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DMJ

DISTRICT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL

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The Science of Reading: From Research to Classroom Practice

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Realizing Rapid Math Improvement in Huntsville City Schools (AL)

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Time Well Spent: How a Strategic Districtwide Approach to Schedules Improves Student Learning While Reducing Costs

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Resources and
Initiatives for
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Why Emotion Regulation Is the Skill Every School and District Leader Needs Now

Marc A. Brackett
Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence

PAGE 6

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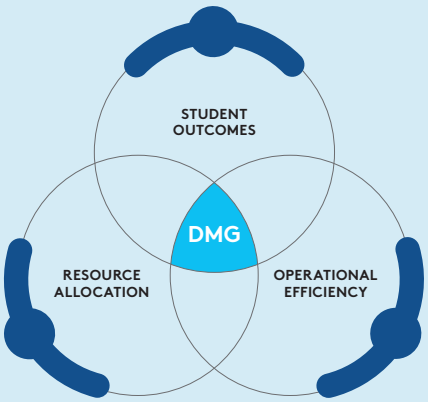
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From the Editor

Public education is facing unprecedented competitive pressure. Families have more choices than ever—charter schools, micro-schools, online programs, private schools, homeschools—and now Education Savings Accounts are providing funding for many of these options, accelerating change. For districts, that means the landscape is shifting fast, and standing still is not an option.

I've been struck lately by how many school systems are thinking about how to "tell their story." Communication and messaging matter—but the story that truly resonates is the one told through student results. In an era of tight budgets, shifting policies, and lingering post-pandemic challenges, the districts that stand out will be those that find ways to do more with what they have—aligning resources with clearly defined priorities, creating operational efficiencies, and staying relentlessly focused on improving outcomes for students.

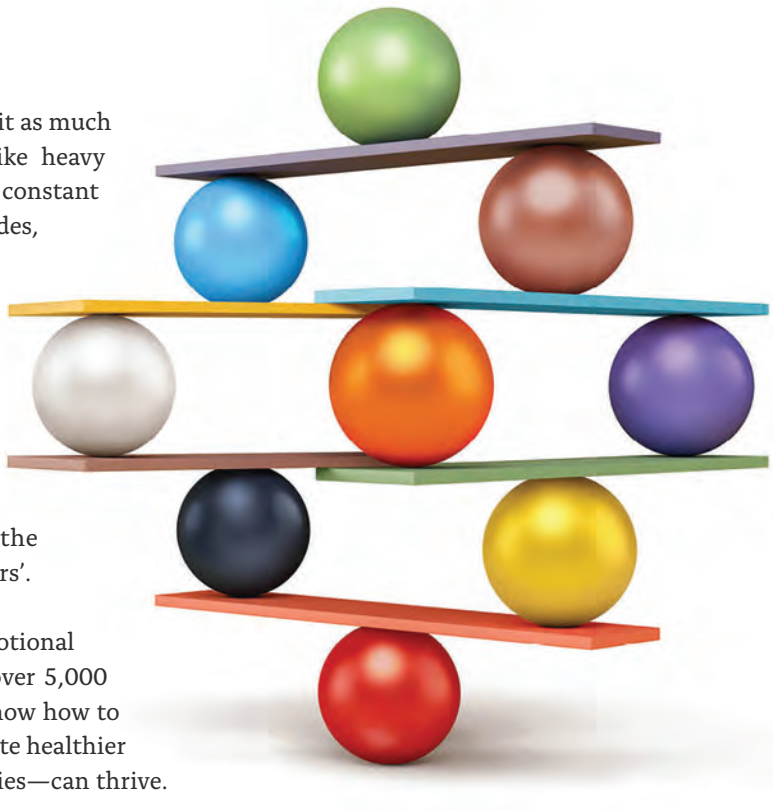
In this issue of *District Management Journal*, we share our approach to budgeting strategically and our work with districts to improve performance. In today's competitive education environment, the game is on—and the winning districts are those that stay focused on the fundamentals with precision: smart strategy, strong teamwork, and relentless focus on results. We look forward to partnering with you to make this happen.



John J-H Kim

Why Emotion Regulation Is the Skill Every School and District Leader Needs Now

Marc A. Brackett



Walk into any school today and you'll feel it as much as see it: students carrying anxiety like heavy backpacks, teachers stretched thin from constant disruptions, parents anxious about safety and grades, and administrators pressed from all sides. Superintendents, principals, and district leaders face daily decisions under a microscope—budget crises, board conflicts, staff shortages, community outrage.

What separates a leader who escalates tension from one who inspires calm isn't general intelligence (IQ), years of experience, or charisma. It's the capacity to regulate emotions—their own and others'.

Over the last 25 years at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, our team's research and our work in over 5,000 schools has shown again and again: leaders who know how to deal with feelings don't just survive stress, they create healthier climates where everyone—students, teachers, families—can thrive.

Emotion regulation isn't "soft stuff." It's a core leadership skill, every bit as measurable and consequential as literacy and math. Emotion regulation predicts outcomes we care about most in schools: teacher retention, student achievement, school climate, and community trust. Leaders who regulate well think more clearly, sustain better relationships, and make wiser decisions under pressure.

By contrast, dysregulation is costly. It clouds judgment, undermines trust, drives burnout, and erodes culture. One outburst from a superintendent can undo months of relationship-building with a member of the school board.

Consider the superintendent walking into a board meeting where parents are furious about program cuts. Her chest tightens, her mind races. In that moment, she has a choice. If she reacts from fear, the meeting spirals. If she names her anxiety, grounds her body, and reframes the outrage as grief over loss, she can respond with empathy and invite collaboration. Her self-regulation becomes co-regulation—the entire room shifts because she chose wisely.

That's not theory. That's daily leadership.

One of the biggest barriers to cultivating emotion regulation skills is misconception. Let's be clear:

- It's not suppression. Pushing feelings down only intensifies them later. Emotions will get expressed one way or another!
- It's not faking calm. Staff can sense when a leader is seething under a smile. Inauthenticity erodes trust.
- It's not about eliminating emotions. Fear, anger, anxiety, and sadness are not flaws to erase. They're signals—data about what matters most. Anxiety reminds us that there's an uncertain outcome about something we care deeply about.
- It's not indulgence. Regulation isn't wallowing in feelings. It's leveraging them wisely to guide decisions.

The point isn't to feel less. It's to use feelings more intelligently.

Why Now? Key Strategies for Emotion Regulation

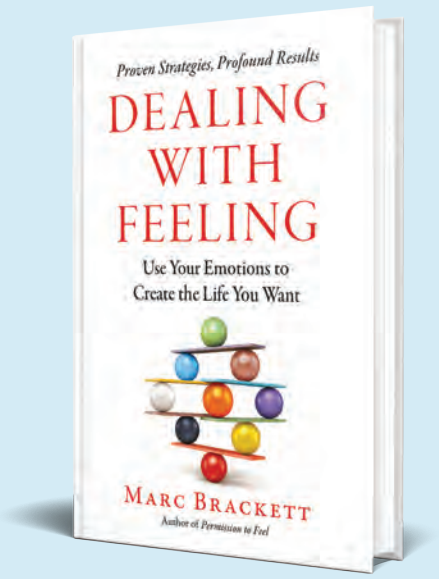
We are living through what I believe is an *emotion crisis*. Eighty-one percent of U.S. teachers say behavior has worsened. Nearly half report misbehavior as their number-one stressor. Teachers lose up to 10 hours of instruction a month managing outbursts instead of teaching.

Add political polarization, the aftermath of the pandemic, and record levels of youth anxiety and depression, and the need for emotionally intelligent leadership has never been greater. Leaders who can't regulate are swept into cycles of reactivity. Leaders who *can* regulate create stability, clarity, and resilience.

The good news? Regulation isn't innate—it's 100% learned. That means it can be cultivated at any age. In my latest book, *Dealing with Feeling*, I share a science-based playbook to help you develop regulation skills. For school and district leaders, here's a brief overview of some key strategies:



Marc Brackett, Ph.D.
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and
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Yale Child Study Center

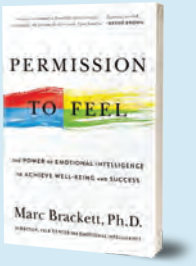


Dealing with Feeling

Use your Emotions to Create the Life You Want

Dealing with Feeling by Marc Brackett explains the latest science of emotion regulation and provides an evidence-based playbook to help us learn to manage our feelings to become the best version of ourselves. Full of strategies, exercises, and practical advice, *Dealing with Feeling* is a book that you will want to keep close at hand.

For education leaders, emotion regulation skills are critical leadership skills that can help shape the entire culture of your teams, your schools, and your district.



Also by Marc Brackett

Permission to Feel

The Power of Emotional Intelligence to Achieve Well-Being and Success

1 Shift Your Mindset

Ditch the myth of "good" and "bad" emotions. Anger can fuel justice; anxiety can sharpen preparation. What matters is how you channel the data that emotions provide.

2 Name It to Tame It

Vague labels like "upset" don't help. Are you apprehensive, overwhelmed, or under pressure? Precision guides strategy. A superintendent who admits, "I'm feeling pressure about making a decision without enough evidence" is better equipped than one who mutters, "I'm stressed."

3 Reset Your Nervous System

Emotions get expressed in the body. Ground yourself before you enter a high-stakes moment—three slow breaths before a press interview or a staff walk-through can reset your physiology and your presence.

4 Reframe the Situation

Cognitive reappraisal is a leader's superpower. What looks like resistance may be fear. What feels like failure may be growth. This mental shift turns conflict into opportunity.

5 Build Emotional Alliances

No leader regulates alone. Having "emotion allies"—trusted colleagues to process tough interactions—prevents rumination and restores balance. One superintendent told me her weekly check-ins with a peer saved her from quitting.

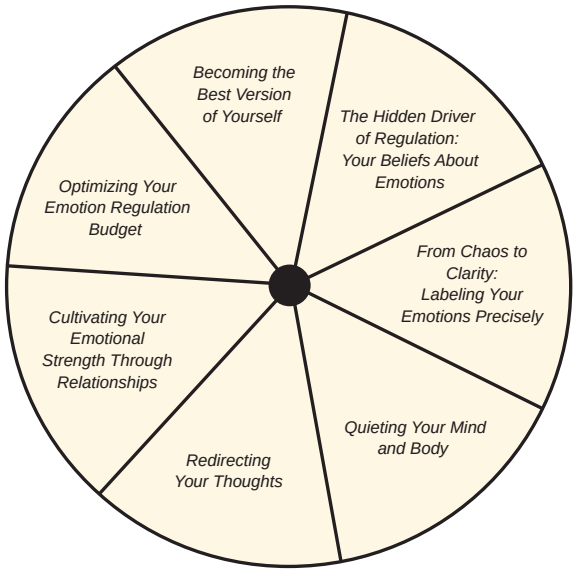
6 Care for Your Body

Sleep, nutrition, and movement are not extra-curriculars; they are the infrastructure of leadership. A tired, depleted leader cannot model regulation.

7 Practice Recovery, Not Just Resilience

Regulation doesn't mean being composed at all times. It means recovering more quickly after stress. Leaders who intentionally restore—through joy, rest, or connection—return to their schools stronger.

The Dealing with Feeling Wheel



The Dealing with Feeling Wheel represents the seven broad areas of healthy emotion regulation.

Source: *Dealing with Feeling* by Marc Brackett

When practiced consistently, these strategies become leadership habits or automatic ways of responding that shape not just isolated moments, but the entire culture of a school, organization, or team. And these habits don't stay at the office door.

> *"Emotion regulation predicts outcomes we care about most in schools: teacher retention, student achievement, school climate, and community trust.*

> ***Leaders who know how to deal with feelings don't just survive stress, they create healthier climates where everyone—students, teachers, families—can thrive.***

Schools are emotional ecosystems. Students and staff don't just listen to what leaders *say*; they feel how leaders *are*. A dysregulated leader normalizes reactivity. A regulated leader normalizes resilience.

One principal I worked with began faculty meetings with a two-minute pause for mindful breathing. Teachers rolled their eyes—at first. Within weeks, they were asking for it. Over time, the culture shifted from frenetic to focused. The principal didn't just regulate herself; she co-regulated her staff, and the ripple effects reached classrooms.

That's the hidden power of leadership: emotions are contagious. Regulation is leadership in its purest form.

And let's not forget that these are the same skills that help us stay present with our children at the dinner table, manage conflict in our marriages, and show up for friends in moments of need.

The Call to Action for Education Leaders

Emotion regulation is not a "nice-to-have." It is the single most important skill for leaders who want to create safe, thriving schools in an emotionally charged world. And it can be acquired at any age!

My hope is that leaders across education embrace these skills—not only to navigate their own pressures but to model resilience for staff and students. Regulation doesn't erase challenges. But it equips us to face them with clarity, compassion, and courage.

Leaders can build these skills systematically, with strategies they can apply immediately. In *Dealing with Feeling*, I show how. The goal is not perfection but progress: showing up as our best selves more often, and teaching those around us to do the same.

If we want schools where teachers feel supported, students feel safe, and communities feel hopeful, we must start with leaders who can deal with their own feelings—and help others do the same. ◆



Marc Brackett, Ph.D.

Marc Brackett, professor at Yale University's Child Study Center and founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, is an award-winning researcher on the role of emotional intelligence in learning, decision making, creativity, relationships, physical and mental health, and workplace performance. He is the author of *Dealing with Feeling* and the best-selling book *Permission to Feel* and the lead developer of RULER, an evidence-based approach to social-emotional learning, which has been adopted by over 5,000 schools.

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STUDENTS foster the skills that boost belonging, motivation, and academic success.

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SESSION SPEAKER
Karen Niemi
Executive Director
Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence

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PRISM™

Prioritizing Resources and Initiatives for Strategic Management



John J-H Kim and Simone Carpenter

Many school districts today are caught in a vise. Student needs continue to rise along with costs to serve them; meanwhile, ESSER funds have expired, and enrollment declines and competition fueled by new legislation are increasing fiscal pressure for many districts. Against this backdrop, student outcomes continue to fall short of expectations and achievement gaps persist or are widening.

Meeting today's challenges requires more than incremental adjustments. Districts must ensure that every dollar—and every hour of staff time—is aligned to what works and to what matters most. This demands a clear view of each initiative's purpose, each initiative's full cost, its effectiveness, and its alignment to the district's strategic priorities.

While this approach seems sensible and straightforward, in reality, it is complex work, and districts often lack the tools or bandwidth to address these issues at scale. In the effort to meet rising student needs, new programs have been layered over old ones, year after year. District leaders are hard pressed to even list all the initiatives happening across their district, much less provide an analysis of each. Programs frequently overlap, often fail to align, and are seldom retired, even when they fail to deliver results. Efforts to streamline this situation are often driven by tradition or politics rather than by clear strategy and data.

Also, school district budgets are inherently designed as tools to ensure that sources and uses of funds comply with regulations; they are not designed to provide information that would enable easy analysis and better allocation of funds to more effective uses. As a result, budget development processes in school districts often disconnect those who are driving instructional strategy from those who allocate resources. Resources are allocated based on funding source, and departments typically build their budgets in silos, creating initiatives that often overlap or conflict with one another.

To help districts better understand how their resources can be most effectively allocated, District Management Group (DMG) has developed PRISM—Prioritizing Resources and Initiatives for Strategic Management. PRISM is a structured approach that helps districts make data-driven decisions to streamline programming to align with student needs and district priorities, increase accountability, and ensure resources are directed where they can deliver the greatest benefit—all while promoting long-term financial sustainability.

Exhibit 1

District Management Group's PRISM Approach



Source: District Management Group

The PRISM approach is comprised of four key phases (*Exhibit 1*):

1. **Phase I: Initiatives Inventory**
   A comprehensive, validated catalog of all district initiatives is created, detailing the purpose, target population, costs, and results of each initiative. This inventory helps to identify overlap, gaps, and alignment with strategic priorities.

2. **Phase II: Academic Return on Investment (A-ROI)**
   Deeper analyses of specific initiatives are conducted to determine what is working, for which students, and at what cost, providing actionable insights to keep, expand, segment, fix, replace, or eliminate programs.

3. **Phase III: Build Internal Capacity for Ongoing A-ROI**
   Through professional learning and hands-on practice, district teams learn to conduct their own A-ROI studies. This builds long-term capacity and helps to create a culture of data-driven decision making.

4. **Phase IV: Benchmark Staffing**
   Staffing allocations are analyzed within and across schools and compared to similar districts to ensure people resources align with student needs and district strategy.

In the following sections, we will explore each of the four phases in greater detail.

Phase I: Cataloging Initiatives with an Initiatives Inventory

For many districts, the first step is to gain a clear understanding of the current situation. After years of well-intended additions—grants, pilots, vendor programs, new roles—few district leaders can list all the initiatives that are underway, let alone specify whom they serve, how success is defined, who is involved, and what the total cost is.

Therefore, DMG begins by building what we call an Initiatives Inventory—a comprehensive, validated catalog of all district initiatives outside of core classroom activities. While this sounds straightforward, each district contains a multitude of departments with limited information sharing across the district, and student needs and demographics that change more rapidly than do departmental responses. Virtually every district, small and large, thus finds itself with many programs that no longer have a clear definition of success or an accurate tabulation of the cost.

In order to build this inventory of initiatives, DMG works with department leaders and the budget and finance department on a rigorous, standardized, bottoms-up process to gather key information including the following:

- Expected outcomes,
- Target population,
- Financial commitment and source of funding,
- Teachers and staff involved and time spent,

- Relation to organization priorities and strategic plan, and
- Measures of outcomes (if available) or principals' perception of effectiveness.

By the end of this phase, the district has a portfolio view that includes the **total number of initiatives** and the **total dollars invested**. In addition, DMG provides the following information for each initiative:

- A definition of success, the target students, and core features,
- The direct expenses (licensing, materials) plus the cost of staff time at both the school and central office levels,
- Outcomes data and principal feedback,
- Alignment to the district's strategic priorities, and
- Alignment to the needs of the students that the initiative is intended to serve.

With this comprehensive catalog of all the programs, people, and processes outside of day-to-day operations, DMG is able to provide districts with a variety of insightful analyses. For example, the Cost/Impact Matrix (*Exhibit 2*) plots initiatives by impact and cost, providing leaders with powerful insights. Based on this matrix, high-impact/low-cost efforts become candidates for expansion; low-impact/high-cost efforts might be flagged for review; and high impact/high-cost efforts might warrant some tailoring. Exhibit 3 is an example of one district's Cost/Impact Matrix. Based on this matrix, district leadership decided to more closely examine their dual language program, which was very high cost but also high impact. As a result of an A-ROI analysis, district leadership decided to maintain the program but further tailor its target group. The Initiatives Inventory phase typically identifies millions of dollars that can be redirected to the most essential priorities of the district and can help address significant budget gaps.

The Initiatives Inventory also clarifies where goals or data processes need to be strengthened so that progress can be tracked more consistently in the future. While trying to address these issues, many districts will immediately institute processes for any new initiatives to better set themselves up going forward.

Phase II: Evaluating Academic Return on Investment (A-ROI)

While the Initiatives Inventory provides a comprehensive overview, complex, high-cost, or politically sensitive programs demand a deeper look. This is where Academic Return on Investment (A-ROI) analyses become essential.

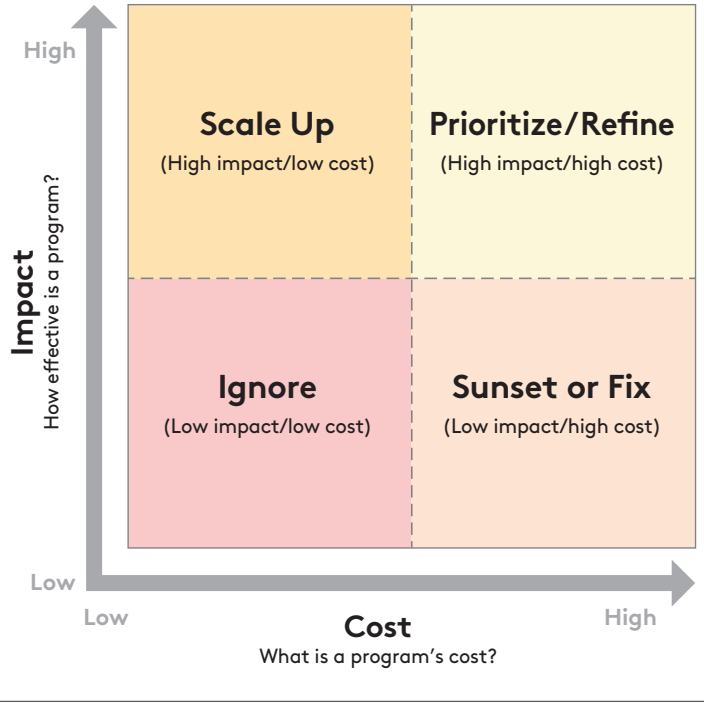
A-ROI measures the cost-effectiveness of specific educational programs and initiatives to help districts answer three critical questions (*Exhibit 4*):

1. Is the initiative improving student outcomes?
2. For which student segment?
3. At what cost?

DMG has developed a structured, methodical 10-step process to support school districts in conducting A-ROI analyses (*Exhibit 5*).[1] The rigorous methodology enables districts to understand the following:

Exhibit 2

District Management Group's Cost/Impact Matrix



Source: District Management Group

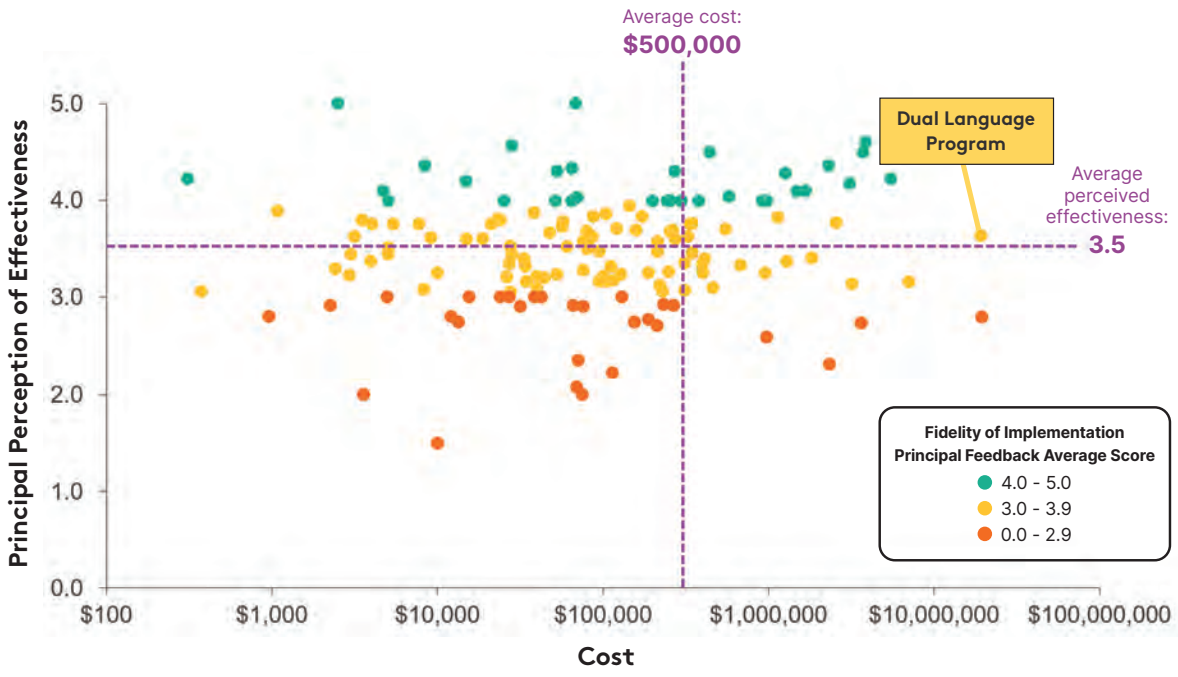
> *The Initiatives Inventory phase typically identifies millions of dollars that can be redirected to the most essential priorities of the district and can help address significant budget gaps.*

- **Detailed Outcomes by Student Segment**
  Detailed data on student outcomes segmented by key characteristics, such as grade level, socioeconomic status, or special education needs, enable districts to identify which student groups are benefiting the most or the least from a given program. For example, a literacy intervention might show strong results for early elementary students but limited impact for older students. Without this level of granularity, districts risk making decisions based on incomplete or misleading information.

- **Fully Loaded Program Cost**
  The fully loaded program cost includes direct expenses (licensing, materials) plus the cost of staff time at both the school and central office levels. A common mistake made in many districts is to capture only the direct costs, which fail to recognize the often very significant resources of staff time being invested to implement the program. Understanding the fully loaded cost of a program and viewing it against the outcomes allows for better decision making.

- **Benchmarking Program Outcomes**
  Student outcomes are compared to those of a carefully selected benchmark group to determine whether observed outcomes can be attributed to the program or if they might have occurred without the intervention. The effectiveness of the program must be confirmed in this manner to ensure effective resource allocation.

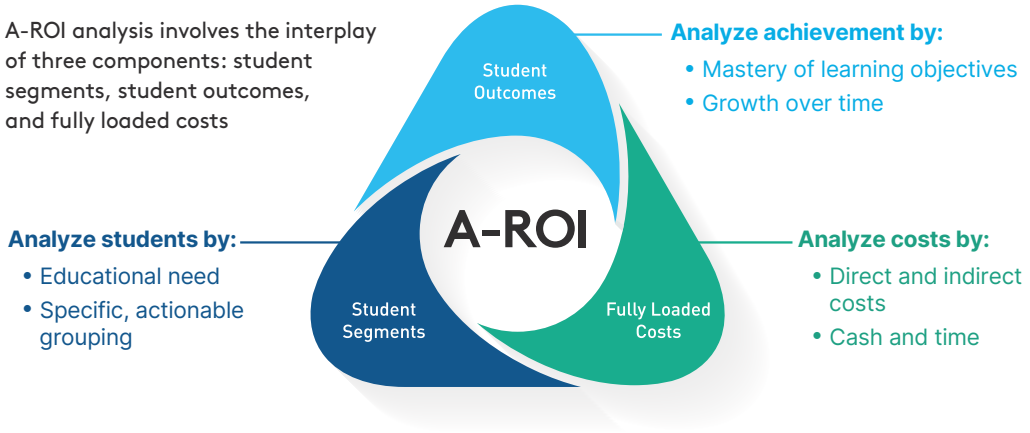
Exhibit 3



Source: District Management Group

Exhibit 4

District Management Group's Academic Return on Investment (A-ROI) Framework



Source: District Management Group

- **Cost-Effectiveness Analysis**
  Determining the relationship between the resources invested in a program and the outcomes it delivers helps to deepen the understanding of which programs are working most effectively and efficiently, for whom, and at what cost.

Applying A-ROI enables district leaders to make the most effective use of resources by moving beyond the traditional "keep or eliminate" paradigm, and consider information that is even more detailed than that provided in the Cost/Impact Matrix. With more granular information, districts can explore more nuanced options that will yield stronger outcomes. Districts can **expand** high-impact, low-cost programs; **segment** a program to serve specific student demographics who benefit most; **fix** programs in need of structural adjustment or address implementation where design is sound but fidelity is weak; **replace** underperforming initiatives; or **eliminate** those that do not deliver (*Exhibit 6*). Ultimately, embedding A-ROI into decision-making processes fosters more equitable and efficient use of resources, ensuring that investments align with district priorities and deliver meaningful results for students.

Exhibit 5

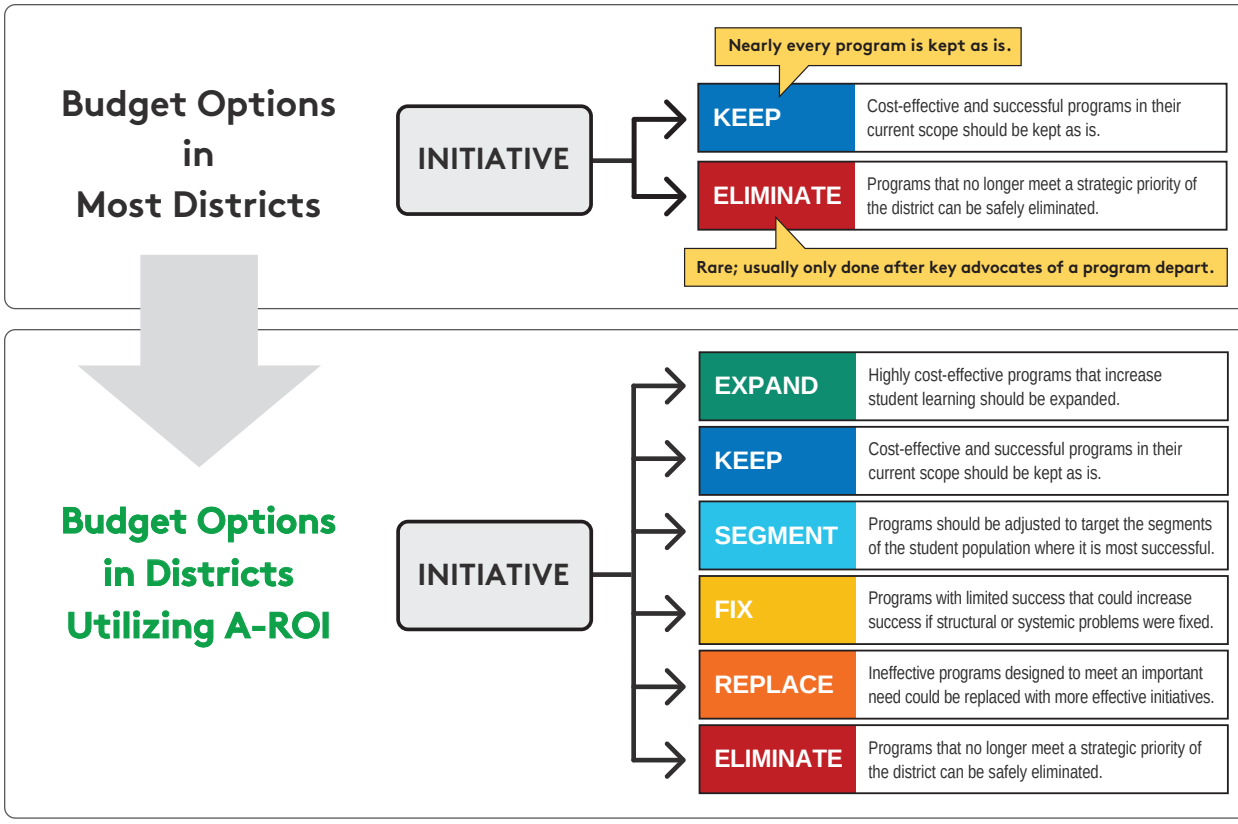
District Management Group's 10-Step Process for A-ROI Analysis

Plan	Design Analysis	Evaluate	Act
1 Select Target	4 Collect Segment Data	7 Evaluate Program Effectiveness	10 Translate insights into actions and commit to program improvements
2 Define Success	5 Collect Outcomes Data	8 Analyze Cost-Effectiveness	
3 Identify Comparison Group	6 Map the Cost	9 Draw Insight	

Source: District Management Group

Exhibit 6

Options for Action with A-ROI



Source: District Management Group

Phase III: Building Internal Capacity for Ongoing A-ROI

The long-term sustainability of the A-ROI strategic approach relies on district teams building their own capacity to continue this work. DMG offers the Academic-ROI Institute, which provides hands-on professional development to equip district teams with the tools and frameworks to permanently embed data and A-ROI analyses into their planning and budgeting cycles.

The Institute's "learn by doing" model ensures immediate utility. District teams conduct real A-ROI assessments on one of their own district initiatives under the guidance of experienced DMG coaches. They thereby have a shared learning experience while also producing actionable insights that immediately inform current district decisions. This team-based approach builds internal capacity for ongoing A-ROI application and can help foster a collaborative culture of data-based decision making in the district.

Phase IV: Benchmarking Staffing to Optimize People Resources

With approximately 80% of district spending allocated to staff salaries and benefits,[2] districts must review their approach to staffing in order to achieve financial sustainability. As the final phase of PRISM, DMG benchmarks school-based staffing both within the district and compared to peer districts to ensure these investments align with student needs, equity goals, and district strategy.

Every district has an implicit staffing approach shaped by history, temporary fixes, and unwritten rules. DMG's process cuts through this complexity, gathering quantitative data combined with qualitative insights from leaders. It begins by diving deep into the data—examining FTEs, schedules, and enrollment and class size data

> *With the PRISM approach, districts replace across-the-board cuts and advocacy-driven decisions with clear priorities and data-based evidence to direct resources toward what works.*

from the human resources and finance departments. Because numbers alone can't tell the full story, DMG gathers input from district and school leaders to help uncover the implicit rules and practices that shape staffing decisions. This combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis paints a comprehensive picture of the district's current staffing landscape.

DMG then helps the district compare staffing levels, class sizes, and workloads across its schools. This internal comparison highlights opportunities to better utilize staff time, optimize staff talents, and promote more equitable distribution of workload across schools.

External benchmarking against peer districts of similar size and demographics provides context and insight. This comparison invites reflection on whether differences in allocation are the result of intentional strategic priorities (e.g., smaller early-grade class sizes) or unintentional, outdated practices, allowing leaders to learn from high-performing peers.

Staffing decisions are never easy. They involve real people, real classrooms, and real students. But with the right data and insights, districts can make these decisions with confidence and intentionality. DMG's benchmarking process doesn't just highlight problems; it empowers districts to find solutions. By aligning staffing strategies with district priorities, addressing inequities, and making data-driven decisions, districts can ensure that their most valuable resource—their staff—is being used to its fullest potential.

In the end, benchmarking is not just about numbers on a spreadsheet; it's about creating a staffing strategy that supports every student, every teacher, and every school in achieving their best.

PRISM: A Framework Built for Today's Fiscal Reality

Districts face a tougher operating environment than at any time in recent memory. Traditional, incremental budgeting cannot meet this moment.

PRISM offers a practical way forward. Its structured, analytical approach helps districts make data-driven decisions to streamline programming to align with student needs and district priorities, increase accountability, and ensure resources are directed where they can deliver the greatest benefit—all while promoting long-term financial sustainability.

With the PRISM approach, districts replace across-the-board cuts and advocacy-driven decisions with clear priorities and data-based evidence to direct resources toward what works. Programs are fixed, replaced, or eliminated when they do not deliver; staffing aligns with need; and budgets become instruments of strategy—not just compliance. The result is stronger outcomes for students *and* greater financial resilience. In short, PRISM helps district leaders ensure that every dollar and every staff role advance the district's most important goals—the discipline that current fiscal pressures demand. ◆

NOTES

[1] John J-H Kim, Alex Newell, and Kathleen Choi, "Strategic Budgeting: DMG's Approach to Effective Resource Allocation," *District Management Journal* 32 (Winter 2023).

[2] National Center for Education Statistics, "Condition of Education: Public School Expenditures," U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, last updated May 2024, accessed December 2, 2025, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cmb/public-school-expenditure.

District Management Group

10 Lessons to Remember

Prioritizing Resources and Initiatives for Strategic Management: Putting PRISM into Action

District budgets are under pressure: ESSER funds have expired, enrollment declines are reducing revenue for many districts, and competition fueled by new legislation is further increasing fiscal pressure. Meanwhile, student needs continue to rise, and student achievement levels are not meeting expectations. The PRISM (Prioritizing Resources and Initiatives for Strategic Management) approach offers a clear, disciplined way to ensure the district is strategically directing time, people, and dollars toward stronger outcomes for students. Remember these 10 lessons:

1 Know your current investments.

In an effort to meet student needs, many initiatives have been added in over the years. Do you know all the initiatives that are currently in place? Start by making a comprehensive list.

2 Confirm implementation is occurring as intended.

Results depend not only on program design but on execution. Checking implementation fidelity helps determine whether weak outcomes are a reflection of design flaws or inconsistent delivery.

3 Set clear and measurable goals for every initiative.

Clear, shared definitions of success anchor analysis and decision making. Without clear, agreed-upon goals, the district risks guessing at impact rather than evaluating it accurately and objectively.

4 Ensure alignment to strategic objectives.

Are all your initiatives supporting your district's strategic objectives? With resources tight, focusing resources on achieving district goals is essential.

Time and people are your most valuable resources.

Understanding staff strengths and how staff are spending their time can unlock opportunities to invest staff energy and time where it has the greatest return.

Remember that time is money.

Capturing fully loaded costs means including the cost of the time that school and district staff dedicate to an initiative. Too often, cost calculations only capture the direct costs of curricula or licenses and fail to capture the cost of staff time.

Keep or cut aren't the only options.

By providing information on what works, for whom, and at what cost, A-ROI opens pathways beyond keeping or cutting initiatives. You can scale or segment what works, and fix, replace, or eliminate programs no longer delivering value.

Focus on improving systems.

PRISM sheds light on weak data collection, uneven implementation processes, and fragmented budgeting structures that can limit both effectiveness and the ability to build a strong planning and budgeting process.

Build internal capacity to sustain the work.

PRISM is most powerful when district and school leadership understand A-ROI and adopt data-driven decision making as a lasting part of their budgeting and planning cycle.

Engage stakeholders to build buy-in.

Not everyone will be able to run an A-ROI calculation, but engaging stakeholders will promote their understanding that decisions are data-driven to ensure resources are being used most effectively for students and staff.

District Management Group

Manager's Toolkit

Do you have enough information about district initiatives to ensure your resources are being allocated strategically?

In an effort to meet student needs, many initiatives have been layered in over the years. Having a comprehensive and clear understanding of all the initiatives in your district is the first step to ensuring your resources are allocated efficiently and effectively in support of your strategic goals.

Take this self-assessment to see how well positioned your district is to make strategic budgeting decisions aligned to the district's objectives.

	Few/Don't Know	Around Half	Most
How many of your initiatives have a clearly stated objective that is well understood and shared?			
How many of your initiatives are tied to your strategic priorities and goals?			
How many initiatives clearly define which populations are being served?			
For how many initiatives do you have cost data?			
How many of your initiatives track the amount of time spent by school and district staff on implementation and management?			
For how many of your initiatives do you have outcomes data?			

	Few/Don't Know	Around Half	Most
How many initiatives are being implemented with fidelity across schools?			
How many initiatives are considered valuable and effective by principals and school staff?			
Total number of checkmarks in each column			
Multiply	x 1	x 2	x 3
Total score by column		+	+

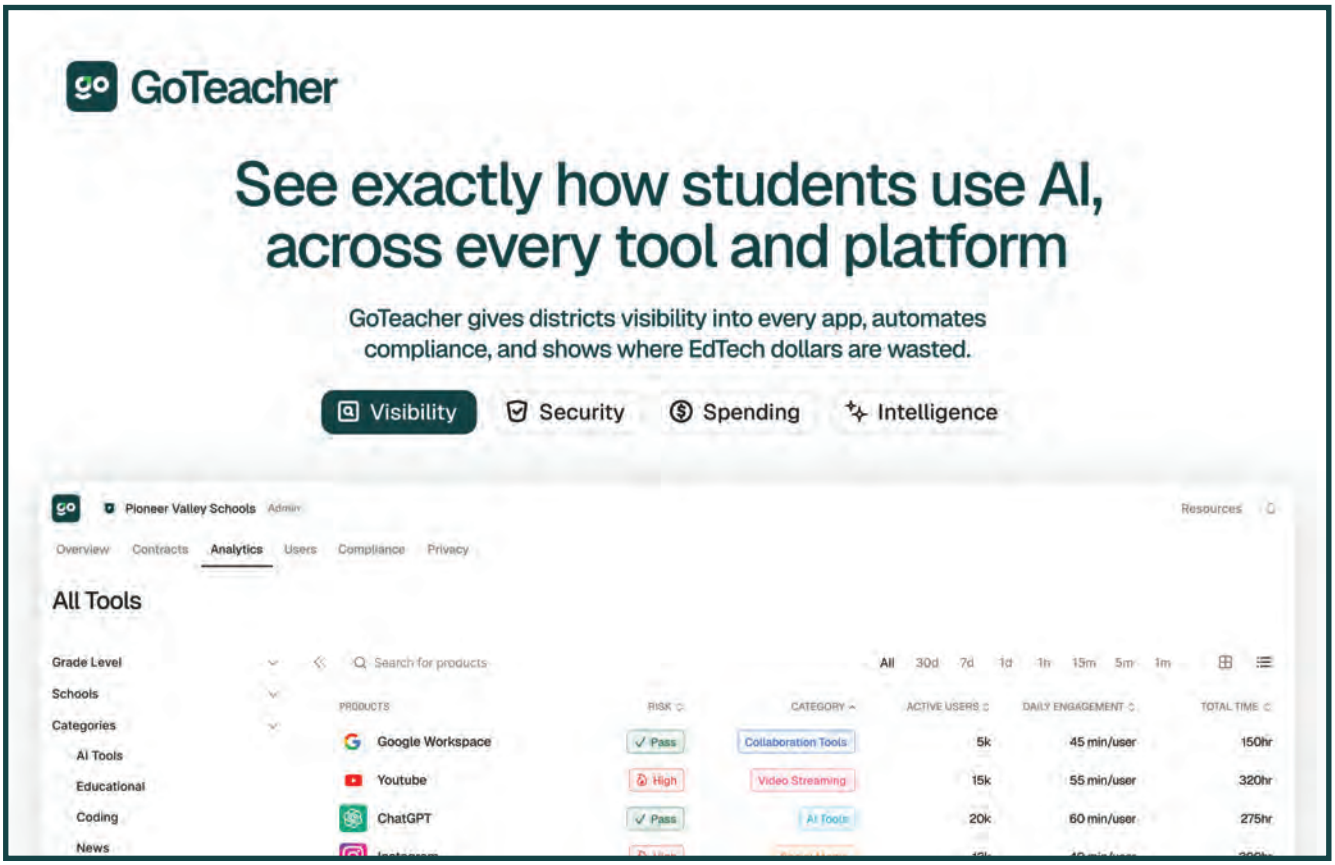
Total Score

Total Score:

10 or less: Making strategic decisions about your programming will be difficult. There is an opportunity to bridge your data gaps through an Initiatives Inventory or other strategic process that can provide actionable insights.

11-17: You are off to a good start! Review your answers to explore areas where you might want to increase your efforts.

18+: You and your team are capable, skilled, and inspiring leaders of change in your district. You are taking the right steps and projecting yourselves as change leaders.



Reimagining Staffing to Maximize District Resources

Cedar Rapids Community School District (IA)

Joseph Costello

In the fall of 2024, the leadership team at Cedar Rapids Community School District (CRCSD) knew they would be facing a $12 million budget deficit in the coming 2025-2026 school year. CRCSD, the third-largest school district in Iowa, had been experiencing a steady decline in student enrollment, dropping from 16,000 students in 2013 to about 14,000 today. The decline was driven by factors such as open enrollment, the emergence of new charter schools, and the state's Educational Savings Account program. With fewer students, the district was receiving fewer dollars to fund its schools. While one-time Covid-19 relief funds through ESSER temporarily delayed difficult financial decisions, the district needed to take action to address the impending budget deficit.

> *"Through the design of a strategic staffing model, DMG helped CRCSD fully address its $12 million budget deficit and create a more systematic and effective way of allocating its resources.*

Many districts take a districtwide "belt-tightening" approach to budget deficits, implementing across-the-board cost-cutting. While seemingly equitable, this approach has the unintended consequence of potentially cutting important and effective programs while leaving less effective programs in place. Wanting to bring a more strategic and transparent approach to resourcing its schools, CRCSD engaged District Management Group (DMG) to help clearly diagnose the challenges facing the district and design a solution that would provide sustainability while enabling the district to deliver most effectively for its students. Ultimately, through the design of a strategic staffing model, DMG helped CRCSD fully address its $12 million budget deficit and create a more systematic and effective way of allocating its resources. This was just year one of a multi-year process to effectively manage declining resources.

FAST FACTS

Cedar Rapids Community School District

15,003* students

- **54%** White
- **22%** Black/African American
- **10%** Hispanic/Latino
- **2%** Asian
- **1%** Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander
- **11%** Two or More Races

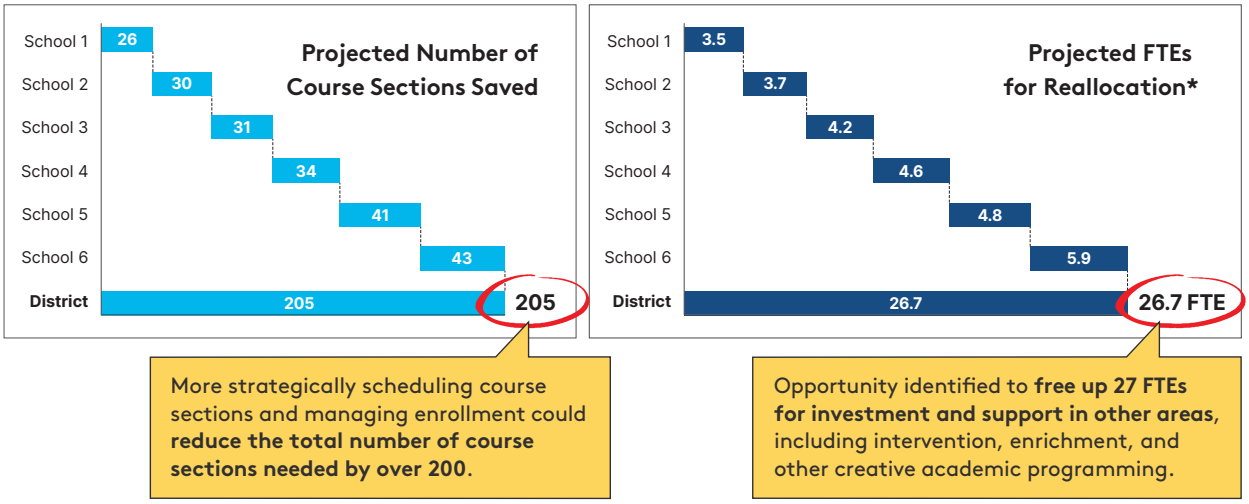
44 schools

- **12** Preschool/Kindergarten
- **18** Elementary Schools
- **6** Middle Schools
- **5** High Schools
- **3** Specialized/Other Schools

Source: https://www.iaschoolperformance.gov/ECP/StateDistrictSchool/DistrictSummary?k=9256&y=2025
* Includes preschool students

Exhibit 1

Summary of Staffing Efficiency Findings at the Middle School Level



Source: District Management Group analysis of CRCSD Course Data; SY 23-24

*How double-blocked classes were coded may result in fewer projected FTEs in some schools.

A Deep Diagnostic Yields Insights

DMG and CRCSD began by reviewing community demographic and enrollment data and assessing student outcomes across schools. Additionally, DMG analyzed staffing levels across all schools, benchmarked against internal guidelines as well as the trends in similar districts across the country. The analysis quickly uncovered that staffing levels were inconsistent among the district's schools. The shifts in enrollment had occurred gradually, and enrollment trends had varied among schools—some had seen increases even as overall district enrollment numbers fell—leading to an inconsistent distribution of resources between schools. As is the case in many districts, there were no clear rules governing how many staff in each role should go to each building based on student enrollment levels and the relative needs of students. To ensure a deep and accurate understanding of district resourcing, in addition to its quantitative analysis, DMG gathered qualitative information through interviews and focus groups with over 60 school and district leaders and staff.

Key findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed the following:

- **Variation in staffing:** Some schools and programs were overstaffed, while others were understaffed.
- **Variation in student needs:** The needs of students (i.e., special education, English learners, and students experiencing poverty) varied among schools, resulting in a wide variation in staffing needs across schools.

Operating Budget (FY2024):	Per Pupil Expenditure (FY2024):	English Language Learners:	Free/Reduced Lunch Program:
$318,150,000	**$18,330**	**11%**	**57%**

- **Many one-off positions:** Relics of outdated district initiatives or staffing decisions, many positions (i.e., specific interventionists, coaches, facilitators, and paraeducators) had unclear or outdated roles and responsibilities and lacked any connection to a centralized approach to staffing.

At the middle school level alone, a detailed analysis of staffing and course offerings revealed the opportunity to unlock up to 27 teacher FTEs for other purposes by scheduling more efficiently without limiting offerings for students (*Exhibit 1*).

Based on these insights, DMG identified three key opportunities for CRCSD to improve its approach to staffing, which included (1) developing a clear allocation methodology, (2) improving the process for making staffing decisions, and (3) instituting quick adjustments to take advantage of opportunities for efficiency.

Continuing its partnership with DMG, CRCSD took action and developed the following responses:

1. **Student-Based Staffing and Resource Allocation Model:** CRCSD opted for a student-based staffing and resource allocation model that establishes baseline staffing levels based on enrollment, and then allocates additional resources to support students with special education needs or language needs or experiencing poverty. School leaders would be able to use these additional resources for more staffing or supplies at their discretion. DMG and CRCSD worked with a team of district stakeholders to develop and finalize these staffing rules to ensure they reflected the vision of the district.

2. **Methodology for Making Staffing Decisions:** CRCSD developed and documented a clear process for making staffing decisions, grounded in projected actual enrollment levels for each school.

3. **Quick Adjustments with a People-First Approach:** The district was able to eliminate vacant positions and eliminate positions created by attrition to ensure that very few staff members were impacted by the staffing shifts and reductions. This people-first approach allowed CRCSD to maintain trust with its educators and community while also directly addressing its financial situation.

Reimagining Staffing to Create Long-Term Stability

As a result of this work, CRCSD was able to systematically redesign how it resources its schools, creating a model for district financial sustainability grounded in logical, agreed-upon rules for how resources should be allocated. "Our highest priority is providing every student with a high-quality education in a safe and supportive environment," says CRCSD Superintendent Dr. Tawana Grover. "These adjustments allow us to meet current needs while making targeted investments that support our students and staff."

> *"These adjustments allow us to meet current needs while making targeted investments that support our students and staff.*
>
> – Dr. Tawana Grover
> Superintendent, Cedar Rapids Community School District

With DMG's support, CRCSD managed to reduce 27 FTE at the central office, 77 teaching positions across elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as 145 campus support staff positions, bringing district and school-based staffing levels back in line with student enrollment. The district was able to close vacant positions and rely on retirements and attrition to minimize the impact on existing staff members. In collaboration with human resources and the Cedar Rapids Education Association through the collective bargaining process, teachers were realigned, and no staff received Reduction in Force (RIF) notices. Importantly, this approach will help the district avoid budget crises in the future and will create a more predictable approach to staffing and resourcing for district leaders and staff. Looking ahead, the district is planning to reinforce its transparent approach to budgeting and resourcing by creating regular feedback loops with leaders and stakeholders to ensure that community resources go toward the investments that will yield the strongest outcomes for students. ◆

PRISM™

Prioritizing Resources and Initiatives for Strategic Management

DMG's **comprehensive service** equips districts to:

- ✔ **Align spending** with student needs and district priorities
- ✔ Make objective, **data-driven budgeting decisions**
- ✔ **Direct resources** to maximize student outcomes
- ✔ **Increase accountability**
- ✔ Promote **long-term financial sustainability**

Align spending with what matters most

Learn more about PRISM™

District Management Group
Helping Schools and Students Thrive

The Science of Reading: From Research to Classroom Practice

Haley Harshman and Shannah Varón

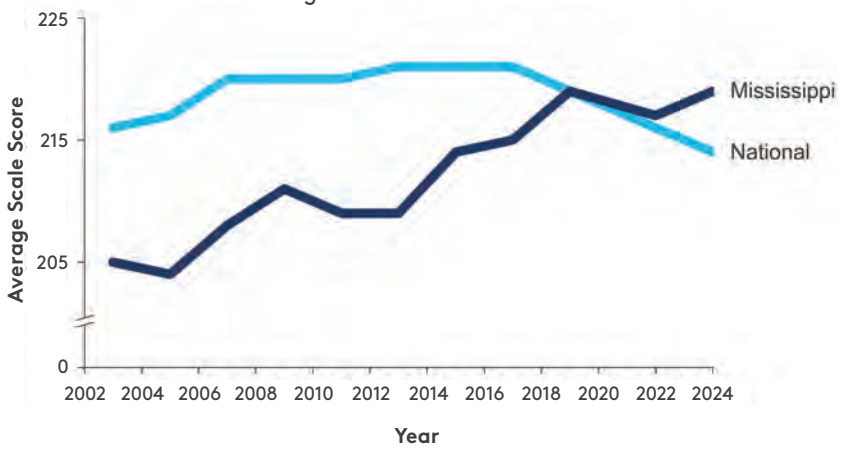
For decades, the so-called reading wars divided educators. One camp favored whole language strategies and planned instruction with a focus on a student's natural ability to learn language holistically. The other emphasized systematic instruction, such as discrete phonics instruction.

This lack of consensus left classrooms across the country with fragmented approaches to literacy. Then came the Covid-19 pandemic, which deepened learning loss and pushed reading outcomes to crisis levels. According to NAEP scores released in September 2025, fully one-third of U.S. eighth-graders are not reading at even the Basic level. These results mean that one out of every three eighth-graders in the U.S. cannot fulfill basic literacy tasks such as identifying the order of events, a character's traits, or the main idea in a text[1]—skills that are generally mastered in elementary school.

Exhibit 1

Trend in 4th-Grade NAEP Reading Proficiency Mississippi vs. National

Average Scale Score Over Time



Source: The Nation's Report Card National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

Against this backdrop, the debate is finally losing steam. A broad consensus is forming around the Science of Reading (SoR), which is not a single program or curriculum but a growing body of ever-evolving research that defines the essential components of effective literacy instruction.

The National Momentum for the Science of Reading

One early adopter of Science of Reading policies was Mississippi, which passed landmark legislation in 2013 requiring curriculum to be based on SoR. Student outcome data shows that this was the right move: on recent NAEP results, Mississippi shows a strong upward trajectory in fourth-grade reading, now surpassing the national average reading scale score for fourth-graders (*Exhibit 1*).[2]

What Is the Science of Reading?

The Science of Reading is a research-backed approach that identifies the building blocks of reading, and posits that they must all be taught systematically in order for students to master the skills of literacy. These core components include:



Phonemic Awareness – The ability to identify and play with individual sounds in spoken words



Phonics - Reading instruction focused on understanding how letters and groups of letters link to sounds to form letter-sound relationships and spelling patterns



Fluency - The ability to read words, phrases, sentences, and stories correctly, with enough speed and expression



Vocabulary - Knowing what words mean and how to say and use them correctly



Comprehension - The ability to understand what you are reading

Source: "The Science of Reading: An Overview," National Center on Improving Literacy (accessed November 5, 2025), https://www.improvingliteracy.org/resource/the-science-of-reading-an-overview.

With Mississippi leading the way, now 40 states have policies mandating evidence-based literacy instruction. The movement has accelerated recently: in part spurred by the success of the podcast *Sold a Story*, 26 states adopted such policies in just the last three years (*Exhibit 2*).[3]

The Implementation Gap

Mandating the Science of Reading based on a strong research base is a meaningful first step, but it is just that: a *first* step. Curriculum companies have rushed to align their products with SoR, and in the last few years, there has been significant investment from school districts in these new high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) to support the transition to research-based practice in reading.

These policy advances and curriculum investments represent meaningful progress. Yet the most difficult challenge remains implementation in the classroom. The question is not whether the research or the materials exist, but how to ensure teachers consistently use these practices in ways that strengthen student literacy and improve outcomes.

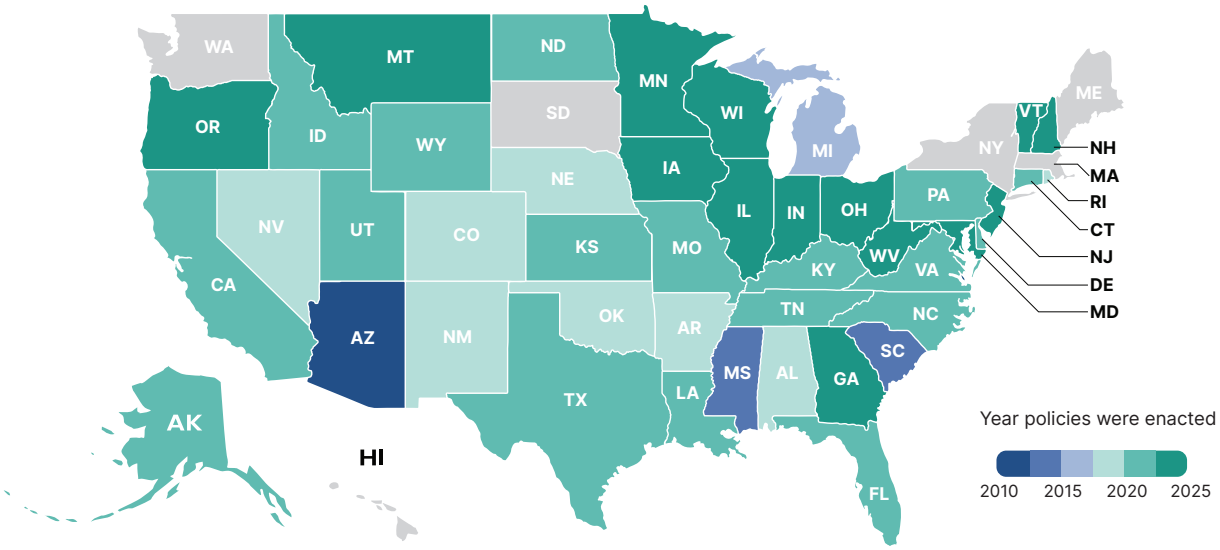
> ***"The move to get the Science of Reading to anchor U.S. classroom pedagogy and practice is research-based and well-intentioned, but it all hinges on strong implementation."***

This is where District Management Group's Breakthrough Results (BTR) program has proven valuable. BTR equips districts to move from policy to practice by bringing to life the principles of the Science of Reading and activating teachers' focus on a discrete skill. The program uses an improvement science approach—testing strategies in rapid cycles and using real-time data to scale what works.

At its core, Breakthrough Results is the education sector's distillation of some of the most effective continuous improvement approaches drawn from other sectors, such as engineering and health care—Six Sigma, Total Quality Management, Kaizen, Lean, and others. Each of these models is built on the same principle: the relentless pursuit of performance through small, incremental improvements guided by frequent data.

Exhibit 2

States with Science of Reading Policies



Source: Whiteboard Advisors, https://whiteboardadvisors.com/the-science-of-reading-is-entering-its-next-chapter

BTR adapts these methodologies for the school context, but the process is the same: identify a key leverage point, test strategies in rapid cycles, use real-time data to adjust, and then scale what works. By applying this disciplined, improvement science–based approach, BTR helps districts not only achieve measurable gains but also build educator capacity to sustain them year after year. Given the Science of Reading's focus on rigorous implementation of reading programs and student skill development based on data, it is a perfect use-case for the Breakthrough Results methodology.

The result is measurable gains in reading skills and the development of lasting professional capacity to sustain improvement.

> *"The question is how to ensure teachers consistently use these practices in ways that strengthen student literacy and improve outcomes.*

Case Study: Grand Island Public Schools (NE)

Science of Reading Focus Area: Fluency

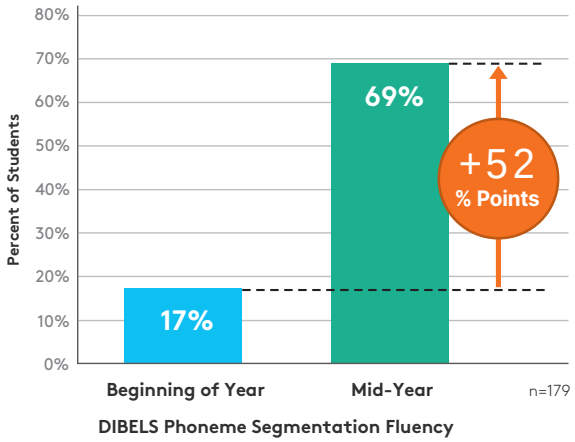
The Challenge: Many kindergarteners were not meeting benchmarks in phoneme segmentation fluency (PSF), while second-graders struggled with nonsense word fluency—words recoded correctly (NWF-WRC). Without fluency, students were stuck at the decoding stage, expending too much energy on sounding out words.

The Fix: The BTR coaches helped teams set aggressive yet achievable growth targets for fluency based on focus areas in kindergarten and second grade. Many teachers adopted new, structured routines, like repeated readings and partner practice. Others added detailed student monitoring, with students tracking the goal. Teachers also looked at very specific skills that students were missing and intervened with mini-lessons targeting gaps. Teachers and school-level coaches were able to identify strategies as a result of the BTR focus and progress monitoring. Weekly data reviews allowed teams to refine grouping and intervene quickly with students who were falling behind.

The Result: BTR students in both kindergarten and second grade saw significant gains in the fluency focus for that grade level (phoneme segmentation fluency for kindergarten; words recoded correctly/blending for second grade). For example, in kindergarten, 69% of students were at or above the mid-year benchmark on the DIBELS assessment at the end of the BTR cycle, compared to just 17% at the beginning of the year (*Exhibit 3*).

Exhibit 3

Grand Island Public Schools
Breakthrough Results Kindergarten Students Reading At/Above Benchmark
SY2024-25



Source: DMG and Grand Island Public Schools

Case Study: East Baton Rouge Parish Schools (LA)

Science of Reading Focus Area: Phonemic Awareness

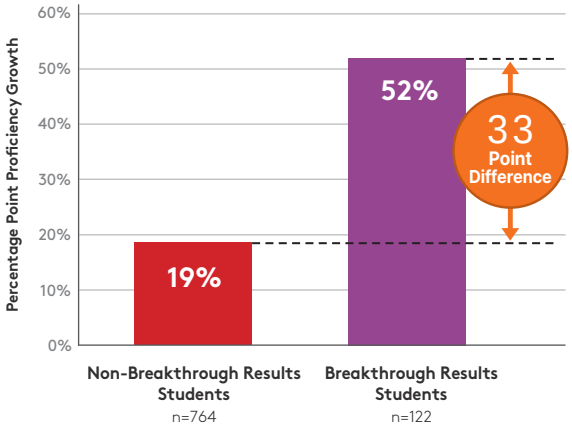
The Challenge: Pre-K students in East Baton Rouge Parish Schools (EBR) lacked foundational phonemic awareness, the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words. This skill is one of the strongest predictors of reading success and can be built in pre-K to set kindergarten students on a strong path to becoming readers. The district wanted to increase the ability to blend onset-rime, a key early skill that allows children to connect sounds into words. Without intervention, these gaps would compound quickly, undermining the district's broader goal of kindergarten readiness.

The Fix: Breakthrough Results Performance Coaches worked with pre-K teams to set clear, measurable goals (SMART goals) for increasing onset-rime blending. EBR teachers embedded short, daily routines for phonemic awareness practice, using multisensory tools like magnetic tiles to make the abstract concept of sounds more concrete. Weekly data reviews helped teams monitor progress and adjust instruction in real time.

The Result: EBR's Breakthrough Results students showed remarkable growth, with a 52-point increase from midyear to end-of-year on a key phonemic awareness measure—2.7 times the growth of their peers (*Exhibit 4*).

Exhibit 4

East Baton Rouge Parish Schools
Pre-K Student Growth in Blending Onset-Rime
SY2024-SY2025



Source: DMG and East Baton Rouge Parish Schools

Case Study: Birmingham City Schools (AL)

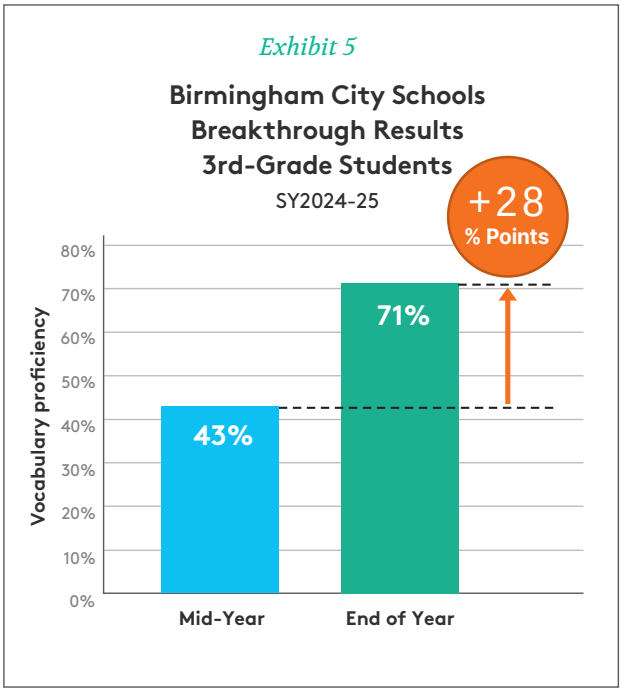
Science of Reading Focus Area: Vocabulary

The Challenge: Third-graders faced challenges accessing grade-level text due to limited vocabulary, a foundational skill for comprehension and knowledge-building.

The Fix: BTR teams implemented daily routines that focused on root words, prefixes, and suffixes. Structured "Blitz" routines helped students connect new words to authentic texts. Coaches guided teachers to use assessment data to adjust instruction, while students tracked their own progress.

The Result: BTR students' vocabulary proficiency increased by 28 points from mid-year to end-of-year (*Exhibit 5*), a

Exhibit 5



Source: DMG and Birmingham City Schools

gain seven times greater than that of their non-BTR peers. Importantly, Birmingham City Schools sustained the remarkable growth on the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment of Progress (ACAP) from the 2023-2024 school year, when they had implemented a fluency-focused Breakthrough Results program.

Lessons from the Field: What Makes Change Stick

District Management Group's Breakthrough Results Program has helped hundreds of schools successfully bring the Science of Reading to life in classrooms—and the BTR approach has proven just as powerful in other areas, from math instruction to attendance and beyond. A few key lessons stand out:

- **Successful Change Programs Begin with Results.**[4] This is the driving principle of our Breakthrough Results model: it's not about setting goals for compliance or process, but about setting performance goals that measure real student outcomes. When goals are tied to results—like gains in fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension—teachers can see tangible progress toward those benchmarks. That clarity builds urgency, motivates practice, and drives the kind of instructional shifts that truly move the needle for students.

- **The Right Data at the Right Time:** Most schools already have plenty of data, but it often comes too late or is too generic to guide instruction. BTR changes that by delivering actionable, timely data focused on specific literacy skills. Instead of waiting for end-of-unit or end-of-year reports, teachers are reviewing progress weekly and using it to make immediate instructional adjustments. With the right information at the right moment, teachers know exactly which students need a shift in approach and which strategies from their Science of Reading toolkit will work best.

- **Real-Time Coaching That Translates into Sustained Practice:** Professional development alone rarely shifts practice. It's too often disconnected from the daily challenges teachers face. Embedded coaching, however, sticks. When support is tied to real-time data and to the very students in front of them, teachers are far more likely to adopt and sustain new strategies. That's why DMG coaches don't wait for the next training cycle. They plug directly into existing professional learning community (PLC) structures and offer in-the-moment feedback. Teachers can immediately try a suggested adjustment during instruction, see how it works with their students, and refine it in real time. This rapid application accelerates teacher growth, builds confidence, and ensures professional learning leads to meaningful, lasting change in classrooms.

The move to get the Science of Reading to anchor U.S. classroom pedagogy and practice is research-based and well-intentioned, but it all hinges on strong implementation. For this reason, having an implementation partner such as DMG's Breakthrough Results team can bring the Science of Reading to life, building data literacy for teachers and activating that on-the-ground knowledge base—which leads to strong and sustainable results for students. ◆

NOTES

[1] "10 Takeaways from the 2024 NAEP Results," NAEP (accessed November 5, 2025), https://www.nagb.gov/powered-by-naep/the-2024-nations-report-card/10-takeaways-from-2024-naep-results.html#:~:text=On%20a%20500%2Dpoint%20scale,either%20grade%2C%20compared%20to%202022.

[2] "NAEP Reading: US Reading Score Trends," NAEP, 2024 (accessed November 5, 2025), https://www.nagb.gov/naep/reading.html.

[3] Anna Kimsey Edwards, "The Science of Reading Is Entering Its Next Chapter," Whiteboard Advisors, October 14, 2025, https://whiteboardadvisors.com/the-science-of-reading-is-entering-its-next-chapter/.

[4] Robert H. Schaffer, "Successful Change Programs Begin with Results," *Harvard Business Review* (1992).

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>
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Realizing Rapid Math Improvement in Huntsville City Schools (AL)

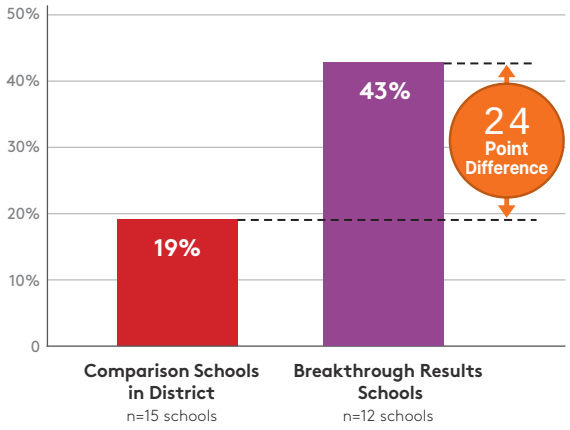
Shannah Varón

In public education, the pursuit of rapid student achievement gains is a constant, and often elusive, priority. In the winter of 2025, Huntsville City Schools (HCS) undertook an effort to accelerate math proficiency among its fourth-grade students, hoping to realize immediate gains on the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment of Progress (ACAP) in spring 2025.

Exhibit 1

4th-Grade Math ACAP Year-Over-Year Growth

SY2023-24 to SY2024-25



Source: DMG and Huntsville City Schools

BTR

209 fourth-grade students

70 team members

12 schools

Partnering with District Management Group (DMG) to implement the Breakthrough Results (BTR) program, HCS successfully demonstrated how a focused, data-driven approach can lead to transformative outcomes for students in a short period of time. The HCS schools that implemented the BTR program saw a **43% increase in proficiency** on ACAP over the prior year, a number that far exceeded the 19% growth in proficiency observed in a comparison group of the district's higher-performing schools that were not part of the BTR program (*Exhibit 1*).

FAST FACTS

23,816* students

- **39%** Black/African American
- **36%** White
- **15%** Hispanic
- **2%** Asian
- **1%** American Indian/Alaska Native
- **7%** Other

Source: https://www.huntsvillecityschools.org/page/district-overview
*2025-26 Enrollment

44 schools

- **26** Elementary Schools
- **11** Middle Schools
- **6** High Schools
- **1** Virtual 3-12 School

A Unique Context: The Importance of Math in the "Rocket City"

Huntsville, Alabama, is known globally as Rocket City due to its foundational role in the U.S. space program and its position as a center of the aerospace and defense industries. In the mid-20th century, a team of German rocket scientists moved to Huntsville to work for the U.S. Army. Today, Huntsville is home to Redstone Arsenal, the largest employer in the region, which is a hub for the U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command and the Missile Defense Agency. Huntsville is also home to NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center. This unique environment is characterized by a high concentration of highly skilled professionals, including a significant number of Ph.D.s, who are a driving force behind the city's innovation and economic success.

In this context, strong math and science skills are not merely academic goals; they are essential for maintaining the city's intellectual and industrial leadership. For Huntsville City Schools, ensuring high levels of math achievement is critical to preparing students to access economic mobility in Huntsville.

The State Mandate: Raising the Stakes for Student Performance

The pressure to elevate student achievement in Huntsville is further intensified by recent state-level policy. The implementation of two high-stakes laws, the Alabama Literacy Act and the Alabama Numeracy Act, has changed the landscape of public education in the state. These new laws require students to meet specific proficiency benchmarks in reading by the end of third grade and in math by the end of fifth grade. Failure to meet these benchmarks can, in some cases, affect a student's promotion to the next grade level. This legislative framework creates a heightened sense of urgency for school districts across Alabama to ensure that every student is on a solid academic path. For Huntsville City Schools, programs like BTR not only are about local improvement but are also a direct response to these state mandates, providing a proven, rapid-cycle method to get students on track and ensure they are meeting critical proficiency requirements.

> *"HCS schools that implemented the Breakthrough Results program saw a 43% increase in proficiency on ACAP over the prior year.*

The BTR Framework: A Blueprint for Rapid Improvement

In spring 2024, just 28.2% of HCS' fourth-graders were proficient on the state's ACAP math assessment, which did not bode well for meeting the mandated math proficiency benchmarks by the end of fifth grade. HCS Superintendent Dr. Clarence Sutton had heard from his superintendent colleague Dr. Mark Sullivan of the strong gains in third-grade literacy achieved in Birmingham, Alabama, using DMG's BTR program. Dr. Sutton wanted to explore the possibility of using Breakthrough Results to address the concerning math gaps in Huntsville. The question was: with only a few months until the state proficiency exam, could students show meaningful progress on the ACAP?

Operating Budget (SY2025):	Per Pupil Expenditure:	English Language Learners:	Free/Reduced Lunch Program:
$440,779,434	**$11,417**	**6%**	**51%**

Source: Huntsville City Schools, https://www.huntsvillecityschools.org/page/district-overview

In January 2025, Dr. Sutton reached out to DMG, and together, district leaders and the Breakthrough Results team shifted into action. The DMG team partnered with leaders in Huntsville to identify key focus areas on which growth could lead to outsized impact on ACAP—namely, data and measurement as well as geometry—and built focused SMART goals around these areas. The team also identified an approach to selecting target students and a progress-monitoring system that leveraged the district's existing tools (i-Ready diagnostic and the Savvas assessment platform). Seventy teachers, instructional coaches, assistant principals, and others participated in the Breakthrough Results program to elevate math achievement in a laser-focused way for 209 Huntsville fourth-graders, who represented 26% of enrolled students at focus schools.

Together, they implemented the core features of the Breakthrough Results program as illustrated below.

Breakthrough Results Core Component	Approach at Huntsville City Schools
Determine a focus area aligned to the district's strategic goals	**Fourth-Grade Math,** specifically data and measurement and geometry domains.
Set a "SMART" (Specific, Measurable, Ambitious/achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goal	Focusing on students who scored one grade level below on i-Ready's mid-year diagnostic, the SMART goal was to ensure that a specific number of these students at each BTR school **achieved more than 27 points of growth** on the district's assessments from pre-test to post-test. The target group of students represented 26% of the total fourth-grade enrollment in these schools, making the challenge both significant and well-defined.
Determine a pre-test, post-test, and interim progress monitoring framework	Though i-Ready was used for selecting students for the target group, the district created a pre-assessment, a post-assessment, and three progress-monitoring assessments using their Savvas platform and the bank of questions aligned to data and measurement as well as the geometry domains.
Determine an 8-to-10-week cycle for the work	The cycle ran from February 28, 2025, to May 2, 2025.
Weekly coaching by the DMG Performance Coach	Performance coaches met with team leads and teams of teachers weekly in virtual meetings, plugging into existing Professional Learning Community (PLC) structures.
Data visualization and data literacy skill development	DMG built a **dashboard** that was used biweekly by district, school, and teacher leaders **to track student progress** against their goals with the support of the DMG Performance Coach.
Rapid, iterative learning and strategy testing	Huntsville team members worked quickly, based on data, to try new strategies for improving math skills. For example, by looking at the data, teams realized the importance of explicitly teaching critical math vocabulary and ensuring student mastery of these terms to be able to do related math problems.

Source: DMG and Huntsville City Schools

Remarkable Student Outcomes: Evidence of a Successful Model

The most compelling story from the Huntsville BTR program is told through the student data. The results, measured across multiple assessments—ACAP, i-Ready, and Savvas—were nothing short of dramatic.

> *"BTR schools saw a 43% increase in proficiency, a number that far exceeded the 19% growth observed in a comparison group of higher-performing non-BTR schools in the district.*

Unprecedented Growth on the ACAP

The most striking result came from the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) for fourth-grade math. BTR schools saw a 43% increase in proficiency, a number that far exceeded the 19% growth observed in a comparison group of higher-performing non-BTR schools in the district (*Exhibit 1*). This data point is a powerful testament to the program's effectiveness at a school-wide level. An impressive 10 out of the 12 BTR schools saw more students reach proficiency on the ACAP compared to the previous year, demonstrating the widespread impact of the program.

Doubling the District's Growth on i-Ready

The i-Ready assessment, which measures student proficiency from mid-year (MOY) to end-of-year (EOY), also showed significant gains. BTR students gained an average of 29 points in overall i-Ready proficiency, which was 2.4 times the district's average growth of 12 points. This remarkable achievement highlights the program's success in accelerating the learning trajectories of its most in-need students. Furthermore, in the specific focus area of Data & Measurement, a key focus of the program, BTR students outpaced their non-BTR peers by an even wider margin, with a 44-point increase in proficiency compared to just a 7-point increase for non-BTR students (*Exhibit 2*).

Milestone Achievements on District-Created Assessments

The rapid-cycle nature of the BTR program was further validated by the results from district-created Savvas assessments. From a pre-assessment to a post-assessment, BTR students increased their average score by **29 points**. This continuous progress was visible throughout the program, with average scores steadily climbing from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment, with interim progress monitoring checks (PMs) serving as key indicators of progress (*Exhibit 3*).

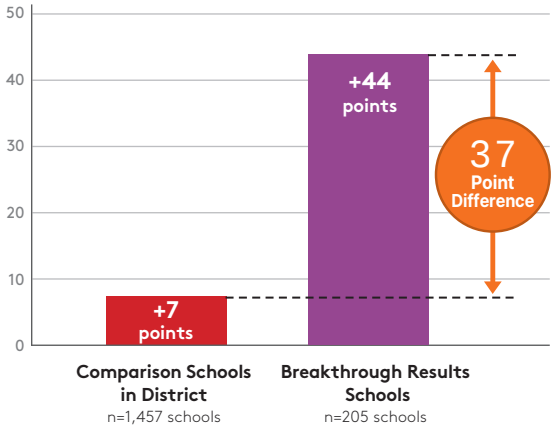
Building Capacity: Fostering a Culture of Collaborative Improvement

The BTR program's impact extended beyond student scores; it also had a profound effect on the professional practices and collaboration among educators. The structured data cycles and weekly meetings provided a model for how to engage in purposeful instructional planning and monitor student progress in real time. "This was a great example of how PLC meetings should be structured. It inspired us to continue meeting regularly next year, using the same planning approach and responding," a Huntsville BTR team lead shared.

Exhibit 2

Growth in 4th-Grade Math Students Performing On or Above Grade Level in Data and Measurement on i-Ready Diagnostic

Mid-Year to End-of Year, 2025



Source: DMG and Huntsville City Schools

> *The Breakthrough Results Program empowered our teachers to help their students to achieve outstanding results quickly. We are excited by the success we've seen with our students in just eight weeks.*
>
> – Dr. Clarence Sutton
> Superintendent, Huntsville City Schools

As one BTR principal noted, "We will continue to collaborate and use pre- and post-assessments to determine mastery of standards, while intentionally and effectively leveraging the right resources to support student learning."

This cultural shift toward data-driven collaboration and shared accountability is one of the most significant long-term outcomes of the program. The BTR dashboards equipped teams with the tools and routines to act on student-level data, fostering a sense of shared ownership for student progress. The process helped teams sharpen content knowledge and close instructional gaps, strengthening the alignment between curriculum and assessment vocabulary.

Looking Forward: Scaling Success in Huntsville

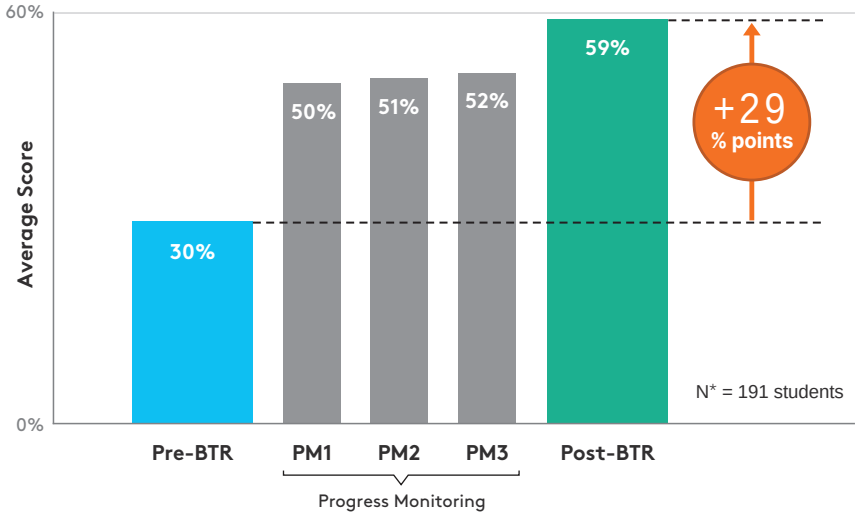
The success of the initial BTR program cycle in the spring of 2025 was a powerful proof of concept for Huntsville City Schools. "The Breakthrough Results program empowered our teachers to help their students to achieve outstanding results quickly. We are excited by the success we've seen with our students in just eight weeks," said Superintendent Clarence Sutton. The increases in fourth-grade math proficiency on the ACAP despite the short timeframe, combined with the accelerated growth on i-Ready and district-created assessments, have led the district to expand its use of the BTR program. The BTR program is now being implemented for both fourth- and fifth-grade math, aiming to replicate and scale these impressive results, and position HCS students for success in the context of the Alabama Numeracy Act.

This initiative serves as a model for other districts seeking to implement a rapid-cycle improvement process. It demonstrates that by establishing a clear focus, providing structured support, and empowering educators with data and collaborative routines, it is possible to achieve significant, measurable gains in a short amount of time. ◆

Exhibit 3

Increase in BTR Students' Average Score on Savvas Assessments

Pre-assessment to Post-assessment



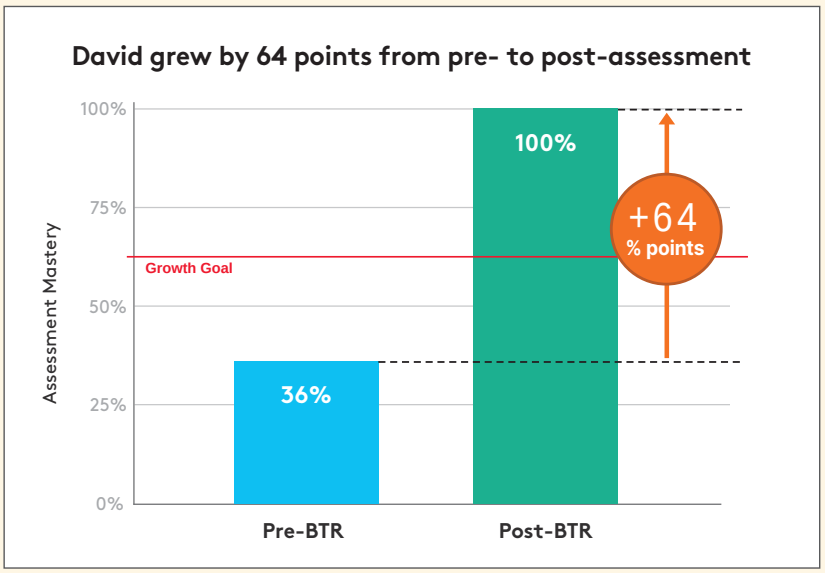
Source: DMG and Huntsville City Schools *Only students with both pre- and post-test results were included in this analysis.



David's† Results

"I understand angle problems now. Working in the small group helped me focus."

—David



Source: District Management Group

"This extra time to dive deeply into the knowledge really benefited David. The small group time became the highlight of the week for him and his scores. Instead of approaching the work out of fear, he became willing to engage and work through the problems even though it was difficult."

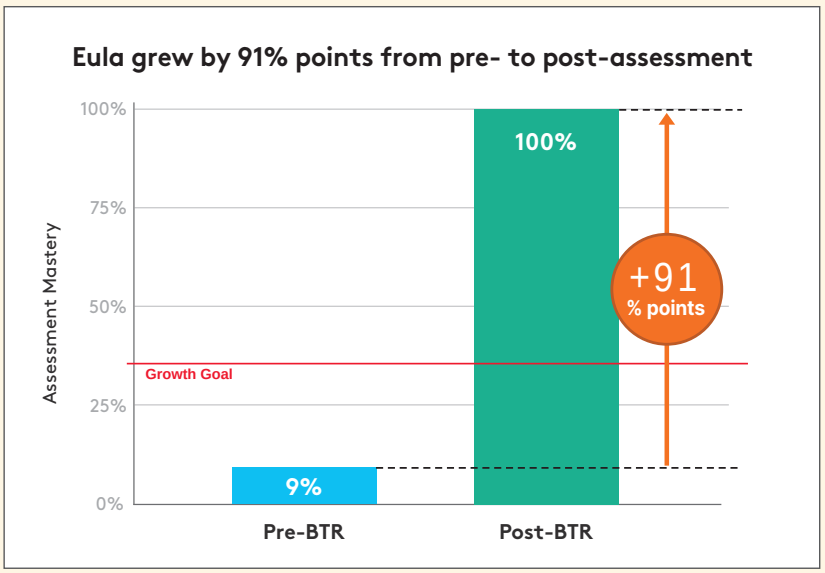
—Breakthrough Team Member, Teacher



Eula's† Results

"One day I raised my hand to read a math problem in class, I did so well in English that the whole class cheered for me. I was so excited, now I raise my hand all the time!"

—Eula



Source: District Management Group

"When Eula came in October, she... was new to the English language. She was driven and worked hard with me in small group instruction. ...By the end of the year, she can read the math problems on her own."

—Breakthrough Team Member, Teacher

†Student's name has been changed.

Breakthrough Results Program

It's All About Results

District Management Group's Breakthrough Results program focuses on achieving measurable results. It is rooted in the belief that results are an essential catalyst for change, creating the momentum to drive true transformation.

What is the Breakthrough Results program?

The Breakthrough Results program is a methodology rooted in the principles of improvement science, and adapted by District Management Group for school districts. It starts with a laser focus on goals, brings together teams to work in rapid cycles of iteration, and incorporates actionable data to measure progress and drive innovation. It makes use of a district's tools, teams, and structures and organizes them into a system to drive results. Throughout the work, coaching and just-in-time professional development support building leadership, teamwork, collaboration, and data skills.

What are the core features?

- **Bite-sized "SMART" goals** are established by teachers and school staff. Together, they work to achieve a **s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**mbitious and achievable, **r**ealistic, and **t**ime-bound goal.
- An **assessment and progress-monitoring framework** is created based on what the district has and is using on the ground (pre-test, interim progress monitoring, and post-test).
- An **8-to-10-week cycle of engagement** to achieve the SMART goal creates focus and urgency.
- **Weekly coaching by a DMG Performance Coach** is provided to team leaders at participating schools to support planning and facilitation of strong professional learning community meetings (PLCs).
- **Data visualization and data literacy skill development** for teachers, led by the DMG Performance Coach, is provided throughout the cycle.
- **Rapid, iterative cycles to test various strategies** enable the team to learn quickly from successes and failures in order to achieve meaningful outcomes. This approach is rooted in the best principles of improvement science.
- **A reflection and retrospective** is conducted to assess outcomes and adjust course before launching the next cycle.

Proven to deliver results:

- **Increasing reading proficiency**
- **Reducing chronic absenteeism**
- **Improving math skills**
- **Increasing FAFSA completion**
- **Increasing ACT performance**

Utilized in districts across the country

Double ELA and Math Growth.

DMG's Breakthrough Results Program

A unique combination of focused goals, frequent data reviews, short-cycle iterations, performance coaching and just-in-time professional development.

Proven to deliver measurable results* while building teachers' capacity

> "The results, simply put, are astounding."
>
> - Austin Beutner, former superintendent
> Los Angeles Unified School District



*Based on work with approximately 50,000+ students across mulltiple districts

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Time Well Spent

How a Strategic Districtwide Approach to Schedules Improves Student Learning While Reducing Costs

Joseph Costello and Jenn Ezell

For decades, building an elementary school schedule was a dreaded administrative task—a puzzle a principal or staff member was tasked with working out in isolation, using whiteboards or spreadsheets. But the landscape of elementary education has dramatically changed—with rising academic expectations, staff shortages, a growing population of multilingual learners and students requiring specialized interventions, and persistent achievement gaps. No longer is it enough just to fit students, teachers, staff, and programs into the day. Today's schedules must strategically align instruction, interventions, and enrichment to meet the complex and diverse needs of all learners. How schools use time is now one of the most important levers for student success.

This article explores how districts that take a strategic, systemwide approach to scheduling—supported by clear priorities and the right tools—can make better use of limited staff, deliver stronger outcomes for students, and even reduce costs. Drawing on insights from districts that have successfully reimagined their schedules, we examine the key elements of this approach and how it can help schools meet the evolving demands of modern education.

Why Scheduling Matters More Than Ever Before

The traditional image of an elementary school—where one homeroom teacher guided students through most of their learning day—is becoming increasingly outdated. Over the past several decades, schools have greatly expanded their programming and staffing to meet broader academic, social, and emotional needs. Alongside classroom teachers, today's elementary schools include reading specialists, multilingual educators, counselors, social workers, behaviorists, instructional coaches, paraprofessionals, and countless other positions. Non-teaching staff in schools has grown by more than 130% since 1970.[1]

This growth in programming and staffing reflects a deep commitment to meeting student needs, but it has also made scheduling far more complex. Elementary principals now lead multifaceted organizations, tasked with aligning a wide array of staff and programs within the fixed parameters of the school day, limited budgets, and contractual obligations. When scheduling is left solely to individual schools without a cohesive district strategy, it often results in inefficiencies, inequities, and missed opportunities to maximize student support.

> *"Today's schedules must strategically align instruction, interventions, and enrichment to meet the complex and diverse needs of all learners. How schools use time is now one of the most important levers for student success.*

Scheduling as a Strategic Lever

A districtwide strategic approach to elementary scheduling reframes the schedule as more than a logistical necessity; scheduling becomes a powerful lever to advance educational priorities. Districtwide strategic scheduling ensures that all students—regardless of their school or grade—have equitable access to core instruction, interventions, enrichment opportunities, and social-emotional learning. It enables schools to maximize the impact of their staff, reduce fragmentation, and better align daily practice with district goals.

The Covid-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for change in scheduling practices. Faced with unprecedented disruption, schools reexamined how they used time and resources. Many implemented staggered arrivals and dismissals, added dedicated social-emotional learning blocks, and experimented with flexible learning models. These innovations, born of necessity, demonstrated how rethinking the schedule can be used to address both student well-being and academic growth.

The lessons learned during the pandemic—about prioritizing what matters most, discontinuing low-impact practices, and creating time for social-emotional needs—should not be forgotten. Instead, they should form the foundation for a more strategic, student-centered approach to scheduling that meets the realities of today's schools.

Foundational Scheduling Best Practices

A robust district strategy for elementary schedules hinges on best practices that dedicate time and staff to the highest-priority areas while ensuring thoughtful and efficient use of resources. The following strategies and best practices are foundational to building schedules that improve outcomes and align with system goals.

1. **Clarify Instructional Minute Guidelines and Establish Protected Time**
   A strong district strategy provides clear instructional priorities, expectations, and guidelines, including specified instructional minutes for each subject. This detail ensures consistency across schools and classrooms, guaranteeing that all students receive similar access and the same number of minutes of instruction. Software tools like DMSchedules can help districts embed required instructional

[1] D. R. Superville, "Districts' Budgets Swell to Accommodate a Surge in Non-Teaching Staff," *Education Week*, August 13, 2014, https://www.edweek.org/leadership/districts-budgets-swell-to-accommodate-a-surge-in-non-teaching-staff/2014/08.

minutes as default settings, making it easier to ensure schedules adhere to districtwide learning goals. District leaders can monitor implementation across the district, ensuring that all schools adhere to expectations, and can see when adjustments need to be made based on enrollment or staffing.

Guidelines should also clearly establish when instructional time should be protected so that students don't experience disrupted instruction in core areas like ELA and math. With software like DMSchedules that provides visibility into homeroom schedules, pull-out services can be scheduled appropriately to adhere to these guidelines.

2. **Institute Dedicated and Flexible Intervention/ Enrichment Blocks**
   Creating dedicated blocks for intervention and enrichment in the main schedule is one of the most impactful changes a district can make. Without these blocks, struggling students are often pulled from core instruction—undermining the very support intended to help them. A best-practice schedule includes built-in intervention blocks that allow all students to remain in their core reading and math classes while still receiving extra-time instruction in the areas they need.

   This approach facilitates the following results:

   - **Targeted support:** Common grade-level intervention blocks enable the efficient regrouping of students across classrooms based on specific academic needs. This ensures that students receive support from the most qualified teachers for their area of focus, maximizing the impact of interventions.
   - **Staff efficiency:** By grouping students with similar needs, districts can reduce the number of staff required to provide these services. Staggering

CASE STUDY

DMSchedules Enables Vermont Schools to Better Serve Students Requiring Additional Supports

The Vermont Agency of Education (AoE) recognized the critical role of scheduling in achieving its objective of enhancing the effectiveness, availability, and equitable delivery of services to students requiring additional support. Through Act 173 of 2018, Vermont AoE made DMSchedules software and services available to all 247 of its public elementary schools. The results have been overwhelmingly positive:

- **Embedded intervention time:** Schools using DMSchedules now have dedicated intervention time seamlessly integrated into the main schedule, ensuring that interventions and supports are provided *in addition to* core instruction, not as a replacement. Service providers no longer need to "negotiate" with teachers for student availability, streamlining the delivery of critical support.

- **Increased transparency and communication:** The centralized nature of the scheduling software allows schedules to be shared easily with all staff. Individual staff schedules are updated in real time, fostering better communication and ensuring timely and effective service delivery. As one principal noted, "Teachers like the ability to see everyone's schedule; it makes scheduling easy for auxiliary staff and for special area teachers who are responsible for duties and other unstructured times of the day."

- **Ease of schedule building and scenario modeling:** Principals found the software user-friendly, allowing them to drag and drop schedule blocks and immediately identify conflicts. This ease of use encourages modeling and comparing different scenarios, enabling schools to design schedules that best benefit students and staff. One principal even stated, "I have never enjoyed creating the schedule as much as I have this year!"

The Vermont initiative underscores that while scheduling and time management might seem "mundane," time is a precious resource fundamental to successfully implementing interventions and supports critical for students.

> *A districtwide strategic approach to elementary scheduling reframes the schedule as more than a logistical necessity; scheduling becomes a powerful lever to advance educational priorities.*

intervention periods by grade level allows support services staff (e.g., special educators, reading specialists, multilingual staff) to "flood" each grade throughout the day, focusing their expertise where and when it's most needed.

- **Dynamic grouping:** Effective strategies involve regularly assessing student growth (e.g., every six to eight weeks) and adjusting groups accordingly. Students who master an area can exit intervention or move to the next area of focus, ensuring that support remains responsive to individual progress.

3. Optimize Staff Time and Talent and Build Structures for Collaboration

Strategic scheduling can significantly improve how staff time and talent are utilized, particularly when there are staff shortages, by enabling the following:

- **Delineating whole-class versus small-group time:** Master schedules that clearly delineate whole-class and small-group instruction time within ELA and math blocks enable support staff to provide push-in services more effectively without disrupting core instruction. Staggering these small-group times by grade level further optimizes support staff coverage.

- **Regrouping students for specials:** Instead of traditional specials rotations where specialists move between many classrooms, regrouping students during specials can reduce the number of specials teachers needed. For instance, in a grade with five classrooms, splitting one classroom's students across the other four for specials can increase class sizes only slightly while reducing the need for an additional specials teacher.

- **Leveraging shared staff across schools:** Districts can maximize the time of service providers by staffing them based on workload rather than caseload. This might involve having staff work full days at one school before moving to another, rather than traveling between schools multiple times a day. Centralized access to up-to-date schedules ensures that support staff can schedule students appropriately and avoid pulling them from core instruction.

- **Maximizing direct service time:** Research often shows that support staff spend less time directly with students than expected due to administrative tasks and meetings. Districts can set clear guidelines on direct service percentages and group sizes to increase the time staff spend with students, potentially reducing the need for additional hires or allowing existing staff to support more students.

4. Take Advantage of Technology for Schedule Management

Because scheduling has grown much more complex, moving away from manual, spreadsheet-based scheduling and taking advantage of an efficient scheduling software tool such as DMSchedules can provide numerous benefits (*Exhibit 1*):

- **Efficiency and accuracy:** These tools are designed to identify interdependencies and conflicts, reducing mistakes and the extensive manual updates required with traditional methods. For example, districts using DMSchedules report saving up to 40 hours per school per year by eliminating manual work and improving staff coordination.

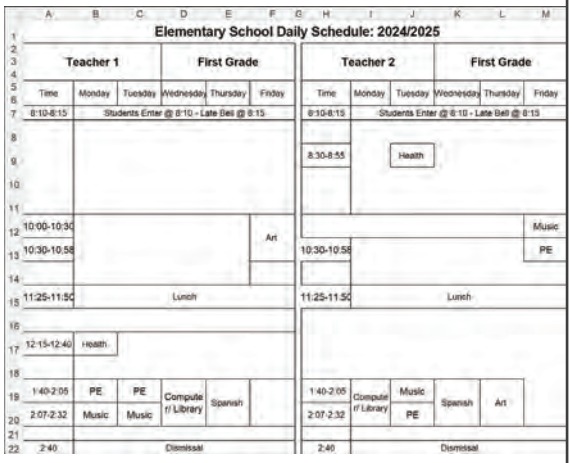
- **Transparency and communication:** Advanced software provides centralized scheduling information and sharing features that provide

Exhibit 1 **SPREADSHEET-BASED SCHEDULING VS. DMSCHEDULES SCHEDULING SOFTWARE**

Traditional (Spreadsheet-Based) Schedule:

Challenges:

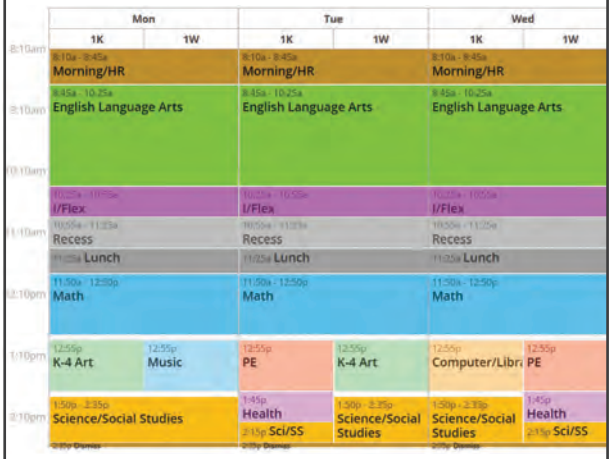
- Difficult to make adjustments (e.g., unmerge cells)
- No intervention block
- No error tracking; staff may be scheduled for conflicting times
- Manual updates required each time
- Only lunch and specials are specified; teachers may not follow district guidelines for minutes of instruction



DMSchedules-Driven Strategic Schedule:

Benefits:

- Easy to adjust with drag and drop
- Protected Flex/Intervention block for each grade
- More clarity and transparency on when service providers can push in or pull out
- Highlights conflicts before it's too late
- Specific times for ELA and math, aligned with district guidelines
- Aligns central office and school staff



Source: District Management Group

real-time updates to all staff, thereby improving communication and ensuring everyone is working from the most current version of the schedule. This transparency also allows administrators to easily see where students are and what is being taught throughout the day.

- **Scenario modeling:** Advanced software allows principals to quickly model and compare different scheduling scenarios, making it easier to examine the different schedules' impact on students and staff, and allowing for a discussion of tradeoffs before implementation. This creative problem-solving process is invaluable for designing optimal schedules.

By implementing these best-practice strategies, districts can create elementary schedules that are not only efficient but also deeply aligned with their educational priorities, leading to improved outcomes for all students.

Key District Actions Needed to Implement Districtwide Strategic Scheduling

Implementing a strong districtwide strategy for elementary schedules that incorporates these best practices is a multifaceted endeavor; it's not a one-time fix but an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. It

requires clear leadership, a commitment to data-driven decision making that is connected with the district's broader philosophy for elementary education, and the adoption of appropriate tools and processes.

Below are key district actions needed to underpin a strategic districtwide scheduling strategy:

1. **Conduct a Detailed Review of Scheduling Needs**
   Gain a clear understanding of your district's scheduling needs through a qualitative and quantitative analysis of current elementary school schedules, staffing practices, and program offerings. This review should assess:

   - How time is currently distributed across subjects, specials, and interventions
   - The availability of uninterrupted time for core instruction
   - The efficacy and efficiency of current intervention and specialized student support approaches, including special education and multilingual education
   - Equitable access to programs across all schools in the district

   This analysis helps identify areas for improvement and opportunities to unlock existing staffing for new or different programs. District Management Group (DMG) frequently partners with districts to conduct these analyses.

2. **Define Clear District Priorities**
   Using the learnings from the review, the district must articulate core educational priorities. What are the nonnegotiables for student learning? What are the key initiatives (e.g., literacy acceleration, multilingual learner support, social-emotional learning) that need protected time and resources? This clarity provides the foundation for all scheduling decisions.

3. **Establish Clear Districtwide Guidelines for Staff Utilization**
   Using the priorities it has defined, the district then develops explicit guidelines for instructional time, direct service time for support staff, and appropriate group sizes for interventions. While the needs of individual schools and students may vary, district guidelines are critical to ensure that schedules are aligned with best practice. Monitoring these

CASE STUDY

Scheduling Analysis Enhances Multilingual Services in Fairfax County (VA)

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) supports students from a broad tapestry of countries and cultures. As such, the district has devoted substantial resources to multilingual instruction and English language proficiency. FCPS engaged with DMG to analyze six sample elementary schools to ensure that English language development (ELD) was provided to students in a way that complemented their literacy instruction.

Results from the analysis helped to inform districtwide scheduling guidelines that safeguarded core instruction while ensuring students receive ELD that corresponds with their needs. The work in FCPS resulted in the following specific benefits, among others:

- **Improved guidance on competing service needs:** The refined district guidelines supported how staff should balance the needs of multilingual learners who require special education services and other special classes to ensure that learners access uninterrupted core instruction while having their needs met.

- **Clear expectations for staff roles and collaboration:** The analysis revealed that much is asked of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers, and guidance was needed for how much time ESOL teachers should spend in direct service of students versus collaborating with their colleagues. These clarified expectations allowed staff members to be more intentional with their time in support of improving outcomes for students.

> *The complexity of modern elementary education demands a strategic, district-led approach to scheduling that maximizes the precious resource of time.*

metrics regularly helps ensure that staff time is maximized for student-facing activities.

4. **Leverage a Common Specialized Scheduling Software or Tools**
   Moving beyond a generic tool to dedicated scheduling software is critical. Scheduling platforms such as DMG's DMSchedules provide the functionality to

   - Model various scenarios quickly and efficiently
   - Identify conflicts and interdependencies in real time
   - Ensure adherence to instructional minute guidelines and best practices
   - Provide centralized, real-time access to schedules for all stakeholders so that leaders have visibility into the design of schedules and how students are accessing the variety of needed instruction

   In addition to using scheduling software, some districts choose to partner more deeply with DMG by leveraging the "We Build It" model, where schedules are professionally built by DMG staff to ensure alignment and relieve the burden from school teams.

5. **Foster Collaboration and Communication**
   A strategic scheduling process should involve key stakeholders from across the district and individual schools, including principals, teachers, and support staff. Workshops and focus groups can build alignment, gather feedback, and ensure that the schedules are practical and meet the diverse needs of the school community. Transparent communication about schedule changes and their rationale is paramount.

6. **Commit to Ongoing Review and Adjustment**
   The needs of students and schools are dynamic. A strategic scheduling framework includes processes to regularly review schedules, assess student progress, and adjust groups and interventions as needed. This iterative approach ensures that the schedules remain responsive and effective over time.

Sustaining Improvement: The Long-Term Vision

Creating a strong district strategy for elementary schedules is not just about solving immediate problems; it's about building a sustainable system that continuously improves student outcomes. By optimizing the use of time and talent, districts can

- **Address learning gaps more effectively:** By embedding dedicated intervention time and ensuring targeted support, districts can accelerate learning for struggling students and close achievement gaps.
- **Enhance teacher effectiveness:** Clear schedules that protect core instructional time and facilitate collaboration among teachers and support staff create a more supportive and productive environment for educators.
- **Ensure equitable access to key programming:** A districtwide approach ensures that all students, especially those with diverse needs, receive the consistent and high-quality support they require, regardless of their school.
- **Maximize resource allocation:** By efficiently leveraging existing staff and identifying opportunities to optimize programs, districts can make the most of their financial and human resources, even in times of budget constraints.

The complexity of modern elementary education demands a strategic, district-led approach to scheduling that maximizes the precious resource of time. By prioritizing student learning, optimizing staff time, and embracing innovative tools and collaborative processes, school districts can transform their elementary schedules from dreaded logistical exercises into powerful instruments for driving measurable and sustainable improvements in student outcomes. The investment in a strong district scheduling strategy is an investment in the future success of every student. ◆

Scheduling made easy

Create and manage elementary school schedules with ease. Drag-and-drop to build your school-wide schedule and automatically generate individual homeroom and specials teacher schedules.

- **Quickly and easily** build schedules
- **Support** instructional priorities
- **Improve** staffing utilization
- **Embed** teaching and learning **best practices**



> **Thanks for creating an amazing product. I have never enjoyed creating the schedule as much as I have this year!**

– **Principal**
Norwich School District, VT

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Transforming the Use of Time

Phoenixville Area School District (PA)

Richard Viard

When Phoenixville Area School District (PASD) in Pennsylvania made the decision in early 2020 to modernize its elementary scheduling with DMSchedules, leaders were energized to make better use of time and replace cumbersome spreadsheets with an effective software tool. Then, just months later, the Covid pandemic upended everything—and the district was thankful to have exactly the tool it needed.

With DMSchedules software already in hand, PASD was able to design multiple hybrid models that accounted for social distancing requirements, staggered attendance, and cohorts of students alternating between in-person and remote learning. The success experienced during this incredibly challenging time led the district to later expand its use of the software to special education, small-group instruction, and shared staff scheduling, giving leaders districtwide visibility into how time and resources were used. What began as an effort to improve efficiency became a transformation in how the district manages time for equity, learning, and stability.

A Timely Investment

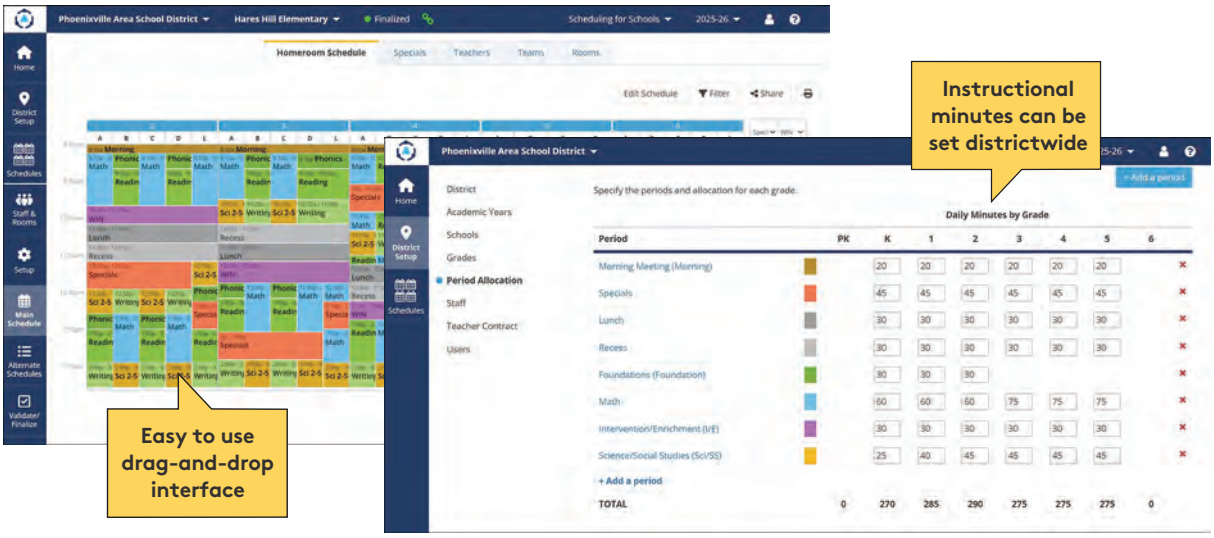
Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Jessica Kilmetz and the district's four elementary principals had long wrestled with scheduling challenges. Building schedules in spreadsheets took days, often left principals uncertain whether instructional guidelines were being met, and created little visibility across schools.

The move to DMSchedules promised efficiency and clarity. But when Covid-19 hit, Dr. Kilmetz and her team felt fortunate to have an easy-to-use, powerful scheduling tool in hand. By August, when PASD announced the school year would begin fully remote, leaders had complete sets of schedules for in-person, hybrid, and virtual learning ready to go.

As health guidance and Covid case counts shifted, the district was able to pivot and respond. Days of trial-and-error spreadsheet work collapsed into hours. Leaders were able to set instructional minutes, drag and

> *"With DMSchedules, staff could build IEP-compliant schedules quickly, integrate them with general education classes, and share a complete student schedule on a single page.*

Exhibit 1 **DMSCHEDULES SCHEDULING SOFTWARE**



Source: District Management Group

drop blocks, and quickly generate compliant schedules (*Exhibit 1*). The software also provided critical transparency. In a remote or hybrid environment, where students and staff were dispersed and often isolated, the software enabled district leaders and school administrators to have a complete view of teacher, staff, and student schedules across all schools. This level of visibility was essential for staying coordinated and connected.

"The fear and uncertainty of Covid made every decision feel urgent and high stakes," Dr. Kilmetz recalls. "Partnering with DMG to implement the master scheduling software proved to be an invaluable decision that helped the district keep learning going but also brought a measure of stability and clarity in an otherwise chaotic time."

Beyond Crisis: Expanding to Special Education and Small Groups

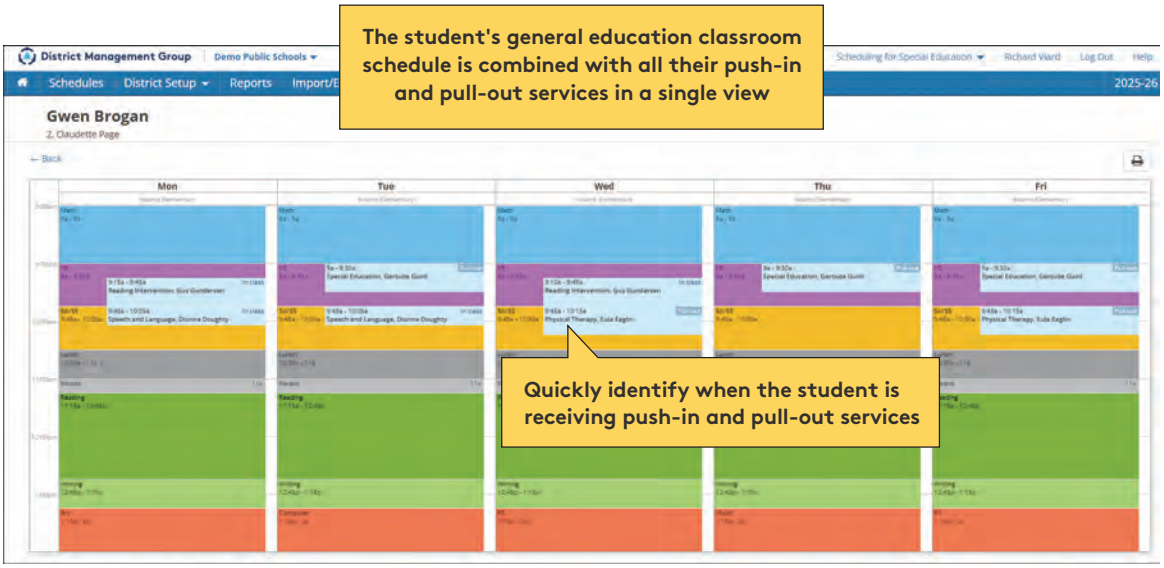
Once the district experienced what DMSchedules could do during the pandemic, leaders quickly saw its potential beyond core scheduling. In 2023, PASD expanded its use to special education scheduling.

Previously, coordinating interventionists, special educators, and related service providers had required juggling multiple spreadsheets and endless adjustments. With DMSchedules, staff could build IEP-compliant schedules quickly, integrate them with general education classes, and share a complete student schedule on a single page (*Exhibit 2*). Principals and case managers had a clear view of how general education classes and push-in and pull-out services fit together, and families received more transparent, consistent information. In addition, homeroom teachers could see their classroom schedule alongside details about which students and staff were coming and going throughout the day, information that is typically unavailable without a system like DMSchedules (*Exhibit 3*).

Discovering Even More Applications

The district then realized it could utilize this tool to schedule all forms of small-group instruction: English language services, behavior support, reading intervention, and even music lessons. For the first time, PASD could see exactly when small groups were happening, who was leading them, and how they fit into the broader day. This visibility prompted leaders to define best practices and create a shared vision for small-group instruction across all elementary schools—how long sessions should last, what group sizes were appropriate, and which times of day should remain protected from push-in or pull-out.

Exhibit 2 **A STUDENT SCHEDULE SHOWING PUSH-IN AND PULL-OUT SERVICES**



Student and teacher names have been changed.

Source: District Management Group

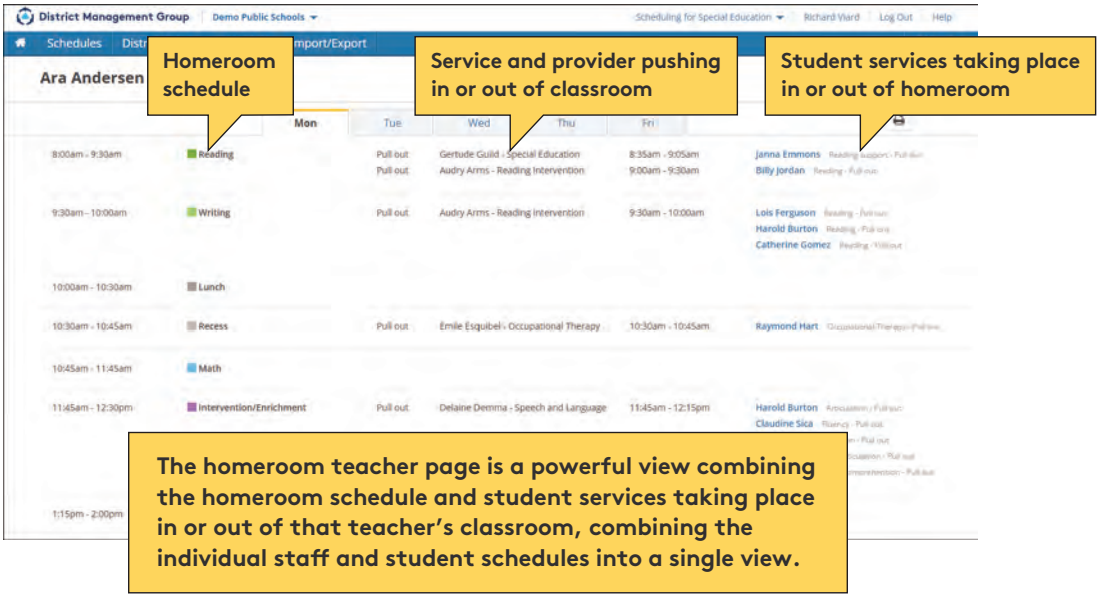
Leveraging Staff Time and Talents

As a district with relatively small elementary schools, PASD depends on shared staff. Scheduling them had always been a puzzle with too many moving pieces. With DMSchedules, rotations that once seemed impossible—splitting time between buildings, staggering days, or covering multiple roles—could be designed and adjusted in minutes.

Dr. Kilmetz commented: "Our schedules are super tight in some instances and some disciplines, and I don't know what we would do without DMSchedules. The ability to see at a glance how a teacher has been utilized and how students have been served in every area has helped us align our staffing requests with the needs of our students. When new students enroll, the team can now quickly determine where to place them and how to meet their needs."

> ***"The ability to see at a glance how a teacher has been utilized and how students have been served in every area has helped us align our staffing requests with the needs of our students."***
>
> – Dr. Jessica Kilmetz
> Assistant Superintendent,
> Phoenixville Area School District

Exhibit 3 **HOMEROOM TEACHER SCHEDULE SHOWING STUDENT SERVICES**



Student and teacher names have been changed.

Source: District Management Group

A New Way of Seeing Time

Today, PASD uses DMSchedules not just to build schedules, but to understand how time is allocated across the district. Leaders can spot gaps, align resources more equitably, and make decisions with greater confidence.

What began as a simple effort to move away from spreadsheets has grown into a districtwide transformation in how it uses the valuable resource of time. With DMSchedules, PASD can make every minute count—whether in the face of unexpected disruption, as the pandemic created, or in the steady rhythm of daily school life. ◆

Impact of DMSchedules

- **Efficiency:** Days of manual work reduced to hours
- **Continuity:** Ready for in-person, hybrid, and remote learning during Covid
- **Special education:** Streamlined compliance, clearer information for IEP meetings, better communication with families
- **Transparency:** Real-time visibility into student schedules
- **Shared staff:** Smarter rotations, greater equity across schools
- **Analytics:** Districtwide insights to guide staffing and scheduling decisions

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Improving Special Education

Making the Most of the Overlooked Resource of Time

Hannah Cain



Special education teams across the country are stretched thin. Beyond student instruction, special education teachers and service providers juggle IEP meetings, progress monitoring, compliance paperwork, family communication, and coordination with paraeducators and general education staff. Staff feel overextended, turnover is high, and open positions have become increasingly difficult to fill.[1]

As student needs become more complex and budgets tighten, making the most of time—an invaluable and too often overlooked resource—has never been more important. The lengthy list of essential but time-consuming responsibilities crowds out meaningful work with students. Understanding the demands on staff and trying to ease or streamline compliance tasks, improve collaboration or student grouping structures, and strengthen inclusion efforts are ways in which district and school administrators can help make more efficient use of time, leading to stronger outcomes for students.

National studies of time such as the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) examine overall teacher workload and compensation,[2] while Random Moment Time Studies (RMTS) have often been used in special education to document activities for Medicaid reimbursement.[3] These studies are valuable but can lack detail due to small sample sizes or the methodology of capturing only a single moment in time. As part of District Management Group's special education work with districts, we conduct a detailed time study that differs from the ATUS and RMTS in that we review schedules of *all* staff supporting students with disabilities. Using our proprietary DMPlanning® software, staff spend 5 to 10 minutes per day over the course of one week entering their schedules exactly as they live them. In addition to collecting daily activities, the platform also gathers information on setting, group size, and topic, providing districts with a detailed snapshot of how, where, and with whom staff are investing their time.

> ***When used effectively, time becomes a powerful lever: it allows educators to focus more directly on students and their growth, while enabling districts under financial and operational pressure to maximize the resources they already have.***

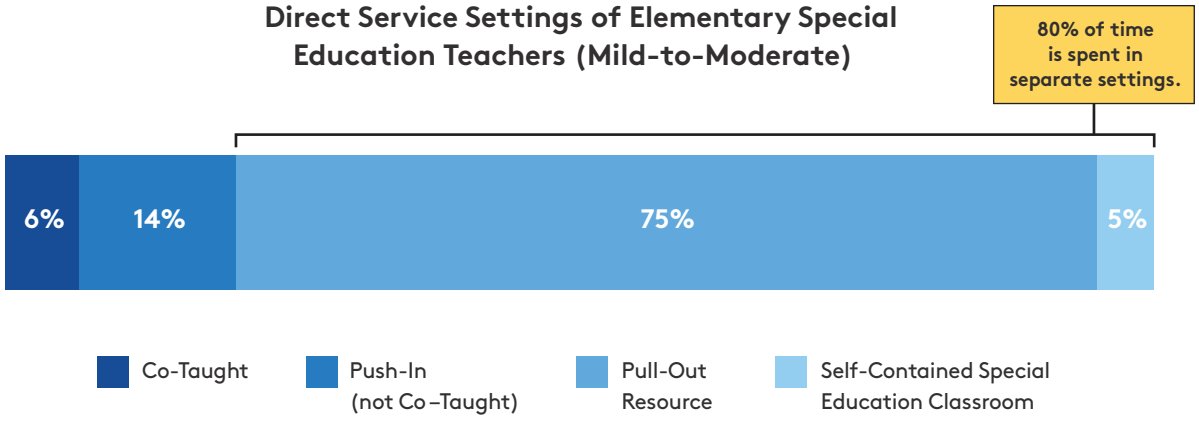
Administrators are often surprised to find that staff time is not always spent in the way they had assumed. Some eye-opening findings have included the following:

- One district found that mild-to-moderate special education teachers spend 80% of their time in separate settings, reflecting a reliance on pull-out models rather than inclusive instructional practices (*Exhibit 1*).
- In another district, special education resource teachers across all grade levels reported spending only 1% of their time collaborating with colleagues, potentially limiting the effective inclusion of special education students in the general education classroom.
- The amount of time paraeducators in one district reported working directly with students varied from 23–98%, suggesting inconsistent workloads or undefined role expectations (*Exhibit 2*).
- Special education coordinators from another district reported spending over half of their time on IEP compliance tasks, leaving limited capacity for providing coaching and professional development to staff.
- One district's speech language pathologists and social workers were found to spend nearly two-thirds of their time supporting students in group sizes of one or two, potentially limiting their reach.

Not only were these findings insightful, but they were found to be highly actionable. With an understanding of how staff spend their time, administrators were able to reconsider working structures, identify gaps in role clarity, monitor staff workloads, and see how guidelines

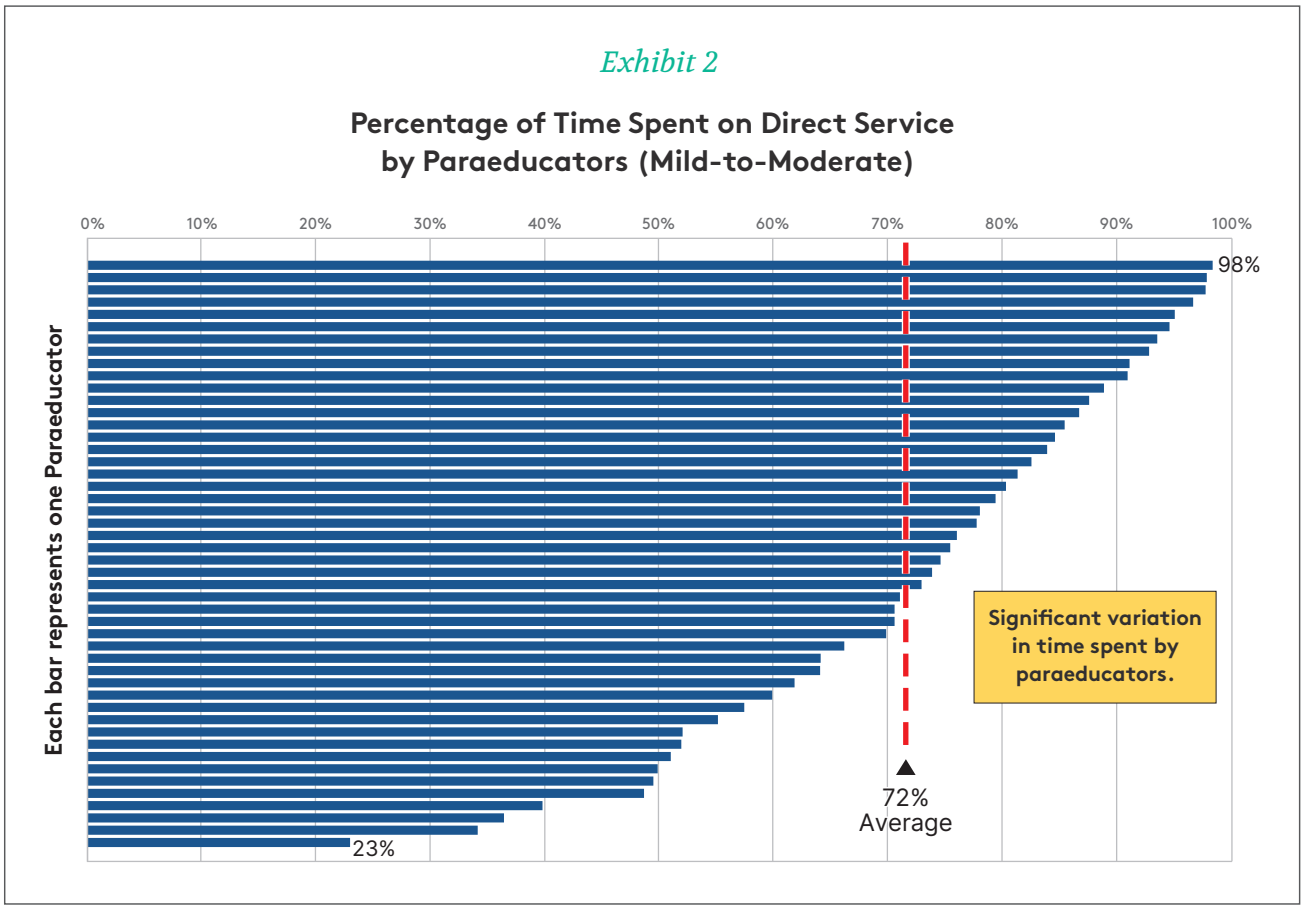
Exhibit 1

Direct Service Settings of Elementary Special Education Teachers (Mild-to-Moderate)



Source: District Management Group and Anonymized District Data; SY 2024-25

Exhibit 2



Source: District Management Group and Anonymized District Data; SY 2024-25

or policies may be implemented differently across their district. When used effectively, time becomes a powerful lever: it allows educators to focus more directly on students and their growth, while enabling districts under financial and operational pressure to maximize the resources they already have.

Redefining the Role of the Paraeducator in Chelmsford Public Schools (MA)

Findings from a 2023 Special Education Opportunity Review for Chelmsford Public Schools conducted by DMG resulted in a two-year effort by the district to redefine the role and responsibilities of paraeducators in their district.

The initial review of time data highlighted specific challenges with how paraeducators in the district supported students with disabilities:

- **Direct Service Inconsistencies:** Paraeducators spent varying amounts of time working with students across grades and schools.
- **Instructional Support Misalignment:** Paraeducators reported introducing new material to students when supporting academics.
- **Notable Subbing Duties:** Paraeducators spent notable amounts of time subbing in lieu of their typical duties with students.
- **Supporting Students Without Disabilities:** Paraeducators often worked with students *without* disabilities who were not on their caseload.
- **Unclear Reporting and Direction Structures:** Paraeducators and certified staff expressed confusion about whom paraeducators report to and who provides day-to-day direction.

The district convened a Working Committee of school administrators, teaching staff, and paraeducators to take action on these findings. In year one, with the support of DMG, the committee redefined the role of paraeducator, making updates to the job description that outlined a clear vision for the role, clarified the reporting and management structure, and outlined responsibilities in student support and instruction. During this time, special education district administrators worked to plan and develop materials for professional development so the redefined role of paraeducator could be shared with *all* staff in the district, including general education teachers.

In year two, implementation of this work began. At the start of the school year, the district hosted a collaboration workshop with all staff, focused on explaining the changes to the paraeducator role and sharing strategies for teachers and paraeducators to work together. Throughout the year, additional professional development was provided specifically for paraeducators, where the expectations for their work with students were reiterated alongside additional development content for supporting diverse student needs.

To gauge the success of these efforts, paraeducators participated in a follow-up DMPlanning® time study at the end of year two. Sample findings found that paraeducators were spending more time working directly with students and were generally not introducing new academic content. Additionally, a survey was conducted to gauge paraeducators' understanding of the redefined role and assess effective collaboration with special education and general education teachers. Overall, paraeducators shared that they understand and believe in the changes to their role and are able to effectively collaborate with teachers in their school. With clearer responsibilities and improved collaboration with both general and special education teachers, paraeducators are now providing focused, coordinated support that helps students with disabilities make progress toward academic and social success.

Protecting Time to Collaborate in Kyrene Elementary School District (AZ)

During a 2024 Special Education Opportunity Review with Kyrene Elementary School District, a DMPlanning® time study led the district to pursue more intentional collaboration time between special and general education staff. Analysis of school-provided data showed that a large portion of middle school students with IEPs were being placed in co-taught classrooms. However, the time study data, reinforced by focus group interviews, highlighted that special education and general education co-teachers had little time to collaborate, leaving the special education teacher functioning more like a paraeducator than a true co-teacher.

In the year following this review, the district began efforts to prioritize intentional collaboration time between general and special education teachers to better support students with disabilities. Following Lead IDEA's best practices for collaboration and co-planning,[4] the district is working with DMG to build and implement a pilot model for the upcoming school year where

- Time for collaboration is established and protected *within* the regular workday,
- *All educators* are provided with professional learning opportunities for supporting students with disabilities and resources for collaboration and co-planning, and
- District leadership intentionally supports collaboration and co-teaching by embedding it in school culture.

Poorly implemented co-teaching leads to inequitable roles, isolated student groups, inconsistent grading, and missed opportunities to leverage both teachers. When teachers truly co-plan and co-teach, each teacher's expertise is fully leveraged, both focus on instruction instead of administrative tasks, and the workloads are fairer and more balanced. Most importantly, *all students* in the classroom receive inclusive, high-quality teaching.[5] ◆

NOTES

[1] Elizabeth Bettini and Allison Gilmour, "Addressing Special Education Staffing Shortages: Strategies for Schools," EdResearch for Action, Brief No. 31 (Annenberg Institute at Brown University and Results for America, 2024), https://edresearchforaction.org/wp-content/uploads/55015-EdResearch-Special-Education-Staffing-Brief-31-FINAL-1-1.pdf.

[2] Kristine L. West, "New Measures of Teachers' Work Hours and Implications for Wage Comparisons," *Education Finance and Policy* 9, no. 3 (2014): 231–63, https://doi.org/10.1162/EDFP_a_00133.

[3] Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, "What Is a Random Moment Time Study?," Medicaid.gov, last modified April 5, 2024, https://www.medicaid.gov/faq/2024-04-03/162291.

[4] Lead IDEA, Toolkit 2: "Promoting Shared Ownership and Collaboration," *Lead IDEA Navigator*, accessed December 8, 2025, https://lead-idea.org/navigator/retention/mine-yours/promoting-shared-ownership-and-collaboration-page.

[5] Wendy W. Murawski, *Collaborative Teaching in Elementary Schools: Making the Co-Teaching Marriage Work!* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2009).

FINALLY! SCHEDULING BUILT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

DMSchedules for Special Education

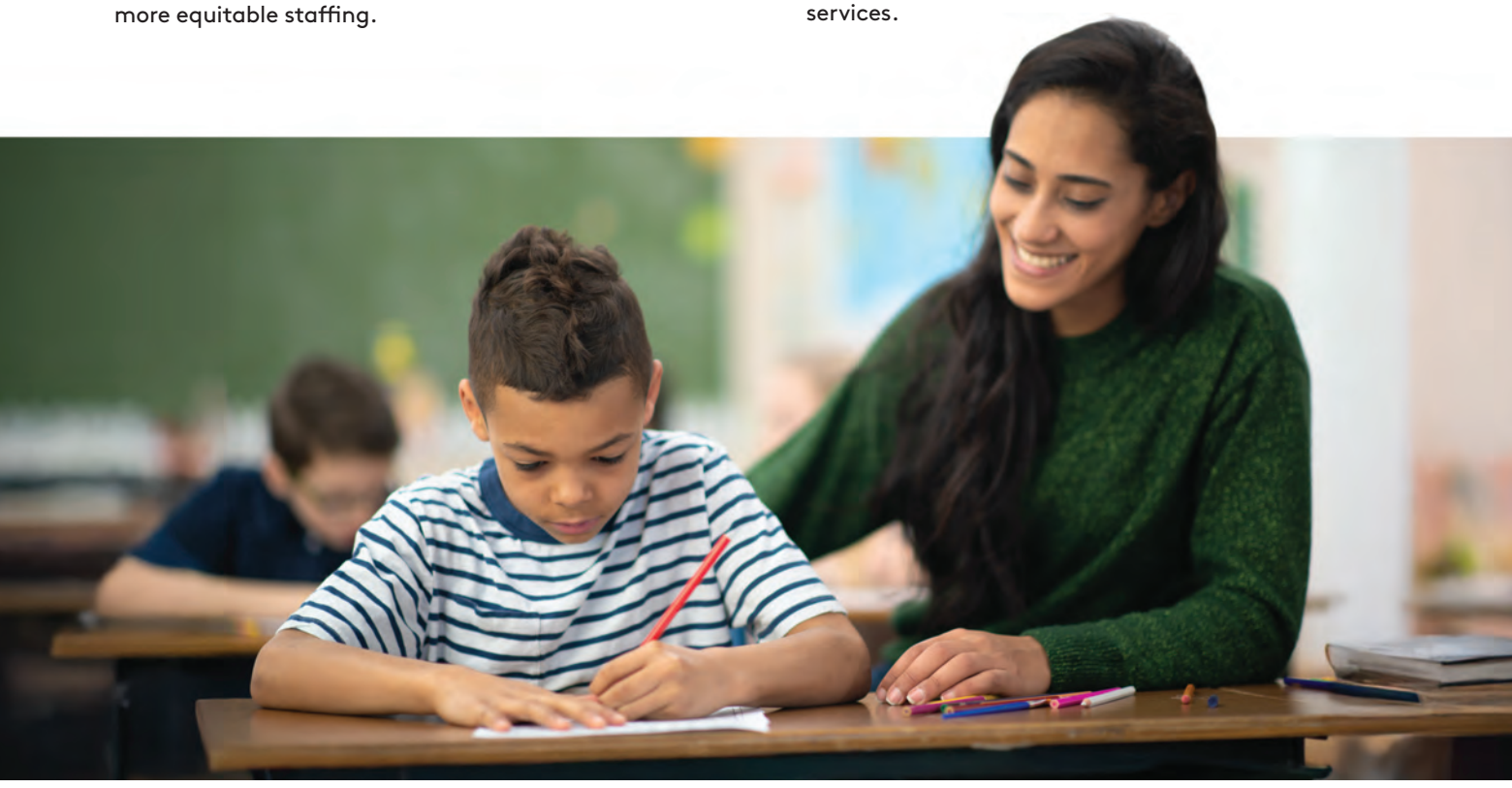
Quickly and easily create student services schedules that:

Coordinate Services
One shared system—connecting interventionists, special educators, related service providers, and student support staff enables coordination and collaboration.

Protect Core Instruction
A view of each student's full schedule makes it easier to schedule services without interrupting core classroom learning or conflicting with other providers.

Balance Workloads Fairly
Real-time visibility into workloads, group sizes, and direct service time helps school administrators support more equitable staffing.

Ensure IEP Compliance
Students receive the full support their IEPs require by avoiding scheduling conflicts and reducing missed services.



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DMG Summit 2025



What's top of mind for district leaders? At DMG's 22nd Annual Summit in New York City, held February 5–7, we brought together over 200 district leaders from 77 districts nationwide to explore the biggest challenges in public K-12 education today.

Over three days, districts shared their work on raising student outcomes, improving special education, making a difference through secondary and special education scheduling, and increasing focus and alignment through strategic planning. We also examined the evolving role of AI-driven tools in education. Here, we provide some highlights of our time together.

Opening Session and Case Study

In the opening keynote, John Kim, DMG CEO and founder and Harvard Business School professor, provided a review of the state of the sector, highlighting the most pressing challenges district leaders were facing—from stalled academic recovery and structural imbalances to increasing politicization. Emphasizing the urgent need for bold thinking and innovation in public education, he challenged leaders with the following questions: What will you do differently to drive both operational excellence and innovation in your district? What's on your conveyor belt of ideas? His remarks set the tone and focus for the conversations that followed over the next two days.

In a subsequent session, John Kim led participants through a thought-provoking Harvard Business School case study discussion in which they examined the challenges of driving organizational change, and highlighted the complexities of change leadership in systems with long-standing structures, traditions, and expectations. They discussed practical frameworks and tools that district and school leaders could apply to their own unique contexts.



John J-H Kim, Founder and CEO, DMG

Keynote

Dr. Marc Brackett, founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and professor at the Yale Child Study Center, delivered a keynote on the transformative power of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools. He emphasized the importance of a systemic, whole-school approach to SEL that prioritizes the well-being of both educators and students by creating emotionally supportive environments. Dr. Brackett also highlighted the vital role of emotionally intelligent leadership in building a culture that promotes both academic achievement and emotional wellness.

"I want everyone to become an emotion scientist. We need to be curious explorers of our own and others' emotions so they can enhance rather than hinder our well-being and success in life."

~ Dr. Marc Brackett

Following his keynote, Dr. Brackett led a session exploring evidence-based strategies to help educators and students better understand and regulate their emotions.



Marc Brackett, Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence



Kaiz Alarakyia, AI for Education at Google DeepMind

Fireside Chat: Harnessing the Power of AI for Future-Ready Learning

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming education, redefining how we teach, learn, and connect in classrooms around the world. In this fireside chat, Kaiz Alarakyia, product manager of AI for Education at Google DeepMind, and John J-H Kim explored recent developments in AI in education and discussed the opportunities and challenges these tools present, as well as their potential to empower both educators and students.



John J-H Kim, District Management Group

Strengthening School Board Governance and Aligning Strategic Priorities

In an exclusive session for superintendents and board members, John Kim led a dynamic discussion on strengthening school board governance. Drawing on national research and real-world experience, John Kim explored how to build and sustain effective superintendent–school board partnerships. Using the case study method, participants examined key governance challenges and strategies, leaving with a clearer understanding of how to establish the foundations for more effective collaboration and long-term success.

Breakout Sessions

Closing the Gap: Achieving Outstanding Academic Results

Leaders from Birmingham City Schools (AL), Central Falls School District (RI), and Fresno Unified School District (CA) shared how they used **DMG's Breakthrough Results (BTR) program** to overcome deeply rooted academic challenges and achieve rapid, measurable improvement in student outcomes.

While each of the three districts brought its own context and challenges, they all found success by focusing on a few key elements of the Breakthrough Results program:

- **A laser focus on student outcomes,** anchored by highly specific time-bound goals (often within 10 weeks) set in consultation with DMG
- **Teacher leadership development** rooted in data analysis, facilitation coaching, and peer collaboration
- **Weekly performance coaching** with a Breakthrough Results Performance Coach
- **Frequent, actionable progress monitoring** through customized data dashboards by DMG

BIRMINGHAM CITY SCHOOLS
BUILDING LEADERS. IMPACTING THE WORLD.

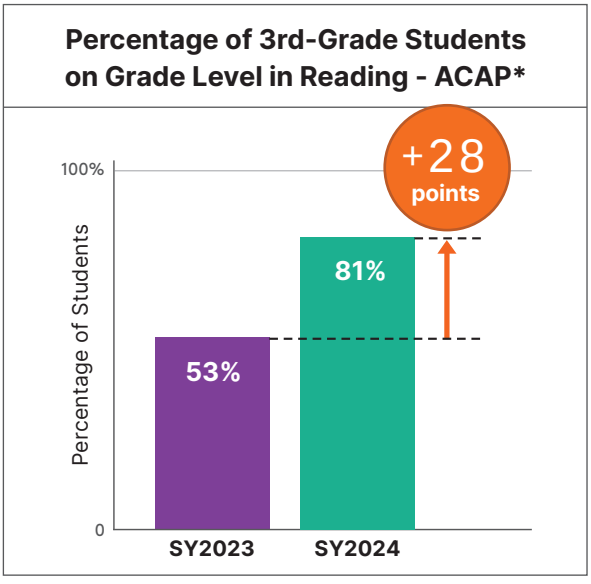


Mark Sullivan
Superintendent,
Birmingham City Schools (AL)



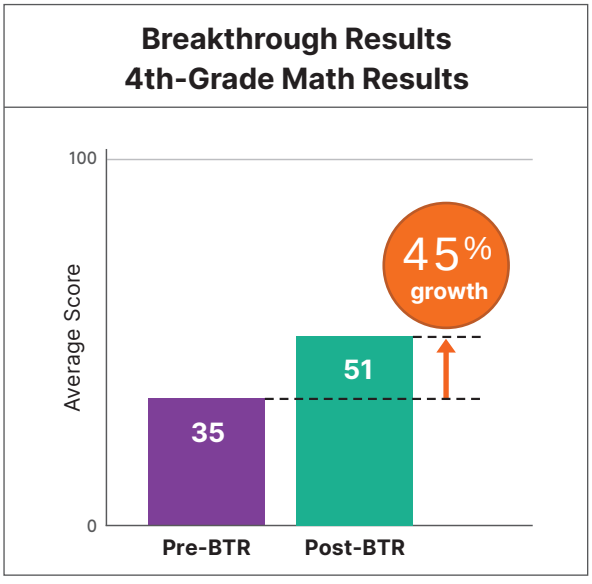
Pamela Williams
Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction,
Birmingham City Schools (AL)

Birmingham City Schools boosted third-grade reading proficiency **from 53% to 81%** on the 2024 Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP), and effected a **45% increase** from pre- to post-assessment scores for fourth-grade math students.



Source: District Management Group based on data from Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama

*Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP)



Source: District Management Group

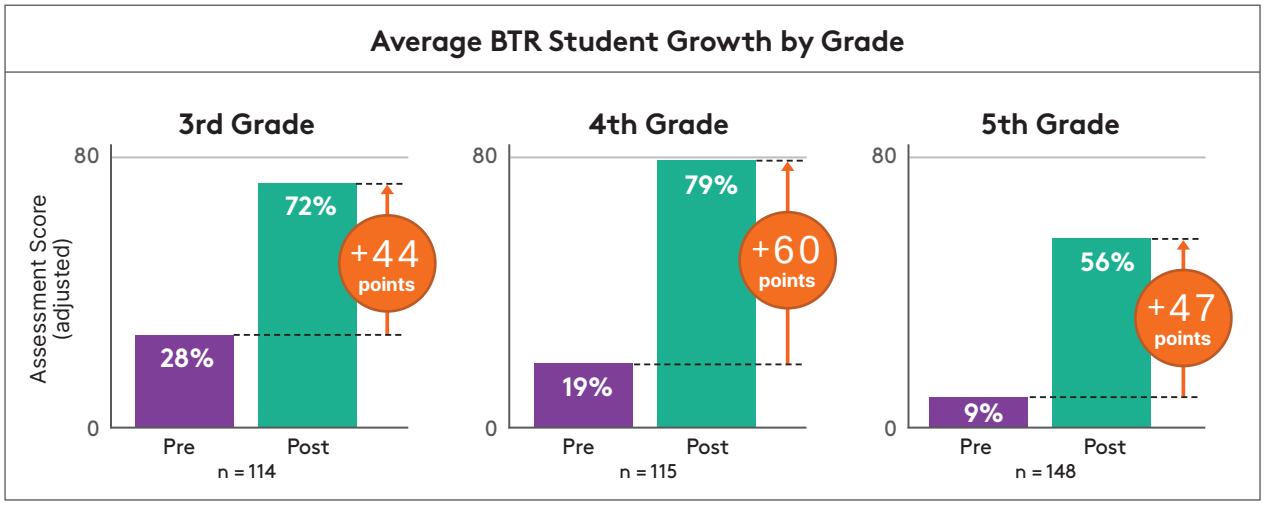


Stephanie Downey Toledo
Superintendent,
Central Falls School District (RI)



Joy Souza
Chief Academic Officer,
Central Falls School District (RI)

Central Falls School District paired the BTR efforts with a districtwide adoption of Eureka Math Squared Curriculum, resulting in **major math gains across grades 3–5,** including a 60-point improvement for fourth-graders in just 10 weeks.



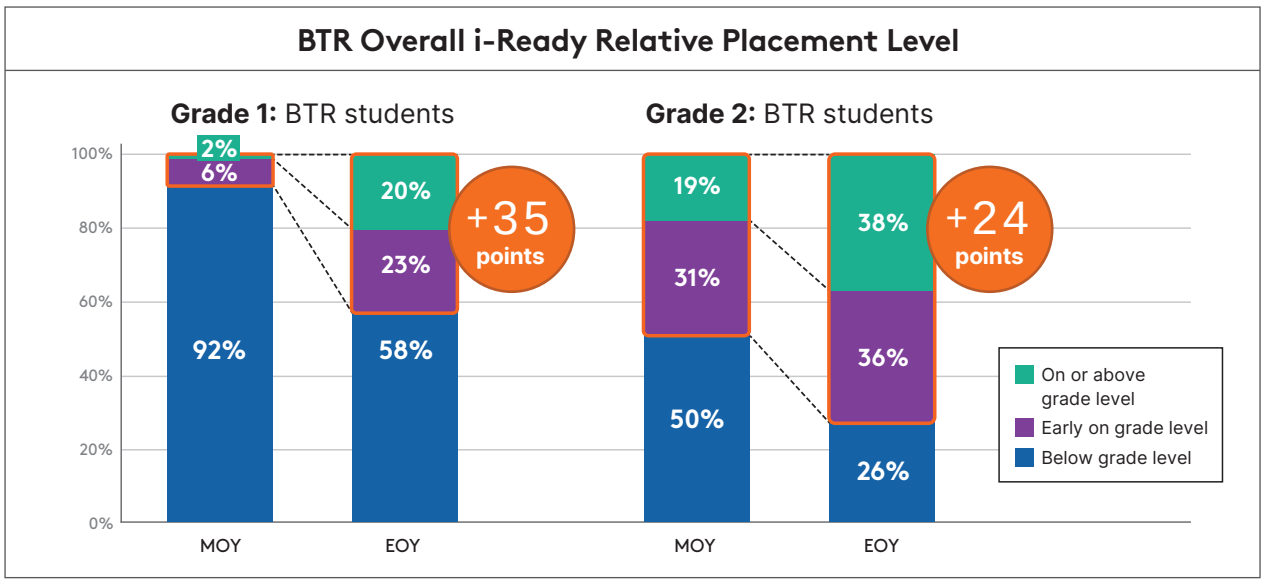
Source: District Management Group

Fresno Unified School District

Fresno's Bullard region saw **dramatic fluency gains in first and second grades,** leading Fresno Unified to expand BTR to improve third-grade literacy across 29 schools in SY24–25.



Jennifer Stacy-Alcantara
Instructional Superintendent,
Fresno Unified School District (CA)



Source: District Management Group

Beyond Compliance: Integrating Special Education into Core Teaching and Learning

Leaders from North Adams Public Schools (MA) and Community Unit School District 300 (IL) shared how they utilized DMG ' s Special Education Opportunity Review to transform special education to be more inclusive, collaborative, and student-centered, even in the face of limited resources and rising needs. Superintendents Barbara Malkas and Martina Smith described how the Opportunity Review helped shift the district from a compliance-driven approach to one rooted in instructional leadership, shared responsibility, and inclusive practices. Central to this work is a clear vision that sets high expectations for students with disabilities and guides district strategic decisions, resource allocation, and everyday practice.



Martina Smith
Superintendent,
Community Unit School District 300 (IL)



Barbara Malkas
Superintendent,
North Adams Public Schools (MA)



Tom Simon
Director of Student Support Services,
North Adams Public Schools (MA)

> ***At the heart of our efforts is a mindset that students with disabilities are not 'someone else's responsibility.' Special education staff and general education teachers are working to better serve all students, together.***
>
> **~ Barbara Malkas,**
> Superintendent, North Adams Public Schools (MA)

Better Outcomes in Special Education: Maximizing Student and Staff Success Through Scheduling

Leaders from Griffin-Spalding County Schools (GA) and Butler Area School District (PA) shared how DMG's school scheduling software DMSchedules has helped them bring greater clarity, efficiency, and equity to special education scheduling. They explained how the software significantly reduced the time spent on manual scheduling and conflict resolution, and helped with compliance, allowing teams to focus more on student progress, instructional alignment, and intervention effectiveness.



Aaron Royhab
Director of Special Education,
Butler Area School District (PA)



Keith Simmons
Superintendent,
Griffin-Spalding County Schools (GA)

> ***For us, DMSchedules helped uncover both overstaffing and understaffing, which were previously misunderstood due to a lack of clear visuals.***
>
> **~ Aaron Royhab,**
> Director of Special Education, Butler Area School District (PA)

Putting Every Dollar to Work in a Post-ESSER World: Academic-ROI Guides the Way



Kristina Miller
Director of Continuous Improvement & Accountability,
Rockford Public Schools 205 (IL)



Paul Gordon
Superintendent,
St. Charles Community Unit School District 303 (IL)

Leaders from St. Charles Community Unit School District 303 (IL) and Rockford Public Schools 205 (IL) shared how they leveraged DMG's Academic-ROI (A-ROI) methodology to evaluate their programming, strengthen district systems, and align resources with their strategic priorities, ensuring that every dollar spent drives meaningful student outcomes.

St. Charles CUSD 303 used A-ROI to uncover performance gaps and inefficiencies in its dual-language program. The analysis helped district leaders make a compelling case for a more effective and cost-efficient model, better aligned to student needs, which will launch next year.

At Rockford PS 205, the A-ROI methodology is being used districtwide to create a common language within the district and enable district leaders to assess new initiatives based on success criteria and measurable outcomes rather than personal attachments to programs.

> ***In education, there's so much emotion around our programs because we care deeply. Academic-ROI presents the facts clearly and helps you make a more educated decision about the direction of the program you are evaluating.***
>
> **~ Paul Gordon,**
> Superintendent, St. Charles Community Unit School District 303 (IL)

Enhancing Opportunities for Students Without Increasing Costs Through Strategic Scheduling



Sudha Venkatesan
Director of Secondary Education,
San Bernardino City Unified School District (CA)

San Bernardino City Unified School District (CA) partnered with DMG to transform secondary school scheduling and staffing. Through detailed reviews of middle and high school schedules, the DMG team uncovered the root causes of challenges and delivered actionable recommendations. These efforts led to improved outcomes in high schools and redesigned guidelines for middle school schedules that are better tailored to student needs. DMG also helped the district address staffing inequities systemwide, promoting more equitable resource use and stronger alignment with student needs across all schools. The work fostered cross-department collaboration, built trust among stakeholders, and positioned the district to make more strategic, student-centered decisions moving forward.

> ***The process revealed deeper systemic challenges but also clarified where and how to act.***
>
> **~ Sudha Venkatesan,**
> Director of Secondary Education, San Bernardino City Unified School District (CA)

Effective Strategies for Implementing Your District's Strategic Plan

District leaders from Birmingham City Schools (AL) and Portsmouth School Department (RI) shared how they effectively implemented their strategic plans to produce real results for students, staff, and communities. Leaders shared strategies for overcoming common implementation challenges, using data to guide decisions, tracking progress effectively, building a culture of accountability, and maintaining stakeholder engagement to ensure the district's goals are achieved.



Mark Sullivan
Superintendent,
Birmingham City Schools (AL)



Adrianne Marbury
Strategic Partnerships and Community Engagement Coordinator,
Birmingham City Schools (AL)



Thomas Kenworthy
Superintendent,
Portsmouth School Department (RI)



Liz Viveiros
Deputy Superintendent,
Portsmouth School Department (RI)

How Are You Feeling? Evidence-Based Strategies for Regulating Emotions

This session explored how emotions drive our attention, decision making, relationships, health, and daily performance. Dr. Marc Brackett and Karen Niemi led participants through a deep dive into evidence-based strategies to help educators and students better recognize and manage their own emotional experiences. They shared practical, research-backed techniques for using feelings wisely to build healthier relationships, achieve ambitious goals, and enhance overall well-being.



Marc Brackett
Founding Director,
Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence



Karen Niemi
Executive Director,
Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence

Optimizing Resource Allocation: Insights from a Budget Simulation

Building thoughtful, strategic budgets requires balancing the needs of many stakeholders and making tradeoffs. At the Summit, participants had the opportunity to engage in an interactive session where they stepped into the roles of leaders of a fictional school district to navigate the complexities of strategic budgeting. Through a realistic simulation, district leaders worked to stay within budget, allocate resources using data, and align spending with district priorities, all while managing tradeoffs and competing stakeholder interests. The session offered hands-on experience and valuable insights into the challenges and decision making required to build thoughtful, effective budgets.



Simone Carpenter
Director,
District Management Group



Joe Costello
Director,
District Management Group

DMG Summit—New York, 2025











DMG Summit—New York, 2025





















DMG Summit—New York, 2025
















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DMG Summit—New York, 2025







Page 65: Top left: Tom Slmon, Director of Student Support Services, North Adams Public Schools (MA); Barbara Malkas, Superintendent, North Adams Public Schools (MA); Martina Smith, Community Unit School DIstrict 300 (IL); **Top right:** Jeff Moore, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Mamaroneck UFSD, NY; **Bottom left:** Cindy Reilmann, Chief Financial Officer, Special School District of St. Louis (MO); **Bottom right:** Marc Brackett, Founding Director, Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence.

Page 66: Top left: Michael O'Neill, School Committee Member, Boston Public Schools (MA); Michael Patton, Superintendent of Schools, Saratoga City School District (NY); **Top right:** Nicholas Tishuk, Executive Director, Bedford Stuyvesant New Beginnings Charter School (NY); **Center:** John J-H Kim, CEO and Founder, District Management Group; **Bottom left:** Jaime Aquino, Superintendent, San Antonio Independent School District; (TX) **Bottom right:** Alice Lai, Director, District Management Group.

Page 67: Top left: Judi Battle, Human Resources Director, Griffon-Spalding County Schools, (GA), Louis Bonadonna, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Support Services, Northport-East Northport UFSD (NY), Dave Moyer, Superintendent, Northport-East Northport UFSD (NY) ; **Top right:** Martina Smith, Community Unit School District 300 (IL); **Center:** Craig Gibbons, Senior Vice President, District Management Group; Adrienne Marbury, Strategic Partnerships and Community Engagement Coordinator, Birmingham City Schools (AL); Mark Sullivan, Superintendent, Birmingham City Schools (AL); Jessie Lee, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, Birmingham City Schools (AL); **Bottom left:** Scott Rowe, Superintendent, High School District 214 (IL); **Bottom right:** Audrey Flojo Collett, Assistant Superintendent Octorara Area School District (PA), Steven Leever, Superintendent, Octorara Area School District (PA).

Page 68: Top left: Mike McCloskey, District Education Specialist; West Hawaii Department of Education (HI); **Top right:** Leticia Ozuna, Trustee, San Antonio Independent School District (TX); **Center:** Elizabeth Micci, Director, District Management Group; Mark Sullivan, Superintendent, Birmingham City Schools (AL); Pamela Williams, Chief Academic Officer, Birmingham City Schools (AL); Stephanie Downey Toledo, Superintendent, Central Falls School District (RI); Joy Souza, Chief Academic Officer, Central Falls School District (RI); Jennifer Stacy-Alcantara, Instructional Superintendent, Fresno Unified School District (CA); **Bottom left:** Scott Rowe, Superintendent, High School District 214 (IL); Ana Riley, Superintendent, Bristol Warren Regional School District; **Bottom right:** Joy Souza, Chief Academic Officer, Central Falls School District (RI); Ann Lynch, Deputy Superintendent, Central Falls School District (RI); Stephanie Downey Toledo, Superintendent, Central Falls School District (RI).

Page 69: Top left: Keith Simmons, Superintendent, Griffon Spalding County Schools, (GA), Judi Battle, Human Resources Director, Griffon-Spalding County Schools (GA); **Top right:** Warren Morgan, Superintendent, Cleveland Metropolitan School District (OH); **Center:** Kristina Miller, Director of Continuous Improvement and Accountability, Rockford Public Schools 205 (IL); Paul Gordon, Superintendent, St. Charles Community Unit School District 303 (IL); Simone Carpenter, Director, District Management Group; **Bottom left:** Marc Brackett, Founding Director, Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence; **Bottom right:** Tom Kim, Superintendent, Batavia Public School District 101 (IL).

This page: Top left: Sudha Venkatesan, Director of Secondary Education, San Bernardino City Unified School District (CA); Joe Costello, Director, District Management Group; **Top right:** John J-H Kim, CEO and Founder, District Management Group; Mark Sullivan, Superintendent, Birmingham City Schools (AL); **Center:** Lorie Cristofaro, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Lockport Township High School District 205 (IL); John J-H Kim, CEO and Founder, District Management Group.

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Top ways your education community can use Gemini



Educators

- Draft lesson plans aligned to learning objectives and education standards
- Re-level texts and assignments and increase student engagement by adjusting content to fit their interests
- Generate assessments, assignments, and rubrics from scratch or use previous examples with corresponding answer keys



Students

- Deepen understanding with on-demand support, like explanations of challenging concepts and step-by-step guidance
- Prepare for exams by creating personalized practice quizzes based on hard-to-grasp concepts
- Brainstorm and research ideas, get feedback on writing, and generate citations



Education leaders

- Go from a blank page to a grant proposal, alumni outreach template, newsletter, recommendation letter, or email to a parent
- Summarize long documents, analyze data, and create templates for budget proposals, permission slips, and more
- Brainstorm new initiatives, develop project plans, and draft talking points for presentations

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Industry pioneer in AI

The work underpinning generative AI comes from Google's invention of the Transformer in 2017. And AI has powered Google products for nearly a decade - from autocomplete suggestions to malware detection in Gmail.

Grounded in learning science

By using learning science principles as the backbone of how we build Gemini, we're ensuring that it is as helpful as it can be for learners. Infused with LearnLM, Gemini 3 Pro is the best model in the world for multimodal understanding[1] and experts preferred LearnLM over GPT-4o by an average of 31% when evaluated across a diverse set of learning scenarios.[2]

Rapid innovation

Research and product teams work together to develop new features and improve products faster – like bringing additional capabilities to NotebookLM.

Learn more at edu.google.com and chat with Gemini at gemini.google.com

Sources: 1. Google DeepMind, November 2025 2. Google, LearnLM Tech Report

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Welcome to Our New DMCouncil Members



Almi G. Abeyta

Superintendent
Chelsea Public Schools (MA)



Adam Angelozzi

Superintendent
Point Pleasant Borough School District (NJ)



Adrienne Battle

Superintendent
Metropolitan Nashville Public School District (TN)



Keith Burton

Superintendent
Caddo Parish School Board (LA)



Steven Cole

Superintendent
Rabun County School District (GA)



Timothy Condron

Superintendent
Mattoon Community Unit School District 2 (IL)



Brad Dahl

Superintendent
Fremont Public Schools (NE)



Marcy Doud

Superintendent
Intermediate District 287 (MN)



Shawn Dutkiewicz

Superintendent
Octorara Area School District (PA)



Mark Fritch

Superintendent
Nebraska City Public Schools (NE)



Karla Guseman

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Joliet Township High School District 204 (IL)



Daren Hatch

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District 113 (IL)



Anita Huggins

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Miki Inbody

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Jeff Lavender

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Norfolk Public Schools (NE)



Joshua McDowell

Superintendent
Crete Public Schools (NE)



Thomas Moore

Superintendent
Niles Township Community
High Schools District 219 (IL)



Ernest Muh

Superintendent
Leilehua-Mililani-Waialua
Complex Area (HI)



Andrew Offner

Superintendent
Falls City Public Schools (NE)



John Poppert

Administrator
Educational Service Unit 11 (NE)



Matthew Ray

Superintendent
Omaha Public Schools (NE)



Michelle Reid

Superintendent
Fairfax County Public Schools (VA)

Welcome to Our New DMCouncil Members



Jair Ribeiro

Founder and President
Parceiros da Educação
(São Paulo)



Joseph Sawyer

Superintendent
Shrewsbury Public Schools (MA)



Ryan Scallon

Superintendent
Portland Public Schools (ME)



Mark Shanoff

Superintendent
Osceola County Public Schools (FL)



Michael Smith

Superintendent
West Aurora School District
129 (IL)



Clarence Sutton

Superintendent
Huntsville City Schools (AL)



Iton Udosenata

Superintendent
Tigard-Tualatin School District
23J (OR)



Kari Weston

Superintendent
Dinwiddie County Public
Schools (VA)



Marco Menendez

Superintendent
AIMS K12 College Prep Charter
District (CA)



Cory Worrell

Superintendent
Waverly School District 145 (NE)



Matt Zediker

Superintendent
Yorkville Community Unit
School District 115 (IL)

DMInstitutes

Comprehensive Training Programs for School District Teams





UPCOMING

Secondary Scheduling Institute

Design Data-Driven Schedules to Improve Student Outcomes



With the support of scheduling best-practices training, coaching, tools, and templates, district teams will learn and work together to design schedules that align with school and district goals and meet the needs of all students.

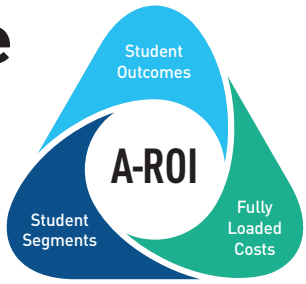
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Begins January 27, 2026

UPCOMING

Academic-ROI Institute

Align Budgets with What Works Best for Students



District teams will conduct an A-ROI assessment for an initiative to determine what works best for which students and at what cost. The hands-on approach builds capacity to successfully and sustainably evaluate future district programming.

SPACE IS LIMITED

Coming Fall 2026

DMInstitutes - A Different Approach to Professional Development

- Reinforce learning over a period of months with a combination of lectures, workshops, and coaching
- Work on real district challenges for hands-on learning
- Build team capacity by attending as a team and learning together
- Share ideas with other district teams through our cohort-based model

Learn more at www.dmgroupk12.com/services/professional-development

Congratulations to Our Award-Winning DMCouncil Members

DMG Transformative Leadership in Education Award 2025

The Transformative Leadership in Education Award, presented by District Management Group, honors visionary, innovative leaders who drive measurable, systemwide improvement in student outcomes. It recognizes the courage, innovation, and relentless focus required to turn bold ideas into lasting change. Dr. Mark Sullivan was honored for the dramatic academic turnaround that he is leading at Birmingham City Schools, which is changing life trajectories for students.

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Dr. Mark Sullivan
Superintendent
Birmingham City Schools (AL)

Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship

The Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship is awarded to the most innovative and forward-thinking superintendents and top-level instructional leaders dedicated to using technology as a lever for innovation and impact. By bringing these leaders together, Google GSV Education seeks to create a powerful network of change agents to influence the ed-tech landscape and, most importantly, drive toward rigorous outcomes for students.



Dr. Michael Lubelfeld
Superintendent
North Shore School District 112 (IL)

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NORTH SHORE SCHOOL DISTRICT 112



Angie E. Gaylord
Chief Academic Officer
Dallas Independent School District (TX)

DALLAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

AASA Learning 2025 Lighthouse Demonstration System

Butler Area School District (PA) was named an AASA Learning 2025 Lighthouse Demonstration System for its exemplary work in community alignment and engagement. A model for how schools and communities can work together, Butler has built a powerful network of partnerships, innovative programs, and student-centered practices that strengthen both learning outcomes and community ties.

BUTLER AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT



Dr. Brian White
Superintendent
Butler Area School District (PA)



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>
> *- Grand Island, Nebraska, Breakthrough Results Team Member*

* Measured using Average Daily Attendance and enrollment figures, year-over-year.

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