

Where Are We: Progress Monitoring in the Response to Intervention Environment



White Paper

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For many schools and districts, Response to Intervention (RtI) promises a roadmap toward identifying struggling students and provides a systematic approach to helping those students catch up to expected educational progress. At a glance, you should be able to see a particular student's abilities, their struggles, what supports are being provided to the child, and the expected outcome.

This organization is valuable; without it we wouldn't know who needed help and which students were receiving what supports. When a teacher has 25+ students in a class, organization is key.

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Introduction: Help Students Catch Up and Keep Up with RtI

Data is the engine of any effective Response to Intervention program. It identifies students in need of support, prescribes the most effective interventions, and measures the progress students make through the system. The RtI framework takes the student data being gathered every day and translates it into a roadmap for greater student success.

An overview of the importance of RTI and where progress monitoring fits in the tiered process

A typical Response to Intervention system seeks to classify students into a series of three tiers. Tier 1 is for most students, those who are making adequate progress through the curriculum. In the course of a school day, all students are receiving high-quality, research-based foundational instruction. Regular screening identifies students who may need added supports. The classroom teacher provides any further support needed for a Tier 1 student in small groups with other students who happen to be struggling.



If the screening process identified a student as needing more support than what would be available in Tier 1, that student moves to Tier 2. In addition to the Tier 1 instruction, students in Tier 2 receive instruction targeted for the skills in which they are struggling either in a small group or individual setting. Some schools have their Tier 2 students pulled out of their assigned classes during non-core instructional periods for more targeted instruction. Students often do not stay in Tier 2 for long—perhaps as little as a grading period. The goal is to fill knowledge gaps so they can successfully learn the Tier 1 curriculum. An effective progress monitoring scheme is what tells educators whether that student is ready to return to Tier 1 or move to Tier 3.

At Tier 3, students receive intensive interventions in addition to the regular tier one instruction. If those interventions are not taking hold, as shown by progress monitoring, the next step is to refer the student for a comprehensive evaluation that may show a learning or behavioral disability. The student would then fall under the purview of the services those departments may provide.

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Difference between screening and progress monitoring

In Response to Intervention, screening is the first step toward making sure every student is effectively learning the Tier 1 curriculum. Typically, a universal screening assessment is given at the beginning of the school year and then repeated two or three times over the course of the year. Students who do not meet the “cut point” score are referred for a more in-depth assessment. The goal throughout this process is to find the students most likely to struggle or who are not ready for on-grade level curriculum in the course of the school year and why those students are more likely to struggle. The tiers in an RtI strategy are assigned through this screening process.

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Unlike screening, progress monitoring is conducted through short assessments administered on an ongoing basis for all students receiving additional interventions. Progress monitoring is measuring the progress the student is making on the intervention that is ultimately preparing them for success at Tier 1.

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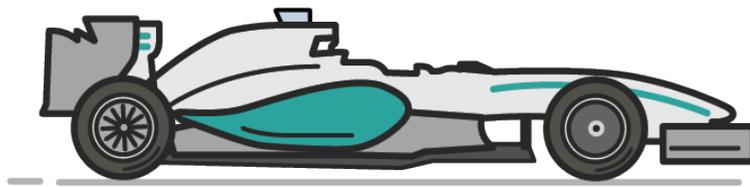
For students in tiers 2 and 3, progress monitoring data helps teachers and support specialists determine if interventions are working for every student. Skilled instructional support staff become masters at interpreting progress monitoring data and adjusting interventions based on student trends.

Finding a curriculum partner that can serve as a regular source of progress monitoring data serves two important purposes. It saves educators a lot of effort and better helps inform the student’s progress on the intervention. Otherwise, when progress monitoring is conducted by a teacher one on one it is prohibitively time consuming and often leads to infrequent administrations.

The Importance of Progress Monitoring

Once a student has been identified by the initial screening as being at risk of struggling in a certain academic aspect, an RTI program initiates progress monitoring. The goal is to discern whether a student is responding to the intervention available to them or if they need to be shifted to another tier and provided additional interventions.

Progress monitoring should be completed every other week at minimum to give the teacher ample data with which to make curricular and intervention decisions. It is recommended to give a student 8-10 weeks or more of exposure to Tier 2 instruction, supports, and the requisite progress monitoring before making any decisions that would slot the student into Tier 3 and assigning additional interventions.



Without progress monitoring, a Response to Intervention program is like taking a road trip without any signs. You would not only lack insight into where you are, but also could not see whether you are on schedule or even going in the right direction. As a student journeys through their intervention, progress monitoring helps them move along in the most efficient manner and can help educators prescribe actions to help the student get back on schedule.

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Methodologies and Strategies for Monitoring Student Progress

There are many ways to assess student learning. Most of the assessments you see in a traditional classroom are based on mastery of Tier 1 instruction. For example, a class just finished a lesson on two-digit multiplication. The summative assessment at the end is looking for mastery of that skill.

The problem with such an approach when the goal is to monitor progress in the RtI setting is that the results of such an assessment only show two states of growth: students either did or did not learn to multiply. Progress (and progress monitoring) is a process that measures the student's response to the interventions supplementing the Tier 1 instruction. Thinking of the example above, a student's intervention may be teaching them one digit multiplication while the traditional classroom summative test is measuring the on-grade level skills.

This is why the RtI world has coalesced around curriculum-based measurement (CBM).

Why curriculum-based measurement?

A curriculum-based model of progress monitoring is independent of any instructional hierarchy being used in the classroom; such an assessment can be given at any time of the year and used with all instructional strategies, which is key when you may administer such assessments on a weekly basis.

In fact, the best CBM probes:

- ✓ Are brief and easy to administer
- ✓ Sample the year-long curriculum the same way each time
- ✓ Are administered the same way every time
- ✓ Incorporate automatic tests of retention and generalization
- ✓ Offer reliable and valid scores
- ✓ Are graphed for teachers to use to decide instructional programs and teaching methods for each student
- ✓ Are prescriptive and standardized

Curriculum Based Measurement comes in two flavors, Robust Indicators and Curriculum Sampling

Robust indicators can be effective for students in the primary grades to indicate readiness for Tier one Reading instruction. As Tier one instruction becomes more complex, especially with Math, curriculum sampling CBM probes offer a more complete picture of the student's response to an intervention and ability to successfully complete Tier 1 work.

Once universal screening has taken place and identified some students as needing extra support, you want to see whether those supports are working to decide about the next course of action to take for that child.

You want a progress monitoring strategy that leverages the curriculum you've worked so hard to devise for that student. Using a single skill to indicate readiness for a whole curriculum loses its effectiveness with older students. In most circumstances, a room full of middle school students will write similar amounts of words, for example.

A CBM probe on writing expression may ask the students to respond to a common, non-academic prompt for a prescribed amount of time. Measuring progress for such a probe may take into account such empirical evidence as the number of words a student used, how many letters per word, number of misspellings, and punctuation mistakes. Each one of these elements is considered an indicator of the student's ability to perform effectively on a wider variety of skills. The single skill measured is intended to be a 'robust indicator' of all other skills. As the student makes progress, those numbers will change and are graphed to see that progress.

The curriculum sampling methodology of progress monitoring may seem like a considerable undertaking, but not if you enlist the help of technology.



What are the best practices?

Make sure your progress monitoring tool allows you to check students at their level as they work on intervention tailored for their unique learning needs. With Classworks, once a student takes an assessment, you know the progress monitoring level for them. You know where to start as the system moves them through a customized intervention.

Your progress monitoring tool should give easy-to-read data to help you track the intervention and make instructional adjustments. With Classworks, you can view your students' results in real time, including their current and target rate of improvement. Results can be printed for documentation.

It's also important to keep track of behavioral changes, changes in environment, or any other factors that could affect the way the student is responding to the intervention. Many states require detailed documentation of these findings. Classworks makes this process easy for teachers with areas built-in to record notes.

These advancements make the process of progress monitoring easier to administer. In order to reflect student progress, they need to be assessed regularly. That regularity becomes harder to achieve the more cumbersome and time-consuming your progress monitoring strategy is.

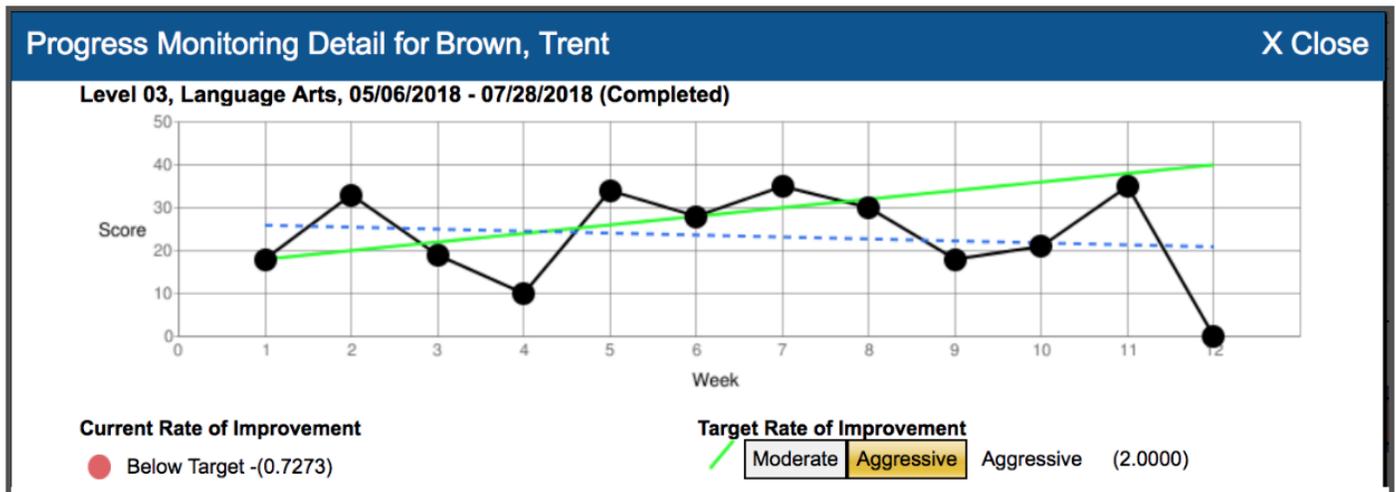
What Data Are You Looking For?

As mentioned, curriculum-based measurement works best for progress monitoring in a Response to Intervention environment when it occurs regularly. As long as your universal screening was correct and your CBM probes are short and unintrusive, this should be possible. After a few weeks, the data you gather will help you better target your interventions, group students for in-person instruction, and report progress to parents and other stakeholders.

Without effective Progress Monitoring, Rti loses its impact. ”

What data is available?

Consistent usage of CBM probes allows a teacher to spot trends in student performance in a shorter period than traditional mastery methods of assessment. In only a few short weeks, student trend lines can be plotted on a graph in relation to desired performance.



What factors might impact the data?

It is impossible for a teacher to create a truly consistent testing environment for every student every time. The thoughts, moods, and physiology of children change on a daily basis. Scheduling conflicts can make accomplishing thorough progress monitoring a moving target. And, unfortunately, the outside world presents our students with challenges that cannot be accounted for.

Yet Response to Intervention is only as good as the data that informs decisions. Testing administrators and teachers need to make a concerted effort toward consistency in the name of capturing the most accurate data possible. In particular, consider these variables:

Strive to conduct your progress monitoring on an undeviating schedule. A regular schedule can help to negate many other variables such as the students being hungry, rushed, or distracted.

Provide a distraction-free environment. A student can often feel the pull of their peers, with the drive to join them knocking their concentration off course.

Consistent probing formats can make students more comfortable as they know what to expect from progress monitoring. Even better is seamless probing that occurs during other instruction.

Also, avoid being too reactionary when assigning interventions. If a student is receiving too low or too high of an intervention, it can scatter their data and make tier assignment less exact. Interventions and the process of assigning them should be uniform.

How do you take action on the data?

Once you have established trends among the data, it's time to determine the necessary rate of improvement for each student in Tier 2 and Tier 3. In the Classworks Progress Monitoring system, you decide between moderate or aggressive rates of improvement. As the student's trend solidifies, it becomes time for you to decide what action to take. With a shallow pool of data, you may opt to raise or lower the student's CBM level to reflect their current response to the intervention. With a deeper pool, the student may warrant a change in their RTI tier classification.

Before these situations appear, it is important to come up with a standardized policy for such interventions. For example, how long does a student have to score above or below their targeted rate of improvement before instruction is modified? A teacher's intuition is considerable when it comes to their students' abilities, but gathering such a wealth of data allows for protocols that can ease the process of progress monitoring.



How Classworks Makes Progress Monitoring More Intuitive and More Meaningful

Response to Intervention has become the preferred way to help struggling students catch up and keep up. But in the age of expanding class sizes and more varied exceptionalities, it can be hard for a teacher to faithfully carry out an RtI strategy. And as we have seen, without effective progress monitoring RtI loses its impact.

But what does an effective progress monitoring tool look like?

Assessment should take place on a regular schedule that allows data to be gathered at a rate where short-term trends can be observed, tracked, and met with the appropriate action. Data should be graphed in a way that makes it easy for the teacher or any other stakeholder (including the student) to see the learner's rate of improvement. The target rate of improvement should be customized to meet the needs of the student and their goals. Progress monitoring should empower teachers to make on-time adjustments to a student's program, but what if those adjustments could take place with the click of a button?

In Classworks, progress monitoring is intuitive to start and stop for students. On one screen teachers are able to assign Progress Monitoring to all of their students and monitor the data in real time. Students sign in and have their probe waiting for them each week. The dashboard is designed for teachers to easily spot trends and make adjustments. Color-coded trend lines and visuals tell teachers when adjustments to interventions are needed. When a trend forms, action can be quickly taken that helps an RtI program carry out its goals, whether that is intensifying a student's interventions or promoting a student through the tiers.

Classworks takes the guesswork out of Response to Intervention, freeing educators to do what they do well: design and deliver engaging instruction that helps every student reach their potential.

About the Author

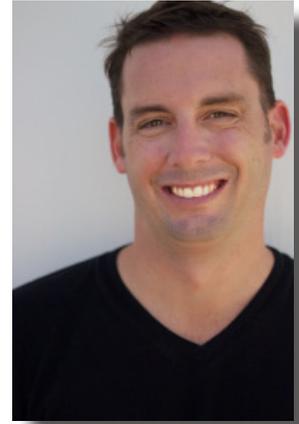
Scott Sterling is an education journalist and commentator with five years of experience in Title I education. His work has appeared in the New York Times, Education Week, District Administration, and other digital outlets. He is based in St. Petersburg, Florida.

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About Classworks

Classworks is an online instructional and assessment solution proven to help students become critical thinkers and independent learners. Classworks offers K-8 math, reading, language arts, and science instruction as well as assessment and productivity tools. Classworks provides both on-grade level classroom instruction and individualized instruction that is flexible, powerful, and drives student growth. Classworks results-driven, engaging educational solutions are built upon strong instructional pedagogy and technological innovation.

For more information, please visit www.classworks.com, contact Classworks at 770.325.5555 or email hello@classworks.com.

