

# THE CURRENT



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## *Director's Report* *By Kim Gibbons, Ph.D., Executive Director*

### **Assessment Practices Across SCRED: Where are we, and how did we get here?**

It would be hard to find any staff person across the SCRED districts who would say that we are lacking in student data. In fact, we have reached a point where we have so much student data available to us that it becomes mind-boggling to try to sort it all out and occasionally make sense of contradictory information. As a whole, the field of education is mired in the accountability era. It can be very easy to lose sight of the big ideas. Why do we give the measures we give? How is the information used? What are the limitations of the data we collect? And most importantly, how can we use data for instructional decision-making to improve outcomes for students? At the same time, we need to consider the four purposes of assessment: screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, and evaluating system outcomes.

When I first started at SCRED in 1995, statewide accountability tests did not exist. Computer adapted tests were not widely available, and there were not easy ways to manage student assessment data. At the same time, we knew that it was important to conduct regular screening of all students and collect progress-monitoring data to validate the effectiveness of instruction and intervention programs with some students. My predecessors Gary Germann and Chris McHugh found a gold mine at the University of MN –just a mere 55 minutes down I35! What they found were simple, quick, and inexpensive measures that could be used to screen all students and progress monitor at-risk students.

At the time, these measures were called Curriculum Based Measures (CBM). CBM's were developed by Stan Deno and his colleagues at the University of MN, and the idea was pretty simple: create simple indicators of academic competence that could capture the overall academic strength of an individual student at a given point in time,

*Director's Report – continued*

and then use these data to track growth over time. Anyone who has ever had a baby knows that all babies receive a rating of their general health right after birth. This rating, known as the Apgar rating, uses a 10-point scale. Babies receive 2 points for being pink all over, two for crying, two for taking vigorous breaths, two for moving all limbs, and 2 for having a heart rate that exceeded 100. This quick assessment of overall health allowed obstetricians to screen babies that might need more support and evaluate whether the additional support was effective. Stan Deno developed academic measures that function in the same way. These measures are very similar to what we now use in the Aimsweb program. For example, Oral Reading Fluency (Words Correct per Minute) was found to be an excellent predictor of overall reading achievement, including comprehension, and it is extremely sensitive to change. While ORF does not tell us every detail about student reading achievement, we have confidence that the measure is highly correlated with the broad domain of reading, and we know that we can intervene with a comprehension intervention, and the measure will tell us whether this intervention is working. Despite over 35 years of research, many myths and misconceptions exist about these measures.

The biggest misconception that is still alive is that CBM-Reading (Oral Reading Fluency) is used because our goal is to have students read as fast as they can and that all interventions should focus on having students read faster. The goal of reading is to have students read with appropriate rate, accuracy, and expression (prosody) so they can construct meaning from text. The reason students read for one minute is because we only need a one-minute sample of reading to make an accurate prediction. We also time the task so that we can compare scores across time and compare across students.

We measure ORF because it is (a) an indicator of overall reading achievement, (b) really quick to administer, and (c) a great tool for monitoring progress. If we have a student who scores “below target” on ORF, we need to figure out why. Some students are slow (below target) but accurate (95% or greater). These students usually benefit from some type of fluency-based intervention. Other students are slow and inaccurate (less than 95% accurate). These students typically need more diagnostic information on where skill deficits exist with decoding. Giving these students a “fluency intervention” like repeated reading wouldn’t be advised because they would end up practicing making lots of errors. Some students are fluent (above target) but make lots of errors. Other students are fluent and accurate, yet they still struggle with comprehension. The real challenge is figuring out WHY students are having reading difficulty and matching interventions to student need. Once we have done that, we can use ORF to monitor progress!

SCRED districts have been using the Aimsweb program since about the year 2000 for the primary purposes of screening, progress monitoring, and evaluating system outcomes. Around that time, we became aware of another test called the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). The MAP is a longer achievement test than CBM’s and is administered via the computer. The test is an adaptive test meaning that students are tested above or below their grade level depending on the accuracy of

*Director's Report – continued*

of their answers. Students receive a RIT score after each administration that can be compared over time and used to evaluate growth. We advocated for the use of MAP because we thought it provided good diagnostic information that could be useful for instructional planning, and because it provided an additional source of information that could be used for decision-making. It is also a great tool for monitoring outcomes at the system level and is useful for assisting in course placement decisions at the secondary level. While the MAP is a great test, I fear that people have turned it into the “Holy Grail” and are using a single test score on the MAP to make important decisions about students – often times erroneous decisions. We need to always remember that error is always present in any assessment measure that we give a student. The score that a student receives on the MAP or an Aimsweb measure is not the students “true score.” The student’s true score is always within a range of above and below the obtained score. So, when I hear that students’ MAP OR Aimsweb scores are used to determine which students receive intervention support, I become concerned. I want to make sure that we are always using multiple sources of information to inform our decision. For example, let’s suppose that Jimmy, a fifth grader, reads 145 words read correct per minute (Fall Target is 125) and a score of 201 on the MAP (Fall Target is 211). Should Jimmy automatically receive a Tier 2 intervention? NO! Now many of you might say, wait, Jimmy is at “high risk” based on his MAP score. However, what if we go back and look at Jimmy’s previous MAP scores and find that he has been above target in previous years. His Aimsweb score is well-above target, and his teacher reports he is making super progress within the reading curriculum. In fact, Jimmy has been in an advanced reading group for many years. That information should cause us to question the data, and use multiple sources of data to make an informed decision. We should always look at multiple sources of data and ask, “Do these data make sense?” before making important decisions.

Finally, with the change to the new English Language Arts (ELA) standards (Common Core), we have all seen first hand how rigorous the target scores have become. Most SCRED districts do not have the resources to provide supplemental and intensive instruction to all students below target. There are simply too many students that are scoring below target and too few instructional resources. Most districts will need to identify a percentage of students to target for intervention (i.e., students below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile) AND work on continuing to improve the core instruction that all students receive. The measurement tools we use will help us gauge our progress.

In summary, please take a moment to reflect on a few things. Review what measures are being given in your building and the purpose for these measures. Ask yourself whether your grade level and problem solving teams are using multiple sources of information to make decisions about which students need additional support. Talk with your team about what to do when the data “don’t make sense.” And finally, be sure to access the SCRED website at [www.scred.k12.mn](http://www.scred.k12.mn) for great information on the measures we give, how they can be used, and tools to help your teams accelerate student learning!

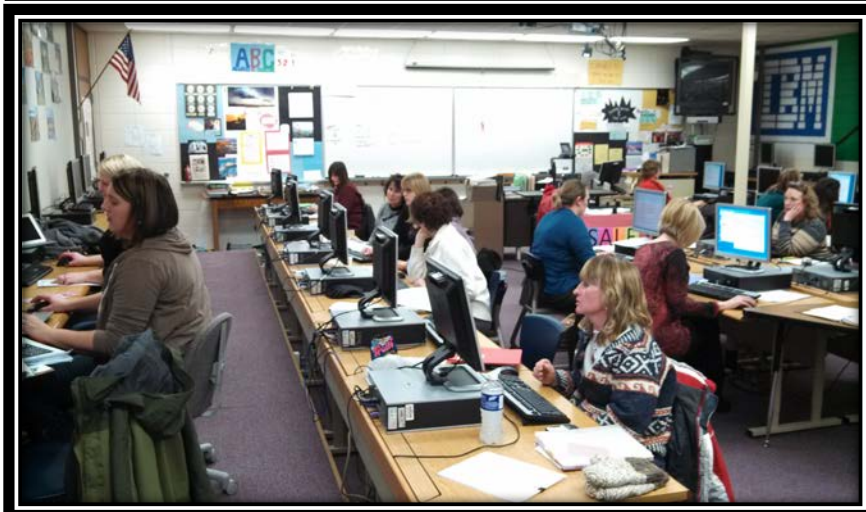
*UNIQUE LEARNERS' UPDATE*  
*By Jamie Nord, Director of Special Education,*  
*Nicole Jack and Nicole Woodward, Unique*  
*Learners' Managers*

## SCRED Paperwork Parties

On January 16, 2014, SCRED held the second Paperwork Party of the year. The turnout was terrific! Between the North (Hinckley) and South (North Branch) locations, 27 member district staff were in attendance with 13 SCRED staff available for consultation. Member district staff appreciated the night to get caught up on paperwork in a fun and supportive environment!

### SAVE THE DATE

Please join us for the next SCRED Paperwork Party on April 9, 2014 from 4-8pm. More details to follow. We would love to see you there!



# Unique Learners' Update - continued

## SCRED CIMP 2014

On January 22 through January 24, 2014, the SCRED Training Center was bustling with School Psychologists, Collaborative Planners and Unique Learners' Managers reviewing files for SCRED CIMP 2014. The Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process (CIMP) is designed to provide case managers with objective, meaningful feedback on due process paperwork, as well as inform professional learning needs at the individual, building, district, and SCRED levels. CIMP results will be available as soon as possible.

The first annual CIMP awards ceremony was held at SCRED on January 24, 2014. Award recipients are pictured to below.

Additional CIMP awards will be distributed upon the release of CIMP results. Stay tuned!

### **CIMP MVP (Most Valuable Programmer)**

*Recipient: Stu Harder*

For the creation of and advancements in the SCRED CIMP database

### **World Record Number of CIMP Reviews**

*Recipient: Marleen Zak*

For the countless number of CIMP reviews over the years - Happy CIMP Retirement, Marleen!





*Instructional Services Update*  
*By Adam Lekwa,*  
*Instructional Services Coordinator*

It is February, which means it is time to start thinking about next year's schedule, professional development offerings, and budget planning. The phrase "budget planning" may not inspire much excitement, but at SCRED the process can be exactly that: it is an opportunity to think critically about the process of instruction, to move from ideas to actions, and to continue to help our systems continue to adapt to the changing needs of students.

Prior to this process we review multiple sources of information to guide our planning, ranging from trends in achievement discussed at district-wide data meetings to feedback from SCRED and district staff and results of surveys distributed to staff and administrators in all SCRED schools. For this short update we wanted to share a summary of feedback and survey responses we received recently. These surveys, along with other sources of information, help us understand changing needs and better plan for the next school year.

**Elementary**

- Responses regarding professional development for topics within the context of elementary grades suggested great interest in more training in mathematics interventions.

**Secondary**

- SIM Strategies, which can be applied to a variety of skills in literacy or functional academics, was a very popular item with our survey respondents.
- When asked to rate needs for training in academic interventions, many respondents rated mathematics as the area in which they felt most need.
- Respondents also suggested needs for professional development focused on intervention strategies for students struggling with literacy skills in secondary settings.

**All ages**

- Instructional shift to meet state standards, as well as college and career readiness standards.
- Effective differentiation in the classroom.
- Professional development on advanced topics within progress monitoring.

These responses have helped us begin to shape our plans for next year in the midst of winter budget planning meetings. We are thankful for the time and thought that went into each of the responses we received to these surveys, and are looking forward to what promises to be an exciting 2014-15 school year.

*Outcomes Services Update*  
*By Kindle Perkins Kabat,*  
*Outcomes Manager*



The SCRED Outcomes Services has had a busy first half of the 2013-14 school year! The Winter GOM Benchmark testing window ended on Friday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, and the optional Winter MAP window ended on Friday, January 31<sup>st</sup>. At the time of this newsletter, Outcomes was busy loading the GOM data into Aimsweb and TIES. The winter MAP data does not typically get loaded into TIES.

TIES iCue and Cognos have historically included color coding to reflect student risk level for being on track academically. Up until Fall of 2013, a color of blue was given to students who scored at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile on a particular measure. As college readiness is soon to become the accepted measure of accountability in K-12 education, early identification toward this goal is essential for the success of students and the effectiveness of instruction (Theaker & Johnson, unpublished manuscript). NWEA is conducting research to link ACT scores associated with college success with Measures of Academic Success (MAP) scores from NWEA. Based on the ongoing research conducted by NWEA, TIES has changed the criteria for Blue for the following measures:

**MAP Reading (grades 2 through 10)**

**MAP Math (grades 2 through 10)**

**Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) (grades 2 through 6)**

Currently, the Blue color is set to predict to “college readiness” as defined by research conducted by NWEA. NWEA defines “college readiness” as: Students scoring in this range are predicted to earn a score of 24 on the ACT. This is the score identified by the study as indicating “college readiness” at the State University Level. A score of 24 on the ACT is associated with a minimum of a 50% chance of earning at least a B in typical first-year credit-bearing college courses at the State University Level. Research indicates that students who earn first-year grades of B or higher, on average, are much more likely to complete a postsecondary degree. A 50% chance of earning a B corresponds approximately to a 75% chance of earning at least a C or higher.

Spring is getting closer! (Although the weather doesn’t show much sign of spring yet!). Please remember that the Spring benchmark testing window for MAP will occur earlier in the spring, and before the Spring benchmark testing window for GOMs. Please take note of the testing dates listed below:

<b>Spring MAP</b>	<b>Grades 2 – 8+</b>	<b>March 12 – April 9</b>
<b>Spring GOM</b>	<b>Grades K – 12</b>	<b>April 28 – May 9</b>

SCRED Outcomes is participating on a Minnesota Assessment Group task force that will focus on working with NWEA to remediate testing difficulties prior to the Spring MAP testing window.

*Social Behavior Update*  
*By Christine Matthew and Holly Grams,*  
*Social Behavior Collaborative Planners*

With the increase of mental health and behavioral needs for students, it is important to focus on the significance of creating a positive school climate and to address these increasing needs. Arne Duncan, US Secretary of Education has released a guidance package that is designed to help educators, school leaders, parents, and communities improve student behavior. This package focuses on the importance of keeping students in school and out of trouble.

All teachers and students should feel safe in schools and to accomplish this Arne Duncan emphasizes the importance of focusing on supportive and preventive practices. These practices may include tiered supports such as systems like PBIS, promoting social and emotional learning, and providing ongoing training for school personnel in the area of social behavior. In 2011, across the United States, 3 million out of school suspensions and 100,000 expulsions occurred. Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of special education students and minority students make up these staggering numbers. The high number of suspensions and expulsions in the United States prompted the creation of a document titled “Guiding Principals: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline” which was released by the U.S. Department of Education in January of 2014. The guide emphasizes the importance of not removing students for nonviolent behaviors but to instead focus on preventative approaches and targeted services for these students. The following is a list of 3 guiding principals schools should consider when working to improve school climate and discipline: (1) Create positive climates and focus on prevention; (2) Develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors; and (3) Ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement.

Schools within the St. Croix River Education District have worked hard to implement many positive supports in place for students to help with growing social behavior needs. The newest initiative across the districts includes implementing school-wide mental health screeners. 5 elementary schools within the St. Croix River Education District have decided to participate in using mental health screeners in their schools to better support the needs of students. The purpose of this screener is to gather information that can be used to identify students demonstrating elevated levels of behavioral difficulty, and who may therefore be considered in need of targeted behavioral interventions and supports within the general education setting. These screeners can also identify particular areas of concern for each identified student in the interest of determining which interventions may be most appropriate in supporting their needs. It is believed that getting students targeted services to meet their behavioral needs will lead to improvement in both their behavioral and academic functioning. We are very excited about these screeners and are hoping for great outcomes for students.



*Early Childhood Update*  
*By Karen Wolner,*  
*Early Childhood Collaborative Planner*

Early childhood is excited to announce that we finally have normative data for measuring and assessing mathematical skills in young children! Since 2007/2008, SCRED districts have been piloting the Preschool Numeracy Indicators (PNI) developed by Robin Hojnoski, Ph.D. and Randy Floyd, Ph.D. at the University of Memphis. Last summer, the University of Minnesota developed normative data for the PNI, so we now have a system in place to fully implement an RtI model in early childhood mathematics. Starting in January 2014, during our winter benchmark data collection, districts for the first time will have color-coded spreadsheets to identify children who are on target, close to target, or far from target. A round of applause goes to Kindle Perkins Kabat, Sandy Benson, and Joan Rustad for all their hard work in getting this ready!

This past fall we also added an additional tool to continue our seamless measurement system from Birth – Grade 12 with fluency measures. Early Childhood Special Education Teachers, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, and our Physical Medical Consulting Teacher were trained on the Early Movement Indicator (EMI). The EMI was created by a team of researchers at Juniper Gardens Children’s Project at the University of Kansas. “The EMI is one means of checking children’s growth toward the important general outcome of being able to move in a fluent and coordinated manner to play and participate in home, school, and community settings.” For more information on the early childhood General Outcomes Measures go to: [www.igdi.ku.edu](http://www.igdi.ku.edu); or [www.myigdis.com](http://www.myigdis.com)

*SCRED Announcements:  
Winter 2014*

SCRED welcomes Amber Andrews as our new receptionist! When you call SCRED, Amber is the voice on the other end of the phone. When you visit SCRED, Amber is the first face you will see!

Joyce Johnson, SCRED Bookkeeper, is retiring after 20 years! We will be hosting a retirement party for Joyce on March 31<sup>st</sup> from 3:30 – 5:30. Stop by for some refreshments and the opportunity to say goodbye to Joyce.

Suzie Hischer is the new Finance Manager at SCRED. She started in mid-February, and we are so excited to have her on board!

SCRED is currently looking for school psychologists and a Low Incidence Collaborative Planner. Spread the word. Employment information may be found on the SCRED website at [www.scred.k12.mn.us](http://www.scred.k12.mn.us)