

How Will I Know If My Child is making Progress?

Children go to school to learn, of course. But parents and guardians of children with disabilities often ask, "How will I know my child is learning and making progress?" You can answer that question by looking at a variety of educational testing data, including information from three important educational sources. The educational sources are the child's special education program, the general education program, and information from sources outside the school district.

Special Education Program Sources:

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97) is a special education law that emphasizes educational outcomes for students in special education. IDEA '97 guidelines require that schools track educational progress for children with disabilities. Here are four of the best sources:

- (1) **The results of a student's most recent evaluation.** Students who may have disabilities are evaluated before special education services can begin. This comprehensive evaluation looks at cognitive and behavioral factors, as well as physical and developmental factors in all areas of suspected disability. The initial evaluation provides a baseline for measuring progress and developing an individualized education program (IEP). Once a child has an IEP, the school will reevaluate or review existing evaluation data at least once every three years. You can compare the most recent evaluation report with earlier reports to gauge your child's progress. You have a right to obtain copies of evaluation summaries and to have the information explained to you.
- (2) **Measurable annual goals.** Your child's IEP must include measurable annual goals. For each goal area, the IEP must record your child's beginning level of performance, either in a section on "present levels of educational performance" or in the goal statement. Each goal statement must outline the skills or behaviors to be changed, the direction of the desired change, and the expected ending level of performance. You will receive reports outlining your child's progress toward meeting these goals.

- (3) **Progress reports**. The IEP document must identify how your child's progress toward annual goals will be measured and how you will be informed of the progress. According to IDEA '97, you must be informed "at least as often as parents are informed of their nondisabled child's progress." Periodic report cards, other written reports, and meetings are among the many ways you can be informed about your child's progress. These sources of information will help you determine whether your child's progress is sufficient to achieve the IEP's annual goals.

- (4) **Annual IEP review**. A new IEP is written annually for children in special education. The IEP must include a statement of the child's present level of educational performance. You can compare this statement to the statement made the previous year. How much has your child's reading level advanced? How much has your child's on-task behavior increased?

General Education Program Sources:

Children with disabilities may participate in the general education curriculum. The curriculum used for non-disabled students should be used whenever appropriate for children with disabilities. You can request additional information from your child's general education teachers regarding progress.

- (1) **Classroom teacher information**. If your child participates in a general education classroom for all or any part of a day, you can attend teacher's conferences, open houses, and other typical school events for more information, observations, and feedback about your child's progress. Daily work, test scores, and report cards can also provide valuable information.

- (2) **State-wide assessments**. In South Dakota, the Dakota STEP is administered each spring to students in grades 3 through 8 and 11. South Dakota teachers, parents, administrators, and the public are informed of each school's performance in specific areas through the NCLB Report Card, which reports the results of the Dakota STEP.

You can access your school district's report card and all South Dakota school district report cards by going to the following State website:

[South Dakota Department of Education Report Card](#)

The Dakota STEP assessments are designed to ensure educational accountability for all school districts across the state. The assessment results help schools and districts identify strengths and weaknesses in their curriculum and instruction so schools can adequately prepare students to meet graduation standards. Upon completion of the Dakota STEP assessment you will receive a report from the school district regarding your child's individual assessments results. Your Child's Dakota STEP progress assessment results will be reported to you by the school district using the following progress indicators: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced.

Information from Sources Outside the School:

The school isn't the only source of information on a child's educational progress. Independent evaluation and less formal observations can provide a more complete picture of your child's progress.

Independent evaluation. Children can be assessed at facilities outside the school setting, sometimes at the expense of the school district and sometimes at the family's expense. In either case, independent evaluation results can be compared to previous testing and other progress indicators.

Observing Skills at Home and in the Community. You can observe whether your child has generalized a skill taught in school. This means that your child can use the skill in many environments, such as the home and community, as well as in school. For example, is your child's speech understandable at home and to the server in the restaurant? Can your child do the math worksheet on money *and* count the change received at the store? Can your child perform this skill better than he or she could last year?

What if my Child is Not Making Progress?

If you think your child is not making meaningful educational progress, you can request a team meeting to discuss revisions to the child's IEP. The school cannot guarantee that a child will achieve the goals and objectives or benchmarks in the IEP; however, the school must make a "good faith effort" to assist the child in making educational progress.

An IEP team meeting can be held to discuss and plan revisions to improve the possibility of making progress. Your child may need changes in: special education or related services, assistive technology, curriculum methods of instruction, change in educational setting, or other appropriate measure to enhance student progress.

If the IEP team cannot agree whether or not your child is making meaningful educational progress, the team will most likely recommend to you that additional evaluations be completed to provide current data for determining meaningful educational progress.