

Project title: *Special Education Cost Savings through Full Regionalization*

Freetown-Lakeville Regional School District

April 1, 2013



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INTRODUCTORY LETTER

The Towns of Freetown and Lakeville formed a K-12 regional school district on July 1, 2012. Prior to this, Freetown and Lakeville retained their own individual K-4 programs at the town level, and the two towns regionalized for grades 5-12. The administration believed that this regionalization could realize savings on our in-district Special Education costs by coordinating the educational program PK-12.

The administration's initial goal was to reallocate funds from the secondary level to the elementary grades. To reduce class sizes and improve coordination of instructional strategies and practices. With large class sizes in the elementary grades, it was very difficult to meet the needs of students that required more differentiated instruction. These students ultimately required Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to insure their needs were being met, and this resulted in increased spending for Special Needs services.

The District sought to provide K-6 teachers with the necessary tools to collect relevant student data, professional development to administer and analyze the data, and the programs necessary to store and monitor this information. In addition, internal capacity was built through in-house professional development and teacher collaboration in conjunction with outside professional development services to implement a Response to Intervention Model. With the data to inform their decisions and the professional knowledge to make appropriate pedagogical and content specific modifications, teachers were able to address individual student needs through tiered interventions before any referral to Special Education services was made.

Through the addition of these strategies and resources and the dedication and hard work of all staff involved, we saw our in-district special education population decrease, the literacy rates for all grade levels involved increase, and a much higher level of teacher engagement and collaboration. Our plans are to continue to modify and tailor these long-term commitments to the children of the district and increase participation across all grade levels, PK-12.

Sincerely,

Michael Ward, Director of Finance & Operations Lisha Cabral, Coordinator of Grants

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The regionalization of the Freetown-Lakeville School District presented the opportunity to maximize cost savings in many areas. One in particular that would also result in a much higher level of direct student services was the reduction of unnecessary Special Education services.

While some areas such as smaller class sizes were achieved with a mere reallocation of resources, we knew there had to be a larger scale level of service delivery that had to change. The new model would need to be student-centered and focused on using timely data for effective decision making. This would, in turn, require appropriate teacher supports such as resources and professional development to be successful.

Materials came in the form of a research-based core reading program. This did not serve as a curriculum, however, so alignment of the curriculum also needed to be completed with close reference to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Data was then collected, analyzed, and utilized to direct instructional practices. When deficient skills were identified, professional development in determining root causes as well as appropriate interventions was provided. A significant amount of collegial cooperation and collaboration was urged and time was provided for this purpose. A Response to Intervention Model was developed and implemented with consistency across grade levels and schools from kindergarten to grade 6.

Developing a focused plan as well as providing the resources teachers needed along with the supportive professional development and time to work together all created significant results. Teacher collaboration, engagement, and efficacy have increased. Student performance in literacy has improved and risk indicators have decreased. Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores in English Language Arts (ELA) for grades 3 and 4 have also improved. Finally, the overall Special Education rate (as well as the funding allocated for this expense) has dropped to its lowest rate, and is, in fact, currently lower than the state average.

PARTNER COMMUNITIES

The Towns of Freetown and Lakeville cooperated in bringing regionalization to include all town schools, grades PK-12. The regional district then partnered with IDEAL Consulting services of Westport, Massachusetts to provide the services necessary to achieve our ambitious goals in literacy and professional practice.

GOALS

The District sought to reduce the number of students who displayed learning gaps and were referred for special education evaluation. In addition, the reading comprehension

rate among the elementary grades was found to be an area of weakness for students. This was evidenced by both teacher assessments and state standardized test scores. Individual needs were not being identified at the classroom level and specific, targeted interventions were not being provided efficiently. Establishing a Response to Intervention Model that was consistent across grade levels was of paramount importance.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

September 2011: Teachers in grades 1-3 were provided with the Pearson Reading Street core reading program materials and professional development training. This gave all teachers the same resources and materials in ELA. This also helped as teachers were now working on aligning their curricula to the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The scope and sequence for all grades was now the same across elementary schools.

September 2011: A computer system capable of storing and analyzing data that would be collected for review became necessary. IDEAL Consulting Services had the capability to provide this service for all participating teachers at an affordable cost that could be maintained beyond the scope of the grant. The Student Performance System (SPS) includes all students and follows their progress from grade to grade. IDEAL was also able to provide the professional development necessary to administer and score benchmark assessments.

September 2011 – June 2012: The most valuable benefit of working with IDEAL was that we were given access to the literacy experts on staff. Once teachers knew how to collect data for students, they then needed to know what the data represented and what to do with this information. Thus began ongoing professional development for all teachers in grades K-3 and ELA teachers in grades 4-6. Classroom teachers, special educators, Literacy Coaches, Reading Specialists, principals, and Central Office personnel participated in regular trainings throughout the year. Dr. Cynthia McGurl not only assisted teachers in analyzing the results of screening tools, but she then helped them create a highly functioning progress monitoring system for those students requiring more immediate attention.

All students participated in benchmarks three times a year. These included:

Grade K: Letter Naming Fluency, First Sound Fluency, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, Nonsense Word Fluency, and Whole Words Read. Grade 1: Letter Naming Fluency, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, Nonsense Word Fluency, Whole words Read, and Oral Reading Fluency. Grade 2: Nonsense Word Fluency, Oral Reading Fluency, and Maze. Grades 3-6: Oral Reading Fluency and Maze.

Teachers then Progress Monitored any students who displayed less than satisfactory gains in target areas. It was at this point that it became increasingly important to provide professional development about the Foundational Reading Skills required to read successfully and adequately comprehend text as teachers were asking more challenging and pointed questions as well as making more targeted instructional decisions to address individual student need. A comprehensive Response to Intervention Model was created with three specific tiers of interventions built over time. However, all participants needed

a more consistent understanding of what interventions were available and appropriate for a number of unique situations.

June 2012: As teachers worked to align their curricula and strategies, it became apparent that a consistency in format would also be essential. Jay McTigh and Grant Wiggins provided professional development for teachers in grades K-12 in the design of curricular units using Understanding by Design.

August 2012: Dr. McGurl and Diana Malkin provided a graduate level course entitled Advanced Problem Analysis and Intervention in Reading. This course was well-attended, and teachers left with an understanding of how to create individual case studies as well as individual action plans for their schools in addressing tiered interventions. This created and solidified the necessary Response to Intervention (TRI) framework for the district.

September 2012: Teachers in grades K, 4 and 5 were provided with the Pearson Reading Street core reading program materials and professional development training. This gave all teachers the same resources and materials in ELA. This also helped as teachers were now working on aligning their curricula to the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The scope and sequence for all grades could now be the same for grades K-5.

September 2012 – January 2013: Educational Support Teams (ESTs) were established in each school. These teams were trained by Dr. McGurl to lead future Data Meetings and Progress Monitoring Meetings at each grade level. In this way, the capacity was built internally, and this work will continue.

January 2013 – May 2013: Dr. McGurl continued to train the ESTs with a more specific focus. She met with all grade levels to provide content and age specific differentiated instruction activities and strategies. She modeled the process for analyzing the usefulness and effectiveness of such strategies. Teachers now have a process that they will use with future interventions and strategies.

January 2013 – June 2013: ESTs at each school grades K-5 now run all data meetings with their colleagues. They organize and initiate the screening sessions, troubleshoot individual case situations, and provide valuable feedback to their colleagues.

BUDGET

RTI (Response to Intervention professional development and resources) \$54,000

DI (Differentiated Instruction professional development) \$8,000

Core Reading Program (Reading Street) \$30,000/\$60,000

High Speed Internet switches (to facilitate use of SPS) \$24,500

The District based its original budget request on its need to make data-informed decisions for students and to create a different classroom environment through differentiating instruction based on identified individual needs. We also wanted to establish a

comprehensive Response to Intervention process that was consistent and understood by all teachers and administrators both across grades and across schools. Finally, we wanted to increase teacher capacity and their ability to work together collaboratively to problem solve and plan accordingly. Though they had professional expertise, they did not have the opportunity to meet together to share ideas and troubleshoot potential problems. They also were unable to share student information, particularly about effective strategies or practices that students may have responded to in previous years. To provide further consistency across grade levels, we also included the purchase of a reading series for grades K-5.

The only amendment made to the original grant request was to utilize some of the RtI funds for teacher training on the Understanding by Design model. The architects of the model, Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins, assisted teachers of all grade levels to better align their understandings and expectations for students based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

There were several issues impeding individual student growth potential under the prior model of three separate school districts. First, each of the two grade K-4 elementary schools operated separately as independent school districts, and the regional district operated as a three-school grade 5-12 entity. This did not allow for any reallocation of funds between the three districts which was particularly debilitating for the two elementary schools. Additionally, schools with the same grade levels of students they were working with different materials and resources, pedagogical understandings, and approaches to differentiation. These differences in teaching and learning proved problematic as these two schools both sent students to the same intermediate school. Finally, students were only attending the intermediate school for one year (grade 5) before moving on to the middle school. This exacerbated the fact that there was very little continuity in student interventions or services as the teachers had little time to work with and get to know the students before they moved on, and the teacher collaboration between buildings was non-existent.

There were several challenges in meeting the needs of all participants. The middle school and high school had to endure cuts in services in order to allow for smaller class sizes at the elementary level once funds could be reallocated for that purpose. Solutions such as a modified schedule, lost electives, and an increase in some class sizes were necessary as a result.

The District then sought to align the instruction offered at the two elementary schools with the intermediate school. This required the purchase of a core reading program for grades K-5 as well as the necessary professional development for utilizing these materials effectively. In addition, a Response to Intervention model, previously not in place, had to be established. This required an understanding of the model, the interventions that could

be used, and the purchase of materials and/or redistribution of staff in order to adequately deliver the interventions prescribed.

A great deal of collaboration was also necessary between all three buildings. With no scheduled in-service training days in the school year, this work had to be done with teacher substitutes and during the summer. A system of communication was necessary to keep track of student progress and accurately deliver this information to the students' next teachers in a timely and useful manner.

Each of these challenges was met as a result of the plans put in place and the cooperation of IDEAL Consulting. Not only did the special education referral rate drop dramatically, but teacher capacity and student literacy rates increased significantly. Each system put in place is sustainable and will be able to continue and grow across grade levels as well.

OUTCOMES

Almost all students in the “Safety Zones” across all grade levels made significant progress. These indicate scores that are noted as “Well Above Average,” “Above Average,” and “Average.” This chart also illustrates the significant decreases in the number of children in the “Risk Zones.” This classification includes all scores that are considered “Low Average,” “Below Average,” and “Well Below Average.” While the second grade maintained consistency, all other grades saw marked changes.

Grade	Measure	Critical Skill	<u>Safety Zones</u>	<u>Safety Zones</u>	<u>Risk Zones</u>	<u>Risk Zones</u>
			<u>2011</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2013</u>
K	PSF	Phonemic Awareness	49%	76%	51%	24%
K	NWF-CLS	Phonics	47%	64%	53%	36%
1	PSF	Phonemic Awareness	35%	53%	65%	47%
1	NWF-CLS	Phonics	45%	56%	55%	44%
3	ORF	Fluency	55%	63%	45%	37%

3	MAZE	Comprehension	60%	78%	40%	22%
4	ORF	Fluency	60%	67%	40%	33%
4	MAZE	Comprehension	61%	77%	39%	23%
5	MAZE	Comprehension	59%	68%	41%	32%

MCAS scores saw similar gains as students' individual needs were met more quickly and more specifically. There was also a significant reduction in the number of students in the Needs Improvement categories.

ELA grade 4		2010	2011	2012
	Advanced	7	8	13
	Proficient	37	42	48
	Needs Improvement	44	41	29
	Warning	12	8	10

ELA grade 3		2010	2011	2012
	Advanced	12	9	16
	Proficient	45	52	52
	Needs Improvement	37	32	26
	Warning	5	7	5

Finally, the ultimate cost savings goal for this grant was the reduction of unnecessary Special Education services. This total also decreased significantly due to these initiatives and efforts. As a result, nearly \$500,000 in Special Education reductions is being presented in the FY14 estimated budget.

2011	2012	State average
20%	15.5%	17%

This data is the direct result of close progress monitoring, specific and timely targeted interventions, and an emphasis on RtI protocol. This also reflects the significant amount of professional development teachers have participated in including the core reading program, RtI, differentiated instruction, collaborative planning and curriculum writing, data analysis, and Foundational Reading Skills.

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REFERENCES

IDEAL Consulting Services

Pearson Reading Street