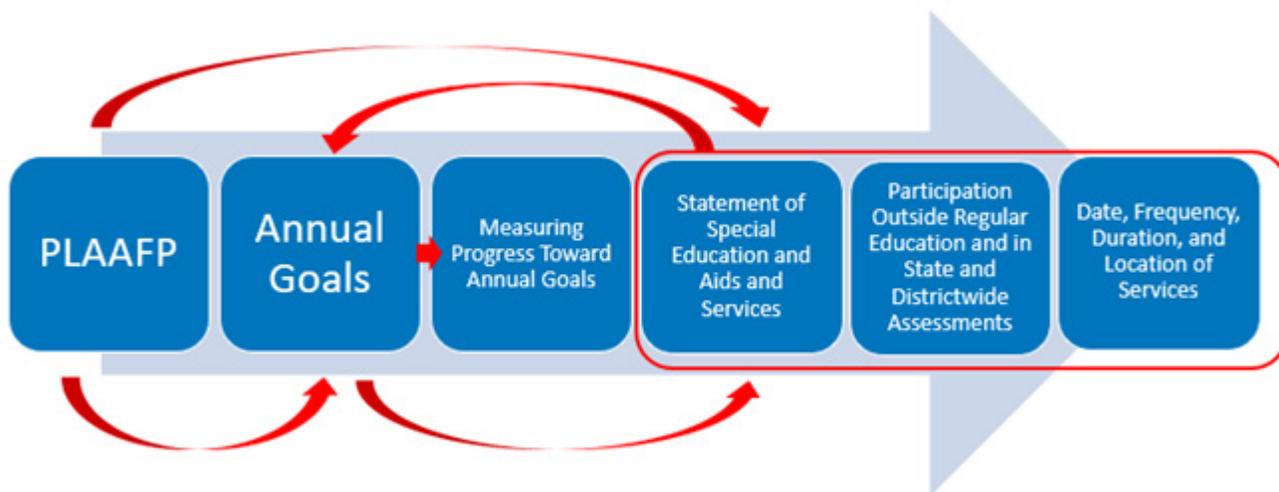




# Looking for Connections: Ensuring the Parts of the IEP Work Together

## Facilitator Guide



## About the Activity

This activity is intended to help educators and administrators analyze whether the parts of the individualized education program (IEP) work together and ensure that they are driven by student needs as described in the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) statement. Specifically, the activity will ask educators to analyze the alignment between the students' needs and the proposed services and goals within the IEP. According to the U.S. Department of Education (34 C.F.R. § 300, 1999, Appendix C, Question 36):

There should be a direct relationship between the present levels of performance and the other components of the IEP. Thus, if the statement describes a problem with the child's reading level and points to a deficiency in reading skills, the problem should be addressed under both goals and specific special education and related services provided to the child.

Before this activity, we recommend that participants become comfortable with the structure and components of the IEP. Depending on the knowledge and experience of participants, facilitators may find it helpful to require participants to complete the self-paced course [IDEA and the IEP: From Compliance to PROGRESS](#) and/or provide training on the IEP structure and content. For participants with less background knowledge or who are using a less familiar IEP document, it may also be helpful to complete the [Getting to Know Your IEP](#) activity to ensure they are familiar with where they can find needs, services, and goals in the IEP.

This guide includes information to support facilitating the activity and includes options for how the activity can be adapted depending on the time available and the knowledge of the participants. To complete the activity, we recommend that facilitators provide a redacted copy of a local IEP or use the [IEP Case Scenario Handout: G.H.](#) to ensure that the entire group is reviewing the same document the first time the activity is completed. Why use the G.H. scenario? For some participants, reviewing an example scenario before reviewing an actual IEP makes it easier to

### Activity Overview

- **Purpose:** Understand the extent to which the IEP is reasonably calculated to promote progress by addressing the identified needs and corresponding goals and services
- **Suggested time:** 20–60 minutes
- **Suggested audience:** General and special educators, administrators, special education staff, preservice educators
- **Materials:** Participant handout, copy of an IEP or [G.H. scenario](#), three to five highlighters of different colors
- **Prerequisite knowledge:** Understanding of the IEP components and structure



analyze and review the content. Note that the G.H. scenario is for professional learning purposes. As such, it includes elements of a well-written IEP along with areas that need improvement.

### Activity Objectives

By completing this activity, participants will be able to

- identify the needs, services, and goals outlined in the IEP,
- analyze how the identified needs connect to the proposed services and aids and annual goals, and
- reflect on how well the parts of the IEP align and whether the IEP is addressing all the needs.

## Facilitating the Activity

This section presents an overview of the process and materials needed to facilitate the activity.

- Review the structure and purpose of the activity.
- Determine whether you will use a copy of a redacted local IEP or the G.H. scenario. When selecting an IEP, consider a less complicated one, if possible. (If you ask participants to use an IEP that they are not familiar with, it may take additional time to identify the key components.)
- Schedule time to facilitate the activity. Depending on timing and group structure, prioritize and customize the activity to meet the needs of your audience. This guide provides two different structures.
  - The 40- to 60-minute session includes time for the group to reflect and check their understanding after each step of the activity.
  - The 20- to 30-minute session includes time for reflection after participants have completed all steps of the activity.
  - An additional option for how to further adapt the structure based on the group dynamics and familiarity with the process is also provided.
- If you are planning to model the activity, ensure you have identified clear examples and that the technology is set up to project your examples.
- Ask participants to bring highlighters or provide them yourself.

### Materials

Each participant will need the following:

- Copy of participant handout
- Copy (not original) of an IEP or the [G.H. scenario](#)
- Three to five highlighters of different colors



### Sample Structure for a 40- to 60-Minute Session

Step	Description of step
<b>Set the stage (5 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set the activity purpose by reviewing why this activity is important and the primary activity objectives. Reinforce that this activity is not intended to be evaluative but a learning experience.</li> </ul>
<b>Step 1: Identify needs (5–10 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Briefly review how student needs are a key feature of the student’s PLAAFP statement.</li> <li>• Model an example. Review the PLAAFP statement and highlight a student need.</li> <li>• Ask participants to             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– locate the remaining student needs described in the PLAAFP statement of the IEP, and</li> <li>– highlight each unique need with a different color highlighter.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Discussion and reflection (5–10 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a whole group or in small groups, have participants reflect and discuss. The following are potential questions to consider:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What needs did you identify?</li> <li>– How did you identify the student needs?</li> <li>– To what extent were the needs clearly identified in the PLAAFP statement?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Step 2: Identify aids and services (10 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say, “In this step, we are going to identify the special education, related services, supplementary aids and services, and program modifications and supports for school personnel that correspond to the needs we identified in Step 1.” If needed, consider referring to the <a href="#">IEP Tip Sheet: Overview of Statement of Services and Aids</a>.</li> <li>• Model an example. Refer to the need you identified in Step 1. Highlight the corresponding special education, related services, supplementary aids or services, or program modifications/supports for school personnel.</li> <li>• Ask participants to             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– select one of the needs they highlighted during Step 1,</li> <li>– review the IEP to identify and highlight the related special education, related services, supplementary aids and services, or program modifications/supports for school personnel using the same color highlighter, and</li> <li>– repeat this step for the remaining needs identified in Step 1.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



Step	Description of step
<b>Discussion</b> <b>(5–10 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a whole group or in small groups, have participants reflect and discuss. The following are potential questions to consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What services did you identify?</li> <li>– To what extent is there a clearly aligned service, aid, or program modification for each need?</li> <li>– Were there services that did not have a corresponding need?</li> <li>– Were there identified needs that did not have a corresponding service?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Step 3: Identify goals</b> <b>(5 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say, “Next we are going to identify the goals that correspond to the needs we identified in Step 1.”</li> <li>• Model an example. Refer to the need you identified in Step 1. Highlight the goal that corresponds to the primary need of the student who requires specially designed instruction. Remind participants that multiple needs can be addressed through a single goal and that goals should align with provided specially designed instruction.</li> <li>• Ask participants to               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– select one of the needs highlighted during Step 1,</li> <li>– review the IEP to identify and highlight the corresponding goal using the same color highlighter associated with the selected need, and</li> <li>– repeat this step for the remaining needs identified in Step 1.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Discussion</b> <b>(5–10 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a whole group or in small groups, have participants reflect and discuss. The following are potential questions to consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To what extent do your goals address the primary needs of the student?</li> <li>– Are all the needs identified in the PLAAFP statement addressed in the goals and proposed services?</li> <li>– Are there goals that are proposed that do not have a corresponding need?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



### Sample Meeting Structure for a 20- to 30-Minute Session

Step	Description of step
<b>Set the stage</b> <b>(5 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set the activity purpose by reviewing why this activity is important and the objectives. Reinforce that this is not intended to be evaluative but a learning experience.</li> <li>• Briefly describe how student needs are a key feature of the student’s PLAAFP statement.</li> <li>• Briefly model reviewing the PLAAFP statement to identify and highlight a student need and corresponding aids, services, and goals aligned to the needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Identify needs, aids, services, and goals</b> <b>(10–15 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask participants to complete the following steps:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identify and highlight each remaining need in the IEP with a different highlighter.</li> <li>– Identify and highlight the special education, related services, supplementary aids or services, or program modifications/supports for school personnel related to each need. (Remind participants to use the same color highlighter associated with the highlighted need.)</li> <li>– Identify and highlight the corresponding goals. (Remind participants to use the same color highlighter associated with the highlighted need.)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Discussion and reflection</b> <b>(5–10 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a whole group or in small groups, have participants reflect and discuss. The following are potential questions to consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To what extent are the needs clearly identified in the PLAAFP statement?</li> <li>– To what extent does each need have a clearly aligned service, aid, or program modification?</li> <li>– To what extent do your goals address the primary needs of the student?</li> <li>– Are all the needs identified in the PLAAFP statement addressed in the goals and proposed services?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

#### Alternative Option

If time is limited, consider focusing on one part of the process (e.g., mapping needs to services or needs to goals) rather than mapping the needs to both the services and goals. Alternatively, you could complete all steps with only one need identified in the PLAAFP statement.

### Key Ideas to Reinforce While Facilitating the Activity

This section summarizes some key ideas that are important for facilitators to emphasize while facilitating the activity.



- This activity is *not intended* to teach participants about the PLAAFP statement, measurable annual goals, or statement of services and aids or to analyze the quality of the components in isolation. It is intended to ensure that participants see how these three parts align to create an internally consistent IEP. If participants are struggling to identify the needs, goals, and services in the IEP, consider providing the PROGRESS Center [IEP Tip Sheets](#) to participants as a resource, stop and teach key concepts about the IEP components, or complete the [Getting to Know Your IEP](#) activity before continuing with the activity.
- This activity is *not designed* to be evaluative. It is a learning experience to help participants be more thoughtful in creating future IEPs. As a facilitator, you may need to redirect participants' attention if they complain about the IEP structure or begin critiquing the quality of the IEP.
- When facilitating the activity, consider reinforcing the following key messages:
  - The PLAAFP statement and specifically the student needs identified in the PLAAFP statement provide the foundation for the rest of the IEP.
  - Every need identified in the PLAAFP statement should have a corresponding service or aid (i.e., special education, related service, supplementary aid or service, or program modification/supports for school personnel).
  - Some needs may not have a corresponding measurable annual goal, but every need that necessitates specially designed instruction (special education) should have a corresponding measurable annual goal.
  - No service or goal should be proposed if it does not have a corresponding need.

## After the Activity

Following the activity, facilitators may find it helpful to:

- Encourage participants to replicate the activity with an IEP for a student that they work with.
- Share the following resources to help participants learn more about the PLAAFP, statement of services and aids, and measurable annual goals:
  - PROGRESS Center IEP Tip Sheets
    - » [IEP Tip Sheet: PLAAFPs](#)
    - » [IEP Tip Sheet: Measurable Annual Goals](#)
    - » [IEP Tip Sheet: Overview of Statement of Services and Aids](#)
  - PROGRESS Center [Self-Paced Learning Courses](#) focused on the IEP.



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