Acadience Learning Online
Initial Goals for Acadience Reading K–6

We developed the initial goals in ALO to provide a starting point or first approximation of an appropriate individual student-learning goal. The initial goals will provide a reasonable individual goal for many students; however, an educator may want to adapt or modify the initial goal based on additional information about the student or the educational context.

Student Learning Goals

First, we will describe the rationale for progress monitoring and setting student learning goals. Then we will address the desired characteristics of an individual student-learning goal that the initial goals are designed to approximate. Next, we will address initial goals for in-level material followed by initial goals for out-of-level progress monitoring. Finally, we will address some of the issues an educator may want to consider when adapting or modifying the initial goal.

Purpose of Progress Monitoring and Student-Learning Goals

The purpose of progress monitoring and formative evaluation is to provide ongoing data that can be used by educators to improve student learning and outcomes. Indeed, progress monitoring and formative evaluation provided the third largest effect size on student outcomes out of 138 possible influences examined by Hattie (2009). Systematic and ongoing data collection through progress monitoring assessments provides data to inform whether students are making adequate progress toward important reading outcomes or whether instructional modifications or additional instructional support are needed to address individual learning needs.

Goals are necessary to determine whether or not a student is making adequate progress. Goals provide expected levels of performance and a frame of reference by which to evaluate the adequacy of a student's progress.

Characteristics of An Appropriate Individual Student-Learning Goal

Setting an individual student-learning goal is an important aspect of progress monitoring and formative evaluation that is frequently given insufficient attention. Overarching considerations for a student goal are that the goal be: (a) meaningful, (b) ambitious, and (c) attainable.

Meaningful

A goal is **meaningful** if it addresses an important skill and specifies achieving a valued level of the skill by an appropriate time. If a student's skills are discrepant from grade-level expectations in core academic areas, then a meaningful goal would be to either (a) meet grade-level expectations or (b) reduce the student's discrepancy from grade-level expectations. For example, if a student's benchmark status is Well Below Benchmark at the beginning of the year on Acadience Reading, a meaningful goal would be to be At or Above Benchmark by the end of the year.

Ambitious

A goal is **ambitious** if it maximizes student progress toward becoming a successful reader. For students whose skills are Below or Well Below Benchmark, it is not enough to make the same progress as students who are typically performing. To close the gap for students with skill deficits we need to set a goal that accelerates their progress. As educators, an ambitious goal shifts us out of our comfort zone, challenges us, strengthens

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our commitment and resolve, narrows our focus, and empowers us to avoid distractions. Setting ambitious goals that are specific, well defined, and measurable leads to better outcomes than vague, abstract, or trivial goals. Goals that are challenging have been shown to have strong positive effects on student performance. Michelangelo is rumored to have said, "The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark." Even when we set an ambitious goal and fail to reach it, we often attain a far better outcome than we would in setting and meeting a modest goal. Pathways of Progress provides an interpretive framework to evaluate the ambitiousness of a goal. Using Pathways of Progress, a goal would be considered ambitious if it represents Above Typical or Well Above Typical Progress.

Attainable

A goal is **attainable** if it is realistic to accomplish. The attainable and ambitious goal characteristics are always in a dynamic tension. The more attainable a goal, the less ambitious; the more ambitious, the less attainable. If we believe a goal is set too high for us to accomplish, we may not invest in it. We may not strive and reach and stretch and go the extra mile to attain it.

Of course, this is a tricky balance. In general, for students whose skills are Below or Well Below Benchmark we recommend a goal that represents Above Typical Progress as a reasonable balance of ambitious and attainable. There is compelling research evidence that we can make the greatest impact on student outcomes in the early grades, especially K, 1, and 2. Even extremely ambitious goals are attainable in those early grades with a well-trained educator and high quality instruction matched to student needs.

In-Level Initial Goals

We will refer to progress monitoring using material consistent with the student's assigned grade and time of year as in-level progress monitoring. In-level progress monitoring occurs during a semester or year where the Acadience Reading subtest is a part of the benchmark assessments at the target time of a progress monitoring goal. For example, progress monitoring for a kindergarten student on First Sound Fluency (FSF) from the beginning to middle of kindergarten would be in-level progress monitoring because FSF is a part of the middle-of-kindergarten benchmark assessment.

Similarly, monitoring the progress of a first-grade student with NWF from the beginning to the end of first grade would be in-level progress monitoring, as would monitoring the

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progress of a third-grade student in third-grade Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) material. In ALO, we specify an initial goal for in-level progress monitoring based on the individual student's benchmark status and their desired Pathway of Progress, subject to maximum and minimum values as described next.

Pathways of Progress and Benchmarks

In-level progress monitoring is important for early intervention and prevention. Pathways of Progress and the benchmarks and cut points for risk combine to provide a framework for setting goals and interpreting progress for in-level progress monitoring. For students whose beginning-of-year skills are Below Benchmark, the odds of achieving subsequent benchmarks and meeting grade-level expectations are generally 40% to 60%.

For students whose skills are Well Below Benchmark, the odds of achieving subsequent benchmarks are generally 10% to 20%. For these students, a meaningful goal entails accelerating their progress to achieve grade-level benchmarks. Thus, for students whose beginning-of-year benchmark status is Below Benchmark or Well Below Benchmark, we set a meaningful, ambitious, and attainable initial goal of (a) meeting the end-of-year benchmark and/or (b) making Above Typical Progress.

For students whose beginning-of-year skills are At or Above Benchmark, the odds are generally 80% to 90% of achieving subsequent benchmarks and meeting grade-level expectations by making Typical Progress with effective core reading instruction. For these students, we set the initial goal of (a) remaining At or Above Benchmark at the end of the year and/or (b) making Typical Progress.

Initial goals are specified in a two-step process. First, the desired Pathway of Progress is determined. Second, the initial goal is constrained by maximum and minimum values based upon the student's grade level. The first step in specifying an initial goal is summarized in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1. Initial Goal Pathway of Progress by Beginning-Of-Year Benchmark Status

Beginning-of-Year Benchmark Status	Recommended Pathway of Progress for a Meaningful, Ambitious, and Attainable Individual Student-Learning Goal
Below or Well Below Benchmark	Midpoint of Above Typical Progress
At or Above Benchmark	Midpoint of Typical Progress

Minimum values for initial goals are specified by grade level. For grades K–2, the minimum is set to be the end-of-year benchmark. In the early elementary grades especially, reaching the benchmark can be achieved for most students with powerful and effective classroom instruction focused on teaching the essential early literacy and reading skills. In addition, getting students on track for critical early literacy and reading skills in the early elementary grades can prevent significant reading difficulties later.

For students in third grade whose scores are Below Benchmark at the beginning of the year, the minimum initial goal is also the end-of-year benchmark. Third-grade students whose scores are Well Below Benchmark at the beginning of the year have a minimum initial goal of Below Benchmark, thus reducing their discrepancy from grade-level expectations. For students in grades 4–6, the discrepancy from grade-level expectations can be substantial and dramatic changes in the student's trajectory of progress are more difficult to attain, so the midpoint of Above Typical Progress is specified for their initial goal.

Maximum values for initial goals are also specified. For students whose beginning-of-year skills are At or Above Benchmark, the initial goal was constrained by the lowest value of the Above Benchmark range. Thus, a student who met the beginning-of-year benchmark might have an initial goal that would be Above Benchmark at the end of the year. For students who have scores that are Below or Well Below Benchmark at the beginning of the year, the initial goal was constrained by the midpoint of the At Benchmark range.

In the following examples we will illustrate the initial goals for in-level progress monitoring and how an educator might choose to modify those initial goals for individual students.
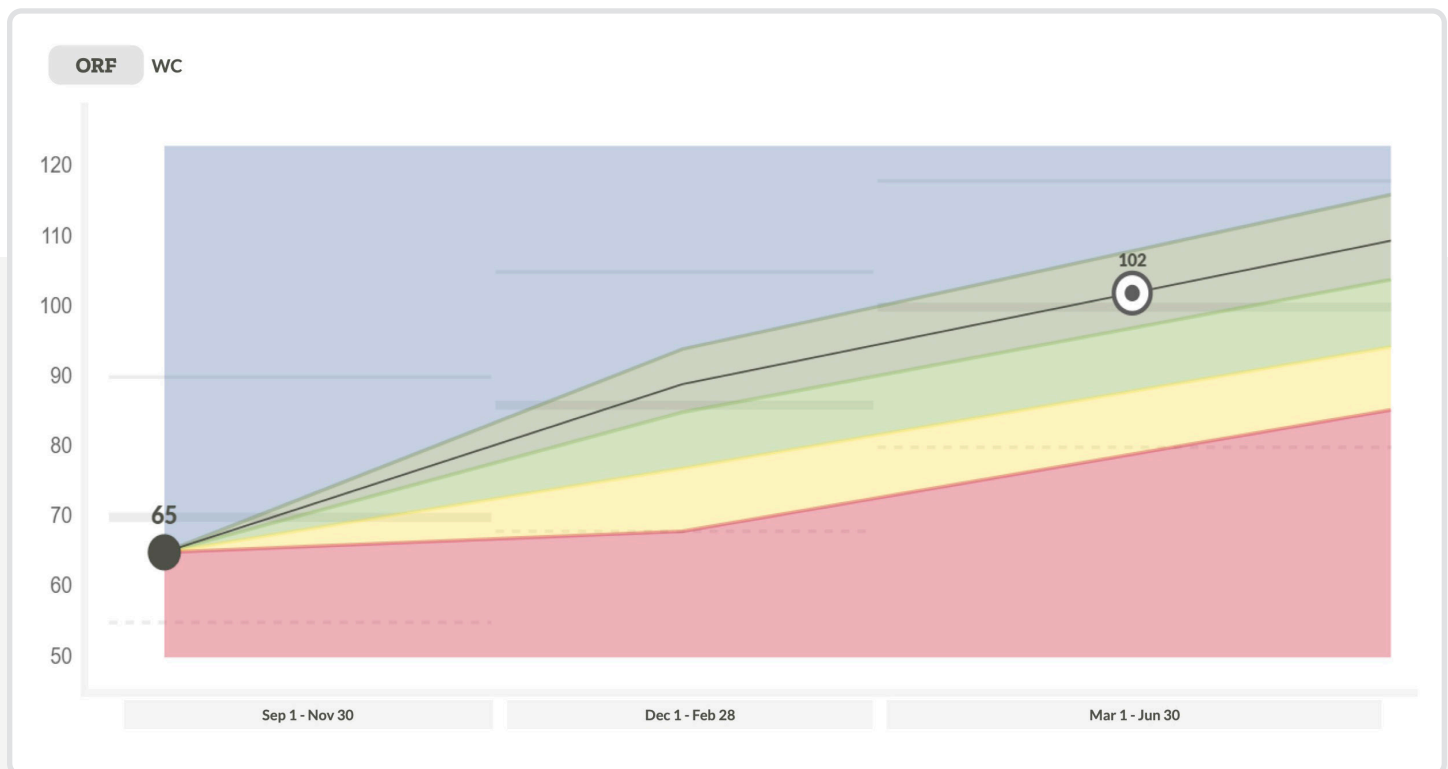
In-Level Goal Setting Examples

1   In-Level Goal Setting: Tabitha

Tabitha is a third-grade student whose scores are Below Benchmark on the Reading Composite Score (RCS) and ORF Words Correct. In ALO, the initial, in-level goal for Tabitha is 102 words correct, the middle of the Above Typical pathway (see *Figure 2*). A goal of 102 words correct by the end of the year is an initial approximation of a meaningful, ambitious, and attainable goal for Tabitha.

If Tabitha accomplishes this goal, her skills would be At or Above Benchmark at the end of the year and she would have made Above Typical Progress. While an initial goal may be adapted or modified based on professional judgment and additional information, in this case, the instructional team decides that this is a meaningful, ambitious, and attainable goal for Tabitha and decides not to modify it.

Figure 2. Tabitha's In-Level Goal for ORF Words Correct

Miriam is a fourth-grade student whose RCS and ORF scores are Well Below Benchmark at the beginning of the year. In ALO, the initial, in-level goal for Miriam is 110 ORF Words Correct in fourth-grade material. This goal would be in the middle of Above Typical Progress; however, that initial goal would result in skills that would still be Below Benchmark at the end of the year (see *Figure 3*). Based on Miriam's learning history and the intervention in place, the team decides to modify the initial goal to be more ambitious. The goal is adjusted to be 115 words correct in Level 4 ORF which would be at the bottom of Well Above Typical Progress.

If Miriam meets the adjusted goal, she would reach the end-of-year ORF benchmark (see *Figure 4*). The team determines that this goal would be meaningful, ambitious, and attainable for Miriam.

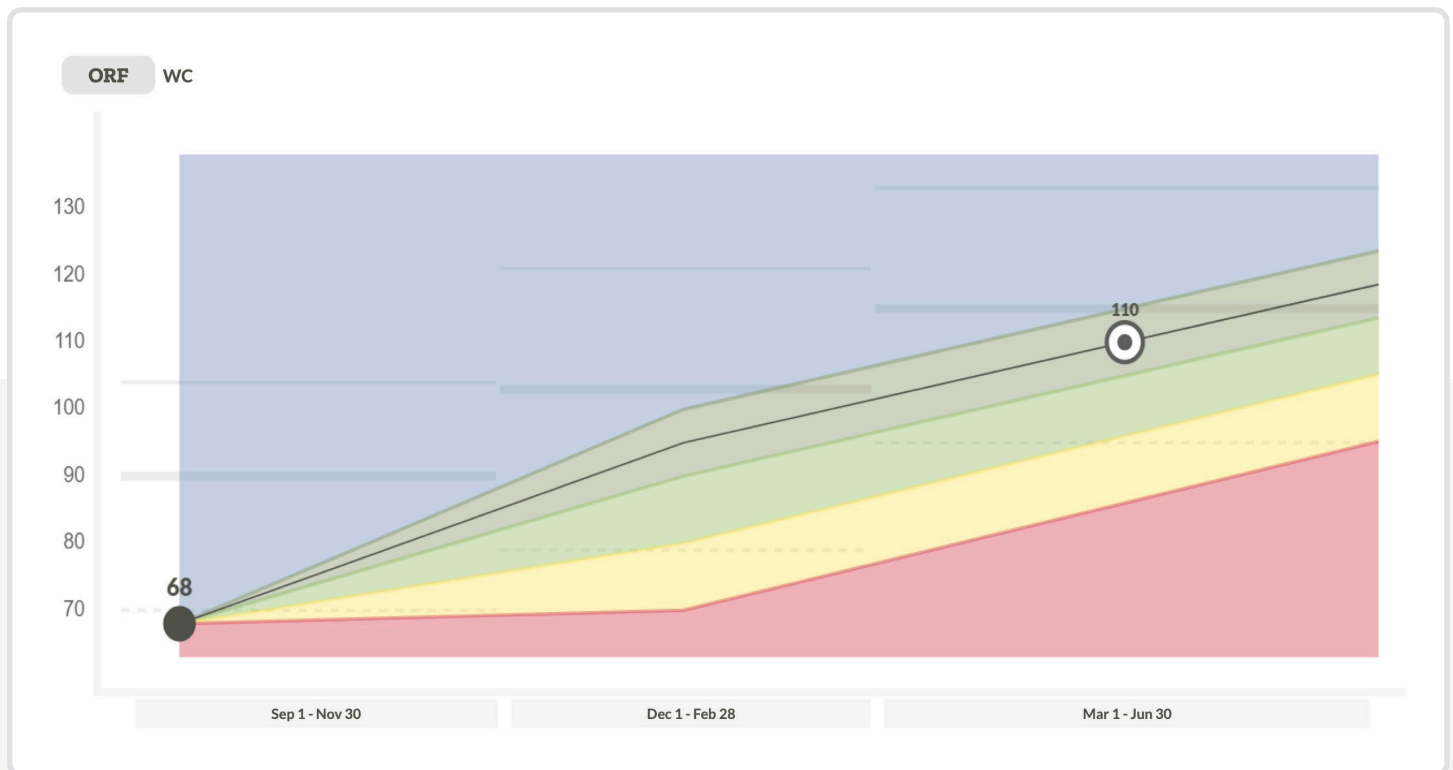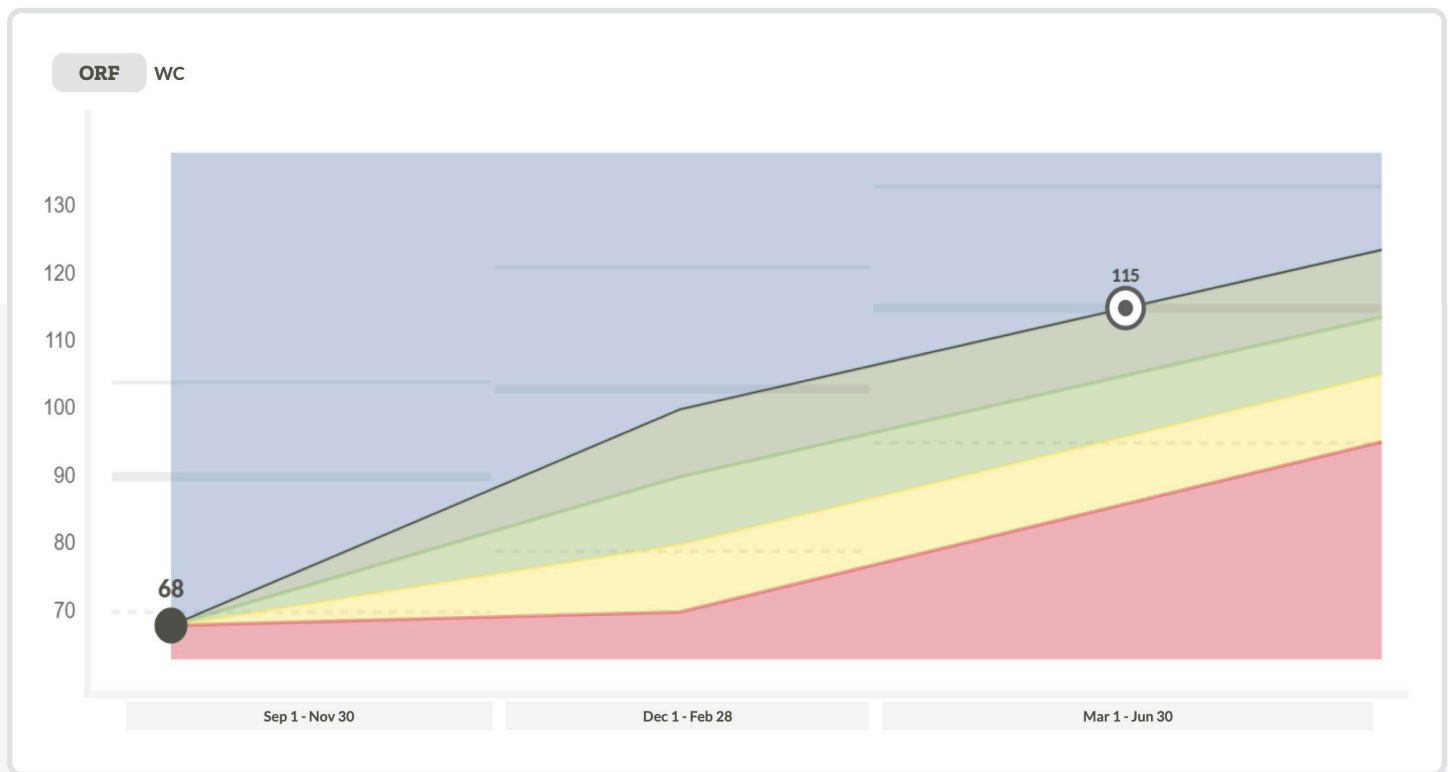**Figure 3.** Miriam's Initial In-Level Goal for ORF Words Correct

**Figure 4.** Miriam's Adjusted In-Level Goal for ORF Words Correct

3   In-Level Goal Setting: Katarina

Katarina is also a fourth-grade student whose skills are Well Below Benchmark. In ALO, the initial goal of 97 ORF Words Correct in fourth-grade material would be in the middle of Above Typical Progress (see Figure 5). Similar to Miriam, that initial goal would result in skills that were still Below Benchmark at the end of the year for Katarina. However, based on Katarina's learning history and additional assessment information, the team decides that adjusting the goal to 115 words correct to meet the end-of-year benchmark would be extremely ambitious and unlikely to be realistically attainable.

Pathways of Progress informed this decision because a goal of 115 words correct would be solidly in the Well Above Typical Progress pathway for Katarina. The team instead decided to plan to support Katarina to meet grade-level expectations during fifth grade (that is, taking 2 years to reach grade-level benchmarks). In the current year, the plan is to reduce the discrepancy between Katarina's skills and grade-level expectations by increasing her skills from Well Below Benchmark to Below Benchmark. In the subsequent year the plan is to continue to increase her skills from Below Benchmark to At Benchmark. The team determines that 97 words correct on ORF would be a meaningful, ambitious, and attainable goal for Katarina consistent with their plan.

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Figure 5. Katarina's Initial In-Level Goal for ORF Words Correct
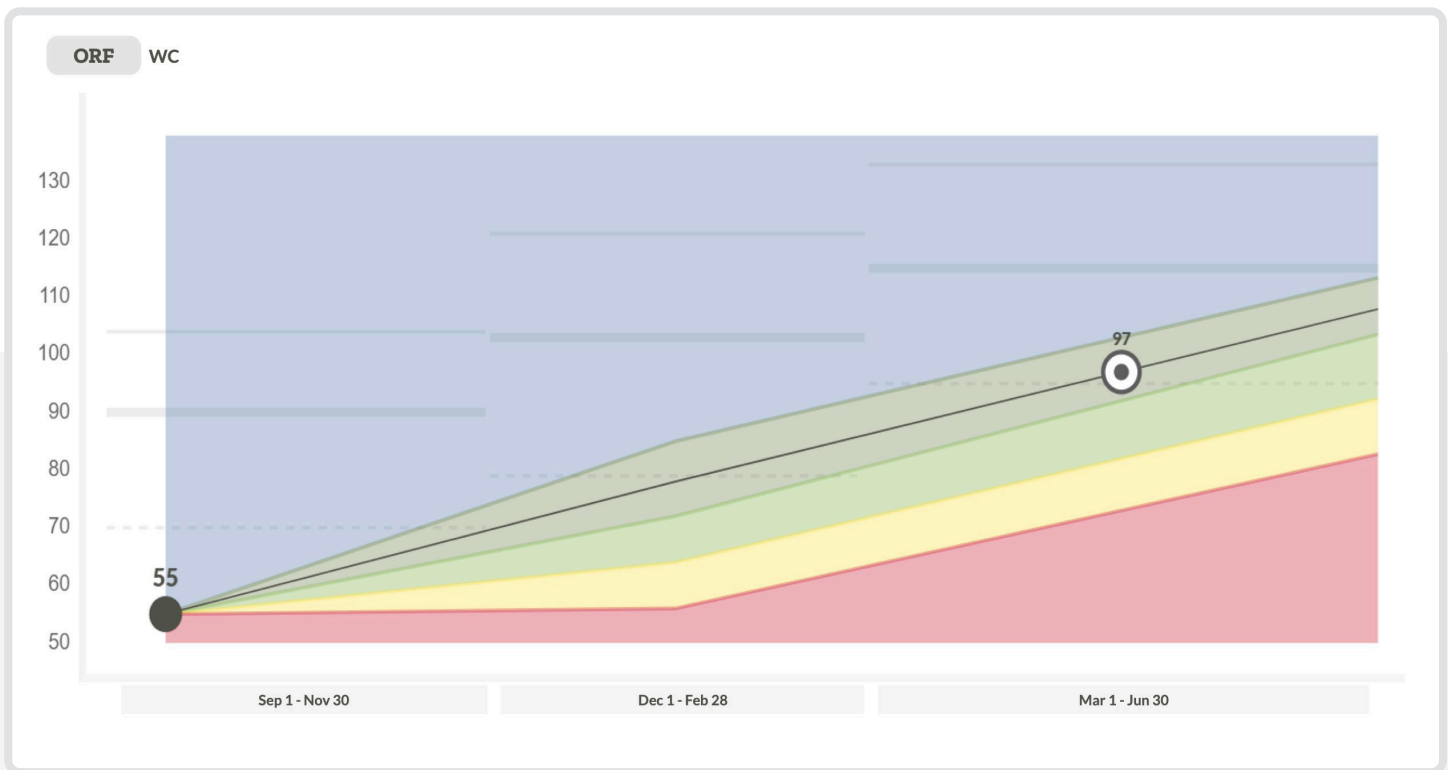
Initial Goals for Out-of-Level Progress Monitoring

While in-level progress monitoring is important for early intervention and prevention, out-of-level progress monitoring is important for the remediation of severe skill deficits and gaps in the student's learning. Out-of-level progress monitoring occurs during a semester or year where the progress monitoring measure is not a part of the benchmark assessments at the target time specified for the goal. For example, progress monitoring for a kindergarten student on FSF from the middle to end of kindergarten would be out-of-level progress monitoring because FSF is not a part of the end-of-kindergarten benchmark assessment.

Similarly, monitoring the progress of a second-grade student with NWF from the beginning to the end of second grade would be out-of-level progress monitoring, as would monitoring the progress of a fourth-grade student in Level 2 ORF. When setting initial goals for in-level progress monitoring, Pathways of Progress and grade-level Benchmarks inform goals that are meaningful, ambitious, and attainable. However, out-of-level Pathways of Progress are not yet available.

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Survey

The Acadience Reading Survey assessment provides detailed recommendations and materials for selecting the optimal level of material for out-of-level progress monitoring. Once the optimal material for out-of-level progress monitoring is selected, we will use the benchmarks that correspond to the out-of-level materials and accelerate the time to achieve them.

For example, if we are monitoring the progress of a fourth-grade student using second-grade material, the second-grade benchmarks would correspond to the out-of-level progress monitoring material. Because a meaningful goal for the student will reduce the discrepancy between their skills and expected skills, we will accelerate the out-of-level benchmarks.

The steps for using accelerated, out-of-level benchmarks for setting an initial goal for out-of-level progress monitoring are:

Step 1   Identify the optimal grade level and assessment material for out-of-level progress monitoring. Acadience Reading Survey is designed for this purpose.

Step 2   Specify the end-of-year, out-of-level benchmark corresponding to the out-of-level material.

Step 3   Accelerate the goal by cutting the time to attain the out-of-level benchmark in half.

The first step is to identify the optimal level to use for out-of-level progress monitoring. The optimal level for progress monitoring should simultaneously illustrate (a) the student's current level of skills, (b) an instructional goal that the student needs to attain, and (c) progress toward the goal.

To illustrate progress, the material must be at a level in which changes in student skills will be apparent. Thus, we would not select material at the student's mastery level, nor would we select material that is too difficult because progress will not be apparent and the student and teacher or interventionist may become discouraged. The progress monitoring level may be the same as the instructional level. However, when monitoring in out-of-grade level materials, use the highest level of material in which change can be shown in skills targeted for instruction. For example, with ORF the optimal progress monitoring level is the highest level of material in which the student reads with at least 90% accuracy, and the student's ORF Words Correct score is above 20 in first-grade material, 40 in second-grade material, or 50 in third- through sixth-grade material. Acadience Reading Survey is a valuable tool to identify the optimal level of assessment material to use for out-of-level progress monitoring.

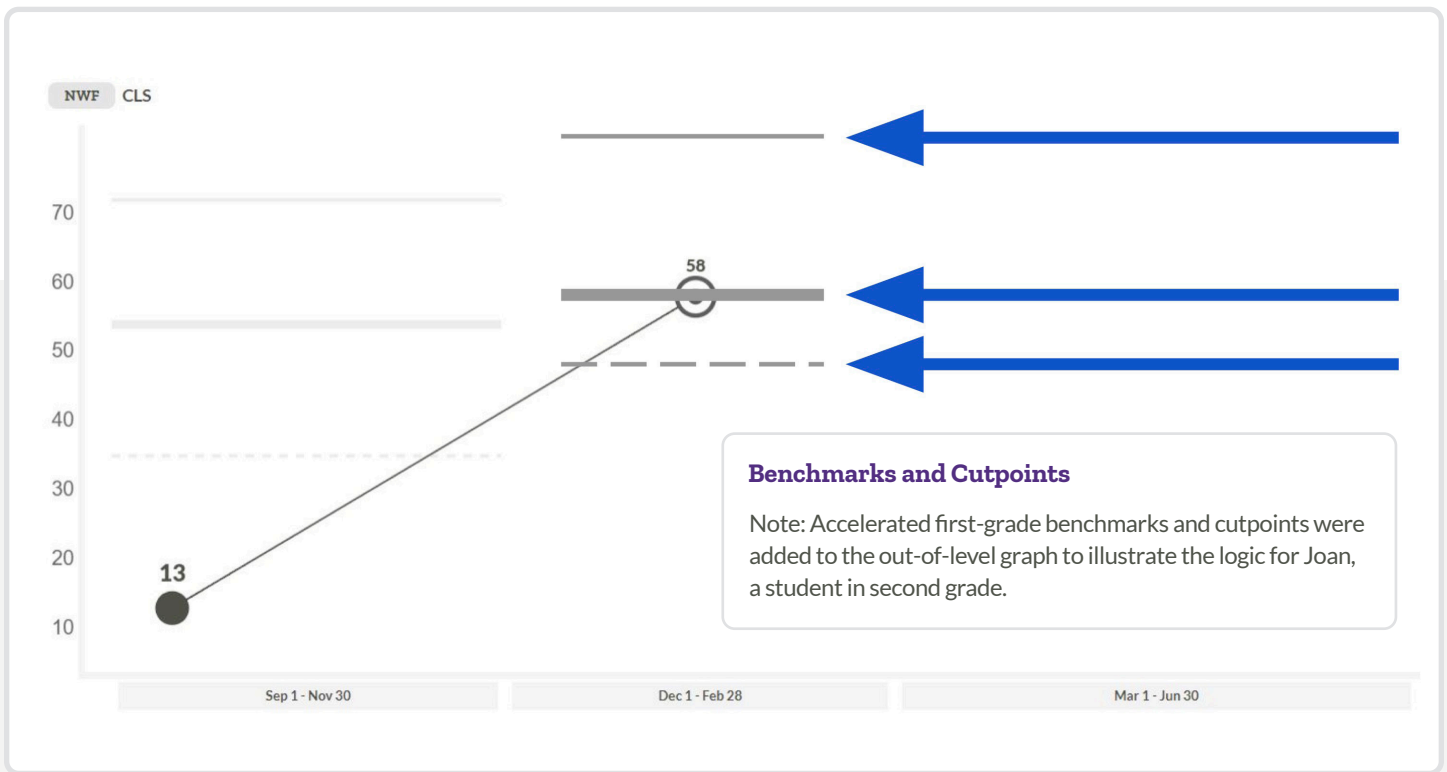*acadience*® reading k-6

Out-of-Level Goal Setting Examples

1 Out-of-Level Goal Setting: Joan

Joan is a second-grade student who has met the kindergarten benchmark on Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) but who has very low skills on basic phonics and the alphabetic principle with a Nonsense Word Fluency Correct Letter Sounds (NWF CLS) score of 13. This score suggests that Joan has a deficit in the first-grade skills of basic phonics and the alphabetic principle and we will set a goal and monitor her progress in out-of-level material, specifically on NWF. Essentially, we desire for Joan to acquire the essential first-grade skills that she is missing as quickly as possible so that she can make adequate progress in second-grade material.
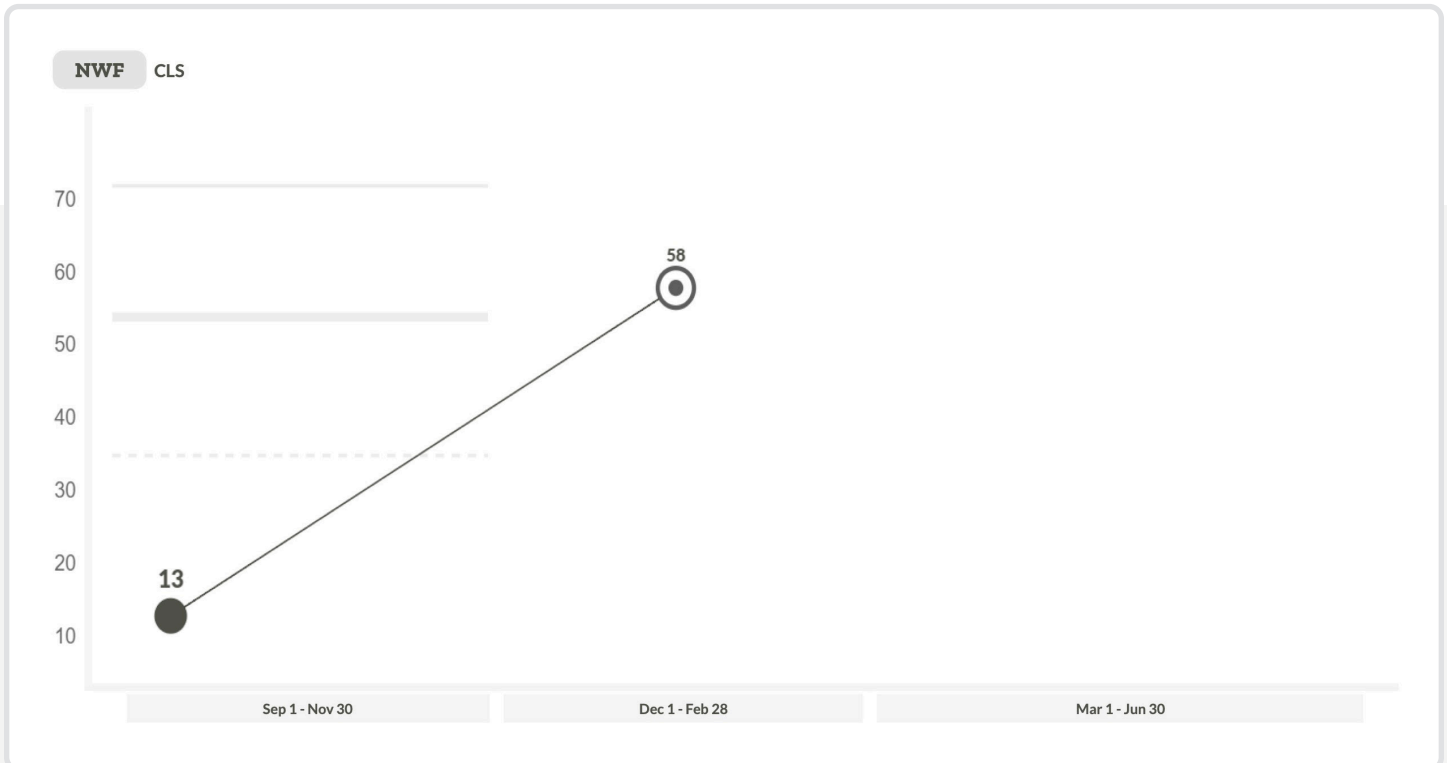
In setting a goal and monitoring progress in out-of-level material, a number of procedures have been advocated. While the procedures vary in complexity, most yield similar results. We recommend a relatively straight-forward procedure of using the benchmark that corresponds to the out-of-level material as a goal, but accelerating progress or making the goal more ambitious by cutting the time to attain that benchmark in half. For Joan, we will set a progress monitoring goal of meeting the first-grade, end-of-year benchmark by the middle of her second-grade year.

 The initial progress monitoring goal and aimline for Joan would be, "When presented with an Acadience NWF form, Joan will use basic phonics skills and understanding of the alphabetic principle to identify at least 62 correct letter sounds by the middle of the year." *Figure* 6 illustrates the procedure for accelerating the benchmarks for an out-of-level initial goal for Joan. *Figure* 7 illustrates the corresponding progress monitoring chart using Acadience Learning Online.

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Figure 6. Annotated Out-of-Level Goal and Progress Monitoring Graph Illustrating Accelerated Benchmarks for NWF Correct Letter Sounds

Benchmarks and Cutpoints

Note: Accelerated first-grade benchmarks and cutpoints were added to the out-of-level graph to illustrate the logic for Joan, a student in second grade.

Figure 7. Out-of-Level Goal and Progress Monitoring for NWF Correct Letter Sounds Using ALO

Considerations for Adapting or Modifying the Initial Goal

The initial goals provide a starting point for a desired individual student-learning goal. The initial goals are designed to be meaningful, ambitious, and attainable based on the student's benchmark status and the desired Pathway of Progress for that student to attain subsequent reading benchmarks. As such, the initial goals will be appropriate for most students. It is always important to use all available information when planning instruction for a student, and this includes setting goals. There are students for whom a teacher or educational team may choose to modify a goal for an individual student.

When making educational decisions for students, including modifying the initial goal, we recommend beginning with the RCS. The RCS is the best predictor of future reading performance and incorporates the broadest sample of behavior including reading for meaning, at an adequate rate, with a high degree of accuracy. Sometimes adjusting the goal for one or more of the components that comprise the composite will result in an RCS that is At or Above Benchmark and that represents the desired amount of progress for the student (for example, Above Typical Progress for students who are Below or Well Below Benchmark). After the RCS, benchmarks for each of the components also provide an important consideration for goal setting. If modifying or adjusting a goal by a few points could meet a benchmark on a component measure, it is well worth considering.

In addition to meeting the grade and time-of-year benchmarks as an overarching goal, it also is desirable to maintain a relative balance in the component skills that comprise the composite. For example, it would not be desirable to meet the ORF Words Correct benchmark but have very low accuracy. Nor would it be desirable to specify a very high goal on ORF Retell, but a comparatively low goal on ORF Words Correct or ORF Accuracy.

Finally, it is important to consider the educational and instructional context, that is, the Multi-Tiered System of Support that is in place. While Pathways of Progress provide a normative framework for understanding Typical Progress and Above Typical Progress across a broad range of schools and classrooms, the pathways do not necessarily provide an indication of what can be achieved with powerful and effective instruction, especially in the early elementary grades. Acadience Reading

data at the systems level (e.g., grade level, school, district) can provide valuable information about the effectiveness of the system of support that is in place. For example, screening data that are collected periodically for all students can be summarized at various levels (e.g., instructional group, classroom, grade level) to determine the proportion of students making adequate progress. The Summary of Effectiveness data view in ALO provides one such framework to assess the general, overall effectiveness of the system of support. If the core instruction or intervention supports being provided are not working for many or most students, some consideration should be given to strengthening the system of support.

In addition to adopting new curricula or programs, professional learning and inservice training may be needed. Situations where an educator is concerned that Typical or Above Typical Progress may not be attainable are an indication that support is needed for the system of instruction. Further professional learning or coaching may assist the interventionist in understanding the essential early literacy and reading skills and how best to teach, model, practice, and provide corrective feedback.

It may also be important to emphasize those aspects of the curriculum or intervention which highlight the essential early literacy and reading skills. If the curriculum or intervention does not provide adequate support for teaching those skills, selecting a research-based intervention may be indicated. If sufficient resources or time are not available to ensure timely mastery of the essential early literacy and reading skills, then problem-solving at the systems level to address those issues becomes the priority.

Summary

Setting meaningful, ambitious, and attainable goals is a critical part of progress monitoring and formative evaluation. Hattie (2009) has reported that progress monitoring and formative evaluation provided the third largest effect size on student outcomes of 138 possible influences that he examined. For students who are Below Benchmark or Well Below Benchmark in their skills, establishing meaningful, ambitious, and attainable goals that will accelerate their progress is a critical part of progress monitoring and formative evaluation.

For additional information on using the ALO goal-setting utility or Pathways of Progress, please see our website at www.acadiencelearning.org/resources/pathways-of-progress or contact us at info@acadiencelearning.org.

Reference

Hattie, J. A. C. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London: Routledge.

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