

Your guide to avoiding progress monitoring missteps

Failing to share with parents on a regular basis the [progress](#) their child with a disability is making toward his IEP goals can quickly lead to a FAPE violation.

"The heart of the issue is meaningful parent participation," said Peter Maher, a school attorney at [Shipman & Goodwin](#) LLP in Hartford, Conn. "In order to meaningfully participate, parents need to be aware of how their child is performing in school in general and specifically on goals and objectives."

Review these tips to ensure you are properly sharing student progress with parents:

Provide formal and informal reports. You must send the student's parents the quarterly report cards every student receives, Maher said. But you also have to determine how often you're going to send the parents informal progress reports, depending on the student's needs, and follow through with what you have documented in the student's IEP.

Set up a routine for collecting and sharing data. Set up spreadsheets or other systems to collect data in a meaningful way and create reports on demand, Maher said. Input data on a daily or weekly basis. "Setting up systems for routine and ongoing data collection is the best practice," he said. If you are entering data on a weekly basis, you may send parents a biweekly or monthly chart on their student's progress, Maher said. "You want this to be feasible for school teams to do and not create an administrative burden," he said.

Report progress in a user-friendly way. Avoid special education jargon and share with parents quantitative, or objective, data rather than qualitative, or subjective, data, Maher said. "For example, if you are reporting on the student's reading fluency, [don't] veer off and say, 'The student is lazy and talks too much in class,'" he said. "Those may be issues to address, but when you're talking about IEP progress, you want to confine those reports to objective progress related specifically to the goals and objectives." Use visual aids, such as graphs or charts, to break down the information for parents and show that you are instructing the student toward her goals and objectives, Maher said. Just be certain you show the progression of the student's growth rather than just the baseline and latest results. "You don't want to lose important data and nuances to the data in distilling something into those summaries or visual graphs," he said.

Eliminate surprises. No one on the IEP team, including the special education director *and* the parents, should be surprised about the student's progress, Maher said. "We want to avoid surprises at all costs," he said. "The IEP doesn't guarantee outcomes, but it does guarantee that we follow a process and if things aren't going in the right direction, we reconvene to adjust the student's goals and objectives or have other IEP team discussions." You may need to reconvene to determine if the student needs additional evaluations, goal revisions, or changes to his specially designed instruction.

Keep a record of your reports. Document when you share progress reports with parents in case of future concerns, Maher said. Save electronic correspondence and file

hard copies. "If you print a hard copy for parents," he said, "make sure a copy of the report and cover letter you send to them is in the student's file in case you need to reference that at a later date."

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