Overview of Academic Goal-Setting Strategies

This handout describes three validated goal-setting strategies educators can use to set intervention goals using general outcome measures. For students with disabilities, these goal setting strategies may also be used by individualized education program (IEP) teams to set data-based IEP goals.

1 Benchmarks for Middle- or End-of-Year Performance

How to Set the Goal: Identify the grade-level winter or end-of-year benchmark (typically provided by the publisher) and use for goal.

Advantages
- Easy to use when progress monitoring tool provides benchmarks.
- Tracks progress toward grade-level expectations.
- Efficient for setting goals for large numbers of students.

Considerations
- May not be appropriate for students significantly below benchmark. To determine appropriateness, calculate the weekly growth rate required to meet the goal and compare it to typical rates of improvement from national norms.
- For some students whose present levels or current performance indicate grade level expectations may not be appropriate, an off-grade level benchmark may be appropriately ambitious. IEP teams should consider students' individual circumstances when making these decisions.
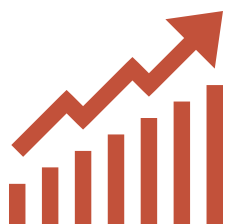
2 National Norms for Rate of Improvement (ROI)

How to Set the Goal: Identify the national norm for ROI for the student's grade level and the number of weeks left in the instructional period or school year. Use the formula below to calculate the goal.

$$\text{ROI} \times \text{\# Weeks} + \text{Baseline Score} = \text{GOAL}$$

Advantages
- Provides a mechanism for writing an ambitious but realistic goal based on the student's initial performance.
- Useful when the benchmark is unrealistic during the IEP or intervention time frame, but the student is expected to make growth comparable to peers.

Considerations
- If a student is performing below grade-level peers, matching the normative ROI may maintain an achievement gap in some cases.
- Some progress monitoring tools provide recommendations for "ambitious" ROIs.
- When national norms are unavailable, local norms for ROI can be estimated through statistical modeling. This requires an adequate sample and staff with technical expertise available.

3 Intra-Individual Framework

How to Set the Goal: Calculate the student's individual growth rate based on past performance and use the formula to the right to determine the goal.

$$\text{Goal} = \text{Slope} \times 1.5 \times \text{\# Weeks} + \text{Baseline Score}$$

Slope Calculation:
3rd median – 1st median / # data points – 1

Advantages
- Provides a valid strategy for setting a goal in situations where students are performing far below grade level and typical growth rates are not appropriate.

Considerations
- May be difficult to understand and calculate and, therefore, requires more training and support.
- Requires collection of six to nine data points before setting the goal.
- May not be necessary for students performing at or near grade level.

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