

In this issue: **Individualized Education Plans (IEP)**

In this edition of reSources you will find articles and resources related to the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that we hope families and educational professionals will find useful as they collaborate to ensure young children and youth who are deafblind are provided with an appropriate comprehensive IEP. Topics covered include an informational update about California's Alternate Diploma Pathway; a discussion of eligibility categories and the importance of documenting deafblindness within the IEP; guidance on developing meaningful and appropriately ambitious IEP goals: an approach to supporting a student's meaningful participation in the development of their IEP; and practical tips for family members participation on the IEP team. The articles include links to multiple external resources related to the IEP process. If your team would like further consultation and resources as you develop and implement an IEP for a child or youth who is deafblind, our CDBS staff can provide child-specific technical assistance. Learn more here: <https://cadeafblind.org/ta/>

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Meet the New Director of California Deafblind Services



Dr. Adam Graves

We are pleased to announce that **Dr. Adam Graves** is the new director of California Deafblind Services! CDBS has been expertly led by Dr. Kathleen Mortier of the Extensive Support Needs Program in the Special Education Department at San Francisco State University since 2019 until her retirement from SFSU in August 2024. Dr. Mortier has returned to her home country of Belgium where she will continue to engage in policy work related to the important issues of impartial involved education and family-professional partnerships. We are very grateful for the leadership and support she provided our CDBS team for the past five years.

Dr. Graves coordinates and teaches in the Visual Impairments Program in the Special Education Department at San Francisco State University and

is the current president of the Council of Exceptional Children (CEC) Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness. In addition to this work in teacher preparation in the field of visual impairments, Dr. Graves has worked with students who are blind, visually impaired, and deafblind since 2003. Over the years he has served as a classroom assistant, special education teacher, teacher of students with visual impairments, and as an educational consultant for the Texas Deafblind Project. We feel he is the perfect match for CDBS and we're excited for you to get to know him. He is eager to meet and support more professionals and families across the state.



Dr. Kathleen Mortier

VIDEO SERIES: Individualized Education Plans (IEP)

California Deafblind Services hosted a virtual family training series in the Spring of 2024, titled “Ensuring a Quality IEP for Your Child with Deafblindness.” In this four-part webinar series, CDBS staff and other highly qualified professionals presented key information and shared helpful resources. The recordings of these free hour-long webinars (both English and Spanish versions) are available through the [California Deafblind Services YouTube page](#)

1. “Your Rights as an Advocate for Your Child”; Mary Rios from Disability Rights California
2. “Understanding the IEP Assessment Process; Darlene Norman, LEP; Resilient Minds Collective
3. “Developing Appropriate Goals, Services, and Accommodations”; Linda Burnett, DHH teacher, Julie Maier, and Janelle Dowling from CDBS
4. “Communicating and Collaboration with Your Child’s IEP Team; Myrna Medina and Janelle Dowling from CDBS

[Webinar series can be found here:](#)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2JMOP_SIF8&list=PLPmj65Huj6Q_OyuSvxbB6n4fpbq4m_jv5

Developing ambitious, realistic, and relevant IEP goals for learners who are deafblind

By Julie Maier, CDBS Project Coordinator

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) guides the delivery of special education services for a student with disabilities. One might consider it a blueprint for what the educational team will provide and do to ensure a student's access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) states "The IEP includes a statement of which special education and related services are to be provided to a child with a disability, so that the child can (1) advance toward the attainment of annual goals, (2) make progress in the general education curriculum, and (3) be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers." [IDEA §1414\(d\)\(1\)\(A\)\(i\)\(IV\)](#). This article highlights the importance of developing student goals within the IEP that are individualized, meaningful, appropriately challenging, and attainable.

Children and youth who are deafblind, especially those with additional disabilities, have unique needs related to access to language, grade level curriculum, and the people, activities, and materials in their environment. An educational team who takes the time and care to develop individualized, meaningful goals for a learner who is deafblind makes a positive impact on the student's life. Meaningful and appropriately challenging goals will lead to skill and concept development in areas that will enhance the student's participation and independence in their school and home communities and prepare them for a satisfying adult life. Due to the access needs and sensory profiles of learners with these complex support needs, individualization is key. Selecting goals from a resource like an IEP Goal Bank is not an appropriate way to develop goals for a student who is deafblind, unless the goal is customized to address the student's unique instructional needs.

Examples of goals from goal bank that ARE NOT individualized or particularly meaningful:

1. When shown vocabulary cards with pictures, Corrina will match the card to another matching card in the set with 80% accuracy in 4/5 trials.
2. When presented with pictures of objects, Mei will count the objects with 80% accuracy for 4 out of 5 sessions.
3. When given a puzzle, Terrence will assemble the puzzle with 80% accuracy in 4/5 trials.
4. When given a task, Jose will stay on task for a predetermined amount of time with 80% accuracy in 4/5 trials.

Examples of goals that ARE individualized, meaningful, appropriately challenging:

1. During academic lessons and activities in both her 3rd grade and special education classes, Corrina will recognize 5-10 content-based vocabulary words by looking or reaching toward a choice of two picture-supported vocabulary cards when completing a shared writing task or answering reading comprehension questions with 80% accuracy.
2. During math lesson and routines throughout the day, including class jobs and recess games, Mei will correctly count objects and people using her fingers or a number line to count to 10 in 4 out 5 of opportunities.
3. At the beginning of the day given adult support and modeling, Terrence will assemble his daily object calendar by placing tactile objects in the order of the day's schedule, reference his schedule during time between lessons and activities, and indicate when an activity is complete by placing the object cue in a finished box with 80% accuracy.
4. When in a calm, regulated state and provided with a high-contrast, visual photo checklist Jose will complete a familiar classroom or school job with less than three reminders over a 10-minute period in 4 out 5 days.

IEP goals are created and reviewed on an annual basis for two purposes. First, to ensure the student is provided with the instruction, supports, and accommodations necessary to make progress in areas of identified need. Second, to capture a student's progress during the previous 12 months. Annual student goals are based on a student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP). It is essential that the team collaboratively identifies the student's abilities, preferences, and areas for growth or need before developing the annual goals. When determining a student's present levels it is very important that we are keeping the student's strengths in mind. Rather than comparing a student to peers of the same age and noting areas where they may be behind or deficient, the team should identify and describe in detail how the student is currently performing in a particular area such as communication, motor skills, social skills, and academic knowledge. Ideally, this description includes the accommodations, modifications, and supports the student uses to participate in lessons, activities, and daily routines and how the student can respond and show what they know.

Present level descriptions also identify areas of need, and it is essential that the student's sensory profile, interests and preferences, and accommodations or modifications that support access and participation are noted. This assessment should include input from educators and service providers with knowledge and experience with deafblindness. Meaningful and relevant goals will consider and incorporate the student's current, preferred mode(s) of communication and their sensory functioning and visual, auditory and physical access needs.

Based on the present levels the IEP team develops goals that they confidently determined the student can reasonably achieve within 12 months. Family members, and the student when appropriate, should participate in the development of the goals that address high-priority needs. Certainly, the family's priorities in terms of the skills they want their child to learn and the life that they envision for their child in the future should be considered as the goals are developed.

There is no magic number of goals for an IEP. The IEP should include a goal that addresses each area of identified need. Every IEP should include academic goals that align to grade level academic standards, including for students who participate in the alternate state assessment. Additional goals related to communication and language development, social interactions and relationships, motor skill development, independent life skills, and self-determination are often included for students with more extensive support needs.

IDEA clearly states that all students should be working toward academic goals that are aligned with grade-level academic standards and that includes students with more complex support needs. A previous reSources article, "[Making Meaningful Connections to Grade-Level Curriculum: An Approach to Adapting Core Curriculum](#)" explains the importance of providing impartial access and participation to grade-level curriculum and practical ways to provide meaningful academic instruction. That article may be helpful to consider when developing academic goals for a learner who is deafblind with additional disabilities.

In addition to academic-related goals, goals that support communication skills and concept development, social interactions, increased independence and self-determination, and functional skills for daily living are typically needed. Communication goals may focus on developing or enhancing skills in use of tactile sign language, tactile symbols, object communication, or the use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices. Social interaction goals could promote socialization skills and developing relationships with peers and adults and the team might design structured activities, peer-mediated interventions, and multiple opportunities for meaningful social engagement across the day. Goals related to independence and functional skills may include activities of choice-making and goal setting, daily living, orientation and mobility skills, and self-care tasks using adaptive strategies and equipment.

Goals should describe a specific, measurable skill or behavior that is relevant to the learner which they can realistically achieve sometime within the next 12 months. There are certain requirements for goals and an acronym commonly used to describe those components is SMART. (Sources: The IRIS Center; Shelley Moore).

S	Specific / Strength-based
M	Measurable / Meaningful
A	Ambitious / Attainable
R	Relevant / Realistic
T	Time-specific / Triangulated e.g. (multiple ways to track student progress)

An example of a SMART goal related to social skills might be: *“Katie will approach peer(s) and initiate suggesting a recess game or asking to join a recess game and play a turn-taking game with the peer for at least 5 minutes 4 out of 5 days a week as measured by an observation charted data and students and peer reports.”*

Measurement of a goal can occur in many ways. As they develop each annual goal the team should determine and describe the ways that the members of the team will know that the skill or concept was demonstrated and describe that in measurable terms. For the previous suggested goal, the measurement might be as simple as keeping a monthly calendar in which it’s indicated

who a student invited to join them at recess, what game they played, for how long, and how much adult or peer support was provided. Every two to three weeks the teacher reviews the data and note the patterns and indicate if the student’s performance is changing or increasing or if a modification needs to be made to the activity or to the goal to ensure it can be practiced on a regular basis.

Collaboration among all members of the IEP team, including parents, educators, specialists, and the student when appropriate, will lead to the development of meaningful goals that address the student’s skills, interests, needs, and goals for the future. Goals must be individualized, flexible, and responsive to the student’s progress, preferences, and changing support needs. Regularly monitoring goals through data collection and observation allows the team to track student progress and make adjustments to the instruction, activities and accommodations and modifications as needed. Through technical assistance (TA) our CDBS team can assist educational teams and families with consultation and feedback on the development of a student’s IEP. You can find information about technical assistance and the TA request form here: <https://cadeafblind.org/ta/>

Below are several helpful resources to support educational teams, including family members, in understanding all the components of an Individualized Education Program and the development of meaningful IEP goals for a learner who is deafblind.

The IRIS Center: [Developing High-Quality Individualized Education Programs](#)

The IRIS Center: [Challenging, Ambitious, Measurable Annual Goals](#)

Center for Parent Information and Resources: [Annual Goals in the IEP](#)

Center for Parent Information and Resources: [Content of the IEP](#)

References:

Center for Parent Information & Resources. (2017). Annual Goals in the IEP. Retrieved from <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/iepgoals/#content>

IDEA §1414(d)(1)(A)(i)(IV). Individualized Education Program. (2004). U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-ii/1414/d>

The IRIS Center. (2019). IEPs: Developing high-quality individualized education programs. Retrieved from <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/iep01/>

Moore, Shelley. (2019). See ya later S.M.A.R.T. goals. Five Moore Minutes. Retrieved from <https://fivemooreminutes.com/see-ya-later-s-m-a-r-t-goals/>

Practical Tips for Participating in Your Child's IEP Meeting

By Myrna Medina, Family Engagement Specialist

For many families learning that an IEP is in the calendar can be a scary or nerve-racking experience for many different reasons. Potential discussion topics at an IEP meeting such as placement offer, related services, accommodations and, most importantly, their child's levels of performance can bring up these emotions. It is very difficult for families to hear others describe the things their child cannot do or point out they are not meeting specific goals or expectations. Another reason this situation can be stressful is because many families do not understand the IEP process, much less how to prepare before attending their child's IEP meeting.

The IEP process is one of the most important components in the delivery of special education and related services for students with disabilities. As their child's primary advocate, parents and other legal guardians need to fully understand the IEP process and their role in the process. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a legally binding written plan that provides information about the specifically designed instruction, related services, and other supports to meet the student's unique needs. This plan is created collaboratively by the educational team evaluating and providing educational services to their child. The educational team includes teachers, other related service providers, and the family members, typically the child's parents. This annual meeting's purpose is either 1) development of the first IEP for a student; or 2) evaluation of progress made on the previous IEP and determination of new goals, services, and supports; or to address a new concern.

The goal of the IEP meeting is to ensure that the educational plan meets the student's unique needs by establishing reasonable learning goals for the student, and stating the services, supports, and accommodations / modifications the school district will provide for the student. The educational team is composed of people who bring different perspectives, experiences, and expertise to the table. These multiple perspectives are used to consider the student's strengths, interests, educational performance and then craft goals that meet the student's unique needs. The development of an appropriate and meaningful IEP requires the team members, including the parents, to share a lot of information and engage in lengthy discussion. If family members do not feel prepared this can feel very overwhelming.

The following are practical tips for family members to use during the IEP process. They are organized as before the meeting, during the meeting and after the meeting. I know it is necessary to learn about the parental rights and responsibilities included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as families advocate for a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for their child and I think starting with these basic strategies will help family members feel more confident and empowered. Learning the basic skills to prepare should make things easier and less stressful especially when there is the sense that "it is you against the world".



Before the Meeting

1. Understand why your child qualifies for special education.
2. Diagnosis / Eligibility criteria
3. What type of meeting is going to take place: Is it the initial IEP? The annual review? The three-year reassessment for services IEP? Or an addendum to add services or address a new concern? Or a progression IEP?
4. Organize your child's folder: gather medical information, evaluations, or any written communication, and relevant resources to share.
5. Organize your own notes, write a list of issues and concerns that you feel are important, including your own questions. (See the IEP Team Planner Tool under Additional Resources)
6. Be the expert on your child: Prepare a sample parent vision statement that describes your child. This is your opportunity to highlight your child's strengths, challenges/needs, preferences, learning styles, dreams and goals and your vision as a parent. (See Example of Parent Vision Statement and Positive Student Profile under Additional Resources)
7. Request a copy of the draft IEP and evaluations prior to the meeting so you have time to read it ahead of time.
8. Check if the notice of the meeting lists all participants and notify the school if you will have guests attending the meeting with you.

Parent right: To receive proper written notice, in their native language.

During the Meeting

1. Be proactive- Always arrive early to the meeting. That will give you time to settle in and not stress.
2. Bring your prepared binder showing a picture of your child, so everyone knows the focus of the conversations should be around the student. It helps to humanize the discussion.
3. Bring your questions, concerns, and any information you want to share.
4. Bring a friend/ support/ note taker/ advocate. Note: You must give proper notice to the school district at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.
5. Collaborate/cooperate. When possible, do an icebreaker activity, such as moving the seating arrangement, that would help to change the energy of the meeting and will let them know that the team can work together to promote the student's success.
6. Be open to new ideas. Professionals also want the best for your child.
7. Ask questions to clarify anything that is unclear or if you have concerns. Special education laws and programs are complicated. Even when you are well prepared, you may hear unfamiliar terms during an IEP meeting.
8. Focus on the outcome and make sure the team understands your expectations and goals for your child. This keeps everyone on the same page as you work together on a plan.

Parent right: To participate in the development of the IEP and any decision-making meeting.

Concluding the Meeting and After the Meeting

1. Make sure you thoroughly understand the IEP offer before agreeing to services.
2. Ask any clarifying questions, do not leave the meeting without a satisfying answer.
3. Ask for a copy of the IEP document to review at home and then return the signed IEP after reviewing.
4. Use written communication before or after the meeting such as email, text or written letter that provides a record of communication between you and other team members.
5. Recognize and appreciate the time and effort of the entire team

Parent right: May refuse to consent to the IEP or a portion(s) of the IEP, such as assessment results, educational goals, placement offer, accommodations and modifications, or services and supports.

You can sign the IEP to indicate your attendance and participation in the meeting, but not consent to the IEP. You have the right to bring it home to review, sign, and return.

Preparation is the key to being an effective, confident advocate at **your child's** IEP meetings. Once you have everything ready for the meeting, try to relax and focus on your child's strengths, interests, and challenges. Remember that you know and understand your child better than anyone else on the IEP team does. That mindset will help you approach the IEP meeting with strength and confidence.

Additional resources:

- [Example of Parents' Vision Statement and Positive Student Profile](#). This example was provided by a CDBS Family Support Provider.
- [Individualized Education Plan \(IEP\) Checklist for Parents](#) by PACER Center Inc.
- [IEP Team Meeting Planner](#) by PACER Center Inc.
- [The Short-and-Sweet IEP Overview](#) by the Center for Parents Information & Resources
- [Developing an Effective IEP for Children with Deaf-Blindness: A Parent Mini-Guide](#) A collaboration of Perkins School for the Blind, Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN), state deaf-blind projects, and families of children with Deafblindness.
- [Families as Partners in the Educational Team: Parenting and Leadership](#) by Perkins School for the Blind

BETTER



BEST



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B's Profile



Nickname: B.

Age: 7

Favorite items: Ipad, picture books, light-up toys, Blue's clues show, Simple Songs videos & Disney Rhymes.

Strengths & Attributes:

- Smart
- Curious (Sensory seeker)
- Happy
- Friendly
- Visual learner
- Right hand dominant

Vision & Goals:

1. We envision B. living a life of Choice in a safe and healthy environment.
2. We envision B. making meaningful relationships at school and in the community.
3. We envision B. spending her days at places that she enjoys and finds productive.
4. We envision B. living her life to the fullest and as independent as possible with the adaptations based on her needs.
5. We envision B. learning daily life skills with the appropriate support based on her cognitive level of understanding.
6. We envision B. expanding her receptive language and communicating her thoughts through her AAC device.

What works?

- Patience
- Praise me for my achievements
- Making eye contact
- Background noise-reduction
- Giving time to process a question/command.
- Regulate behavior- Floor activities/ mouthing toys/rag.

What Doesn't work?

- Being off routine/rushed
- Unclear/long directions or commands
- Sudden or unexpected changes
- Hot environment
- Loud sounds
- Yelling
- Assuming I don't understand
- Soiled diapers

CA's Alternative Pathway to a Diploma: Key Information and Resources

By Janelle Dowling, CDBS Educational Specialist

Until 2023, high school students with extensive support needs who participate in the state's alternate assessment had only two options when they were planning for graduation. Students either had to meet local and state requirements for a diploma, (including [A-G courses](#) without modifications to the curriculum — *A-G courses are the 15 or more courses across 7 subject areas required to be eligible for California public universities*) or they could receive a certificate of completion. In September of 2023, [Education Code 51255.31](#) became effective and now allows for students who meet specific criteria to opt for an “Alternative Pathway to a Diploma”.

What is the Alternative Pathway to a Diploma in California?

This is a route to a high school diploma that was developed into law in California under the Federal “Every Student Succeeds Act” and [Education Code 51255.31](#). It is designed specifically to allow for students with exceptional support needs who began grade 9 in the 2022-2023 school year or later to receive a high school diploma. This alternative pathway to a diploma can be applied to students who meet the criteria and are attending school at a public school, charter school, state special school, or through the county office of education. If the student qualifies for the alternative pathway to a diploma and completes their coursework requirements, they will be allowed to participate in all graduation activities, receive their high school diploma, and continue to receive their special education services through age 22, as defined in their IEP.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Who can qualify for this alternative pathway to diploma in California?

A student with exceptional support needs, who is eligible to take the California Alternative Assessment and who has started their ninth grade year in 2022-2023 school year or later. The IEP team should discuss the appropriateness of this alternative pathway to a diploma and clarify the specific plan for your student. Once the team has determined that the student is eligible, they will develop a plan for the student's course schedule to ensure that they have access to standards aligned coursework.

2. How do we approach this topic with the IEP team? Who determines whether my child is eligible?

The IEP team will discuss the student's eligibility and the appropriateness of this alternative pathway for the student. The team will determine eligibility for the CAA and can use this guide to help with the discussion:

- <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/caaiepteamrev.asp>
- <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/documents/altassessmentdecision.pdf>

If you want to initiate this discussion with your child's IEP team, you should do so as early as possible, so the coursework can be laid out to effectively meet the minimum requirements.

3. What are the course requirements for the Alt-Pathway?

Students will complete state standards-aligned coursework meeting the [California statewide minimum coursework requirements](#), specified in [Section 51225.3](#) of the Education Code.

Here is an example of a planning template you might use in your planning:

Fill in the table with course titles your child/student plans to complete for each requirement. You will have “open” boxes, where electives and specialized classes can be included in the plan.

EC 51225.3	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade	Beyond 12th
3 yrs- English					
2yrs Math: including 1 Algebra					
2yrs-Science: -life sci/biology -physical science					
3yrs: Social Studies: -World History -US History -Government (1sem) -Economics (1sem)					
1 yr Elective from Vis Perm Arts, World Language and/or CTE					
2yrs PE					

4. How is this diploma different from an A-G diploma or the certificate of completion?

The A-G diploma includes local additional high school graduation requirements, which are in line with University of California expectations. This alternative pathway removes these local requirements and includes only the state minimum requirements with standards-aligned coursework with modified course content standards. The diploma still signifies that the student completed a rigorous academic course load in high school and is treated as equivalent to a high school diploma. A certificate of completion is an option for students who do not qualify for the alternative pathway and have not completed the requirements for a traditional high school diploma. The certificate shows that the student worked toward progress on their IEP goals, but did not meet the same minimum requirements in coursework.

5. Once my child receives this diploma, will their special education services be terminated?

No, services will not be terminated after high school graduation with this pathway. The [LEA \(Local Educational Agency\)](#) will continue to hold responsibility to provide [FAPE \(free appropriate public education\)](#) through age 22, even if your child completes their alternative pathway to the diploma prior to age 22. The law states, “(2) In accordance with Section 300.102(a)(3) of Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations, the award of a diploma of graduation from high school pursuant to this subdivision does not change a local educational agency’s obligation to provide a free appropriate public education until 22 years of age, or otherwise constitute a change in placement.” This is different from the traditional high school diploma, where if a student with an IEP meets the requirements and graduates with a traditional high school diploma, they no longer qualify for special education and related services.

6. Where can I find more information about the modified course content standards?

The “Core Content Connectors” identify the most important skills for students to learn within each common core standard and break that into simpler steps, creating a framework for teaching grade level content to students with extensive support needs, which includes multiple disabilities, in a way that is meaningful and accessible.

You can find more details about these Core Content connectors (CCCs) here:

CA Dept. of Education <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/altassessment.asp>

Undivided: Core Content Connectors and Essential Understandings <https://undivided.io/resources/core-content-connectors-and-essential-understandings-311>

Helpful Resources:

CA Dept. of Education Information about Alternate Pathway: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/lr/om082523.asp>

Undivided: California’s New Pathway to a High School Diploma for Students with Intellectual Disabilities <https://undivided.io/resources/californias-new-pathway-to-a-high-school-diploma-for-students-with-intellectual-disabilities-1243>

California Includes Sacramento County Office of Education: California’s “New Alternative Pathway to a High School Diploma for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities” <https://bit.ly/CAIncludesAltPathway>

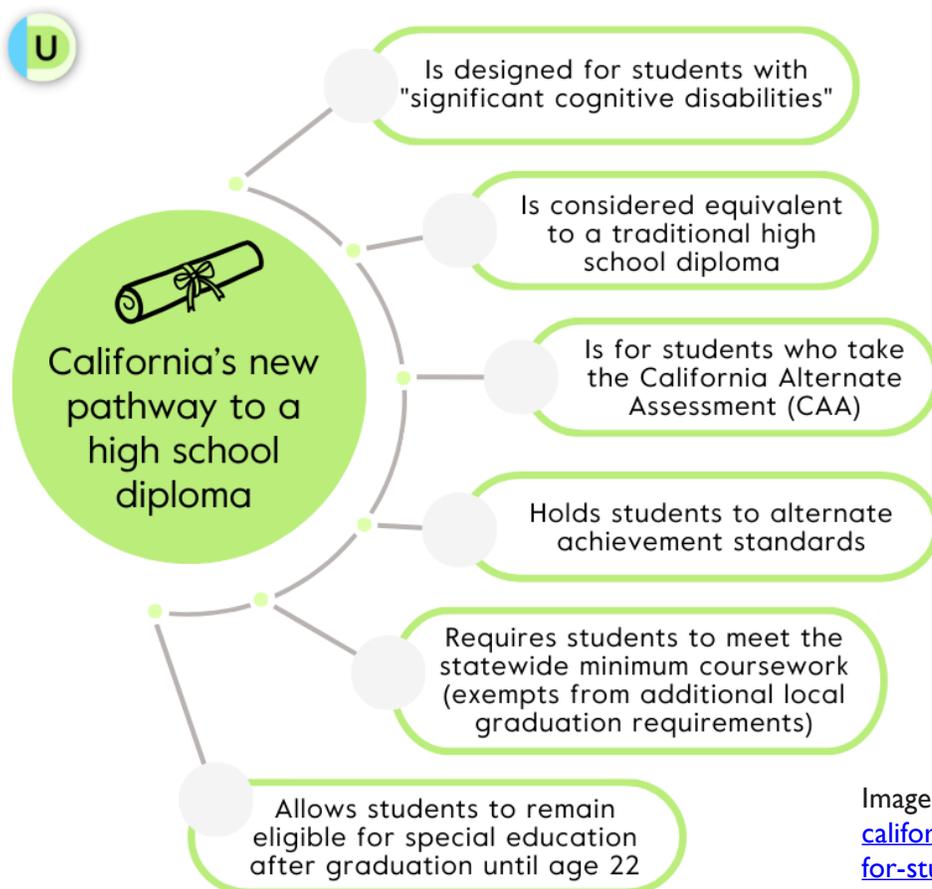


Image Source: <https://undivided.io/resources/californias-new-pathway-to-a-high-school-diploma-for-students-with-intellectual-disabilities-1243>

Student Participation in Their IEP Process

By Janelle Dowling, Educational Specialist

In the Summer of 2015, Julie Maier wrote an article about student participation in the IEP process. In the two-part series, titled, “It’s My Life! Considering the Student-Directed IEP Process”, Julie highlighted many reasons that it is essential for students to actively and meaningfully participate in the assessment, planning, and implementation of their IEPs. This involves a student gaining better understanding of their own abilities and challenges, assessment results, needs, goals, and services. What it means to “actively and meaningfully participate” will look very different for each student.

“The skills and knowledge necessary to fully participate in all aspects of the three IEP phases may be easier to imagine for a student with more academic and expressive language skills. However students who are more impacted by their sensory losses or other physical or intellectual disabilities can certainly participate in the student-directed IEP process in meaningful ways with direct instruction, appropriate supports, adaptations, and accommodations, and supportive team behind them. The key here is to identify ways in which the student can share personal information and goals for their future, make meaningful choices, state preferences, and agree or disagree with goals and plans that other team members are suggesting. Even a student who can respond to yes/no questions or can share information with others by selecting a choice from a field of two or more options using photos, picture symbols, or tactile objects of preferred people, activities, places, and things is helping to direct their IEP plan.” (p. 3).

I have worked with many different IEP teams who are implementing a Student-Directed IEP Process and some of the most successful examples have been with students who have been meaningfully involved in some or all phases of their IEP since they were elementary school age. I consistently observe that these teams can keep the student at the center of their planning and discussions. They also consider the assessment from the student’s perspective and think of better ways to explain the meaning behind the results. They collaborate more effectively because the process is more humanized and personal.

[“It’s My Life! Considering the Student-Directed IEP Process Part 1”](#) included tables that listed several specific “Supports and Adaptations to Consider” in each phase of the IEP, depending on the individual’s support needs. In the table on the next page, I provide ideas for ways that students can participate and direct their IEP before the actual meetings are held and during the meeting process itself. In addition to thinking about the student’s access and support needs, we also want to consider their age in determining the most appropriate ways for them to engage in these phases.



Age	Before the IEP Meeting	During the Meeting Process
5-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn about my myself/my disability • Learn what an IEP is • Prepare slides, a collection, or a collage about my favorite things • Learn about my strengths and talents • Learn about things that are hard for me and what can help • Learn about tools, people, and strategies that “work for me” • Create a presentation, poster, or video to share this info with my team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make invitations or digital invitations to the IEP meeting • Bake or make something to share with attendees • Choose pictures to share in a slideshow or print/display • Join or lead the meeting introductions and greetings • Join or lead Strengths and Preferences • Share slides or responses to questions with the team (virtually if not present) • Create and share a fun digital background or “wait time music” for virtual meetings
11-13	<p><i>Same as above plus</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn vocabulary and acronyms related to my IEP • Reflect and evaluate how I did on my goals this year. • Brainstorm and draft new goal ideas for what I want to learn next year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bake or make something to share with attendees • Choose pictures to share in a slideshow or print/display • Join or lead any sections my team and I determine to be appropriate. • Review a recording or notes from the meeting afterward with a teacher or parent and share my thoughts/feedback
14-18	<p><i>Same as above plus</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in developing my progression plan • Review data or work samples and reflect on progress toward IEP goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send invitations to the team, organize the meeting details, determine and share the agenda. • Join or lead any sections my team and I determine to be appropriate • If not present, review a recording or notes from the meeting afterward with a teacher or parent and share my thoughts/feedback • Sign the IEP when appropriate
18+	<p><i>Same as above plus</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to update and evaluate my progression plans • Update my video resume if I have one 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join or lead any sections my team and I determine to be appropriate (at this age, the student should be fully involved if possible) • If not present, review a recording or notes from the meeting afterward with a teacher or parent and share my thoughts/feedback • Sign the IEP when appropriate

In my experience working with students and families considering a shift to a Student-Directed IEP Process, there are some concerns that frequently arise. The next page gives some scenarios and suggestions for addressing these concerns.

What if...	Then try this...
It is too difficult for me to stay regulated in a meeting like this, but I still want to listen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student can join from a live virtual feed and be able to see and hear everyone but have themselves muted as needed. • Another option is to record the meeting and share the recording with the student, which allows for more control to pause and take breaks or explain things further as needed.
The team is discussing topics that may be negative or upsetting for the student to hear (e.g. toileting needs or aggressive behaviors).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with the student before the meeting about these topics so they are prepared for the conversation and understand why the team plans to discuss it in the meeting. • Alternatively, have the student leave the meeting during this part of the discussion. Share information afterward in a way that is productive and appropriate for them.
I do not want to attend or lead my IEP meeting because it makes me nervous or stressed out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in your IEP in other ways and share your prepared thoughts on different topics with the team in advance. • Work with a trusted member of your team after the meeting to understand what was discussed, changes that are being made, and new goals that were drafted. • Consider asking your service providers to talk with you on a more individual/casual basis about your progress, strengths, challenges, and needs.

If your student or child has never learned about or participated in their IEP before, be sure to consider the best approach for them specifically. For some students, they may need a lot of time to learn about each aspect of the IEP. The team might decide it is most important for them to know who each service provider is and learn about the different support they receive from each person. On the other hand, for another student it may be most important to fully understand all of the accommodations included their IEP, how and when they should be used, and when accommodations are not needed. For some younger students, they might just be learning about their own bodies, the differences in their abilities, and that they have important opinions to share with the people around them. When we break down all the pieces of the IEP process and think about how to involve our students and help them learn to direct their own IEPs, it can feel overwhelming and difficult to decide where to start. My advice to you is just to start with the most salient pieces for your child or student at that specific time. Take some ideas from these tables and think about your student or child, what is important for them at this moment, and move forward. The sooner they start, the more time they will have to really understand the different phases and the more self-awareness and self-determination skills they will gain from the experiences.

Additional Resources:

“It’s My Life! Considering the Student-Directed IEP Process” ([Parts 1 & 2](#)).

“I’m Determined” This is a fantastic website with a lot of good resources about self-determination and tools for training and supporting students to participate and lead their own IEPs. <https://www.imdetermined.org/>

- Tool: [This is a slideshow](#) for helping teachers learn about facilitating Student- Led IEPs.
- Resource: [This is a video](#) for parents to help them see some of the benefits of having students participate in their IEPs.
- Video Modules: [These 4 video modules](#) describe how to work with students to participate in their IEPs by using some of the tools available from the “I’m Determined” website.

Making sense of eligibility categories and the importance of documenting deafblindness in the IEP

By Julie Maier, CDBS Project Coordinator

An essential element of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is the determination of eligibility for special education and related services. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) includes thirteen (13) eligibility categories and offers individual states the option to include a 14th category of “developmental delay” for students aged 3-9 years. [The federal definitions of disability categories](#) are included in Section 300.8 of IDEA. Depending on evaluation results, a student with deafblindness could meet the eligibility definition for several of the low incidence disabilities including: Deafblindness, Visual Impairment, Deafness, Hard of Hearing, or Multiple Disabilities. In the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) the federal government offered broad recommendations and guidance on eligibility criteria and individual states were directed to develop disability definitions and eligibility for special education and related services for their states. (CSR Report, 2020). California Code of Regulation (5 CCR § 3030) uses almost identical definitions for the 13 categories of disability. California does not include “developmental delay” but does include a category of Established Medical Disability for children aged 3-5 years.

For a student who is deafblind it is imperative that deafblindness and the impact of the dual sensory losses is clearly documented and described throughout the IEP. This documentation will ensure that annual goals, program accommodations and modifications, services and supports, and program placement address the student’s unique needs related to their deafblindness. Particular unique needs include the areas of communication, curricular adaptations, orientation and mobility, and social and emotional development. (Rodriguez-Gil, 2011). One logical place to document deafblindness is under Eligibility for Services, however that’s not quite as simple as it seems. Let’s start with looking at the definitions of Deafblindness and Multiple Disabilities in IDEA and in California Education Code:

<p>Deaf-blindness means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.</p>	<p>Multiple disabilities means concomitant impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness or intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. Multiple disabilities does not include deaf-blindness.</p>
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That appears fairly clear, doesn’t it? Deafblindness includes the presence of both vision and hearing issues which causes severe communication and other developmental and educational needs and Multiple Disabilities doesn’t include deafblindness. But not so fast. Let’s take a peek at the federal guidance provided to states for their annual reporting of students with disabilities. States are required to annually report a student’s primary eligibility category. Below is guidance on reporting eligibility provided in IDEA (bold font emphasis was added):

<p>Deafblindness: (1) If a child has only two disabilities and those disabilities are deafness and blindness, and the child is not reported as having a developmental delay, that child must be reported under the category “deaf-blindness.”</p>	<p>Multiple Disabilities: (2) A child who has more than one disability and is not reported as having deaf-blindness or as having a developmental delay must be reported under the category “multiple disabilities.”</p>
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Based on this reporting guidance, if a student is deafblind and has additional disabilities, which over 90% of children and youth with deafblindness experience, then they cannot be eligible under Deafblindness and teams often select under Multiple Disabilities for eligibility. However, the guidance also states that Multiple Disabilities does not include Deafblindness, which is identified as only deafness and blindness and no additional disabilities. This is a primary reason each state deafblind project conducts an annual child count and collects a census of all children that are deafblind aged birth to 22 years in a state, which includes individuals with only vision and hearing losses and those with one or more additional disabilities as well. The difference in the results of the two annual reports is stark. In 2023 the California Department of Education reported serving eighty-seven (87) children from birth to 22 years eligible under the Deafblindness category. In contrast, our California Deafblind Services annual child count from the same year reported 1,138 children from birth to 22 years with both vision and hearing loss, including those with additional disabilities, received educational services.

If a student has vision and hearing losses and an additional disability this reporting guidance leads many IEP teams to identify the student as having Multiple Disabilities as indicated by one of the sensory low incidence categories (Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, or Deafness) and Intellectual Disability or Orthopedic Impairment. However, when this determination is used, then the other accompanying sensory loss is not identified under eligibility. The Multiple Disabilities category provides a broader classification for students with more complex needs that allows for more flexibility in designing individualized educational programs that meet the student's unique needs. When Multiple Disabilities is identified as the primary eligibility, the guidance about selecting Deafblindness as the secondary eligibility is not clearly stated.

When a student is deafblind with one or more additional disabilities, we recommend that teams strongly consider Deafblindness as the secondary disability which helps to ensure that deafblindness is documented in the IEP. Some teams may choose to select another category, such as Hearing Impairment or Visual Impairment, to ensure particular services or a program model that most appropriately meets the students educational needs. For instance a program for students who are blind/low vision with additional disabilities may exist in a particular district and in this case, the team may determine Multiple Disabilities and Visual Impairment are the appropriate eligibility categories. In another case, access to language through American Sign Language may be a high priority and the team would select Multiple Disabilities and Hearing Impairment or Deafness.

It is important that deafblindness is well-documented in an IEP, whether or not it is included as an eligibility category. When Deafblindness is not selected as a primary or secondary eligibility category then it is even more critical that deafblindness is well-documented and described in other areas of the IEP. Areas where information about the student's current vision and hearing etiology and levels should be clearly described include:

Eligibility: Under the selection of the Primary and Secondary Eligibility is the statement "Describe how the student's disability affects involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (or for preschoolers, for participation in appropriate activities)". The team can describe the student's current vision and hearing levels and the accommodations and supports needed to access the general education curriculum in this section.

Present levels: Present levels include information about the student's current pre-academic, academic, and functional skills. Functional skill areas typically included in the IEP are communication development, gross-/fine-motor development, social emotional/behavior, vocational adaptive/daily skills, and health. For a student who is deafblind, information included in each of these areas should address their vision and hearing limitations or losses and their impact on skill development in each of those areas. Present levels also includes information about the student's strengths, interests and preferences, and parent input and concerns. These are additional areas to describe the student's unique needs as related to deafblindness.

Special Factors: This section includes information about 1) a student's need for assistive technology; 2) low incidence services, accommodations, and equipment; 3) considerations if the student is blind or visually impaired; and 4) considerations if the student is Deaf or hard of hearing. These sections provide the team an opportunity to provide a clear, detailed description of the student's needs in both the areas of vision and hearing. Low incidence services are available to students who are Deafblind, Visually Impaired, Deaf, Hard of hearing, or Orthopedically Impaired.

Services: Offer of FAPE: When determining program placement and services the team must list all of the supports and services considered, including those options that are not selected. This list should include options that include supports and services considered to provide access to general education classes, programs for students with visual impairments, or programs for students who are hard of hearing or Deaf.

Services: Supplementary Aids and Services Accommodations and Modifications:

Program Accommodations and Modifications: This section provides the team the opportunity to describe in detail the accommodations and modifications that are needed for a student to participate in general education classes or other education-related settings. Many of these accommodations and modifications will be specific to ensuring increased access to visual and auditory information and supports that enable the student to participate in the curriculum and other educational activities and routines.

Other Services and Supports for School Personnel, or for the Student, or on Behalf of the Student: This section provides the team the opportunity to describe in detail additional services needed by the school personnel or family to implement the IEP. It might include: specialized training in a specific low incidence disability, such as deafblindness; technical assistance from the state deafblind project; progression services; or providing the family with information to help them better understand the child's unique needs.

Hopefully this discussion of eligibility categories and the importance of documenting deafblindness within a student's IEP is useful and answers some questions that you and your team has encountered. Our CDBS staff can provide further clarification about eligibility determination and offer suggestions for how to describe a student's unique sensory learning profile and their educational needs. Please contact us if you would like consultation or support when developing an IEP for a child or youth with deafblindness.

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