Providing Academic Feedback for Special Populations

Creating Environments that Work for All Students: Real Manuals for Real Teachers

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About the Department of Child & Family Studies

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Creating Environments that Work for All Students:
Real Manuals for Real Teachers

Providing Academic Feedback for Special Populations
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Introduction

Academic feedback is the information provided to students, parents, and teachers about progress toward academic and behavioral goals. Providing academic feedback to teachers, students, and parents requires the ongoing formative evaluation of student performance and modification of instructional programs based upon the results of this evaluation. Special education, which is based upon individualized education programs, lends itself especially well to this type of systematic feedback. Formative evaluations rely upon student performance rather than a disability label to determine the best academic and/or behavioral program for the student. It provides a method for regular monitoring of student performance under various instructional procedures and provides data necessary to individualize programs. For example, rather than waiting until the end of an instructional unit, a teacher may give several quizzes or probes during instruction. The information gained through these quizzes and probes may indicate areas that need to be re-taught or reinforced. Additionally, it results in repeated measures gathered in familiar surroundings by familiar teachers and satisfies the need for accountability.

Research suggests that:

(a) Students in special education whose programs are monitored systematically and developed formatively over time display higher achievement than students whose programs are not monitored systematically and developed formatively.

(b) Greater achievement results when teachers follow a regular schedule of evaluation and modify instructional programs based upon the evaluation.

(c) Graphing data results in higher achievement than when results are simply recorded (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986). The authors speculated that graphing data might allow teachers to analyze performance trends more accurately and frequently, and graphs might encourage teachers to provide more frequent performance feedback directly to students.
In order to plan effective instruction for students in special education, it is important to know their present levels of functioning when the school year begins. Knowing present levels will help to identify areas of strength and weakness that, in turn, will identify areas on which to focus instruction.

Present levels may be determined by:

✦ Diagnostic or curriculum based testing such as STAR or LEXILE testing
✦ Consulting cumulative folders for information from the previous year
✦ Talking to previous teachers
✦ Observing students in the natural environment
✦ Consulting FCAT scores
✦ Work samples
✦ Previous IEPs

“The key to thorough knowledge of student learning abilities is not in the quantity of right and wrong answers. Instead, knowing a student’s strengths and weaknesses and identifying breakdowns in the learning process come from direct, systematic, and sensitive observations of:

✦ Patterns of errors and successes from multiple samples
✦ How the student performs tasks
✦ When and in what context successes and difficulties occur
✦ With what consistency the behaviors occur
✦ The ease, fluency, and capacity in assimilating and expressing new knowledge
✦ Affective reactions and coping strategies”

(Reed, 1996)
Systematizing Information

Once present levels of functioning have been determined, a method for systematizing information needs to be chosen. The method should provide useful, easily understood information for the teacher, student and parents about academic and behavioral progress. Allowing students to take part in recording information on graphs or charts ensures that they get immediate feedback. Teachers, of course, keep their own set of records tracking student progress to share at conferences with parents and students and to aid in writing IEPs.

Measurement tools should be consistent over time (i.e. LEXILE levels at the beginning, mid-point, and end of the year).

The panel of teachers made the following suggestions:

- Use graphs and charts to record academic and behavioral progress and provide feedback to students. Fuchs and Fuchs (1986) say that this also results in more accurate and frequent analysis of students’ progress.

- Students can keep track of assignments, quizzes, and tests and the grades they receive on them so that they will always know where they stand in the class. It will also help them to understand what their strengths are and what they need to work on. They should be taught how to keep track of their grades to monitor their own progress. A simple chart could be attached to their planners:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Arts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Goals and expectations should be clearly stated and reflected in the recording procedure so that progress toward goals is easily tracked. The Grade Level Reading Expectations (p. 65) chart reflects some grade level expectations for sixth grade reading.
Giving Students Feedback

Students need to receive timely, accurate, easily understood feedback about their academic and behavioral performance. If students are involved in keeping track of their grades, feedback becomes an automatic process.

Following are some suggestions the panel made for implementing a constructive feedback process:

- **Feedback should be positive and constructive.** The most constructive feedback is frequent, on-going, and based upon the student’s needs identified in present levels of functioning.

- **Vary the method of providing individual feedback** – sometimes privately, sometimes in front of the class (positive feedback only), sometimes written, sometimes verbal, and sometimes during public ceremonies such as assemblies.

- **Individual conferences should be held** with students at least twice during a grading period, more often if the student is having problems.

- **Feedback can be given on organizational goals** such as keeping a neat, well-organized notebook with dividers. This allows the students who have severe academic problems to be successful at other tasks.

- **Display students’ work** in the classroom. Create a wall chart that indicates progress on behavioral or academic goals.

- **Individual conferences with students** are often very effective, but it is important to have projects or assignments for the rest of the class to work on while you are talking to each student.

Sources of feedback include:

- **Formal and informal sources** such as tests, projects, homework, and behavior checklists.

- **Charts, graphs, or checklists.** Students receive immediate and meaningful feedback when they keep track of their own grades by these methods.

- **Portfolios containing work samples.** Each student might have a hanging file in a crate in the classroom to keep samples of tests, quizzes, assignments and projects. On a designated day, students could choose one sample to keep for their portfolios and take the rest home. Portfolios could pass along at the end of the year to students’ new teachers enabling them to develop present levels of functioning based upon the previous year’s work.
Getting Started

The beginning of each semester is often spent getting to know students and determining their strengths and needs. The panel recommended the following activities to help do this quickly and efficiently:

- **Determine present levels of functioning** by giving baseline tests (i.e. STAR or LEXILE) and writing assessments. Establishing baseline data will help teachers, students, and parents to more easily track progress and identify areas that need more attention.

- **Do a quick writing assessment** at the beginning of the year. Give the students a topic and ask them to write a paragraph. Evaluate the paragraph for:
  - Punctuation – periods, commas, capital letters
  - Grammar – subject/verb agreement, tense, word endings
  - Topic sentences and supporting details
  - General sense

- **Discuss the results with the student** and develop writing goals. Choose one or two goals and save the rest for later. (see the Writing Rubric on page 66 for examples of these goals).

- **Plan lessons** to achieve these goals.

- **Hold individual conferences** with students to discuss academic and behavioral goals – yours and theirs.

- **Develop a system for tracking progress** toward the goals. This should be a system that students and teachers can manage easily.

- **Develop rubrics that define the goals** and expectations for each area to be addressed so that teachers, students, and parents know and understand them.

- **Build a checklist** of what needs to be accomplished during the year. Give each student a checklist to help keep track of accomplishments.

- **Teach students how to chart their grades.** For example, Math might be charted on a line graph (50%, 75%, 100%) and Social Studies might use a rubric with checkpoints for parts of a project.
# Basic Skill Inventory

The following will give you some basic areas to consider when developing inventories to evaluate students’ competencies.

## Reading

**Decoding (accuracy, then fluency)**
- Letter recognition and letter sound correspondence
- Sight vocabulary, phonics, and morphology

**Comprehension**
- Paraphrasing (retelling orally or in writing)
- Recall and inference
- Rate of oral reading

## Written Language

**Penmanship**
- Letter formation and rudimentary spelling

**Content**
- Number of words written
- Quality, sequencing, or coherence of ideas
- Consideration of the audience

**Style**
- Grammar (e.g., subject-verb agreement)
- Mechanics (e.g., punctuation or sentence structure)
- Word choice

## Mathematics

**Skill topics**
- Readiness skills, vocabulary, and concepts
- Numeration and whole numbers
- Fractions and decimals
- Measurement
- Geometry

**Skill format**
- Problem sets requiring computation
- Word problems requiring selection and application algorithm

**Skill difficulty variations**
- Number of steps in solution
- Amount of extraneous information
- Explicit vs. implicit indicators of mathematical operation

## Language Arts

**Skill topics**
- Alphabetization and spelling
- Reference skills (e.g., dictionary, phone book, newspaper
- Correspondence skills and filling out forms

---

Resources

Following are a series of sample forms and graphs that you can customize to fit your particular classroom and subject. They are simple to allow your students to keep track of their own progress while yielding enough information for record keeping and instructional planning.

Present Level of Functioning Worksheet

Grade Level Reading Expectations

Writing Rubric and Recording Form

Kid Friendly Math Rubric (problem-solving rubric)

Sample Spelling Test Chart

Questionnaire for General Education Teachers
  Working with Included Special Education Students

Academic Feedback Checklist

Math Scores

Reading Scores

Blank Charts
# Present Level of Functioning Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>Grade:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reading Level:**
(choose appropriate measures)

- [ ] IRI
- [ ] WJ-R
- [ ] LEXILE
- [ ] FCAT
- [ ] Other

**Math Level:**
(choose appropriate measures)

- [ ] WJ-R
- [ ] FCAT
- [ ] STAR
- [ ] Other

**Writing Assessment:**

- [ ] Strengths
- [ ] Weaknesses

**Behavior:**

**IEP Goals:**
# Grade Level Reading Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Predicts ideas or events in text, gives rationale for prediction, confirms &amp; discusses predictions.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Uses pre-reading strategies (i.e., skimming text headings, bold type, and other text features)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Makes predictions about purpose and organization using background knowledge and text structure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Reads and predicts from graphic representations (i.e., example, illustrations, diagrams, graphs, maps).</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Uses context and word structure clues to interpret words and ideas in text.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Makes inferences and generalizations about what is read.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Uses graphic organizers and note-making to clarify meaning and to illustrate organizational pattern of texts.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Identifies word parts: prefixes, suffixes, roots</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Selects appropriate meaning for a word according to context.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Analyzes word relationships such as analogies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Restates text by note making or summarizing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Uses a graphic organizer to clarify meaning of text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Determines text’s major ideas and how they are supported with details.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Draws inferences and supports them with text evidence and experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Paraphrases and summarizes text to recall, inform, or organize.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NM = Not mastered  E = Emerging  M = Mastered  NA = Not Applicable
## Writing Rubric and Recording Form

**Student Name:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clear purpose or theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develops ideas through details and examples</td>
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<td>Is well organized</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capitalization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sentence Structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incorporates complete sentences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incorporates complex sentences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paragraph Structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Includes a topic sentence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Includes supporting sentences</td>
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<td>Includes a concluding sentence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word Choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uses descriptive language</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Incorporates variety in word choice</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Kid Friendly Math Rubric (problem-solving rubric)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Support for thinking</th>
<th>Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6     | Exceptional Awesome Goes Beyond | • Finds all important parts of problem  
• Has complete understanding of math needed  
• Uses unusual, creative thinking  
• Finds more than one way to solve problem  
• Uses many ways to show thinking like diagrams, charts, graphs, etc.  
• Experiments, designs, analyzes  
• Does more than problem asks | • Writes a clear, convincing, thoughtful answer  
• Writes to an audience  
• Very clear diagrams |
| 5     | Very Good Clear Strong | • Finds most of the important parts of problem  
• Has good understanding of math needed  
• Finds one or more ways to solve problem  
• Uses several ways to show thinking like diagrams, charts, graphs, etc.  
• May experiment, design, analyze  
• May compare problem to another, predict | • Writes clearly  
• Makes sense  
• Writes to an audience  
• Clear diagrams |
| 4     | Pretty Good Gets the job done | • Finds most of the important parts of problem – some less important are missing  
• Understands most of the math needed  
• Finds one or more ways to solve problem  
• Uses several ways to show thinking like diagrams, charts, graphs, etc.  
• May experiment, design, analyze  
• May compare problem to another, predict | • Addresses all parts of the problem  
• Writes to an audience  
• Writing may be unclear |
| 3     | O.K. Good Try Unclear | • Finds a few of the important parts of problem  
• Understands some of the math needed  
• Thinking gets mixed up  
• Might miss the big idea  
• May or may not solve the problem  
• Mathematical thinking is unclear or limited  
• Chooses wrong ways to solve problem  
• Doesn't explain thinking | • Has trouble writing ideas  
• May or may not write to an audience  
• Diagrams or charts not clear |
| 2     | Incomplete Confusing | • Little understanding of problem  
• Finds less important parts of problem  
• Understands bits and pieces of math needed  
• Doesn't explain thinking  
• Uses ways to solve problem which don't fit the problem | • Writes in a confusing way  
• May or may not write to an audience |
| 1     | May or may not make an effort No Understanding | • Doesn't understand problem  
• Makes little or not attempt to explain results | • Writes in a way that is very hard to understand |

Spelling Test Chart

Grade

Spelling Tests
# Questionnaire for General Education Teachers Working with Included Special Education Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course(s):</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Overall, the student’s academic performance in the class is:
   - [ ] Outstanding
   - [ ] Satisfactory
   - [ ] In need of improvement
   If in need of improvement, the primary areas of concern are:
   _______________________________________________________________

2. The student’s current grade is:  
   - [ ] A  
   - [ ] B  
   - [ ] C  
   - [ ] D  
   - [ ] Failing

3. The student’s current test grade is:  
   - [ ] A  
   - [ ] B  
   - [ ] C  
   - [ ] D  
   - [ ] Failing

4. The student turns in:
   - [ ] All assignments
   - [ ] the majority of assignments
   - [ ] relatively few assignments
   - [ ] no assignments

5. The student has failed to turn in the following assignments:
   _______________________________________________________________

6. Overall, the student’s behavioral performance in the classroom is:
   - [ ] Appropriate
   - [ ] in need of improvement
   If in need of improvement, the primary areas of concern are:
   _______________________________________________________________

7. I recommend the following be done to support the student in my class:
   _______________________________________________________________

8. I would like assistance in:
   _______________________________________________________________
### Academic Feedback Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Math, reading, and writing baselines given.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Present levels of functioning determined.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Goals determined from baselines and present levels.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Discussed present levels and goals with students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Decided on curriculum and rubrics that will address the goals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Teach students to track their grades and progress.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Math Scores

Student Name: __________________________

Computation Skills

Score

100% 90% 80% 70% 60% 50% 40% 30% 20% 10% 0%

Problem Solving

Score

100% 90% 80% 70% 60% 50% 40% 30% 20% 10% 0%
Reading Scores

Student Name: ______________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>100%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>0%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Comprehension |
| 100% | 90% | 80% | 70% | 60% | 50% | 40% | 30% | 20% | 10% | 0% |
Student Name: ____________________________

Subject: ____________________________

Score

100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%


Score

100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%

Jan 15  Jan 30  Feb 15  Feb 28  Mar 15  Mar 30  Apr 15  Apr 30  May 15  May 30  Final June
Student Name: ______________________

Subject: ______________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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Conclusion

Research shows that student achievement is higher when teachers regularly evaluate performance and use their evaluations to plan instruction. The charts and graphs included in this manual demonstrate that evaluation does not have to be lengthy or complicated. In fact, when the evaluation method is relatively simple, students are able to participate in the activity and derive even greater benefits. The key is that evaluation must be conducted on a regular basis, and students must be informed of the results. As with any other educational strategy, it only works if you use it.
References


