

**Manchester School District
New Hampshire Department of Education
Focused Monitoring Process
Summary Report
June 2009**

Year II of Focused Monitoring

The New Hampshire Department of Education (NHDOE) Focused Monitoring (FM) Process, with the support of the department's Content Enhancement Instruction Leadership (CEIL) project, has completed the second year of technical assistance to the Manchester School District. The primary goal of the NHDOE FM Process is to support the Manchester School District in improving achievement results for all students while decreasing the achievement gap that exists between student groups, specifically students with disabilities.

Introduction

Technical Assistance during the second year of the New Hampshire Department of Education Focused Monitoring Process has continued to support the Manchester School District's middle and high school FM Teams as well as participate in district-wide activities in an effort to support the district's systemic improvement in student achievement.

Year II of the FM Process concentrated on the following:

- Training of general and special educators in developing measurable Individual Education Program (IEP) goals and measuring progress toward those goals
- Supporting the development of Professional Learning Communities in each building
- Supporting the design and implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI) models
- Monitoring the implementation of the School in Need of Improvement (SINI) plans at the middle and high school levels
- Participating as members of the District In Need of Improvement (DINI) monitoring team.

The Technical Assistants have visited 20 of the 23 schools in an effort to support the alignment of the district's improvement efforts more closely at all three levels. The Technical Assistants also visited the Selma Deitch Early Learning Center to discuss the continuum of supports and services to the district's preschool population.

Throughout the two year FM period the Technical Assistants have not only worked at the building level but also strived to maintain a "balcony view" perspective of the district as a whole to provide the district with a detailed summary of Year II. FM Summary Report for Year I is enclosed and is also available at the SAU Office.

Progress Toward Year II Focused Monitoring Goals

1. Expand building level capacity through continued work with the middle and high school PLC Data Teams.

In January 2009, two half-day sessions were held with the middle and high school PLC Data Teams to summarize SINI progress and expand knowledge of PLCs and AYP Safe Harbor. Plans for monitoring and evaluating SINI activities were developed.

2. Support the implementation of SINI Action Plans in the middle and high schools.

Middle and high school data team representatives came together in October to share the roll-out for the SINI plans, to discuss technical assistance needs for year two and to discuss integrating elementary representatives in this process. Common improvement initiatives and assessments were documented.

3. Reinforce the development of improved IEPs, specifically in the area of Measurable IEP goals.

Representatives from all district schools participated in four full-day training sessions on writing measurable IEP goals with Carol Kosnitsky, Education Consultant. Each school team membership consisted of a special educator, a general educator and a building administrator.

4. Support the alignment of improvement efforts district wide by linking the elementary, middle and high school initiatives to ensure consistency in curriculum, instruction and assessment leading to improved student achievement.

Individual on-site work sessions with data teams and/or special educators were scheduled at each of the elementary schools focusing on PLCs/RtI and writing measurable IEP goals. In addition, the Technical Assistants participated in all DINI Monitoring Meetings and District Leadership Team Meetings.

5. Other

The Technical Assistants met with the Building Level Instructional Coordinators (BLICs) and Assistant Principals to discuss competencies and credits for students receiving support in resource rooms. Multiple failure data, progress reports and attendance were reviewed.

School-Site Visits

The NHDOE Focused Monitoring (FM) Team visits to the Manchester School District Schools in the spring of 2009 were conducted for the purpose of supporting district-wide

and school-wide efforts to improve student achievement results and narrow the achievement gap between student groups.

The school visits provided the NHDOE Technical Assistants with an opportunity to hear the common concerns, interventions and improvements initiated at each school and identify areas of concern and challenges from preschool through high school. Additionally, the school teams discussed a variety of school-based efforts that have been underway to address the need to improve student achievement in curriculum, instruction and assessment areas. The following areas have been identified as challenges and needs:

Response to Intervention (RtI)/Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

There is a sense of urgency among building level leaders to improve student achievement. Tension exists between the urgency felt at the building level for solutions versus a desire for a consistent district-wide RtI plan. A comprehensive, consistent understanding of an RtI model and a plan to design and implement this model across the district which provides common tools, resources, language, skills etc. should be developed.

- RtI development across the elementary schools ranges from a developing awareness to a deep understanding.
- The demographics of some of the schools create an inverted pyramid model in that the majority of students require intensive support which heightens the need for a well-designed Tier I. The high rate of transiency, ELL, SES and Special Education populations contribute to this demographic.
- Building level staff are feeling time starved in terms of having adequate Professional Development time, PLC and collaboration time as well as time for interventions in the classroom.
- There is an observed need for a universal screening tool.
- There is a need to identify district wide interventions and common formative assessments/probes.
- There are limited and varied interventions available at the elementary level.
- Shared specialist schedules can drive/limit the design of RtI schedules.
- At secondary levels the special educators are not naturally included in PLCs.

Communication

There is a need for district-wide communication and sharing of information in both vertical and horizontal directions:

- Feeder elementary schools to middle schools
- Middle school to high school

- Elementary, middle and high school principals to each other
- Special education and other transitions from school to school
- Throughout the school system including the Board of School Committee to the parents, families and students of the school community

Transitions

There is a lack of a clearly defined and consistent process and plan for level-to-level transition. Schools are beginning to create their own transition plans.

- There is a lack of time to meet and plan for transitions from level to level.
- Elementary to middle school literacy folders are not valued at the middle school level.
- There is a lack of timely and student-specific record sharing from school to school.

Transiency

The very high rate of transiency in some schools is perhaps one of the most significant variables that impact every aspect of school improvement and student learning. Consistency in curriculum, instruction and assessment practices across the district at all levels is therefore critical.

English Language Learners (ELL)

The ELL population provides significant challenges to the schools in providing basic access to the curriculum. There is a need to tell this story and to provide the necessary supports to the students, families and teaching staff.

Technology

There is a need for teachers to have access to technology such as Performance Tracker in order to understand and utilize student results from state and local assessments to inform instruction.

Resource Allocation

There is a significant difference in resource allocation between Title I and non-Title I schools resulting in a disparity in student support options.

Governance

The Board of School Committee needs to develop a full understanding of the changes needed to improve student performance in the Manchester School District. In addition, there is a need for the Board of School Committee to embrace the implications of the district's ongoing District In Need of Improvement, School In Need of Improvement, Restructuring status and related issues and take appropriate action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After visiting 20 of 23 schools, and the district preschool program and discussing these topics with administrators and teacher leaders, the Technical Assistants find that there is a compelling need for district-wide supervision and coordination of the curriculum, instruction and assessment systems, in order to provide consistency and articulation across the district.

District Reorganization

The district reorganization proposal is critical to the DINI Plan. Manchester must have Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment (CIA) oversight and coordination in order to ensure a consistent approach. The Manchester Board of School Committee will need to develop an understanding of the CIA needs so they can support the Manchester District's vision and reorganization plan.

1. Clearly define and communicate to all constituents a clear vision for the Manchester School District that is achievement based, understandable, doable and measurable.
2. Provide time to build consensus and understanding district-wide, from school-to-school, to ensure common understanding and consistency in approach in the design of new models.
3. Engage in proactive planning for schools entering or about to enter the NHDOE's Restructuring Process by using strategies developed by Northwest Elementary School.
4. Provide Professional Development to the Board of School Committee to increase understanding of the district's AYP status and district improvement efforts.
5. Establish district-wide supervision and coordination of the of the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment systems in order to provide consistency and articulation across the district and to support improved achievement of all students.
6. Consider extending the school day and expanding summer school opportunities for academically at-risk students in order to provide additional time for necessary interventions.

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Alignment and consistency of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment systems will require increased supports in the form of staffing, materials and professional development. Specific timelines for introducing new initiatives and providing supports will be critical in order to avoid system overload and fatigue.

1. Design a core curriculum for literacy that provides guaranteed curriculum essentials utilizing a development and implementation process that is similar process to the Every Day Math adoption approach.
2. Form a district PLC/RtI task force, which represents all district constituencies, to develop the "right" solution/vision for RtI and the CIA framework.
3. PLCs will implement a tiered intervention model and identify interventions at each level for literacy and math and ensure consistency from school to school. PLCs will need dedicated time, and school schedules may need to be altered.
4. Identify and employ school-wide Universal Screening tools to ensure consistent diagnostic screenings at each level at the beginning of each school year to target student learning needs and establish performance baselines.
5. Determine what other district-wide or classroom-based assessments are necessary for ongoing progress monitoring of student achievement to inform instruction.

Special Education

1. Consider conducting an audit/review of the district's special education programs to determine the effectiveness of the current delivery model and to ensure a continuum of supports and services for all students with disabilities.
2. At the high school level, consider options for earning credits tied to competencies and delivered through placements other than resource settings, e.g., math or literacy labs and extended learning opportunities.
3. Consider methods for maintaining district-wide collaboration, program continuity and development for the district's preschool population.
4. Revise grade-to-grade and building-to-building transition practices to improve consistency across the district.