



Board of Education Meeting  
December 17, 2012

DMC Project Update

The School District of South Orange & Maplewood's engagement with The District Management Council (DMC) aims at improving student outcomes and reducing the achievement gap. The district's work with DMC can be divided into four projects.

**Project 1: Implement the core reading program and refine intervention programs.**

The School District of South Orange & Maplewood is partnering with DMC to help ensure that the district's elementary school core reading program is implemented across the district consistently. The district has already taken significant steps to develop and implement a strong core curriculum. However, not all schools have yet fully and faithfully implemented the district's literacy program. A central focus of DMC's work is to ensure consistent implementation of the core reading program across all elementary school buildings.

Currently, approximately 650 elementary students in the district are struggling in reading. Among students with disabilities, fewer than half score proficient on the NJASK, and this proportion declines in upper grades. To help support struggling readers and improve student outcomes, DMC will work with the district to implement additional instructional time for struggling readers—with or without an IEP—with content expert teachers.

DMC's work with the district includes five objectives:

1. Track consistency of implementation of the core reading program.
2. Establish a project management structure within the district to develop and facilitate implementation of accountability tools and systems to track consistency of core reading program.
3. Convene professional learning cohorts of reading teachers and classroom teachers to share best practices and refine the plan as needed.
4. Refine the use of data.
5. Expand intervention.

**Project summary to date**

The project plan includes the following objectives. DMC has made much progress on the majority of the defined objectives and will continue to do so in the next few months.

***Objective 1: Track consistency of implementation of the core reading program.***

In order for the current core reading curriculum to have the maximum benefit, all students must have access to its rigorous content and thoughtfully laid-out plan. To achieve this objective, DMC has

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The District Management Council

interviewed all elementary school principals to assess the how core reading instruction works in their respective schools. Through these conversations, DMC has drafted a report outlining the key elements of the core reading program that are currently in place across the district and areas of opportunity for improving the program's implementation.

**Objective 2:** *Establish a project management structure within the district to develop and facilitate implementation of accountability tools and systems to track consistency of core reading program.*

The School District of South Orange & Maplewood has convened a reading committee composed of elementary school principals and reading teachers to help create accountability tools and systems to monitor the implementation of the core reading program. As of December 17, the reading committee will have met twice. During these meetings, the committee will identify potential obstacles that schools may face in implementing the core reading program and will begin brainstorming methods for overcoming potential barriers. Moving forward, the committee will help drive work to overcome these possible obstacles.

**Objective 3:** *Convene professional learning cohorts of reading teachers and classroom teachers to share best practices and refine the plan as needed.*

In addition to supporting fidelity with the district's core reading program, the reading committee described above will also share best practices around reading with district staff. The committee may also help modify the district's current reading plan as required.

**Objective 4:** *Refine the use of data.*

In order to enhance teaching practices, reading specialists and teachers should use data to target areas of student need and identify effective teaching strategies. DMC will help create and implement systems to streamline and strengthen the use of common reading formative assessments to enhance teaching practices. Key activities include:

- Determine strengths and areas of friction with the current system of common formative assessments. Recommendations to simultaneously strengthen and simplify the use of common formative assessments will be provided.
- Help develop a reporting system that can compare data across students, classrooms, and buildings using existing district software and tools.
- Conduct trainings with district-level and school-level administrators on collecting and using data from common formative assessments.
- Help create a schedule for data review sessions with teachers to drive improvement.

**Objective 5:** *Expand intervention.*

To sustain and build upon learning in the core curriculum, DMC will help review current remediation and intervention efforts. This work will also help the district prioritize best practices, such as extra time on task with skilled teachers. Additional time will seamlessly connect with core instruction and provide students the opportunity to develop, practice, and reinforce critical reading skills.

The new remediation and intervention reading program would provide struggling students—with and without an IEP—with at least 30 minutes or more of daily supplemental instruction from a teacher trained in reading instruction at the elementary level. This time would be additional to their core instruction.

At the secondary level, students who are not at grade level would likely receive even more time on task. DMC will review schools' current scheduling practices to help integrate extra time into the school schedule seamlessly. Key activities include:

- Create clear methods to identify students to target for additional reading instruction.
- Review current reading intervention efforts and compare to proven best practices.
- Develop a three-year phased implementation and staffing plan to provide extra time for struggling students from teachers skilled in the content area. Any plan proposed will be cost neutral.
- Assist in developing schedules incorporating small group instruction.

## **Project 2: Refine the current model for supporting students with disabilities included in general education**

The School District of South Orange & Maplewood has an admirable commitment to including students with disabilities in a general education setting. DMC will help further support the district's best practice-based approach to supporting students (with or without IEPs) in an inclusion setting.

DMC has three objectives for this workstream:

1. Develop an integrated, consistent approach to supporting students with disabilities in an inclusion setting based on best practice research.
2. Develop an action plan to formalize the agreed-upon approach for supporting students in inclusion in every building.
3. Allocate resources more effectively to align with the developed plan.

To help create a consistent and effective approach to supporting students in an inclusion setting based on best practices, DMC will:

- Facilitate planning sessions to outline areas of strength and improvement in current strategies.
- Collect detailed data of present efforts, school by school, including student outcomes, staffing, and pedagogical approaches.
- Help create a strategic action plan formalizing the district's new approach to supporting students in inclusion settings.
- Conduct school-by-school analysis of staffing and program implications of formalized approach.

### **Project summary to date**

The project plan includes three objectives. The School District of South Orange & Maplewood and DMC have made progress on the data collection, and will continue to work with the district to achieve the other objectives.

***Objective 1:** Develop an integrated, consistent approach to supporting students with disabilities in an inclusion setting based on best practice research.*

DMC has interviewed all principals and has gathered data around the current inclusion efforts in their schools. The district has formed a committee composed of stakeholders from various departments in the district that will help review DMC's findings around how current practices align with best practices on raising achievement of students with disabilities. This inclusion committee will create a plan to build a program based fully on proven, research-based best practices. As of December 17, this committee will have met twice. In these meetings, the committee reviewed current inclusion practices and discussed the program's strengths and opportunities for improvement.

A central part of this discussion involves gaining agreement from both general education and special education practitioners around the definition of success for students with disabilities. DMC will engage with the inclusion committee to articulate a clear new vision of support for students with mild to moderate disabilities and students who struggle without disabilities.

***Objective 2: Develop an action plan to formalize the agreed-upon approach for supporting students in inclusion in every building.***

Successfully implementing a new model for supporting students in inclusion will require a detailed, thoughtful plan that brings together many stakeholders. This will be based on a clearly articulated theory of what supports students need to succeed.

To create a successful system, the program must adapt to the district's individual culture. As a result, DMC will draft a plan to support students in the inclusion setting that is collaboratively developed, prioritized, and actionable. Key activities include:

- Facilitate multiple sessions to develop a multi-phase action plan to implement a consistent approach to supporting students in an inclusion setting.
- Assist with scheduling and staffing implications at each building for implementation plan.
- Develop a monitoring plan to assess effectiveness of new approach at key milestones.
- Support implementation at the school level.

***Objective 3: Allocate resources more effectively to align with the developed plan.***

Management of resources and funds may need to realign to the service delivery models in use; shifts to a new service delivery model may impact staffing, scheduling, and other areas of district operators. Based on the inclusion committee's proposed plan, DMC will assist the district in allocating resources to support the district's approach to inclusion. Key activities include:

- Understand current budgeting and management processes that support struggling students in the district across pupil services, the business office and human resources.
- Create staffing plans consistent with the new model of support.

### **Project 3: Special education financial management system**

The School District of South Orange & Maplewood is working with DMC to develop a special education financial management system. This system is called dmPlanning and will help the district achieve two goals:

1. Create a strategic budgeting process for special education.
2. Develop a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and decision-making with respect to special education and struggling students.

Most general education positions already have such guidelines, such as desired class size at the elementary level or expected teaching loads at the secondary level. These guidelines create a straightforward budgeting process and makes assigning staff to buildings transparent. Oftentimes, building a special education budget can feel less exacting than other portions of the budget, but it needn't be. By matching student needs as defined in IEPs with reasonable workload expectations for staff, the district can use a more thoughtful budgeting process.

The project plan includes five objectives:

1. Determine what data is required to thoughtfully and proactively build and manage special education budgets.
2. Create a system to easily, accurately, and quickly collect and analyze the information required to thoughtfully budget, manage, and forecast special education spending.
3. Help develop staffing and workload criteria (aligned with the district vision of service delivery) for special education staff.
4. Develop an integrated system linking special education, business office, and human resources.
5. Implement a web-based technology tool to help develop staffing guidelines, building allocation rules, and to ease ongoing data collection, forecasting, and budgeting.

The special education financial management system will bring greater clarity to budgeting and allow for thoughtful resource allocation decisions. Key deliverables for this project include:

- Identifying data and other information required to thoughtfully budget and manage special education.
- Creating a system to easily and timely collect the required information.
- Providing technology tools to analyze the required data such that decision making is more data driven, child centered, and transparent.
- Helping the district develop and document district-wide vision for special education criteria for staffing and workload based on the district's service delivery model.
- Developing special education financial reports and forecasting tools.

### **Project summary to date**

The School District of South Orange & Maplewood and DMC have taken significant steps to achieve three of the five objectives thus far, and will continue to do so over the coming months.

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### The District Management Council

**Objective 1:** *Determine what data is required to thoughtfully and proactively build and manage special education budgets.*

DMC has engaged in conversations with the Special Education Director and Business Manager to discuss the data required for planning, budgeting, and allocating staff. Through these conversations, DMC has started to review existing budget and planning documents, which will help inform decisions about what information is required to build thoughtful plans and budgets. Discussions have also begun to determine what data may be required for planning and budgeting transportation, special education tuition, and other non-staff expenses.

**Objective 2:** *Create a system to easily, accurately, and quickly collect and analyze the information required to thoughtfully budget, manage, and forecast special education spending.*

Based on these discussions, DMC has collected and reviewed existing budget and planning documents. DMC has facilitated conversations regarding the data required for planning, budgeting and allocating staff. Through discussions with central office staff members, DMC has started to determine who and when data will be collected, and will continue to engage in discussions with staff members. Collecting this data is the first step in creating a system for budgeting, managing, and forecasting special education spending.

**Objective 3:** *Help develop staffing and workload criteria (aligned with the district vision of service delivery) for special education staff.*

DMC has worked with district leadership to establish the roles of staff who will participate in a time allocation study this month. Focus groups with special education staff were held the week of November 26<sup>th</sup>. The focus groups helped the district and DMC learn more about the day-to-day responsibilities of staff and gain a full understanding of current roles, responsibilities, and time commitments. During the week of December 10<sup>th</sup>, staff participated in a survey using an online tool, dmPlanning, and filled out an online form to enter their typical weekly schedule, with technical support from the DMC team. The information for this survey was collected in early December. DMC will analyze the resulting data along with the insights gained during staff focus groups, and will share the data with the district, allowing district leadership to better understand how staff spend their time across the district and within specific buildings. The information will also empower district leaders with the information they need to make informed staffing allocation decisions.

**Objective 4:** *Develop an integrated system linking special education, business office, and human resources* and **Objective 5:** *Implement a web-based technology tool to help develop staffing guidelines, building allocation rules, and to ease ongoing data collection, forecasting, and budgeting.*

Based on the information collected from focus groups and the online survey, DMC will work with district leaders to begin executing on the final two objectives in the project plan. This data collection and analysis will help the district and DMC develop a system for creating well-aligned budgets across offices and departments, and to implement the dmPlanning technology tool to better manage and forecast special education budgets. Work on these steps will continue over the next two years, as DMC helps the district develop the technology tool and provide implementation support as the tool is rolled out.

**Project 4: Provide project management for the creation of a special needs school on district-owned property.**

The School District of South Orange & Maplewood is committed to meeting the needs of as many students as possible within the district. To that end, DMC will help manage the district's efforts to expand program offerings. DMC will help the district leadership manage the program creation process, including:

- Identifying which student needs can best be met through new programming.
- Providing guidance in program development.
- Providing guidance on space requirements.
- Managing implementation for September 2013 opening.

DMC is currently reviewing a number of alternatives proposed by the district to build new programming in partnership with other proven partners.