FALL 2016 | Volume 20

DMJ

the **DISTRICT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL**

12 DMC SPOTLIGHT
Improving Special Education:
DMC's Best Practices for Cost Effectively Raising Achievement

26 DMC MANAGER'S TOOLKIT
Are There Opportunities to Improve Special Education in Your District?

28 CASE STUDY
Big Gains for Newport News (VA) Using a Systems-Thinking Approach to RTI

IMPROVING SPECIAL EDUCATION

INTERVIEW
with
Norman Atkins
of **RELAY**/GSE
p. 4

A Publication of
DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®
dmcouncil.org

WORK WITH DMC TO IMPROVE SPECIAL EDUCATION WHILE CONTROLLING COSTS

Find out how hundreds of districts have helped students:

- Read and comprehend well
- Master grade-level content
- Become college and career ready
- Reduce problematic behaviors

CONTACT DMC TO LEARN MORE

877-DMC-3500 OR VISIT WWW.DMCOUNCIL.ORG

DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

on

dmcouncil.org

REGISTER NOW

Superintendents' Strategy Summit

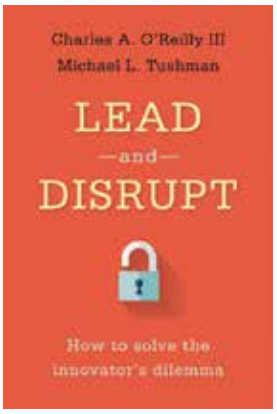
Innovating with Impact: Moving from Bold Ideas to Sustainable Results

January 11–13, 2017 New York, NY

Join us for the 14th annual superintendents-only Superintendents' Strategy Summit. Here we will explore strategies to lead your district to innovate, embrace change, and improve outcomes. We will specifically discuss how to align organizational structures, roles, and responsibilities to encourage innovative new practices. Drawing on lessons learned from other districts and from other industries, we will explore how innovative ideas can be developed and implemented effectively in public school organizations with long-held practices and complex structures.

Our guest presenter will be Harvard Business School professor Michael L. Tushman, who will lead a session entitled The Challenge of Innovation and Organizational Effectiveness. As part of this session, he will discuss his latest book, *Lead and Disrupt: How to Solve the Innovator's Dilemma*, co-authored with Charles O'Reilly III of Stanford's Graduate School of Business. Tushman is not only an expert in leading strategic innovation and change, but is also deeply familiar with the challenges faced by public school districts through his work on the Public Education Leadership Project, a leadership development program run in partnership by the Harvard Business School and the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Michael L. Tushman
Professor
Harvard Business School



We will also feature a case study on Ivy Academy: Blended Learning in Downingtown Area School District where we will explore how this district embraced innovation while continuing to excel.

Join other forward-thinking superintendents from around the country to network, share ideas, and explore this exciting topic. To learn more and to register, visit dmcouncil.org/summit17 or email events@dmcouncil.org.

READ

DMC's Online Resource Library

For more articles on best practices, case studies, and toolkits on the subjects of resource allocation, special education, human capital, and strategic planning, visit www.dmcouncil.org.

Kathleen Choi, managing editor, has a background in international finance, strategy consulting, and copywriting. Kathy holds an A.B. from Harvard College and an M.P.P. from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Christopher Cleveland, senior associate, works closely with school districts on projects spanning special education and intervention, scheduling, and resource allocation. Christopher holds an A.B. from Harvard College in sociology, with a minor in mind, brain, behavior (MBB).

Melissa Donaher, associate, supports districts on various projects, including special education and RTI, elementary scheduling, and strategic budgeting. Melissa holds a B.A. in applied psychology/human development and history from Boston College, with a minor in international ethics and social justice.

John J-H Kim, founder and CEO of DMC, is responsible for ensuring that DMC brings the best management and leadership practices to its members. He is also a senior lecturer at the Harvard Business School. John holds an A.B. from Harvard College and an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School.

Nathan Levenson, president of DMC, oversees all consulting activities and directs the development of technology solutions. Nathan holds a B.A. from Dartmouth College and an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School, and is a graduate of the Broad Foundation Urban Superintendents Academy.

Rachel Melikan, senior marketing manager, works to broaden awareness of DMC's services and to deepen engagement with our membership through events, communications, and resources. Rachel holds a B.A. in Russian and Eastern European studies from Wesleyan University and an M.P.A. from Suffolk University.

Megan Roth, product manager at DMC, works to ensure our performance solutions are successfully developed and applied to meet district goals. Megan received a B.A. in history from Dartmouth College.

DMJ
the **DISTRICT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL**

PUBLISHING

Editor-in-Chief and Chief Executive Officer: John J-H Kim

Managing Editor: Kathleen Choi

Editorial Director: Nathan Levenson

Contributing Writers/Researchers: Christopher Cleveland, Melissa Donaher, John J-H Kim, Nathan Levenson, Rachel Melikan, Megan Roth

Editorial Production: Marisa Carlson

Art Direction, Design, Production: Holland-Mark, Boston, MA

DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®

EDITORIAL OFFICES

133 Federal Street
Boston, MA 02110
Tel. 877-DMC-3500
www.dmcouncil.org

To order reprints of articles, call 877-DMC-3500 or email kchoi@dmcouncil.org.

To advertise in *The District Management Journal*, please call 877-DMC-3500 or email kchoi@dmcouncil.org.

Letters are welcome and should be addressed to the Editor, The District Management Council, 133 Federal Street, Boston, MA 02110, or emailed to letters@dmcouncil.org.

SUBMISSIONS

The District Management Journal welcomes submissions. Unsolicited manuscripts will be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

SUBSCRIBE

Become a member of The District Management Council at dmcouncil.org and *The District Management Journal* is included in your membership.

Copyright © 2016 District Management Council. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photo-copy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission.

ISSN: 2162-0490 (print)
ISSN: 2162-0504 (online)
The District Management Council

DMC partners with public school district leaders to improve student outcomes, operational efficiency, and resource allocation. By collaborating with a nationwide network of districts and distilling best practices research, DMC delivers actionable solutions and implementation support.

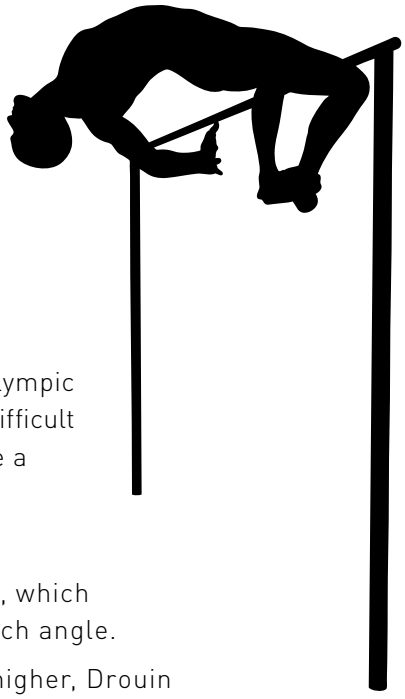
VOLUME 20

Printed in the U.S.A.

PRINTED WITH SOY INK

From the Editor

Systems Thinking Wins Olympic Gold



Canadian Derek Drouin's high jump of 7 feet 9.75 inches won him Olympic gold this summer. A single high jump happens so quickly that it's difficult to appreciate fully the complexity involved. So, I was fascinated to see a detailed description in the *New York Times* that dissected how Drouin optimizes each movement to maximize overall performance.

- Instead of running straight toward the bar, Drouin runs along a curve, which allows him to lean away from the bar and put himself at a better launch angle.
- While it is generally assumed that running faster results in jumping higher, Drouin actually runs slowly: this allows him to control the takeoff, keep his leg straight, and maximize the conversion of horizontal energy to vertical energy.
- Drouin swings his arms back in the final stride to create more power; he then reaches high with his left arm to guide his body into the air.
- He arches his back less than most high jumpers, which reduces the chances of knocking over the bar.

To me, this is an incredible example of systems thinking. Because of a deep understanding of the relationship between each component of the jump, each movement is optimized as it relates to the whole. Drouin actually came up with innovations such as running along a curve and running more slowly. What is fascinating is that each movement is perfected not in and of itself, but in the way that works best to create an overall winning jump.

In this issue, our Spotlight on improving special education and our case study on Newport News Public Schools' work to improve elementary reading highlight the importance of taking a systems-thinking approach. Improving special education or elementary reading is not about a single silver-bullet solution. Instead, it is about taking a close look at the system as a whole, and then aligning and leveraging the talents of teachers and staff and the resources of time and money to all work in concert to bring about improved results for students. Like Drouin's gold-medal high jump, we must make sure all parts are optimized to work in concert to achieve our goals.

John J-H Kim

Creating a "Relay" of Highly Effective Teachers:

An Interview with Norman Atkins of Relay Graduate School of Education

Norman Atkins established the Relay Graduate School of Education (Relay) in 2007 to fundamentally change the way the United States educates teachers. Recently cited by the U.S. Department of Education as an organization "demonstrating vital leadership in improving teacher preparation," Relay strives to create a "relay" of exceptional teachers to close the opportunity gap—an idea based on research showing that three successive years spent with highly effective teachers can eradicate the achievement gap for low-income and other at-risk students. Relay's mission and approach was born from Atkins' active involvement in anti-poverty efforts as well as firsthand experience founding and leading Uncommon Schools, a growing network of high-performing charter public schools in New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts.

Relay turns the traditional teacher-training model on its head. At Relay, aspiring teachers spend the majority of their time working directly with students in the classroom while receiving coaching and feedback from experienced educators. Relay focuses on providing the practical knowledge and skills needed to be effective in the classroom; about 40% of Relay courses are accessed online, with video lessons demonstrating practical techniques that can be immediately applied to engage students in learning. Success at Relay is defined not by passing exams, but by demonstrating student growth in the classroom. Initial evidence indicates this groundbreaking model is working—more than 90% of those who participated in the two-year Relay Master's program effected at least a year's worth of student growth in one year's time.

Now in its fifth year as an independent institution and accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education and by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Relay has over 2,750 alumni and 2,400 current students. There are Relay campuses in 10 states and counting, and Relay student-teachers are teaching in more than 50 school districts and charter networks across the United States. As Relay continues to grow, Atkins hopes to encourage more district and school leaders to invest in strengthening their greatest asset—their teachers—in order to give all students the greatest opportunity to succeed.

In this edited interview with DMC CEO John J-H Kim and DMC Associate Melissa Donaher, Norman Atkins explains the inspiration and strategy behind Relay's innovative teacher-training program, and discusses how school districts can create a highly skilled and effective teaching force.

At Relay, we believe that becoming a great teacher or principal is much like becoming a great musician or surgeon: it takes continuous practice, feedback, and dedication.

—Norman Atkins
Co-founder and President
Relay Graduate School of Education

How has your personal experience shaped your views about the U.S. education system?

I grew up north of Chicago in Evanston, Illinois, in a predominantly white community. But when I was five years old, I was put on a bus to attend a lab school, a public school, across town in a black neighborhood. As a child of *Brown v. Board of Education*, I feel that going to school in a diverse community and being surrounded by diverse teachers was essential to my educational experience. I had phenomenal black women teachers who not only taught me how to read and do math, but welcomed me with open arms and open hearts, and instilled in me a love of school and a desire to be a lifelong learner.

But by high school, even in this pioneering district, I was troubled to see that the white and black kids were living very separate lives and were on divergent paths. Not only were the black kids sitting at separate lunch tables and participating on different sports teams, but the Advanced Placement and advanced-track classes were predominantly white, while the lower-level and special education classes were predominantly black. After high school, white students were going off to attend four-year colleges in great numbers, but this was less true for the black students.

Even today in the most strongly integrated districts around the country, we are not seeing the outcomes for African American and Latino children that we should be. And it isn't just going to happen automatically. Having African American, Latino, and Asian students sit next to white students is not going to erase the opportunity gap, as psychologist and theorist Kenneth Clark argues. One needs to be incredibly conscientious and purposeful to ensure a high quality of instruction and to create opportunities so all students are able to succeed.

Was it this experience of attending an integrated school that brought you to the education sector?

Early in my career, this experience led me to be interested in fighting poverty more broadly. In my work with the Robin Hood Foundation in New York, I visited countless homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and programs for people with AIDS. But I kept coming up against this idea that the best way to combat poverty was with education. I became increasingly convinced that improving public schools was the most efficient and effective way to create opportunities for low-income kids.

I was living in Montclair, New Jersey—I had moved there for the public schools for my own kids. And then, in the 1990s, New Jersey passed a charter school law, and it seemed like a lofty invitation to people like me to make the magic of a small mission-driven school for low-income kids work. I raised my hand to start one of the first charter schools in Newark, New Jersey, in 1997. The mission of North Star Academy was to prepare low-income African American and Latino students to enter and graduate from college and lead choice-filled lives. Parents were very receptive of this model, and soon, North Star grew from a single school to a network of charter schools that became Uncommon Schools. Since then, Uncommon

RELAY/GSE
Learn.
Practice.
Perform.

The Relay Graduate School of Education is a nontraditional teacher-training program with the mission of creating a "relay" of effective teachers who are able to close the achievement gap for students across America. Relay Graduate School of Education is a national, accredited, nonprofit institution of higher education.

- Relay delivers teacher education through a **"nurse practitioner" model: practice above theory**, with teacher certification linked to demonstrated results in the classroom

Schools has expanded across the Northeast, and currently serves 16,000 students in 49 schools.

With a successful and rapidly expanding network of charter schools, what led you to start Relay?

I was sitting with David Levin, the founder of KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) Charter Schools, and we started talking about how we wanted to create more opportunities for more students. We wanted to have an impact beyond what we could achieve with our networks of charter schools. We figured that training exceptional teachers and school leaders would be the best way to go do that. We began dreaming up what was initially called Teacher U, in partnership with Hunter College, and this eventually became the Relay Graduate School of Education.

Given the numerous education reforms underway around the country, what convinced you to focus on teacher quality?

I feel sad for kids who have teachers who are not strong in content knowledge and not skilled at providing rigorous instruction. And I feel sad for kids who have teachers who are not expressing love, building relationships, and setting high expectations for all their students.

It worries me that only 24% of all of America's teachers are top-third college graduates; even more troubling is that only 11% of teachers working in low-income communities are top-third college graduates. When I compare these statistics to those in other countries with more successful education systems, I am convinced that we can and need to do more to get stronger teachers in classrooms. In the long term, I think that we need to fundamentally change the status of teaching in the United States. We need a massive strategic initiative, something like a GI Bill for teachers, to create incentives for the very top college graduates to go into teaching as a profession.

However, we're not going to see that tomorrow, or anytime soon, so the question becomes: to what extent can we train and develop people who are interested in going into teaching to be successful as teachers? And to what extent can we create the kind of training and development and career trajectory that will motivate more people to go into teaching?

What programs does the Relay Graduate School of Education offer to aspiring and current teachers and school leaders?

We have a variety of programs for people coming from different backgrounds, including programs for undergraduates (both education and non-education majors) and a residency program for those looking for a gradual on-ramp into the teaching profession. We have programs for new teachers who are taking an alternate route to certification. We also have offerings for experienced teachers who are working on their master's degree and/or their advanced certifications in areas such as special education.

Additionally, we are serving aspiring principals, sitting principals, and principal supervisors. We currently have 400 principals and principal managers from 24 states across the country enrolled in a yearlong National Principals Academy, and I think this is likely to grow significantly over time. Currently about half of the principals and principal managers in our program are from district public schools. We've been working closely with the Denver Public Schools and the Tulsa Public Schools, in particular. We see a huge and growing demand around the country for supporting sitting principals and principal supervisors.

How is Relay different from traditional teacher-training programs?

The Relay experience is unique in a number of ways. First, the clinical experience is very extensive. Relay student-teachers spend most of their time in classrooms working directly with students, while also participating in a gradual on-ramp into

- Relay currently serves **2,000 teachers** and **400 school leaders** across the United States, and already has **2,750 alumni**
- Relay currently has campuses in **10 states** (Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas) and counting
- Relay collaborates with more than **50 districts**, nonprofits, and philanthropic investors all over the United States
- Relay has also worked with principals and principal supervisors from **24 states** and the District of Columbia
- Tuition for a two-year Relay Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) degree is **$17,500** for teachers in high-needs schools. After institutional aid from Relay, effective tuition for graduate students is typically **$6,000 to $8,000**

the teaching profession through courses and online learning modules. Second, there is a tremendous emphasis on practice: rehearsing and scrimmaging outside of the classroom in order to get ready to deliver lessons in front of students. Third, the techniques and strategies both in general pedagogy and in content are specific and actionable. These techniques are taught by highly skilled teachers with experience and proven success teaching low-income students. Fourth, we have a strong emphasis on student learning outcomes. Finally, a focus on mindset is central to our program. We want Relay graduates to be able to help their students develop not only cognitive skills but noncognitive skills. We focus a great deal on teaching our teachers to develop character, which is really different from other teacher-training programs.

At Relay, we feel a great deal of urgency to get the teaching right for the benefit of students, and we are particularly focused on closing the opportunity gap for young people growing up in low-income neighborhoods. Our long-term goal is to drive systemic change in the education sector that will lead to a demand for a new kind of trained teacher: one with demonstrated results in the classroom.

And the way you are teaching these skills also seems different from traditional models …

Relay students are not writing papers about education so much as they are videotaping themselves and getting feedback on the video from their professors, who are themselves exemplary teachers. The program is rigorous in that it is performance-based; you can't do well from your armchair or by cramming for a series of exams, the way you might prepare for a test in college. This is about deepening one's understanding of the skills, techniques, strategies, relationships, and mindsets that you need in order to be successful as a teacher. And, we're also using technology in somewhat novel ways. At Relay, many of our assignments and much of our direct instruction and peer collaboration occur online.

Our long-term goal is to drive systemic change in the education sector that will lead to a demand for a new kind of trained teacher: one with demonstrated results in the classroom.

Can you give a specific example of how Relay's instruction may differ from traditional teacher-training programs?

Many traditional programs focus on teaching how to develop engaging lessons for students, and feel that classroom management will take care of itself. At Relay, we have paid very careful attention to how to build the platform, set the tone, create the culture, and set up routines that help students to feel comfortable, safe, and productive in their classrooms;

I don't think there is anything that we're doing at Relay that the traditional teacher-training programs couldn't do if they wanted to.

in this environment, teachers can then launch the most engaging lessons.

We teach many specific techniques and strategies regarding instruction. One specific example is how we teach to check for understanding. I think that the traditional program encourages teachers to have a broad sense that the students are learning the material that's being taught, but at Relay we teach a number of specific techniques for ensuring the students are learning while the lesson is going on, such as using gestures, which help teachers quickly see how well each student in their classroom is following the lesson.

Why do you view the residency model as so critical?

In our early years, most of the people coming to Relay had been recruited by district public schools and charter public schools and were coming to us for training, certification, or a master's degree. But now, a majority of Relay students majored in something other than education as undergraduates. Many are coming to us right after college, but others may be several years down the road and switching careers.

Before they are asked to lead their own classrooms, it is extremely beneficial for novice teachers to participate in a yearlong apprenticeship or residency in the classrooms of model teachers, while gradually taking on an increasingly large role. We know historically, not just at Relay, but across the United States and across time, that teachers tend to struggle in their first year, no matter what port of entry they've come through. We're trying to mitigate that, but we're also trying to help them raise their game, so they can be effective as quickly as possible and feel successful and want to stay in those jobs over time.

As we build this residency model, we're continuing to recruit more talented, diverse people coming from backgrounds other than education. We have about 500 residents in our program this year; about two-thirds of them are people of color. After they have a solid residency year, we are preparing them to work in low-income communities across the country in both district and charter schools.

What results have you seen with teachers who have gone through the Relay program?

Relay graduates learn to track student learning through interim assessments, to respond to data, and to shift the instruction to make sure that all students are successful. They're employed full-time in charter and district public schools in underserved communities. They're leading their

Norman Atkins' Biographical Timeline

1984
Brown University
B.A., History

1985–1989
Independent Journalist
New York Times Magazine, New Yorker, Rolling Stone, Parenting, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, and *Boston Globe*

1989–1994
Robin Hood Foundation
Co-Executive Director

1997
Columbia University
Teachers College
M.A., Educational Administration
Computer Science

K-12 students to achieve at least one year's worth of growth in a year. And in reading, our internal data shows that they're achieving an average of 1.4 years of growth in a year's time. For our graduate students, being able to demonstrate their students' growth with data is a critical piece of getting their master's degree.

Does Relay's model have the potential to become mainstream?

I don't think there is anything that we're doing at Relay that the traditional teacher-training programs couldn't do if they wanted to. I would expect that in time, many of the things that we're doing will be fairly common and routine across the board in teacher preparation programs. District public schools are going to want to hire teachers who have clinical experience and are able to manage classrooms, teach rigorous content, and adapt to meet the needs of all their students.

I'm optimistic that we're moving in this direction as a country. I'm encouraged by the district superintendents who are starting to take a look at the work that we're doing. Although rooted in the charter sector, our work is very much applicable to their schools and districts. Whether it's Relay or other institutions of higher education or teacher preparation programs, what's important is closing the gap. We need to collectively develop teachers for the specific roles that are needed in classrooms and schools in urban public school districts.

What are some challenges of implementing the Relay model?

One of the challenges is that states put out regulations and lists of topics to be covered in a teacher preparation or master's program, and higher education institutions essentially turn each one of these topics into a three-credit course. Across the board in higher education, there is a need to shift to more performance-based programs.

> **We need to shift the learning experience from writing about the task to learning how to perform the task.**

You see this happening in the context of teaching hospitals or nurse practitioner programs, or even programs for people who are getting a master of fine arts in sculpture, painting, or poetry. We need to shift the learning experience from writing about the task to learning how to perform the task. Clearly, that needs to be done in concert with a background in theory. But the theory should not overwhelm the practice. At Relay, we're still trying to get the ratio right. And it feels like the field is also recognizing this need to change.

Of course, the greatest challenge of the residency model from a district perspective is how to pay for residents in the year in which they are not the teacher of record. But, I want to encourage a long-term economic view: consider the benefits of investing upfront in building strong teachers compared to the costs of churn, recruitment, and most importantly, weak student outcomes.

The tuition at Relay is a lot less expensive than that of many other teacher-training programs.

Our tuition and fees are mindful of the fact that teachers are not particularly well paid and often can't afford an expensive program. We're trying to find the financial aid and resources to ensure that teachers in great numbers are going to be able to get through their master's program with no additional debt.

NORTH ★ STAR

1996–2002
North Star Academy
Co-Founder & Co-Director

Uncommon Schools

1996–2008
Uncommon Schools
Founder & CEO

RELAY/GSE

2008–Present
Relay Graduate School of Education
Co-Founder & President

ZEARN

2012–Present
Zearn
Co-Founder & Board Chair

Consider the benefits of investing upfront in building strong teachers compared to the costs of churn, recruitment, and most importantly, weak student outcomes.

Our goal is to get to financial sustainability without philanthropic resources paying for core programs. We are on track to do that, and we want to run good programs that our graduate students and partners value.

What can superintendents and district leaders do to create a stronger, more effective teaching force?

I've spent the past half-dozen years going around the country to visit with superintendents and discuss their human capital needs. I worry about the challenge superintendents face of having to hire teachers late in the school year and not being able to orient these teachers to the model of instruction and

RELAY/GSE Programs

The Relay Graduate School of Education offers two two-year Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) programs:

1 **For aspiring teachers:**
Relay Teaching Residency
In the first year, residents work with students under close supervision of a mentor teacher. In the second year, residents transition to a lead teaching role.

2 **For current teachers:**
Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) Program
Students are full-time, lead teachers while enrolled in Relay.

Curriculum is designed around a central question:

What do teachers need in order to be immediately effective, to guarantee their students are engaged and learning, and ultimately, to be happy in their profession?

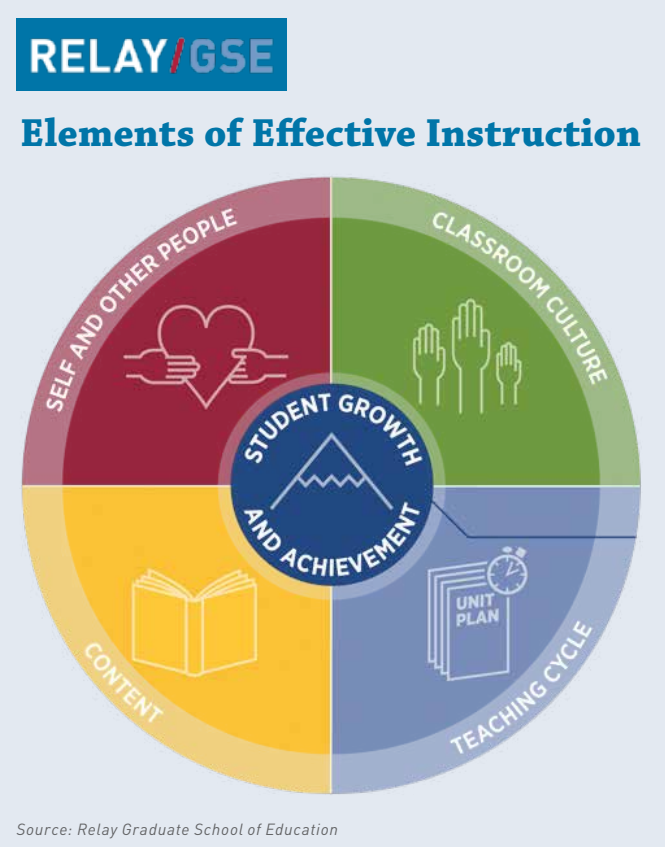
In both programs, students take courses at Relay in both core teaching techniques and content-specific instruction. Relay students practice these techniques in their classrooms and receive expert feedback weekly from faculty and classmates.

Year One
Graduate students learn:
- The basics of how to build relationships with students, families, and colleagues
- The fundamentals of classroom management, lesson planning, and assessment design
- Skills in data-driven instruction, so they can measure and track students' academic achievement and growth

Year Two
Graduate students learn:
- Broader knowledge of unit planning and how to incorporate literacy across content areas
- Specific techniques that help them build rigorous and joyful classrooms—the kind of learning environments that encourage both academic achievement and character development
- Graduate students prepare for the Master's Defense, a capstone project in which they track how students in their PK-12 classrooms grow throughout the year

Additional programs for education professionals:

- **For principals and principal supervisors:**
  National Principals Academy and National Principal Supervisors Academy
- **For everyone:**
  Free, open-enrollment online courses in topics such as blended learning, teaching character, and creating positive classrooms



Source: Relay Graduate School of Education

curriculum in the district. So I encourage districts to instead invest in the residency model.

In particular I want to encourage superintendents to consider putting into a residency model paraprofessionals and college graduates who have the requisite backgrounds. Using paraprofessional funds, Title 2, and other supplemental funds, you can have them perform these responsibilities alongside residency training like Relay. This provides the opportunity to have a yearlong tryout, and if successful, the district can hire these folks for full-time jobs as teachers the following year. I think this could be a good employment strategy for districts. Relay would like to partner with superintendents who are thinking about doing that. The goal of Relay in partnering with superintendents is not just to provide a boutique program for a small number of teachers, but to develop a really diverse, talented pool of teachers and school leaders for school districts and charter networks in low-income communities around the country.

The goal of Relay in partnering with superintendents is not just to provide a boutique program for a small number of teachers, but to develop a really diverse, talented pool of teachers and school leaders.

Even if Relay is not in your community, I think the basic concept is the same. I would encourage superintendents to build partnerships with residency programs nearby, and to develop future teachers systematically through a residency model in core schools. And I would encourage superintendents to develop resident advisors or mentor teachers in a way that provides a good professional opportunity for these skilled teachers. ◆

IMPROVING SPECIAL EDUCATION:

DMC's Best Practices for Cost Effectively Raising Achievement

Nathan Levenson and Christopher Cleveland

DMC Spotlight represents the thinking and approach of the District Management Council

No one seems satisfied with the state of serving students with special needs, and for good reason. In nearly every school district across the country, the conversation is the same. Parents are concerned that their children aren't well enough prepared to succeed in life, college, and career. Students themselves often feel excluded or frustrated by ever-higher standards that they can't seem to meet. Classroom teachers feel underprepared to address ever-mounting student needs, and special education teachers feel stretched thin. Despite the hard work of so many caring people and the mounting resources dedicated year after year, disappointment and frustration persist.

But there is reason to be hopeful. Based on extensive research by the What Works Clearinghouse, the National Reading Panel, John Hattie's *Visible Learning*, numerous major research studies, and our own hands-on work with almost a hundred districts, the District Management Council (DMC) has developed and honed a best-practice approach to improving special education. With DMC's approach, districts have seen dramatic gains in achievement and inclusion and have expanded services for students with disabilities; the cost is no more, and in some cases less, than current efforts; and these strategies have helped other struggling students, including struggling readers, students living in poverty, those requiring Response to Intervention (RTI), and even some English Language Learners (ELLs). It is a commonsense but not commonplace approach developed based on a synthesis of pedagogical research, scheduling expertise, change management techniques, data from hundreds of districts, and in-depth study of those districts most successful in this area.

To date, DMC has helped implement this approach in almost a hundred districts. The exciting news is that our method has been shown to help a lot, not just a little. For example:

- A suburban district narrowed the high school achievement gap by 66% and reduced the number of struggling readers by 65% in grades K-5.

- A mixed urban/suburban district tripled the eighth-grade ELA proficiency among students with disabilities from 12.8% to 33.3%; proficiency rates in math also rose from 14.6% to 27.5%.

- An urban district increased middle school reading proficiency by four to eight points while the state average decreased by five points. Its high school graduation rate increased from 68% to 82%.

In our experience, big gains are possible and cost-neutral, but the transformations don't come easily or quickly. Implementing best practices requires detailed data; broad-based participation by parents, teachers, principals, and the central office; careful planning; strong communication; and patient, steadfast, hard work. Fear of noncompliance, uncertainty about regulations, and concerns about deep sensitivities to any changes make adding staff and layering in programs the path of least resistance. But if districts are to improve the performance of students with special needs, this important work must be tackled, and these best practices need to be put in place.

DMC's 10 Best Practices for Improving Special Education

The following 10 best practices, when implemented well with a systems-thinking approach, can dramatically improve the lives of struggling students with and without Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). This approach can also have a positive effect on the budget as it results in more effective and efficient allocation of resources. There is one important caveat: some students have unique needs not entirely addressed by this approach, especially students with severe disabilities, autism, or students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) new to the country.

We at DMC hope these ideas will spark interest and encourage districts to think about implementing these best practices for the maximum benefit of students and the budget.

1 Focus on student outcomes, not inputs

First and foremost, districts that have raised achievement, expanded inclusion, and improved the social, emotional, and behavioral health of students keep the focus on results. In too many districts, if last year's efforts didn't work as well as desired, more staff, more paraprofessionals, more co-teaching, and more hours of service are added. These changes seldom help students and always cost more. Over the past decade, districts increased the number of special educators and paraprofessionals per 1,000 students by more than 10%, and yet achievement levels have barely budged.[1] If the current approach isn't achieving great outcomes, current practice must be reviewed and modified. History shows that continuing to add resources and layer in solutions does not yield success.

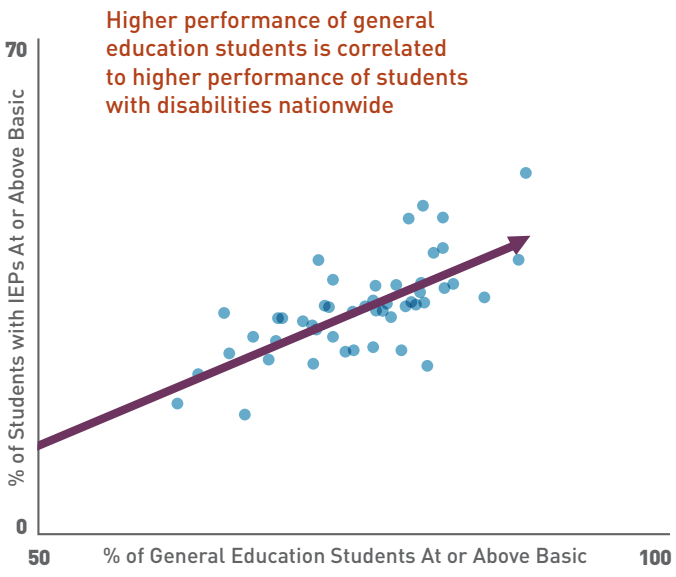
2 Effective general education instruction is key

Effective general education instruction is key: higher performance of general education students correlates to higher performance of students with disabilities, as shown by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (*Exhibit 1*).[2]

Students with special needs and students who struggle spend most of their day in the general education classroom; therefore, core instruction provided by the classroom teacher must meet most of their needs (not all, but most). In some districts, a culture has emerged where special education staff take the lead in serving students with disabilities. In many schools, elementary school children who struggle to read are pulled out of the core reading block to be taught by a special education teacher or paraprofessional. While well-intentioned, these practices often shift responsibility for student success away from the general education teacher to a special education teacher or paraprofessional. If we want students to master the general education curriculum, general education teachers have to be a big part of the solution.

Students are best served academically when their general education teacher takes primary responsibility for their learning. Beyond core instruction, even interventions are often best provided by general education staff, which is the hallmark of RTI. Fundamentally, RTI and efforts like it embrace general education as the foundation for all students' success.

Exhibit 1 **NAEP GRADE 4 READING PERFORMANCE BY STATE**



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Assessment, 2015.

3 Ensure all students can read

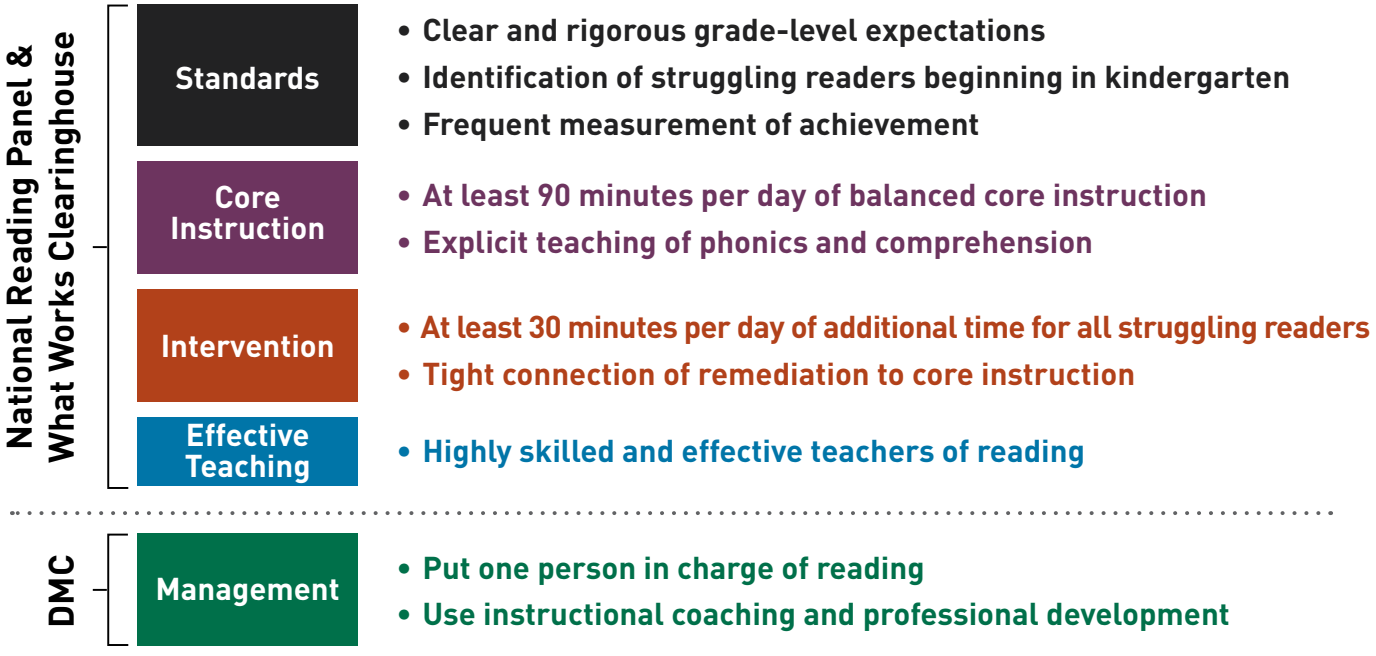
In many districts, up to half of the referrals to special education are, at their root, due to reading difficulties. Referral rates jump in third through sixth grades when reading problems make it difficult to learn math, science, and social studies. An overwhelming majority of students who have not mastered reading by the end of third grade will continue to struggle throughout high school and beyond. These students tend to have increased rates of behavioral problems in later grades and are less likely to graduate from high school or to enroll in college.[3]

The good news is that well-established best practices for teaching reading exist. Drawing from the National Reading Panel, the What Works Clearinghouse, and DMC experience, DMC has assembled the 10 most essential best practices (*Exhibit 2*). Districts have dramatically reduced the number of struggling readers by using these proven strategies. And, implementing these best practices typically costs less than what most districts are already spending on this key skill. The bad news is that not many districts faithfully implement these best practices. The worst news is that in too many districts, students with mild to moderate disabilities are more likely than general education students to be excluded from these best practices.

4 Provide extra instructional time for struggling students every day

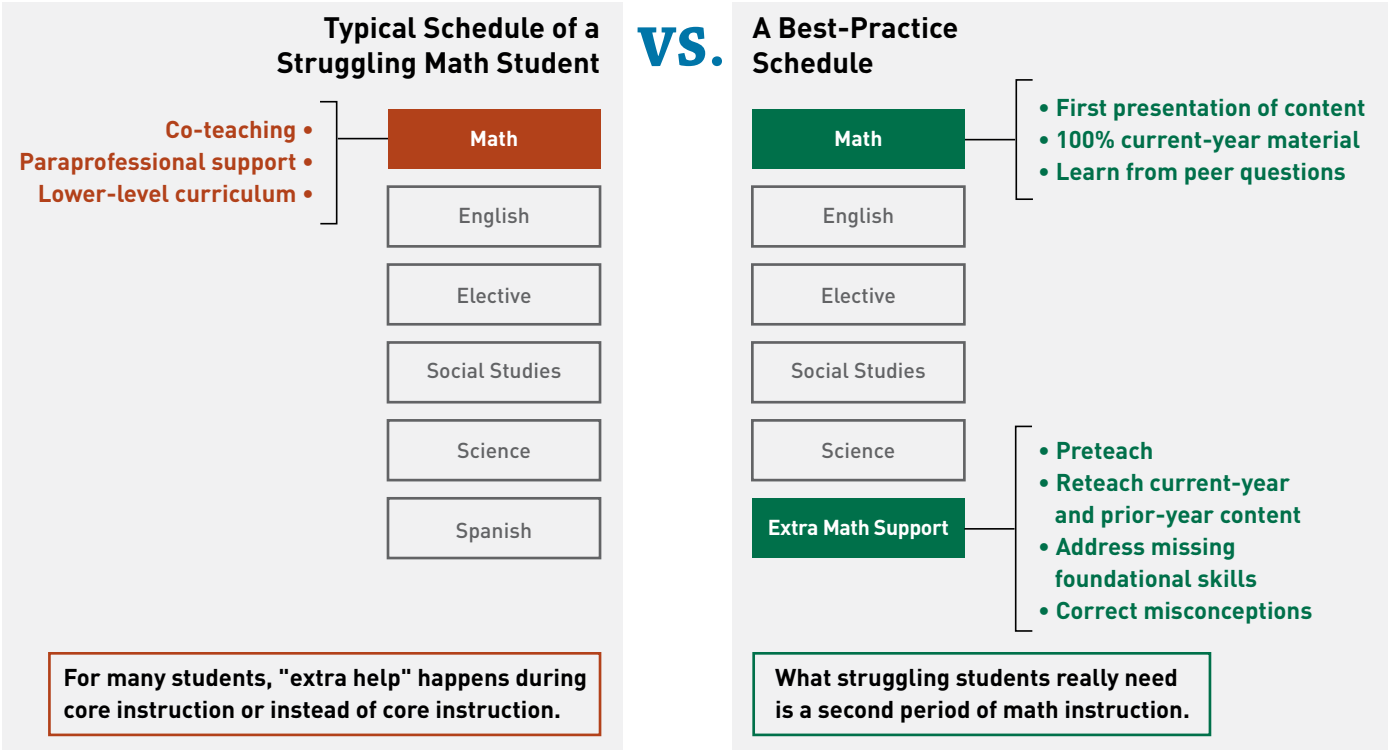
Students who have difficulty achieving grade-level standards often need more time for instruction in order to catch up and keep up with their peers. These students must master previous content, plus they may need current content explained a few more times than their nonstruggling peers. At the elementary level, students who have difficulty with reading should receive at least 30 minutes a day of additional reading instruction. At the secondary level, where the

Exhibit 2 **ELEMENTARY READING BEST PRACTICES**



Source: National Reading Panel, What Works Clearinghouse, experience of districts who have dramatically improved reading scores

Exhibit 3 **COMMON PRACTICE VS. BEST PRACTICE IN PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH EXTRA TIME**



Source: DMC

content is more complex and the scope of prior learning even larger, the extra instructional time required for struggling students to catch up and master grade-level content is typically an extra period per day. This model is often referred to as the "double dose" support model. At both the elementary and secondary levels, this additional time can be used to preteach materials, reteach the day's lesson, address missing foundational skills, and correct misunderstandings.

In many schools, struggling students are provided extra adults, but not extra time. Struggling learners may receive additional support from a teaching assistant, paraprofessional, special education teacher, co-teacher, etc., while staying in the same classroom as their peers for the same duration as their peers. Some schools have specialized instruction in place, but it is typically not in addition to the regular period. Struggling students, for example, may be assigned to a "replacement" class, a lower-level general education class that covers less content with less rigor.

Extra "help time" should not be confused with extra instructional time. It is common for students with special needs to have a resource room period or a support period where a special education teacher provides ad hoc help or test prep across multiple subjects, grades, and courses. This is not the same as a daily dedicated extra period focused explicitly on math skills, for example.

Districts that have successfully closed the achievement gap and significantly raised the achievement of students with and without special needs provide extra instructional time each day in addition to core content instruction time (*Exhibit 3*).

5 Ensure that content-strong staff provide interventions and support

As standards have risen and the complexity of the content has increased, staff's having a deep understanding and mastery of what they teach becomes even more important. A teacher who has engaged in extensive study and training in a particular subject is more likely to have a wider repertoire of ways to teach the material.

Imagine a student who is having difficulty with eighth-grade math. The student receives a period of instruction each day from a skilled math teacher, and yet still struggles. During the extra period of math support, the student will still need a skilled math teacher to review the topic, review wrong answers, infer what misconceptions led to this error, and then reteach the approach. This process asks a lot of the teacher, but a lot is required.

However, in most districts, extra instruction is provided either by paraprofessionals, who are not teachers, or by special education teachers, who have expertise in pedagogy but often are generalists without expertise in teaching subjects such as math, English, and reading.

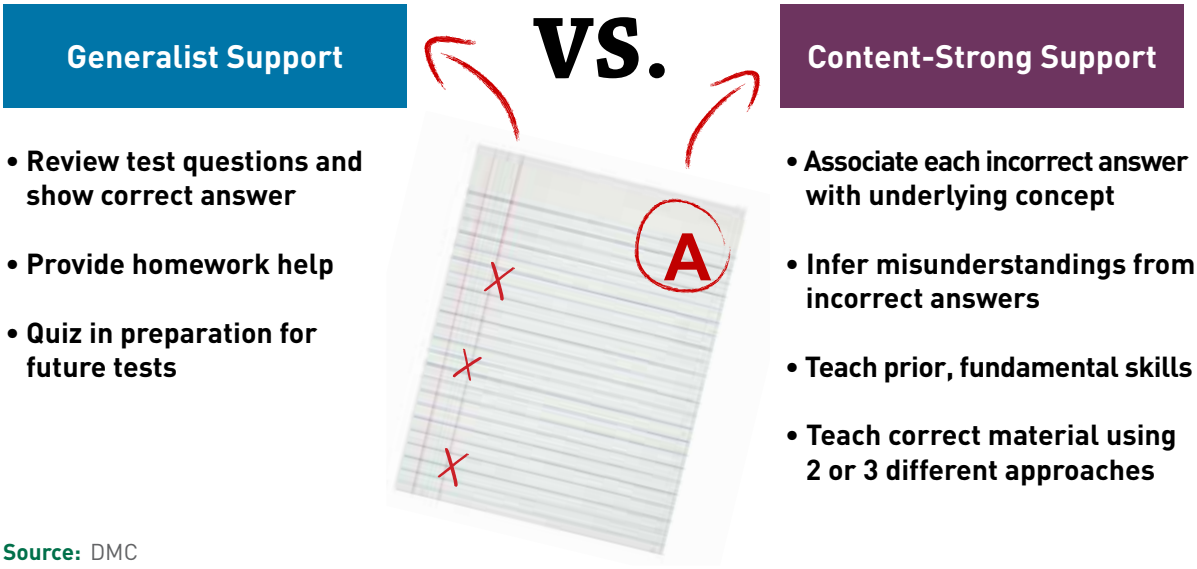
Certainly some special educators are very strong reading, writing, and math teachers, but not all. One large-scale study by the National Council on Teacher Quality indicated that only 2% of special education teacher programs prepare these teachers for content-strong instruction.[4]

Districts that have made the most significant gains among struggling students have done so by providing these students, whether or not they have IEPs, with teachers skilled in content instruction during extra instructional time (*Exhibit 4*).

6 Allow special educators to play to their strengths

Districts that have made strides in improving services for struggling students have focused on ensuring that teachers are able to play to their strengths. For example, some special education teachers may have expertise in specific content areas, while others may be very efficient and skilled in assessing and managing the IEP process. It is highly beneficial to leverage these areas of expertise. In general, there are four ways a special education teacher's role may be tailored:

Exhibit 4 **GENERALIST SUPPORT VS. CONTENT-STRONG SUPPORT**



Source: DMC

- **Content-Specific Expertise:** Teachers who have particular strengths in academic content areas (e.g. reading instruction, math instruction) should focus on maximizing their time supporting students in their academic area of specialization.
- **Pedagogical Expertise:** Teachers with pedagogical expertise should coach general education teachers on accommodating the needs of students with disabilities and on using scaffolding, differentiation, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), chunking, and other teaching strategies.
- **Social-Emotional Expertise:** Special education teachers with a strong background in providing social-emotional or behavior supports to students should focus on delivering these important supports. These teachers can work with students on self-monitoring strategies and can coach teachers on how to avoid behavior triggers.
- **Case Management Expertise:** Some special education teachers are particularly efficient and effective in managing the IEP process. These teachers should focus on case management responsibilities and thereby allow other special education teachers more time to serve students.

Making these shifts in roles enables teachers to focus on applying their particular strengths to benefit students. Specialization of roles also simplifies professional development for special education teachers; teachers can develop deeper skills in one area rather than having to master many different skills and specialties. Teachers often express their frustration at having to choose among keeping up on the latest regulations, learning about effective instructional practices, and staying abreast of ever-changing curriculum.

7 Focus paraprofessional support on health, safety, and behavior needs, rather than on academic needs

Across the country, the number of paraprofessionals per 1,000 students has increased by 27% since 2000.[5] Paraprofessionals play a critical role in the lives and education of many students, especially those with severe needs, autism, or behavior issues. They also play a potentially lifesaving role for students with health issues and have helped expand inclusion. Indeed, the number of students with severe disabilities, autism, and behavior needs has increased, and more paraprofessionals have been counted on to meet these needs.

In too many districts, if last year's efforts didn't work as well as desired, more staff, more paraprofessionals, more co-teaching, and more hours of service are added.

However, paraprofessionals have also been given a growing role in supporting academic needs. A DMC review of 1,500 detailed schedules of paraprofessionals from 20 districts revealed that elementary paraprofessionals working in general education or resource classrooms (the most common setting for paraprofessionals) spend fully 40% of their day providing academic support or instruction. In some districts, 70% or more of the paraprofessional's day is dedicated to teaching reading to struggling students. In countless interviews, paraprofessionals and special education teachers refer to the paraprofessional in this role as a reading tutor or teacher.

This seemingly logical, caring effort actually runs counter to many of the best practices. As we've discussed, these students need to be receiving instruction from content-strong teachers, and they need to be receiving extra instructional time instead of having additional support during core instruction. What's more, the presence of an aide can actually *decrease* the amount of instruction a student receives from the classroom teacher; it is not uncommon for a classroom teacher to feel that a student with an aide already has 100% of an adult's time, and therefore to focus attention on those students without aides. As a result, students with the greatest needs receive the least attention from a teacher certified in the subject. Finally, an aide hovering beside a student creates a social barrier, stifling peer interaction and thereby defeating one of the primary benefits of inclusion.

It is important that districts focus paraprofessional support on health, safety, and behavior needs, and have certified reading teachers, RTI interventionists, and other trained specialists focused on academic and other specific needs. Fortunately, most districts can shift their staffing to better meet the needs of students in a cost-neutral way.

8 Expand the reach and impact of social, emotional, and behavioral supports

Addressing students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs is critical. Social, emotional, and behavioral skills enable students to communicate, connect with others, resolve conflict, and cope with challenges. These skills allow students to pursue academic success. It is hard for children to learn and for teachers to teach when these needs go unmet.

Many districts have responded by adding counselors, social workers, or paraprofessionals. But in an era of tight budgets, districts still feel understaffed to meet the overwhelming need. The key is to expand the reach and impact of existing staff, expand staffing by shifting resources, and partner with others to provide free or low-cost services.

Psychologists, social workers, counselors, and behaviorists are asked to do many, many things. They play an integral role in the identification and evaluation of special education students, manage many IEPs and 504s, attend meetings, coach teachers, communicate with parents, and of course, directly support students. However, the time these staff dedicate to directly serving students versus all the other tasks varies significantly between districts, even among like-districts just a few miles apart.

One large district found that although it had a large team of social workers, only 45% of the day on average was spent with students, and many social workers spent far less time than that with students (*Exhibit 5*). As points of comparison, some schools target 75% of the day to be spent with students; and some clinics in teaching hospitals expect pediatric social workers to spend roughly 85% of their time with patients.

A DMC review of eight neighboring districts revealed that some psychologists spent over five days per initial or three-year evaluation while others completed the same tasks in about a day and a half. The discrepancy occurred not because

Expand Services: Pursue Partnerships

While the task of meeting the ever-increasing social and emotional needs of students can seem daunting, **partnering with local nonprofit agencies can help provide and pay for these services.**

One district partnered with a local nonprofit counseling agency that **provided and supervised 14 FTE graduate student counselors for the cost of 2.5 FTE district counselors**. The agency also provided an expert in anger and stress management at no cost.

Another nonprofit provided a full-time licensed social worker paid for almost entirely from reimbursements from students' health insurance. Those without insurance were treated at no cost, and students and families had no paperwork or copayments. A similar insurance-paid program was established with a well-respected drug and alcohol counseling nonprofit. All services were provided at school during the regular day.

With DMC's approach, districts have seen dramatic gains in achievement and inclusion and have expanded services for students with disabilities; the cost is no more, and in some cases less, than current efforts.

some worked faster or harder, but because the systems and expectations varied significantly by district. In fact, when staff moved from one district to the next, they quickly adapted to the prevailing standard. Some districts have managed to double the amount of student services delivered by existing staff by streamlining meetings and paperwork.

But even if all nonstudent work were streamlined, many districts still would be understaffed. Fortunately, many districts can improve and expand social, emotional, and behavioral supports within their existing budget by shifting to having fewer staff overall but a higher number of staff with the particular skills required.

Behaviorists, for example, are often called miracle workers by principals, teachers, and parents. These highly skilled professionals can diagnose why a student has disruptive outbursts, can provide students with coping mechanisms, and can give guidance to teachers on avoiding triggers. Most schools want and need more of these services, but determine that the budget can't allow for it. Instead, paraprofessionals are hired to help students after behavioral incidents. A better solution is to increase the number of behaviorists, reduce the number of paraprofessionals, and have the remaining paraprofessionals report directly to behaviorists and provide ad hoc support to multiple classrooms.

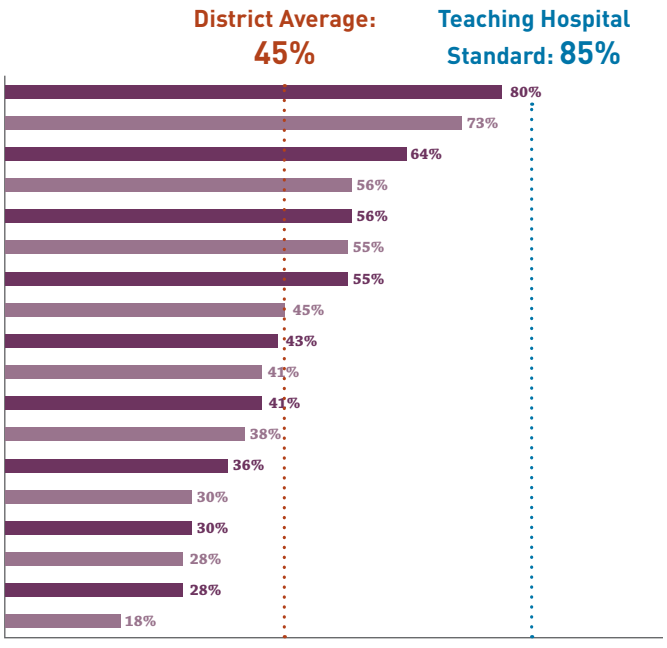
Finally, some districts further expand social and emotional services by partnering with local nonprofit counseling agencies, teaching hospitals, graduate psychology programs, or even insurance-funded mental health counselors.

9 Provide high-quality in-district programs for students with more severe needs

Most parents want great programs in their local schools to meet their children's needs, but when good options aren't available, they want to send their children to suitable programs outside the district. Despite long bus rides, less inclusion, and little connection to their town, out-of-district placements are necessary when no equal option is available in-district.

In the past, many mid-sized and smaller districts decided against providing in-house special education programs; these districts felt they lacked sufficient numbers of students at any given grade level to justify the cost of such services. This needn't be the case. If a district has at least three students with similar

Exhibit 5 **SOCIAL WORKER DIRECT SERVICE**



Source: DMC

To implement best practices at-scale and in a cost-effective manner, districts must have a detailed understanding of how staff are currently serving students.

needs within the same age range, it may be more cost-effective to establish an in-house program than to place the students in an out-of-district program.

Of course, the savings resulting from decreased tuition payments and transportation costs must be invested in providing enhanced in-district services. The key to providing effective and cost-effective programs is to hire staff with the right skills and training, to adjust staffing levels throughout the year as enrollment shifts, and to provide dedicated leadership for these programs.

10 Know how staff spend their time, and provide guidance on effective use of time

Nearly every classroom teacher in every school in America has seen his or her job shift from working alone in a classroom from September to June to working as part of a team (including PLCs, embedded professional development, district-developed lesson plans, formative assessments, and pacing guides). Schools and districts plan how best to use a reading block, what materials to use, and when to monitor student progress. Many heads make better decisions and provide a consistent experience for students.

By contrast, special educators, related services providers, and RTI staff are typically left to themselves to figure out how best to help their students, how best to juggle the many demands on their time, and how best to schedule services. This serves neither the student, the teacher, nor the budget well.

To implement best practices at-scale and in a cost-effective manner, districts must have a detailed understanding of how staff are currently serving students. Then, the district must work collaboratively to establish expectations regarding the service delivery model and to set guidelines on the amount of time to be spent with students.

Given the vast range of tasks that staff perform, it is challenging for districts to develop an in-depth understanding of how staff spend their time. When districts utilize schedule-sharing technology to gain a deep understanding of current practices, both staff and administrators are often surprised at how much time is spent in meetings, how much service is provided 1:1 or 2:1 even though the IEPs call for small groups, and how much instruction is provided by paraprofessionals.

Armed with a detailed understanding of current practices, districts can thoughtfully plan what is the best use of time for each role, grade level, and student need. For example, a district might set the expectation that a struggling reader (with or without an IEP) receive the following: instruction 30 minutes a day, five times a week (in addition to the full core reading block), in a group of up to five students with similar needs and within a two-grade range, from a teacher with extensive training in teaching reading, and with that full-time teacher teaching seven groups a day. These are nuanced plans, not simple

Scheduling is both an art and a science, and effective scheduling is key to ensuring that student needs are best met.

one-size-fits-all. And yes, there will and should be exceptions to the rule, but having a rule based on best practices provides valuable guidelines.

Finally, school and district leaders must assist principals and special education and intervention staff to build thoughtful schedules in accordance with best practices. Too often, the master building schedule forces teachers to pull students from core instruction in reading or math, prevents grouping of students with like needs, or demands attendance at too many meetings. Scheduling is both an art and a science, and effective scheduling is key to ensuring that student needs are best met. There is no reason to believe every teacher or principal is an expert scheduler; even if they are, their schedule is impacted by dozens of other people's schedules, so efficient and effective schedules cannot be built in a vacuum. Coordinated scheduling is essential to ensure that time is being used most effectively.

Not easy or quick, but worth the effort

A proven, commonsense approach as captured in these best practices can help improve a child's success not only in school but in life. While implementing these best practices can have a significant positive impact, to say that implementation is easy would be misleading. It takes time and hard work to effect large-scale shifts in service delivery, staffing, scheduling, and roles and responsibilities. It takes time, much communication, and attentiveness to foster buy-in and ensure fidelity of implementation.

Districts that have been able to expand and improve services, increase inclusion, and close the achievement gap have generally devoted three or more years to the effort. During these years, many districts assembled cross-functional guiding coalitions that included leaders from general education, special education, and RTI, as well as principals and many others. In addition, these districts also engaged in collaborative, open, and frequent dialogue with parents. These successful districts were determined to better serve students with special needs and students who struggle; tight finances would not stop them. While they understood that moving too fast could erode trust and understanding, they also knew that waiting to start would delay helping students in need. Clear goals, careful planning, and lots of communication helped to pave the way.

The increase in student needs, a fear of noncompliance, uncertainties about regulations, and deep concern about sensitivities to any changes in delivery of service often make adding staff, adding programs, and devoting mounting resources seem like the only option. Unfortunately, despite all the efforts of the past, the results have been disappointing. But there is hope. Taking a close look at current practices and taking a systems-thinking approach to implementing best practices can make a significant difference in student outcomes. It is hard work, and a time-consuming process, but well worth the effort to improve the lives of students with special needs and students who struggle. ◆

NOTES

1. Fordham Institute, "Shifting Trends in Special Education," 2011.
2. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Assessment, 2015.
3. Annie E. Casey Foundation, "A KIDS COUNT Special Report: Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters," 2010.
4. National Council on Teacher Quality, "2014 Teacher Prep Review," 2015.
5. Fordham Institute, "Shifting Trends in Special Education," 2011.

DMC's 10 BEST PRACTICES
FOR IMPROVING SPECIAL EDUCATION

1. **Focus on student outcomes, not inputs**
2. **Effective general education instruction is key**
3. **Ensure all students can read**
4. **Provide extra instructional time for struggling students every day**
5. **Ensure that content-strong staff provide interventions and support**
6. **Allow special educators to play to their strengths**
7. **Focus paraprofessional support on health, safety, and behavior needs, rather than on academic needs**
8. **Expand the reach and impact of social, emotional, and behavioral supports**
9. **Provide high-quality in-district programs for students with more severe needs**
10. **Know how staff spend their time, and provide guidance on effective use of time**

10 Mistakes to Avoid

Improving Special Education

Every district wants to improve outcomes for students with special needs and for students who struggle, but not every district has a systematic, well-aligned plan to achieve this. These 10 lessons may help guide the way.

1 Don't assume that spending more money and increasing the number of adults will raise achievement.

If the district's performance has fallen short of expectations, the first question should not be, "What more can be added?" Instead, take a close look at current practices and analyze what might be done differently.

2 Don't shift responsibility for struggling students to special education.

The expectation and hope for all students is that they will succeed with the general education curriculum. To make this happen, general education staff need to take responsibility for the success of all students.

3 Don't forget that reading is the gateway to all learning.

Students will not succeed without mastering reading. Make sure the district is focused on ensuring all students can read and comprehend well by third grade.

4 Don't let the schedule get in the way of providing extra time for instruction.

Schedules often make it feel virtually impossible to implement priorities like extra time for instruction. However, struggling students need schools to take control of the schedule to provide them with the extra time they need to succeed.

Don't confuse homework help with extra instructional time.

Students who struggle need extra time with highly skilled, content-strong teachers who can preteach and reteach content, fill skill gaps, and correct misconceptions. Just providing students with extra time for general homework help isn't enough to ensure their success.

Don't let meetings and paperwork take too much time away from working with students.

The number-one priority of teachers and service providers is to help students. Too often, meetings and paperwork consume far too much time. Keep the focus on spending time with students by setting guidelines and streamlining meetings and paperwork.

Don't expect special educators to be experts in everything.

Being a special educator is a tough job. Instead of expecting special education teachers to be "jacks of all trades" with expertise in everything, districts should leverage the particular strengths of its special educators.

Don't assume principals and staff can build student-centered schedules.

Scheduling effectively and efficiently requires expertise. Provide clear guidelines and have a skilled scheduler help craft or at minimum review all staff and building schedules.

Don't let noncertified staff serve students with great academic needs.

When students begin to struggle after being instructed by a teacher in the general education setting, the response too often is to provide noncertified staff members to support these students. Students with greater academic needs require a highly skilled teacher in order to achieve success.

Don't wait to get started, but don't move too quickly.

Change is hard. Districts that implement best practices effectively take the time to get it right by thinking through the details and cultivating understanding among staff and parents.

DMC **Manager's Toolkit**

Are There Opportunities to Improve Special Education in Your District?

All districts want to improve outcomes for students with special needs and for students who struggle, but practices are not always aligned to meet this objective most effectively. Take this test to see whether there might be opportunities for improvement in your district.

QUESTIONS	All the Time	Most Times	Sometimes	No, or Don't Know
Parents, staff, and principals feel resources are sufficient to close the achievement gap.				
General education teachers are primarily responsible for the success of students with special needs.				
All elementary students who struggle in reading are provided an additional 30 minutes of reading instruction five times a week.				
All secondary students who struggle in math are provided an extra period of math five times a week.				
Only special education teachers with strong backgrounds in math support students who struggle in math.				
Struggling readers are supported by teachers rather than by para-professionals.				

QUESTIONS	All the Time	Most Times	Sometimes	No, or Don't Know
Social workers spend the majority of their day with students.				
Each school is supported by at least a half-time behaviorist.				
Staff and school schedules are reviewed by a scheduling expert.				
Principals, special education leaders, and general education leaders meet regularly to plan together.				
Total number of checkmarks in each column				
Multiply	**x 1**	**x 5**	**x 10**	**x 15**
Total score by column				

TOTAL

YOUR SCORE	YOUR DISTRICT'S OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE SPECIAL EDUCATION
0–25	You are doing almost everything right. Keep it up!
26–50	You have many key elements in place. Adding a few missing pieces could make a very big difference.
51–75	Some important pieces are in place, which reflects that a high value is placed on best practices. There is an opportunity to better align efforts to reinforce and strengthen each other.
76 plus	As in many districts, there are opportunities to make improvements to better support your students.

Big Gains for Newport News (VA) Using a Systems-Thinking Approach to RTI

Nathan Levenson and Megan Roth

In 2011-12, the state of Virginia began phasing in more rigorous state tests and standards that yielded troubling results for Newport News Public Schools (NNPS). The new math Standards of Learning (SOL) state test, rolled out in 2011-12, showed that only 55% of NNPS elementary students were proficient in math as compared with 86% under the old test; the new reading test introduced the following year showed only 60% of elementary students in the district were proficient, down from 79%. In both math and reading, the impact of the new standards had been much greater for the students in NNPS than for students in other districts across the state.

Superintendent Ashby Kilgore and her leadership team were highly concerned. Newport News Public Schools (VA), a close neighbor to both Virginia Beach and Norfolk, was well known across the state of Virginia as an excellent urban school district.[1] With multiple military bases nearby, the student population of 30,000 is quite transient; despite this, NNPS had always posted consistently strong test scores across all subjects and was well regarded for its successful programs ensuring students are career and college ready.

District leadership was determined to raise the results of the district's students. The leadership team decided to add staff to ensure that all students struggling academically during core academic periods would be supported. By December 2013, close to 600 interventionists, reading para-professionals, coaches, tutors, and retired teachers were placed in K-12 classrooms district-wide. Besides adding more staff, the district also invested in additional teacher training and new curriculum. While Kilgore and her team were hopeful that more support would help, they were not willing to take a wait-and-see approach. "There was a real sense of urgency to improve the results," says Superintendent Kilgore. "We were on a search for a solution."

The leadership team thought it essential to gain an in-depth understanding of how best-practice districts support students who struggle and to identify where changes in their current practices might be needed. They therefore decided to engage The District Management Council (DMC) in the fall of 2013 to take a close look at the district's practices, with a particular focus on elementary reading. The DMC study would then benchmark their practices to those of other like-districts and to best practices.

1. In the state of Virginia, districts are called "Divisions." For the purposes of this article, we will be referring to Newport News Public Schools as a district.

NEWPORT NEWS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

NEWPORT NEWS PUBLIC SCHOOLS (VA)
FAST FACTS

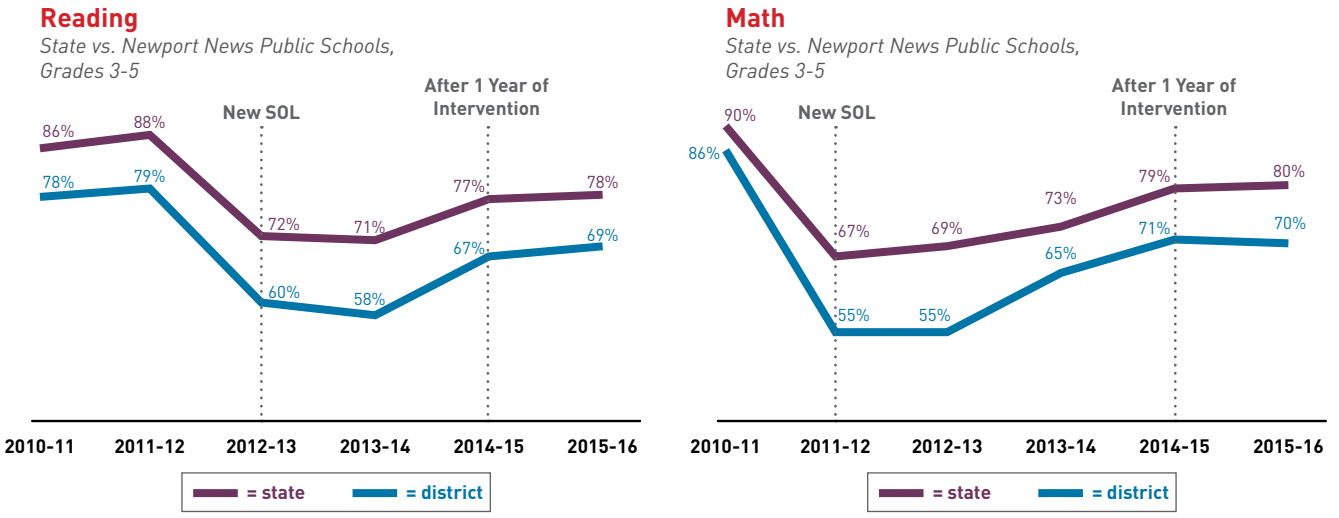
29,805 students:

- **53%** Black
- **25%** White
- **13%** Hispanic
- **5.7%** Multi-race
- **2.5%** Asian
- **0.3%** Native American
- **0.3%** Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

FRL population: **62.6%**

Special Education identification rate: **13.3%**

Exhibit 1 **PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS PASSING THE STANDARDS OF LEARNING (SOL) ASSESSMENT**



Source: Virginia State Department of Education: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/school_report_card/index.shtml

By the spring, it was clear that the addition of staff was not working as hoped. There were some signs of improvement in math; 2013-14 was the third year of the new math standards, and the district had been putting great effort into developing teachers and focusing them on unpacking standards and increasing rigor. But in reading, early testing showed that scores were stagnant. Despite the significant increase in the number of adults, students weren't progressing. Disappointed with these results, the district was determined to take action. With the DMC study completed, district leadership knew what needed to be done in elementary reading to bring the district in line with best practices. The team rapidly moved to implementation, and had the best-practice elementary Response to Intervention (RTI) model well in place for the 2014-15 school year.

The results from the first year were significant: all 24 elementary schools improved in reading that year, some with as many as 21% more students reading at grade level. On average, the reading test scores in grades 3-5 increased nine points, surpassing the state growth of six points. While aimed at improving reading, the interventions implemented also had a positive effect on math outcomes. In math, the gains achieved in 2013-14 were further enhanced with an additional six-point gain in 2014-15. And, the levels of achievement in both reading and math were sustained in 2015-16 (*Exhibit 1*). By contrast, in grades 6, 7, and 8, where additional staff were added but these additional interventions did not occur, the gap between the district and the state was not reduced, and in some instances actually increased.

Surprisingly, the district was able to achieve these dramatic improvements in outcomes by reallocating existing resources. The key was taking a systems-thinking approach to ensure that the district's precious resources of people, time, and money were being used most effectively and that the efforts were aligned to work in concert to best support students.

Taking a Deep, Hard Look

While taking the immediate action of adding additional staff to support struggling students, Superintendent Kilgore made the uncommon move of simultaneously engaging The District Management Council to perform a review of district practices, with a particular focus on elementary reading.

Total number of schools: 37

- **24** elementary schools
- **7** middle schools
- **5** high schools
- **1** middle/high school combination

Operating budget: **$296** million

Per pupil spending: **$9,928** (FY2016)

Graduation rate: **92%**

Dropout rate: **2.4%**

Source: http://www.nnschools.org/overview
Per pupil: http://www.nnschools.org/overview/documents/costperpupil.pdf
Data is from October 2016, except where otherwise noted.

The results from the first year were significant: all 24 elementary schools improved in reading that year, some with as many as 21% more students reading at grade level.

DMC set out to examine in fine detail how the needs of struggling learners with and without IEPs were being met in the district. The team from DMC began by spending several days meeting with staff. Representatives from each role supporting struggling learners with or without IEPs attended focus groups. In addition, individuals ranging from key central office leaders to special education paraprofessionals were interviewed individually. The goal of the focus groups and interviews was to paint a clear picture of current practices through a qualitative lens. Questions asked included:

- *How is a student identified as a struggling student?*
- *What data is used?*
- *How often is data reviewed?*
- *Are students pulled out of core classes to receive support?*
- *Who are the adults supporting these students? What is their background? How are they assigned?*
- *Is there a consolidated intervention plan, or does each elementary school have a different approach?*

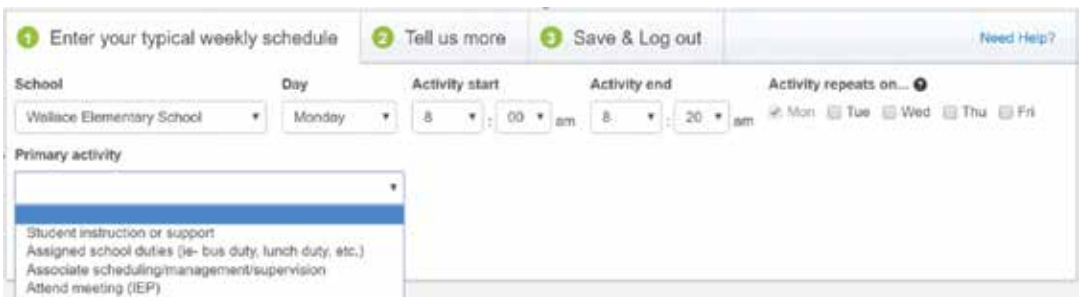
The interviews and focus groups provided an essential understanding of the different tiers of intervention embedded in each elementary school and in the daily practices of teachers. This information provided the groundwork for developing a clear set of opportunities to improve the support of struggling learners, and helped in tailoring recommendations to district context and culture.

With this qualitative data in hand, the DMC team then turned its attention to quantitative data. The DMC staff began by gathering and analyzing reams of data from the district, as well as gathering from all staff who supported struggling learners information about their typical week's schedule. Using dmPlanning, DMC's proprietary web-based software, staff entered their activities and responsibilities in 30-minute increments for one full school week. As shown in Exhibit 2, dmPlanning captured in fine detail how students were being supported. Data captured included:

- *What is the primary activity? (student instruction, attending a meeting, IEP compliance monitoring, paperwork, or assigned school duties such as bus duty, lunch duty, etc.)*
- *Which students are you meeting with?*
- *What is the group size? Is it one-on-one? If not, how many students are being seen at one time?*

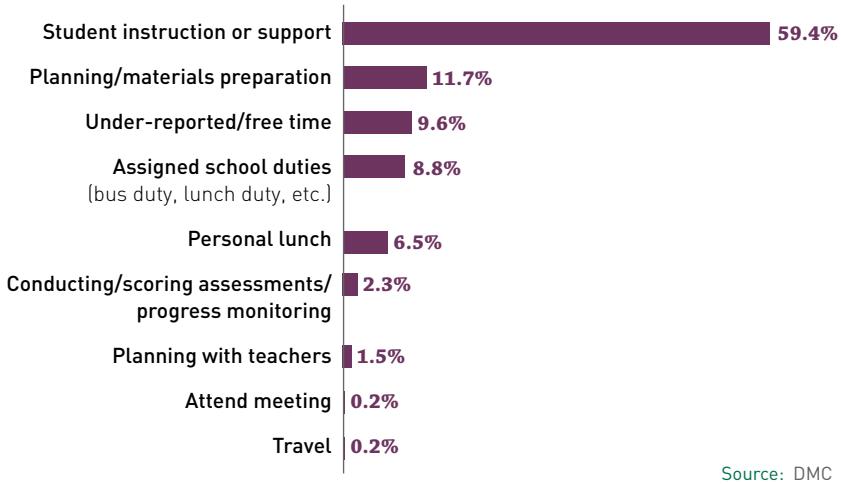
Through this software, 600 staff—close to 95% of all support staff—shared their schedules. The dmPlanning technology was then able to quickly analyze all these weekly schedules and provide a clear view of how service was being delivered in the district. Reports were generated to show how staff spent their time, the number of students each practitioner supported, the average group size, and the percentage of time spent on academic and nonacademic topics.

Exhibit 2 **dmPLANNING SCHEDULE-SHARING PROGRAM**



Source: DMC

Exhibit 3 **ELEMENTARY INTERVENTIONISTS' ACTIVITIES (ONE-WEEK PERIOD)**



Source: DMC

Surprising Findings Lead the Way for Change

With all this qualitative and quantitative data in hand, DMC was able to analyze and share how the district's practices compared to best practices as defined by the National Reading Panel, What Works Clearinghouse, and other research such as John Hattie's *Visible Learning*. Using its proprietary database, DMC also provided a benchmarking analysis comparing Newport News Public Schools' practices to those of other districts. Based on these analyses, opportunities were developed to improve support for struggling students, specifically with regard to reading.

1. Clarify responsibilities

The analysis showed that interventionists performed a variety of activities (*Exhibit 3*). Interventionists spent 9% of their week on school duties, had 10% of their week as free time, and spent an average of only 59.4% of the week on student instruction or support. As a benchmark, classroom teachers spend closer to 85% of their time providing instruction.

A deeper analysis of the data revealed that there was significant variation among interventionists in terms of time spent instructing or supporting students; the average was 59.4%, but among interventionists, the amount of time spent per week ranged from 45% to 74% (*Exhibit 4*). These findings were consistent with information gathered from the interviews and focus groups; many staff cited a lack of definition of responsibilities for interventionists and noted significant variation in responsibility by school. Often, staff were assigned with little instruction on how they should engage with students or at what points in the school day this support should occur.

2. Focus on matching teacher skills to student needs

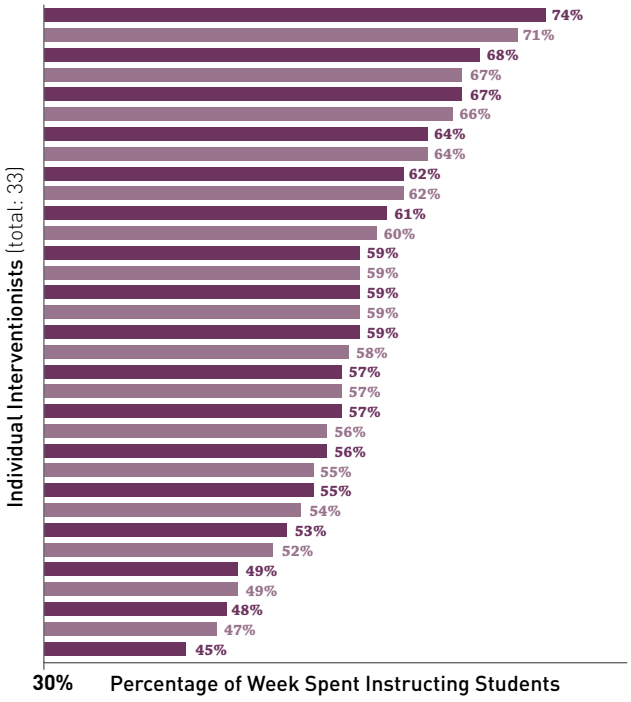
Interviews and focus group data also revealed that staffing assignments were not necessarily aligned with the skills and training of staff members. When NNPS hired an additional 600 support personnel, the focus was on providing support to struggling students as quickly as possible. The rapidity with which the district provided additional support was impressive and well intentioned; however, many of the new staff were generalists and were assigned to positions for which they did not have the appropriate background training and expertise.

3. Reconsider the role of paraprofessionals

The analysis showed many paraprofessionals were spending the majority of their time, fully 83% of their week, supporting students academically (*Exhibit 5*). The district was surprised to realize how much of the academic support for struggling students was coming from nonteachers (38% of their time was spent supporting students in reading, and 23% of their time was spent supporting students in math).

In keeping with best practices, students who struggle with reading need to be supported by highly skilled and effective teachers of reading. Paraprofessional support should be focused on students' health, safety, and behavior needs as opposed to academics. Making thoughtful assignments of skilled teachers to match student needs would be essential for success.

Exhibit 4 **PERCENTAGE OF TIME SPENT INSTRUCTING STUDENTS (ELEMENTARY INTERVENTIONISTS)**



Source: DMC

4. Create meaningful extra time for struggling students to learn

Perhaps the biggest surprise was finding out *when* the "extra help" was being provided. Interviews with staff indicated that students struggling in reading, for example, were often pulled out of the literacy block to receive intervention. Data from dmPlanning confirmed this finding: staff reported that students were pulled from core-class instruction over 60% of the time to receive extra help; therefore, this support was not in fact "extra" help but was replacing core instruction (*Exhibit 6*). To effectively support struggling learners, the district needed to carve out time on a daily basis in addition to core instruction for these students to dedicate to reading and math skills.

5. Reallocate both time and financial resources

Like many districts, NNPS had already made a big commitment to intervention staffing, but it wasn't getting the maximum impact from this expenditure. The district needed to utilize its resources differently. To better serve students who struggle academically, the number of teachers needed to be increased and the number of paraprofessionals providing academic support needed to be reduced. The schedule needed to be actively managed to ensure that every teacher's time was being scheduled efficiently and that every school had time dedicated to intervention so that extra help was supplied in addition to, not instead of, core instruction. Active management of instruction delivery would allow better services to be provided at no added cost.

The Team Takes Action

Led by the Superintendent, the district leaders invested weeks discussing and understanding these findings and recommendations. They were shocked to see the numbers on pull-out support and the amount of academic support provided by generalists. The team grappled with how their approach differed from best practices. "The detailed analysis of how staff spent their time was essential information that helped us become committed to moving forward," Superintendent Kilgore observed. "It allowed us to dissect and understand our strengths and weaknesses. It made our path forward clear." After a few weeks of in-depth conversations, the NNPS team was in full agreement and was determined to improve their interventions. With the support of DMC, the team developed a plan to align their resources and create a strong RTI structure to support struggling learners. While DMC's study was focused primarily on reading, many of the changes to scheduling and to the approaches to intervention would have positive effects on math as well. Under the leadership of Chief Academic Officer Brian Nichols, the team began to plan for implementation.

Nichols developed a detailed implementation plan to prepare for the fall 2014 launch of the new intervention model. The district leadership team anticipated the buy-in process would be challenging because this large shift in practice would require principals to do significant work over the summer. The team hoped that 10 schools would sign up to pilot the program.

"We made sure the plan was fully thought out before sharing it with stakeholders," Nichols stated. "It was important that principals and teachers see a concrete plan of how the new model would look, and how their responsibilities would change." The leadership team focused on the district motto, "Smart is something you become." They emphasized that kids learn the most when smart structures are in place and skilled adults support them. This plan was focused on putting those smart structures in place and ensuring the right adults were in front of students.

To guide conversations with principals and staff, the leadership team developed a presentation to effectively communicate the urgency for change, explain in detail the best practices, share data about current practices, and outline key steps. The team presented their plan to key stakeholders—principals, teachers, interventionists—in the spring of 2014. Amazingly, an unprecedented 100% of elementary schools signed up for the pilot. The feedback from all 24 principals was that the plan made sense, was crystal clear, and their schools and students needed this intervention model as quickly as possible.

Aligning Time and Talent

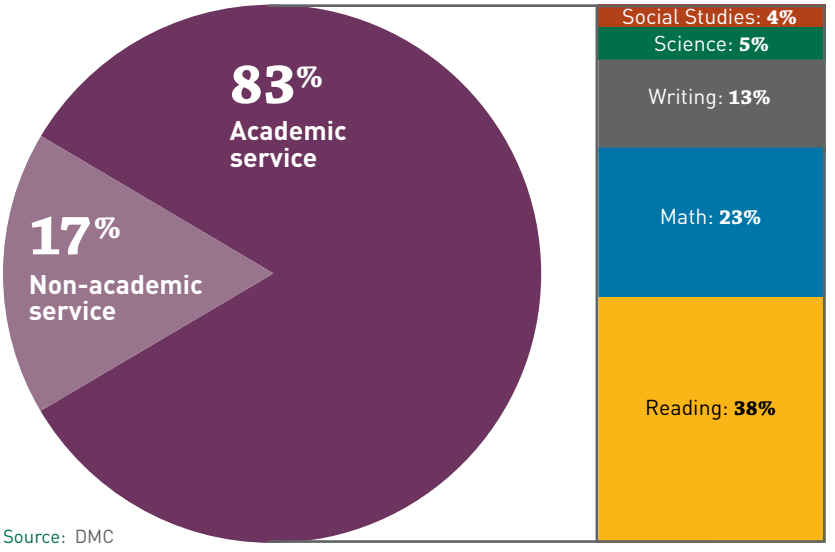
Each principal understood that a key component of supporting struggling learners was carving out extra time each day for instruction. It was essential that this time be outside of the literacy and math blocks and be part of the daily classroom schedule. Over the summer, principals spent one day each week with the CAO and his team to brainstorm, develop, and iterate new master schedules. After the master schedule was developed, principals worked with staff to begin developing daily schedules for interventionists. Each school faced a different series of obstacles, but as a result of strong collaboration and much hard work, each school had a 30-minute intervention and enrichment block in place for the very first day of school.

The second key component was to overhaul the hiring and staffing process for interventionists. The job description for interventionists changed significantly and shifted away from a focus on "generalists." New roles were created for math interventionists and reading interventionists. The team then looked at the skills, training, and background of all current intervention staff and determined the most appropriate role in the new model for each staff member. To smooth the transition, no staff were let go; with attrition, many of the generalist positions were replaced by staff with the specific skills needed to best serve students.

Another new priority for all school-based leadership teams was to focus on data to assess student learning in intervention groups. The teams developed a process to identify specific skill deficits and place students meaningfully into an intervention group with peers who had similar challenges. "The student isn't simply in 'reading' intervention anymore," says CAO Brian Nichols. "The student will be in a targeted intervention, such as comprehension strategies for nonfiction reading. We've changed intervention from ongoing to finite. The goal is to address their need and keep filling gaps to keep students progressing." Under the new structure, students are expected to take assessments to pinpoint their needs, and to take assessments before exiting interventions.

Data from dmPlanning confirmed this finding: students were pulled from core-class instruction over 60% of the time to receive extra help; therefore, this support was not in fact "extra" help but was replacing core instruction.

Exhibit 5 **HOW DIRECT SERVICE TIME IS SPENT BY INCLUSION PARAPROFESSIONALS**



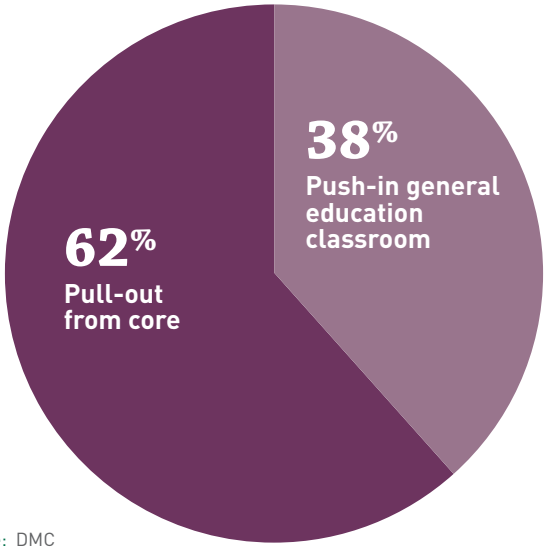
Source: DMC

Realigning Existing Resources Brings Results

In the first year, it was already clear that the hard work was paying off. The test results showed that all 24 of the elementary schools saw a gain in reading proficiency levels. Math results, which had already begun to climb the prior year, continued their upward trajectory with an additional six-point gain. By contrast, in grades 6, 7, and 8, where additional staff were added but additional interventions of this magnitude have not yet occurred, gains have been more limited and the gap between the district and the state has not reduced, and in some instances actually has increased.

The district cites two elementary schools, McIntosh and Yates, as being particularly good examples of the impact the interventions made. Both schools had the intervention framework solidly in place the first day of school and had no other

Exhibit 6 **STUDENT INSTRUCTION TIME PUSH-IN VS. PULL-OUT FROM CORE**



Source: DMC

major changes occur (e.g., student demographics remained constant) over the prior year. Both schools saw significant gains in reading in the first year of the interventions, with further improvements in the following year. Both schools also experienced a significant jump in math scores in 2014-15, which were sustained at Yates the following year, but declined somewhat at McIntosh in 2015-16 after the significant jump the prior year (*Exhibit* 7). The district credits these successes to the scheduling and intervention changes put in place and the strong buy-in from principals and teachers alike, who were determined to get results.

Exhibit 7 **INCREASE IN READING AND MATH TEST SCORES YATES AND MCINTOSH ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

3rd-5th grades

		SY 2013-14	Intervention Year 1 SY 2014-15		Intervention Year 2 SY 2015-16
READING	McIntosh	46%	+17%	+2%	65%
	Yates	52%	+16%	+6%	74%
MATH	McIntosh	53%	+18%	-9%	62%
	Yates	52%	+21%	same	73%

Source: Newport News Public Schools

Lessons Learned

The NNPS team noted four keys to their success:

1. Effective communication

All elementary principals understood the systems-thinking approach—the connection between the school schedule; extra time for instruction; strong, skilled teachers; and student learning. Linking these concepts and clearly communicating the rationale for the strategy with key stakeholders was critical to gaining support for this effort. The team attributes the 100% buy-in from elementary schools to the thoughtful communication, the compelling data shared, and the detailed strategy.

2. Detailed planning

Principals, teachers, and interventionists were well prepared for the initial fall launch, and were included in the spring and summer planning process. All staff whose lives were going to change were included in the planning process. People felt comfortable asking questions and surfacing challenges, and felt the planning process prepared them to jump into the intervention work in the fall.

3. Creating a balance between school autonomy and alignment to a district-wide best-practice intervention model

Schools with a variety of profiles and cultures successfully launched the new intervention model. Both Superintendent Kilgore and Chief Academic Officer Nichols emphasized the importance of understanding the differences between schools. "We had a plan, but allowed principals to interpret this plan for what would work best in their schools," Superintendent Kilgore stated. While 100% of the elementary schools chose to implement the plan, some faltered at first. They hit roadblocks or lost focus as school got underway.

However, during the first few months, the district had a handful of schools with the intervention blocks in full force; these schools all had very different profiles, cultures, and contexts. Some schools had historically high achievement, while others supported more struggling learners. Seeing schools with a variety of student needs successfully establish the block helped show the way. The schools that initially faltered had excellent examples of successful schools with profiles similar to their own.

4. **Believe it is possible to achieve better results with existing resources**

   The structural changes and staffing changes were achieved with existing resources. Each school found time for an extra 30-minute intervention and enrichment block—carving out time can be a free initiative; it just has to be made a priority. Some positions were phased out, but the district managed this through attrition and nobody lost their job in this process. The district worked to align existing staff's strengths with students' needs. As attrition occurred, the district stayed focused on ensuring that staff with the appropriate skills were brought in and assigned to working with students.

The Road Ahead

The district focused on honestly assessing and analyzing its current approaches to serving students who struggle, and was intent on improving results. While proud of its results to date, the leadership team message is clear: our work here is not done. In 2014-15, the focus was on creating time and restructuring staff responsibilities. In 2015-16, attention turned to perfecting the intervention and enrichment block. Central office, principals, and teachers refined the data and measurement tools used to track results and made changes to the interventions as needed. New tracking and monitoring forms were developed that aligned across the district. "[In this intervention model] kids are seeing themselves as successful; they are seeing themselves become smarter. There is a commitment across the district to keep moving forward with this plan," Superintendent Kilgore reflects with satisfaction and conviction.

[In this intervention model] kids are seeing themselves as successful; they are seeing themselves become smarter. There is a commitment across the district to keep moving forward with this plan.

—Superintendent Ashby Kilgore

Newport News Public Schools was willing to take a hard look at current practices and aggressively work to align its resources—its staff, its time, and its energy—to bring its practices in line with best practices. This meant taking a systems-thinking approach: the district had to focus on understanding the kind of work needed, who was needed to do that work, and when it was to be done. The work then had to be carefully aligned and coordinated. In large organizations like school districts, taking a systems-thinking approach and organizing the various parties to work in concert can be extremely challenging. Set patterns of doing things, long-held beliefs about how things should be done, or a fear of doing things differently when the future of students is at stake can pose impediments to change.

Collecting and analyzing data to promote a common understanding of how things are currently being done and why and how things might need to change are critical steps in building support and getting the process underway. In Newport News Public Schools, this data prompted action and helped rally and align the principals, teachers, and staff. In keeping with best practices, Newport News is engaged in continuous improvement, and each year is working to further refine its practices. As shown in the results, students are clearly benefiting. And perhaps most surprising is that these results were achieved with existing resources. A systems-thinking approach to realigning resources in the district was the key. ◆

DMC's 2016 Leadership Development Meetings

Shifting Resources
to Support Strategic Priorities

While student achievement is the ultimate goal of all districts, the often-divergent needs of stakeholders and the long-standing ways of doing things greatly affect how resources are allocated. As a result, resource allocation often is not fully aligned with the district's stated priorities.

This year, DMC has been focusing on the topic of *Shifting Resources to Support Strategic Priorities*. At our 2016 Leadership Development Meetings (LDMs), DMC discusses how a comprehensive, systemic approach to managing resources can allow districts to meet the needs of students, staff, and taxpayers despite tight budgets. We focus on high-leverage strategies for resource realignment and discuss ways to create shared understanding and reduce pushback.

These LDMs include a budget simulation exercise in which teams are asked to close a 3% budget gap faced by a fictional district. The budget gap must be addressed while balancing the needs of multiple stakeholders and making additional investments to promote the district's strategic plan. The simulation exercise assesses the impact of each team's decisions on student achievement, operational efficiency, and "karma"—the level of political capital with stakeholders in the community. The different approaches pursued by the teams spark lively discussion about strategy, priorities, and tradeoffs.

The Leadership Development Meetings held in Chicago and Washington, D.C., this year have attracted 150 district leaders, representing 40 districts and 650,000 students; our final session on this topic is being held in Boston on November 3–4.

Next year, DMC's conferences will focus on ***Innovating with Impact: Moving from Bold Ideas to Sustainable Results***. DMC will discuss how to align organizational structures, roles, and responsibilities to encourage innovative new practices. Drawing on lessons learned from other districts and from other industries, we will explore how innovative ideas can be developed and implemented effectively in public school organizations with long-held practices and complex structures.

Please stay tuned for further details about our Superintendents' Strategy Summit and our Leadership Development Meetings on this topic. We hope to see you there!

CHICAGO
APRIL 2016

Left page: Top: Viviana Conner, World Language Coordinator K-12, Greenwich Public Schools (CT); Michael Conner, Chief Academic Officer, Norwalk Public Schools (CT); and Erik Olson, Assistant Superintendent of Operations and Continuous Improvement, Sun Prairie Area School District (WI). **Top center:** Stacie Talbert-Scott, Executive Director of Budget & Purchasing, and MeriAnn Besonen, Executive Director of Finance, Rockford Public Schools (IL). **Bottom center:** Sarah Caruso, Chief Financial Officer, Jefferson Parish Public Schools System (LA). **Bottom:** Timothy Caskey, Executive Director of Labor Relations and Personnel Services; Jana Hennen-Burr, Assistant Superintendent; and Lora Arnott, Director of Special Services, Elk River Area School District #728 (MN).

Right page: Top left: Sam Ribnick, Director, DMC (in back); Jeff Schuler, Superintendent, and Faith Dahlquist, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, Wheaton Warrenville CUSD 200 (IL). **Center left:** Laura Seifert-Hertling, Director of Special Services; Daryl Vossler, Principal; Matthew Boucher, Principal; and Imina Oftedahl, Director of Educational Services, Fridley Public Schools (MN). **Center right:** Brad Hillman, Assistant Superintendent, Middle School Teaching and Learning, Indian Prairie School District (IL); David Law, Superintendent, Anoka-Hennepin School District (MN); and Louis Lee, Assistant Superintendent, High School Teaching and Learning, Indian Prairie School District (IL). **Bottom left:** Nathan Levenson, President, DMC (in back); Johnna Rohmer-Hirt, Director, Research, Evaluation, and Testing, and Nichole Tuescher, Executive Director of Human Resources, Anoka-Hennepin School District (MN); and Helen Nixon, Chief Human Resource and Development Officer, Howard County Public School System (MD). **Bottom right:** James Woell, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources, and Kathy Kosteck, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, Elmhurst School District 205 (IL).

What is a DMC Leadership Development Meeting?

DMC Leadership Development Meetings (LDMs) are opportunities for cross-functional district leadership teams to learn about and collaboratively tackle the topic discussed at DMC's superintendents-only Superintendents' Strategy Summit. District teams have a unique opportunity to learn about the topic together, work through problem-solving sessions and facilitated discussions, and apply these ideas to their district. DMC holds its LDMs in three locations each year: Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Boston.

DMC's 2016 Leadership Development Meetings

WASHINGTON, D.C.
OCTOBER 2016

Left page: Top left: Mark Fredericksen, Principal, and Shane Clausen, Principal, Waconia Public Schools (MN); and Mary Katona, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, Methacton School District (PA). **Top right:** Heather Hughes, Director of Special Programs, and Dana Barnes, Principal, Eagle Mountain-Saginaw Independent School District (TX); and Lori Ward-Rodgers, Executive Director of District Effectiveness and Federal Programs, Bibb County School District (GA). **Center:** Back: John Kim, Chief Executive Officer, DMC; Connie Wallace, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and Corey Golomb, Director of Special Education, Arlington Independent School District (TX). Front: Steven Wurtz, Chief Academic Officer, Arlington Independent School District (TX); Donald Robertson, Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer, and Farrell Hanzaker, Chief Financial Officer, Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VA). **Bottom left:** John Smith, Principal, Doug Loomis, Chief Human Resources Officer, and Mark Webster, Principal, Amarillo Independent School District (TX). **Bottom right:** Amy Wodnicki, Director of Student Services, and Jillian Bichsel, Director of Professional Development, Chartiers Valley School District (PA).

Right page: Top left: Christine Osorio, Superintendent, and Troy Miller, Assistant Superintendent, North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale District 622 (MN). **Top right:** James Schiele, Chief Financial Officer, and Deborah Dockens, Director of Elementary and Classified Staffing, Eagle Mountain-Saginaw Independent School District (TX). **Center left:** Mark Wiernusz, Senior Director, DMC, presents a session on the top opportunities to free up funds. **Center right:** Jack DeWitt, Director of Student Services, Glen Ridge Public Schools (NJ), and Ronnie Collier, Chief Financial Officer, Bibb County School District (GA). **Bottom left:** Bryan Hennekens, Director of Technology and Innovation, and Bill Holmgren, Director of Finance and Operations, Columbia Heights Public Schools (MN); and Patrick Devine, Superintendent, Waconia Public Schools (MN). **Bottom right:** Dirk Phillips (center), Superintendent, Glen Ridge Public Schools (NJ), and Diane Ullman, Senior Director, DMC.

DMC in Action

SPOTLIGHT ON DMC ENGAGEMENTS

In addition to our many partnerships with school districts, DMC has several exciting engagements underway with state agencies:

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education works with DMC to develop resource allocation and budgeting tools

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in collaboration with DMC, is working to develop frameworks and tools to assist districts with resource allocation and budgeting. The purpose is to provide tools that will help districts analyze and benchmark current resource allocation and then identify how resources can be best leveraged to support their strategic plans. The pilot is currently being launched with nine districts.

Vermont Agency of Education collaborates with DMC

The Vermont Agency of Education has announced it will support up to 10 districts to help improve the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of special education services. The agency will help underwrite the costs for selected districts to work with DMC to conduct an in-depth review of current practices, benchmark these against best practices and those of like-districts, and identify actionable steps to improve services for students with special education needs.

DMC PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS IN YOUR DISTRICT

Shifting Resources to Support Strategic Priorities

In response to demand following our Superintendents' Strategy Summit and Leadership Development Meetings on the topic of Shifting Resources to Support Strategic Priorities, DMC can provide in-district professional development workshops for your leadership team on this topic.

Topics to be covered include:

- **Key high-leverage strategies for resource realignment:** Funding priorities and new initiatives within existing budgets will require a new approach to managing resources. DMC will share the highest-impact opportunities to maximize resources for student success based on extensive research.
- **Winning support for shifting resources:** Building a shared understanding of why resources should be shifted helps smooth the way for implementing change. DMC will discuss common reasons that good people fight thoughtful changes to spending, and will present four strategies that can create shared understanding, build support, and reduce pushback.
- **Budget simulation exercise:** Working in teams, key district leaders will work to identify resource shifts to close a budget gap in a fictional district while trying to fund key strategic priorities. The simulation exercise assesses the impact of each team's decisions on student achievement, operational efficiency, and "karma"—the level of political capital with stakeholders in the community. This strategic budgeting simulation is designed to bring out differences of opinion in how district leaders prioritize budget decisions given their views on district strategy, their personal preferences, priorities, and values.

For more information on having DMC facilitate a professional development workshop in your district, please contact us at info@dmcouncil.org.

DMC SPEAKS

DMC at Vermont School Board Association Annual Conference

"Maximizing the Impact of Limited Resources" will be the topic of DMC President Nathan Levenson's speech at the Vermont School Board Association's 2016 annual conference, to be held on October 20, 2016, in Fairlee, Vermont.

DMC at Association of Metropolitan School Districts' Annual Conference

DMC President Nathan Levenson will deliver the keynote address at Minnesota's Association of Metropolitan School Districts' (AMSD) annual policy conference, which will take place on November 15, 2016. Levenson will discuss DMC's best-practice strategies to raise achievement for struggling students. Then, in conjunction with staff from AMSD-member school districts, DMC staff will lead a variety of breakout sessions on improving early literacy, scheduling elementary special education and intervention staff, and managing change.

DMC ROUNDTABLES

DMC Roundtables are half-day regional meetings hosted by DMC-member districts for forward-thinking superintendents and their senior staff. DMC leads discussions about best practices, explores case studies, and promotes a sharing of experiences and lessons learned.

DMC launched these regional roundtable meetings in 2015. Thus far, eleven roundtables have been held across the country, each hosted by a DMC-member district. Collectively, these discussions convened more than 145 districts and 330 district leaders. Upcoming DMC roundtables include the following:

Cost-Effective Strategies to Close the Achievement Gap

Hosted by Superintendent Lawrence Mussoline
Downingtown Area School District (PA)
November 9, 2016

Cost-Effective Strategies to Close the Achievement Gap

Hosted by Superintendent Curtis Jones
Bibb County School District (GA)
November 9, 2016

Shifting Resources to Fund Your Strategic Priorities

Hosted by CEO/Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks
Gwinnett County Public Schools (GA)
November 10, 2016

Cost-Effective Strategies to Close the Achievement Gap

Hosted by Superintendent Brian White
Chartiers Valley School District (PA)
November 10, 2016

If you are interested in attending a DMC roundtable or interested in hosting a DMC roundtable in your area, please contact us at info@dmcouncil.org.

DMC Members on the Move

Frank Alvarez

After four years as superintendent of Rye City School District (NY), Frank Alvarez resigned and left the district over the summer. Prior to this, Alvarez served as superintendent of Montclair Public Schools (NJ) for nine years, and earlier had been superintendent of River Vale Public Schools (NJ) and North Caldwell Public Schools (NJ).

Mark Bezek

Mark Bezek assumed the superintendency of the School District of Somerset (WI) this fall after 10 years as superintendent of Elk River Area School District 728 (MN).

Jack Cross

Jack Cross retired from Clinton Public Schools (CT) after serving as superintendent since 2009 and as assistant superintendent of the district for two years prior to that.

Michael Goar

Michael Goar became the chief executive officer of Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Greater Twin Cities after serving as the chief executive officer and interim superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools (MN). Before returning to his home state of Minnesota, he had served as the deputy superintendent and chief operating officer of Boston Public Schools (MA).

Dan Hoverman

After nine years as superintendent and a total of 41 years of service with Mounds View Public Schools (MN), Dan Hoverman has retired.

Linda Lane

Linda Lane retired as superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools (PA); she served as superintendent since 2011, and before that was deputy superintendent of the district for over three years.

Chris Lennox

After serving as assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction in the district, Chris Lennox is now superintendent of Mounds View Public Schools (MN).

Maryann O'Donnell

Maryann O'Donnell is now superintendent of Clinton Public Schools (CT) after serving as the district's assistant superintendent since 2009.

Jeff Rose

After five years as superintendent of Beaverton School District (OR), Jeff Rose became superintendent of Fulton County Schools (GA).

Sonja Brookins Santelises

Sonja Brookins Santelises, who had served for three years as chief academic officer of Baltimore City Public Schools (MD), returned to the district as chief executive officer. Most recently, Santelises had been working as vice president of K-12 policy and practice for the Education Trust in Washington, D.C.

Valeria Silva

Valeria Silva, who served as superintendent of St. Paul Public Schools (MN) since 2009, has transitioned to a consulting role for the district.

John Thein

John Thein has come out of retirement to serve as interim superintendent of St. Paul Public Schools (MN). He previously served as superintendent of Roseville Public Schools (MN) for 17 years.

Gregory Thornton

Having served as chief executive officer of Baltimore City Public Schools (MD) for the past two years, Gregory Thornton has stepped down. Thornton previously served as superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools (MN).

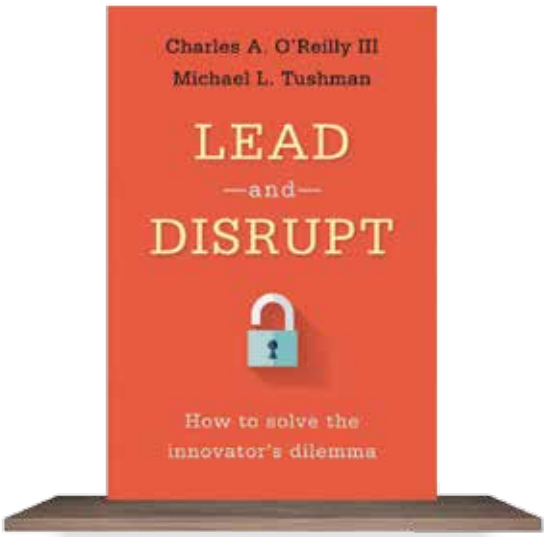
Bruce Watkins

Bruce Watkins is now interim superintendent of Elk River Independent School District 728 (MN). He has worked with St. Paul Conservatory (MN) and Nova Classical Academy (MN), and earlier had served as superintendent of St. Cloud School District (MN).

Kenneth Zeff

After serving as interim superintendent of Fulton County Schools (GA) since 2015, Kenneth Zeff is now executive director of Learn4Life, an organization that brings together education, business, and community partners, along with families and students, in a regional cradle-to-career initiative.

Member Bookshelf



Lead and Disrupt: How to Solve the Innovator's Dilemma

Charles O'Reilly III and Michael L. Tushman

Is the demise of companies such as Kodak, RadioShack, and Blockbuster simply inevitable? Stanford Graduate School of Business professor Charles O'Reilly and Harvard Business School professor Michael Tushman explore why successful, resource-rich firms find it so difficult to innovate and adapt in the face of change. The solution to surviving and thriving, they conclude, lies in *ambidexterity*: the ability simultaneously to *exploit*—focus on incremental innovation and continuous improvement—and to *explore*—promote experimentation and innovation. O'Reilly and Tushman provide insights on how to be an ambidextrous leader and present a framework for building an ambidextrous, winning organization. Using examples across a broad range of industries, the authors draw lessons and show us how to lead and disrupt for success.

I Know How She Does It: How Successful Women Make the Most of Their Time

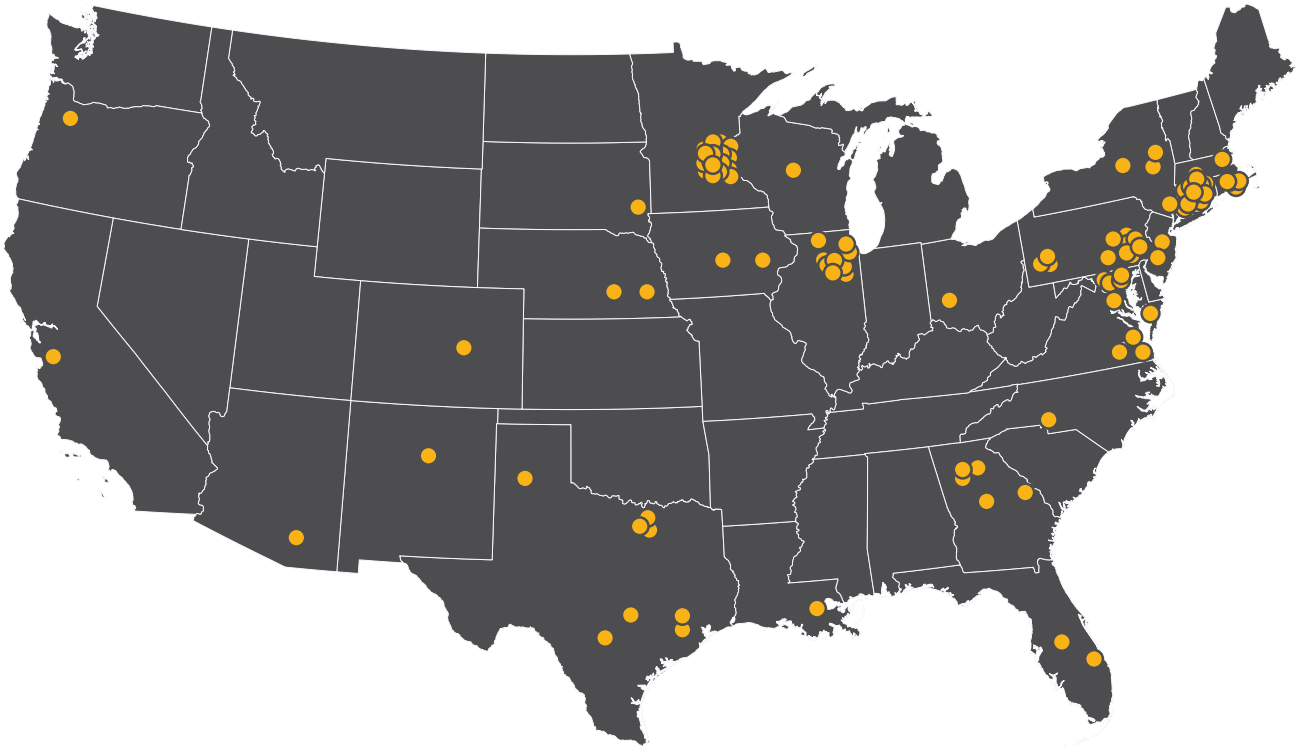
Laura Vanderkam

Time management expert Laura Vanderkam uses data to show that women (and men) *can* "have it all." Vanderkam collects and analyzes time log data from 143 successful women in half-hour increments, 24 hours per day, for one full week. Analyses of the data reveal that these women worked less and slept more than they themselves thought, and they managed to have time for significant others, children, exercise, and other activities important to them. Through a detailed examination of the data, Vanderkam extracts lessons on how these women fit everything in, as if arranging tiles into a mosaic, to make the most of their time. Vanderkam's time logs are like dmPlanning, DMC's proprietary web-based software, for our personal lives!

JOIN DMC

Become part of a national network of forward-thinking leaders focused on improving performance in public education

nearly 150 school districts
1,200 district leaders
across 25 states
serving 2.6+ million students



A membership with DMC connects your district with K-12 leaders nationwide and provides you with access to best practices research, professional development conferences, and the tools school district leaders need to achieve results.

JOIN TODAY: 877-DMC-3500
INFO@DMCOUNCIL.ORG
WWW.DMCOUNCIL.ORG

DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

HELPING SCHOOL DISTRICTS MANAGE FOR SUCCESS

DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

DMC's 14TH ANNUAL SUPERINTENDENTS' STRATEGY SUMMIT

INNOVATING WITH IMPACT

MOVING FROM BOLD IDEAS TO SUSTAINABLE RESULTS

January 11-13, 2017 • New York, NY

Join us to explore strategies for leading your district to innovate, embrace change, and improve outcomes.

Guest Presentation

Michael L. Tushman

Professor, Harvard Business School, and co-author, *Lead and Disrupt: How to Solve the Innovator's Dilemma*

Special Case Study

How a district successfully implemented blended learning

Featuring discussion with DMC member superintendent Dr. Lawrence Mussoline of Downingtown Area School District (PA)

JOIN US

LEARN. SHARE. NETWORK.

For more information or to register, contact events@dmcouncil.org or 877-DMC-3500

DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL