

Answers to Questions Posed During Pearson aimsweb Webinar:

Special Education Leads: Quality IEPs and Progress Monitoring Using Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM)

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QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCESSING THE HANDOUTS AND THE POWERPOINT

- **Can you please review how to access the PowerPoint and Handouts at the end of the presentation?**

Information from this webinar can be accessed in a number of ways. A recording of this webinar along with a copy of the PowerPoint presentation can be found on the *aimsweb* website: www.aimsweb.com/Mark-Shinn.

Other materials on this topic, including the PowerPoint slides, handouts, and articles, book chapters, and training manuals to read, can be viewed on Dr. Shinn's website by clicking on the Resources Tab on the Homepage and then the folder 'Presentations and Handouts' at markshinn.org. Go to the *aimsweb webinar Special Education Leads Quality IEPs*.

QUESTIONS ABOUT RESEARCH ON GOALS

- **Could you please provide a citation for the research about the positive outcomes of fewer (IEP) goals?**

The research I was referring to was about the effects of using CBM in goal setting and progress monitoring and the gains in achievement. There is very little research about IEP goals and even about consumer satisfaction with the process. For whatever reason, this vital component of legal protection for persons who receive special education appears to be of little interest to academics. The complaints about current IEP goals are long-standing, practical ones

See:

Rinaldi, R. T. (1976). Urban schools and P.L. 94-142: One administrator's perspective on the law. In R. A. Johnson & A. P. Kowalski (Eds.), *Perspectives on implementation of the "education for all handicapped children act of 1975"* (pp. 135-152). Washington DC: Council of Great City Schools.

Smith, S. W. (1990). Individualized educational programs (IEPs) in special education: From intent to acquiescence. *Exceptional Children*, 57(1), 6-14.

That are echoed in more contemporary perspectives. See, for example:

Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2004). What is scientifically based research on progress monitoring? Washington, DC: National Center on Progress Monitoring, American Institute for Research, Office of Special Education Programs.

Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2008). Best practices in progress monitoring reading and mathematics at the elementary level. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology V* (pp. 2147-2164). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Many of these articles and book chapters on the topic are posted for reading on my website. It should be noted that IDEA-2004 no longer required short-term objectives in large part due to concerns about overly long IEPs and the lack of evidence that short-term objectives and that type of progress monitoring leads to increased achievement. See, for example:

Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (1984). Criterion-referenced assessment without measurement: How accurate for special education. *Remedial and Special Education*, 5, 29-32.

Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2004). *What is scientifically based research on progress monitoring?* Washington, DC: National Center on Progress Monitoring, American Institute for Research, Office of Special Education Programs.

The research I cited on frequent progress monitoring with tests like CBM to which I was referring was:

Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (1986). Effects of Systematic Formative Evaluation: A Meta-Analysis. *Exceptional Children*, 53(3), 199-208.

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Yeh, S. S. (2007). The cost effectiveness of five policies for improving achievement. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 28, 416-436.

QUESTIONS ABOUT CONDUCTING A SURVEY-LEVEL ASSESSMENT (SLA) TO DETERMINE THE PRESENT LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE (PLOP)

- **So does SLA mean going back grade levels until you find where the student is successful?**

One of the points I was trying to make about conducting an SLA to determine PLOP that the process was an improvement to the practices employed in conducting an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI). The IRI has been a common practice for decades with the primary purpose for determining instructional placement. Students were tested by having them read aloud from different levels of curriculum until an “instructional level” was determined.

Three major weaknesses have been noted historically in IRIs since the late 1970s, despite their potential utility in instructional planning and their popularity. First, IRIs vary and often are an informal testing process, meaning that there is *no standardization*. Different people do it differently, from the instructions to students (or lack thereof) to scoring. This lack of standardization means that the reliability and validity of the results are open to question and therefore, more high stakes decisions like screening and progress monitoring are compromised. Second, IRIs historically have been hampered by the *test format*. Most often IRI’s test format is based on having students read aloud passages of fixed length, typically 100 word passages. For very poor readers, this format is not only inefficient—it may take poor readers 4 or 5 minutes to read 100 words—but also it can be frustrating for students and decrease their motivation. The third criticism, the *outcome score* from IRIs, the percent of words read correctly or accuracy, is especially problematic. It is not that reading accuracy is unimportant. It is critical. But with accuracy, the same score can be earned in very different ways. Reading 9 words correctly out of 10 earns the same accuracy score of 90 words read correctly out of 100. Accuracy scores, although they look quantitative, need to be interpreted more qualitatively. A reading score of 85% is generally considered terrible reading and likely to be associated with reading comprehension difficulties.

As part of the expansion of CBM use in the 1980s, I adapted the IRI idea of having students read passages of successively different difficulty levels for use with R-CBM. Incorporating the term Survey Level Assessment (SLA), collecting broad samples of student achievement on a range of material difficulties, from the work of Kenneth Howell, CBM lent itself to remedying the three problems of IRIs. CBM was standardized, and as a result, considerable information has been gained about reliability and validity, meaning that the results can be used with confidence to make screening and progress monitoring decisions. Test format was not based on fixed passage length, but fixed testing period. In R-CBM, tests read aloud for 1 minute, a process that was efficient, and minimized students’ frustration. Finally, the outcome score was the number of words read correctly (WRC), which has been demonstrated to be sensitive to within and between student differences.

Now, this is a long answer to a short question, but yes, SLA is used to test students by “going back” until you find where a student is successful. In my presentation, I noted that unlike many testing practices that are focused almost exclusively on documenting what students *can’t do successfully*, the SLA process is focused specifically on testing students to determine what they *can do successfully*. The SLA outcomes can be used not only to determine PLOP for goal setting, but also to determine the severity of the performance discrepancy. A Grade 6 student whose SLA PLOP is Grade 2 has a much more severe reading discrepancy than a Grade 6 student whose PLOP is Grade 4.

It should be noted however, that there are two methods of conducting an SLA, a “top down approach” which is more systematic, beginning with the student’s current Grade placement and testing downward, or a “bottom up approach” where a professional guess is made—and confirmed or disconfirmed—about the PLOP and testing upwards. The bottom up approach is more useful when the performance discrepancy is judged to be potentially very severe and the examiner wants to ensure that students start the testing process with success.

- **When giving the R-CBM you give 3 passages at each benchmark, correct?**
- **Is there a recommended number of R-CBM passages per grade level (i.e. 3rd, 4th, 5th grade passages for a 5th grade student) to determine the most effective SLA level for benchmark performance reporting?**

For SLA, I prefer to use the same approach as I would when Benchmarking any student. That is, for R-CBM, I would prefer to make a judgment based on the median of 3 passages at each grade level. This preference gives me a highly reliable sample *and* enables me to compile a sizable number of words that the student reads incorrectly for purpose of error analysis. For areas other than WE-CBM, I would recommend completing the SLA with a single sample at each grade, unless I have reason to suspect the score as not accurate due to motivation.

- **In my experience, I have found that short, quick measures such as R-CBM work well for SLA. However, I have seen many students become tired, thus impacting motivation, on lengthier measures, such as M-CAP and M-COMP. Recommendations?**

As noted above, it is permissible to use a single sample of each measure for a SLA in other areas, *if* the same is judged to be representative of what the student does and doesn't do successfully. But is also possible, if not preferable to spread the SLA across multiple days. For example, with a Grade 4 student who is significantly discrepant in math, I could use the Benchmark Grade 4 results that have already been collected and then administer Grade 3 M-COMP and M-CAP. If the student is still discrepant, I would administer Grade 2 math—and only in the areas where they are still discrepant—either later in the day or on another day.

- **When giving the maze for Benchmark Assessment, do you give 3 passages again or only one?**

If I were Benchmarking using Maze, a reasonable practice to ensure growth and development in middle school when nearly all students are proficient readers for purposes of universal screening and universal progress monitoring, I would use one sample. Like any group administered test where there is a selection response (i.e., circle the word), I need to anticipate that some scores will be suspicious and I will need to retest or test using R-CBM. If I were to do SLA with Maze, I would use one sample per grade unless I suspected the score was not accurate. However, I would recommend doing a *reading* SLA with R-CBM.

- **In our District, we complete SLAs with our special education students the first week of school. Thoughts?**

I would conduct a SLA at the point of writing the student's first IEP goals and then on a case-by case basis when a student's IEP is about to expire as part of the annual review. These data could be used to answer two questions:

Has the student significantly reduced the performance discrepancy? Answering this question can help me judge the progress of the student and whether the achievement gap has been reduced significantly and if so, the *need* for continued special education service.

What is the student's PLOP? Answering this question can help me write my next annual goal *if* the student continues to need special education.

QUESTIONS ABOUT LOCAL NORMS AS A METHOD OF DETERMINING THE CRITERION FOR ACCEPTABLE PERFORMANCE (CAP)

- **What if local norms are exceptionally high? If we compare to national norms, then isn't it more consistent?**
- **I'm in an extremely high-performing district. National norms usually fall below our "low" students. Would I still use local norms?**
- **If students in community perform above average the goal is for them to achieve above average?**

The question about and use of local norms is probably the second most vexing question that has been asked over the years with respect to CBM and its use in decision making. For whatever reason, we've been led to believe that somehow national norms are some sort of "truth" or are inherently better than local norms. I'm not for or against national norms. It depends on how my community performs for me to judge their appropriate use. A presumption that national norms are always better for individual decision making violates our training in basic measurement principles; that is, anytime a student's score is being compared to any group, we assume that the student has had similar, although not necessarily identical acculturation (i.e., experiences and opportunities) as the norm group. See the excerpts from the APA, AERA, and NCME Standards for Tests and Measurement for more information on this topic.

American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education. (2004). *Standards for educational and psychological testing*. Washington DC: American Educational Research Association.

The validity of norm-referenced interpretations depends in part on the appropriateness of the reference group to which test scores are compared.

Standard 4.7

If local examinee groups differ materially from the population to which norms refer, a user who reports derived scores based on published norms has the responsibility to describe such differences if they bear upon the interpretation of reported scores.

Standard 13.4

Local norms should be developed when necessary to support test users' intended interpretation.

Comment: Comparison of examinees' scores to local as well as more broadly representative norm groups can be informative. Thus, sample size permitting, local norms are often useful in conjunction with published norms, especially if the local population differs markedly from the population on which the published norms are based. In some cases, local norms may be used exclusively.

The challenge for us as educators is to decide if the achievement differences between how *our* students (i.e., those in our local community) perform and those of the national norm are so significant as to affect the decision we make.

Let me use screening as an example first. In a high-performing community (e.g., the typical student is *above average* nationally), *in theory*, there would be *very, very few* students with significant achievement discrepancies (e.g., below the 10th percentile nationally). *Few* students would be identified for Tiered intervention and even fewer for special education. Does this theory “fit” in your community? Probably not.

Conversely, in a low-performing community (e.g., the typical student is *below average* nationally), *in theory*, *most* students would be identified with significant achievement discrepancies (e.g., below the 10th percentile nationally). *Most* students would be identified for Tiered intervention and a *sizeable* proportion for special education. Does this theory “fit” in your community? Probably not.

The criterion for acceptable performance using a normative approach works the same way. If a student has a significant achievement performance discrepancy in a high-achieving district and is receiving special education, reducing the local achievement gap—having the student read as well as typically developing students locally—would be in the best interest of the student to ensure continued educational success *without* special education.

If a student has a significant achievement performance discrepancy in a low-achieving district and is receiving special education, reducing the local achievement gap—having the student read as well as typically developing students locally—would be in the best interest of the particular student with respect to determining the least restrictive environment (LRE) and ensuring that sufficient attention is provided to improving general education instruction to increase outcomes for *all students*.

I hope to do a separate webinar on the use of local and national norms in decision making.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PROGRESS MONITORING PRACTICES

- **The student at the end that the goal would be 4th grade, would progress monitor then in 4th?**

Here is the most common progress monitoring mistake: monitoring progress in student’s PLOP, mistakenly referred to as *instructional level*. To monitor progress this way, a student’s progress would be monitored in *instructional level* material until some criterion were reached, then be monitored in the next most difficult level until another criterion was reached, and then monitored in an even more difficult level, etc. This type of progress monitoring practice is called *mastery monitoring (MM)* or *short-term monitoring* and is quite different from the type of progress monitoring practices inherent in CBM and progress monitoring, *general outcome measurement (GOM)*. The literature details a number of disadvantages of MM, not the least of which is logistics. Progress monitoring material is constantly changing. In GOM, a teacher monitors progress toward individually designed goals *in the goal-level material*. If the annual goal were to be successful in Grade 4, even though the student’s PLOP may be Grade 2, progress would be monitored in Grade 4. For more information on the differences between MM and GOM see:

Fuchs, L. S. (1994). *Connecting performance assessment to instruction*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

Fuchs, L. S., & Deno, S. L. (1991). Paradigmatic distinctions between instructionally relevant measurement models. *Exceptional Children*, 57(6), 488-500.

Shinn, M. R. (2012). *Measuring general outcomes: A critical component in scientific and practical progress monitoring practices*. Minneapolis, MN: Pearson Assessment.

MISCELLANEOUS OTHER QUESTIONS

- **Does IDEA require the IEP team to be reconvened when these adjustments are being made? We make adjustments based on need throughout the year but do not reconvene the team each time. We communicate to parents by a phone call or in person conversation.**

Minor adjustments to IEPs can be made through notification. Major adjustments like substantial revisions in the intervention require more parental involvement. If a student’s IEP needs to be revised to address lack of progress, I would argue that this should be a major adjustment and convene the team to do so. In contrast, if a special education is so effective in reducing the gap and the CAP would be raised, I might suggest that this is a minor adjustment. If the gap is reduced so there is no longer a significant performance discrepancy, then I would argue this is a major adjustment warranting discussion of the *need* for special education and the necessity to consider a transition plan.

- **Where can I find more info about 1 minute reading assessment? I have been taught to do a 5-minute assessment.**

Reading Curriculum-Based Measurement (R-CBM) was developed and validated more than 30 years ago in a federally funded research effort to give special education teachers simple and psychometrically sound tests for purposes of writing IEP goals and monitoring

progress. In that research effort, a variety of oral reading testing times were compared with respect to reliability. A 1 minute sample was just as reliable as a 5 minute sample, and of course, the former is much more efficient. High quality data are collected without jeopardizing much instructional time. A plethora of professional books, journal articles, and book chapters, including aimsweb training manuals, details the specifics of practice and the research on the measure itself.

- **How does this align to CCSS?**

I conducted a webinar on the alignment of Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM), and particularly the *aimsweb* CBM language arts measures as they aligned to the CCSS. Go to:

http://downloads.pearsonassessments.com/videos/Shinn_AW_10_30_2012/lib/playback.html

You can also find a copy of the accompanying handouts and a white paper on the alignment to CCSS on the *aimsweb* website and on my own website at markshinn.org in a folder in the same section as today's webinar.

A Copy of the Sample Leadership Letter I Referred to In My Webinar That a Number of Person Requested

Sample Letter Describing Changes in IEP Goal Writing and Progress Monitoring Practices

Background: This is a sample letter that I offered to persons in Pennsylvania after I presented at their state technical assistance conference on improving the quality of IEPs and Progress Monitoring Practices. It is an expansion of a letter written by the Director of Special Education of Minneapolis Schools, Dr. Keith Kromer, who was as fine a leader as I have had the pleasure to work for. In 1982, after asking me to survey Minneapolis special education teachers about their opinions about the District's IEP goal setting process (a computerized objective bank that they hated) and their progress monitoring practices (which really were only end of the year WJs), he drafted a letter like this to the staff giving permission to change and some guidelines about how he was going to support it. It was an inspirational moment in my then early career---to see REAL leadership to improve practices. I've tried to capture some of those elements in a letter than can be modified, improved to be sure, and customized to meet your own needs.

Mark

Date

Dear <school district> staff members:

As we approach our 40th year of federal provision of a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) and established a culture that has progressed from an emphasis on compliance and proceduralism to one where results are valued above all, it's time to rethink and redo our IEP goals and special education progress monitoring. Some presentations last week at the PaTTAN conference on scientifically based frequent progress monitoring and quality, but fewer IEP goals, it reaffirmed my knowledge and belief that we can do even better for <school district> students identified with disabilities. I thought I would summarize my conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice here.

First and foremost, we all need to "catch up" on the types of scientifically based progress monitoring practices that have been shown to be one of the most powerful "intervention" tools in the tool box. Therefore, as a priority for all special education staff, I am asking that you all read the following articles within the next 2 weeks.

<Identify 3 simple but big ones here>

These articles will be posted on the District's Blackboard site (or some other PD alternative). I strongly encourage you to read them and have a discussion with colleagues. To support this discussion, I would like to schedule an afterschool meeting at < > led by < > and me on < >.

In addition, I would like to announce a change in policy and practice, beginning April 1, 2014. After that date, at the time of any current student with an IEP's annual review, at the expiration date, I would request that IEP teams think carefully about how they write their annual goals, selecting them from a list of recommended <xxx> Public Schools Basic Skills IEP annual goals that will be disseminated at a training meeting no later than <xxx>. I expect these goals will be written based on objective PLOP (present level of performance) information obtained with a Survey Level Assessment (SLA) that, again, will be part of our training process. The requirement for short-term objectives, consistent with Pennsylvania Regulation (but not required by Federal Law) still applies, but I strongly encourage you to consider them as "soft targets" reflective of representative curricular or standards "milestones." THIS SECTION IS NOT REQUIRED IN MANY STATES

As part of our efforts to ensure improvement in the quality of IEPs and progress monitoring practices, I also am setting the expectation that for newly identified students, quality IEP goals in line with the standards I've described in the previous paragraph also applies.

Finally, as perhaps the most critical component of these IEP goal writing and progress monitoring practices, I am setting the expectation that by <time line; such as January Nov. 1, 2014) special education teachers will be monitoring progress weekly toward these annual goals with at least 7-10 students.

As part of the district leadership commitment to support these best practices, I would like it to be clear that there will be the **tools, training, and support** to do this and do it well. Let me start with what we will abandon as part of our leadership **support**. It is no longer required that:

1. IEPs include large numbers of goals for each area of concern. Almost always, these goals are either overly vague, highly specific, but difficult to measure, and have not led to meaningful discussions about how IEP goals should drive the development of appropriately intensive interventions and frequent progress monitoring using evidence-based practices.
2. Progress toward goals **other than our district's** Basic Skills IEP annual goals is monitored.
3. Broad band (multi-grade) achievement tests such as <the ones used in the district> or other tests are used at annual or 3-year reevaluations.

As director, I want you to be assured that we already have the **tools** to write these goals and conduct frequent progress monitoring. <describe your CBM or seek such commitment here>. And, I would like you to know that we are committing the training resources to ensure you can do this well as efficiently. Thus, we have arranged the following training dates.

1. Goal setting, including SLA. <date and time>
2. Facilitating efficient progress monitoring.
3. Using data to adjust instruction.

I want you also to know that each of you will be assigned a progress monitoring coach. I intend to identify 2-3 staff members who will be released from other non-case load duties as soon as possible to come to your schools to use your goals, your progress monitoring data, from **your students** for training

and feedback.

I look forward to this effort to improve further what we do. I am proud of your staff and their accomplishments to date and believe efforts to improve our goals and frequent progress monitoring practices will make us the best.

Respectfully submitted