PROGRESS MONITORING: GUIDANCE FOR VIRTUAL AND DISTANCE LEARNING

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) at 34 CFR 300.320 (a)(3) requires that every Individualized Education Program (IEP) include a description of:

- How the student's progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured; and
- When periodic reports on the progress the child is making toward meeting the annual goals (such as quarterly or other periodic reports, concurrent with the issuance of report cards) will be provided.

According to the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Ideas that Work, "Progress monitoring is a scientifically based practice used to assess students' academic performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction."

In a virtual or distance learning setting, a free appropriate public education (FAPE), specially designed instruction, and related services continue to be required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This includes progress monitoring, the method of formative assessment, which measures a student's progress toward IEP goals. Despite recent shifts in learning environments and modalities, IEP meetings are still convening, and any data that can be collected is necessary to inform instructional decisions. These new settings have created potential challenges with program implementation and data collection. As a result, developing high-quality, evidence-based progress monitoring and subsequent reporting has proven difficult for IEP teams.

While students who receive special education services are required to have annual IEP goals, these goals should not be considered substitutes for the graded assignments linked to the general curriculum. The IDEA requires that IEP goals identify student-specific areas of need. These goals drive the specially designed instruction developed for the student by the IEP team. IEP goals do not supplant or substitute general education academic standards; they should facilitate the student's access to and progress within the general curriculum.

When reviewing how progress will be monitored during an IEP meeting, the team must include an explanation of how the student will demonstrate learned skills and knowledge. Within virtual or distance learning, some goals may be challenging to monitor for progress. For example, task-specific goals such as sitting in an assigned seat, raising a hand to gain teacher attention, or others, such as peer conflict resolution, transitions, or social behavior goals, may not be observed at all in the virtual setting. In those instances, IEP teams should discuss if the goal needs to be amended or if alternative forms of data collection can be utilized.

What is Progress Monitoring?

Progress monitoring begins when a student's current levels of performance are determined. The student's academic performance is measured regularly, as determined in the IEP. Based on these measurements, instruction and teaching techniques should be adjusted to meet the individual student's learning needs.

What are the benefits of progress monitoring?

The use of progress monitoring results in more efficient and appropriately targeted instructional techniques and goals. Benefits to expect from effective progress monitoring may include:

- Accelerated learning as students receive more specially designed instruction;
- Ongoing individualization through data-driven and meaningful updates on student goals, accommodations and services;
- Continuous evidence of the effectiveness of instruction;
- Informed instructional decisions;
- Increased accountability due to clear documentation of student progress;

- Increased communication with families and other professionals regarding students' progress;
- Learning expectations aligned with student progress; and

What are the characteristics of an effective progress monitoring system?

- Measures the skill, action, or behavior outlined in the goal
- Uses an equivalent measure each time
- Promotes systematic/frequent data collection
- Ease of implementation
- Takes only a short amount of time away from instruction
- Allows for analysis of performance over time

What are the patterns in the data?

Once sufficient data has been collected, it is crucial to analyze patterns for students and groups of students. Data should be used to determine whether students are making progress, maintaining skills, or demonstrating stagnation, regression, or a loss of skill. Using this information, the team should adjust student learning plans and supports as needed to ensure future opportunities for student success.

Questions to Consider:

Is the level of instructional material for independent practice too easy/difficult and potentially creating frustration?

- Is learning improving, or is it stagnant? Why?
- If there is stagnation, regression, or a loss of skill, what should we add, change, or increase?
- Modalities to improve engagement in learning
- Motivation systems; reinforcement
- Specific skill instruction/frequency of specific skill instruction

How Can Students Access Supports for IEP Goals Virtually?

Students may be working towards their IEP goals through virtual learning systems and structures. These structures may include a virtual review of content, virtual participation in whole or small group instruction, and periodic check-ins or face-to-face collaboration with teachers and related service providers. The chart below includes examples of methods/modalities in which students may access supports for their IEP goals in a virtual setting. These tools, combined with virtual observations and one-on-one check-ins, provide structured and measurable progress monitoring data.

TYPE	EXAMPLE
Work Sample: Work-samples are used to test a student's current skill level and can support the transfer of skills to the general education curriculum.	**Example:** Student A has a goal in handwriting or a goal for writing their name. A work-sample from their classroom assignments could be used to see if they are able to transfer handwriting skills learned to the general education curriculum.

TYPE	EXAMPLE
Teacher-created Performance Assessments: Tools that guide the teacher in constructing and using his/her classroom tests and rubrics to improve student achievement. They allow the instructor to customize an assessment to match a student's IEP goals; however, they may be time-consuming.	Tools such as Math Worksheet Generator on Intervention Central can help teachers make math probes for specific math calculation skills. Check out these tools: Early Math Fluency Generator, Dolch Word List Fluency Generator, and Oral Reading Fluency Passage Generator
Checklists: Checklists are easy to use and effective. They are used to ensure that a student has met all of the requirements of an assignment by organizing tasks, so essential steps are not skipped.	Checklists can be used for independent living skills, such as handwashing, toileting, and transitions, measuring a variety of academic and behavioral skills, or as a self-evaluation method for the student.
Rubrics: A scoring rubric communicates expectations of quality around an assigned task. Scoring rubrics are used to delineate consistent criteria for grading. A scoring rubric allows teachers and students alike to evaluate criteria. They can be used at all grade levels.	See an example of a rubric here.
Norm-referenced Tests/Probes: These are standardized tests designed to compare and rank test-takers in relation to one another. Using a norm-referenced test makes it possible to compare an individual's scores with those of a larger group (typically same age or grade level).	The National Center on Intensive Intervention at American Institutes for Research has compiled an Academic Progress Monitoring Tools Chart. The chart presents information on academic, norm-referenced progress monitoring tools with ratings on their reliability and validity. See the list here.

Virtual Observations

When conducting a virtual observation of a student with disabilities, look for, and track:

On-task behavior

- Is the student maintaining focus or work effort on the assigned task?
- Are assignments completed, and what is the time required to complete them?
- Use data reports from the chosen learning management systems to evaluate the student's time spent working on learning tasks (on-time attendance).
- Did the student enter the learning period on time/when expected?
- Measure the frequency of student outreach (i.e., asking a question or gaining assistance). What methods did the student use to communicate a need?
- Measure student participation or response in class-wide polls, chorale/action-based responding opportunities, or interactive games.

Related IEP goals this structure may support:

- Behavior (participation in a group activity, response to a verbal or non-verbal redirection)
- Social-Emotional (emotional regulation/coping, managing negative social interactions/comments)
- Verbal Expression (communicating needs, identifying items from a picture, retelling a story)

One-on-one Check-ins

Use one-on-one check-ins to support progress with:

- IEP goals that are difficult to track in the general education or small group setting
- Social-Emotional goals
  - Check-in on how students are feeling (visually or verbally)
  - Reinforce strategies and tools that were previously taught and assist the student with generalizing them into the current setting (Example: Student A has an IEP goal related to increasing his/her use of self-soothing strategies and decreasing elopement. At check-in, review the student's daily schedule, identify times when the student could benefit from a break, and brainstorm a location the student can access within the home and tools that may support self-soothing behaviors).
- Work completion (submitted assignments, tasks completed)

Related IEP goals this structure may support:

- Reading Skills: basic reading; decoding; fluency, comprehension
- Writing Skills: spelling; sentence composition
- Life Skills: knowing personal info (phone number, birthday, address); independent skills (as self-care, navigation in the environment)
- Social-Emotional Skills: navigating the new learning structure; emotional regulation/coping; social interaction
- Executive Functioning Skills: review current and upcoming assignments
- Behavior Skills: reflect on what went well and what did not; address current barriers for the student; address behavioral challenges in the new environment (relational/personal), develop a plan for communicating needs with the team

Using Existing Resources for Progress Monitoring

Identify previously utilized online resources to progress monitor student goals and adapt to the virtual or distance learning setting. Students may continue to work with the progress-tracking tools that they have previously used in the school setting if possible.

Progress Monitoring Tracking in Virtual Environments

With the advent of virtual and distance learning, teachers may develop new and creative methods to monitor student progress and maintain effective partnerships with students and families. Creating progress monitoring trackers and eliciting parent support can make this process a little easier. Examples include:

- Create or iterate on an existing Excel sheet
- Google Forms can capture important information quickly and efficiently
- Increase parent partnership through guiding home-based progress monitoring
  - Identify goals that can be met in the home
  - Ensure goals are written in parent-friendly language
  - Assist parents on when and how to support progress monitoring

- Create an independent study checklist for students by:
  - Identifying what students need to be prepared for learning
  - Provide examples, descriptions, visuals as needed
  - Use of parent signature to indicate the student met expectations
- The parent sends a photo of progress/work completion at the end of each day/week

Progress Monitoring on Virtual Assessment Platforms

It is important to plan for new progress monitoring tasks (set-up and scheduling) before working "face-to-face" with students in a virtual platform. Teachers are encouraged to practice virtual progress monitoring strategies in advance, including:

- **Collect all necessary materials for implementation,** for example, student-specific materials, such as pencils, calculator, reading tracker, headphones, a microphone, etc. Create a list and share it in advance with the student/parent.
- **Coordinate and schedule with students and their families.** Communicate in advance any time parameters, the purpose of progress monitoring tasks, and expectations for students and their families for engagement. A periodic strength, weakness, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis is beneficial in this process, including centralizing communication and scheduling with the primary teacher or teacher of record.
- **Plan sufficient time for the task.** When creating a schedule, allow enough time for progress monitoring of students and transitions between students. Although assessments could take as few as five minutes per student, these should be planned or scheduled due to caseload and other constraints.

Home to School Communication

The need for strong partnership and communication between home and school is critical. Providing families with consistent and easily accessible information regarding how their student is progressing on their IEP goals is essential. Providing families with consistent and easily accessible information regarding student progress with IEP goals is essential to the learning process. Educators should consider communication structures that provide for more frequent feedback and collaboration with families. Although teachers may ask for parental support with progress monitoring, parents are not obligated or required to perform such tasks. It is the responsibility of the educator to monitor progress and ensure student access to tools and resources needed to be successful within their specially designed instruction and goals.

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