



Chapter 7

Progress Monitoring Conferences

Vignette

We've had a really good year so far. The first week of school we had a conference with Mrs. McNeil, our daughter Leah's teacher. Mrs. McNeil went over the school handbook—policies, procedures, and stuff like that. Then she explained how she would be working on the goals on her [Leah's] IEP [Individualized Education Program] and what kinds of things we should expect to see in terms of Leah's progress until report card time, particularly in reading. Then we'd meet again and see if any changes needed to be made. She told us about the FISH folder that would be an ongoing part of parent involvement this year. Each night, Leah brings home her FISH folder for us to review—a pocket folder that Leah had decorated with brightly colored pictures of tropical fish. In small type below the FISH label they'd printed Family Involvement Starts Here. In the pocket on the left is completed work from that day in all her subjects and any announcements or newsletters for us. In the pocket on the right are any homework assignments or activities Leah needs to complete or particular skills or concepts we might work with her on that week during the course of family activities. In the three-ring section in the middle there's always a graph or chart showing Leah's daily or weekly progress on one of her individual goals. Even though she's in third grade, Leah really struggles with reading, and one of her goals focuses on that. It has been great to actually see her improve on the number of words she reads correctly and the [comprehension] questions that she answers, and she gets so excited when she tells us, "My line is going up!" Mrs. McNeil also uses a point system in her class so that Leah can earn points for being prepared for class, raising her hand,

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and doing her work. The point chart comes home in her folder, so we can see how her day has been and talk with her about special activities or privileges she's working for. There's also a place for us to write any comments or questions we have for any of her teachers, and we usually get the answer the next day in her folder, or we get a call from the teacher. We talk with Leah about what she did in school that day, what she'll be doing tomorrow, and then we sign the FISH ticket, and Leah takes it back to school the next day with her FISH folder. The signed FISH ticket goes into a big fish bowl for a drawing at the end of the month for a special reward.

We know every night to ask to see her FISH folder. It's great! We really feel like we know what's going on with Leah this year. We know what to talk about at parent conferences because we see the progress that she's making, and we know that her teacher wants us to be involved in her education on a daily basis.

Monitoring students' progress has always been one of the hallmarks of the educational process (Wallace, Espin, McMaster, Deno, & Foegen, 2007). Individual parent-educator conferences that focus on students' school progress are among the most common and significant of all parent-professional interactions. These sessions allow for the clarification of information exchanged via non-face-to-face means (e.g., notes and report cards) and for the direct dissemination of information relevant to a student's education. In addition, progress report conferences allow for evaluation of IEP goals and objectives and serve as a mechanism for maintaining contact among parents, family members, and professionals.

Although there may be disagreement regarding the most appropriate timing for the progress report conference, research maintains that these sessions should be held on a regular basis (Black, 2005; Flaughner, 2006; Kroth & Edge, 2007; Mathur & Smith, 2003). Most schools plan these meetings to coincide with report card or grade reporting schedules, although such conferences also should be held to meet the individual needs of parents and students. Black (2005) suggested that they not be held exclusively at times of crisis. In fact, when educators discuss issues with parents on a regular basis, parents report feeling positive anticipation of conferences, in part because of their confidence that there will be no real surprises (Minke & Anderson, 2003).

Just as students with exceptionalities receive individualized programs and schedules that correspond to their unique needs, so too must their parents have individually scheduled feedback conferences (Garriott, Wan-

Student: Leah

Teacher: Mrs. McNeil

Goal Area: Reading

Grade: 3rd

Present Level of Performance (provide a summary of baseline data of the student's performance in authentic activities):

Leah is correctly reading 44 words per minute when reading third-grade material.

Annual goal:

Given a third-grade reading probe, Leah will read 100 words correct per minute for three consecutive assessments by May.

How will student's progress/growth be monitored?

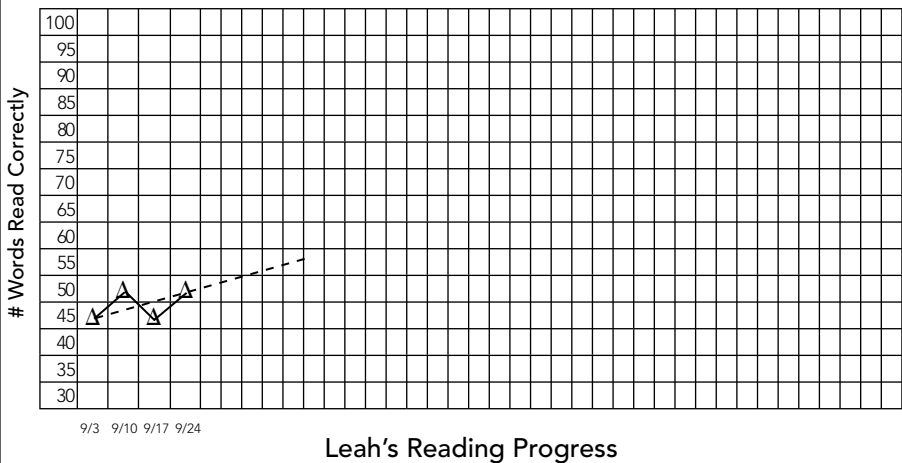
Curriculum-Based Measurement probes, third-grade level

Who will collect/record these data?

Teacher

What is the schedule for monitoring progress?

Weekly



Parent Participation/Comments:

Figure 7.1. Progress monitoring chart.

TABLE 11.1.
Indicators of Effective Individualized Education Program
(IEP) Meetings

1. The meeting was held in a private, comfortable location conducive to collaborative dialogue and scheduled at a time convenient for parents.
2. Sufficient time was allowed for discussion.
3. All IEP team members were present at the meeting: parents, student's general and special education teachers, representative of the local education agency, person who could interpret the educational implications of assessment, student (if appropriate), and others at the discretion of the parents or school.
4. Parent consent was obtained for the absence of a team member, and written input from that team member was made available for the meeting.
5. Educational jargon was minimized. An interpreter was provided (if appropriate).
6. The meeting began with introductions of all team members and a brief overview of the goals and intended outcomes of the meeting.
7. The discussion opened with an overview of the student's strengths and current levels of academic and functional performance.
8. The current IEP was reviewed, and multiple sources of data were considered in designing the program plan, including information and observations from the parents.
9. All applicable special factors were considered in developing the IEP: technology, language, communication, sensory impairments, behavioral issues, and so on.
10. The annual goals (and short-term objective or benchmarks, if appropriate) written were observable, measurable, and meaningful for the student.
11. The goals (and objectives or benchmarks) were linked to the appropriate curriculum standards and designed to enable the student to access and progress in the general curriculum.
12. Behavior goals or a behavior plan was included to address behavior that interferes with the student's (or other students') learning.
13. Special education and related services included in the plan were clearly described to the parents.

(continues)

TABLE 11.1. (continued)

- 14. A schedule was determined for monitoring the student’s progress toward achieving the annual goals and reporting that progress to the parents (at least as often as progress is reported to the parents of students without disabilities).
- 15. The special education and related services and supplementary aids written into the IEP are “based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable.”
- 16. Determination was made regarding how the student would participate in district and/or state assessments, and any necessary modifications or accommodations were written into the IEP.
- 17. Transition services were written for the student turning 16 (or earlier if appropriate).
- 18. After the annual goals were written, placement options and necessary supports were discussed.
- 19. The placement determination reflected requirements for the least restrictive environment.
- 20. Determination was made regarding who would inform the other professionals not present at the meeting of their responsibilities for the IEP.
- 21. The parents were given a copy of the IEP.
- 22. The procedural safeguards were explained to the parents, and a written copy was provided.

Although teachers and other educational personnel may understand the components and protocol required in developing an IEP, the standards adopted by school districts or agencies may be in direct conflict with those requirements. District policy, though unwritten, may specify that only services readily available in the district are to be noted on the IEP, regardless of a student’s needs. Other policies may require authors of IEPs to word components of the document in an intentionally vague or difficult-to-interpret fashion, as in writing annual goals, for example, in terms such as “demonstrating indications of improvements” rather than in more empirical and easily evaluated ways. The unfortunate thing about these practices is that they unceremoniously thrust educational personnel into the awkward position of demonstrating allegiance either to their employer or to the