

PRODUCT ONE

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

ADVOCATE FOR STUDENT LEARNING

“People without information cannot act; people with information cannot help but act.” Ken Blanchard.

Description (suggested 2 pages)

What specific intervention was designed to close the achievement gap between student groups in your school and/or district?

The specific intervention that has been focused in this product is a targeted approach to guiding building administrators and special educators as they support students in demonstrating that they are making progress toward the state standards. The components of this intervention include establishing training structures and monitoring systems to promote student learning as measured by district performance indicators that the district students in special education programs improve demonstrated success in state assessments through three main avenues.

1. *Appropriate supports provided through planned and practiced accommodations and appropriate curriculum/instructional strategies*—the main ways in which this tier of the intervention was addressed was through discussions directly at the building level, dissemination of information to teachers through email communications, individual conversations with teachers, and arrangement of the available accommodations in our computerized IEP program. Presentations were made to the entire staff at two schools on selecting and using accommodations to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Similar presentation was made to all teachers new to the district in fall of 2008 (given low new hire rate, no such venue was available in fall 2009).
2. *Assessment decisions made based on data*—reviewed student results by studying options, running sample reports and discussing with building teams to inform instructional decisions.
3. *Participation in Washington Alternate Assessment System (WAAS) strengthened*—through staff training, monitoring, and other supports. In SY 08-09 I put together a team of 2 teachers, a program specialist, and me to be the WAAS training team. We attended multiple trainings at the ESD and systematically supported teachers in completing the state assessment for students with significant disabilities. This team continued support with differing focus in SY 09-10 (tab 7).

1. Why did you choose this project?

State assessment data is showing that students with disabilities in the district are performing significantly below students with disabilities across Washington. This project was chosen as it addresses areas such as staff supervision, curricular and assessment guidance, parental involvement, studying data, and many more areas as you will learn. Additionally, in reviewing data collected last year (POLE 360, self-assessment through personal capacity activity), it was clear that focusing on this project would not only support student outcomes. It would also allow for personal growth in specific areas—most importantly improving connections with those considered my peers (building principals) in the development, implementation, monitoring, and celebration of movements that impact student learning. As the Assistant Director of Student Special Services, my duties are essentially to *promote compliance and fiscal responsibility and support special educators in making key decisions to improve student learning*. This intervention provides opportunity to address both aspects of my duties.

2. What was your specific role in the intervention?

My specific role in this intervention related to development of the vision, organization and communication. In many cases, this also includes planning and implementation of resources and professional development. The Student special services leadership team consists of the Executive Director, myself, two program specialists, and two contracted specialists focusing on compliance and elementary program problem-solving. At times, facilitation of these sessions is shared with others to maximize benefit to all participants.

3. How was the intervention supported by research/best practice?

The practice that has guided my efforts has been continuous improvement through studying data, studying what works, and developing a plan to support student learning. The district strategic plan specifically guides schools to implement changes in the way we do business through organization of professional learning communities. “District level leadership contributes positively to student achievement when an understanding of defined autonomy is shared and honored by all district office personnel” (Marzano & Waters, 2009). This intervention, therefore, aligns directly with the objectives outlined in the district’s strategic plan. Bellamy, Crawford, Marshall, and Coulter (2005) list the following characteristics of high-reliability organizations: “(1) clear goals and constant monitoring of the extent to which goals are being met, (2) an understanding of the necessary conditions under which these goals are met, and (3) immediate corrective action when goals are not being met.” In Marzano’s *What Works in Schools, Translating Research into Action* much research is discussed regarding action steps in improving student outcomes—these have been the foundation for the implementation of this intervention.

5. What barriers to Student success needed to be addressed by the intervention?

The barriers that existed prior to implementation of this intervention plan involve my direct stakeholders: the staff and administrators charged with designing, implementing, and monitoring specially designed instruction.

Specifically:

- Acceptance by teachers that their independent, solitary way of teaching and assessing students needed to change by openly discussing data and making strategic improvements to student learning
- Developing a means of accessing staff for training.
- Given reduction in leadership team staffing and the scope of our roles, setting up (and meeting) appropriate timelines and activities were often a challenge.
- Building principals did not all have knowledge of appropriate special education procedures and implementation relied on their supervision and support.

It is my hypothesis that these barriers are relative to the availability of direct contact and support that can be provided to each of these groups.

6. How was this intervention connected to the school and district vision?

The vision of the district is to develop in students the skills and attitudes that will maximize their potential for lifelong learning and ethically responsible decision-making. This intervention is aligned with the strategies given in the district plan that directly support teachers in making key decisions to improve student learning. Over the last two years, the district has developed a renewed Strategic Improvement Plan that clearly outlines strategies and responsibilities to improve student learning. Goal 1 of this plan is **Student Achievement**, “With district support, leadership, and guidance, each student will achieve proficiency... (2009-2012 District Strategic Improvement Plan, p.6).” The district vision is to support all students in achieving high standards of learning. This particular group of students is not making adequate progress; are not achieving high standards of learning.

Guiding Questions:

7. What Student groups were involved in the intervention?

The target group of this intervention involves K-12 students served in special education programming. Within this were two distinct groupings—students with significant disabilities (implementation of the WAAS portfolio) and students served through our resource room programs. The district provides special education services to just under 1800 of our more than 14,000 students.

8. What other programs, practices or cultural aspects of the school/district were impacted?

Taking the words “that all students can work toward grade level standards and meet graduation requirements” to action and internalized belief is a cultural shift in itself. Practices of making excuses for student achievement (or lack of) can no longer be an option. This consistent message is having far reaching impact not only on special education programs but also on general education programs as well. This is further discussed in the Analysis section of this product.

Analysis (suggested 8 pages)

1. What were the particular data used to indicate an intervention was needed and why were these data used?

The specific data used in guiding student improvement includes:

- WASL Testing outcomes and trends (disaggregated as able by building, special education students, alternative assessment results) over a period of several years. This information was then summarized for each building in a “cliff’s notes” format to further support delivery of intended messages (tab 9).

Rationale: Federal, State, and Local mandate. Goal one of the district’s strategic plan specifically calls out student’s successful participation in the Washington Comprehensive Assessment Program.

- Reports run through IEP Online system addressing accommodations for testing and testing plans
 - District
 - State

Rationale: By studying the data specific to the district’s IEP development, we can see the trends in student participation in state and district assessment and intervene directly with staff who may not appropriately address this through the IEP team. Supporting authentic provision of accommodations or teaching staff how to most effectively prepare students for state and district tests is part of the intent of special education legislation.

- Student-specific test result data
 - Ran sample reports for each building on strategically-identified students and discussed with building teams

Rationale: By studying student-specific test results, each building can make informed course adjustments in access to general curriculum, focus of targeted specially designed instruction for that student, and study overall strengths/needs of program design.

- Monitoring parental involvement in IEP team meetings

Rationale: This specific data has been collected for the past three years and discussed with staff. By monitoring whether parents were present at, and participated in, the IEP team meetings, we can make predictions as to the involvement parents have in the overall process of their student’s instructional plan. This premise is supported in the research review conducted by Marzano, as he states that “parents’ interest in and communication about the schoolwork of their children” has a direct correlation to student achievement (p. 128).

2. How was research-based best practice used in the intervention? (Standard 2)

See italicized information above providing rationale for each data used

3. Explain how the intervention promotes equity and a culture of high expectations for student achievement? (Standard 2)

A district-wide focus on increasing the achievement of students with disabilities can only result in increased expectations for student performance. The district’s Department of Student Learning has created highly valuable tools to support teachers in focusing curriculum and instruction toward power standards identified in core content areas K-12. For students served in our special education programs these standards won't make much of a difference, though, if they are not accompanied by a rigorous curriculum that is aligned with those standards. Yet in too many special education classrooms students continue to be taught on a low-level interpretation of the standards based on what we know student can currently perform. When teachers design programs based on student standards at his/her chronological age/grade level, taking into account what they do not know and do know, a significant shift will occur in the equity and culture of high expectations for the achievement of our students. To support this effort, I am participating on the district’s Standards-Based Report Card committee to ensure that students on the continuum of performance standards can have access to appropriate grading systems—thereby removing yet another perceptual barrier/excuse. Another district-wide impact from this project aligns with the global district focus on professional learning communities. By openly discussing data among teachers, teams, and schools, we can move toward changing the culture to accept the professional responsibility all teachers have in moving all students toward higher levels of achievement.

4. What data and feedback were collected and how were they analyzed and used during the intervention? (Standard 2)

Data and feedback were collected several times over the course of this intervention.

Data was collected/collated in a variety of ways:

Summative:

- District WASL data
 - Current/trends
- Building WASL data
- Individual student data

Formative:

- District testing accommodation plans
- Building testing accommodation plans
- Collecting Washington Alternative Assessment System (WAAS) portfolio work samples early and providing feedback
- POLE 360 (used strengths, perceptions results to develop strategies of approach)
- Individual student data

Email surveys were conducted in several instances:

- Surveying teachers regarding assessment support needs
- Surveying building administrators regarding the data that would be/has been helpful

Investigative:

- Conducting random or targeted reviews of student Individualized Education Program (IEP) plans to guide interventions with particular teacher(s)
- Running reports in our online IEP system to monitor effectiveness of interventions as they relate to program design in completion of paperwork.

This data was analyzed during the intervention in a variety of ways. At times I connected directly with teachers of students whose profile was of interest. In late fall 2008 I met with the principal and resource room teacher at one building, bringing with me an individual profile of each student served in special education. We studied histories of DIBELS, MAPS, and WASL testing, compared these to the IEP goal focus of these students, and determined some course corrections that needed to be made in terms of IEP priorities. This school did celebrate some notable increase in special education student performance when looking at cohort numbers—it is anticipated that this year's MSP will reflect an additional increase given the length of time that this intervention has been in effect. Given the success of this particular meeting, I suggested to the special education leadership team that the large data carousel venue we had previously organized be altered to the building level. These individual building meetings have become a major layer of this intervention.

5. What was done to honor and celebrate successes and contributions? (Standard 2)

- A key vehicle for celebration has been through our weekly publication, *News from the Annex* (this is the name of our special education office building—the Administrative Annex). With deliberativeness I have regularly added recognition in the **Staff Spotlight** section to celebrate those who are making progress or notable effort in any of these goal areas. Additional areas of this publication have been used to reinforce prior-stated expectations in the **Compliance** and **Resources** sections.
- Clock hours have been provided for nearly all applicable professional development sessions to honor the time and effort that staff put forth in attending.
- Host a WAAS Portfolio Completion Pizza party to celebrate and acknowledge the tremendous effort of our teachers (last spring).
- Sending Thank You notes to staff that supported each other or me in delivering the messages in promoting our goals (I designed a postcard that we had mass-printed for our leadership team—each of us has a goal to send out 5-10 per week).
- Highlighting the efforts and options available to staff in the quarterly newsletters that go home to families.

6. How did the intervention impact Student learning? (Standard 2)

The results from the first year that I implemented this plan (08-09) were quite successful in the area of alternate state assessment (tab 6). I anticipate that we will see a continued improvement trend in student performance on state assessments due to increased focus on standards-based instructional strategies—with the data discussions we have had, plus the phenomenal supports buildings have been receiving from our department of student learning, teams have an abundance of information with which they should be able to use to make a difference.

A critical component of this intervention involves the provision of appropriate curriculum to classrooms. Through a Building Support Team venue (tab 8), curricular purchases have been made to support the efforts of teachers to provide improved outcomes for students that go beyond the contractual and non-regulated \$250/per year per special education teacher. Using a purchase request form, teachers articulate the needs of their program, a request for supplemental curriculum, and the data that is used to make their selection. These teachers have shared follow up thoughts on the specific impact on student learning of curricular purchases made this year:

"I used this program in the middle school and found it to be the most effective spelling program I tried. I tracked the data in reading and spelling during a previous year's program. Then implemented and tracked the data when I implemented the [Spelling Through Morphographs] program. The previous year I saw little change in reading and spelling data was very disappointing. The students did not demonstrate growth and several students data indicated there was regression after a year of working hard on spelling. The next year, I found no students showed regression, some stayed the same and some showed growth. The significant finding was what happened in reading. All my students demonstrated growth and several students showed multiple years of growth. I highly recommend the use of this program in middle school and would share how I used it with anyone interested." Middle School Special Educator

“Corrective Reading (workbooks): This is the workbook that goes with Level C in the program. The students simply have to recall information from the passages. I find that using the Comprehension Workbooks (different program but still SRA) along with the SRA Decoding program gives the students much more practical instruction in making analogies, inferring, making deductions, etc. I’m not sure if I would order the workbooks again for the decoding program if I am using the Comprehension Program at the same time.”

“I use the [REWARDS] program in conjunction with the SRA Decoding program. I begin the semester with REWARDS and the transition to the Level C decoding program is much smoother. Students, who were struggling to raise their reading rates last year, began reading much faster in the decoding program after the REWARDS program. There was such a marked improvement that I was able to break one class into two groups. One moved to the last half of the book (Level C), the other stayed with the beginning. I will be reteaching the REWARDS program at the beginning of the 2nd semester to “catch up” new students and for a refresher/review. I am also going to implement REWARDS in my lowest reading group to see how REWARDS will work with this struggling group of readers. I will definitely want to reorder the REWARDS program.”

Guiding Questions:

7. What effect did various stakeholders have in the development, implementation, and success of the intervention? (Standard 4)

The intervention plan has been seriously impacted by the stakeholders in this situation. Consistent with longitudinal research studies, district data demonstrated discrepancies in performance indicators between students who had a higher participation the general education setting and curriculum than those who did not. Similarly, students who find that coursework and schedule is appropriately challenging and motivating are more likely to stay in school until graduation. Parents, in agreement with federal law, are consistent in valuing that their child be served in the least restrictive setting appropriate, which is discussed in terms of required supports during the annual IEP team meeting. Teachers, both general education and special education, impact the implementation of this aspect of intervention based on the degree to which each are capable, knowledgeable, and willing to implement high standards-based instructional programming and accommodations for students with disabilities. Building and district level administrators encourage departmental interventions that can increase student success, graduation rates, and AYP results.

8. What evidence is there that the needs of Students and families were kept at the forefront of the intervention? What stakeholder voice do you have to verify? (Standard 4)

Parents: As discussed earlier, the knowledge that parent involvement in student programs can be a significant factor for student achievement is widely accepted. Efforts made to involve families in this intervention included increased prompting of teacher staff in the types of involvement they could solicit and in reaching to parents as I could through student meetings and our department newsletter. Teachers have been given resources to support increased authentic parent involvement in the IEP process. Additionally, teachers are aware that we keep data on parent participation in IEP team meetings (as indicated by a signature on the IEP and documentation of their input on team meeting minutes). The fact that my position is not at a building seriously impacts my direct work with families that might generate actual voices of verification of parents as stakeholders. However, the district Special Education Programs are in the process of surveying families about this and other aspects of special education programming (as part of the state monitoring process). The student special services newsletter is published three times each school year. In each newsletter, parents are given resources that might assist in the education of their students. Based on phone calls to the secondary program specialist, parents are using some of the resources that are given with a focus on participation in general curriculum (such as Bookshare.org).

Students: The evidence is yet to be seen given the limited time for outcomes of student achievement. This will occur through measurable improvement on student achievement—data focuses on student factors. At this time, the focus on students themselves has been genuine. In an article published on portfolio assessment, Vincent Melograno claims that education may be enhanced by collecting portfolio items which reflect students’ skills, understandings, social behaviors, and values. In working with teachers to determine appropriate grade level experiences as part of our WAAS Portfolios, I have shared this reality. To help teachers manage this requirement, I have supported interest assessments, teaming conversations with grade level subject experts, and sharing of resources with other

special education teachers. Students as stakeholders are also kept at the forefront of this targeted intervention by studying their data to make decisions about programming. Additionally, with each building team meeting that occurred this year, I ran a report of at least one special education student in each grade level that addressed a summary of all state and district-collected test information. When sitting with the school staff with reports in hand, we were able to look directly at the student's assessment results, present IEP and evaluation, and accommodation summary. This allowed teams to experience first-hand the way in which all the possible data might be of support to specific conversations.

9. What was done to support and develop teachers in the implementation of the intervention and to what extent were these efforts successful? (Standard 2)

- Presentation to staff at district's new staff orientation (SY08-09)—having had opportunities to interact with some of these staff since, it is clear that the messages were heard. I have also received calls from building principals saying that they've heard of the resource I created and could I share/discuss.
- Staff evaluation focus—for each observation preparation, therapy staff are now required to explain to me how they have collaborated with general and special educators in preparing the lesson or instructional focus for the particular student. I view this as extremely successful given the outcomes of these discussions. Therapy staff members are finding that they are increasingly connected to student success in general curriculum when we put them in these situations.
- IEP Module training (SY08-09)—over the course of several offerings, teachers were released to spend ½ day in training regarding developing IEPs that not only met compliance regulations but also were standards based. I used a training module provided by OSPI and modified it to fit the specific practices of the district, while adding in resources from a federal database of support materials.
- IEP new staff training—for special education teachers and ESA staff, this is the first opportunity to indoctrinate them into the philosophy of our department—though the focus for this day of training is on compliance, it has been extremely successful to infuse the thinking that students are all general education first and that the purpose of specially designed instruction is to support students in accessing and participating in the general curriculum.
- Data carousel focus (SY08-09)—this was considered a success in terms of making people aware of the special education data; however, it did not generate sustained, specific conversations that led to changes at the individual IEP or classroom level.
- Building data notebook (SY 08-09, 09-10) and individual meetings with *each* building team (SY09-10)—with more than 80% of our building meetings behind us, we are seeing successful outcomes (tab 9). I have had follow up conversations with 3 building principals and 5 special education teachers regarding implementation of their action plans.

Here are some quotes from principals when surveyed in preparation of this year's data...

Was this binder of information useful to you/your building? How -

"It was very helpful to have the data collated to bring up discussions with RR teacher about effectiveness of current support to RR kids with behavior difficulties and/or problem solve trends that were showing up."

"Yes, to become more aware of student need in spec. ed."

How might you use a collection of information that will be provided to you this year?

"Meet with the special education teacher, and grade level teams (PLC) to determine plan of action/instruction for students."

"To work with my RR and grade level teams to more carefully track students."

Any other comments:

"I am sure that this was a pile of work, but it was very appreciated and helpful to have it all in one spot."

"The binder has most of the information we use to review and establish our SIP building plans. It was nice having it so nicely prepared. If you are planning on preparing it again this year a comparison of years data would be helpful to look at trends."

"All trend data and comparisons was great."

Student Performance Summary was good

"WAAS Summary was good. Any cohort data would be great. So any SPED kids that were at school in third and fourth, or fourth and fifth, or all three would be great."

"Thank you!"

"It would be nice to use the data from last year as a baseline and receive the data from this year in comparison."

“A comparison chart that shows how our students do in relation to other schools in the district – this would help as we move toward PLC sharing of information.”

“First of all I found the data helpful and I am using it with our SIP team this year to examine trends in data around trends in discipline. It also helps paint a picture as how our suspensions compare to other schools and how suspensions do not necessarily mirror our demographics.”

- Building support process (SY09-10)—though not my idea, I am including this in the list of steps toward intervention because I have since promoted my intervention through this process (see curriculum purchase notes above for impact of this initiative).
- Aggressive support for WAAS portfolios for SY08-09 followed by a continuum of support plan for SY09-10 (tab 7). This was extremely successful for teachers both years with two exceptions. Two teachers (one new to the district this year and one who struggled with portfolio process in the past) did not take full advantage of the support system. These two teachers will likely require a higher level of principal intervention next year to support their students’ successful completion of portfolio assessment.

10. What impact did the intervention have on providing a safe, efficient and effective learning environment? (Standard 3)

To authentically address this question, a summary of district discipline was created and shared with buildings. This data was disaggregated by students served in special education versus general education students. With some buildings, we took it even a step further and created a comparison of percent of special education students compared to percent of general education students in the building. Conversations at our building team meetings are leading to unified steps in which I can team with building administrators to ensure students are receiving appropriate instruction—and will ultimately positively impact the overall learning environment.

11. What management skill did you use to identify, prioritize, and address challenges presented by the initiative? (Standard 3)

The various data used in this intervention was analyzed continuously to be sure that in guiding others toward this initiative my reasoning was sound. An effort was made to ensure that all written correspondence was clear and concise; recipients were able to identify what was expected of them and were also able to both celebrate successes as well as target improvement. When direct meetings occurred, collaborative conversations focusing on the realities and agreed-upon need to improve opportunities for student learning were our focus. In doing so, I made every effort to communicate that the results were “OUR” results, not ones owned by anyone in particular. You may recall that previously when barriers were discussed, the main barrier was that teachers in special education have a longstanding history of not being required to follow any prescribed curriculum pacing guides, use any particular strategies, or really report any specific data—thus, accountability of special educators in job performance has been largely limited to managing their classroom environment and ensuring that parents are pleased. This is not to say that the bulk of our special educators were not doing their jobs—most are and have been. However, they have largely been doing so in a bubble that is separate from the overall mission of schools and district. By bringing building leadership into the discussions about student assessment options, provision of accommodations, and the focus of targeted interventions, they have an avenue to better support student improvement. In schools that are performing at a higher level (special education students), principals are already having those conversations.

12. How were decisions made in obtaining, allocating or reallocating resources (e.g., time, financial, personnel, professional development) to support the change process? (Standard 3)

During the school year last year, we made a calculated decision to dedicate financial resources to allow us to release teachers for staff development. Over the course of the year, all teachers were released at least once to participate in the IEP Module training I planned and implemented with the program specialists’ support. Additionally, I arranged for the release of all teachers of students accessing alternate assessments to be trained. We also made a deliberate effort to ensure staff receives clock hour opportunities when involved. Given the significant reductions in budget this year, staff releases were limited to those who were interested in making the difference by volunteering for particular committees. Preparation of material reviews were created to maximize the impact possible when attending building team meetings. In short, this change process is not costing the district additional resources; we did not budget for the curricular purchases that have been made, as the building support process for purchase requests is creating a venue that prevents those who want a quick answer from accessing resources that historically they weren’t using effectively anyhow. Further, a follow up requirement was initiated to increase the accountability factor—teachers have to maintain data systems to assess effectiveness of any resources allocated.

13. What evidence do you have of how you treated all stakeholders fairly, equitable, with dignity and with respect? (Standard 5)

Evidence of this nature is difficult to obtain—I have solicited comments from the teachers and others with whom I have worked to ensure that this is true. By the time that I make this presentation for real, this will be fleshed out more completely. I do know that after one building meeting a teacher was reportedly upset about the data picture in her building, internalizing that the results were due to her ineffectiveness. Since then I have worked with her to better understand the factors of the data, make plans for altered strategies, and to involve her general educators differently in the instruction of the students. Likewise, at all subsequent meetings, I have made a concerted effort to find authentic celebrations and highlight those as well as reinforce the message that ALL involved in the instruction of students with special needs are in a position to change the outcomes for students.

14. What opportunities and what challenges were presented by laws, regulations, and policies that affected the change and how did you address these? (Standard 6)

In implementing changes to programs for students with special needs, all filters need to run through the filter of IDEA—the Individuals with Disabilities and Education Act and the subsequent Washington Administrative Codes that govern its interpretation in our state. These specific regulations, as well as state requirements, dictate the options available for assessment plans and accommodations. In turn, they guide us in the provision of accommodations and instructional strategies that need to be considered for daily access to curriculum. An opportunity that has affected this initiative is the legal requirement for least restrictive environment. As we discuss this consideration, teams are increasing in their comprehension that students will perform to a higher standard if they are afforded instruction that is in, or is aligned with, the state standards.

15. What role did communication with internal and external constituents have in promoting the change? (Standard 1 and 2)

Communication with all involved is critical. As indicated earlier, raising the level of concern without leaving an impending doom or creating a sense of futility is a fine line away from having others believe that everything will just naturally work out. In each conversation—whether in person, on phone, or via email—I have set a goal to address three overall goals: first, we have work to do (and specifically name the work); second, I believe we can get there (and work with them to develop a plan to do so); and third, I am available to support. Additionally I have engaged regularly in correspondence with OSPI representatives regarding state interpretation. Recently after one such exchange, the Alternate Assessment Coordinator at OSPI emailed, “Rhonda, You and your team are so good about consistency for kids. Thanks for all you do!”

16. In what ways have you assured that the leadership and ongoing work in this area is a shared responsibility? (Standard 4)

This is the focus of all conversations (written or direct) related to this initiative. I have consistently invited teachers/buildings to let me know what is necessary to make this shift in instructional consideration occur. This is an interesting initiative—it will look differently in each building, with each student. There is no way that this change can occur without ongoing shared responsibility. In talking with principals and teachers, they are certain of the longevity of the message: that students with disabilities require systematic targeted instructional interventions in order to make the improvements we need to make as a district. By creating and following through with procedures that have sustainability, by being consistent in decision-making, it is known that this is not a short-term initiative.

Reflection (suggested 2 pages)

1. How effective was the intervention and how do you know? Consider the effectiveness of your process, stakeholder involvement, management, and effect on school culture.

The effectiveness of this intervention is considered to be positive. While the true telling will be in the larger context of the state monitoring process over the next few years, I believe that our trend toward improvement will be forthcoming. In prior years we have developed improvement goals as part of the state grant process as a department—this intervention is part of taking the 20 indicators and openly discussing them; sharing the responsibility for student progress with the key stakeholders. When I think to the future of this intervention, I see this as a marginal success overall with some glaring successes, other seemingly ineffective results, and others—as described above—as harbingers of good things to come.

The intervention employed is most certainly meeting screaming success for students with significant disabilities as demonstrated by our data compared to prior years. Having recently studied the portfolios presented for submission to the state, those who participated in the continuum (as determined appropriate) of supports were able to effectively create a second round that are sure to demonstrate well their students’ access to general curriculum. There are two teachers who did not avail themselves of the menu of support to the extent recommended; these will

undoubtedly be the sets of portfolios that will not see the same level of success as the others.

I know this intervention has been effective because I am able to engage in conversations about student learning with more people that I have since arriving in the district. I know it has been effective because other departments are involving special education programs/special educators where they were not before. As to the heart of the intervention, whether my mission was accomplished in terms of building an understanding that students with disabilities should be exposed to general curriculum, higher learning expectations, and more rigorous instructional practices with deliberate strategies designed to enhance their performance: I will call these last two years effective stepping stones on the path toward special education reform in the district.

2. What leadership strategies and skills you employed were most effective? What might you do differently if you had to do it over again?

According to the POLE 360 completed last year, leadership skills in the area of vision and goals, leadership for teaching and learning, management and organization, and managing with ethics and integrity are perceived strengths cited by those involved in the survey. These were skill areas that I employed while focusing on stretching my demonstrated ability in some of the other areas. For example, in relation to standard 1: Vision and Goals, I was certain to inform others of my involvement in the innovation that was being undertaken. Additionally, I enhanced this effort through regular communication with various groups involved (teachers, building administrators) as to how things were going. Also according to the POLE from last year, a long-term strength of mine is in consistently holding high expectations for all involved and consistently using data to inform decisions—these were also employed. Another strategic intended outcome was to change the perception among my peers that I did not consistently demonstrate a thorough knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment—areas that had long been considered as strengths but were not evident given my transition to the district. Over the course of this intervention I have engaged in numerous conversations about instructional strategies and curricular decisions—these have been the most rewarding conversations related to this intervention as I believe that pinpointed discussions such as these are the ones that can lead to direct results for each student. This has been observed by my supervisor, as related in my most recent performance evaluation (tab 11).

As I look to the future of this intervention and reflect on the past two years, ‘do-overs’ come to mind. First, in terms of principal seminars, I would try harder to ensure that principals who needed to be at the table for the conversations were there. Second, I would change the preparation for the building support meetings held this year—while they were great conversations, they could only have been enhanced if we had spent less time identifying the data and more time discussing it—spending less team time on the ‘here’s what’ and more on the ‘so what’ and ‘now what’ of professional conversations (formula for laying the groundwork of PLC discussions as explained to us by Dr. Many). However, since do-overs aren’t possible, I will need to look critically at how we can continue to accomplish the task of improvement from where we are now.

3. What challenges were overcome and what challenges still need to be overcome?

At the beginning of this intervention, barriers were identified—at the time, I had anticipated that the largest challenge would be convincing teachers that a change in their practice was necessary; that they would need to exchange their autonomous practices with proven methodology in order to make a difference for students. It has been interesting because the actual challenge was in convincing special educators and building administrators that students CAN perform to a higher level than they are presently. In schools where they have identified excuses (called factors) for their low student performance, teachers are not taking advantage of the change process by not attending support meetings, not making available their data for review, not engaging in the discussions that are necessary to eventually make the difference for students. It’s interesting that in buildings where the vision that *all students can learn and all must be contributors who are accountable for the change* we are seeing the opposite of the behaviors just discussed. Another barrier identified includes the continuum on which building leaders lie in terms of understanding effective indicators of instructional programs for students with disabilities. Over the course of last year the executive director and I designed and implemented Principal Seminars on a monthly basis. The sessions that I designed focused on this intervention (standards-based instruction, instructional prioritization, choosing and using accommodations—studying standardized data by building); resources were collected or developed that were intended to empower principals in effective supervision and leadership of their special programs. While I will watch comparative data as we proceed, I will continue to attempt to engage in these necessary conversations in the more resistant buildings.

4. What will you do to sustain positive impact and forward momentum?

Building leaders in the district are seriously invested in the improved outcomes for students with disabilities. An outcome of this initiative is the improved sense of joining forces to invest in the process. Only a few years ago, building leaders called to discuss discipline concerns, need for paraeducator time, or request support when parents were dissatisfied with their children's programs. Discussions now, while at times still in the previously-stated realm, focus frequently on joint problem-solving for student learning. For the first time this year, the executive director is involved in SIP discussions and tours in our buildings. These are indicators that this is a sustainable change. What I will do is continue to focus on student learning in each conversation. This consistency in message will model the philosophy that ALL students CAN learn and that accountability is not just for the mainstream. As we move into the preparations for next year, I have asked that the focus for spring and next year's professional development center on an instructional 'SWAT' team—**Students Will Achieve** Team.

In grade level groups, I plan to work with strategically-identified teachers on identifying and using instructional strategies with their students that can increase their successes in navigating general curriculum and the overall general education setting, to develop and maintain data systems that can guide instructional course corrections (through effective implementation of Professional Learning Communities), and to make effective and efficient scheduling decisions regarding special education services (when to pull students versus providing instruction in the general education setting, how to set up the resource room schedule, etc). This SWAT team needs to first address the programs at the middle school—this is where we are not presently making a difference.

Provision and discussion of resources should also continue—development of the building data notebooks that are presented to principals prior, discussed, and a subsequent discussion meeting would be much more effective this second time around and would likely further us along on the trend of improved student learning with the tweaks discussed previously.

This project is supported by artifacts:

Artifact 1: Personal Capacity Worksheet

Early in our Pro Cert process we used forms provided by Pacific Lutheran University to gain an understanding of our then current practice of leadership. This form provided a way for each of us candidates to evaluate what our focus was at the time in each of the leadership standards. By using the completed form, I was able to identify areas upon which I need to improve. Additionally, the natural evolution of the product I am presenting occurred.

Artifact 2: Leadership Context Profile

Again, early in our Pro Cert process, this form provided by Pacific Lutheran University guided me in a deeper analysis of my department.

- First, by studying our demographics, staffing, and organizational structure, I was able to identify existing resources to accomplish my goal of improved student learning.
- The second step was to study the data available and make some predictions about how to use that data.
- The third step was to consider the aspects of our district that impact my leadership (thereby analyzing some of the barriers that needed to be addressed in my project).
- The fourth step was to study the community characteristics that influence my organization, which led me to consider the various interest groups and stakeholders as I developed the project.
- The fifth step in the profile was to consider our school improvement plan. As a district administrator, I do not have the opportunity to operate within a school improvement plan; however, our department has developed a strategic plan that addresses mission, vision, goals, and activities. This has evolved from the point originally indicated in the profile to an alignment with the district Strategic Improvement Plan (which I have enclosed in this section for your review).
- The final step is a reflection process to determine what logical implications for student achievement, creating a safe and respectful environment for students, staff, parents, and community, and accountability for learning. The conclusion, for me, was that we needed to build the capacity of our staff to invest in their own ability to support student achievement. This has led to my project.

Artifact 3: Monthly reflection journal outlining professional reading/subsequent leadership as related to the product

Over the course of the past two years, I have kept a monthly reflection journal. The first year focused on specific topics provided by Don Lapenski, my university advisor, centering around our study of professional research on topics relevant to school and district leadership. The second year became a summary of direct action steps taken in support of project development.

Artifact 4: Personal POLE 360

Last winter I invited 17 people to participate in a survey of my leadership within the scope of the six ISLLC standards for leaders of education. After studying the results, I engaged in conversations with some of the responders and with my supervisor to gain a better understanding of the areas of targeted growth that resulted. This study, and the subsequent conversations, gave rise to key activities within my project. Mostly, these were in the area of overt engagement in the leadership activities of our department. Most of my role as the assistant director is behind-the-scenes. Thus, in addressing the land of opportunity (the areas identified as *sometimes true*), I acted with deliberativeness in the foreground more often in order to be viewed as a more powerful leader in our district. To assess results, I invited some key contributors to write me letters of recommendation at the end of the 08-09 school year, which I have included in this artifact after the POLE results.

Artifact 5: WASL/WAAS Data over time

This artifact includes a couple of visuals representing the trend in the performance of students in special education programs on the WASL. This is one way I know that this project is making a difference. Interestingly we are making the biggest difference with elementary (and to lesser degree high school) students. Middle school performance is taking a downward or fairly stagnant trend.

Contributing factors that have been or continue to be addressed:

- 2006 state allowed options for out-of-grade level assessment that have not been available in benchmark grades since
- New teachers hired at elementary and high school — middle school program have had little movement.
- Middle school teachers have not attended training that has been offered, so access to staff continues to be a barrier (for some groups)

Artifact 6: WAAS Portfolio Support Plan, supporting documents, and Teacher and Principal survey results

This artifact includes a copy of the plan that was implemented for 09-10 school year. In SY 08-09 I put together a team of two teachers, a program specialist, and me to be the WAAS training team. We attended multiple trainings at the ESD and systematically supported teachers in completing the state assessment for students with significant disabilities. This team continued support with differing focus in SY 09-10 using the enclosed format. This was extremely successful for teachers both years with two exceptions. Two teachers (one new to the district this year and one who struggled with portfolio process in the past) did not take full advantage of the support system. These two teachers will likely require a higher level of principal intervention next year to support their students' successful completion of portfolio assessment.

Artifact 7: Example, Building Support Request and teacher feedback supplement

A key component in this project was ensuring that classrooms were equipped with curriculum that could meet the unique needs of students. The Building Support process was implemented this year and has been a nice way to ensure that staff are looking closely at the needs of their students through the district's Professional Learning Community format of *what do we want our students to learn, how are we going to know they're learning it, and what are we going to do if they don't*. It's these conversations that lead to the purchase request.

Artifact 8: Example, excerpt from Building Data Binder with file review

By far, the most reinforcing activity in this project has been the work directly with building teams related to their own data. This is one example of a file review that was created to guide our conversations.

Artifact 9: Excerpt from most recent department newsletter

Research is clear on the positive impact of parent support and partnership in learning. In each of our newsletters (sent to families of students in special education three times each year) I include an article relevant to student learning. Parents must know that we believe ALL students can learn, and that special education services are implemented to support their children in moving closer to the state standards. As much as possible we expose parents to the language of learning. This is an excerpt from our most recent newsletter.

Artifact 10: Most recent annual performance evaluation

In considering evidence to support that I am a leader who is an advocate for student learning, I chose to include my most recent performance evaluation.