



**Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Special Education Subcommittee Members**

Testimony on the Special Education Services in School Districts

presented by

**The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators
Dr. Shane Hotchkiss, Superintendent of the Bermudian Springs School District
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Chairman Ortitay and House Special Education Subcommittee members, my name is Dr. Shane Hotchkiss, Superintendent of the Bermudian Springs School District, located in northern Adams County. We serve 1850 students across 75 square miles with over 40% of our population considered economically disadvantaged. Our campus is only located two miles from Route 15, but we have no public water, no public wastewater, and no cable television. I appreciate the opportunity to provide the Subcommittee with some information and comments about the requirements of school districts to provide special education services to students from the perspective of a rural school district.

My colleague, Dr. Leichliter, spoke about the identification and IEP development process for special education students. I will focus my comments on the annual IEP evaluation process and progress monitoring of goals for special education students.

Each IEP written for a special education student contains educational goals. The process for setting goals is based on where the student is presently functioning, and where the predicted level of achievement should be over time. A baseline set of data is used to identify the current level of student functioning, and periodic assessments are scheduled throughout the school year to collect data points for evaluation of each goal in the IEP. These data points are compared to the projected goal to determine if satisfactory progress is being made toward the goals. These data

collection points may trigger an IEP meeting prior to the end of the school year if significant progress toward goals is not being met.

In all, the annual IEP progress monitoring is a seven-step process:

1. **Write annual goals and objectives.** The goals estimate what the student is expected to accomplish over a specific period of time. The goals must be measurable and may have short-term objectives established for each goal. The annual goals estimate what outcomes can be expected in an academic year based on the student's present level of performance. Typically, IEPs are written on an annual basis. The objectives provide steps for meeting the goal. Each goal and objective should include:
 - a. The condition under which the behavior is performed
 - b. Clearly defined, observable behaviors
 - c. The performance criterion (i.e., the number of times the behavior is performed at criterion level, and the frequency of assessment)
2. **Make data collection decisions.** Decisions need to be made as to what data will be collected, where it will be collected, how often it will be collected, and who will collect the data.
3. **Determine data collection tools and schedule.** A data collection schedule must be created and adhered to ensure the information represents pre-determined calendar dates for data points collected.
4. **Represent the data visually.** Many IEP's will require visual representations of data so that parents, students, and educational professionals can easily view and understand the data. Charts, graphs, and checklists are often used for these visual representations.

5. **Evaluate the data.** Decision rules are often established by the IEP team to help them make decisions as to whether satisfactory progress is being made by the student or if an intervention and adjustment to the IEP is needed.
6. **Make instructional adjustments.** When the data indicates that an adjustment is needed in the IEP, an intervention is implemented, and new data collection procedures are implemented to monitor the progress of the new intervention.
7. **Communicate progress.** This is one of the most critical aspects of progress monitoring. Parents and students should be actively engaged in the data review process, so they are part of the ongoing IEP evaluation process. This ongoing communication provides for better oversight of the student's IEP and makes the annual IEP writing process more effective.

Monitoring the progress of our special education students at Bermudian Springs has always required a significant amount of collaboration and coordination. It has also stretched the capabilities of our small staff. In general, progress monitoring is very difficult at the high school level. Depending on the level of support a special education student receives from us (itinerant, supplemental), the learning support teacher may only see them once a day for 43 minutes in support. During that time, they are expected to help our students with homework and projects, read tests, assist them with making up tests/assignments from absences, allow them to see related service providers (speech, OT, PT) while also working to find the time to progress monitor their IEP goals.

Recently a high school learning support teacher shared with me that when a choice must be made between helping a student complete a science project that was due days ago, versus having them complete a reading or math probe, the science project (which is essential to passing that class and earning a credit for graduation) wins every time.

Often this means that in order for us to complete our progress monitoring, we must often defer to the regular education teacher for the collection of data points. This places added stress and time on that regular ed teacher who is already doing so much to accommodate and modify for our

students on a daily basis. The bottom line is there is simply not enough time to monitor progress at the high school level.

At the elementary level, the challenges are much the same. An elementary learning support teacher recently shared her experience in supporting several students that have struggled to meet their annual goals. Because of this, she was constantly collecting data, shifting goals, and discussing with parents/the team about how to best support the students to help them to make the most growth possible within the school year. The data collection process for these students is essential, but also takes a tremendous amount of time, which in turn impacts the instructional time provided to other learning support students.

Even though the Bermudian Springs School District only consists of three schools on one campus, we still struggle to ensure consistency across buildings regarding progress monitoring. This makes it difficult to see growth in a child if every year the goals are adjusted, and different materials are being used to assess growth.

As noted, monitoring an IEP for special education students requires a great deal of collaboration between the school entity, parents, and students. It requires a significant amount of school resources and professional employee time to appropriately document and adjust IEPs for students. In many cases, it also may require the coordination of services from outside agencies for interventions such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, behavioral counseling, and other professional services that are not provided by employees of the school entity. Many school districts employ Special Education Supervisors or Coordinators to ensure IEP timelines are being met and services are appropriately scheduled.

I hope this gives the subcommittee a better understanding of how school entities set goals for special education student and monitor the goals throughout the school year. It is a complex process that requires the coordination and collaboration of many educational professionals in cooperation with the parents and students we serve.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this information with you. I will be happy to answer your questions.