointing to an hour, Carol will state the hour and also demonstrate that she can count to 60 by 5s, 9 out of 10 trials.

2. Given pictures of clock faces with the long hand pointing to the half hour, Carol will state the time by saying the hour and the word thirty (e.g., seven-thirty) and demonstrate, by showing the direction on the clock, the rule that the clock hands always move in a "clockwise" direction, 9 out of 10 trials.

3. Given pictures of clock faces with the long hand pointing to the quarter hour, Carol will state the time by saying the hour and the words "fifteen" or "forty-five" (e.g., two-fifteen or eight forty-five) and state the rule "Short hand points, long hand counts."

Goal

Given pictures of clock faces with the hands in any position, Carol will state the correct time in "minutes after the hour," accurate to the nearest 5 minutes, 9 of 10 trials.

Present Levels of Performance

Emil promptly follows simple, one-step directions such as "Touch the block" or "sit down" fewer than 1 of 5 times.

Objectives

1. Given a one-step direction, Emil will promptly follow the direction 9 out of 10 times.

2. Given a two-step direction, Emil will promptly follow at least the first of the two steps 9 out of 10 times.

3. Given a two-step direction, Emil will promptly follow both directions 9 out of 10 times.

Goal

Give a three-step direction, Emil will promptly follow all three steps, in the correct order, 9 out of 10 times.

Present Levels of Performance

Gerry completes and submits fewer than half of his homework assignments.

Objectives

1. Gerry will submit at least 6 of 10 assignments.

2. Gerry will submit at least 8 of 10 assignments.

3. Gerry will submit 10 of 10 assignments.

Goal

Given homework assignments within his academic capabilities, Gerry will continue to complete and submit each assignment at a level judged as satisfactory by his teacher.