OCKRIM
FAMILY ADVOCACY

PARENT GUIDE

What makes a good IEP goal?

A goal is a skill your child will work on this year, with a clear way to measure progress. If you can't picture it happening in the classroom, it isn't specific enough.

The six ingredients of a strong goal

1. A specific skill
One skill described in plain words: what your child will actually **do**.

2. Measurable
A number you can track: how often, how accurate, how long.

3. A starting point
Present levels, so everyone knows where your child is today.

4. Ambitious but realistic
Challenging enough to close gaps, reachable within one year.

5. Clear conditions
Where it happens, with what supports, and how it will be checked (data, work samples, observation).

6. Time-bound
An end date, plus progress reports that tell you if your child is on track.

Why it matters

Goals drive the services, minutes, and supports your child receives. A vague goal ("will improve reading") makes it impossible to know whether the plan is working. A measurable goal gives you data, gives the team accountability, and keeps the plan tied to your child's real needs, including social-emotional ones.

Academic goal examples

Too vague: "Maya will improve her reading."

Reading fluency: By the end of the IEP year, given a grade-level passage, Jordan will read 90 words correct per minute with no more than 3 errors, in 3 of 4 trials, as measured by monthly progress monitoring.

Writing: By June, Ava will write a paragraph with a topic sentence, three supporting details, and a closing sentence, scoring a 3 or higher on a 4-point rubric on 4 of 5 writing samples.

Social-emotional and behavior goals

This is where many plans fall short. A strong behavior goal teaches a **replacement skill**: what your child should do instead, not just what they should stop doing.

Red flag: "Eli will stop leaving the classroom" or "will have fewer outbursts." This names what to stop but teaches nothing, and gives no way to measure real growth.

Coping with anxiety: By May, when Maya feels overwhelmed in class, she will choose and use one of her calming strategies (deep breathing, break card, or check-in with a trusted adult) and return to her work within 5 minutes, in 4 of 5 observed opportunities, as measured by weekly staff data.

Replacement behavior: By March, when Eli is frustrated with a task, he will ask for a break using his break card instead of leaving the room, in 4 of 5 observed opportunities, as tracked on a daily behavior chart.

Self-advocacy: By the end of second semester, Sam will ask a teacher for a needed support (extra time, a quiet space, or clarification) using words or a card, in 8 of 10 opportunities, as tracked on a teacher log.

School attendance and anxiety: By the end of the first semester, Noor will enter the building with a trusted staff member and begin her first class within 10 minutes of arrival, on 4 of 5 school days, as tracked by attendance and check-in logs.

Check any goal against these questions

- What is my child's starting point, and where is the data?
- How will this be measured, and by whom?
- How often will I get progress updates?
- What does this look like day to day in the classroom?
- If it's about behavior: what skill is my child being taught instead?
- Does my child need a behavior assessment (FBA) before we write this goal?

Want help applying this to your child? Call or email Kevin to schedule a free, no-pressure consultation: **847-636-6254 · kevin@ockrimfamilyadvocacy.com**.

General information only. Kevin Ockrim is a special education advocate, not a lawyer or therapist, and nothing here is legal or clinical advice. Ockrim Family Advocacy is independent and not affiliated with any school district. © 2026 Ockrim Family Advocacy.