



RTI Roundtable - Issue # 6

Progress Monitoring in a RTI Model

What is Progress Monitoring?

Progress monitoring is a set of assessment procedures for determining the extent to which students are benefiting from classroom instruction and for monitoring effectiveness of curriculum. A fundamental assumption of education is that students will benefit from high-quality instruction. That is, typically, students will learn and achieve the skills and content taught in the classroom. For students who are not responsive to classroom instruction, alternative interventions can be provided and again the students' response to that instruction can be monitored. Progress monitoring is a valid and efficient tool for gauging the effectiveness of instruction, determining whether instructional modifications are necessary, and providing important information for eventual classification and placement decisions.

Progress monitoring is the scientifically based practice of assessing students' academic performance on a regular basis for three purposes:

- 1.) To determine whether children are profiting appropriately from the instructional program, including the curriculum
- 2.) To build more effective programs for the children who do not benefit
- 3.) To estimate rates of student improvement.

How Can Progress Monitoring Be Useful in an RTI Context?

In a responsiveness to intervention (RTI) paradigm, progress monitoring assists school teams in making decisions about appropriate levels of intervention (National Center on Student Progress Monitoring, 2006).

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) (2005, pp. 25-26) has identified nine essential characteristics for progress monitoring to be useful in an RTI context. Progress monitoring should do the following:

- 1.) Assess the specific skills embodied in state and local academic standards
- 2.) Assess marker variables that have been demonstrated to lead to the ultimate instructional target
- 3.) Be sensitive to small increments of growth over time
- 4.) Be administered efficiently over short periods
- 5.) Be administered repeatedly (using multiple forms)
- 6.) Result in data that can be summarized in teacher-friendly data displays
- 7.) Be comparable across students
- 8.) Be applicable for monitoring an individual student's progress over time
- 9.) Be relevant to development of instructional strategies and use of appropriate curriculum that addresses the area of need

What Role Does Progress Monitoring Play in SLD?

Progress monitoring serves an important function in specific learning disabilities (SLD) determination. If applied rigorously, progress monitoring addresses the federal legal stipulation that students who are determined to have a disability have not benefited from general education instruction. If the student receives high-quality instruction, progress monitoring procedures can help school staff and parents determine the extent to which the student benefited.

How is Progress Monitoring Accomplished in Tier 1?

In Tier 1, progress monitoring procedures serve several functions.

Progress monitoring versus general screening.

Proactive assessment procedures are best employed at least three times per year (beginning, middle, and end) and are used as general screening procedures for all students. School-wide screening and progress monitoring can serve a similar function in this regard. Screening of all students is used to determine those students who may be at risk by comparing their performance relative to a criterion measure. Progress monitoring displays individual student growth over time, to determine whether the student is progressing as expected in the generally effective curriculum.

Curriculum-based measurement (CBM) as primary method of progress monitoring

In addition to general screening measures, a system of progress monitoring is recommended at Tier 1 for all students. CBM assesses the different skills covered in the annual curriculum in such a way that each weekly test is an alternate form. The assumption is that these alternate forms are comparable in difficulty. For example, in September, a CBM mathematics test assesses all of the computation, money, graphs/charts, and problem-solving skills to be covered during the entire

year. In November and/or February and/or May, the CBM tests the annual curriculum in exactly the same way (but with different items). Therefore, scores earned at different times during the school year can be compared to determine whether a student's performance is increasing, decreasing, or staying the same (National Center on Student Progress Monitoring, 2006). If the scores are increasing, this indicates that the student's skills are improving. If the scores are remaining the same or decreasing over time, this indicates that a student is not benefiting from the intervention (instruction or curriculum) and a change is needed in the student's intervention program.

The results of progress monitoring in Tier 1 inform decision making about classroom instruction in two main ways:

- 1.) At the class level, average performance of all students combined and their rate of growth can help a teacher or administrator determine how to create instructional and curricular change so that all students reach proficiency on the skill.
- 2.) At the individual student level, schools use predetermined cut points to identify students in need of more extensive and intensive interventions in Tier 2 and beyond.

How is Progress Monitoring Accomplished in Tier 2 and Tier 3?

In Tier 2 and beyond, the purpose of progress monitoring shifts slightly. The main purpose of progress monitoring of Tier 2 and Tier 3 is to determine whether the intervention is successful in helping the student learn at an appropriate rate. Decision rules need to be created to determine when a student might no longer require Tier 2 and Tier 3 services and can be returned to the general classroom (Tier 1), when the intervention needs to be changed, or when a student might be identified for special education. Timely decisions about student progress at this tier are critical for the student's long-term achievement. The following research-based recommendations are made to facilitate timely decision making:

- 1.) Assess student progress using CBM in Tier 2 and beyond twice per week
- 2.) Chart these results and analyze student progress regularly
- 3.) Use preset rules to determine when a student is not adequately responding to an intervention (commonly suggested rules are that four consecutive data points below the goal line warrant changes to the intervention; four above the goal line warrant raising the goal.) (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hintze, and Lembke, 2006; National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2005)

How is Progress Monitoring Accomplished in Special Education?

In special education, progress monitoring also serves other purposes. First, the progress monitoring done to this point provides systematic, reliable, and multiple data points that can inform the eligibility determination decision and subsequent development of specially designed instruction to meet the student's individual needs. Second, progress monitoring is a requirement of the individualized education program (IEP) and provides information about student progress toward short-term objectives and annual goals.

Will the Implementation of a Progress Monitoring System within an RTI Model Require Shifts in School Structures?

The implementation of a progress monitoring system within an RTI model will require shifts in school structures as well as in the roles and responsibilities of educators.

Impact on conceptualizations of SLD

Under a system of progress monitoring, SLD is primarily regarded as low achievement relative to classroom-peer functioning. If, for example, the bottom 25 percent of the class is selected for further progress monitoring or for placement in secondary interventions, then a student's designation for Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention could vary depending upon what class he or she is in. The use of a dual-discrepancy model to identify students whose performance is low and have low rates of progress can help remove some of this variability.

Continued progress monitoring is required through the tiers to be sure that students are responsive to all tiers of instruction. If a student responds (or makes progress) in secondary or tertiary levels of intervention, the school will have to decide whether progress is great enough that the student is ready to return to Tier 1 (general education class) or whether the student should remain in the more intense instruction to maintain levels of performance comparable to peers. Students identified as in need of secondary or tertiary interventions still may require more in-depth assessment to determine appropriate instructional interventions. As progress is measured, educators obtain information about the student's level of performance and rate of gain. The measures, however, do not provide information to help educators make decisions about the student's ability or processing deficits associated with learning and performance.

School structural changes

General education teachers will need to consider and create (or select) appropriate assessments. These assessments will need to be consistent and similar in structure and appropriate to grade level. Another consideration is the relationship of these tools to school content and performance standards. Because best practice suggests that assessments be conducted at least on a weekly basis, teachers and schools need to develop the infrastructure to do this. A process for analyzing results at both the classroom level (to determine individual student performance) and the school level (to determine classroom performance) also will need to be developed.

Teacher training issues

The individual assessments and recording of information comprise a fairly straightforward process. Many teachers already may be familiar with the concepts or be able to quickly learn and implement them after a professional development session. Teachers will need to learn to analyze results to determine which students require the next tier of intervention and when such a move should take place. Incoming teachers also will require professional development on the particulars of the school's system of progress monitoring.