Goals and Data Collection – Data Collection Overview
We collect data because it’s best practice! Data collection provides a baseline so you know where to start, and guides your instructional planning for a student. It increases staff focus and effectiveness, provides a much-needed reality check (your instructional plan may be more successful than you think!), prevents duplication of effort, and keeps you from wasting effort and time on instruction that isn’t needed or isn’t effective.
We also collect data because it is required – by the 2007 State Plan and the DESE Compliance Standards and Indicators. With good data, your PLAAFPs won’t be wishful thinking or outright fiction. Your goals will be grounded in a baseline and accurate starting place. Your progress monitoring will provide a basis for satisfaction with the student’s success or prevent you from continuing a strategy that needs revision. Everyone wins.
This diagram describes the recursive process of developing and providing quality instruction. Step 1 is assessment and planning, followed by the instruction itself, then reflection and evaluation on the results of the instruction. With accurate data, this process becomes an upward spiral. Without accurate data, it can become a tailspin.
This diagram describes the recursive process of Special Education. Step 1 is IEP Development, followed by the implementation of the IEP itself, then monitoring the progress of the IEP. With accurate data, this process becomes an upward spiral. Without accurate data, it can become a tailspin.
At SSD, you may hear your administrator or others refer to formative data collection as “progress monitoring.” According to the National Center on RTI, progress monitoring is defined as repeated measurement of academic performance to inform instruction of individual students in general and special education. This is exactly the kind of data we want to collect to document progress towards IEP goals.
So how frequently should you be collecting data on IEP goals? It should be frequent enough to guide your instruction, but depends on the skill being assessed & type of assessment. It's generally preferred that we collect data every 1-2 weeks whenever possible, but there are other possible frequencies, depending on the goal & data source.
What type of data should I collect?

- We want to collect data directly linked to IEP goals.

- Potential data sources:
  - District formative assessments that are tied to prioritized standards (i.e. Acuity, eValuate, Discovery Ed, Gates, iReady, Star, SRI/SMI, etc)
  - School or classroom formative assessments that are tied to prioritized standards (i.e. running records, common assessments, etc)
  - SSD-recommended tools for progress monitoring (i.e. AIMSweb, EasyCBM, Algebra CBMs, Early Winging CBMs, CBMs for student with Significant Cognitive Delays, etc.)
  - Structured observations/rating scales (particularly for behavior)
  - Strategic sampling of student work (student data folder), rubric evaluation

To determine specific data sources, consider student’s IEP goals & what logical data sources exist. With standards-based goals, use of district or school data can often align nicely. Additionally, consider the SSD list of recommended progress monitoring tools. This list is continually being updated, and includes tools for progress monitoring in the areas of reading, writing, math, behavior, & language. Finally, things like structured observations, rating scales, sampling of student work, & rubric evaluation also can serve as data sources.
It’s extremely important to consider how data will be shared with families, students, & IEP teams. Visual representation of data is always preferable whenever possible, as it make it so much easier to understand. Several tools exist to help you with graphing data, including tutorials for excel or web-based graphing on the SSD Data Teams google site. Additionally, many district-assessment tools have graphs or reports built into the system. Finally, paper-pencil graphs are always an option – you can even get the student involved in graphing their own data!
In the interval between one IEP and the next, progress on the IEP goals must be reported to the parent/guardian. Progress reporting is an ongoing process, conducted according to the timeline specified in the IEP. Reports are based on data collection, and provide the baseline for the next IEP’s goals. If no progress on a goal is being made, the goal must be reviewed and revised.

Progress on goals must be reported no less frequently than the schools grade reporting schedule.