

How can parents tell if their child is making progress?

If you think your child is not making meaningful progress in school, request a meeting to discuss revising your child's IEP. Your child may need changes in special education or related services, instructional methods, or assistive technology or other accommodations.

An essential part of any curriculum is the assessment of learning. Keeping track of student progress is necessary to ensure that instruction is effective, that special needs are being met, and that each student is moving toward the standards set by the state and the goals developed specifically for him or her. Teachers use assignments, projects, quizzes, tests, and homework to monitor their students' understanding of concepts and their mastery of skills. Schools administer standardized assessments each year to measure academic performance.

But parents should not leave all the checking to school personnel. Parents need to be involved in making sure that their child is progressing. Since a child who receives special education services has the right to participate in the general curriculum, information about how well the child is doing in school must come from both special education and regular education sources. In addition, parents can gain valuable insight into their son's or daughter's learning by carefully observing him or her at home and in the community. To get a complete picture of their child's progress, parents need to consider information from several sources:

- **Teachers and specialists** - The most important source of information about a child's progress is his or her teachers and specialists. Report cards provide some feedback about how a child is doing, but parents should also make an effort to keep in touch with school personnel on a regular basis. Parents may find it helpful to mark their calendar with reminders to talk to teachers after school or to schedule conferences. Keeping a list of questions, concerns, and comments to address in these discussions is useful. Parents and teachers can also exchange information in a notebook that the child carries to and from school.
- **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** - An IEP is written each year for every child in special education. Each IEP must include an updated statement that describes how the child is currently performing in school. Parents can get a sense of their child's progress by looking at the differences between the most recent statement and the one in the previous year's IEP. An IEP must also include measurable annual goals that describe what the child is expected to achieve during the academic year. How often the child's progress toward these goals will be measured and how parents will be informed of the progress must be identified. Parents of a child with a disability must receive progress reports at least as often as parents of children without disabilities do.
- **Standardized assessments** - The No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to administer statewide assessments. Students are tested in reading and mathematics annually in grades 3 through 8 and at least once during grades 10 through 12; they are tested in science at least once during the elementary, middle, and high school years. In Connecticut, student performance is measured by the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). Under the law, all students, including those with disabilities, must participate in these assessments. If necessary, children with disabilities may take the tests with specific accommodations. If the Planning and Placement Team that develops a child's IEP determines that the child cannot participate in a statewide testing even with accommodations, the school must use an alternative assessment for the student.

- **Parents' own observations** - Parents can gather important information by observing their child in settings outside the classroom, such as at home, at the store, in the playground, or at the library. These observations may reveal progress in a child's development, academic skills, social skills, or behavior. For example, parents may notice that their child can speak more clearly when ordering a meal in a restaurant, is more confident about reading a book, or can count change more quickly when purchasing an item in the supermarket. They may observe that their child has an easier time making friends or behaves more appropriately with his or her siblings. They may see that their child needs less help to complete homework assignments, takes less time to finish chores, or is able to stay focused for longer periods. Parents may find it helpful to keep track of this information by focusing on a few changes at a time. They can create a valuable record of progress by making a list of two or three areas in which they would like their child to improve and jotting down specific observations over a three-month period. This record can then be shared at teacher conferences or meetings to develop an IEP.
- **The child** - Parents should talk to their child about school, as appropriate. They should ask about how things are going, what subjects are most enjoyable, how much time is spent on particular activities, and which assignments are easiest or most difficult. These types of conversations not only provide parents with useful information; they also help the child develop a critical skill – the ability to monitor his or her own progress.

Sources:

- **"How Will I Know If My Child Is Making Progress?"** PACER Center ACTION Sheet, www.pacer.org;
Negotiating the Special Education Maze: A Guide for Parents and Teachers, by Winifred Anderson, Stephen Chitwood, Deidre Hayden, and Cherie Takemoto (Woodbine House, 2008)

Resources:

The following materials related to progress monitoring are available from CPAC in English or Spanish:

- **"The ABCs of Staying in Touch with Your Child's School," "Numbers to Remember," and "No Child Left Behind: What Parents Need to Know."** Contact us at 800-445-2722 or cpac@cpacinc.org to request copies, or visit our website at www.cpacinc.org.
- **"Observing Your Child's Behavior"** contains tips on how parents can gather information that helps them monitor progress and develop an appropriate education program for their child. Contact CPAC to request a copy.
- Schools are increasingly using a method of progress monitoring called curriculum-based measurement. **The National Center on Student Progress Monitoring** provides information on this method on their website, www.studentprogress.org.



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