Progress Monitoring with Data Collection of IEP Annual Goals

Closing the Achievement Gap of Students with Disabilities One Student at a Time

By Will J. Gordillo and Anne Miller

February 2017

The purpose of this white paper is to provide special educators and leaders' information on why progress monitoring with data collection of Individualized Education Program (IEP) annual goals is such an important process to implement in order to improve outcomes and results for students with disabilities. Special education and general education teachers working with students with disabilities need to be supported and provided the resources and tools in order to develop, build habits and effectively use student progress monitoring with data collection practices on IEP annual goals to close the achievement gap. Success often depends on the degree of interest, guidance and support provided by leadership staff to educators. When the IEP process of reporting progress on annual goals adopts "results" as an essential element of achievement, implementing a next generation electronic system of measuring student progress with data collection of IEP annual goals is a logical and necessary next step.

> *"The key components that favor results and improvement include: teamwork, goals, and the selective and judicious use of data."*[i]

Introduction

When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 2004, it eliminated the requirement that IEPs include short-term objectives or benchmarks, except for students with disabilities who take alternate assessments. Instead, the focus became annual goals, which are statements that identify what knowledge, skills, and/or behaviors a student is expected to be able to demonstrate at the next scheduled review. Annual, measurable goals must be developed to meet the students' needs, as identified in the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP).

PCG | Education

With the adoption of Common Core or state-specific standards and the accompanying standardized state assessments, the development and implementation of standards-based IEPs began to gain traction. A standards-based IEP, or "one in which the IEP team has incorporated state content standards in its development," can be developed using a simple seven step process.[ii] Many professionals and family members view standards-based IEPs as a best practice to create high expectations for students with disabilities.[iii]

According to the most recent data from the Office of Special Education Programs, **62.6%** of children with disabilities (CWDs) across the nation are now receiving instruction 80% or more of their day inside the general education classroom with non-disabled peers and take the required standards-based state assessments.[iv]

Key components of IDEA 2004 include:

- Higher standards to provide an opportunity to improve access to rigorous academics. These greater expectations and supports should lead to higher achievement.
- Students with disabilities must be challenged to excel with the general education curriculum and be prepared for success in their post-school lives.
- States are required to report on the progress of students with disabilities in their annual state accountability process, and to ensure special education is viewed as a service and not a place.
- Progress towards IEP goals must be assessed and reported periodically throughout the year.

Progress Monitoring Perspectives

Progress monitoring is a **scientifically based** practice used to assess a child's academic progress on IEP goals and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Progress monitoring tells the teacher what a child has learned and what still needs to be taught.[v] IDEA 2004 states that a student's IEP must contain a description of how the child's progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured, and that periodic reports be provided.

To meet this requirement, state departments of education (SEAs) have been implementing a variety of methods to accurately ensure tracking and reporting of student progress on IEP goals.[vi] An analysis by NASDSE, through Project Forum in conjunction with the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), found that some SEAs were still requiring measures of student progress and many had amended statutes, regulations and guidance or had utilized or are planning to use high tech solutions as well as common training and technical assistance measures to achieve IDEA 2004 requirements for reporting progress on IEP goals.[vii]

Trends in Reporting Progress on IEP Goals[viii]
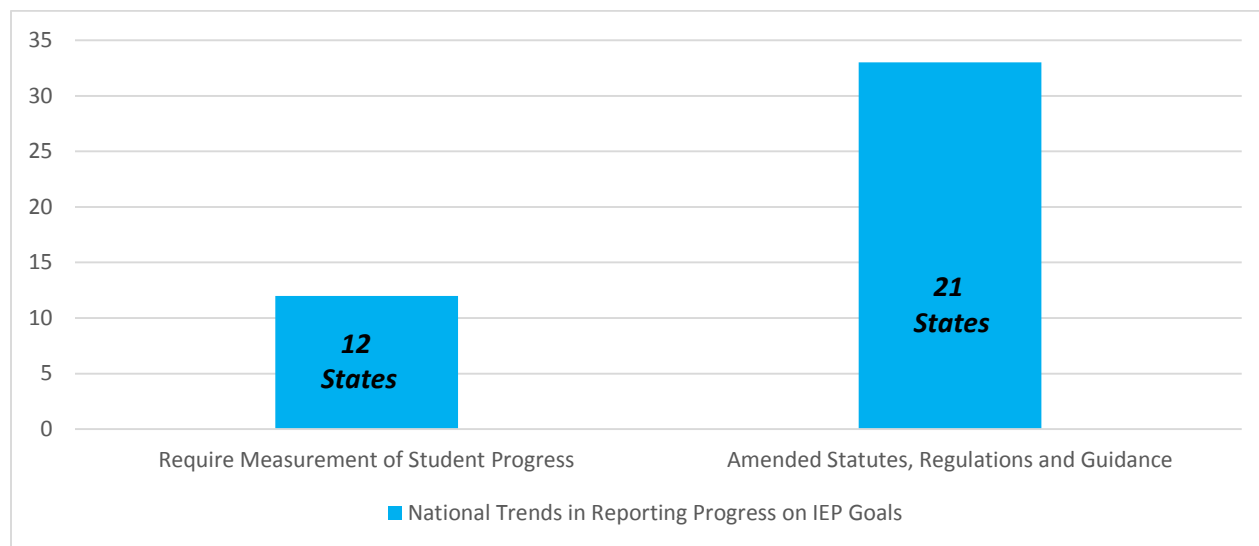
Since this policy analysis was conducted, many SEAs have continued to amend statutes, regulations and guidance while implementing statewide electronic IEP systems with either mandatory or opt in options for their district local education agency (LEA) representatives. Concurrently, they are working to strengthen practices on how progress towards annual goals are measured and undertaking efforts to implement electronic progress monitoring with data collection methods aligned to their electronic IEP processes to facilitate the intent of the requirement for progress monitoring in IDEA 2004.[ix]

In 2014, OSEP announced a paradigm shift towards Results-Driven Accountability (RDA), thus initiating a focus on the results-driven State Performance Plan indicators to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Since then, state and local education agencies and school district personnel responsible for the development and implementation of IEPs have been working through the implications of this change and taking meaningful action to align practices to this significant shift.[x]

At present, state and local education agencies continue to use a variety of strategies to monitor, track, and report progress on IEP goals. Some have clearly delineated procedures to guide these interrelated processes and others do not. Teachers continue to struggle with the lack of guidance, support, tools, and resources readily available to incorporate progress monitoring and to simplify the data collection necessary to measure and report progress on their students' annual IEP goals.

Teachers often have to search for resources or tools that are accessible on the web (e.g. Teacher Hub, About Education, Progress Monitoring Toolbox, etc.).[xi] The documentation collected is frequently a resource intensive, paper-based, teacher dependent process. The extensive portfolios of notebooks and binders compiled run counter to paperwork reduction efforts, and they do not take advantage of emerging technologies and tools that exist to aid teachers in this process.

Occasionally, documentation to qualify and substantiate progress made towards IEP goals are not robust or available, or they are insufficient to support the decisions made in IEP meetings. When this happens, the district and/or school becomes far more vulnerable to accusations of non-compliance. This may result in conflicts during IEP meetings which generate complaints, challenges, and costly litigation.

This was evidenced in a 2015 administrative law judge ruling against the Hayfield Public School District that was later reviewed by the Minnesota State Educational Agency. In the case, the district was found to keep inadequate records that failed to report whether the student's progress was sufficient to enable him to achieve the goals set out in his progress reports.[xii]

Emerging Next Generation Progress Monitoring with Data Collection of IEP Annual Goals Practices

While there are many SEAs and LEAs that have embraced technology and automation through the implementation of electronic IEP systems, others are still using a paper-based IEP and have not made the transition. Whether the IEP processes are automated via technology or not, most do not have a robust means for monitoring the progress towards annual IEP goals, nor for collecting and reporting data.

Some efforts have been taken to utilize electronic progress monitoring tools that incorporates data collection technology. These solutions align with the requirement for progress monitoring in IDEA 2004, resulting in a focus on improving academic outcomes for student with disabilities.[xiii] Electronic tools are also being used to support the implementation of Response to Intervention and Multi-Tiered System of Supports.[xiv]

EMERGING PRACTICES: USE OF TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS AND TOOLS FOR PROGRESS MONITORING WITH DATA COLLECTION.

National trends reflect that more districts are utilizing **high-tech solutions** as well as common training and technical assistance measures to support the fidelity of implementation for monitoring student progress on their IEP annual goals. Electronic progress monitoring with data collection of IEP annual goals is **a practical solution to time- and resource-intensive special education paperwork reduction mandates,** and holds promise as an efficient and effective use of technology.

Public Consulting Group (PCG) has partnered with **3,200 school districts and 34 states**. Over **25 million IEPs have been** created in PCG's EDPlan special education management system. Across the country, **one in every five** special education student's IEPs are managed in PCG systems, which include the processes for implementing the IDEA requirements of periodic reporting of student progress.

Furthermore, **school districts serving over 60,000 students with disabilities** have moved forward to strengthen their processes by using EDPlan's more robust Progress Monitoring with Data Collection (PMDC) solution that integrates with electronic IEP systems in an effort to close the achievement gap and improve outcomes and results for students with disabilities.

BENEFITS REPORTED BY SCHOOL DISTRICTS IMPLEMENTING PCG'S PROGRESS MONITORING WITH DATA COLLECTION TECHNOLOGY SOLUTION

- Strengthens the evidences available to the IEP team members to support the periodic reporting of progress;
- Improves fidelity: Consistent data collection across LEA;
- Saves time: Efficient and effective use of technology;
- Auto calculates progress based on data collected;
- Auto calculates trend and aim lines;
- Graph generation to provide visual representation of progress;
- Helps build progress monitoring and data collection habits;
- Saves paper.

BENEFITS REPORTED BY SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERS IN THE FIELD[xv]

- Meets IDEA requirements compliance for measuring and reporting progress;
- Provides a systematic approach to data collection;
- Provides longitudinal data on student progress;

- Guides instruction by assisting teachers in making data-informed decisions;
- Charts progress on goals/objectives;
- Has relevant and current information for PLAAFP;
- Maintains documentation for eligibility redetermination;
- Maintains documentation for Extended School Year services consideration;
- Maintains documentation for all IEP decisions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROGRESS MONITORING WITH DATA COLLECTION

- Informs instruction and alters variables to better address the individual student needs;
- Accelerates learning because students are receiving well-designed and calibrated appropriate instruction;
- Enables more efficient communication with families and other professionals about students' progress; and higher expectations for students by teachers;
- Provides technical advantages for quantifying progress;
- Documents student progress for accountability purposes.

> *"Our teachers feel like they are on the cutting edge of a system that has the potential to significantly impact student achievement. They love the clarity and usability of the system. The integration of Progress Monitoring and the IEP system reduces redundant data entry and ensures compliance with the IEP."*
>
> *Kevin Kirst, Albemarle County Public Schools*

The IEP process that is most aligned with RDA's focus on improving outcomes and results for students with disabilities (SWD) is monitoring student progress. **In 2013–14, the number of children and youth ages 3–21 receiving special education services was 6.5 million, or about 13 percent of all public school students.[xvi]** These students deserve the accountability necessary to measure and track progress on the goals delineated in their IEPs to sustain growth and receive the accompanying educational benefits.

Formalized progress monitoring provides parents and teachers with data aligned to goals and the necessary information for targeted instruction to proactively impact student achievement and facilitate problem solving. This process is also instrumental in efforts to strengthen and calibrate IEPs to provide educational benefits for SWD. RDA heightens the importance of collecting data to monitor progress towards IEP goals, and targeted, specially designed instruction for SWDs.

PMDC towards IEP annual goals is an evidenced-based process that aligns to the six essential practices featured by the National Center for Educational Outcomes (NCEO). NCEO chronicled how five school districts with very different demographics used assessment and accountability as an impetus for positive change.[xvii]

Monitoring the academic progress of students provides formative results and aligns with best practices around IEP development and classroom instruction. Research has demonstrated that when educators use student progress monitoring, teacher decision making improves, and students become more aware of their performance.

A significant body of research conducted over the last 30 years has demonstrated this methodology to be a reliable and valid predictor of subsequent performance on a variety of measures, and thus useful for a wide range of instructional decisions.[xviii] Electronic progress monitoring of IEP annual goals with data collection is a viable solution for SEAs and LEAs to consider when implementing a systematic process that offers guidance, support, and resources for teachers.

When electronic progress monitoring is implemented, educators build habits and incorporate progress monitoring requirements into their daily activities. At the same time, data collection is simplified and becomes

well integrated in students' IEPs and classrooms. Progress monitoring with data collection for behavior specific goals was likewise deemed a viable technology solution by the Council for Exceptional Children.[xix]

SUMMARY

EDPlan's PMDC solution supports and strengthens the efforts of SEAs and LEAs to set standards that will guide processes for students with IEP annual goals in a compliant, accountable, and results-driven manner. Progress monitoring eliminates the focus on short term "mastery" and directs the attention to the students' annual goals. Focusing on improving outcomes and results for SWDs is in accordance with the stipulations set forth in IDEA 2004, as well as RDA. The web-based PMDC solution provides the standardization, structure, guidance, and support to facilitate the following:

1. Simplified data collection
2. Applied measurement approach
3. Problem solving
4. Graphical representation of progress
5. Easily understood format for teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents
6. Progress and trends for individual students and groups of students across multiple grades and schools
7. Alerts users
8. Reporting capabilities at the classroom, school, and district level

These supports help keep the focus on data-based decision making and problem solving around the IEP annual goals while helping to mitigate some of the challenges that are inherently apparent when implementing Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS).[xx]

Progress monitoring occurs naturally in the routines of our daily lives. For example, we use technology to monitor our weight, breathing, blood pressure, heart rate, steps walked, budgeting, real estate, and the stock market. Technology solutions have helped us simplify and implement efficient and accessible processes for monitoring and collecting useful data in areas we are keenly interested in, making decisions about, being accountable for, and improving results. So why not apply these next generation solutions to improve the "quality" of the IEP process for monitoring progress with data collection of IEP annual goals?

In 2015, the Florida Department of Education defined a quality IEP as one in compliance with all requirements of state and federal laws and regulations, and one which reflects decisions based on the active and meaningful involvement of all members of the IEP team."[xxi] The IEP provides a clear statement of expected outcomes and the special education services and supports to be provided to the student. The requirement to monitor students' progress aligns well with the processes of developing "quality" IEPs for students with disabilities.

IDEA refers to the periodic reporting of each child's progress towards the annual goals. These reports give parents, other members of the IEP team, and the public agency the opportunity to review the IEP and make adjustments if they are warranted. When a child does not make the progress expected, then it's essential to determine why not and take corrective action. The implementation of the robust electronic PMDC of IEP annual goals technology solution will support the efforts of the IEP team to address the questions that arise around a student's progress towards their goals while confidently implementing the systemic problem solving process embedded in Multi-Tiered Systems of Support.

About the Authors

Will J. Gordillo, a Senior Associate and Subject Matter Expert in the area of Special Populations and Diverse Learners at PCG Education. He provides consulting services to states, districts and schools nationwide as a collaborative thought partner by conducting program reviews, providing technical assistance in areas of need including the facilitation of action planning, designing and delivering blended learning professional

development and coaching for teachers, paraprofessionals, support personnel and leaders. Prior to joining PCG Education, Mr. Gordillo cultured extensive experiences serving as a special education teacher, K-12 administrator in a variety of leadership roles including assistant principal, principal, director, assistant superintendent overseeing special education, section 504, gifted and talented and psychological services in two very large urban school districts. Both districts were members of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative. During his tenure as district administrator, he had the privilege to serve as a member of the advisory group for this organization. He also served as a member of strategic teams assembled by the Council of Great City Schools to conduct special education audits of member districts to improve special education outcomes and results. Will has also served as president of the Florida Council of Administrators of Special Education and as professional development chair of the Council of Administrators of Special Education. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of the South Florida Chapter of Autism Speaks and was Chairperson of the 2014 Walk for Autism Speaks Palm Beach. He has been recognized and profiled in the Special Education Leadership Collaborative Newsletter, Urban Perspectives Fall Star 2011 Volume 17, Number 2, and LRP Publications Special Education Director, Special Education Connection profile article, September 2008 and his writings have been featured in Publications.[xxii]

Contact Will at wgordillo@pcgus.com

Anne Miller is a Sr. Implementation Specialist with over eight years' experience working with school districts in the implementation of IEP solutions. Anne's primary focus the last 7 years has been on progress monitoring with data of IEP goals, which led to the design and development of PCG's PMDC solution. Anne is currently consulting and training on the content of data collection methods and practices along with implementing and supporting the PMDC module in several states across the country.

Contact Anne at anmiller@pcgus.com

About Public Consulting Group

Public Consulting Group (PCG) is a management consulting firm that primarily serves public sector education, health, human services, and other state, county, and municipal government clients. Established in 1986 with headquarters in Boston, the firm has extensive experience in all 50 states, clients in six Canadian provinces, and a growing practice in Europe. Because PCG has dedicated itself almost exclusively to the public sector for more than 30 years, the firm has developed a deep understanding of the legal and regulatory requirements and fiscal constraints that often dictate a public agency's ability to meet the needs of the populations it serves.   PCG has helped numerous public sector organizations to maximize resources, make better management decisions using performance measurement techniques, improve business processes, improve federal and state compliance, and improve client outcomes. Many of PCG's nearly 2,000 employees have extensive experience and subject matter knowledge in a range of government-related topics, from child welfare, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Welfare to Work (WtW), Medicaid and Medicare policy to special education, literacy and learning, and school-based health finance. PCG's current work includes more than 2,000 active contracts in all 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia. PCG has six designated practice areas, each of which has a proven track record of achieving desired results for clients. The firm often combines resources from two or more practice areas to offer a multidisciplinary approach to solve a client's challenge or pursue an opportunity.

i Schmoker, M (1999), Results, The Key to Continuous School Improvement, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.

ii Project Forum by NASDSE, Standards-Based Educational Program Examples by Marla Davis Holbrook, August 2007 http://www.nasdse.org/Portals/0/Standards-BasedIEPExamples.pdf

iii Project Forum by NASDSE, Standards-Based Educational Program Examples by Marla Davis Holbrook, August 2007 http://www.nasdse.org/Portals/0/Standards-BasedIEPExamples.pdf

iv Source: OSEP Grad 360 Part B Data 2016

v Peter W. D. Wright and Pamela Darr Wright Progress Monitoring
Last revised: 10/13/14 http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/progress.index.htm

vi *"State Tracking to Measure Student Progress Toward IEP Goals," by* Paula Burdette, Ph.D., published in February 2009

vii *State Tracking to Measure Student Progress Toward IEP Goals," by Paula* Burdette, Ph.D.
http://www.nasdse.org/Portals/0/Documents/StateTrackingtoMeasureStudentProgressTowardIEPGoals.pdf

viii viii *"State Tracking to Measure Student Progress Toward IEP Goals," by* Paula Burdette, Ph.D., published in February 2009
ix ix *"State Tracking to Measure Student Progress Toward IEP Goals," by* Paula Burdette, Ph.D., published in February 2009

x Results Driven Accountability http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda/index.html

xi Teach Hub, K-12 News, Lessons & Shared Resources by Teachers, for Teachers, *provided by the K-12 Teachers Alliance*,
Tips for Tracking and Setting IEP Goals http://www.teachhub.com/tips-setting-tracking-iep-goals

About Education, Special Education, IEP Goals for Progress Monitoring, http://specialed.about.com/od/iepgoals/a/iepgoals.htm
NYS Education Department Regional Special Education Technical Center Progress Monitoring Tool Box
http://www.onsetasc.org/resources.cfm?subpage=830100

xii Hayfield Public School District ISD #0203-01, Special Education Connection Case Report, 2016 LRP Publications, Pages 1-5.

xiii See, for example, Prince George County Public Schools, Gwinnett County Public Schools, The School District of Philadelphia, or Iredell-Statesville Schools.

xiv Tools Chart, National Center for Intensive Interventions at AIR http://www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/progress-monitoring

xvProgress Monitoring: How Local Procedures Support General Supervision, Charre' N. Moulton,
Director of Special Services, Jenkins County Schools and Jessica Miller, Director, Glascock County Schools, Georgia Spring Leadership Conference, March 2014.

xvi IES NCES Children and Youth with Disabilities http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp

xvii "Moving Your Numbers, Telfer, D.M., & Glasgow, A. (2012. District Self-Assessment Guide: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase performance for students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement, Minneapolis Minnesota, National Centre for Educational Outcomes.

xviii Safer, Nancy and Steve Fleischman, Research Matters / How Student Progress Monitoring Improves Instruction, Educational Leadership, Educational Leadership, How Schools Improve, v2 n5 p 81-83 February 2005

xix Vannest, Kimberly, J.; Burke, Mack D; Payne, Tara E.; Davis, Cole R.: Soares, Denise A. TEACHING Exceptional Children, v43 n5 p50-51 May-June 2011

xx Sparks, Sarah, D., Practical Lessons on Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports, Response to Intervention Next Generation, Education Week, December 13, 2016

xxi FDOE BEESS Resource Information Center Publication: Developing Quality IEPs 2015 Fourth Edition by Marty Beech Ph. D., http://fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7690/urlt/0070122-qualityieps.pdf

xxii Gordillo, W. (2015). Top 10 Trends to Watch in Special Education in 2015 http://www.scilearn.com/blog/2015-special-education-trends

9 Strategies for Students with Disabilities: How to shift to results driven accountability, January 5, 2015
http://blogs.scholastic.com/education_pulse/2015/01/nine-strategies-for-students-with-disabilities.html#.V5pE0GfruM_

Collaborative Professional Development is Essential to Teaching Students with Disabilities, July 19, 2016: http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/education_futures/2016/07/collaborative_professional_development_is_essential_to_teaching_students_with_disabilities.html