

E-6: Evaluate and keep track of student performance

Track mastery of objectives

Record results promptly so that the data can inform your short and long-term planning

Why is prompt tracking important?

The only way to know if students are learning and making progress to the big goal is to track their performance on assessments. Tracking allows you to clearly organize student results in order to:

- Quickly analyze data and identify the progress and gaps in student and class performance (CIE)
- Adjust instructional choices to push students toward achieving mastery (CIE)
- Motivate students to work hard by showing them their progress and what they can do to improve (I-1)
- Communicate student progress to student influencers (I-6)

Read testimonials on the importance of tracking below.

What does it mean to track effectively?

What it is	What it is not
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recording results the same day as you give the assessments • Always recording student results by objective • An essential activity for developing effective instruction and leading students to dramatic achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recording data into your tracking system every once in awhile, or forgetting to do so altogether • Only recording overall test scores into the tracking system • Only a “TFA thing,” or a secondary, less important, or “nice to have if I have time” activity

How can I track effectively?

- **Review your tracking system** – make sure it is ready to go and will allow you to record student and class mastery on individual objectives. [Read about how to develop your tracking system](#)
- **Commit to making tracking a consistent habit** - avoid letting tracking become an afterthought. Answer these guiding questions to help develop a tracking routine:
 - *What computer will you most likely work at to enter your students’ progress into your tracking system? If you don’t have access to a computer, how else do you think you might do your tracking?*
 - *What time of the day (before school, during your off period, your lunch break, after school, in the evening) is best for you to take 20 – 40 minutes to enter your students’ data? Time will vary depending on how many students you have, but block off time in your planning systems*
 - *What days of the week (every day, every other day, on weekends) will you commit to tracking your students’ progress? The most effective teachers track student performance the same day as they give an assessment*
 - *If you find that this plan is not working, what steps will you take to create a more workable plan?*

E-6: Evaluate and keep track of student performance

What do other teachers say about the benefits of tracking?

Rebecca Cohen (Baltimore '00)

Many of our kids are on a low skill level, but a big part of their poor performance on these tests is that they don't believe in themselves. If they can go into the benchmark test saying to themselves, "I know everything that's on here," then that confidence will go a long way in improving their scores. Confidence is so important to student achievement. True, our tracking system lets my colleague and I know what to teach and it proves that our students are learning, but what we really like is that we can say to our students, "Look how you're constantly growing." Sometimes one kid misses an objective, sometimes the whole class does; but either way, this information is invaluable in showing me what I need to teach to whom. It makes me a better educator.

To put it quite simply, my tracking system is important because I know where I'm heading and my kids know where they're heading. Also, the highlighting process helps create the culture of achievement I strive for in my classroom. I can't buy into my students' education for them; they have to know within themselves that what they are learning is important – and because of my tracking system my students are 100% bought into what we do in class. Of course, when I first introduce the tracking system I always have some students challenge me. But, I stick with the system because the first time students master a skill and get to highlight it on their sheet, they're hooked.

Tracking applies to all educators. The fact is, you're the boss of your classroom and you need to know what your kids still need to learn.

Some of you might feel tracking is just a "TFA thing," and that your Program Director only wants you to track your students' progress so that Teach For America can use the data as proof that our mission is succeeding. Well, first of all, we desperately need to prove that our mission is succeeding! And while Teach For America is indeed "pushing" tracking, Teach For America teachers are not the only ones who do it. I developed my system with a non-TFA teacher and have passed it on to another non-TFA veteran teacher who loves it. Tracking applies to all educators. The fact is, you're the boss of your classroom and you need to know what your kids still need to learn. If you're not going to get this information through tracking, how else will you?

Bethany Mills (New Jersey '02)

- My spreadsheet gives me specific information to show my students, and it's been a **great motivator** for my kids who don't get very high grades. I can physically *show* them that they are leaving my class with specific information and skills, which gives a great sense of accomplishment for kids who are working at all levels. Even those kids who come to school once a month (I'm sure you have some too) still have that one X in their spreadsheet.
- Since they see individual growth, my students don't compete with other students grade-wise. They can feel good about themselves and – very importantly – they see how their **hard work really CAN pay off**. Each new X is concrete proof that success can come by putting in small chunks of effort.
- This system also allows me to **communicate progress to parents**. If parents are disappointed with a student's grade, I can show them how hard their child is working and everything he *has* learned about science.
- Of course, this quantitative data allows me to **see whether or not I am reaching my big goal** and making significant gains. At the end of the year when I'm evaluating myself, I can look at a sheet of paper and there's a number, and because of that number, I can say, "Yes, I made significant gains." It's an amazing feeling.
- On a more personal level, I also think my system has **improved MY morale** as compared to last year. Last year I based whether or not my students were doing well on my mood at the end of the day, rather than proof that they were actually learning something. This year, I can clearly SEE whether my students are learning what I wanted them to learn each day. I *know* I'm doing my job because I have the evidence I need to help my students make significant gains. That light bulb is really shining now.

Justin May (Greater New Orleans '00)

I simply *had* to make time to grade and enter data from written assessments, analyze the data for trends, prepare station groupings, write my assessments, etc. There were times that I gave an assessment and never looked at it. That didn't

E-6: Evaluate and keep track of student performance

help anything. There were times that I gave an assessment and graded it, but never put it into the system. That didn't help either. But when I consistently made time for the system, I could see the progress my students were making to the end of year goal and I was motivated to use every bit of instructional time to get that goal. As harsh as this may sound, when I wasn't tracking, I wasn't teaching.

Erin Clarkin (Rio Grande Valley '00)

Overall, tracking my students' progress was incredibly valuable because it allowed students to see where they were and what they needed to do. Also, it gave me so much lesson-planning information. For example, I could look up at my wall and immediately see that I did not need to cover addition of decimals, since all of my students had mastered objective #6. It took some work on my part to set up, but the time-saving benefits throughout the year were immense.

I'm going to keep working on a way to track my students' ability to analyze problems and explain math processes in a way that will inform my instruction. If you think tracking will be too difficult or that it's just not something you can prioritize right now, remember, if you don't know where your students currently stand, there is no way to know how to move forward with them.