

The Roles and Practices of Student Service Staff as the Data-Driven Instructional Leaders

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Abstract

Instructional leadership in K-12 schools is changing dramatically as schools seek to satisfy the demands of high-stakes accountability policies. In this paper, the authors argue that the need to use achievement data effectively pushes instructional leaders to adapt existing structures and expertise to facilitate data-driven decision-making. The discussion draws on the results of a five-year National Science Foundation study of how school leaders create socio-technical systems to help teachers work with student achievement data. The data, collected from two schools over two years, demonstrate how good leaders have turned to the practices and the expertise of student service staff in their efforts to develop schools that use data effectively. Thus, this paper discusses: 1) the press for data-driven program design, 2) the precedent of student-level intervention created by special education practices and, 3) the role student service staff can play as data-savvy instructional leaders. The emergence of a new role for student service staff and their practices points toward the next step in instructional leadership.

Introduction

The idea of accountability is not a new road in educational institutions, but the emphasis on using student achievement data to hold schools accountable is a recently emergent phenomena. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) outlines many of the same aspirations as previous initiatives, such as Goals 2000, but with demands for local schools and districts to measure performance with student achievement data. For many of us in education, NCLB represented the first time that student data had been presented to us in such a way. Meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals forces school leaders to understand how to develop local systems to translate summative testing data into the kinds of information teachers and staff can use to improve student learning. This change has pushed school leaders into the new data driven paradigm, which calls on schools to understand and use this new data to inform instruction. This is not an easy transition, considering that most educators are only now beginning to receive training on the use of data in schools.

The press to use assessment data has led school leaders to seek out data analysis and implementation expertise. Some of this expertise, to be sure, has been provided by district assessment specialists and external consultants. However, student service staff, such as special educators, school psychologists and social workers, have been trained in using achievement data for years prior to NCLB. Since the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997, special educators have been trained to develop federally mandated Individualized Education Programs (IEP) that provide action plans with measurable annual achievement goals for individual students. IEP goals must address both academic and functional needs of the child to measure progress through the general school curriculum (Huefner, 2006). Special education teachers and school psychologists are typically responsible for the assessment

activities that contribute to developing IEPs. Student services staff have often received training in the use of assessments and data collection as a part of their professional training programs, which is not the case for many teachers and administrators receiving their general education licensure. Student services support staff have also acquired additional data analysis expertise as a result of the NCLB mandate that all students participate in state and district-wide assessments. In the past, students with special needs were often tested out of grade level when taking state achievement tests. Now NCLB requires that all students be assessed at grade level achievement tests. Independent of the 1% of students with the “most significant cognitive disabilities,” all special education students are expected to take grade level achievement tests (Huefner, 2006). While IDEA 1997 required state level testing for special education students, it was not until the requirements of NCLB that testing of special education students truly became a school concern.

This paper explores how (and whether) school leaders are turning to student service staff as local experts in data analysis and use to meet the demands of high-stakes accountability. As part of a five year National Science Foundation Study, we have been collecting data which examines how school leaders create data driven systems to improve instruction at their school. In this research it has become apparent that school leaders have turned to the practices and expertise of student service personnel in their efforts to develop schools that use data effectively. We found that while schools already had significant capacity to design *curriculum-level* interventions to address the needs of groups of students, leaders in our schools turned to special education practices and professionals to provide the in-house expertise necessary to create a variety of *student level interventions*. Our paper will provide a picture of the increased role that student service staff has had in developing and maintaining program and student level support programs. Specifically, we will investigate two central issues:

1. *Student service practices provide a precedent for student-level intervention design.*

School leaders are reshaping Special Education practices to help all students and teachers meet the demands of high stakes accountability. The emergence of Problem Solving Teams (PST) provides a good example of how special education practices, specifically the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process, is being adapted for general educational issues with individual students.

2. *Student service staff play new roles as data-savvy instructional leaders.* Student service staff are trained in using data to diagnose and guide learning plans for individual students. The need for data-driven student-level interventions invites a new range of staff, including special educators and school psychologists, to play key leadership roles in revising core instructional practices of schools.

In addition to showing how schools utilize expertise at-hand to build data driven instructional systems, we also believe that our findings begin to provide insight into how schools might unite internal instructional systems, such as instructional and student services staff, that have been historically separated. This new melding of practices promises to reshape both instructional leadership and special education. As school leaders draw data-driven special education practices into the core instructional program, special educators access to a better range of services to children. The capacity to identify and help students before they fail not only fulfills accountability demands but also changes how schools view teaching and learning.

Methods

This paper represents data collected during a National Science Foundation-funded research project designed to study how leaders create social and technical systems to help teachers use achievement data in their instruction. Our study was designed to investigate the

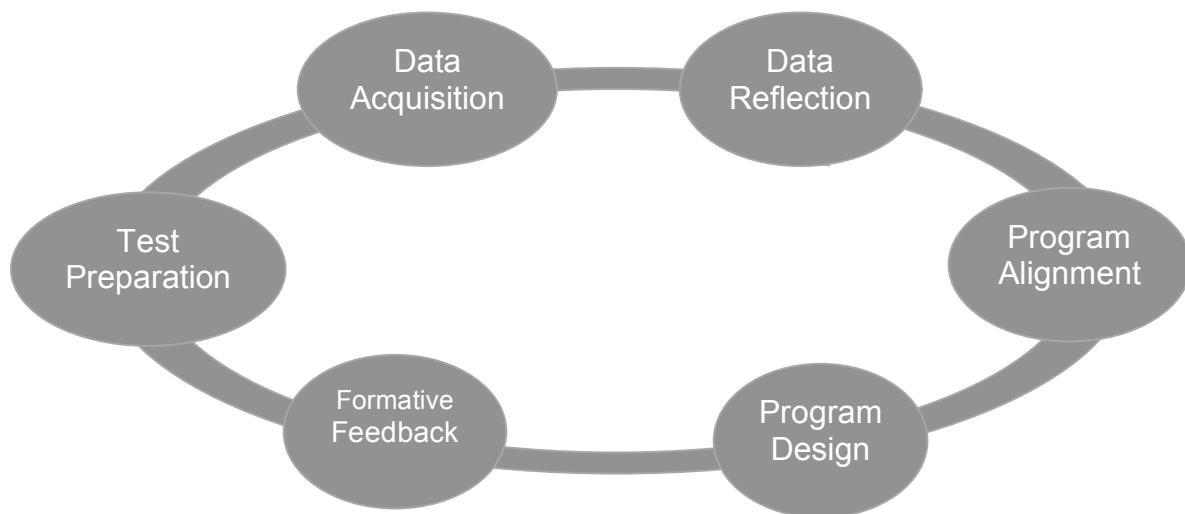
practices of schools with strong records for improving student achievement scores and reputations for using data effectively. We focused our site selection on the practices of elementary and middle schools leaders in a Midwestern state. We also collected information on data-based practices at the district level for each school. Site selection began with consulting educational leaders at the university, state, and district levels. We generated a list of elementary and middle schools identified by improving test scores and school leaders with a reputation for effectively helping teachers to use data.

Our data analysis draws on data sets collected at each school composed into individual school case studies. Yin (1994) proposes a variety of data be collected to insure the accuracy of case study representation. We conducted 52 structured interviews with formal and informal leaders at the school and district level. We also recorded 53 observations of faculty meetings, professional development sessions, data retreats, and other important events as identified by the staff, and collected a variety of artifacts from every school such as school improvement plans, staffing charts, budgetary information and parent/community handouts. To make sense of the over 1000 pages of field notes and artifacts collected, we used a qualitative data analysis program (NVIVO 7.0) to code our data. We developed a coding system based on the emerging DDIS framework (Appendix A). The research team began the process by coding common data documents to work out the details of the coding process, and completed the data coding process by fall 2006.

In our initial paper on this research project (Halverson, Grigg, Pritchett & Thomas, 2005) we developed a Data-Driven Instructional System framework (DDIS, Figure 1) to trace the structures and practices school leaders established to achieve data-driven organization functions. As described in these functions included:

1. *Data Collection*: How schools collect, store and represent the variety of information used to guide student learning;
2. *Data Analysis*: How schools made sense of the data collected and set instructional goals;
3. *Program Alignment*: How schools used data to determine instructional program adequacy and coherence;
4. *Program Design*: How schools developed new program initiatives based on data-driven discussions;
5. *Formative Feedback*: How schools developed processes to measure the success of program design in terms of student progress;
6. *Test Preparation*: How schools prepared students to generate new achievement results.

Figure 1. The Data-Driven Instructional Systems model.



The DDIS framework acted as a selective coding filter to help us organize narratives that described the data-related practices present in each school (Glaser, 1998). The data we present here reflects the practices of formal and informal leaders and staff who took on key roles in facilitating data-driven conversations, reflections or redesign efforts in their schools.

Findings

Our DDIS study revealed several kinds of social and technical systems school leaders developed for using data to improve learning. The student service staff appeared to play important roles in the program design and formative feedback DDIS functions. This paper will highlight two schools, Malcolm and Harrison¹, to understand how the roles and practices of student service staff shifted to help use data to improve learning. These short descriptions of the school's context were distilled from case-study site reports developed as a result of our data analysis:

Malcolm School is an urban k-5 school with a highly mobile population of 220 children. In the past several years, 70% of Malcolm's students have qualified for free or reduced lunch. The school's proportion of minority students is among the highest in the district. Malcolm is considered a school-wide Title I school, and it is eligible for state class-size reduction funding. In spite of the challenging population, Malcolm has improved their student standardized test scores to the point that they now rival those of any other school in the district. Through our research at Malcolm it was apparent that school leaders and teachers have developed several core data-driven instructional practices to guide teaching and learning. While a focus on literacy and curriculum were somewhat expected, we also found a highly developed data driven support

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

system for student behavior at the school. Malcolm's support system addressed both program level and student level concerns at the school. The student service staff, including school psychologists, Title I teacher, special educators and social workers, facilitated these supports as well as play an integral role in making sense of data taken on program and student level interventions. Malcolm leaders see these support staff as critical for the instructional initiatives at the school to be able to work. Student service staff are part of the school's decision making body emphasizing the integration of both the academic and behavior components which are often seen as separate entities at schools.

Harrison School is a culturally diverse K-8 school serving more than 500 students in a large urban Midwest city. Harrison serves a diverse population with nearly 30% Asian, 10% African-American, 20% Hispanic and 50% White students. 70% of Harrison students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 30% have English as a second language. Once identified as a "school in need of improvement" under the NCLB criteria, the Harrison staff applied for and received a Comprehensive School Reform grant to reorganize the school around the Direct Instruction curriculum. Just as with Malcolm, Harrison's transformation began with a focus on literacy and curriculum alignment while at the same time developing an elaborate academic and behavioral support system that used data to help determine program and student level intervention needs. In Harrison's case the school piloted a district-wide initiative to use the problem solving method to provide school-wide support for struggling children. Harrison's use of problem solving model provides insight into how special education practices are used for the purposes of school-wide data driven decision making. In Harrison's case, the student service staff; especially the school psychologist, have helped the school progress in its data driven model.

Our research in both of these schools illustrated how student services staff are relied upon to provide data-driven instructional leadership services beyond traditional job descriptions. To be sure, much of the work of school psychologists, and social workers in each school has persisted. However, we found that staff members in each of these areas, staff identified with expertise in using data to help customize and implement student learning plans, were contributing to new forms of leadership in the schools. In these next sections of the paper, we will describe how first the *practices*, then the *roles*, of student services staff are being transformed by the need to develop capacity for data-driven instructional practices. We will then describe the implications for these changes in the instructional practices of the schools.

Individualized Education Programs as a Precedent School Wide Initiatives

Special education's Individualized Education Program (IEP) served as a powerful precedent for organizing student level data-driven instructional practices in each school. IEPs have served as core practices for providing special education services since the advent of Public Law 94-152 in 1975. An IEP describes the services customized to meet the special needs of a student. Broadly speaking, prior to the advent of the IEP, school instructional interventions were primarily assembled at the curricular level. Student support staff, such as guidance counselors, helped students meet the demands of the instructional program. If students struggled with their courses they would be tracked into remedial classrooms, moved to another school, or they would simply be failed. The IEP in particular, and special education in general, constituted an important, data-driven precedent for individual student program planning. With the IEP, schools could legitimately pursue a student-centered path to instructional interventions by customizing existing (and new) resources to the needs of individual students.

The significant aspect of the IEP's we wish to highlight are the mandatory, data-driven components of the process: identification and evaluation, staffing, plan construction and plan review. In the *identification and evaluation* processes, teachers or school staff members use classroom assessment data and informal observational data to determine that students struggling in the general education program receive more comprehensive evaluation, often in the form of specialized assessments. The assessment results are then referred to a *staffing* team composed of parents, teachers, assessment professionals (often a school psychologist or special educator), an administrator and sometimes other relevant professionals. The team reflects on the data and the perceived needs of the student to determine the student's eligibility for special education services, and to develop an *action plan* that includes a) statement of the student's present levels of performance; b) short and long term achievement goals; c) a description of services to be provided; and d) when the services will be provided. The team then agrees to a means of evaluation and a process for revisiting the goals and services specified in the IEP.ⁱ

To be sure, the IEP as implemented in many schools is far from a model practice. IEPs have been used to over identify students of color as qualifying for special education services (see, for example, Losen & Orfield, 2002; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002; Blanchett, 2006). In practice, the IEP process was often merely seen as step toward assigning a student for special education. This reactive model is often referred to as the "wait to fail" model of special education because if classroom interventions did not change student outcomes then the next step was to wait for the child to fall far enough behind for him to qualify for special education. Even if used to effectively identify students, IEPs have often been used to marginalize students into pull-out programs that cut off access to general education classrooms (Capper, Frattura & Keyes, 2000). For the purposes of this paper, we are less interested in the history of IEP usage than in

the precedent IEPs provide for using data to address student-level learning issues. The now common-place IEP process illustrates a powerful prototype of how school staff use data to design learning plans for individual students. In our research, we found two examples of how schools extended quasi-IEP processes into school-wide programs designed to use data to identify, design and evaluate new kinds of student level interventions: Problem-Solving at Harrison, and the Respect and Responsibility Program at Malcolm.

Problem-Solving Teams: Taking the IEP School-Wide

Problem-solving teams extend the IEP process to address learning issues for students across the school. Reschly, Tilly and Grimes (1999) describe problem solving as a systemic, non-categorical approach to delivering special education services. In a traditional special education model, students need to be assigned to disability categories in order to receive services. Problem-solving processes allow schools to diagnose learning issues with the assessment tools used with all students, and to customize learning plans for students based on the existing instructional program (Jankowski, 2003; Yssledyke & Marston, 1999). Although problem-solving, like the IEP, is rooted in special education, many districts have extended the scope of problem-solving activities to address planning and student learning activities across the school. Harrison's Easton School District, for example, describes their approach to problem-solving as "a school improvement initiative based on the problem solving process." Problem-solving in the Easton District is described as:

a collaborative, outcome-based intervention process that utilizes continuous progress monitoring to drive instructional decision making and resource allocation based on student needs.

The advent of NCLB pressed Easton's problem solving process from a special education intervention to a school-wide data-driven decision making model that integrated school improvement planning, aligning resources with standards and instructional priorities, and developing professional learning communities. One Easton district leader noted:

I think that data use is something that's evolving in a positive way. I think that the No Child Left Behind with all of its weaknesses, one of the really positive things that it has fostered is an increased awareness of ... data in general. [I]t fostered an increased awareness of and appreciation for accuracy in data.

NCLB has pushed the district schools to take data seriously, and to understand how measures of student achievement are linked to core instructional processes. The district leader explained:

Understanding how (data use) fits into the whole strategic planning process for the school, I really think that this is a result of No Child Left Behind... We really wouldn't have been able to create that kind of urgency for schools to pay attention to it if it weren't for No Child Left Behind.

NCLB pushed the district to develop a model to integrate problem identification, planning, solution development and assessment into a school-wide process. The urgency to meet the demands of high-stakes accountability called for the capacity of schools to change instructional practices accordingly (Abelmann & Elmore, 1999). Adapting the problem-solving model from a student-level to a school-level intervention pointed toward how schools might integrate these processes across the school.

While the district model uses problem-solving to describe a more general, school-wide intervention strategy, the problem-solving team (PST) at Harrison is more firmly rooted in the

special education model. The Harrison implementation problem-solving process demonstrates the link between current practices in special education and a possible future for the organization of public schools. Starting with the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, schools such as Harrison have been required to collect data on students before placing them in special education. Many schools responded by developing school-based teams, modeled on IEP staffing teams, that were composed of the classroom teachers and student service staff members such as the school psychologist and special education teachers (Reschly, Tilly & Grimes, 1999).

Harrison's version of problem solving echoes the IEP process of *referral*, *team staffing*, and *intervention plan* that includes data-based criteria for success. According to the school psychologist, "anyone in the school can make a PST referral...based on either (student) learning or behavior." When a teacher observes a continuous, or worsening, academic or behavioral problem with a student, they submit a formal referral to the school psychologist. The psychologist then uses available information to assess the condition and specific needs of the child, and will then decide who should be present at the PST meeting and when the problem will be discussed.

A team staffing composed of the school psychologist, special education teachers, classroom teachers and the parent then meet to determine which kinds of data will help to construct a learning plan for the student. The school psychologist is always part of the team. The following narrative synthesizes our experience with the PST process at Harrison. The school psychologist begins the meeting by providing a summary information packet for each student referred to the team. As a Direction Instruction (DI) school, Harrison teachers and staff use a variety of formative assessment tools to assess student learning and determine student learning goals. This data rich environment allows the school psychologist to develop a sophisticated data

profile of how a student is learning in terms of the DI curriculum. The discussion is further strengthened – in terms of data use – through the use of the readily available district and promotion data kept in district data warehouses. This data is often used to make a correlation between the student’s current problems and her or his past attendance, standardized testing, etc. This information supplements the perspectives of the team’s experiential knowledge of student. The team then reviews the information packet compiled by the school psychologist. The PST delves into whether anyone had observed anything different the student’s recent behavior. The classroom teacher reports whether there are any behavioral disturbances recorded through the DI marking process. The social worker describes the student’s behavioral record, and the parent, if present, is asked about issues at home. The psychologist will then hone in on the behavioral problem in terms of academic achievement by comparing current DI measures with other assessments, such as DIBELS² testing. These measures are checked with the perspectives of classroom teachers. The PST develops a series of measurable academic and behavioral goals and interventions for the student. Because the PST works in the data-rich DI environment, many of these goals can be measured in terms of the school’s existing assessment tools. The PST then sets up a follow-up meeting to monitor the student’s progress towards his learning or behavioral goals. If the goals are met, then the student will be released from the PST plan. If the student has not met adequate progress toward the PST plan goals, the PST will develop further intervention, including the possibility of a special education placement.

The PST thus acts as an intermediate structure intended to provide a non-categorical adjustment of the school instructional program to meet the needs of students. Most classrooms at Harrison continue the Direct Instruction curriculum as the core instructional program; and the

² DIBELS, or Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, are a set of standardized, individually administered measures of early literacy development. They are designed to be short (one minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of pre-reading and early reading skills. (<http://dibels.uoregon.edu/>)

special educators and school psychologists continue to address student learning issues in classrooms through flexible grouping and in pull-out interventions. The PST serves as an intermediate adaptation of the IEP that allows the school to develop data-based interventions to address emergent student behavioral and learning issues. One teacher commented that “certainly anyone involved in a PST is discussing data on some level because you have to keep track of some kind of data.” The central role of the PST is evident in both how the student is discussed, as well as, in the data used to look at a respective student. The school’s social worker discussed how problem-solving:

brings it all down to the individual student level...every problem solving team meeting involves deciding what kind of data we're going to collect on that particular issue and then usually in three or four weeks we all meet back together to look at it and figure out what to do with it.

In the past, the staff might have assumed that something was wrong with the student when meetings such as this were held. The data-based PST meetings have started change the conversation to what supports students need to be successful. A Harrison kindergarten teacher summarized the influence of problem-solving at Harrison: “problem solving is the overall way to approach everything in the building.”

The transition to problem-solving at Harrison has highlighted the difficulties of bringing together the previously separated roles of classroom teachers, special educators and school psychologists in the PST. The psychologist acknowledged that many teachers continue to struggle with the transition using achievement data, a staple of her professional practice, to diagnose student learning issues. “Even though my brain works that way, I find it very confusing that other people don’t get the sort of logical connections between it, but everyone's different.”

The psychologist described the difficulty of getting teachers to integrate data into the student evaluation process:

(I) try to keep people on track of “why do you think that we're getting this particular data?” and “what do you want to be different?” and then “what is our plan?” and “how are we going to make it different?” So, any discussion that I'm involved in, I try to focus it back to data because it leads us beyond just admiring the kids or (saying) “we're working really hard and yet its not coming out” to focusing on who) didn't do well.

Another problem in using data to address student learning issues across the school was the current role-bound silos in which existing data were organized. The PST described how “trying to get the data ...out from pockets of people to the broader staff ...continues to be a big problem because some people really get it now and really know how to use it, but its often times not the classroom teachers.” Reconciling the tension between traditional instructional practices and the data-driven problem-solving process is continuous aspect of her work at Harrison. “It's not so much that people aren't capable of analysis,” she explains, “but a lot of times they just want to jump to okay what are we going to do and how are we going to fix it, and this, unfortunately, leads to lousy solutions.”

Part of her difficulty was helping teachers shift to a special education perspective of data-use from a more informal approach to assessing students. Here the gap between special education and general education training became apparent. As one teacher commented:

When we were first trained in problem solving, we were unfortunately were trained from more of a special education point of view instead of the overall school thing and so we're still struggling to get that be everyone looking at how

we deal with problems and that method because there's still people who think that its special ed- its not a way of how we work in the school so its something that we're still learning how to do.

Emphasizing the data-driven practices both in DI and in other parts of the school has helped teachers to make the transition to the special education model. Teachers have used several kinds of formative assessments to gauge the success of reading interventions. The principal described how:

(O)ur problem solving model (gives us) a bigger picture of a kid. Rather than just-saying “the kid can’t read,” we can ask “what are we going to do?” Now we have a couple snapshots of how kids are doing: maybe its a grade level thing, or maybe a classroom level thing. Maybe its a school wide level thing.

Situating the PST process in this data rich environment has helped teachers and staff see how assessment data can be used across the instructional program to shape student learning.

Leadership roles for Harrison student services staff. The new PST leadership roles put additional pressure on Harrison student services staff. Behavior and learning problems that were once dealt with through informal processes are now subject to PST interventions. The PST structure allows for a small group of teachers and parents to work together in developing a data driven plan with the assistance of student service staff with extensive training in working with data. The Harrison student service staff have taken on these roles. However the assessment and intervention expertise of the school psychologist and the social worker is stretched thin in efforts to evaluate learning for all students in terms of achievement data. The school social worker, for example, described that, as a result of PST: “there's not a real clear line between psychologist and social worker.” While the psychologist “provides guidance (and) does IQ tests” and the

social worker continues to do “home visits for attendance,” when it comes to working with assessing student learning, “both of us are involved.” This emphasis of the using data and the PST has meant that some of student support service responsibilities have been pushed to the margins: “if you mean clinical therapy...(then), no, that doesn’t happen here because neither of us has the time that we could commit.”

Student service staff have also taken on more formal leadership roles in the school. Another Easton district initiative calls for the establishment of Learning Teams at each school. The Learning Team is organized to use data to improve student learning through developing the school education plan, organizing professional learning for teachers, and cultivating safe learning environment. Learning Teams must include the principal, the literacy coach and at least 6 teachers. The Harrison Learning Team also includes the school psychologist, the social worker and a special education teacher. The Learning Team plays a central role in coordinating how data are used to support learning through the school. As the school principal explains

I know our Learning Team is really key (for) looking at data....They're the ones who develop the planning for the school. The people on the Learning Team...are familiar with it, are trained in data collection and analysis, and (they) can help to move the others along.

The student service staff play central leadership roles in the Learning Team. A part of this formal leadership role has been to help colleagues learn to use data effectively to develop and analyze the school educational plan The school psychologist, for example, sees her role as helping the Learning Team to become more data focused:

We do a pretty good job of using it in problem solving teams...We're now using it a little bit more into the Learning Team. That has been a bit of a challenge, to tell

you the truth, despite the fact that that's really what (the Learning Team) is trying to do - problem solve all the time and use the data and what the data tells us (to do). It's coming, but that's been kind of a slow process.

Although she served in a leadership role to help the Learning Team use data effectively, the school psychologist was still limited by her position to do anything about the ways other committees, primarily the teacher-driven grade level teams, used data to inform their practices. Part of the problem in using data at this level was the gulf between the data expertise of the student service staff and the teachers. The school psychologist related how:

It was very frustrating because I think "here's this great data and we're not using it." I said "Lets look at where the kids are falling apart on the test..." There was a small (teacher) committee that looked at it (last year) They looked at the math test...they discovered a pattern which I had been aware of for a number of years.

Fortunately, the school principal has been able to build links between the support staff and the teachers. As the school literacy coach commented "I'd say the Principal always gives the direction...She's a great thinker who always sees the big picture."

The PST process at Harrison has made student service practices and staff central to the school instructional program. The need to meet accountability challenges pushed school leaders to develop instructional programs that could yield predictable results in terms of student learning. Analyzing the role and function of the PST demonstrated how the school relied upon the IEP precedent and student service expertise as critical resources for developing the capacity to diagnose and address student learning issues.

The school principal emphasized how Harrison worked to develop a program to serve all children:

It depends on what the PST figures out (about) where we're really struggling. Is it just looking at the data, and trying to figure out what's going on with this child and then figuring out different strategies and interventions. Are we effective with every single strategy? No, but I've never seen a school that tries so hard. We don't give up because (a student) doesn't qualify for special ed. When I was a teacher in another school, there were these "grey area" kids, and they would just say, 'sorry, we can't help you there, they don't qualify for special ed so just deal with it.' We don't do that here. We work through the process and all of the kids get supported.

The Respect and Responsibility Program: IEP as a precedent for student behavior intervention

The Malcolm School developed an intervention structure similar to the PST with their Building Consultation Team (BCT). Student academic, social, and behavioral challenges are referred to BCT, which brings together the classroom teacher, administrative staff, and parents to develop and action plan. The BCT and the PST are both built on an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Both develop individual learning plans for students to prevent them from needing special education. As with an IEP each school's model stresses the use of data based decision making. The Malcolm school social worker, who attends all of these meetings describes how the BCT works:

The BCT meets once a week for about 45 minutes per child. The format (is) usually (to discuss) strengths and weaknesses, what are the issues...what's been

tried, what hasn't. And then as a group, we define what are we going to try next and when are we going to get it done by?

The Malcolm BCT was developed for similar reasons as the PST. Special education referrals meant that the students had to be categorized to receive services. The Malcolm staff wanted a more flexible program that could serve students without categorization. Also, the BCT was designed to provide continuous monitoring of the resulting learning plan:

(O)ne of the glitches in (the special education system) system is you create a plan and you know who's supposed to implement it but you don't say when its going to be done by so we include when you're going to get that done by and then periodically, I would say once every or at least quarter, if not month, we go through the previous interventions for kids list and we say "who did it?" and "have you really done it?" or "do you still need to do it?"

The problem-solving approach to continuous monitoring gives the BCT a school-wide perspective on how students are progressing through the system. The school social worker continues:

And we usually schedule kids for a review check in with the parents so kids that we saw in September, we review right around January- say 'how's it going, what's happening, what needs to be done if anything or what were the results of the interventions? And we always set up in the spring of every year what we would call an at risk list or a watch list- kids who we don't want to have slipped through the cracks next fall when we're busy with life and new staff people working with them.

The BCT was designed, like the PST, to provide a student-level intervention strategy that would supplement the strong district program level curricular interventions. Getting to the point of individual student interventions was a result of a long process to revamp the school instructional program. When the principal arrived at the school in the late 1990s, Malcolm had the lowest literacy scores in the city. The needs assessment completed as part of the school improvement process set the instructional improvement agenda for the next decade.

There were 136 problems identified at that time. So we focused on the top four challenges for the school... We created four action teams to focus on the top four issues of the school, and they still exist today. They really are the wheels that drive the school.

These four action teams became Literacy, Curriculum Continuity, Home/School Community, and Climate and Order. Nearly all of the school's initiatives follow from these four categories.

The first three action teams benefited greatly from the quality of the programs provided by Malcolm's Weston school district. In literacy, for example, the school embraced the district's Balanced Literacy program, and Malcolm teachers received extensive training in the district approach to literacy. This training included using formative assessments to determine whether students were making progress, and outlines for how to construct effective literacy interventions. Once the faculty began to feel comfortable, and the students began to make gains, in the literacy program, the school turned their attention to improving writing achievement. Again, the district provided a great deal of assistance in revamping the school's approach to teaching writing and provided staff training in district writing program. Scores began to improve in writing as well, and the principal continued her instructional leadership efforts to acquire district resources for on-going professional development. The district had also established a framework, and sets of

resources, to aid schools in developing capacity for student engagement, student learning, and student relationships. Engagement means the commitment that students have to school, relationships are the personal connections between staff and students, and learning is academic progress. These initiatives informed school efforts in curriculum continuity and home-school relationships.

The Climate and Order team, however, did not find such strong district precedents. The principal explained that “we have such incredible problems with climate and order.” Malcolm had the highest poverty and mobility rates for any school in the district, made ensuring a quality learning environment for students an on-going struggle. Many behavioral issues were rooted in students coming to school with inadequate food or clothing. Children were coming to school hungry, and teachers were spending valuable instructional time feeding students in the classroom. The team felt something proactive was needed to identify students who needed help the most before they acted out in the classroom. One team member commented that:

Our focal point at the time was, let’s make it positive, so we said, ‘What are our goals for this activity?’ and it’s to have the kid learn respect and be responsible for what they did.

Simply pulling students out of the class for behavior issues would force the school to rely on old models of exclusion by pulling students out of the classroom. In the climate of NCLB, however, schools were pressured to move beyond exclusion to make sure students were in class and getting the instruction they need to do well on assessments. Exclusion would not help the students learn, and would not address the underlying issues for behavior. Something else was needed.

The Respect and Responsibility program was designed to provide data and structure for proactive intervention. The Climate and Order team designed R&R to collect a variety of data on student behavior, and to structure interventions proactively to keep them in the classroom. A team member described that:

R&R has to focus on being a social problem solving tool, not a discipline tool.

We might hand out a little discipline, a little consequence for the social problem solving issue, but discipline comes from the principal.

Creating a program to proactively help students with classroom behavior required a sensitive balance between care and consequences:

Sometimes you're talking about the hard stuff about what happened this weekend and other times you're saying that this behavior is unacceptable and therefore, you're going to come in and chat with me at lunch recess about it because I don't know if you're so safe on the playground anyway, so lets talk about that at lunch recess. And so, and this is one thing that we revisit all the time in the building, its one of those chaotic things.

The R&R process has two central phases that roughly parallel the IEP. First, in the *referral* stage, teachers complete a referral form, and the student is sent to the office of the School Facilitator. The facilitator position, a combination of Title 1 teacher and assistant principal, talks with the student to determine whether the student needs a time-out or more substantial help. This process is typical of student disciplinary processes in many schools. The school has recently developed a protocol for responding to R&R referrals: three referrals results in an automatic call home. If a student continues the pattern of behavior, the BCT is assembled to develop an intervention plan. The R & R program kicks in here, during the BCT meetings, to

provide the kinds of nuanced behavior information that the district assessments provide for academic achievement. The School Facilitator compiles R&R referral data into a spreadsheet that tracks how many times a student is referred, by whom, and for what reasons. The R&R team, composed of the School Facilitator, the social worker, and the school principal, meet weekly to track students with large number of referrals, patterns in the referrals such time of day and originating classroom, the type of action taken. A R&R team member described how the data are used to help teachers as well as to identify students in need of support:

I look at which teachers have been referring a lot of children, and why. Is there a dynamic going on between 2 or 3 kids that is causes tension? Are the teachers having problems coping with the stress level caused by the students? What supports should we put in place to help that teacher cope more effectively?

As a result of their reflection, the team created reports about individual student issues and school-wide trends to determine more subtle patterns in student behavior. The reports are then reviewed weekly in Principal Advisory Committee (Malcolm's version of the Harrison Learning Teams) and monthly in faculty meetings. In the faculty meetings, teachers appeared to be very interested in these data, both in regard to their own students and as it pertains to the school as a whole. The R&R data helped teachers to address student behavior problems in the classroom so that children can improve their relationships by spending more time with teachers and peers.

Leadership roles for Malcolm student services staff. As with Harrison, the Malcolm student services support staff played a central role in designing the BCT and R&R. Malcolm is a small school with a challenging school population that needed to make creative use of personnel and resources to achieve its goals. The Malcolm student service staff, much in the same way as Harrison, have taken on multiple leadership responsibilities at the school. In addition to their

service on the BCT and R&R, the school facilitator and social worker both serve on the Principal Advisory Committee (PAC), the core school leadership team. This multi-level involvement allows them see how student level data from BCT and R&R are used at the PAC to make program and school-wide decisions. Understanding how to manage and use this data at a school wide level has allowed the student service staff to develop their skills in response to a particular responsibility. For example, when attendance data became a key part of the social worker's job, she learned the district system to manage the data and made sure to establish a link with the BCT and R&R. The social worker commented on how:

As a social worker, I utilize the (district instructional) framework model and keep (the data) kid by kid. This helps us do early intervention for engagement, early intervention for academics -- we analyze it in how many minutes or how many times of day. And so, that I use when I try to say, 'are my interventions working? (I can) get in touch with what's going on here.

The expertise and involvement that the student service staff have at Malcolm make them necessary for school-wide decision making conversations.

This level of involvement by student service staff has created personnel and financial costs for the school. In terms of personal costs, our observations of Malcolm's social worker made it apparent that she was committed to go above and beyond the call of duty without monetary compensation. The social worker's dedication is beneficial to the school, but such devotion cannot be expected for everyone in the same position. While Malcolm's social worker said nothing about issues such as burn out or unmanageable workloads, it is important to understand that as roles begin to shift leaders need to be aware of the personnel costs on staff. Malcolm's principal found it important to dedicate financial resources to maintain the school

facilitator position. As mentioned earlier, the Facilitator position originated out of Title I money dedicated to help the school make the transition to a school-wide Title I program. Since the position's inception, the principal has worked to redefine the position into a quasi-assistant principal position who, in addition to providing school-wide Title I services, also monitors the R&R program. Based on the school needs assessment, the principal determined that such a position was necessary for the school to make needed changes, and worked the system to ensure she could fund the position. Her creativity helped to establish the roles the school needed to maintain adequate intervention services for student who struggled.

Discussion

These Malcolm and Harrison cases illustrate how formal leaders in schools rely on student service personnel and practices to create data driven instructional systems in their schools. The pressure to use data effectively means that schools must not only receive reliable student achievement data, but must also fashion local systems to adjust instructional practices in order to reach accountability goals. Some researchers have emphasized the unsavory nature of this leadership work as a matter of gaming the system, to unfairly categorize students in order to evade the demands of accountability, to spend exorbitant time drilling students on sample test items, or simply to cheat (Jones, Jones & Hargrove, 2003; Ryan, 2004; Noddings, 2001; Leavitt & Dubner, 2005). Our research in how leaders build data-driven instructional systems revealed that, in some schools, leaders and teachers work to create socio-technical practices for generating and acting on formative data about student learning and behavior (Halverson, et. al. 2005). We found that school leaders did not create these new practices from scratch, rather, they turned to

the local expertise of student service staff, and to the powerful precedent for organizing student level interventions, the special education IEP.

In light of these examples, we would like to make several observations about how data-driven practices are organized around IEP-like structures: 1) while these types of practices might not be new, reframing around data might represent a common solution to an NCLB policy problem; 2) Student-centered assessment practices require schools to reallocate internal resources both in terms of human and material capital; and 3) if special education practices are being adapted for new purposes, why are school psychologists and social workers roles changing, but not necessarily those of special educators?

Common solution to new design problem. The 1997 IDEA mandated that before students were tested for special education, schools had to describe the prior interventions put into place to aid student learning. This need pressed the student services staff to develop practices for documenting the interventions used to support students. Schools throughout the country created team structures to evaluate and discuss whether these interventions were successful. These types of programs were called, for example, Teachers Helping Teachers, Student Study Teams, Malcolm's Building Consultation Teams, or, in Harrison's case, Problem-Solving Team. However, since special education continued to serve as a method to pull students out of school-wide assessment system, these team conversations remained largely in the realm of special education, and did not effect the general education program (Frattura & Capper, in press).

NCLB changed the function of these team conversations about intervention success. Previously, teams may have engaged in perfunctory conversations about adequacy of the school's interventions as a preliminary step to special education assignment. Now, with NCLB, simply assigning students to special education does not help evade the whole school-level

accountability requirements. The law requires 95% of total school population to take the state exam, and with many schools assigning between 10-20% of students to special education, this meant most special education students must take the exam. The quality of the interventions taken to improve learning for students who struggled now mattered at the school level, and those responsible for designing and measuring the success of these interventions took on a new school-wide leadership prominence. In fact, the very students that may have been written off before as special education students are now the group the school receives the most attention for moving toward proficiency. Schools are judged by their ability to move as many of these “bubble students,” as described by Jennifer Booher-Jennings (2005), across the line from basic to proficient performance on the exams. While researchers debate whether this form of “educational triage” offers an effective model for organizing school practice, in our cases, we have seen how the social workers and school psychologists played a central role in developing these quasi-IEP student assessment processes to build learning plans for students who struggle. We suggest that as schools continue to develop new capacities for using data to improve teaching and learning, structures like the PST and R&R, and positions like school psychologists and social workers, will become more prominent aspects of the general education program.

Reallocating internal resources. The cost estimates of NCLB are often modestly calculated in terms of testing and constructing an external accountability system (see, for example, Hoxby, 2002). For local school leaders, however, accountability costs need to include resources for repurposing existing assessment and instructional expertise. Allan Odden’s work on resource reallocation (Odden & Archibald, 2001; Odden, 2004) suggests schools may already have the resources necessary for making this transition. Odden and Archibald (2001) describe how schools create several kinds of specialist positions to deliver services to students who

traditionally struggle, including *categorical* specialists, such as special educators, to provide remedial instructional services directly to students, and *pupil support* specialists, such as school psychologists, social workers and assistant principals, to address student non-academic issues. In our schools, leaders repurposed the *practices* of categorical specialists, and the *roles* of pupil support specialists, to create new forms of data-driven student interventions. Instead of focusing only on students designated for special education, the IEP process in both schools was adapted to serve as an intervention strategy for proactively developing learning plans before students were assigned to special education. In our schools, psychologists and social workers adapted their assessment expertise to provide critical instructional assessment support for students in need *before* they were placed into special education, rather than non-instructional assessment services *after* students had already received special education services.

No gain in organizational capacity comes for free. At Harrison, for example, the social worker commented that her case load for individual student counseling had disappeared, and she did not say whether anyone had stepped in to provide this vital service. The student support staff we interviewed appeared to have high levels of dedication and a commitment to reframe their practices. Still, the principal in both schools pursued and received comprehensive school reform funding to train teachers and staff in new practices, and both principals were able to repurpose certain positions, such as Title I and district support staff, to engage in the quasi-IEP initiatives. Since the previously existing resources, in the form of faculty and staff positions, were already encumbered and embedded in existing school cultures, resource reallocation at Harrison and Malcolm were as much about changing professional culture as drafting a new budget. The ability to reallocate (and repurpose) existing staff resources to provide a critical instructional support system for all students pointed toward a significant aspect of principal leadership expertise at

both schools in our study (Halverson, 2004; Halverson & Rah, 2005). The costs, here, can be figured in terms of the human capital, the expertise, of the school leadership team to recognize which staff members would be able and willing to step into new instructional leadership roles in the school. As with other examples of leadership expertise, it is difficult to translate this ability into a cost-estimate or to construct a model that would scale to effect similar practices in other schools.

Special education practices, but not special educators? We began our study with the hypothesis that special educators, as well as special education practices, would play a key role in these new data-driven, student instructional support systems. Instead, we found that categorical staff played surprisingly small leadership role in the PST and R&R programs. We suggest that the ability of special educators to redefine their roles says more about their current job responsibilities than their willingness to engage in school-wide leadership. Like classroom teachers, the special educators in our case schools defined their job responsibilities in terms of time spent with the specific students in their care. Some of this time was spent working with students in inclusive classrooms, other time was spent serving students in resource rooms and keeping up with the considerable paper trail required to deliver special education services. The special educators at both Harrison and Malcolm found little discretionary time to participate in school-wide leadership activities.

The school psychologists and social workers, also intimately involved in the special education IEP process, framed their job responsibilities in terms of providing services to students as needed. Psychologists and social workers often treated students on an acute student needs on a day-to-day basis. Students who needed more intensive services were referred to the PST or BCT processes, largely conducted by the student service staff, and, if necessary, assigned to special

education. In the IEP process, student service staff, especially the school psychologist, already provided diagnosis and assessment expertise in identifying students for special education. By intervening in classrooms across the school with a wider variety of students than the special education staff, student service staff were able to develop a school-wide perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the instructional program. And since the student service staff in our schools had already served in leadership roles by creating school-wide learning and behavioral reports and helping staff interpret the results of standardized tests, it appeared to be a relatively small step for them to take the new school-wide role of developing learning plans for struggling students.

Conclusion

Schools and districts have faced growing pressure to use data for improving student learning. These pressures have come from high stakes accountability in NCLB as well as from research supporting the use of data based decision making. This shift towards data use has brought student service staff to the forefront because of their expertise in working with data. Understanding data and how to use it has become a part of the ways schools are doing or being required to do business. This shift toward data has pushed school leaders to rely on data savvy staff members. Several members of a school community, such as social workers and school psychologists typically have considerable experience in using data to measure and improve student learning. The practices of special education, for example, are framed by the assessment and diagnostic processes of the IEP. School psychologists and social workers, typically trained in both psychology and education, help students through counseling, evaluation, and designing interventions for academic and non-academic issues. These practices and positions comprise a

significant resource for school leaders to design systems for using data to improve student learning.

This new melding of practices promises to reshape both instructional leadership and special education. As school leaders draw data-driven special education practices into the core instructional program, student service staff gain intermediate structures that can provide a better range of services to children. The capacity to identify and help students before they fail not only fulfills accountability demands but also changes how schools view teaching and learning. This past year a new wrinkle, the Response to Intervention (RtI) model, was added to these challenges with the 2004 Reauthorization of IDEA

In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, districts no longer will be required to consider whether the child demonstrates a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, reading comprehension, mathematical calculation, or mathematical reasoning. Instead, the district may determine if and how the child responds to scientific, research-based interventions as part of evaluation procedures, using a “response to intervention” model that identifies such children before they fail to meet grade-level expectations. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. 20 USC 1400)

The RtI Model suggests a continuum of services which serves all students based on their current needs. This is a major shift in how we view the role of special education in schools today.

School leaders must recognize the possibilities that exist for change through this model because they will be expected to build these structures at their schools. This builds on this prior emphasis

to describe a connecting point between special and regular education. RtI is a proactive model that works to identify students in need of interventions from the time they enter school, and determines the instructional or behavioral interventions a student needs to be successful in the general education classroom. We suggest that the cases we describe provide examples of programs that anticipate how schools might change to meet the demands of RtI, and of how the practices of special education diagnosis, assessment, and intervention might come to characterize the general education program in schools.

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