Be a Data Detective



Presented by Andrea Beachnau

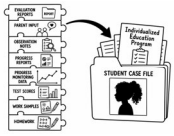
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Collecting the Clues

Understanding how data helps guide Individualized Education Program (IEP) decisions





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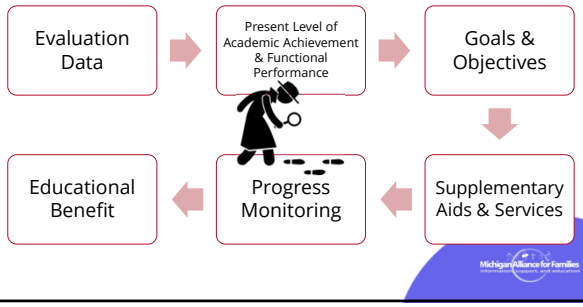
What We'll Investigate Today

- Understanding evaluation data and where it comes from
- Learning what test scores really mean
- Following the data into different parts of the Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Monitoring progress to determine educational benefit
- Learning what questions to ask when information is unclear

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Following the Data Trail



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The Evaluation Investigation

Understanding how schools gather information about a student's strengths and needs



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Detective Tool #1: The Evidence File

Gathering Information from Multiple Sources

- Standardized assessments
- Classroom assessments
- District & benchmark assessments
- Work samples
- Observations
- Parent input
- Teacher input
- Student input
- Progress data

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What Areas Might Be Evaluated?

- Academic Skills
- Communication
- Social & Emotional Skills
- Behavior
- Adaptive/Daily Living Skills
- Motor Skills
- Sensory Needs
- Health
- Transition Skills

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Investigating the Evidence

Are the Right Clues Included?

Case File: What to Look For

- Multiple data sources
- Parent input included
- All concerns evaluated
- Evidence-based conclusions
- Educational impact explained

Interview Questions: What to Ask

- What data supports this?
- Were all concerns evaluated?
- What strengths were identified?
- How does this affect school?
- Is more information needed?

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Cracking the Code

Learning how different types of data help tell the story



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MD4

Detective Tool #2: The Score Decoder

Making Sense of Evaluation Scores

Type of Score	Standard Score	Scaled Score	T-Score	Percentile Rank
Average Score	100	10	50	50th Percentile
Typical Range	85-115	7-13	40-60	30th Percentile
Common Uses	Academics & Cognitive Tests	Skills Area/Subtests	Behavior & Executive Functioning	Overall Comparison to Peers
What It Tells Us	Compared to Same-Aged Peers	Specific Strengths & Needs	Level of Concern or Support Needs (Higher Score May Indicate More Concern)	Compared to Same-Aged Peers

M-STEP: Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (Grades 3-8, 11, 12)

- English Language Arts
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies

MI-ACCESS: Alternate Assessment for students eligible with most significant cognitive disabilities (Grades 3-8, 11, 12)

MD1

MD2

MD3

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Determining Need

One Clue Doesn't Tell the Whole Story

Low Score + Evidence of Impact

Low Reading Score
+
Struggles with reading assignments
+
Similar concerns reported at home
+
Refusal to read aloud in class
+
Difficulty accessing grade-level text



Low Score + Little Evidence of Impact

Low Fine Motor Skill
+
Completing classwork successfully
+
Participating in writing & art independently
+
No concerns from teachers or family

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MD1

Observations: Facts vs Opinions

Objective Observation

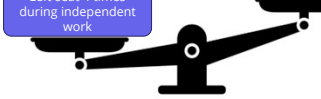
Describes what was seen, heard, counted, and measured

- Raised hand 2 times during a 20-minute lesson
- Completed 3 of 5 assigned tasks without prompting
- Left seat 4 times during independent work

Subjective Statements

Based on opinions, assumptions, or interpretations

- *"Has a bad attitude"*
- *"Refuses to work"*
- *"Always distracted"*
- *"Is lazy"*



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When Home & School Tell Different Stories

Sometimes Information Doesn't Match

Family reports concern
School reports no concern

OR

Family reports no concern
School reports concern

Different Perspectives May Be Related To:

- Different expectations
- Different environments
- Different demands
- Different supports
- Different times of day
- Different people

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Investigating the Evidence

What Story Is the Data Telling?

Case File: What to Look For

- Scores without explanation
- Missing educational impact
- Conclusions without evidence
- Opinions vs. objective data
- Unexplored differences
- Unaddressed concerns

Interview Questions: What to Ask

- What does this mean?
- How does this affect learning?
- What evidence supports this?
- What was observed?
- Do we need more information?

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Building the Case File (PLAAFP)

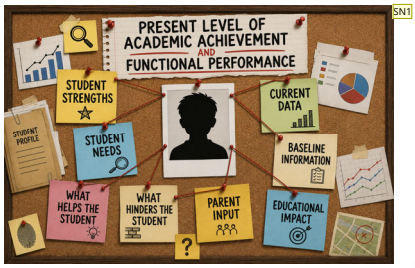
Understanding how evaluation data becomes the foundation of the IEP



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Detective Tool #3: The Student Snapshot

What Should Be Included in the PLAAFP



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Why Educational Impact Matters

- **Data:** Shows Reading Difficulty → **Impact:** Difficulty understanding grade-level text → **Impact:** Increased frustration, avoidance, off-task behavior during reading tasks
- **Data:** Shows Communication Difficulty → **Impact:** Difficulty participating in classroom discussions → **Impact:** Increased behaviors when needs & wants not understood
- **Data:** Shows Self-Regulation Difficulty → **Impact:** Missed instructional time and learning → **Impact:** Difficulty participating in classroom routines

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Following the Data Into the IEP

Evaluation Data → **Present Level of Academic Achievement & Functional Performance** → Goals & Objectives → Supplementary Aids & Services → Progress Monitoring → Educational Benefit

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Investigating the Evidence

Is the Case File Complete?

Case File: What to Look For

- Missing strengths
- Missing parent input
- Missing baseline data
- Unclear educational impact
- Needs without a plan to support
- Scores without context

Interview Questions: What to Ask

- Does this sound like my child?
- What's helping learning?
- What's getting in the way?
- How does this affect school?
- What data supports this?
- How is this need being addressed?

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Following the Trail to the Rest of the IEP

Understanding how identified needs become measurable goals, supports, and services



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Detective Tool #4: The Goal Analyzer

Strong Goals Leave Clues

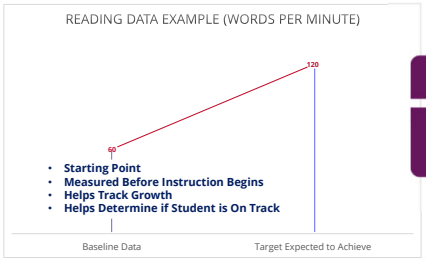


- **Baseline data:** where is the student now?
- **Skill:** what will improve?
- **Target:** what is the expected outcome?
- **Measurement:** how will progress be measured?
- **Timeline:** by when?

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Why Baselines Matter



- **Starting Point**
- **Measured Before Instruction Begins**
- **Helps Track Growth**
- **Helps Determine if Student is On Track**

Detective Toolkit

Use the Same Measuring Tool

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Detective Tool #5: The Support Finder

Accommodations, Modifications, Programs & Services



Accommodations: changes **HOW** a student learns
(ex. extended time, preferential seating, audio supports)

Modifications: changes **WHAT** a student learns
(ex. reduced assignments, alternate curriculum)

Programs & Services: provide specialized instruction and support based on individual needs
(ex. speech therapist, social worker, specialized transportation)

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Investigating the Evidence

Is There a Support for Every Need?

Case File: What to Look For

- Needs without supports
- Missing baseline data
- Vague goals
- Supports that don't match needs
- Missing plan to track progress

Interview Questions: What to Ask

- How is this need being addressed?
- Why was this support selected?
- What is the baseline?
- What does success look like?
- How will we know it's working?
- Are any needs missing?

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Is the IEP Working

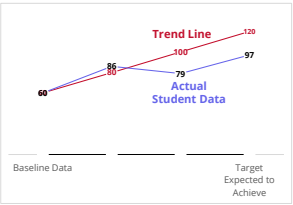
Using data to understand student progress



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Detective Tool #6: The Progress Tracker

Following Progress Over Time



Progress Monitoring May Include:

- Data and progress reports
- Graphs and trend lines
- Work samples
- Teacher-made tests
- Observations data
- Service logs

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Meaningful Progress vs Minimal Progress

Meaningful Progress

- Data shows growth
- Student is moving toward goals
- Instruction is helping
- Skills are improving



Minimal Progress

- Little change over time
- Same concerns year after year
- Goals repeatedly rewritten
- Data shows little growth



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Investigating the Evidence

Is the Student Making Meaningful Progress?

Case File: What to Look For

- Progress without data
- Little growth over time
- Supports not helping
- Missed or unused supports
- Same concerns year after year
- Goals not on track

Interview Questions: What to Ask

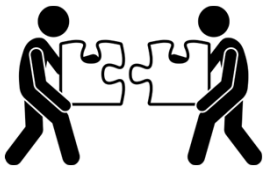
- Can I see the data?
- Is my child on track?
- Is this support helping?
- What evidence shows growth?
- Do we need to adjust the IEP?
- What should we try next?

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Solving the Case

Putting the clues together to understand and support the whole child



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The Data Detective Checklist

When reviewing an evaluation, IEP, or progress report, ask:

- ✓What need is being identified?
- ✓What data supports it?
- ✓How does it affect learning and participation
- ✓How is it being addressed?
- ✓How will progress be measured?
- ✓Is the student making meaningful progress?



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Follow the Clues
Look beyond scores and labels

Understand the Data Story
Look for patterns, connections, and educational impact

Ask Questions
Seek clarification when information is unclear

Participate as an IEP Team Member
Your observations and input matter

Focus on Meaningful Progress
Use data to determine whether the IEP is working





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