# Thoughts on Goal Setting and Progress Monitoring

The purpose of progress monitoring (PM) in early literacy is to keep an eye on the student's progress to close the gap and become a good reader. This means we need goals that will get kids there. The default goals that are automatically set for new PM may not do the job and may need adjusting. In fact, accepting the default PM goal sometimes results in a bad goal for the child, which leads to poorly informed progress decisions.

The graph on the left below looks great, but when the same child's progress monitoring is set up correctly, as in the graph on the right, we see that the child's progress is not good. Keep reading to see how to avoid this problem when setting up goals.
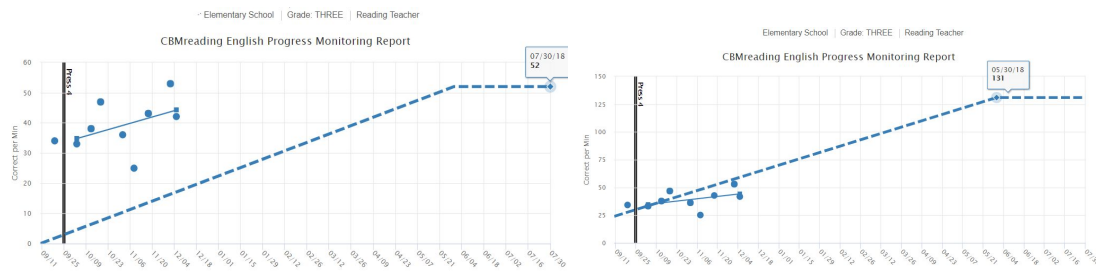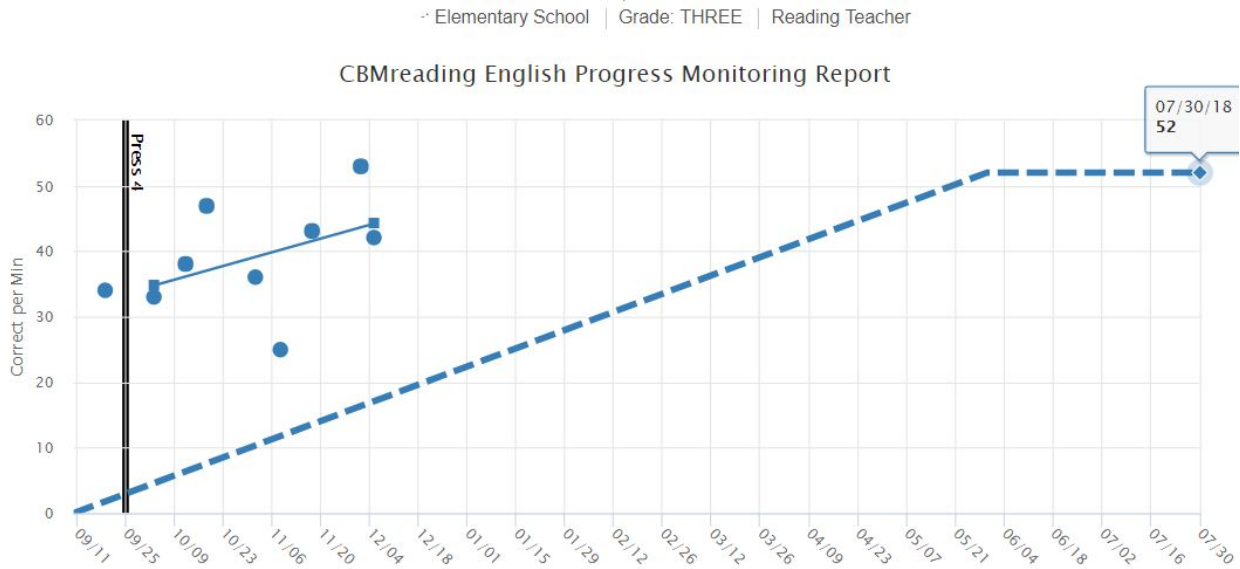

Goal Setting

Checklist for Goal Setting

☐ Enter a Starting score other than zero: Screening or first PM score
☐ Select an End Goal: Usually Spring Grade Level Benchmark
☐ Use the goal: keep an eye on the graph as PM data are collected. Will child succeed?

In this example, the third grade student's PM setup did not have a start score, since he was set up off-level and prior to screening. You will see a zero for a start score if the PM measure was not used for screening, the PM group was set up prior to screening, or if the PM measure is off grade level. When PM was set up, the FAST system default weekly gain labeled "realistic" was used to set the goal, along with the zero start score. A starting point of 0 + 1.4 words/week of gain across a full school year means an end of year goal of only 52 WPM, which is woefully low for a third grade student where the end of year benchmark is 131.

| Student	Screening ?	Starting Week	Start ?	Level ?	Weekly Gain ?	EOY		
						Date	Goal ?	Benchmark ?
	N/A	09/10/2017	0	G2	1.4 - Realistic	05/30/2018	52	131.0

The progress monitoring graph based on this goal makes it look like the child is making excellent progress (see below). The child's trend appears to be well above the goal, and while

the slope suggests the child will lose some ground relative to the goal line, it appears that the trend will still be above the goal at the end of the year. This seems like good news. Unfortunately, the end of year goal of 52 used in this graph is *less than half* of what is needed to reach the end of year benchmark (131). Since the purpose of PM is to keep track of whether the intervention is working (and "working" means that the child gets back on track and is above benchmark) it makes absolutely no sense to use a goal that offers such a terribly low expectation for the child. This child will NOT meet the end of year benchmark.

·· Elementary School | Grade: THREE | Reading Teacher

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If anyone reads the PM graph shown above and is not aware of the necessity to check the defaults in goal setup, they would think the child was doing a stellar job, while he's actually not doing that well. To improve the graph, the goal must be changed from the default settings. If we change the starting score using the initial screening result **(24),** instead of zero, it is clear the child's trend is not going to make the goal, which is now based on making an increase of 1.4 words per week. The graph below shows this change. For reference, the **end of year benchmark** is also shown on the graph as a horizontal solid line. Notice that the goal set by **the initial screening score** and "**realistic**" growth (weekly gain) will *still* not get the child to the benchmark. The goal itself must be changed in the PM setup.

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P9 (G2)   R1 Trend Line   P9 (G2) Adjusted Goal Line   Fall 40th Percentile Line
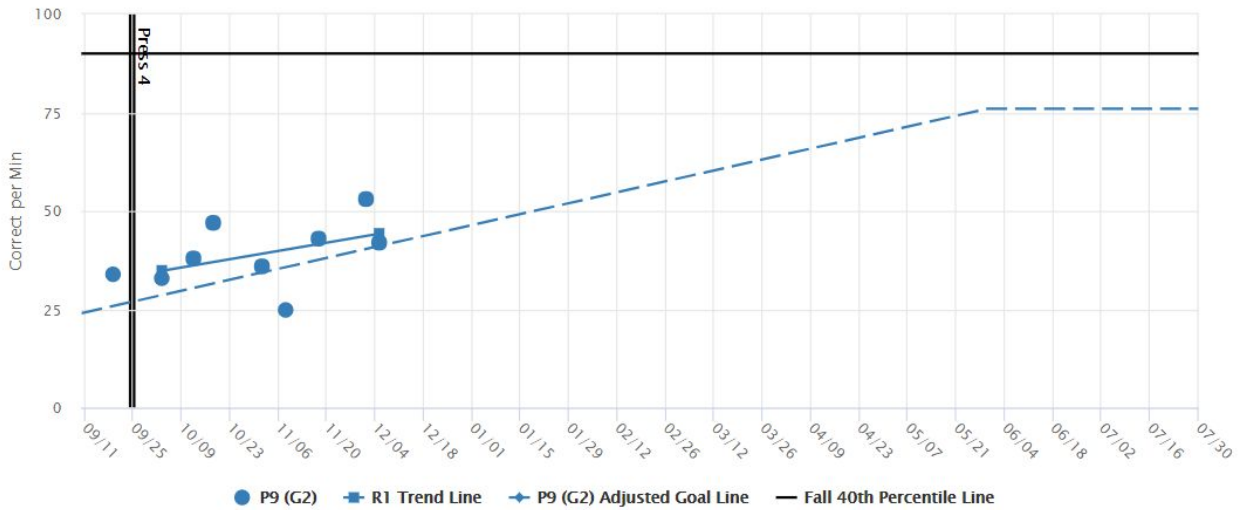
The third graph (below) shows what happens when the **end of year benchmark** set as the the **goal**. In this version of the graph, it is clear that the child is not making the kind of growth needed to close in on the benchmark score. In fact, the child has been steadily falling farther behind. Instruction and intervention must change.

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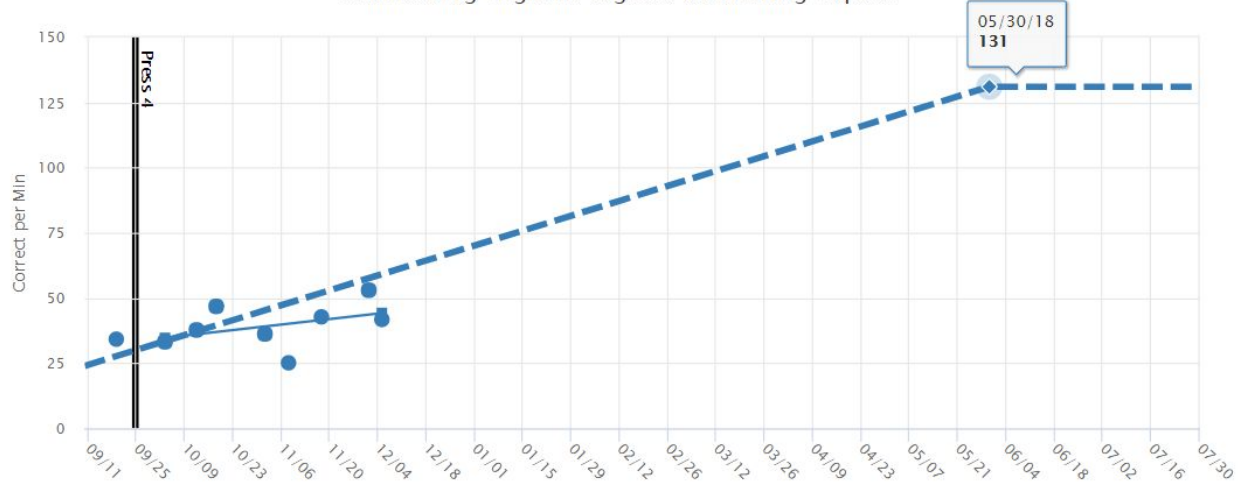
While editing the start and end you will notice the weekly gain value and description change on the goal area of the PM group setup page. The weekly rate is based mathematically on the difference between the starting and ending goal, while the description (realistic, ambitious, etc.) is based on observed growth for students in the FAST data set. Any two values of the starting score, gain, and goal can be altered, and the third value will change. Lower the gain and the goal will be reduced accordingly. Raise the goal and the gain will change.

Why It Matters: Words for coaches
The uncomfortable thing about this issue is that someone looking at the first graph without understanding the meaning and origin of the goal would assume the child is doing quite well, while in reality he's falling farther behind as time progresses. The interventions currently in place are not going to close the gap for this child. When setting up the goals, do not trust the automatic settings to do the right thing for every child. It is critical to think about the goals for each child and make adjustments as appropriate. Remember that the reason we set goals and monitor progress is not to comply with the ELI law, it is to help kids to become successful readers. The good news is that we can make a profound impact on early literacy with quality instruction informed by quality data and goals. It makes sense to set goals that include a starting score, ambitious weekly gain, and a goal for spring grade level benchmark. Don't just go through the motions - use the system to do the best possible for kids.
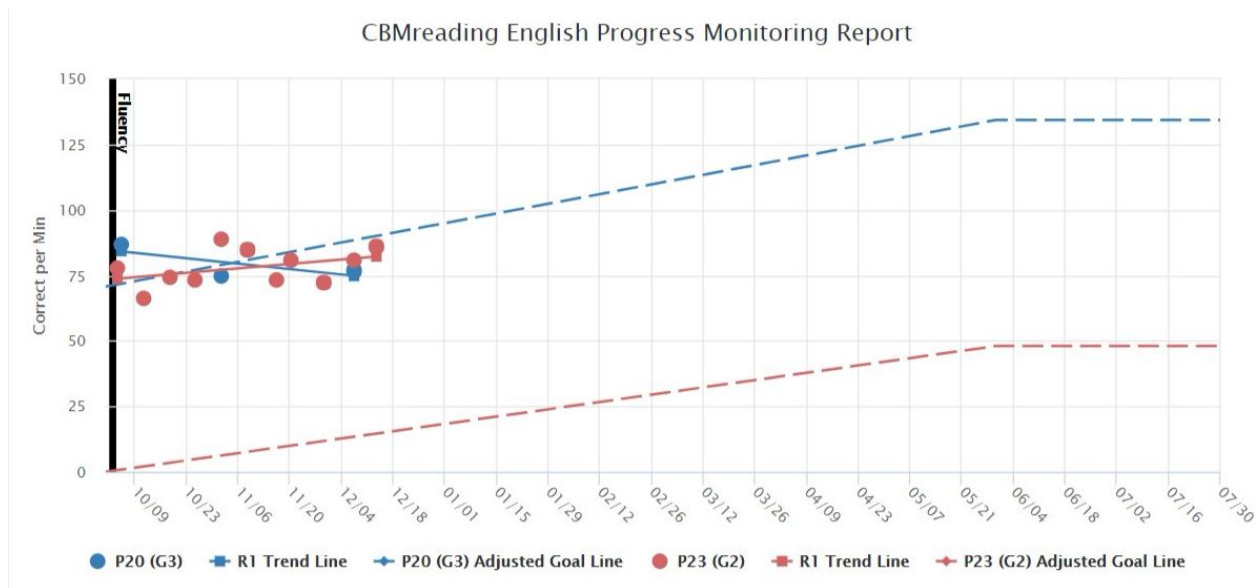
Off-Level Progress Monitoring
The FAST CBMR measures were intentionally designed to solve a common problem with most other CBM-like measures where the grade level passages were too difficult to be used to monitor growth for a large portion of children performing below grade level. The FAST CBMR measures were carefully engineered to minimize the need to measure off-level by using easier, more predictable and decodable text. FastBridge developed the progress monitoring passages to be a bit more "readable" in order to get a larger sample of reading out of lower-performing students. A larger sample of reading on easier passages means better sensitivity to growth. As long as the student can read 10 or more words correct per minute on the grade level passage, there should be limited need to use an off-level measure. According to FastBridge developers, about 98% of students should be able to have their reading growth monitored using grade level materials. This is a change for people used to older reading fluency measures. Do not apply old practices to these new measures.

Closely related to the general issue of off-grade level monitoring, the difficulty of the reading passages in FAST CBMR materials is the same for more than one grade level. In FAST, the passages are developed in bands; for example there is no difference in difficulty between 2nd and 3rd grade passages. BUT, the goals for grade level passages are set for that specific grade level, and not the grade level of the student. Using 2nd grade passages to monitor a 3rd grade student will produce a false sense that the student is making good progress towards an end of year benchmark that was intended for second grade, while not actually even using easier text!

Even more striking are examples where a middle grade student is monitored on earlyReading measures. The goals for those measures are end of year benchmarks for Kindergarten or First grade students and are not suitable as end of year goals for older children. Progress towards these goals would not be gap-closing progress for older children. Of course, there are times when it is reasonable and appropriate to monitor a small number of older children with severe reading deficits on lower measures from earlyReading. Make sure that using these measures

does not unintentionally cause lowered expectations. Unless it is impossible, try and continue to use frequent on-grade level monitoring as well.

Let's take a look at what this looks like in real life. In this example, a 3rd grade child is being monitored every week with 2nd grade probes and once a month with 3rd grade probes. In the graph, the 2nd grade results and goal are indicated in red, while the 3rd grade results are indicated in blue. Since the 2nd and 3rd grade passages are the same difficulty it is no surprise that they are all clustered together. The weekly vs monthly PM trend is interesting, too. The trends contradict each other. It shows how much less reliable infrequent PM can be.

Another example, this time 3rd and 4th.

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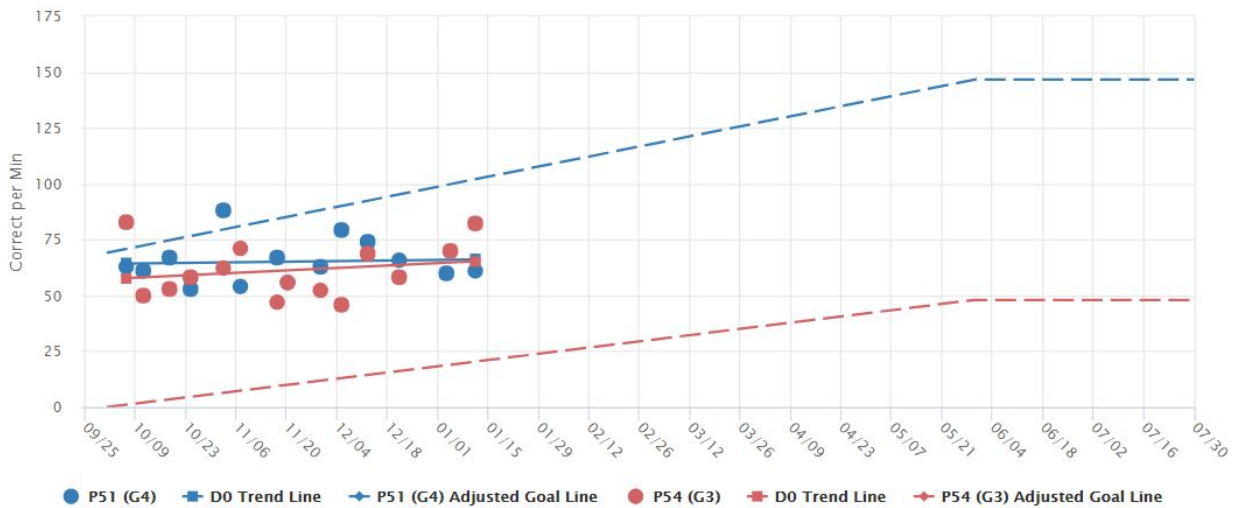
The point is, off level monitoring results in inadequate goals and is usually unnecessary. Monitor nearly all students on grade level to gain the best feedback about the student's progress toward success.

Why It Matters: Words for coaches
Progress monitoring on off-level measures is an old habit that is mostly inappropriate when using the FAST measures. This practice is left over from other assessments that were not very sensitive to growth for struggling students and has been common for kids with IEPs. Unfortunately, this practice results in dramatically lowered expectations for these children, just what they don't need! An off-level goal means lower and slower expectations, rather than accelerated growth.

In the past, using other assessments, we might have selected a 'grade level below' so the student could see more success on what was still a challenging or "close to grade level" passage. As noted above, the passages in FAST are built to be more readable at grade level to begin with, making this unnecessary. FAST CBMR materials do not alternate narrative and informational text, nor pull a sample of a complex text structure. Instead, they are engineered specifically to accurately monitor general reading improvement on grade level for struggling readers. Even dropping just one grade level in FAST, results in monitoring the child's progress toward an inappropriate, inadequate goal. Even though monitoring on grade level at a lower frequency can help keep an eye on the grade level target (as suggested in the past), fewer data points means a longer time before it is clear that the intervention is (or is not) working.

Old habits die hard. IEP teams may not be aware of the measurement characteristics of FAST CBMR. They may also labor under the misunderstanding that they cannot change an IEP goal until the annual review, and refuse to update the goals to something more meaningful and

grade-appropriate. An IEP goal may be revised at any time through communication with the parent/family. A simple communication with the parent may suffice, with a corresponding amendment. Please be sure to check on the current, appropriate process for updating an IEP.

When to Consider Off-level Progress Monitoring
A very small number of students participating in intensive intervention and some students with disabilities might need to be monitored at a lower level. Even when opting to include off-level monitoring, the overall intent is still to improve reading at grade level, but it might be important to monitor intervention on specific skills needed to get there (such as phonemic awareness or decoding). For example, short-term use of an off level measure (in addition to the grade level measure monthly) may be meaningful for a student learning to speak English or a student that has not yet mastered the basic pre-reading skills. In cases like this, it might make sense to monitor these enabling skills for reading to ensure that they are mastered as quickly as possible. As noted above the goals generated automatically in the FAST system for any off level measure will be "too low" to close gaps because they are based on benchmarks for the grade level of the test and not for the student's actual grade level. Think carefully about the appropriate goals and timing for these measures to ensure accelerated progress toward grade level reading skill development. Decisions about using an off level measure should include the student support or problem-solving team, as well as the parent/family of the student. Please do not automatically apply an off level measure to whole groups of students- "English Learners" or "Students on IEPs." Make individual decisions based on individual student needs and performance. There is some good information from FAST related to off-level monitoring in the article entitled: **FASTfact: Survey Level Assessment of Oral Reading** in the FAST knowledge base.

Off-level Think Abouts
- Rare; used for 2% or less of students
- Decided on an individual basis; not applied to whole groups (EL, IEP, etc)
- Used for students reading 10-15 wcpm or less
- Monitoring phonemic awareness or decoding should not replace goals to read connected text, usually at grade level