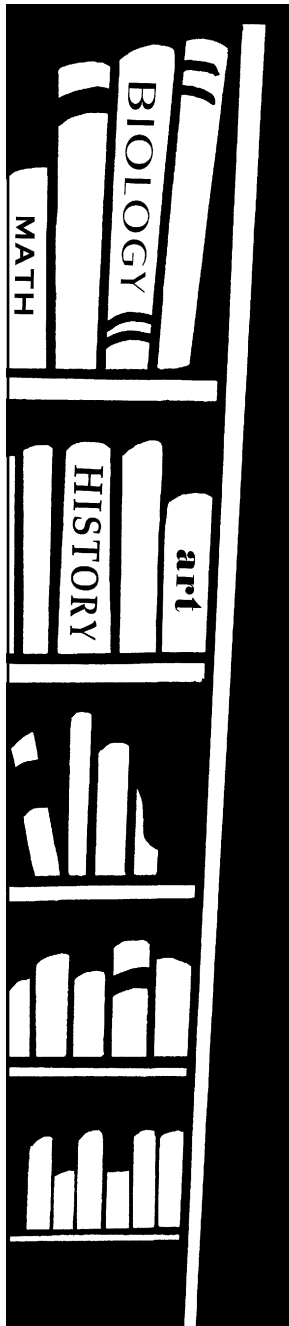


Standards Fact Sheet



Standards-based education reform efforts, together with the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997* (IDEA-97), provide important tools and strategies for improving the quality of education and increasing academic expectations and achievement for students with disabilities.

“Standards-based education reform” is the term used to describe efforts across the nation to improve education by first setting standards. Standards are seen as a way to raise student achievement by specifying what students should be learning and what teachers should be teaching in schools. The goal of standards-based education is to make sure that all students, including students with disabilities, learn more.

Standards place the focus on educational results, so that schools are judged based on the actual achievement of students. Standards provide another tool parents can use to hold schools accountable. Both high standards and high quality schools are required to successfully reform schools.

Education reform strategies were developed to respond to concerns that our nation’s regular and special education system was failing to prepare students to adequately meet the demands of modern society. In IDEA-97, Congress emphasized the importance of raising expectations and academic standards for children with disabilities. The 1997 amendments stress the importance of coordinating special education with education reform activities and ensuring that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum.

In discussions of standards-based reform, two kinds of standards are usually referred to:

Content Standards provide general descriptions of what students should know and learn in different subjects such as language arts, mathematics, science, and other core academic subjects. Some states also have written standards for other important areas such as citizenship, health, and the arts.



Performance Standards provide concrete examples and descriptions of how well students must perform in different subject areas to show that they have obtained the skills and knowledge

described by the content standard (i.e., how well students must read, write, or calculate). Performance standards are the link between the content standards and assessment.



Four essential steps to standards-based education reform:

1. *Set the standards.*

With standards, states decide first what every child should learn. Standards are statements of what students should know and be able to do as a result of their schooling.

2. *Develop the curriculum.*

States or local districts develop specific curriculum based on the standards. Curriculum describes what learning should be accomplished in specific grades. In some states, standards and curriculum are virtually the same.

3. *Design individual courses and instructional strategies.*

Individual schools and teachers decide on the day-to-day content of courses and instruction and choose appropriate materials and methods.

4. *Assess the performance of schools and students.*

Assessments based on the standards are used to measure the actual results of education and hold schools accountable for results and achievement.



Participation of students with disabilities in standards-based education reform

The standards movement is about setting high expectations for all students. Yet because so many students with disabilities have been denied access to the general curriculum and excluded from assessment, there are questions and concerns about how they can be successfully included in education reform efforts.

IDEA-97 is a powerful tool to help ensure that children with disabilities have access to the same high standards and expectations that are set forth for other students. The law requires Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams to link IEP goals and objectives to the general curriculum, which should reflect the state's standards. When IEP goals and objectives reflect the standards and

outcomes established through education reform, parents can then use the IEP to ensure that the school system provides the special education and related services a student needs to achieve those goals and objectives.

Standards provide a mechanism to hold schools accountable for the educational progress of students with disabilities. Measuring progress toward IEP goals which incorporate state standards and reflect the general curriculum is a way to demonstrate improved results. Parents, as members of IEP teams, need to be involved in making decisions about their child, the general curriculum, and standards.

The requirement in IDEA to include students with disabilities in state and districtwide assessment programs provides another tool to promote access to the same standards set for other students. Schools are held accountable for student performance on these assessments.

Consequently, schools typically develop their curriculum and invest their resources in ways that will help students improve their scores. Now that students with disabilities must be included in these assessments, they, too, can benefit from the investment of resources.

Required IEP steps to ensure that children with disabilities are included in state standards through accessing to the general curriculum

Step 1 First, the IEP must state how the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the *general* curriculum.

Step 2 Next, the IEP team must include a statement of measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives, related to meeting the child's needs that result from the child's disability and allow the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum.

The IEPs of students with all types and significance of disabilities should reflect general education standards. No students should be denied the opportunity to participate in the

academic life of the school community. At the same time, some students may require additional goals (such as independent living or vocational goals) not necessarily referenced to academic standards.

Step 3 The IEP must include a statement of the specific special education and related services, supplementary aids and services, program modifications, or supports for school personnel necessary for the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum.

Other steps to ensure full participation of children with disabilities in state standards

Being part of making decisions about standards can help ensure that students with disabilities participate in education reform. Parents can provide valuable contributions that shape discussions and policies around standards and students with disabilities in many ways.


Local decisions about standards should be made by a group of stakeholders which includes parents, educators, and individuals with disabilities.

Listed below are two strategies parents may

**State
or district
Standards**


*are the basis
for* 

**General
Curriculum**

*which is the
framework for
the* 

**IEP Goals and
Objectives**

which call for

**Special
Education
and Related
Services
Necessary to
Achieve Goals
and Objectives** 

wish to use to ensure full participation of children with disabilities in standards.

The first strategy focuses on your child's individualized education program (IEP) while the second focuses on making an impact at the state policy level.

Your Child's IEP

Step 1 Obtain copies of your state or district standards.

Step 2 Obtain copies of your school's curriculum and determine the extent to which the curriculum reflects the state standards.

Step 3 Review the standards and curriculum for your child's age group.

Step 4 Review your child's current IEP goals and objectives or benchmarks.

Step 5 Think about any changes in IEP goals and objectives or benchmarks that are necessary to ensure that your child is involved in and progresses in the general curriculum.

Step 6 Make sure that the IEP team develops new goals and objectives which reflect participation in the general curriculum.

Step 7 Make sure that the IEP specifies any services and supports that are necessary for your child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum.

State Policy

One Determine whether your State Department of Education has developed state standards (which may be called curriculum standards, curriculum frameworks, etc.).

Two Review your state standards to determine whether children with disabilities are specifically included, excluded, or not mentioned.

Three Make sure that your state includes children with disabilities within the standards developed for general education. Make sure that your state does not try to develop separate standards for groups of children with disabilities.

Four Find out whether any educators with special education or inclusion expertise, parents of children with disabilities, or individuals with disabilities helped to develop the standards.

Five Work with your state's Parent Training and Information (PTI) center, Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Organization, Developmental Disabilities (DD) Council, and/or State Advisory Council (SAC) to propose any changes necessary to ensure that your state standards reflect the learning needs of all students, including students with disabilities.

Six Work with your State Department of Education or local school district to ensure that IEP goals and objectives fully reflect the general curriculum and state standards. Consider whether changes to the IEP form developed by the state or district would help IEP teams fully incorporate the general curriculum and state standards.

Information in this **Fact Sheet** is based on the *PEER Information Brief*, "Raising Standards of Learning: Students with Disabilities and Standards-Based Education" by Janet R. Vohs, Julia K. Landau, J.D., and Carolyn A. Romano, J.D.

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