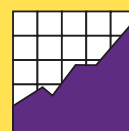


# MOVING YOUR NUMBERS

## Parent/Family Companion Guide

*Using Assessment and Accountability  
to Increase Performance for  
Students With Disabilities  
as Part of District-wide  
Improvement*



NATIONAL  
CENTER ON  
EDUCATIONAL  
OUTCOMES

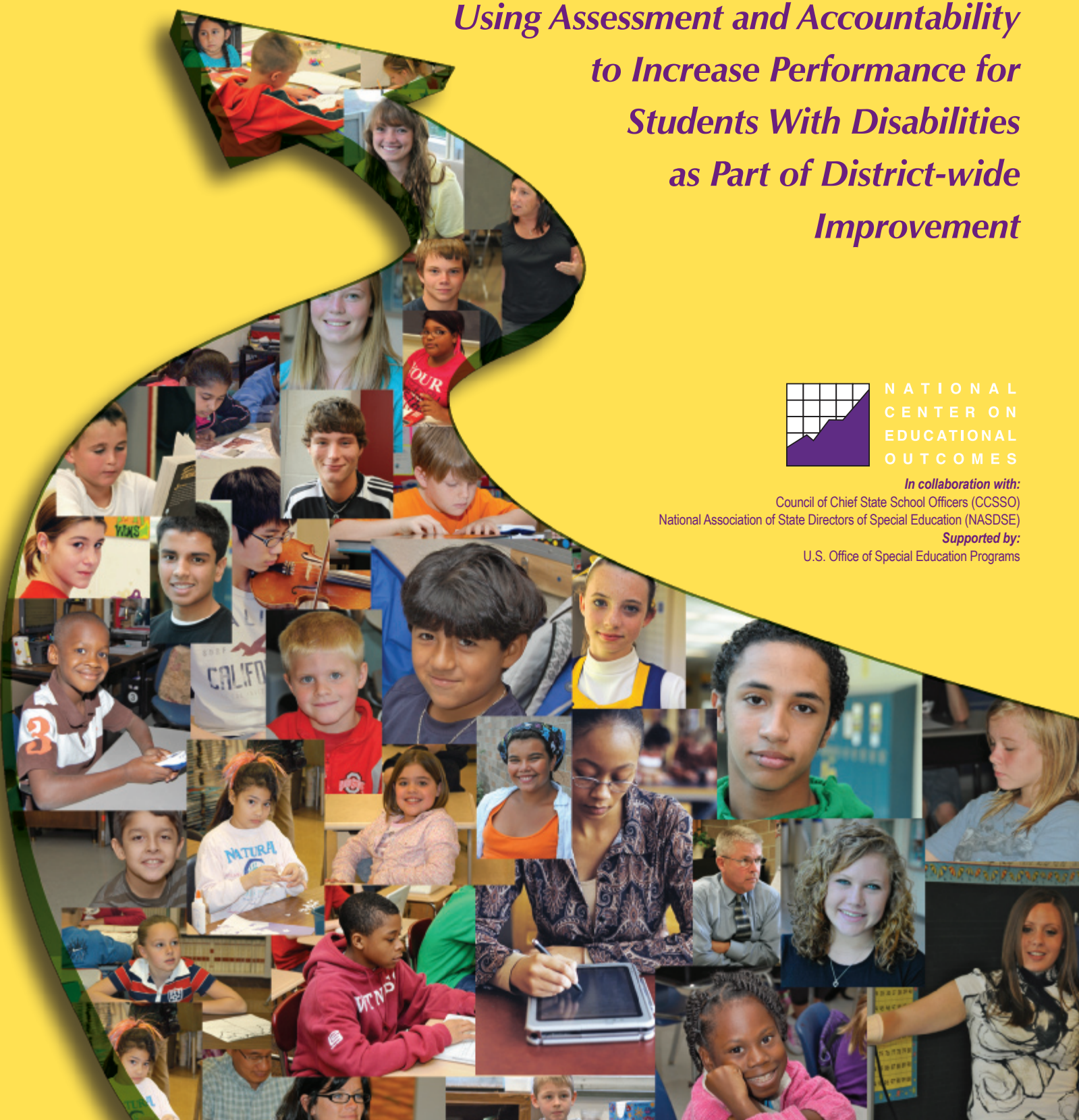
*In collaboration with:*

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)

*Supported by:*

U.S. Office of Special Education Programs



# ABOUT MOVING YOUR NUMBERS

***Moving Your Numbers: Improving Learning for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Reform***, examines how school districts with vastly different demographics increase the performance of students with disabilities and other at-risk learners as part of whole-district reform efforts. Case studies of featured districts, as described in the full report, provide evidence that students with disabilities, like all other students, can learn at higher levels when adults focus their collective efforts on improving instructional practice, consistently implement core work across the district, and use assessment and accountability as a lever for ongoing system and student learning and improvement.

***Moving Your Numbers*** identifies six essential practices that must be in place to improve the performance of students with disabilities. Evidence suggests that these six practices, when used in an aligned and coherent manner, are associated with higher student achievement. These practices are *use data well*, *focus your goals*, *select and implement shared instructional practices (individually and collectively)*, *implement deeply*, *monitor and provide feedback and support*, and *inquire and learn*.

***Moving Your Numbers*** was initiated and is supported through the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) under the leadership of Dr. Martha Thurlow, NCEO Director; Rachel Quenemoen, NCEO Senior Research Fellow; and Dr. Laurene Christensen, NCEO Research Associate. Dr. Deborah Telfer, Director, School of Education and Allied Professions Grant Center, University of Dayton, coordinates the development and review of ***Moving Your Numbers*** on behalf of NCEO. NCEO was established in 1990 to provide national leadership in designing and building educational assessments and accountability systems that appropriately monitor educational results for all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs).

This parent/family companion guide to ***Moving Your Numbers*** was written by Candace Cortiella, Director, The Advocacy Institute, Washington, DC. The document should be cited as:

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Photographs used in this publication have been provided courtesy of the districts featured and the Ohio Department of Education.

Additional case studies of featured districts will be added to the ***Moving Your Numbers*** website as they are developed. Go to [www.MovingYourNumbers.org](http://www.MovingYourNumbers.org) for the complete report and additional tools and resources, and to submit success stories.

NCEO is supported primarily through Cooperative Agreements (#H326G050007, #H326G11002) with the Research to Practice Division, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Additional support for targeted projects, including those on ELL students, is provided by other federal and state agencies. The Center is affiliated with the Institute on Community Integration in the College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Education or Offices within it.

# *MOVING YOUR NUMBERS*

## *Parent/Family Companion Guide*

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### INTRODUCTION

This guide is based on a recent report produced by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), a federally funded center that provides national leadership in designing and building educational assessments and accountability systems that appropriately monitor the educational results for all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

The report, *Moving Your Numbers: Improving Learning for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Reform*, provides an in-depth examination of how five school districts with vastly different student populations increased the performance of students with disabilities.

While the report was developed primarily for use by those working at the state, school district, and school levels, it provides powerful information that can be used by parents and families interested in working to improve the academic performance of students with disabilities.

Parents are critical to student success in all cases, but particularly for students with disabilities. Because of the very specific requirements of the federal special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), these parents engage with school personnel frequently via the formulation of their child's Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) each year as well as regular progress reports provided throughout the school year.

So, parents of children with disabilities are in a unique position to recognize, understand, and participate in key practices that improve learning. The findings presented in *Moving Your Numbers* can help pave the way for parents to become even more effective.



# ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS



While *Moving Your Numbers* identified six practices that can result in measurably improved performance of students with disabilities, these practices must be implemented in an environment designed to support high expectations. Such an environment does not blame students with disabilities for poor performance. Rather, it believes in working hard on behalf of all students. As the saying goes, a rising tide lifts all boats.

The essentials for successful implementation of the practices uncovered in *Moving Your Numbers* include:

## ✓ **Believing that students with disabilities can and should be expected to learn**

For years students with disabilities have been limited by the expectations of adults. Both educators and parents have expected too little. More recently, students with disabilities have begun to show us how much they can learn, not how little. These improvements in learning are the result of a belief that students can learn. Expectations play a powerful role in the success of students with disabilities and parents must insist on high expectations from both themselves and the educators who teach their children.

## ✓ **Including students with disabilities in all aspects of the assessment and accountability system**

Schools, districts, and states must know how all students are performing. The results from state assessments help everyone know just where each student is in relationship to the standards expected for their enrolled grade. Using assessment results in the accountability system used to determine how schools, districts, and states are doing in educating all students is the only way to make sure the success of every student is important. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires all students to be included in all district and state level assessments.

## ✓ **Sharing responsibility for student success among all adults at all levels regardless of role or title**

Too often students with disabilities are considered the exclusive responsibility of the special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and related service providers. Even students who spend a considerable amount of time in general education classrooms may not be considered as students of the general education teachers who teach them. This way of thinking is not compatible with improving performance. All adults must view all students as their responsibility. Only through this “all-means-all-for-everyone” approach can students with disabilities experience full and equal opportunities to learn.

## ✓ **Using assessment and accountability data as tools for improving academic performance**

Educators are increasingly using data to plan instruction and to make changes when student performance is not meeting expectations. As assessments are improved and teachers get real-time results, using data becomes critical. For students with disabilities, assessment data should be a central part of the Individualized Education Program. Gone are the days when parents had to rely on a teacher’s subjective information about a student’s performance. Now, thanks to technology, parents can get objective information about how their child is doing in key academic areas like English and Mathematics. Like teachers, parents must learn how to understand assessment results and how to use the results to plan instruction that will produce improved learning.



# SIX KEY PRACTICES

Moving Your Numbers found six practices that must be in place to improve the performance of students with disabilities. These practices are use data well, focus your goals, select and implement shared instructional practices (individually and collectively), implement deeply, monitor and provide feedback and support, and inquire and learn.

Let's explore each of these six practices and find out ways that parents can understand, recognize, and participate in each.



## 1 KEY PRACTICE: Use Data Well

Education has seen an explosion in data in recent years. Fueled by education reform and accountability efforts and made possible by technology, schools now have the ability to collect, analyze, and use all sorts of data to make decisions.

Many districts have made websites or portals available where parents can view their child's academic performance compared to others. Some of the types of data being offered to parents include:

- State assessment results
- School report card information
- Individual student grades
- Credit accumulation for high school students
- Attendance
- Student weekly progress reports

At the student level, data are used to identify the area of need, develop goals, and track progress.



### Evidence that this key practice exists in your school district includes:

- Clear emphasis on use of data to make sound decisions about instruction.
- Use of data from several relevant sources, including data from state assessments and classroom-based assessments conducted during the school year (called "formative assessments").
- Consistent use of data across all grades in the school and schools in the district.

- Principals working directly with teachers in the use of data.

Parents should expect to be provided with information about the data being used to make decisions. For example:

- How your child is performing on the expectations for his/her grade level. Data on state and district assessments provides an objective snapshot of your student's academic performance.
- How the data on your child's academic performance will be used. What decisions will be made by the teacher and school?
- How the school is working to close the achievement gap? Are students with disabilities performing far below their peers in the school and district?
- How you can play a role in collecting data. What can you do at home to improve your child's performance and how can you relay your efforts to the school?



*Students can also use data! Setting short-term goals and tracking their progress toward the goals is motivating to students.*



## 2 KEY PRACTICE: Focus Your Goals

Districts that are achieving significant improvement for students with disabilities have established a limited number of goals, then mapped out a strategy to accomplish those goals. In doing this, districts involve parents so that all stakeholders are included and all interests are represented. Parents of students with disabilities must be a part of this goal-setting process.



### Evidence that this key practice exists in your school district includes:

- A district plan that clearly states the goals the district wants to achieve. The goals must include all students and be the responsibility of everyone.
- A roadmap of school-level strategies that will achieve the goals.
- A plan to report on progress toward the goals regularly to parents and the community. Progress must be measured with objective data.



For students with disabilities who have Individualized Education Programs or IEPs, their annual goals must be aligned with the state's grade level standards in core academic subjects such as reading and math. This approach—referred to as “standards-based IEPs”—lets parents and teachers understand how the student is performing against grade-level expectations and how much progress must be achieved in order to get to grade level.

Parents should expect students with disabilities to be included in all goals set by a school district. Some important questions to ask include:

- Is my child receiving instruction in the same curriculum as his/her same age peers without disabilities?
- Are IEP goals being written to reflect the expectations for academic performance at my child's enrolled grade?







## KEY PRACTICE: 3 Select and Implement Shared Instructional Practices

No longer are schools and teachers “on their own” when selecting instructional practices. In fact, much is known about which practices work and which don’t.

Districts are working to improve the basic instruction received by all students, recognize quickly which students are struggling, and provide interventions. One such process—called “response to intervention (RTI)” or “multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS)” —is dependent upon the use of sound instructional practices at every stage of implementation.



### Evidence that this key practice exists in your school district includes:

- A clear commitment to using evidence-based practices across all grades and schools, including special education, reflected in district goals.
- Ongoing training for teachers in how to implement instructional practices and interventions.
- Regular communications with parents describing the practices being implemented by the district.

Parents can and should be involved in the school’s implementation of instructional practices and intervention strategies. To get involved, you can:

- Ask questions about the research evidence supporting the instructional practices being used by the school.
- Ask how you can help with the implementation of intervention strategies. If your child is struggling, find out what you can do at home to reinforce the intervention being used in school.
- Ask for regular updates on your child’s progress in academic areas such as reading and math. Progress monitoring involves objective data gained via frequent assessments. It can alert you early when your child isn’t progressing as expected.

Check out these resources for information on effective, research-based instructional practices and interventions.

#### What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the WWC produces reports showing evidence of effectiveness in education research.

#### Best Evidence Encyclopedia

<http://www.bestevidence.org/>

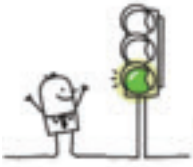
The Best Evidence Encyclopedia (BEE) presents reliable, unbiased reviews of research-proven educational programs

#### NICHCY’s Evidence for Education

<http://nichcy.org/research/ee>

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities’ online Evidence for Education explores the best evidence-based practices education has to offer for students with disabilities.





## 4 KEY PRACTICE: Implement Deeply

Successful implementation of sound instructional practices requires that teachers deliver the practice exactly as it was designed. Often called “fidelity of implementation,” a lack of fidelity is what leads to failure more often than anything else.

Fidelity is critical to achieving the same results that were achieved during the research that established the effectiveness of the practice. Too often, the practice is not implemented with fidelity and then the failure to achieve the promised results is blamed on the practice or, worse yet, on the students receiving it.



### Evidence that this key practice exists in your school district includes:

- Consistent, rigorous follow through by the school district.
- Recognition of the importance of fidelity of implementation in the success of instructional practices.
- Ongoing evaluation of progress being achieved by all students, including students with disabilities.

To make sure practices, including interventions, are being implemented deeply, with fidelity, parents should:

- Ask for information on the instructional practices or interventions being implemented, including precisely how they were designed to be used and delivered. Often this information will be included in the findings of evidence of effectiveness.
- Ask about the training that has been provided to teachers to ensure that they know exactly how to implement the practice.
- Ask how you will be involved in monitoring your child’s performance in response to the practice. For example, will you receive regular updates in formats that you can understand and act upon?





**KEY PRACTICE:**  
**5 Monitor and Provide Feedback and Support**

Keeping a watchful eye on the progress being made is key to achieving improvements for students with disabilities. In recent years, “progress monitoring” – just like fidelity – has been refined to represent very specific, data-driven practice.



**Evidence that this key practice exists in your school district includes:**

- Clear definitions of what the practices look like when they are being implemented well.
- Student progress indicators that are consistent across grades and schools within the district.
- Ongoing collaboration between school personnel focused on the continuous improvement of student achievement.

Providing feedback to your child’s school regarding progress monitoring is also essential. To get involved with the school’s monitoring, parents should:

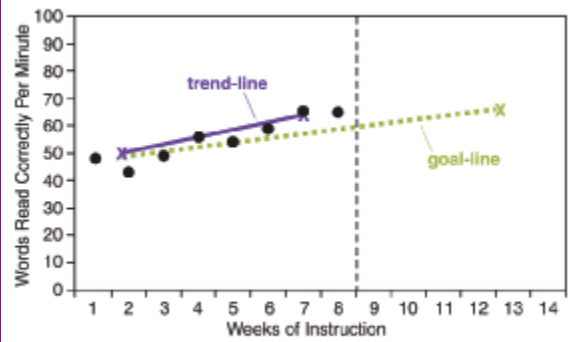
- Ask for information describing the specific type of progress monitoring the school is using. For example, will you receive graphs that display your child’s progress (see box for examples).
- Ask how you will receive regular feedback from the teacher on how well your child is doing. How often will the information be provided?
- Ask how your child will be involved in progress monitoring. Involving students in monitoring their own progress is highly motivating.



**Samples of Progress Monitoring Graphs**

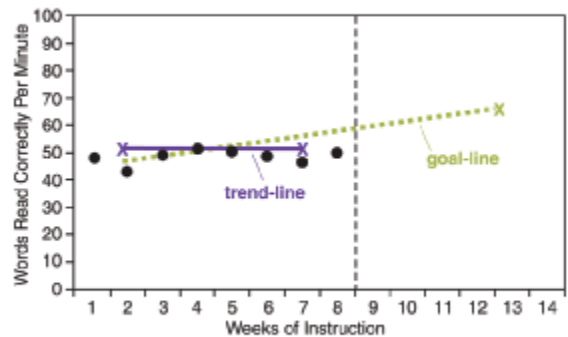
Here are two graphs of a student’s progress in reading. The first shows the student making good progress toward the goal that has been set. The second shows that the student is not making adequate progress. A change should be made to this student’s instruction in order to get on track toward the goal.

**The student is making progress if the trend-line is above the goal-line.**



Goal-line represents progress needed to reach expected performance by end of year.  
Trend-line is student’s actual performance based on CBM.  
Source: www.studentprogress.org

**The student is not making progress if the trend-line is below the goal-line. A change in instruction is needed.**



Goal-line represents progress needed to reach expected performance by end of year.  
Trend-line is student’s actual performance based on CBM.  
Source: www.studentprogress.org

Check out this great resource on progress monitoring!  
National Center on Student Progress Monitoring  
<http://www.studentprogress.org/>



## 6 KEY PRACTICE: Inquire and Learn

Improving the academic achievement of students with disabilities requires teamwork; teamwork among both school personnel and parents. This key practice – inquire and learn – involves the process of constant evaluation and reflection on what is – or is not – happening for students.



### Evidence that this key practice exists in your school district includes:

- Ongoing training on instructional practices and interventions, including how to involve parents.
- Ongoing support for school personnel. These supports should include specific time to engage in discussions with each other about instructional practices and the impact on student learning.

- Clear commitment of support from school leaders – principals and district superintendents. This commitment should include active oversight of the instructional program and improvement strategies.

Schools should work to make parents feel that they are a valuable part of the improvement process. Parents, in turn, should free that it is their obligation to get involved and be informed.

To make sure you are part of the process, parents should:

- Ask the school or district leadership how to get involved with the planning and implementation of a plan to improve student learning.
- Attend all parent activities offered by the school or district, particularly those focused on school improvement efforts.
- Provide regular feedback on the instructional strategies being implemented, from the aspect of your own child as well as the entire school. Focus this feedback on the data made available by the school and district.



# TERMS TO KNOW

## **Achievement Gap**

The difference between the achievement (such as percent of students proficient in reading or math) of all students and individual student groups, such as students with disabilities, within a school, school district, or state. Achievement gaps should be based on standardized testing.

## **Common Core State Standards**

Developed by a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Common Core State Standards define the knowledge and skills students should have in reading/language arts and mathematics within their K-12 education careers so that they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs. For more information, go to <http://www.corestandards.org/>.

## **Evidence-based Practices**

Instructional strategies and interventions that are backed by rigorous evidence of effectiveness.

## **Fidelity of Implementation**

A determination of how well a program is being implemented in comparison with the original program design. May also be called adherence or integrity.

## **Formative Assessment**

A process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes. The term "formative assessment" is sometimes used to refer to the tests themselves.

## **Intervention**

A change in instructing a student in the area of learning or behavioral difficulty to try to improve performance and achieve adequate progress.

## **Progress Monitoring**

A scientifically based practice used to assess students' academic performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Progress monitoring can be implemented with individual students or an entire class.

## **Standards-based Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

A process and document that is framed by the state standards and that contains annual goals aligned with, and chosen to facilitate the student's achievement of, state grade-level academic standards.



**Available *MOVING YOUR NUMBERS* Publications:**

- Administrator Preparation Guide: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement.
- District Self-Assessment Guide for Moving Our Numbers: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.
- Moving Your Numbers: A Synthesis of Lessons Learned from Districts Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.
- Moving Your Numbers: Five Districts Share How They Used Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.
- Moving Your Numbers: The Critical Role of Regional Providers in Facilitating School District Capacity to Improve Achievement for Students with Disabilities.
- Moving Your Numbers: The Critical Role of SEAs in Facilitating School District Capacity to Improve Achievement for Students with Disabilities.
- **Parent/Family Companion Guide: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.**
- Teacher Preparation Guide: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.

**For More Information on**

***Moving Your Numbers*, Contact NCEO or Visit:**

**[movingyournumbers.org](http://movingyournumbers.org)**

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