

June 2014
Volume 1, Issue 5

District-Determined Measures: Considerations for Special Education

Using Content Area DDMs for Special Education Teachers

“When selecting DDMs for special education teachers, it is important to keep in mind the setting in which the instruction occurs. For example, a special educator may work with a student with a disability in a general education math class, but his role may be supporting that students’ ability in reading that will allow access to the math content. In this instance, selecting a measure of a student’s access to written mathematical text may be better aligned with the content for which the educator is responsible than a DDM that assesses mastery of mathematical computation skills. A high quality DDM allows for all students to have an equal chance of demonstrating growth by taking in to account pre-existing knowledge and skills. Students with disabilities may demonstrate their learning differently than students without disabilities; the DDM should reflect these differences. If a student is eligible to receive an accommodation to access the content as described in their IEP, that student is also eligible to receive all appropriate accommodations when completing a DDM. Since accommodations allow the student access to the content being addressed by the DDM, the accommodations support fairness and comparability across all students. The challenge with selecting DDMs for special education teachers is that their responsibilities are often aligned with students’ needs rather than by grade or subject.

Using Unique DDMs for Special Education Teachers

Small Group DDMs: Some special educators work with small groups of students with a modified curriculum. These educators are responsible for teaching the same standards, but made modifications to support students with disabilities. These educators may also teach other content, such as developmental, social or organization skills. An educator working with a small group of students can use a DDM that is closely aligned with the content skills covered.

Important Dates

Keys to Writing Workshops
August 6 – 8, 2014

- *Writing in the Content Areas Keys*
~ August 6 & 7
- *Keys Argument Writing*
August 8

**Final due date for all course
grades/proof of completion letters
for Horizontal Movement**
August 31, 2014



IEP Goals: IEP goals can be used as a basis for a DDM because they provide a good foundation for determining individualized parameters. While this is understandable since they represent targeted learning, there are a number of challenges associated with using IEP goals as DDMs. These include:

- Variations in IEP timelines (i.e., IEP goals are set and checked across the whole year, or in many cases, the IEP does not have the same start and end dates as the school year);
- IEP goals are designed to be dichotomous, that is either met or not met. DDMs require three levels (high, moderate, and low).
- IEP goals are developed with the expectation that they will be met. In contrast, determinations of high, moderate, and low growth are designed to describe a range of growth without a predetermined expectation.
- Educators may not be responsible for a certain IEP goal. (e.g., a reading support teacher is not responsible for a goal supported by the occupational therapist).
- IEP goals are not designed to be comparable across students.
- IEP goals must meet specific legal requirements, such as parental involvement, that may not be consistent with the process of determining goals of a DDM.
- Districts may still find that IEP goals provide a meaningful starting point for DDMs, but it is important to make a distinction between the assessment purpose of each. A DDMs purpose is to make determinations of high, moderate, and low student growth. An IEPs purpose is to determine an appropriate goal for achievement for a given student. Educators should be careful not to confuse the two purposes.

MCAS-Alt: The **MCAS-Alt** is not designed to provide a comparable definition of high, moderate, and low growth for different students. However, a similar process of systematically collecting evidence from student work used in the MCAS-Alt would be appropriate for a DDM. In particular, the systematic process of tracking evidence in the MCAS-Alt could be modified to support a comparable definition of high, moderate, and low growth if an effort was made to ensure that goals are comparable. In addition, a district may consider an approach similar to the MCAS-Alt to collect a portfolio of evidence of growth for an individual student or a given group of students. The challenge would be to create a portfolio designed to measure growth instead of demonstrating knowledge

Using Indirect Measures for Special Education Teachers

Some educators support SWDs in ways other than by providing direct instruction. For example, many special education teachers are focused on supporting student's access to the curriculum, not necessarily instruction in the curriculum content. Other members of the special education team may also not work directly with students on a daily basis. A school psychologist may be responsible for providing a thorough evaluation of student's eligibility for receiving special education services. Since these educators contribute to a student's learning through an intermediary process, a district may consider using an indirect measure of student learning to assess an educator's impact.

Shared Responsibility

Often two educators share responsibility for supporting a student to learn certain content. An ELA teacher may teach lessons on reading strategies to a whole class, while a special education teacher offers additional instruction to a group of students in the class who have IEPs to reinforce the lesson and ensure necessary accommodations are known and provided. The same DDM based on growth in reading would be appropriate for both of these educators. The ELA teacher's impact would be determined using results from all students, while the special education teacher's impact could be determined using results from the students in the class with IEPs.

Districts are discouraged from trying to assign partial responsibility to educators. This approach would belie the intention of classroom settings that involve general education teachers and special education teachers working together to facilitate a class and send the message SWDs "belong" only to their special education teachers. Individuals concerned about attribution should remember that there are always many factors that impact a student's learning – another teacher is one factor among many.

General education teachers and administrators responsible for students with disabilities may not exclude those students' SGPs when determining their median SGPs.

Number of Students per DDM

The amount of evidence needed from each student, for a district to have confidence in the overall measure, will greatly depend on the number of students who contribute data for a DDM. A relatively brief measure administered to hundreds of students will give a reliable measure of an educator's students' performance in that area. In contrast, educators working with fewer students will require more evidence of growth per student in order to achieve the same level of confidence. There is no minimum number of students who must be contributors for a DDM. Including more students improves confidence in the measure, but will be balanced with feasibility.

One solution for educators with a few students is to use multiple pieces of evidence for each student. For example, teachers working with only four students who use the MCAS-alt assessment could consider the evidence for each strand independently. If each strand was comparable to a typical hour long classroom assessment, and the educator collected evidence from six strands for each student, the educator would have evidence of growth from a total of 24 strands, similar to how a classroom teacher may have evidence of growth for 24 students. This would be sufficient evidence for a DDM.

Another solution for educators working with small groups of students is to combine information. An educator working with a small group of students on reading skills may combine evidence from students' SGPs with other evidence of growth on local assessments to construct a DDM with greater precision.



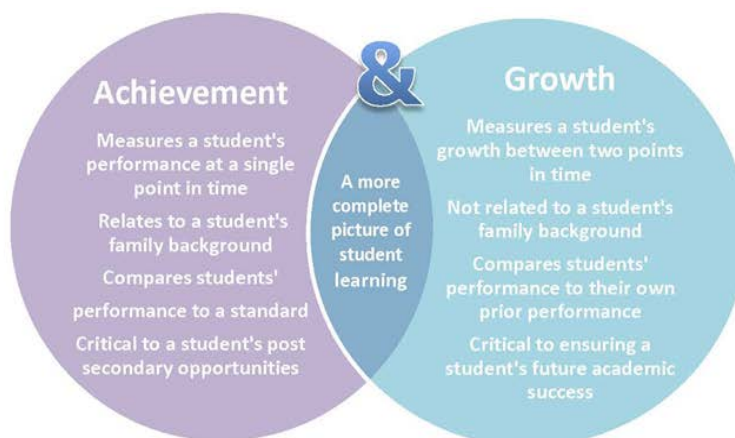
Growth Vs. Achievement



In education, the words “achievement” and “growth” are often used interchangeably. However, their meanings are very different.

Achievement is measured by students' performance at a single point in time and how well those students perform against a standard. Achievement has typically been measured by students' performance on state tests—how well students perform in relation to state standards and the “bar” established for proficiency. Districts', schools', and teachers' performance have been determined almost exclusively by the number of students who pass the state tests.

Growth is measured by how much “gain” or “progress” students make over time (i.e., year-to-year, semester-to-semester, etc.). One way to think of academic growth is in terms of a child's growth chart. A growth chart shows a child's height at age two, three, etc. These data points can be plotted to display that child's physical growth over a specific period of time. Similarly, if a student's math achievement level is measured annually using state achievement or nationally normed tests, the student's “growth pattern” in math can be plotted as it was for height.



Top 10 To Do's for Teachers During Summer Vacation

Use the Summer to Prepare for Next Year



1. Get Away From It All

A teacher must be "on" every day of the school year. In fact, as a teacher you often find it necessary to be "on" even outside of the school setting. It is essential to take the summer vacation and do something away from school.

2. Try Something New

Expand your horizons. Take up a hobby or enroll in a course away from your teaching subject matter. You will be surprised how this can enhance your teaching in the coming year. Your new interest may be the thing that connects with one of your new students.



3. Do Something Just for Yourself

Get a massage. Go to the beach. Go on a cruise. Do something to pamper and take care of yourself. Taking care of body, mind, and soul is so important to having a fulfilling life and will help you recharge and restart for next year.

4. Reflect on Last Year's Teaching Experiences

Think back over the previous year and identify your successes and your challenges. While you should spend some time thinking about both, concentrate on the successes. You will have greater success improving upon what you do well than focusing on what you did poorly.



5. Be Informed About Your Profession

Read the news and know what's happening within education. Today's legislative acts could mean a big change in tomorrow's classroom environment. If you are so inclined, get involved.

6. Maintain Your Expertise

You can always learn more about the topic you teach. Check out the latest publications. You might find the seed for an excellent new lesson.



7. Choose a Few Lessons to Improve

Pick 3-5 lessons that you feel need improvement. Maybe they just need enhancing external materials or maybe they just need to be scrapped and rewritten. Spend a week rewriting and rethinking lesson plans.

8. Assess Your Classroom Procedures

Do you have an effective [tardy policy](#)? What about your [late work policy](#)? Look at these and other [classroom procedures](#) to see where you can increase your effectiveness and decrease time off task.



9. Inspire Yourself

Spend some quality time with a child, your own or someone else's. Read about famous educators and inspirational leaders. Check out these [inspirational books](#) and [inspirational movies](#). Remember why you got into this profession to begin with.

10. Take a Colleague to Lunch

It's better to give than to receive. As the school year approaches, teachers need to know how much they are appreciated. Think of a fellow teacher who inspires you and let them know how important they are to students and to you.

Coaches Corner - Betsy Pontius



As we strive to learn our new math curriculum and help our students meet the rigorous standards, it might help to read the words of an expert in the field.

Liping Ma, a former teacher and principal in China, has written extensively about the differences between how the United States and China teach math to elementary school students. After earning a doctorate in curriculum and teacher education from Stanford University, she worked as a senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. In 1999, she published “Knowing and Teaching Elementary Mathematics,” an [influential book](#) that argues elementary school teachers need a better grounding in arithmetic and math in order to teach them effectively to their students. She currently works as an independent researcher.

Here is a quote I have become fond of.

“... elementary school mathematics *is* much deeper, more profound than almost everyone has thought it to be. In the United States, it is widely accepted that elementary mathematics is “basic”, superficial, and commonly understood. Elementary mathematics is not superficial at all, and anyone who teaches it has to study it hard in order to understand it in a comprehensive way.”

I have enjoyed this year studying with my colleagues. It is amazing what we can learn together.

From the Superintendents Desk



“We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.” – Maya Angelou

I wonder if the changes the caterpillar must endure to become the beautiful butterfly are painful. Change in the education profession has accelerated exponentially in the last five years. While many of the changes are intended to make public education stronger and more effective for students, it is often difficult to trust a process that we really don’t understand or don’t have enough information about. In a society that encourages questioning, we wonder how this change will make things better.

Lately it seems there is a constant need to abandon what we know and embrace something new with little information on how it will make things better. We worry that we won’t be good at implementing the latest trend. Being responsible for the success of a new endeavor while we learn is disconcerting. We are quickly pushed beyond our comfort zone. This reminds me of the custodian who is trying to wash the hallway floor as your class must move from one room to another. The job doesn’t get finished; the custodian has to have a redo of some parts. And it is messy!

As we go our separate ways for the summer I want you to know that I am grateful for all you have accomplished, all you have done for your students and colleagues, and all the effort you expended to learn just one more thing. Thank you for keeping your focus these last few weeks to help our students finish strong.

While many of you will be going off to other jobs for the summer or professional learning opportunities, I hope you will find the time to enjoy yourselves and rekindle relationships with family and friends. Thank you for another successful year of “ongoing” change. Enjoy your summer!