

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Preschool Children with Disabilities:

Using Preschool Outcomes to Inform Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)

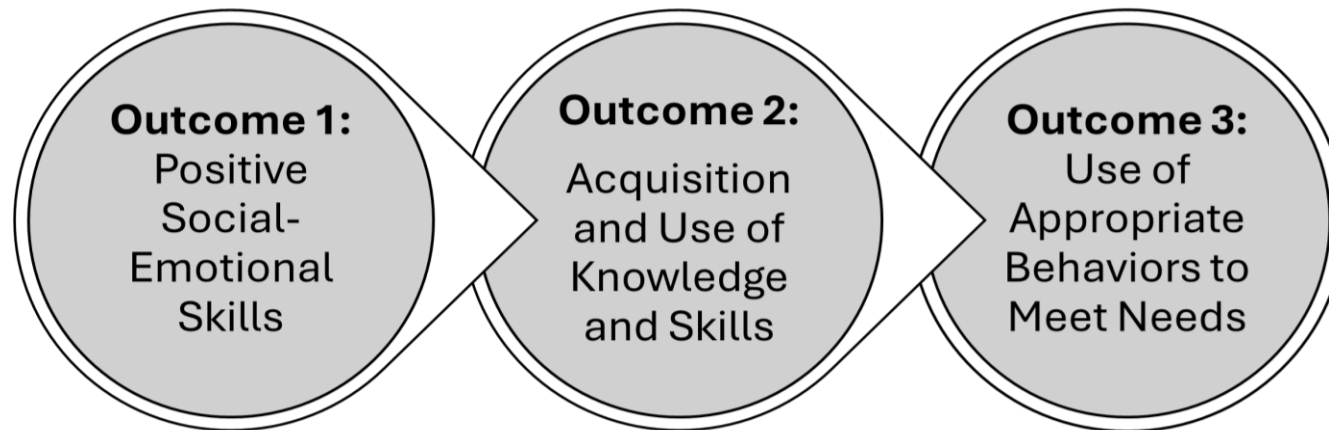
Overview

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that an IEP include a statement regarding a child's present level of performance based on multiple sources of data. This resource provides descriptions of various assessment areas commonly found in preschool children's PLAAFPs and outlines how each area aligns with the three preschool outcomes, also known as [Early Childhood Outcomes](#) (ECOs). The preschool outcomes measure how children ages 3-5 make meaningful progress in key areas of development while receiving early childhood special education services. They focus on children's ability to function in everyday routines and settings, emphasizing participation, independence, and meaningful engagement. The PLAAFP should detail the child's abilities and skill deficits displayed during participation in age-appropriate activities and may be organized by the three preschool outcomes using authentic assessment data in addition to formal evaluations which help provide age-expected developmental context.

Related services are those services designed to assist a student with a disability in benefitting from special education ([34 C.F.R. § 300.34](#)). As such, they are designed to support and increase access to the educational environment for students with disabilities. Given the role of related services, note that data sources from related services providers may be used to support across a wide range of assessment areas and not only those most associated with the discipline. In addition, special education and related services are an IEP team decision based on current and relevant student data and should not be limited or restricted based solely on a given eligibility category. Well-written PLAAFPs are descriptive, jargon free, and support goal writing focused on participation and learning in natural preschool activities.

This document provides guidance on developing high-quality PLAAFPs and includes examples of common assessment areas, with descriptions of how each area relates to preschool outcomes and potential data sources to inform assessment. These examples are not exhaustive, as PLAAFPs must reflect each child's unique strengths and needs.

Preschool Outcomes



High-Quality PLAAFPs for Preschool Children

- The PLAAFP includes current data from more than one source and narrative information to provide all IEP team members with a clear understanding of the student's current skills, strengths, needs, how the exceptionality impacts (or does not impact) mastery of grade-level content, and what academic areas are impacted.
 - *For preschool*, included information provides a clear description of current skills, strengths, and needs meaningful to the child's participation in natural routines and appropriate activities across settings and supports participation-based goal writing and integrated services to the greatest extent appropriate.
- Data sources and context (e.g., modality, method, content, setting, etc.) are indicated.
 - *For preschool*, data sources and context emphasize authentic assessment methods (e.g., play/participation-based observation, routines-based assessment, anecdotal notes/running records, parent input) and other qualitative and/or quantitative information, rather than data collected in a context removed from the child's everyday activities (e.g., strange setting, materials, tasks, people).

Overview of Common Assessment Areas for Preschool Children

Assessment Area	Description of Assessment Area for Preschool Children	Connection to Early Childhood Outcomes	Potential Data Sources to Inform PLAAFP
Academic Readiness	A set of skills that reflect a child's functional ability to acquire and use foundational knowledge and skills necessary for learning and participation in everyday, age-appropriate activities.	Outcome 1 - Attending to people in a variety of settings - Following social norms - Adapting to change in routines Outcome 2 - Showing interest in learning - Imitating and repeating actions - Using problem solving - Engaging in purposeful play Outcome 3 - Navigating the school environment - Using learning materials with purpose	• Developmental assessments (e.g. BDI-3, DAYC-2) • Curriculum-based assessments • Observations in natural settings • Work samples • Play-based assessment data • Family input and home activity logs

Assessment Area	Description of Assessment Area for Preschool Children	Connection to Early Childhood Outcomes	Potential Data Sources to Inform PLAAFP
Adaptive Behavior / Independence	A set of skills that enable a child to perform daily routines and activities with increasing independence, reflecting the ability to meet personal and social needs in a manner consistent with age expectations.	Outcome 1 - Responding in ways that allow participation - Demonstrating autonomy in routines Outcome 3 - Manipulating things to meet needs - Eating and drinking - Dressing and undressing - Diapering/toileting with increasing independence - Engaging in self-care tasks (e.g. wash hands, brush teeth) - Showing safety awareness	• Adaptive behavior rating scales (e.g. Vineland, ABAS) • Functional skill assessments • Developmental and curriculum-based assessments • Observations in natural settings • Family input regarding home routines

Assessment Area	Description of Assessment Area for Preschool Children	Connection to Early Childhood Outcomes	Potential Data Sources to Inform PLAAFP
Behavior	A set of skills that reflect a child's ability to follow directions, respond to environmental and social demands, and engage in socially appropriate actions that support participation in daily routines and learning activities. This assessment area should focus on the external behaviors that can be observed.	Outcome 1 - Resolving conflicts with peers or adults - Behaving in ways that allow participation - Following routines and rules - Engaging in cooperative play Outcome 2 - Responding to gestures/verbal requests - Persists in learning and play activities Outcome 3 - Using words, gestures, or actions to express needs and preferences - Cooperating with self-care tasks	• Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) • Observations in natural settings • Family input

Assessment Area	Description of Assessment Area for Preschool Children	Connection to Early Childhood Outcomes	Potential Data Sources to Inform PLAAFP
Fine Motor	A set of skills that reflect a child's ability to use hands and fingers to complete tasks that support participation in learning, play, and daily routines, such as grasping, manipulating objects, drawing, writing, and using classroom tools.	Outcome 2 - Manipulating objects and materials - Using tools for writing, feeding, or play Outcome 3 - Coordinating hand movements for daily tasks -	• Occupational therapy evaluations and therapy data • Developmental and curriculum-based assessments • Work samples (e.g. drawings, cutting) • Family input regarding self-help tasks such as feeding and dressing • Observations in natural settings
Gross Motor	A set of skills that reflect a child's ability to use large muscle groups to move and navigate within their environment, supporting participation in routines, play, and learning activities. This includes skills such as sitting, crawling, walking, running, climbing, and coordination for functional movement.	Outcome 2 - Moving through the environment to explore and engage - Participating in motor-based play and learning tasks Outcome 3 - Using movement to access materials, people, or activities	• Physical therapy evaluations and therapy data • Developmental and curriculum-based assessments • Observations in natural settings such as on playgrounds or in movement activities • Family input regarding mobility

Assessment Area	Description of Assessment Area for Preschool Children	Connection to Early Childhood Outcomes	Potential Data Sources to Inform PLAAFP
Basic Reading Skills	A set of skills that develop children's understanding and knowledge of print concepts and phonological awareness.	Outcome 2 - Understanding of print concepts (e.g. turning pages in book, looking at pictures) - Increasing development of phonological awareness (e.g. recite nursery rhymes,	• Universal reading screener (e.g., Aimsweb Plus, STAR Early Literacy) • Diagnostic assessments • Progress monitoring • Observations in natural settings
Math	A set of skills that reflect a child's functional understanding and use of early mathematical concepts such as number sense, counting, quantity, shapes, spatial relationships, and measurement.	Outcome 2 - Recognizing spatial relationships - Demonstrating matching, sorting, and labeling skills - Identifying objects by size, color, shape, or function - Comparing size, length, or volume	• Developmental and curriculum-based assessments • Early math screeners • Work samples • Observations in natural settings

Assessment Area	Description of Assessment Area for Preschool Children	Connection to Early Childhood Outcomes	Potential Data Sources to Inform PLAAFP
Pre-Vocational	A set of skills that reflect a child's ability to engage in tasks that build responsibility, problem solving, independence, attention, safety awareness, and work-related foundational skills. These include following multi-step directions, attending to tasks, organizing materials, and beginning to understand roles and routines in group settings.	Outcome 1 - Following social norms and adapting to changes in routines - Participating in turn-taking games - Accepting redirection or feedback from adults Outcome 2 - Attending to and completing structured tasks - Following directions and routines - Organizing materials for play or learning Outcome 3 - Seeking help when needed - Initiating or completing tasks to meet needs - Completing simple responsibilities (e.g. classroom jobs, chores at home) - Showing safety awareness	• Pre-vocational skills checklists • Task completion checklists • Occupational therapy evaluations and therapy data • Observations in natural settings focusing on task persistence and independence • Family input on responsibility and independence in home routines

Assessment Area	Description of Assessment Area for Preschool Children	Connection to Early Childhood Outcomes	Potential Data Sources to Inform PLAAFP
Sensory Processing	A set of skills that reflect a child's ability to receive, interpret, and respond to sensory input in ways that support regulation, attention, participation, and engagement in daily routines. This includes responses to sound, touch, movement, visual input, and body awareness.	Outcome 1 - Regulating emotional and behavioral responses to sensory input - Engaging appropriately in group settings Outcome 2 - Exploring materials Outcome 3 - Seeking or avoiding sensory input in functional ways (e.g. asking for a break or squeezing a stress ball to support regulation)	• Occupational therapy evaluations and therapy notes • Sensory checklists and profiles • Observations in natural settings focusing on sensory responses and engagement • Family input on sensory preferences and challenges

Assessment Area	Description of Assessment Area for Preschool Children	Connection to Early Childhood Outcomes	Potential Data Sources to Inform PLAAFP
Social and Emotional	A set of skills that reflect a child's ability to form relationships, express and regulate emotions, and engage in meaningful interactions with adults and peers. These skills support participation in group settings, the development of friendships, and the ability to navigate social routines.	Outcome 1 - Engaging in positive interactions with adults and peers - Expressing a range of emotions appropriately - Demonstrating self-regulation and coping strategies Outcome 3 - Communicating needs and wants in socially appropriate ways - Using social behaviors (e.g., turn-taking, sharing, requesting help) to access support or resources	• Social-emotional screeners (e.g., ASQ, DECA) • Observations in natural settings focusing on peer interactions and routines • Family interviews and input

Assessment Area	Description of Assessment Area for Preschool Children	Connection to Early Childhood Outcomes	Potential Data Sources to Inform PLAAFP
Speech / Language	Speech is a set of skills that reflect a child's ability to say sounds and words. This includes articulation (producing speech sounds), voice, and fluency (speech rhythm). Language is a set of skills that reflect a child's ability to understand and use language to communicate effectively with others. This includes receptive language (understanding), expressive language (using words, phrases, and sentences), intelligibility, vocabulary development, alternative or augmentative communication systems, sign language, and pragmatic (social) communication skills.	Outcome 1 - Using language to build and maintain relationships - Engaging in reciprocal communication with adults and peers Outcome 2 - Understanding and using language about new concepts - Responding to questions - Following directions Outcome 3 - Using gestures, words, or other communication methods to express wants and needs	• Speech / language evaluations (either formal or informal evaluation data) • Speech / language therapy data • Speech and language samples • Communication checklists • Observations in natural settings of functional communication • Family input on communication

For more information on preschool/early childhood outcomes and IEPs for preschool children with disabilities, visit the Tennessee Department of Education's [Early Childhood Special Education](#) webpage.