Access
EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY

GUIDE

PRESENT LEVELS TELL YOU WHERE YOUR CHILD IS STARTING FROM

How to read present levels in your child's IEP

This guide helps parents and caregivers make sure that picture is complete.

Present levels (also called PLAAFP or PLOP) are the "where are we now" section of every IEP. They describe your child's current academic and functional performance and must be grounded in real data. Under IDEA, all goals must flow directly from needs identified in present levels. Vague or incomplete present levels mean the rest of the IEP may not be built around your child's real needs.

Vague	Strong
Jaylen has difficulty with reading comprehension.	Jaylen reads at a 2nd grade instructional level (Lexile 420L, Jan. assessment). He decodes CVC words but struggles with multi-syllabic words and inferential comprehension.

The required chain

Present levels → Goals → Services

Every goal must trace back to a need named in the present levels.

> TRY THIS
> Pick any goal in your child's IEP and ask: where does this need appear in the present levels? If you can't find it, ask the team to make the connection explicit before you sign.

MY NOTES

Red flags: signs something may be missing

No data cited	Look for specific scores, dates, and sources, not just descriptions
Outdated information	Data should reflect current performance. 2 to 3 year old evaluations are not enough
Copy-paste language	If it reads the same as last year's IEP, it may not reflect where your child is now
Missing areas of need	If your child has a known need (speech, behavior, reading) and it's not here, it won't become a goal
No strengths listed	Strengths are legally required. If you only see deficits, the document is incomplete
No impact statement	There must be a sentence explaining how the disability affects access to the general education
Goals don't connect	If a goal doesn't trace back to a need in present levels, ask the team to explain the connection

Questions to ask at your IEP meeting

- [ ] "What assessment data supports this, and when was it collected?"
- [ ] "Where are my child's strengths in this document?"
- [ ] "Where is the impact statement?" (how disability affects general ed access)
- [ ] "Can you walk me through how each goal connects to the present levels?"
- [ ] "How is my input reflected here?"
- [ ] "Can I take this home to review before I sign?" (you are never required to sign same day)

Need help understanding your child's present levels?

Book a free 15-minute consultation at myaccessadvocacy.com or call (804) 420-2273.

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