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For more resources to help
make data public in your
school, visit:
www.bpe.org/schools/data



Making Data Public

At its heart, teaching is a decision-making enterprise. Every day in every classroom, teachers make many choices about what they will do next for each student, and the results of their decisions are tightly linked to the quality of the data they have. For several years, the Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE) has focused on making sure teachers have relevant, current, and useful data about their students. Our data team mines state, district, and school databases and puts the most important data in easy-to-use tools that school teams use to track each student's progress and make evidence-based decisions about what they need. Many teams have posted impressive gains in student learning as a result.

These efforts have taken on increased value as the Boston Public Schools implements its Academic Achievement Framework, asking schools to organize themselves to provide precise, targeted support for each student.

One of the biggest lessons we've learned is that data-driven improvement is a group effort; teachers must work in teams, and schools must engage the entire school community. When students, families, faculty, and others all concentrate on the same goals — and have the right data to guide their efforts — dramatic improvements result.

Recently, we've helped school teams as they made data public with eye-catching bulletin boards, progress letters to parents, and other communication tools. The ideas grew out of each school's data-driven inquiry, and our data team provided the technical skills and data expertise to execute them. Our partner schools have begun to exchange and improve upon each other's ideas — showing that smart ways of sharing data can support improvements in any school, including those with greater than usual challenges and ambitious goals.

This issue of FOCUS shares the best of what we've seen so far. While each of the featured schools uses data in multiple ways, we've highlighted just a narrow piece from each so that, together, they might offer a picture of how data can engage a school community at every level.

We encourage you to try these strategies in your schools and share what you learn with us and your colleagues. Public conversations about data are difficult to undertake, but the payoff for students is well worth it.

Jennifer Amigone
Director of Applied Research & Data Support
Boston Plan for Excellence

Marshall Elementary School: Waging a Campaign to Improve Attendance

The Marshall Elementary School has one of the largest and highest-need student populations in the city. Despite the challenges their students face, Principal Teresa Harvey-Jackson and the staff remain confident that they can and will accelerate student learning. They have realized, though, they first must get students to school regularly and on time. Last year by mid-winter, the Marshall had a severe attendance problem — less than 90% average daily attendance. The staff decided to wage a campaign to address the problem. They began with data.

A school-wide push

With data support from the Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE), the Marshall instructional leadership team (ILT) delved deeply into student attendance data, identifying a target group of students whose poor attendance was interfering with their academic progress. The ILT realized that the poor attendance of some students was having a ripple effect, negatively affecting all students when teachers adjusted instruction to catch up those who were absent.

The ILT shared their analysis with grade-level teams, and teachers each took on a few target students whom they would monitor and support with one-on-one conversations and phone calls home. For the rest of the year, grade-level teams reported on attendance at the start of each meeting, and the ILT did the same, spending the first part of each meeting looking at school-wide progress, as well as attendance by grade and homeroom and for individual target students.

The focus on target students was a powerful strategy because it “gave us something in common to talk about,” Principal Harvey-Jackson says. “If your targeted kid has moved and mine hasn’t, what are you doing with your targeted kid?” Marshall teachers

used the same strategy for targeting struggling students in reading and math, and Principal Harvey-Jackson says, as a result, “We’re seeing a shift on every grade level because they’re looking at data. Everybody has at least one targeted kid, and they’re reporting on how that kid is doing.”

Data on individual students is posted in the staff meeting room so teachers can see how students are doing — and where more work is needed — in each “family,” the Marshall term for a cohort of students who move together from one grade to the next.

Teacher leaders, like second-grade teacher Shannon Connolly, take responsibility for collecting data and leading the conversations about data in grade-level teams. As a result, Ms. Connolly says, “Every grade-level team has a conversation. . . Every teacher is involved.”

Principal Harvey-Jackson says, “This [data inquiry] project has really excited the teachers in a different way . . . They own that work. They talk about it. They make those agendas. It’s on that agenda, and nobody’s going to make a move away from that agenda.”

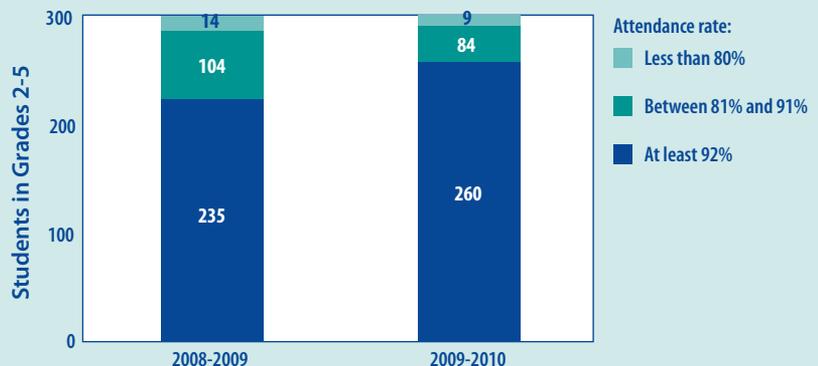
Marshall Elementary School At a Glance

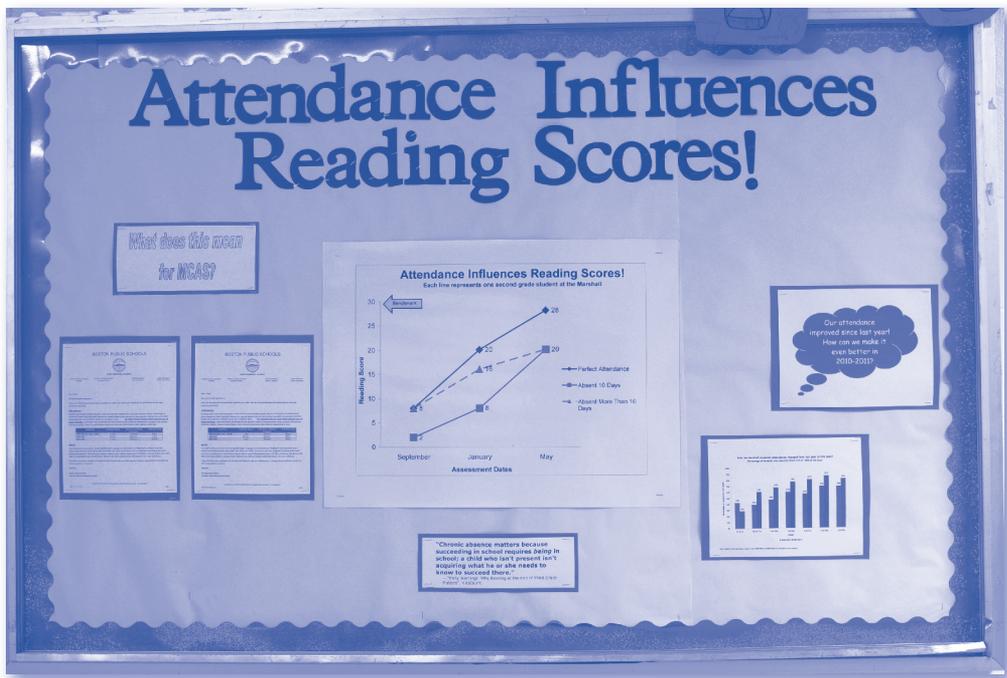
- 700 students, K-5
- 89.4% qualify for free and reduced lunch
- 26.6% are English language learners; 33.9% speak a first language other than English
- 14.6% have special needs
- 36.3% annual student mobility rate
- 89.9% average daily attendance in 2008-09

Students take up the cause

Marshall students have also been tracking their own attendance data on charts in classrooms. During a unit on graphing last spring, fourth-grade students generated line and bar graphs representing their own attendance. Through these colorful, interactive displays of data, students have become aware of their own attendance patterns.

More Marshall Students Attending School Regularly





◀ A bulletin board in the main lobby shows parents how attendance affects reading growth.

Each week, one homeroom at every grade level wins a trophy for best attendance, and the winning class displays it proudly in the lunchroom every day. The competition for the trophy generates the best kind of peer pressure, as students push each other to attend school every day.

The school also celebrates individual students who have perfect attendance on public bulletin boards and at an end-of-year barbeque.

Getting parents' attention

Pleased with the momentum built in teacher teams and with students, the Marshall ILT knew it still had one more audience to engage: parents. ILT members were especially concerned about getting the attention of parents of children with the poorest attendance.

As a first step, Ms. Connolly created an engaging bulletin board in the main lobby that showed the impact of attendance on reading levels. "It was like a light bulb went off," Principal Harvey-Jackson says, when parents visiting the school saw the data.

Then, with help from BPE, the ILT sent a letter to every Marshall parent

that indicated both the number of days a child had missed for each of the past three years and the total *hours* of missed instruction, a new approach that brought a staggering response.

"My secretary wanted to kill me," Principal Harvey-Jackson says. "The calls just kept coming, and teachers were saying that parents were coming up to them and saying 'That attendance is wrong, that can't be right.'"

Though Marshall staff had sent letters home before with days missed, showing the cumulative hours of lost instructional time got the message across in a new and powerful way. Principal Harvey-Jackson explains that, "You can say somebody's been absent 50 days, but 300 hours (of missed instruction) looks different. That's a lot of time when you think about it."

Looking ahead

The Marshall staff was energized by its success improving attendance rates last year. This year, the ILT will continue sending periodic letters to students' families and is working on adding data about the instructional time lost due to tardiness. Principal Harvey-Jackson is considering ways to share data with

after-school providers at the school, so that they, too, can be engaged in supporting improved attendance and academic performance.

The attendance letters and related data, meanwhile, have become part of a file that follows each student, helping teachers to be ahead when they start the year with a new group of students. Building on the work in grade-level teams, Principal Harvey-Jackson created time for teachers to meet across grades to look at data and track student performance over time.

After several years of fostering a data culture, she says it's not one single tool or display that's made the difference; rather, "You keep putting it out there, and you keep giving it to them in writing, and you keep posting it and just making data very, very visible." ■

New Mission High School: Elevating Aspirations with Data

“I know that I can’t get into the college I want with the GPA I have now. I’m working on getting it up to at least a 3.5,” says New Mission High School sophomore Sarah Shephard. She’s only in the tenth grade but is already pushing hard to get ready for college. How did she get so motivated? One reason is data.

New Mission faculty are putting data in front of students, showing them exactly where they stand and what they need to do to be on track for college.

“The campaign that we’re waging right now is: You’re going to college, and you have to get a good GPA.”

— Naia Wilson,
New Mission High School Headmaster

Making college aspirations part of the culture

Headmaster Naia Wilson and New Mission staff are aiming high, setting their goals beyond MCAS proficiency to college readiness. According to guidance counselor Kelli Jones, motivating students to think about college early is key. She says, typically, “students all start to get their act together around junior or senior year. We’re trying to make that happen earlier.”

To that end, Ms. Jones and her colleagues began by implementing a college awareness curriculum in freshman and sophomore advisory classes. The curriculum exposes students to the benefits of a college degree and what colleges expect from successful applicants. These efforts have contributed to an impressive college-going rate — 89% of the class of 2010 was accepted to college; 60% of graduates were accepted to four-year colleges.

Going from college for most to college for all

Though pleased with the success of many students, New Mission



staff members want all students to be competitive candidates for the colleges of their choice and for financial aid. A major factor in college admissions is the cumulative grade point average (GPA), with selective colleges requiring a 3.0 or above. Many students don’t realize the impact of course grades until it’s too late; earning low grades in the ninth grade can make it hard to catch up later, limiting college opportunities.

In the past, New Mission staff had trouble getting students’ attention in time. After they posted students’ GPA data in the main hallway for everyone to see, students started listening.

Public data displays make the difference

A lively display in the main hallway now shows the distribution of GPAs at each grade level and ranks students by ID number (to protect students’ privacy). Ninth-grade English teacher Nachele Gordon says, “I saw a big change in work ethic after those GPAs were posted.”

Students began preparing harder for tests and got on top of homework. Freshman Neyt Soto had struggled to stay on top of assignments in the past, but when he saw the charts go

“The biggest challenges have been getting the kids to understand that from the day they walk in, their grades matter. Everything they do matters from the beginning of freshman year.”

— Kelli Jones,
New Mission High School Guidance Counselor

Raising the Bar

256 students attend New Mission High School

69% achieved Proficient/Advanced in English language arts (2010 MCAS)

Goal: 100% Proficient/Advanced

72% achieved Proficient/Advanced in math (2010 MCAS)

Goal: 100% Proficient/Advanced

85.2% graduate in four-years (Class of 2009)

Goal: 100% graduate

89% of seniors were accepted to college; 60% to four-year and 29% to two-year schools

Goal: Every student accepted to the college of her choice.

up, he says, “I started paying attention. . . The (data) helps you understand exactly what you need to fix.”

Sarah Shepherd had a similar reaction: “It keeps you aware of how the people around you are doing, what that’s going to be like when you try to fill out college applications and there’s somebody next to you that has a 3.5, whereas you have a 2.9. . . It made me think about how this year and next year I really have to go hard.”

From wake-up to follow-up

Raising aspirations was an important first step but not the end goal. Ms. Jones explains, “They want to be at the top but they don’t necessarily know what to do to get there. So it’s having that conversation in between. Okay, so you’re in this category and you want to be in this one. What is it that you’re going to do differently?” In her role as guidance counselor, she uses GPA data to talk with students about efforts they can make and supports they need to be successful.

Students get similar support from their teachers, who have posted attendance bar graphs and other data on their doors, helping students to see how homework completion and their performance on assessments relate to overall course performance.

A new type of conversation

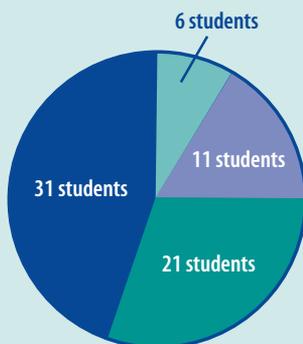
During annual degree audits last April, Headmaster Wilson noticed a change. Thanks to the GPA charts, students were more aware of the urgency of improving their grades. Headmaster Wilson says, “Students asked really good questions. The conversation totally changed.”

Building on this strong start, New Mission staff are incorporating public data displays into their work this year. With help from the BPE data team, they will post student results on other measures of college readiness, including PSAT, SAT, and Advanced Placement exams. With all this data, they are moving students from vague goals to a clear understanding of what it takes to graduate ready for college success. ■

New Mission Freshmen!

What are your plans after high school? Will your GPA get you there?

How is our freshman class doing?



Source: BPS Records

- A GPA of 3.0 to 4.33 is an A or B average. Four-year colleges, military academies, and many scholarship programs look for 3.0 and above.
- A GPA between 2.0 and 2.99 is a C to B- average. If you have high SAT scores, you may still be eligible for state colleges and universities.
- If you have a GPA below 2.0 (a C- or less), you may not be accepted by state universities or colleges. You can attend a community college and apply to transfer into a four-year college after a year or two.
- If your GPA is below 1.0, you may be off track to graduate high school. Community colleges, trade schools, some college preparation programs, and the military all require a high school diploma.

Data Everywhere

Other ways New Mission shares data

Annual degree audits: Every student meets with the guidance counselor and headmaster. Using a planning tool, students check off the number of required courses they have passed with a C- or better and select courses for the next year based on that data.

Semester portfolios: Each student prepares a narrative overview of the semester’s work and presents orally to the grade-level cluster.

Progress reports: Teachers give students a printout of their grades every two weeks.

Online grades: Using EdLine, teachers post assessment and assignment grades at least weekly. Students and parents can access the data online.

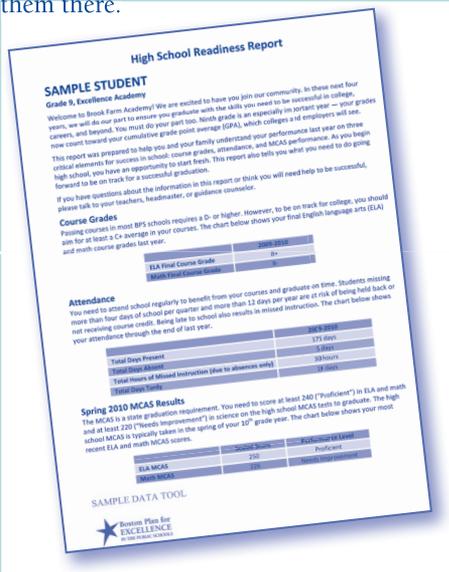
Classroom data walls: Teachers post anonymous attendance and homework completion data, test scores, and formative assessment results on their doors and classrooms.

Public data walls: Progress on attendance, GPA, college acceptances, and honor roll are displayed on hallway bulletin boards.

Rallying Students and Parents with Data

Getting Ready for High School

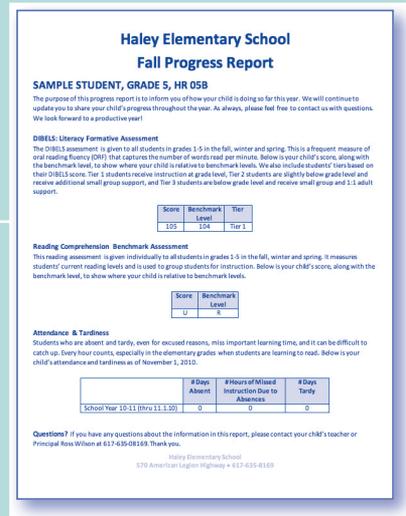
This fall, every ninth-grade student and his family at Brook Farm Academy received an individualized “high school readiness” report with course grades, MCAS results, and attendance data from the previous year. The report serves as an early warning to students who will need to improve performance to get on track for graduation and offers information about the support the school will provide to get them there.



To download these sample data tools and others, visit: www.bpe.org/schools/data

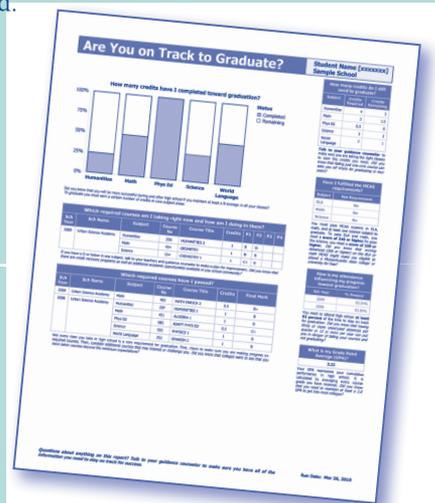
More Than Your Average Progress Report

A customized report, developed with help from BPE, gives Haley Elementary School parents a quick snapshot of their children's progress on reading fluency and comprehension assessments, and daily attendance and tardiness.



Students Track Progress to Graduation

The district's new graduation progress tracker clarifies high school graduation requirements, shows individual students where they stand, and empowers them to seek better outcomes. BPE is working with Brook Farm Academy and Madison Park High School to make the most of this powerful new tool, engaging students in conversations about their progress and helping match off-track students with the interventions they need.



Sharing Data Well: What It Takes

Leadership

None of this work is possible without a leader to champion data use, build the will for change, and organize staff to examine data in teams. The principal plays a crucial role in keeping everyone's focus on progress and supporting staff as they turn data into actions that accelerate student learning. Teacher leaders play an important role too, serving as two-way liaisons between the school's instructional leadership team (ILT), which sets student performance goals and monitors school-wide progress, and grade-level teams, where more fine-grained data is used to guide ongoing improvements in instruction.

The Right Data

Not all data are created equal. Teachers need data that is current, timely, and fine-grained enough to suggest next steps in instruction and support. By tracking daily attendance rather than monthly and zooming in on specific skill gaps with formative assessments rather than relying solely on MCAS results, for instance, school communities are able to identify the small actions that lead to big improvements over time.

Data Expertise

Teachers and school leaders need support to make sense of data that is available, generate reports that address the school's goals, and communicate that data to others. An external partner with technical expertise like BPE can help navigate tricky data systems and create easy-to-interpret, action-oriented charts and reports. School staff also need support to use these data to identify the changes in practice that are likely to make the biggest difference for students. Over time, and with support from knowledgeable colleagues and partners, schools can build the capacity to do this work on their own.

Time

Widespread, effective data use becomes reality in schools that commit — and hold sacred — regular chunks of time for teachers and leaders to examine data together. School-wide leadership bodies and grade-level teams need dedicated time to analyze data together, identify responses to the data, and determine the best way to share what they learn with students, parents, and others.

A Culture of Courage

Getting honest — and public — about data can require courage when the starting point is low or progress doesn't happen as quickly as desired. Initially, members of the school community may find new data startling or discouraging. By keeping the focus on progress and on action steps that community members can take together, the same data can be empowering, as they help everyone get clear about where students are, where they need to be, and what should happen next.



▲ **Principal Teresa Harvey-Jackson and Marshall staff track the reading proficiency of each student.**

A New Opportunity for Building Data Expertise

The Boston Teacher Leadership Resource Center provides teacher leaders with practice-based courses that strengthen their skills in leading school and district improvement. "Using Data" is one of four core courses designed by Boston Public Schools teachers as a part of the new Boston Teacher Leadership Certificate. Participants will study examples from schools that use data well and will develop the technical, analytical, and leadership skills they need to help their colleagues use data to accelerate student learning. Multiple sections of the three-credit, graduate-level course will be available in fall 2011.

The certificate is a partnership of the Boston Plan for Excellence, Boston Public Schools, Boston Teacher Residency, Wheelock College, and UMass Boston. For more details or to participate, visit: www.bpe.org.

Gardner Pilot Academy: Sharing Data — and Students — in Teacher Teams

In 2007, newly arrived Principal Erica Herman was concerned about students with disabilities whose performance was stagnant and lagged far behind their regular education peers. As is the case in many schools, special education services at the Gardner were delivered in isolation from the rest of the curriculum, with specialists and regular education teachers rarely talking and working together.

Curriculum coordinator Abby Brown, a second-grade teacher at the time, explains, “I think that every teacher was doing the best she could in her room, but there was no time to meet to find out what were you doing with José when you took him for 45 minutes. . . . There wasn’t any strategy.”

Blowing up the old categories

The Gardner staff partnered with Dr. Claudia Rinaldi at Boston College* to do away with the silos and meet students’ needs more strategically. They began implementing the Response to Intervention (RtI) model, in which individual student data drive decisions about how time is used, who teaches whom, and how curriculum and supplemental interventions are designed.

In the Gardner’s new RtI structure, each grade-level team has a “learning specialist” with both special education and English language certifications who functions as another full-time teacher for that grade level. Teams meet twice weekly, taking shared responsibility for all students in the grade.

Getting the right data

An improved structure was important, but getting to productive collaboration and coordinated services would require good data. The Gardner staff had to determine which assessments, in which combination, would best reveal each student’s strengths, learning gaps, and progress over time.

They tackled reading first. With help

from Dr. Rinaldi, Gardner staff put together an assessment schedule that includes screening of every student at the start of the year and interim assessments throughout the year. Friday professional development sessions help teachers implement the assessments with fidelity, understand the data they produce, and modify instruction based on results.

Using data for shared decision making

The new assessment data became the foundation of grade-level team meetings. The teams’ shared meeting space — also Principal Herman’s office — is “data central.” One wall shows each student’s progress on mock-MCAS assessments and the actual MCAS, and the other displays each student’s reading level. Teachers physically move the adhesive nametags as each student makes progress.

Teacher teams use the data wall, growth charts generated in Excel, and their own low-tech graphs to pinpoint gaps in learning, plan interventions, implement actions, and closely monitor each student’s progress. Teams meet with the school’s data team three times per year to evaluate progress and plan ahead.

Instructional supports delivered in tiers

In the RtI approach, teacher teams look at assessment data in three tiers. In the first tier, they use assessment data to determine skills and content that *all* students still need to master, then plan whole-class lessons to address those areas. Sometimes, if a big boost is needed, the team will plan an all-hands-on-deck effort, such as an additional 30-minute dose of skills practice, per day, for all students.

In the second tier, they identify learning gaps shared by *some* students and plan supplemental supports, such as small group practice with reading fluency. Tier three students are furthest from the learning goal and need more intensive interventions to catch up. Teacher teams discuss four tier three students each week.

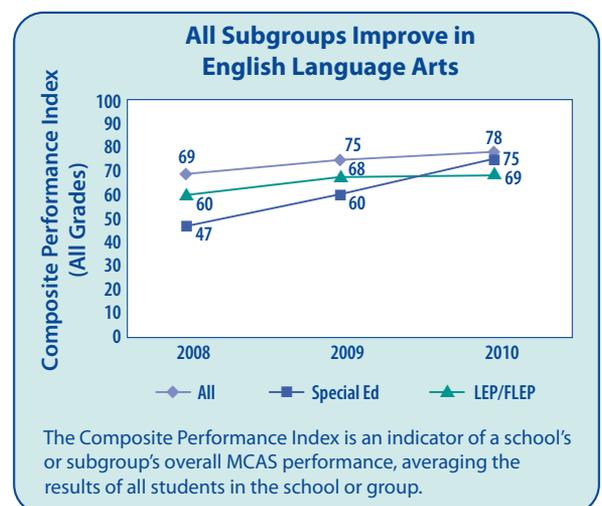
Everyone pitches in with interventions

Once a team has figured out what a tier three student needs to be successful, teachers organize resources to make it happen; they find pockets of time before lunch, take advantage of small group instruction in “learning centers” during class time, use specialists and interns for one-on-one support, and swap students among classrooms to maximize resources.

A new mindset takes hold

Though the Gardner’s RtI work has focused on reading, it has carried over into other arenas. Staff are now in the habit of bringing data to the table in every discussion and figuring out how to use each other to address the needs of students, whether academic or behavioral. After four years implementing RtI, many teachers can’t imagine teaching any other way.

The solution-oriented approach has built staff capacity in unexpected ways



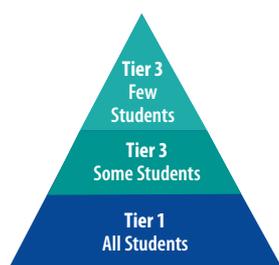
What Is Response to Intervention?

In the Response to Intervention (RtI) approach, instructional decisions are made in direct response to individual student data. Rather than group students in static categories, like special education or language acquisition groups, the type and intensity of support a student receives is driven by up-to-date assessment data and is adjusted based on progress.

RtI doesn't prescribe specific interventions or new programs. It is a way to effectively use existing resources — and determine what new knowledge teachers need — to meet individual students' needs.

The Gardner Pilot Academy's success implementing RtI contributed to the district's decision to roll out a similar approach for all schools. The Boston Public Schools' new **Accelerated Achievement Framework** (AAF) uses RtI, plus a similar approach for monitoring socio-emotional and English language development. Two cohorts of schools (62 in total) have been introduced to the framework so far, and the rest will be introduced by next year.

Matching Type and Intensity of Instruction to Students' Needs



- Tier 3**
 - Intense, supplemental targeted skill interventions
 - Customized interventions
 - Weekly progress monitoring to guide intervention
- Tier 2**
 - Supplemental targeted skill interventions
 - Small groups
 - Monthly progress monitoring to adjust dosage
- Tier 1**
 - Evidence-based core curriculum
 - Assessment system and data-based decision making

Step 1: Analyze data. Use assessment data to determine where students fall in the three tiers of achievement. Check whether the pattern is consistent across multiple assessments.

Step 2: Plan core instruction. Look for gaps in skills or knowledge that cut across all three tiers. Plan curriculum and instruction to meet those gaps.

Step 3: Identify students in need of supplemental or intensive interventions. Select a tier two or three student and ask, what's her core instruction? Is it happening with fidelity? Is she attending regularly? Get the whole picture of that child, her participation, and performance.

Step 4: Identify gaps. Consider what factors are holding the student from reaching proficiency. List everything that stands between her current performance and the standard.

Step 5: Prioritize. Look at the list of gaps, and ask, what is the biggest or highest-leverage issue we could address?

Step 6: Plan for implementation. Determine an intervention to meet the gap, when it will happen, how often, and by whom.

Step 7: Monitor progress. Keep a record of each intervention. Did it happen? How did it go? What were the results?

Step 8: Report on results. At regular intervals, reassess the student and look at the results. If the intervention is not working or has achieved partial success, determine the next intervention.

too. Through team-based discussions and Friday professional development sessions, individual teachers have opportunities to share their successes. As a result, teachers have come to regard each other as in-house experts, seeking each other out for advice and modeling for colleagues when they need help.

Great results for vulnerable students

The most impressive outcomes of this approach to data use have been for the group of students originally of most concern: students with disabilities. They have made the greatest gains in reading fluency and comprehension. The once-cumbersome special education referral process has become

much more efficient as well. Now, teachers begin with a solid basis of data and a record of interventions so there are fewer false alarms and less time wasted on unnecessary assessments. Compared with 34 students referred in 2006-07, only eight were referred last year. As a result, the Gardner's learning specialists spend more time providing instructional support to meet students' Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals.

Going deeper to keep getting better

Each year, the Gardner staff look at their progress and refine their approach. They are constantly tweaking their assessment system and figuring out how to streamline the data collection and analysis process so it is

less cumbersome. Many teachers have come up with their own, low-tech ways to achieve the same results.

Data is now everywhere. "You do not go to a meeting here where there's not data," says Principal Herman. After pushing hard to roll out many changes in the first years, she and the faculty are now slowing down to go more in depth in a few areas. "It's a long process," she explains, "and it's still not done." ■

**Dr. Rinaldi now works for the Education Development Center (EDC) and has contracted with BPS to support district-wide implementation of RtI as a part of the district's new Academic Achievement Framework.*

Blackstone Elementary: Making Data Public in a Turnaround School

Blackstone Elementary School faculty and administrators began this year determined to address big, persistent gaps in student performance. With 82% of first graders beginning their elementary school careers below the district's benchmark for reading, and 83% of students in the upper elementary grades failing to reach proficiency on MCAS, their charge was great.

Director of Accelerated Learning Lisa Lineweaver says, "The baseline numbers were humbling. We have a number of students who are newcomers [to the country]. We have a number who had not had any kindergarten experience. This was their first ever day of school coming into first grade."

Understanding the problem

Blackstone students' underperformance was not new — that's why the school was named a turnaround school by the state. With support from BPE, newly appointed Principal Steve Zrike and his team analyzed several years' worth of student data over the spring and summer and identified three core challenges to overcome:

- English language learners (63% of the school's population) were not making adequate progress in language acquisition and, as a result, were not mastering grade-level content.
- Students in substantially separate special education classrooms were not being taught grade-level content.
- Poor attendance during the early years meant many students were losing out on critical instruction in foundational reading skills.

Humbled, but not deterred, the Blackstone team set out to tackle each problem systematically. At the core of their arsenal they had data.

Excellence begins at 8:35

Enter the Blackstone main office, and a giant wall of attendance data is the

first thing visitors see. A bar graph for each homeroom indicates the number of students who attended each day. Messages supporting unity, respect, and excellence (the school's motto) are paired with no-nonsense reminders: "When we miss a day, we miss seven hours of learning."

Director of Student Success Allyson Hart explains that when she and her colleagues designed the wall they were "being dreamers." They said, "Let's have attendance captains and let's have the kids mark the graphs themselves. Let's really empower them to be in control of what their class is doing and coming to school."

The student attendance captains, appointed weekly, proudly sport armbands when they bring their class attendance report to the office each morning. With help from a City Year corps member, the captains update the data wall themselves. The captains are also in charge of reminding their classmates about the importance of coming to school every day and for encouraging competition with other homerooms for the best attendance award.

Creating necessary discomfort

City Year corps members have been deployed to make calls to the homes of absent students, and Ms. Hart has mobilized the student support team to get involved as soon as poor attendance patterns emerge. They make home visits and call on truancy officers when more serious intervention is merited.

They are getting tough with tardiness too. The school's new attendance policy goes beyond district requirements to make five tardies equivalent to an unexcused absence, and staff do not excuse either without a valid reason.

Ms. Hart stands in the school lobby, adjacent to the data wall, and greets all tardy students and families herself every day. She always asks why a student is late, which can be awkward at times. "You know what?" she says. "I'm fine with that. Getting to school

on time is really important, so I'm fine if it's a little uncomfortable."

BPE supports these efforts with monthly analyses of attendance and tardy data for the school and each homeroom, and with attendance warning letters for individual families.

Getting momentum with reading

With students attending more regularly, the Blackstone faculty feels pressure to use that instructional time to get the most growth possible. Improvement in reading skills is an obvious focus. Last year, only 25% of Blackstone third-grade students reached proficiency on the MCAS reading exam, a strong predictor of eventual high school completion.

Ms. Lineweaver worked with a group of teachers to create a wall-sized reading chart for each grade level in the teachers' common planning area. Each student is represented by a magnet that reflects her progress on brief assessments of reading comprehension (the X axis) and fluency (the Y axis). Most students were clustered in the bottom quadrant in October, far below district benchmarks in both fluency and comprehension.

With so many students starting at very low levels, Ms. Lineweaver knew the staff data wall would have to be a little different from examples she'd seen at other schools. She explains, "One of the things I was trying to figure out was how do we see progress and how do we celebrate it? If the data wall turns into a static thing or a bad news story, then I'm afraid that we won't get the momentum that we need."

They decided to assess every student monthly (sometimes more) and to set goals for the weekly rate of improvement students would need (e.g., four new letters recognized or two more words read per minute) to reach the mid-year benchmark. Teachers move the magnets themselves each time a student is assessed, and they celebrate every jump in learning.

Data drives instruction and support

What the data wall immediately revealed was that the vast majority of students needed more support with comprehension and fluency than the grade-level curriculum provides. Staff decided to augment the core curriculum (tier one in Response to Intervention terms) with systematic phonics and phonemic awareness instruction. All teachers have been working in grade-level teams to implement guided reading groups as well.

In addition, students get extra doses of small-group (tier two) and one-on-one (tier three) instruction based on their assessment data. Students may work directly with the teacher, especially if their skills are very low, or do 20 to 30 minute practice sessions with a paraprofessional, City Year corps member, or retired volunteer from Generations, Inc., who have been trained for this role. Some students receive as much as 15 extra doses of targeted instruction in a week.

It's making a difference

In the first three months of tracking student progress on the data wall, magnets crept up along both axes. With advice and support from the BPE data team, Ms. Lineweaver is tracking the same data in a teacher-friendly spreadsheet, also noting which interventions are implemented each month and which are making a difference. This kind of follow-up is crucial, as teacher teams examine the data month to month and ask, “Do we continue doing what we’ve been doing? Do we increase the dosage of that or decrease the group size so that we’re getting better touch? Do we do something different?”

If an intervention doesn’t result in rapid enough progress for one type of student, teachers devise a new intervention that does. BPE provides additional fine-grained analyses of formative assessment results to guide teacher teams as they select and refine interventions.

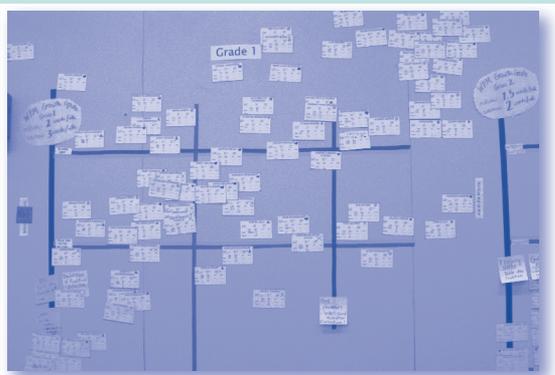
This careful tracking and analysis of interventions is making a difference. By December, 83% of first graders had met the fall fluency benchmark, up from only 20% in September. It’s not yet where students need to be, but the progress is encouraging.

Still dreaming

Though a recent change in principal leadership has been a setback, the Blackstone staff and faculty are pushing ahead. They’ve begun to think about how to integrate academic data with social and emotional factors and extended learning time data. Over time, they will be able to see which activities—in the classroom and through supplementary programs—are making the biggest difference for students. Then, they can match every child to the best possible combination of supports until all reach proficiency. ■

Zrike recently accepted a role as Assistant Superintendent in the Chicago Public Schools. The turnaround plan that was crafted by a team of Blackstone staff remains the same.

Blackstone Staff Track Each Student’s Progress



◀ The Blackstone’s staff data wall shows each student’s performance on two measures of reading skills. Teachers move students’ magnets and record progress after each assessment.

▼ With help from BPE, Blackstone teachers track each student over time to see which interventions are working, which aren’t, and where each student stands in relation to benchmarks.

Student Name	Sept ORF Score	ORF Descriptor	Fluency WPM (from DIBELS)	Oct Progress Monitor	Extra dose of Fluency	Provided by	Duration	Frequency	Date of Dose	Extra dose of Fluency	Provided by	Duration	Frequency
Student 81	2	High Risk	2	9	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	15-29 min	3 times per week	December	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	15-29 min	3 times per week
Student 38	5	High Risk	5	5	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	15-29 min	3 times per week	December	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	15-29 min	3 times per week
Student 51	13	High Risk	13	19	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	<15 min	4 times per week	December	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	<15 min	4 times per week
Student 20	17	High Risk	17	27	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	<15 min	4 times per week	December	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	<15 min	4 times per week
Student 49	21	High Risk	21	39	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	15-29 min	3 times per week	December	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	15-29 min	3 times per week
Student 62	23	High Risk	23	51	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	<15 min	4 times per week	December	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	<15 min	4 times per week
Student 65	26	Some Risk	26	59									
Student 68	26	Some Risk	26	43									
Student 36	29	Some Risk	29	40	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	<15 min	4 times per week	December	Fundations	Ms. Goncalves Wachman	<15 min	4 times per week
Student 44	30	Some Risk	30	44									

It Takes More Than a School

What the District Can Do

The district is the primary provider of data and support that schools need to drive improvements. Its new Data Warehouse is a big step in the right direction, as is the Student Information System that will become available next year. Over time, these systems should improve access to data by putting what schools need in one place. Looking ahead, the district can further support schools by:

- *Providing quality, just-in-time assessments.* Schools may need more than the current menu of assessments, especially as they work to “zoom in” on students who are far below grade level and create data walls across content areas.
- *Sharing effective data reports and templates.* As schools develop and refine tools for sharing data, the district can integrate the best of them into its new data warehouse so that all schools can access them.
- *Making data use a priority for professional development.* School leaders and teachers need opportunities to learn how to set data-informed goals, interpret and manipulate data, and use data to engage the whole community in improvement efforts. The district can draw on schools with effective data cultures to lead professional development with colleagues.

What Families Can Do

Parents don't have to wait until report card season to know how their children are doing. With new and better data systems available (and improvements on the horizon), schools can share data with families much more frequently.

- When you enter a school, look for displays of data and ask about the school's goals.
- Ask your child's teacher if the school has a website for sharing data with parents or if there is another way you can get regular data on your child's progress.
- Ask for information about what you can be doing at home to ensure your child is meeting learning goals.

What External Partners Can Do

Community organizations, after-school providers, funders, and others play an important role in supporting student progress, especially when their efforts are aligned with school goals and tailored to meet individual students' needs.

- Ask what data is available about the individual students your program supports so that your efforts can be aligned to meet student needs.
- Tailor your services to address the specific learning needs of the students you serve. Request support — and, if possible, training — from school staff to understand how you

can make the most difference for the students you share.

- Ask the school principal how grants or in-kind donations can be used to build the school's data capacity and further its goals for accelerating student learning. ■

BPE Data and Inquiry Services

We tailor our data support to meet each school's goals and needs. Specifically, we:

- compile data from disparate sources in a format that is user friendly and error free.
- create custom analyses and tools that answer a school's specific questions about student performance.
- provide frequent analyses of student progress on key measures, such as attendance, reading fluency, or course performance.
- support the principal and teacher leaders to set performance goals, monitor progress, and engage the school community in improving outcomes.
- support teacher teams to analyze assessment data, identify learning gaps, and select and refine interventions through a structured inquiry process.
- help teachers and leaders identify and address systemic practices and policies that contribute to underperformance.
- help staff communicate goals and progress with engaging charts, displays, and reports.



As a local education fund and nonprofit, the Boston Plan for Excellence seeks and supports innovative solutions to the toughest problems faced by Boston's students, their teachers, and the school district as a whole. We are working to make sure every child in Boston receives an excellent education. Every School. Every Classroom. Every Student.

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