

PROJECT BRIEF

Individual Education Programs Based on the DLM Essential Elements

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KEY POINTS

Students with significant cognitive disabilities who participate in DLM Alternate Assessments access grade-level content standards through DLM EEs. The entire set of EEs is a key part of any student's educational program, but IEPs based on the EEs will specify the critical areas for which students require specialized instruction.

Standards-based IEPs link a student's educational program to grade-level content standards and the EEs. An IEP may include goals directly tied to grade-level expectations or important functional skills and concepts.

IEPs for students who participate in the DLM alternate assessment will include:

- » a statement of the present level of academic achievement and functional performance,
- » annual IEP goals that address DLM Conceptual Areas and EEs where gaps in student achievement have been identified, and
- » benchmarks or objectives aligned with and based on grade-level EEs and annual goals.

FURTHER INFORMATION

DLM Professional Development Module, [Individual Education Programs Based on the DLM Essential Elements](#).

Individual Education Programs (IEPs) are mandated by law for students receiving special education services in U.S. public schools. IEPs must include a statement of the child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, including information regarding how the child's disability affects involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. An IEP also includes academic and functional measurable annual goals designed to enable the child's access to general education curriculum. For children with disabilities who take alternate assessments, the law also requires benchmarks or short-term objectives.

STANDARDS-BASED IEPs

In creating standards-based IEPs, teams identify gaps between students' present levels of academic achievement and functional performance and grade-level standards. For students participating in DLM alternate assessments, the DLM Essential Elements (EEs) serve as links to grade-level standards.

Starting with DLM EEs enables teams to identify content critical to each student's progress toward grade-level content standards. DLM EE-based IEPs promote a single educational system and single set of standards for all students. Connecting the IEP to DLM EEs also encourages higher academic expectations for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. IEPs thus developed and implemented improve students' chances for receiving specifically designed instruction linked to grade-level content standards and appropriate accommodations to support achieving grade-level expectations.

VARIATIONS ACROSS STATES

Each state has its own rules that teams should follow when determining the specific format of DLM EE-aligned IEPs. IEP teams should contact their state education agencies for specific regulations and additional information; however, teams will find the following six-step process helpful in writing IEP goals, even taking these variations into consideration.

FOCUSING THE IEP

Student goals and objectives should build on current strengths and address needs identified in present level of academic and functional performance statements. Goals and objectives or benchmarks are informed by and linked to the DLM EEs, but are *not* restatements of them. Further, IEP goals do not replace or comprise a student's curriculum. By law, all students must have access to all grade-level standards; instruction for all students targets the entire set of grade-level EEs, and IEPs detail specialized instruction students require for success. When appropriate, IEPs should include goals and objectives reflecting general functional or life skills in addition to goals linked to grade-level EEs.

It is typically not feasible to develop goals for all grade-level EEs that require specialized instruction. Starting with the DLM Conceptual Areas automatically reduces the number of possible goals from the dozens of EEs at each grade level to a maximum of nine conceptual areas in mathematics and nine in English Language Arts. The DLM Conceptual Areas are linked to understanding how learning develops in reading and mathematics and they allow the IEP team to develop goals and objectives based on important domains of knowledge, skills, and understanding that are most likely to maximize progress in the general education curriculum. The goals will be based on the team's best estimate of how far a student can advance, given specially designed instruction and accommodations, within the year that the IEP is in place.

A SIX-STEP PROCESS FOR IEPs BASED ON DLM EEs

1. **Review grade-level DLM EEs.** Become familiar with the entire EE set to understand the breadth and depth of content appropriate for each student's grade level.
2. **Examine data to determine where each student functions relative to DLM EEs.** Use data from a variety of sources including classroom observations, work samples, formal or informal assessments, and input from the parent and student. Grade-level EEs are the target for the end of the year. Consider this when identifying gaps between present level of academic achievement and grade-level EEs. Will a gap still exist at the end of the year? If not, then specialized instruction with an associated IEP goal is not required.
3. **Use DLM Claims and Conceptual Areas to help set priorities for annual goals.** EEs are clustered into Conceptual Areas, which in turn comprise Claims. For each student, teams can identify Conceptual Areas where gaps cluster and determine which are most critical. Prioritizing Conceptual Areas then leads to specific DLM EEs that require focused, specialized instruction to help the student accelerate learning and close critical gaps.
4. **Develop statements of present level of academic achievement and functional performance based on student strengths and needs relative to the selected DLM EEs.** The DLM EEs align directly to general education curriculum. Thus, the statement should describe how a child's disability affects his/her involvement and progress toward the EEs and in general education curriculum.
The statement is the foundation step toward developing DLM EE-based IEPs. The statement of present level of academic achievement and functional performance should be data-based and specific enough to serve as a baseline for developing IEP goals, and determining accommodations, supplementary aids and services, and program supports.
5. **Develop measurable annual goals aligned with selected Claims and Conceptual Areas.** The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* requires teams to include measurable annual goals in each IEP. The law requires that each IEP include measurable academic and functional annual goals designed to address needs resulting from each child's disability and to enable that child's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. The IEP must also meet all other educational needs arising from the child's disability.
6. **Develop benchmarks and/or short-term objectives aligned with the DLM EEs.** IDEA requires that IEPs for students participating in the DLM Alternate Assessment must also include a description of either benchmarks or short-term objectives for each annual goal. Individual states have determined whether or not to extend this requirement to all IEPs. Every team member should be familiar with specific state requirements while considering the process described here and supporting professional development materials offered by the DLM Consortium. This applies to the use of benchmarks or short-term objectives and other aspects of the IEP.