

Much ado has been made about the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)—especially the use of scientifically (or evidence) based interventions, the five components of effective reading instruction, and accountability. Accountability is often referred to as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) at the state level using the percentage of students reaching mastery on the state criterion-referenced tests (CRTs). However, often neglected is measuring AYP at the individual level. A well-known subsection of NCLB, Reading First, specifies that instruction and assessment are intricately linked and that four types of assessment must be conducted at the classroom level to ensure that all students become successful readers. These are:

1. Screening assessment: quick measures that focus on critical reading skills and can distinguish which students are likely to need additional assistance
2. Diagnostic assessment: provides an in-depth analysis of student's strengths and weaknesses to guide instruction
3. Progress Monitoring assessment: can be conducted a minimum of three times per year or on a routine basis (i.e., weekly, monthly) to determine each student's rate of progress
4. Outcome assessment: can determine whether a student achieved grade-level performance or not

Marzano describes as a key school-level factor—the use of formative evaluation (i.e., frequent assessment with feedback that occurs multiple times during the year). Formative evaluation is synonymous with progress monitoring assessment.

Across the five research syntheses that Marzano reviewed, not one ranked “frequent monitoring of student progress with feedback” lower than third out of five to 10 educational factors. In fact, Marzano and others have concluded that this type of feedback is the most effective factor for increasing student achievement provided it meets two criteria. First, feedback must be provided at multiple times throughout the learning process (i.e., during the school year). It is not sufficient to provide feedback once or twice during the year (e.g., when CRT results are made available), which is referred to as summative evaluation. Second, feedback must be aligned with the curriculum content being learned. In order to provide feedback that can be used to change instruction or performance, that feedback must be based on assessment that is aligned with the curriculum.

Research on frequent progress monitoring with feedback (i.e., formative evaluation) has demonstrated very strong effects when it meets the two criteria above. Without meeting these criteria, it does not. This leaves us with several criteria for an effective, efficient progress monitoring assessment:

Progress Monitoring: An Essential Factor For Student Success

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In addition, assessment measures that are used must meet generally accepted standards of reliability and validity. In order to rate commonly used tests, the Reading First Assessment Committee was appointed to develop a set of standards based on the NCLB legislation, as well as recommended practice, and apply them to some of these tests. Twenty-four of the 29 tests they reviewed met the standards for at least one of the four assessment types. However, only two tests (Curriculum-Based Measurement [CBM] and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills [DIBELS]) have been validated for what





In addition, because CBM requires the student to produce a response (e.g., reading aloud, spelling words, completing math problems, and writing sentences) it provides specific information related to what the student can and cannot do. This information can then be used for instructional planning as well as progress monitoring. Teachers who use CBM make instructional changes more often to meet the needs of their students. Students therefore make greater gains in achievement, are more motivated to learn, and see themselves as successful learners. In addition, parents indicate they like

1) reliable & valid, 2) can be given multiple times during the year (which also means it must be quick to administer), 3) provides timely feedback, and 4) aligned with the curriculum. The only measures to meet these criteria and those set forth by the Reading First Assessment Committee are CBM and DIBELS (Note: DIBELS is an extension of CBM procedures to early literacy skills. As such, the benefits and key factors are the same for both. Due to space constraints, we will focus on CBM.).

CBM was developed in the late 70s and early 80s by Stan Deno, Phyllis Mirkin and their colleagues at the University of Minnesota Institute for Research on Learning Disabilities. CBM has been well researched since that time. CBM consists of a standardized set of procedures to assess student progress toward long-term goals in reading, spelling, written expression, and math. It is an objective, ongoing system to measure student outcomes in order to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional interventions and student progress toward annual curriculum goals.

The key features of CBM that make it beneficial for students, teachers, parents, and school psychologists are that it is:

- Tied directly to the curriculum
- Efficient and easy to administer and score
- Inexpensive to reproduce
- Short in duration (1-3 minutes)
- Given repeatedly (e.g., weekly or monthly)
- Conducive to having multiple forms (generally 20 to 30 per content area)
- Used for reading, spelling, written expression, and math
- Fluency based
- Reliable
- Valid



getting CBM data because it provides information related directly to how their child is doing in school.

Other benefits of CBM for teachers and school psychologists include: a) general and special education teachers rate CBM higher than norm-referenced tests for providing useful information, b) school psychologists prefer CBM over norm-referenced tests for assessing students from diverse backgrounds, and c) CBM data can be used to reintegrate students into less restrictive settings.

Using formative evaluation measures, such as CBM and DIBELS, is not just a focus of Reading First, but has been described as a critical link for student success as evidenced by Marzanno's review. CBM happens to be one of the best options currently available that provides continuous feedback and is directly aligned with the curriculum. As educators, we are always striving to help our students and to find efficient ways of assessing their academic growth. Therefore, in the next issue of *The Utah Special Educator*, we will provide an overview of how to conduct and incorporate CBM into the classroom. ■