

Progress Monitoring Briefs Series

Brief #1: Common Progress Monitoring Omissions: Planning and Practice

Progress monitoring, one of the essential components of Response to Intervention (RTI), is characterized by repeated measurement of academic performance that is conducted at least monthly. The process may be used to assess students' academic performance over time, to quantify student rates of improvement or responsiveness to instruction, and to evaluate instructional effectiveness. For students with disabilities, progress monitoring may also be used to formulate effective individualized programs (National Center on Response to Intervention [NCRTI], 2010).

Successful implementation of progress monitoring is the result of careful planning and thoughtful practice. Omitting key components of the progress monitoring process can lead to wasted time and invalid results. This brief focuses on five common omissions in progress monitoring practices and planning and explains how these activities are integral to the process of meaningful data-based decision making. This document uses recommendations from *RTI Implementer Series Module 2: Progress Monitoring – Training Manual* (NCRTI, 2012).

Additional references and resources are listed at the end of this brief.

As you plan, use the following checklist to help ensure that these important aspects of progress monitoring are not omitted from your program:

- Determine the age-appropriate, reliable, and valid progress monitoring tools that will be used at each grade.

- Create a preset schedule for collecting progress monitoring data throughout the year.
- Outline a set schedule and agenda for meeting to evaluate progress monitoring data.
- Establish the decision rules that will guide the decision-making process and subsequent follow-up tasks.
- Establish practices to ensure fidelity of the progress monitoring process.

Appropriate Progress Monitoring Tools

A valid tool must accurately measure the underlying construct it is intended to measure. To be valid, progress monitoring tools must be appropriate for the grade level at which they are used and related to the instruction provided. In general, the progress of students in kindergarten and first grade should be measured using assessments that target letter names, sounds, and words in isolation. As students get older and are beginning to read connected text, oral reading fluency is monitored. Starting in late elementary school, students should be assessed using comprehension measures such as maze fluency.

With regard to math, students in kindergarten and first grade should be assessed using tasks such as number identification, quantity discrimination (identification of the larger number from a set of two) and missing number (oral identification of the missing number in a sequence of numbers). Computation skills can begin to be assessed once students are in first grade. At second grade and beyond, it may be appropriate to monitor students' progress in math concepts and applications in addition to computation.



Preset Schedule for Collecting Progress Monitoring Data

Successful schools develop schedules for student progress monitoring, ensure that all staff members know the schedule, and set the expectation that data will be collected and reviewed in accordance with the schedule. At a minimum, teachers should monitor progress at least monthly. In addition, and as a general rule, more frequent progress monitoring (e.g., weekly) is conducted for students with severe academic difficulties.

Successful schools have a progress monitoring team (often including the principal, a teacher from each grade, and the school RTI coordinator) that meets regularly. At the first meeting of the school year, dates for biweekly or monthly meetings are set on the school calendar, although team members should be prepared to meet more frequently, if needed. (During the year, the number of students needing specific attention may increase, and the time provided in just one meeting each month may not be sufficient.) It is sometimes helpful to plan for more frequent meetings up front, as it is more difficult to add additional time and meetings later.

Additional planning beyond setting a schedule also produces good results. Many schools find that having a set agenda for their monthly meetings makes the meetings run more smoothly, and a greater number of student concerns can be addressed. A staff member is appointed to be the discussion leader, and all team members have access to relevant student data. Then, a designated amount of time is devoted to identifying and discussing the problem, brainstorming possible solutions, developing a plan of action, designating staff to execute the plan, and setting a date for a follow-up discussion. In meetings with an efficient, experienced facilitator, teams can move through all of these steps in less than 30 minutes.

Decision Rules

Progress monitoring data can be used to assess a student's risk status, the appropriateness of the student's instructional program, and when instructional changes are needed. Thus, progress monitoring frequency and the correct timing of instructional decisions are important considerations.

Successful schools develop guidelines about the number of data points needed to make sound decisions. They keep several issues in mind. First, they know that, as the number of data points increases, the chance of measurement error decreases—which means that the more data points, the greater confidence that students' scores represent actual student skill. Thus, team members recognize that, before making a decision based on progress monitoring, they must collect enough data points to ensure that they have an accurate indication of the student's skills being measured.

Second, team members should allow enough time for an intervention to work. Student success with an intervention may not be apparent until at least 6 to 10 data points have been gathered. Shinn, Good, & Stein (1989) recommend basing a decision on at least 7 to 10 data points; Christ and Silbergitt (2007) recommend 6 to 9 data points. This consideration must be balanced with the team's goal of not wasting instructional time with an intervention that is not working. If data are collected every two weeks rather than weekly, months can pass before a decision is made, thereby losing valuable time if the intervention is not working. Thus, weekly data collection is encouraged to the extent possible. However, it would not be helpful to collect data everyday for two weeks as progress monitoring tools are not sensitive enough to detect growth from day to day.

Third, the team should consider that the more sensitive the tool, the more frequently the tool can be used. For example, second grade students should normally have



an increase of about one and a half words per week on a passage reading fluency (PRF) assessment. Thus, a PRF assessment for second grade would be sensitive enough to be used weekly. On the other hand, the normal increase for first graders on a maze assessment is .40 words per week. The sensitivity of this progress monitoring tool would lend itself to less frequent use—perhaps every two or three weeks, an interval for which increases would be more meaningfully represented as numbers of words rather than fractions of a word.

Examples of two types of instructional decision rules used by schools can be found in *Progress Monitoring Brief #3, Common Progress Monitoring Graph Omissions: Instructional Decisions*.

Fidelity Practices: Accurate and Reliable Administration and Scoring

Ideally, schools plan for and implement RTI and assess fidelity at the same time. Some schools manage to do this, but others realize the necessity for fidelity a year or two into RTI implementation, when their outcomes are less positive than they expected. Schools look at their administrative and scoring practices and realize

that not only are staff members inconsistent in their progress monitoring methods, but scoring practices also vary from teacher to teacher and from one assessment session to another. At this point, the progress monitoring team holds a professional development session to review the intended procedures for their progress monitoring tools. Some schools have coaches who then monitor the progress monitoring practices as needed.

Procedures for monitoring fidelity of assessment, instruction, and adherence to data-based decision-making practices should be built into the school's yearly RTI implementation plan and reviewed at least quarterly.

In conclusion, monitoring the progress of students and using the resulting data to make instructional decisions are crucial components of the implementation of RTI. Given that many staff members spend valuable time and effort monitoring student progress, it is important to ensure that the data are not wasted. Thus, careful planning that includes the components summarized above should precede the implementation of progress monitoring.

References

- Christ, T. J., & Silbergliitt, B. (2007). Estimates of the standard error of measurement for curriculum-based measures of oral reading fluency. *School Psychology Review, 36*, 130–146.
- National Center on Response to Intervention. (2012). *RTI Implementer Series: Module 2: Progress Monitoring – Training Manual*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, National Center on Response to Intervention.
- National Center on Response to Intervention. (2010). *Essential components of RTI—A closer look at response to intervention*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, National Center on Response to Intervention. Retrieved from http://www.rti4success.org/pdf/rtiessentialcomponents_042710.pdf
- Shinn, M. R., Good, R. H., & Stein, S. (1989). Summarizing trend in student achievement: A comparison of models. *School Psychology Review, 18*, 356–370.



Additional Resources

Fuchs, L. S., & Oxaal, I. (n.d.). *Progress monitoring: What, why, how, when, where*. Presentation released by the National Center on Student Progress Monitoring. Retrieved from <http://www.rti4success.org/pdf/progressmonitoringwhatwhyhowwhenwhere.pdf>

These PowerPoint slides explain curriculum-based measurement (CBM), contrast it with mastery measurement, and show how CBM can be applied to instructional planning, individualized education program development, and learning disability identification.

National Center on Response to Intervention. (2010). *Progress monitoring tools*. Retrieved from <http://www.rti4success.org/progressMonitoringTools>

This tools chart lists commercially available progress monitoring tools and rates multiple aspects of each, including validity, reliability, and alternative forms, against a standard set of criteria.

National Center on Response to Intervention. (2010). *Users guide to progress monitoring tools chart*. Retrieved January 25, 2012, from http://www.rti4success.org/tools_charts/supplementalContent/progress/ProgressMonitoringUsersGuide.pdf

This guide provides information about the basics of the chart as well as details about the process for using the chart, which includes gathering a team, determining your needs and priorities, becoming familiar with the chart's language and content, reviewing the ratings and implementation data, and asking for more information.



About the National Center on Response to Intervention

Through funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, the American Institutes for Research and researchers from Vanderbilt University and the University of Kansas have established the National Center on Response to Intervention. The Center provides technical assistance to states and districts and builds the capacity of states to assist districts in implementing proven response to intervention frameworks.



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