



Monday Message

June 12, 2023

Special Education Module

Clearing the Workspace: Meeting Purpose – Annual Review

Last week the OEC received several emails expressing concerns regarding the projected clearing of the workspace in ECATS; specifically, the clearing of the workspace increases the time spent on data entry with one of the more cumbersome areas noted as the accommodations section. Below are some key points used in our responses to individual inquiries.

The decision to clear the workspace was not one made lightly. The decision was delayed from its original projected date in 2021. Unfortunately, the delay between then and now may be contributing to some functionality in the system not being used to its full potential or not for its intended purpose (i.e., Assessment Summary). Some of the factors considered when making this decision included:

1. Teachers reporting that the deleting of information that is no longer applicable is also time consuming and leads to errors in ensuring the IEP is appropriately updated with current and relevant information at the annual review.
2. The workspace is intended to be a temporary location for drafting a proposed IEP. It is a space that can be edited until the IEP Team makes its final decisions and the IEP is finalized.
3. The workspace only clears when the meeting purpose of “annual” is selected. Review and revisions that occur during the life of an IEP are considered “addendums”. Therefore, when the meeting purpose of “addendum” is selected, the workspace remains available to allow for the revision and/or additions to the current IEP.
4. Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance are data that are collected through either formal or informal assessments/progress monitoring methods. These data are entered into the Assessment Summary of ECATS and can be retrieved on demand and entered into any part of the EC process at any time. These are the data that constitute the “review” of the previous IEP as the data measured the student’s progress on the individual IEP goals and is summarized in the PLAAFP brought in from data collected and documented in the Assessment Summary annually. Therefore, leaving these data on the workspace is unnecessary.
5. The regulations require that not only is the IEP *reviewed* annually but the IEP is also *revised* to address any lack of expected progress, any results of a reevaluation, if conducted, information provided by the

parents, the student’s anticipated needs or other matters. Since the review is accomplished by an updated PLAAFP and a final progress report on the expiring IEP at the time of developing the new annual IEP, new IEP goals would need to be proposed. Therefore, leaving the previous IEP goals on the workspace would be unnecessary.

6. It is understood that the accommodations page requires time. However, the belief that accommodations rarely change from year to year presents many risks. Not considering the student’s unique needs within the context of new instructional/non-instructional settings leads to the possibility of adding more accommodations rather than streamlining the important ones through thoughtful IEP team discussion. Since all accommodations must be implemented as written and are not intended to be on an “as needed basis”, reviewing the appropriateness of accommodations at the annual review is critical to insuring consistent implementation.
7. Service delivery should be considered annually to accurately propose the amount of time needed to successfully deliver specially designed instruction to address each of the IEP goals. Service time is not a class period unless an entire class period is needed to address IEP goals. Therefore, leaving service delivery on the workspace is not appropriate as it should be considered in light of the newly proposed annual goals.
8. Lastly, there has been a significant increase in the number of state complaints filed this year. A common issue is the development, review, and revision of the IEP with underlying complaints being that the IEP doesn’t substantively change from year to year particularly in the data sources used to determine the PLAAFP, least restrictive environment, and accommodations. This issue is the same issue that formed the basis of the *Andrew F.* case and challenged whether IEPs were appropriately calculated based on a student’s unique circumstances. The OEC must ensure that the risk of failing to review and revise IEPs annually ensuring that students are making progress toward goals and participation in the general curriculum to the greatest extent possible is reduced. One way to reduce this risk is by clearing the workspace when “annual” as the meeting purpose is selected.

This was a thoughtfully made decision with stakeholders and considered the challenges with the recruitment and retention of our exceptional children teachers and service providers. We hope this provides some understanding of the reasons behind it and our responsibility to ensure that North Carolina has practices, policies, and procedures in place that are compliant with federal regulations and above all to ensure that the good work being done on behalf of and provided to students with disabilities is being documented correctly.

While postponing the clearing of some or all the workspace is not a viable option at this time, we are committed to continually improving the user experience with ECATS. We will be happy to evaluate/reevaluate the user experience with the accommodations section in ECATS as we make this transition.

Tips – Entering Accommodations

1. When considering “Classroom Activities”, prioritize data entry for activities that require a participation level of “Participating with Accommodations”. While the other selections are available in the dropdown to account for all potential scenarios an IEP Team may need to individualize a student’s program with very specific details, the primary purpose of this section of the IEP is to identify the supports *required*, the location in which the supports are to be provided and the implementation specifics for those supports if additional details are needed.

Classroom Activities Selected	Participation Level
Career Technical Education Class	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participating in Regular Class/Activity <input type="checkbox"/> Participating with Accommodations <input type="checkbox"/> Not Participating

2. Input from the student’s general education teacher(s) for this part of the development of the IEP is critical, particularly regarding the appropriateness of the support selected.
 - a. Consider the appropriateness of fewer, specific supports and many, general supports that are perceived “as needed” rather than “required” consistently in a particular setting.
 - b. Consider the difference between accommodations that promote access and modifications that change what students are required to learn within the context of the student’s course of study (standard, occupational, or extended content).
3. Coordinate the annual review data entry window with all service providers to ensure that the meeting purpose “annual” is selected once at the beginning of the data entry window by the student’s EC case manager. This ensures that all efforts to prepare for an upcoming annual IEP Team meeting are synchronized and are being collected in the workspace for drafting the proposed annual IEP.
4. Use the last finalized progress report for the IEP that is expiring as a reference point for the goals the student met or needed more time to meet when developing the annual IEP.
5. Add progress monitoring data for IEP goals into the Assessment Summary in preparation for upcoming IEP Team meetings. Case managers may also include narratives describing the effectiveness of current accommodations in the assessment summary as progress monitoring – classroom accommodations.

ECATS Data Manager Contact Directory

Please click the following link to access the ECATS Data Manager Contact Directory:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tQFdgbqV1kqhMXN9PIGR38JrYbvR8UuZ/edit?rtopf=true>

Be sure to review and update the ECATS Data Manager who serves as the point of contact for your Public School Unit. Thank you for your attention to this.

Note: This message is a repeat of the June 7, 2023, Director’s Weekly Message.

ECATS: IEP-At-A-Glance

The OEC is pleased to announce that the IEP-At-A-Glance tool will be available in ECATS on July 1, 2023. This tool will compile critical components of a finalized IEP necessary for sharing with a students’ teachers for the implementation of the IEP across all settings. A tip sheet with directions has been included with this update. (ATTACHED)

For previous issues of the ECATS Monday Message, please visit <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/classroom-resources/exceptional-children/every-child-accountability-tracking-system-ecats/monday-messages>.