Case Study: Sarah’s Journey

# Navigating the High School Labyrinth – Sarah's Journey

## Student Profile:

* Name: Sarah
* Age: 16 years, 7 months
* Grade: 11th Grade
* School: Northwood High School
* Primary Language: English
* Relevant Background: Sarah has been identified with Specific Learning Disability (SLD) in Written Expression since 7th grade and receives accommodations for extended time, use of assistive technology (speech-to-text), and graphic organizers for writing assignments. She has always been a quiet student, but in high school, her social withdrawal and anxiety have become more pronounced. She maintains good grades in classes where minimal group work or presentations are required but struggles significantly in discussion-based courses or those with frequent collaborative components. She is a talented artist but rarely shares her work with peers or teachers. Her parents report she spends most of her time at home in her room and has minimal social interaction outside of school. This case study is part of a three-year re-evaluation for her IEP, with a focus on her increasing social-emotional difficulties.

## Observed Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Needs:

Observations from multiple high school staff (English teacher, math teacher, art teacher, guidance counselor, librarian) over a 6-week period highlight several consistent patterns in Sarah's social-emotional functioning:

1. Significant Social Withdrawal and Avoidance of Peer Interaction:
* Observation: Sarah consistently chooses to work alone, even when group work is assigned. She avoids eye contact with peers and teachers in hallways and before/after class. She eats lunch alone in the library most days. If approached by a peer, she gives very brief, often one-word, answers and quickly disengages.
* Impact: Leads to isolation, limits opportunities for collaborative learning, and hinders the development of essential communication skills.
1. Elevated Anxiety in Performance-Based or Unstructured Social Settings:
* Observation: When called upon to speak in class, present, or participate in open-ended discussions, Sarah becomes visibly distressed: rapid breathing, flushed face, trembling hands, and difficulty articulating thoughts. She often fumbles for words or states, "I don't know," even when it's evident she understands the material. This anxiety extends to unstructured social settings like the cafeteria or school events.
* Impact: Prevents her from demonstrating knowledge verbally, impacts participation grades, and exacerbates social withdrawal.
1. Difficulty with Self-Advocacy and Expressing Needs/Boundaries:
* Observation: Sarah rarely asks for help or clarification, even when she appears confused. She struggles to articulate her feelings or needs to teachers or peers. She also has difficulty declining requests or setting boundaries, which can lead to her being taken advantage of or feeling overwhelmed.
* Impact: Hinders academic progress, increases stress, and limits her ability to navigate social situations effectively.
1. Limited Strategies for Coping with Academic Pressure and Perfectionism:
* Observation: Despite her academic capabilities, Sarah exhibits perfectionistic tendencies, particularly with written work, leading to procrastination and significant self-criticism. When she perceives she hasn't met her own impossibly high standards, she can become emotionally dysregulated (e.g., tearfulness, intense frustration) and abandon tasks.
* Impact: Leads to academic distress, delays in work completion, and negatively impacts her mental well-being.

## Educational Impact:

These SEL needs significantly impact Sarah's ability to:

* Fully participate in collaborative learning activities and class discussions.
* Develop and maintain meaningful peer relationships, leading to isolation.
* Independently seek help and advocate for her needs in an academic setting.
* Manage academic stressors and complete tasks effectively due to perfectionism and anxiety.
* Transition successfully to post-secondary education or the workforce, where strong communication and collaborative skills are essential.

## IEP Goals

Given the observed needs and their educational impact, the following are IEP goals focusing on Sarah's social-emotional learning. These goals would be supported by specific services, accommodations and/or modifications, and would inform individualized instructional design as needed.

Identify measurements that could be used for monitoring this goal and connect the goal to SEL standards from the resources provided.

### Goal 1: Social Participation & Interaction

* Need Addressed: Significant social withdrawal and avoidance of peer interaction.
* Goal: By the end of the IEP period, Sarah will initiate or respond to social greetings from peers or staff (e.g., "Hi," "How are you?") with eye contact and a verbal response in 4 out of 5 observed opportunities in non-instructional settings (e.g., hallways, lunchroom, library), as measured by adult observation checklist.
* Measurement:
* SEL Standard:

### Goal 2: Managing Performance Anxiety

* Need Addressed: Elevated anxiety in performance-based or unstructured social settings.
* Goal: By the end of the IEP period, when asked to participate verbally in a class discussion (e.g., answering a question, sharing an opinion), Sarah will utilize a pre-taught coping strategy (e.g., deep breathing, "think-pair-share," using notes as a prompt) to articulate a response of at least one complete sentence, with minimal prompting, in 70% of observed opportunities, as measured by teacher observation and rubric.
* Measurement:
* SEL Standard:

### Goal 3: Self-Advocacy & Expressing Needs

* Need Addressed: Difficulty with self-advocacy and expressing needs/boundaries.
* Goal: By the end of the IEP period, when facing a learning challenge or feeling overwhelmed, Sarah will independently initiate a request for support or clarification from a teacher or trusted adult (e.g., asking a specific question, requesting a break, stating "I need help with...") in 3 out of 5 observed opportunities, as measured by teacher and counselor anecdotal records.
* Measurement:
* SEL Standard:

### Goal 4: Emotional Regulation & Coping with Academic Pressure

* Need Addressed: Limited strategies for coping with academic pressure and perfectionism.
* Goal: By the end of the IEP period, when confronted with a challenging or perceived imperfect academic task, Sarah will employ at least one identified emotional regulation strategy (e.g., taking a brief planned break, positive self-talk, re-framing negative thoughts) to manage her frustration, resulting in task re-engagement within 5 minutes, in 75% of observed opportunities, as measured by teacher observation and work completion data.
* Measurement:
* SEL Standard: