Office of the Independent Monitor
October 24, 2012

Study of the Accuracy of the "300 Report" for Monitoring Service Delivery

Outcome 13, Services, of the Modified Consent Decree (MCD) requires the District to provide evidence that at least 93% of special education services specified by students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) were delivered. The outcome also requires that 85% of the services meet the frequency and duration requirements specified in the IEPs.

This outcome relies exclusively on the ability to measure service delivery based on data entered in the electronic Welligent system.[1] At the inception of this outcome, the parties (plaintiff's counsel and District) agreed to determine progress through a scientific study[2] based on an examination of service records for a sample of students.[3] For each of the past nine years, service provision has been measured using this approach, which has generated estimates for the population of students in special education across the District. While this method has been effective, it has two primary limitations: using a defined period for measuring service delivery (eight weeks) and basing the estimates on a sample of students (versus the entire population).

The "300 Report" is a District report for monitoring service delivery using information from providers entered into the electronic Welligent system's service tracking logs. For the purpose of this review, the report was utilized since it is used centrally by managers to monitor service providers. These report allows managers to view the total amount of services provided when compared to what is owed (based on the IEP) for a specified timeframe.

This report enables the District to monitor service delivery for all students over the entire school year. The report differs from how services are measured for the Services Study, as the focus of the "300 Report" is on minutes delivered for meeting the duration[4] requirement and does not include a count of sessions delivered (frequency). More importantly, each report demonstrates capacity to prevent systemic non-compliance of service provision, a major requirement of the MCD.

Over the past year, the District has been developing and refining the "300 Report." This study was designed to validate its accuracy and to identify potential areas for improvement.

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[1] Welligent is a District-wide web-based software system used for online IEPs and tracking related services (such as speech and language, physical therapy) provided to students in special education.
[2] This study has been conducted collaboratively through the American Institutes for Research, the District's Office of Data and Accountability and the Office of the Independent Monitor.
[3] There are more than 82,000 students with disabilities (SWD) in the District receiving a variety of special education instructional (e.g., resource specialist program) and designated instructional services (DIS) (e.g., counseling, speech and language, occupational therapy, etc.), with over 4,000 providers.
[4] The District uses the duration requirement as the measure of compliance for service delivery.

Methods

To validate the accuracy of the District's "300 Report" utilized for monitoring service delivery, the tracking logs of a sample of students from the Services Study were reviewed.

Sample Design

The Services Study analyzed the records of 4,250 students representing 7,712 services across 11 service categories. It sampled 43 cases per service category from the Service Study records, for a total of 473 services. Twenty students were determined to be inactive (not enrolled) at the time of the study's timeframe (February 1 through March 31), and therefore were dropped, resulting in an analyzed sample consisting of 453 services.

Of the records reviewed, 76 students were excluded due to the following: services ended prior to the timeframe; a log was provided for a service different than the one sampled; no log was provided; or the student was not included in the "300 Report." It is important to point out that 53 (70%) of the cases dropped could be attributed to changes in IEPs or student movement, which is a limitation of the study and sampling. This resulted in 377 services being reviewed.

Data Collection and Analysis

The "300 Report" was provided by the District to the study team with specific parameters to match the eight-week period being reviewed. The report included totals for the number of minutes that were to be delivered (target) based on the students' IEPs during the selected time period, actual minutes delivered, minutes credited for student absences, and minutes counted but not credited for provider absences. The report calculates the time delivered by adding the actual service time and the minutes credited for student absences. The report then calculates the percentage of service minutes delivered in relation to the target. The report also includes information of minutes delivered over the target.

Service tracking logs were provided for all services in the Service Study sample for the months of January through April. The logs for the validation study were extracted from the same database, and files were created for each student and/or service.

To validate the accuracy of the report, the logs were reviewed and the number of minutes provided were calculated and compared to the minutes delivered on the "300 Report." Additionally, the number of sessions/days reported as student and/or provider absences were documented by the study team. This information was compared to the time reported for absences, to see how these minutes were being calculated by the program. Lastly, the review identified cases with both over- and under-delivered services to determine if this was due to calculation/programming errors, or whether it was an accurate reflection of service provision.

Findings

Overall, the review found high levels of accuracy as only four out of 377 (1.0%) showed discrepancies between the provider logs and time reported as actually delivered in the "300 Report." While these four cases showed services having been delivered and all met or exceeded the target time calculated in both the logs and the reports, the "300 Report" showed a slightly higher number of minutes delivered than those calculated from the logs.

The review found 86 students reported as receiving more services than targeted[5], with 23 (25.8%) cases showing over-delivery due to student absences. While student absences are given credit as a service provided for both the Services Study and in the "300 Report," this shows a limitation of the Welligent service tracking system for tracking make-up sessions. The inability to distinguish make-up sessions on the logs results in services looking as if they were over-delivered, and does not accurately reflect a provider's effort to reschedule and provide a make-up session. Programming errors were found in five cases for students with behavior intervention implementation (BII) services, as time was over-calculated due to time being credited for student absences. In these cases, daily absences were credited for time much greater than the daily instructional time. In two cases, an absence was credited for an entire week. This was not a problem with the provider incorrectly entering data, but rather the program's calculation of time. This was only noted for students with BII services and does not appear to be a problem with other service types.

The review also noted 15 cases (17.4% of the 86) showing over-delivery was for services prescribed on an annual basis. This may be a limitation of the "300 Report" when examining a brief timeframe, since target minutes are prorated. For example, a student with a service prescription of 400 minutes per year may be expected to receive an average of 40 minutes a month, and the provider may have provided three 40-minute sessions within the eight-week period. The report identifies these services as having been over-delivered; however, this does not reflect service provision over the course of the year. Additionally, for yearly services, a missed session has a high likelihood of being made up, and this may result in a make-up session having been delivered as well as the student absence being recorded.

The study found 41 cases with under-delivered services.[6] While the "300 Report" identifies minutes delivered over the target, it does not conversely identify those delivered below the target. This is a limitation of the report, and adding that functionality would be beneficial for managers in monitoring services out of compliance. Of these cases, six had yearly services, exhibiting a similar issue as described above regarding over-delivery.

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[5] Cases were considered to be over-delivered if the student received over 125% of the services prescribed (targeted).
[6] Cases were considered to be under-delivered if the student received less than 75% of the services prescribed (targeted).

Seven students were reported as having been under-delivered because the report could not calculate target minutes from IEPs. This may occur for three reasons: the provider entered an incorrect end date for the service (the program considers this service terminated); the student is a recent transfer and a 30-day IEP has not been held but the provider delivers services; or the IEP is in dispute and considered a "Stay Put," which appears to be a programming glitch within the system. While providers were able to log services in cases mentioned above, the program was unable to establish target minutes, therefore the program could not calculate minutes delivered. This is another limitation of the report since it relies on target minutes to compare against minutes delivered when determining compliance.

Summary

Overall, the "300 Report" appears to be accurately reporting services provided. While minor discrepancies were noted, the over- and under-reporting of time in some cases should be reviewed to ensure that it is not a result of programming limitations within the Welligent system and the "300 Report." The District should continue refining the Welligent service tracking logs to explicitly identify make-up sessions to avoid over-estimation of service provision. More importantly, the reports should identify and highlight cases that were under-delivered to facilitate compliance monitoring.