Continuity, Coherence, and Change: Examining the Conditions for Effective Intervention Practices in an Urban School District

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Continuity, Coherence, and Change: Examining the Conditions for Effective Intervention Practices in an Urban School District

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone

Submitted by
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To the Harvard Graduate School of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education Leadership.

April 2018
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Acknowledgments

I am deeply humbled by the immense support and encouragement I received throughout the process of writing this capstone. First, I am incredibly grateful to my capstone committee for their feedback, questions, and insights. I could not have dreamed up a better team to work with this year. Dr. Eileen McGowan, thank you for being a truly wonderful teacher, advisor, and committee chair. Your guidance, support, and thought partnership helped me to find my footing, first as an Ed.L.D. student, then in the process of residency and writing this capstone. Dr. Tom Hehir, your passion for ensuring all students have access to a high-quality, inclusive education is palpable and inspiring, and had a tremendous impact on my leadership of this strategic project. It was a privilege to continue learning from your expertise this year. Dr. Brian Osborne, thank you for inviting me to the City School District of New Rochelle and trusting me to work on this important project. Your unyielding commitment to equity is making a tremendous difference in the lives of thousands of students, and it was an honor to learn from your leadership this year.

Thank you to the school and district teams at the City School District of New Rochelle for welcoming me into the district and helping me “learn the ropes.” Dr. Magda Parvey, thank you for your ongoing assistance in moving this project forward throughout the year. To the Interventions Committee, thank you for your fierce dedication to supporting the district’s students, and agreeing to take on additional responsibilities on top of your incredibly important work. Amy Goodman and Tiara Reyes-Vega, thank you for taking me under your wing(s). Not only were your support and collaboration crucial to this project, but the opportunity to observe and learn from your authentic leadership every day was one of the most impactful experiences of my residency.

This Ed.L.D. journey would not have been as powerful – or nearly as fun – without my fellow members of Cohort 6. I am tremendously grateful for the many conversations I had with each of you that pushed my thinking, helped me to see problems in new ways, and made me laugh until my sides hurt. In particular to my peer coach, Carole Learned-Miller, thank you for asking tough questions with kindness. I am a better person and leader for knowing all of you.

Many of the opportunities that have been afforded to me throughout my career were the direct result of the friendship, sponsorship, and mentorship of many leaders – most of whom happen to be women - who believed in me along the way. I would especially like to thank Dr. Laura Kanter Fellows, Andrea Klein, Abby Johnson Cedano, and Meghan Mackay. As Sheryl Sandberg said, “Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence, and making sure that impact lasts in your absence.” The impact you’ve had on me is indelible.
My family have been my rock through every up and down of my life, and this year was no exception. To my brother, Tom, thank you for being my first best friend, making me laugh, keeping me grounded, and inspiring me to become an educator and make sure schools work for all kids. To my Dad, Jerry, I lost track of the number of times you upended your own schedule to help me set up a classroom, move to a new city, or make important decisions over a diner lunch. Thank you for always believing in me, and in the importance of this work. To my Mom, Liz, I thought often this year about how you went back to school to earn both bachelor’s and master’s degrees while working full-time and raising Tom and me. I’m not sure I can verbalize, even now, how powerful of an example your hard work and quiet determination set for me. Thank you also for every small gesture that made me feel loved – and helped me stay sane – throughout this endeavor.

Lastly, to all of the students and families I’ve had the privilege of working with as a teacher and principal, knowing each of you has been one of the greatest joys of my life. You inspire me to keep working every day to become the best educator and leader I can be. Thank you.
Abstract

Public school districts are responsible for ensuring that all of their students receive a high-quality education and achieve academic success. What, then, should a district do when a student is struggling to master grade level skills and content? Research indicates that using a Response to Intervention (RtI) framework in schools can increase the success of at-risk or struggling students. However, effective and full implementation of RtI is difficult to accomplish, especially throughout an entire district. Challenges to this effort come from a complex combination of factors, including confusing and conflicting policies, competing priorities, and a long history of educators working in isolation from each other.

As a resident in the City School District of New Rochelle, I dove deeply into the dynamics of executing a consistent, effective academic intervention system in the district’s elementary schools. In this capstone, I detail how I explored New Rochelle’s current intervention practices, and collaborated with staff from across the district to redesign systems and tools needed to provide targeted, appropriate supports to students at all schools. I also present the challenges New Rochelle may face when trying to implement these systems fully, and how I believe the district can address these challenges using their current assets and resources.

Using the Public Education Leadership Project’s Coherence Framework and the eight-phase model for change developed by John Kotter, I analyze the successes and challenges of this work to date. Based on the lessons learned from this analysis, I present implications for the City School District of New Rochelle, the public education sector broadly, and my own future leadership, to advance the goal of ensuring all students receive the support they need to improve as learners and achieve academic success.
Preface

One afternoon in mid-February, I found myself sitting in the office of the Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services, with several members of her team. I had just led a meeting of the newly-formed Interventions Committee, who I gathered together to kick off a process of revamping supports for struggling students in the City School District of New Rochelle. While the Assistant Superintendent and her team shared several pieces of positive feedback about the meeting, the words of one committee member still rang in our ears. “I’m glad to be here. I think this is so important, and I’m glad you’re taking it on,” she had said. “But I can’t help but feel some déjà vu. We started the same conversations five years ago, but then things just dropped off. It’s never been a real priority. What happens when you leave? How are we going to make sure something actually changes this time?”

Introduction

When I began my residency in the City School District of New Rochelle (CSDNR), my work was guided by a seemingly simple question: If a student in one of the district’s schools is not mastering grade level skills and standards, how does the district address this? But as the conversation above suggests, in New Rochelle, the answer was far from simple.

This capstone explores two essential issues. The first is how a school district should respond to students who are struggling academically, including best practices for student support. The second is the role of school district leadership in ensuring major initiatives, such as redesigned processes for student support, are implemented at the school level with consistency. In this introduction, I provide relevant context about
CSDNR to explain the importance of these issues to this district, at this time. Next, I provide an overview of how the questions of student support and implementation came to life in my strategic project. Lastly, I provide a roadmap for the research, analysis and reflection that I lay out in the rest of the capstone.

*The New Rochelle Context*

Dr. Brian Osborne became Superintendent of the City School District of New Rochelle in July, 2014. CSDNR is a public school district in Westchester County, New York, that serves nearly 11,000 students. When accepting the position, he stated both an excitement to “work in a district that is so rich in diversity” and a commitment to “providing a strong foundation for all students, supporting struggling learners… and better preparing students for postsecondary success” (Weiner, 2014). Dr. Osborne knew early in his tenure that accomplishing those commitments would require tackling issues of inequity in resources and student performance. Further, it would require addressing a history of inconsistency in curriculum and instructional practice between schools (B. Osborne, personal communication, June 29, 2017).

The city of New Rochelle, as Dr. Osborne noted, is racially, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse. This is reflected in the school district’s student demographics. According to data reported by the New York State Education Department (NYSED), in 2016-17, 47% of CSDNR students identified as Latino, 27% White, 21% Black or African American, 5% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1% multiracial. Also, 52% of CSDNR students were classified as Economically Disadvantaged in 2016-17, indicating that their families receive some form of public economic assistance, such as free or
reduced-price lunch (NYSED, 2017). Countless times during my conversations with New Rochelle residents and district staff, they cited the city’s rich diversity as one of the main reasons they love living and working there.

However, housing patterns in New Rochelle have contributed to a kind of residential segregation in the city, divided into north and south. The north end is generally described as being wealthier – and whiter – than the south end, which has a higher percentage of students living in poverty, a predominantly Latino population, and a growing number of English Language Learners. Magnet and other programs help to maintain diversity across New Rochelle’s seven elementary schools, but housing patterns still have an impact. For example, at George M. Davis Elementary School, the district’s northernmost school, 32% of students were classified as Economically Disadvantaged in 2016-17, and 5% were English Language Learners. At Jefferson Elementary School, the district’s southernmost school, 71% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged and 29% were English Language Learners (NYSED, 2017).

When Dr. Osborne began his work in CSDNR, he recognized disparities in the district. One indicator was CSDNR’s high school graduation rate. The overall graduation rate was 80% in 2013-14, the year before Dr. Osborne became Superintendent. However, the rate among white students that year was 91%, while it was 75% among Black or African American students, and 74% among Latino students. He believed these disparities had been exacerbated by a decentralized approach towards choosing the instructional programs in each school, which resulted in inconsistencies in students’ educational experiences across the district (B. Osborne, personal communication, June 29, 2017). Dr. Osborne moved to address these inconsistencies quickly, by bringing
principals together for regular School Leadership Team meetings to foster collaboration, introducing a common math curriculum in all elementary schools, and hiring an Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction to continue moving the district toward greater instructional quality and consistency.

The Strategic Roadmap

In 2017, Dr. Osborne and the CSDNR Board of Education released a strategic roadmap for district improvement, the result of a collaborative feedback process with the community. The roadmap addresses the goals of equity and instructional coherence, particularly through strategic objectives focused on student learning. The document elaborates that, “CSDNR’s curriculum, instructional strategies, assessments, academic interventions, and grading practices will be consistent districtwide,” and “CSDNR will increase the percentage of students ready to read independently to learn in content areas by the end of third grade through tailored reading interventions; and decrease disparities in reading levels among groups” (CSDNR, 2017, 3)

Interventions are mentioned throughout the roadmap, but at the start of my residency they had not yet been a focus area for district leaders. Energy had been targeted first on creating overall consistency in CSDNR’s academic program. But following substantial progress in curriculum implementation, academic interventions became an important component to address during the 2017-18 school year. In accordance with the strategic roadmap, Dr. Osborne wants to ensure that interventions are executed consistently and equitably across the district. In addition, he wants greater insight into how to effectively resource and support school interventions to help the students in
greatest need (B. Osborne, personal communication, July 24, 2017). With these goals in mind, we established academic interventions as the focus of my strategic project.

**Overview of the Strategic Project**

In 1999, a structure called “Academic Intervention Services” (AIS) was introduced in New York through regulations of the Commissioner of Education. NYSED defines AIS as “services designed to help students achieve the learning standards in English language arts and mathematics in grades K-12” (2000, 4). It is mandatory for schools to offer academic interventions, and CSDNR dedicates time, capital and human resources to AIS. However, Dr. Osborne and Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Magda Parvey, were unsure how these resources translate into practice. They hoped to better understand how AIS currently operates in the schools, and how to maximize this structure’s effectiveness at supporting student academic progress.

Together we developed three goals for the strategic project. They were to 1) uncover, analyze and report current AIS practices in CSDNR, 2) determine what AIS practices in CSDNR should be going forward, and 3) create a plan to transition the district from the prior practices to the new. At the start of my residency, I was the only leader dedicated specifically to AIS at CSDNR’s central office. This afforded me flexibility in designing a process to achieve project goals, and allowed me to be responsive to information I uncovered in real time. However, I was certainly not the only person invested in AIS in the district, and I had to balance my vision for the project with the priorities and interests of others. As such, throughout the project I took a collaborative approach. This included on-the-ground learning from interviews and observations during the early phases of the project,
and ultimately bringing together staff from across schools and district teams to engage directly in the work of improving academic interventions in CSDNR.

Roadmap for the Capstone

I begin this capstone by examining the research base about interventions for academically struggling students, including both purpose and practice, which informed my leadership of this work. I continue by further describing my strategic project, including my theory of action and the strategy I developed to enact this theory. I present evidence I collected through the process of leading my project, and analyze the results and key learning moments from the work. I conclude with reflections about the implications that my learning have for the City School District of New Rochelle, public education more broadly, and my own future educational leadership.
Review of Knowledge for Action

In this Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA), I leverage literature on research, policy and practice to explore three key dimensions of academic interventions, which guide my leadership of the strategic project. The first is purpose. To lead CSDNR in a process of rethinking their approach to academic interventions, I first sought to understand the purpose of interventions in American educational practice, and what they are intended to accomplish in schools. The second area of research regards practices. To understand and diagnose CSDNR’s current intervention practices, I examined the most common intervention practices from the literature, including their benefits and limitations. The third major bucket of my research addressed implementation. To create a sustainable path forward for CSDNR’s interventions, I sought to understand the important conditions and factors that support, or challenge, effective intervention systems. I conclude this section by presenting two organizational frameworks, the Coherence Framework developed by the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), and John P. Kotter’s eight-stage process of successful change efforts. These frameworks became crucial to both my leadership of the project and my analysis of its results.

A Note on Terminology

There are many terms used in schools to describe frameworks for interventions. For example, as noted in the Introduction, New York state has an Academic Intervention Services (AIS) structure. The framework of multi-tier systems of support (MTSS) is also gaining popularity across the country, and similar language was used in the 2015 federal Every Student Succeeds Act. However, the predominant intervention framework
examined in the literature is Response to Intervention, or RtI. As such, throughout this section of my capstone, I use RtI to refer to systems and frameworks for interventions, except when specifically discussing research or policies about MTSS or AIS.

Purpose

Modern intervention practices in American education reflect two purposes: an alternate way to approach identifying students with learning disabilities, and a strategy for supporting academic improvement for all students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, 93). Therefore, interventions affect both general and special education. While intervention practices developed over decades, their prominence in the educational lexicon can be traced to two major pieces of legislation: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, and the 2004 re-authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These pieces of legislation reflect the two purposes for interventions in unique ways.

No Child Left Behind was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act passed during George W. Bush’s administration. The law placed intense focus on accountability, particularly on the academic outcomes of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009, 30). It also focused attention on implementing scientifically based curricula and instruction, particularly for reading, in every classroom. Though the phrase “response to intervention” was not used in the legislation, RtI systems provide research-based instruction to meet students’ needs, which aligns with NCLB (Sugai & Horner, 2009, 224-225). Further, NCLB allowed federal funds to be used for supporting students considered at-risk of not mastering grade level skills and standards (Munson, n.d.). NCLB’s focus on accountability and academic
improvement, as well as its funding provisions, promoted RtI’s goal to support the academic achievement of all struggling students.

Shortly after NCLB was signed into law, a specially formed President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education (President’s Commission) published a report with recommendations for improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities. The Commission called for the next reauthorization of IDEA to embody the principles of NCLB, and create a special education approach that does not merely “seek to meet minimum requirements, but rather embraces increased academic achievement and real results for every child with a disability” (President’s Commission, 2002, 4-5). These principles were indeed reflected in IDEA, particularly the law’s references to scientifically-based instruction (Sugai & Horner, 2009, 224).

However, the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA also reflected the second significant purpose for academic interventions, which is a process for identifying students with learning disabilities. For many years, a “discrepancy model” was used to identify students with learning disabilities, which required a significant discrepancy between a child’s school performance and his/her intellectual potential. This model drew criticism because it required students to fall far enough behind academically that a discrepancy could exist before he or she received support (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, 96). Critics referred this as a “wait to fail” model, and advocated for an approach that would put greater emphasis on prevention and early support (President’s Commission, 2002, 25). They also argued that the discrepancy model was insufficient because low academic performance is often the result of poor instruction, rather than a disability. Because of this, monitoring and
intervening with at-risk students earlier in their schooling could actually prevent many students from being classified with a learning disability (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, 96).

The 2004 IDEA reauthorization responded to this concern by asserting that states could not mandate use of the discrepancy model to identify students with learning disabilities. Learning disabilities could now be identified by providing interventions in a general education setting, and monitoring whether these supports resulted in improved academic performance. If a child did not respond substantially to a range of interventions, then he or she might have a learning disability (Martin, n.d.). To support this approach to identifying students with learning disabilities, IDEA 2004 allows schools to use a portion of federal IDEA funds to implement early interventions (Munson, n.d.).

Many parts of IDEA and NCLB are complementary, including their emphasis on scientific approaches, accountability for outcomes, and supporting the most vulnerable students. The purposes for interventions articulated by the laws are also complementary; a focus on high-quality instruction and interventions for at-risk students allows educators to more accurately identify students with true learning disabilities. However, with little implementation guidance, confusion developed about how to actually accomplish both things in practice. The dual purposes led some educators to view RtI with too narrow a lens, focused on sorting students to find those that are “truly LD,” and others with too broad a lens, as a system to solve all problems for all students (Ikeda, 2012, 276).

In 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), replacing NCLB as the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Significantly, this law continues NCLB’s support of interventions for at-risk students, allowing federal funds to be used to implement multi-tier systems of
support that address academics and behavior (Mandlawitz, 2016, 6). However, ESSA provides no further guidance on how to implement these systems in schools, and assigns responsibility for many decisions to states. Confusion persists about how a system of interventions might both support at-risk students and aid in accurately identifying students with learning disabilities. To explore how RtI may be able to accomplish both purposes, I turn next to a review of widespread, successful intervention practices.

**Practice**

RtI is alternately described as a framework, a model, a process, or a system. Whatever the terminology, it requires making ongoing, challenging decisions that affect many people across a school community (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015, 384). Given the complex nature of these decisions, the literature clearly states there is not one set way to offer interventions to students. However, RtI is based on a prevention model from the field of public health, and incorporates many components of this model (Hehir & Katzman, 2012, 109). These include three prevalent RtI components that were consistent across research studies, case studies and policy: screening to identify at-risk students, a tiered model of instructional interventions, and frequent monitoring of student progress. The literature also discussed two distinct approaches to RtI, that shape how schools may implement these components. These are the standard protocol and problem-solving models. In this section, I briefly describe the most widespread components of RtI, as well as both the benefits and challenges of the standard protocol and problem-solving models.

Universal screenings are a practice used to identify those students at risk of academic failure, so schools can closely monitor their performance and offer additional
supports as needed. As suggested by the term universal, the screening assessment is administered to all students. From there, however, practices vary. Any number of assessments might be used. For example, a district may choose to administer a short test of fundamental reading skills at the beginning of the year (Shapiro, 2009, 1), or look at results from the previous year’s standardized assessments (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, 93). Schools and districts also use different standards to identify at-risk students from those assessments, perhaps selecting students who score below a certain percentage correct, or who fall in a specified bottom percentile of students (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009, 32).

Universal screening provides the significant benefit of allowing schools to intervene early if a student is struggling to master grade level skills and standards. However, the flexibility of the process, such as the wide range of assessments to choose from, and the lack of standard performance bar for considering a student at-risk, also poses a challenge to educators (VanDerHeyden, n.d.). To ensure consistency and equity, schools and districts must be very clear and specific about their process and criteria. Decisions about when to begin universal screening are also localized and can be problematic. While the goal is to intervene early, as one CSDNR principal raised, screening at too young an age may present an equity issue if students are labeled “at risk” because they didn’t have access to the same early childhood educational experiences as their more advantaged peers (A. Bongo, personal communication, October 20, 2017).

Following RtI’s universal screening component, “multiple tiers of increasingly intensive instruction is its hallmark” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2016, 228). The most common number of tiers used is three, and as suggested by the pyramid structure presented in Figure 1, fewer and fewer students should receive services at each tier.
Descriptions of the tiers can vary slightly; here I describe RtI guidance provided by the New York State Education Department. In alignment with NCLB and ESSA, the expectation at Tier 1 is that classroom teachers will instruct all students using high-quality, scientifically-based core curricula. From there, intensity of instruction increases between the tiers by reducing group size, or increasing frequency and/or duration of services. If students require additional tiers of service, these supports supplement, but do not replace, Tier 1. Students who struggle in Tier 1, or are considered “at-risk,” may receive Tier 2 interventions targeted to their areas of need. According to NYSED guidance, less than 15% of students should require Tier 2 supports. Approximately 1-5% of students may require even more individualized attention to address their instructional needs, and receive Tier 3 interventions (NYSED, 2010, 12-14).

In order to determine whether intervention intensity should increase or decrease, educators must monitor students’ progress. All students’ academic performance should be monitored periodically. The progress of students who are identified as at-risk, or who receive support at Tiers 2 and 3, will be monitored more frequently, often with shorter,
targeted assessments (NYSED, 2010, 19). The purpose of frequent progress monitoring is to measure whether the student is responding to the interventions he or she is receiving. Progress monitoring works hand in hand with tiers of instruction; as David Prasse describes, “Delivering scientifically based interventions with integrity and monitoring (frequently) how the student responds to those interventions provides an invaluable data base of important information about the need to change or sustain the intervention” (n.d.).

However, similar to concerns raised about universal screening, there is no set standard for exactly what amount of progress indicates that a student’s interventions should be altered, or intensity should be increased or decreased. Educators grapple, then, with defining what qualifies as good progress. It’s crucial that an appropriate measure be used to assess students’ response to interventions, and, like universal screening, that districts set specific goals and criteria delineating an adequate level of response (Fuchs & Fuchs 2006, 97-98). The way schools choose to grapple with these challenges may guide which of two significant approaches to RtI they choose to implement.

In a standard protocol model of RtI (RtI-SP), a standard treatment, in the form of an instructional intervention, is given to a group of students for a set period of time (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, 95). Schools identify the general category of student need, such as phonemic awareness or decoding, and provide intervention supports to small groups of students with that need. Instructional programs used in a standard protocol model are often scientifically-based programs that schools or districts purchase, and they typically have specific structures and guidelines that teachers follow (Shapiro, 2009, 2). If a student’s performance improves in RtI-SP, treatment is discontinued for that student. If not, he or she is moved to a higher tier of treatment (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, 95).
There are a number of advantages to the RtI-SP approach. For example, a finite number of intervention programs can be provided to a large number of students. This allows for a “highly efficient use of resource allocation and allows larger numbers of students to be accommodated” (Shapiro, 2009, 3). This makes it a particularly good fit for schools who have higher percentages of students who are not currently performing on grade level. Murakami-Ramalho and Wilcox (2012) discuss this benefit in a case study about successful RtI implementation in a turnaround school. In this school, the principal instituted a block of time each day when every student received small group instruction. Students switched into small groups across classes and were instructed with programs targeted to their needs by teachers deemed best prepared to address them (Murakami-Ramalho & Wilcox, 2012, 492). Using RtI-SP helped the principal to lead a “school-wide philosophical shift,” and led to student improvement in reading, with frequent movement of students to higher levels and groups (Murakami-Ramalho & Wilcox, 2012, 483, 494).

Regarding RtI’s goal of identifying students with learning disabilities, Fuchs & Fuchs (2006) posit that RtI-SP, due to its structured, intensive nature, prevents identification “false positives,” or classification of students who are not truly disabled (97). However, a potential drawback of RtI-SP is that it doesn’t address highly individualized needs, or severe deficits. The problem solving (RtI-PS) approach, in contrast, focuses on individual children.

As Fletcher & Vaughn (2009) write, in RtI-PS, “a shared decision-making team identifies a behavior or academic problem, proposes strategies that address the problem, evaluates the outcome, and then reconvenes to consider whether the problem has been resolved” (31). Problem solving models provide the most targeted support possible,
matched to the child’s unique profile (Shapiro, 2009, 2). This allows for closer attention to be paid to transfer of skills from the Tier 2 or 3 intervention to classroom instruction.

However, given the number of personnel required to execute the problem solving model, RtI-PS is far less resource efficient than a standard protocol model. In fact, Shapiro (2009) states that at least 70 percent of students must be performing at or above grade level for a school to have the resources required for individual RtI problem solving. In addition, Fuchs & Fuchs (2006) note that there is greater room for inconsistency in implementing RtI-PS interventions in the classroom, and these interventions may not have as strong a research base as standard protocol programs (97). This presents the challenge of possible “false positives” when using the RtI-PS approach to identify students who may have learning disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, 97).

Given that both models support the goals of RtI in different ways, it’s also possible that schools may choose to combine RtI-SP and RtI-PS into a hybrid model. Shapiro writes that a “hybrid approach to RTI would offer the best of both worlds for students – clear and well designed standard protocols in which the large majority of students at some risk would respond and a more finely tuned, focused intervention built on the identified individual needs of students” (2009, 8). RtI-SP perhaps meets most needs for students at Tier 2, while RtI-PS can provide individualized support for students at Tier 3. However, for either model, or a hybrid, to succeed, RtI must “be a highly articulated system: Many and varied activities must be implemented – activities that are interdependent and that call for different skills” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2016, 229). Next, I explore the conditions necessary to support a well-articulated, effective RtI system.
Implementation

Though research shows the components of RtI lead to academic improvement for students, coordinating those components presents many challenges. As Fletcher and Vaughn (2009) write, “the most daunting aspects involve schoolwide implementation, where the scaling issues are significant” (33). To gain insight into how these practical challenges may be overcome, I explored the important conditions and supports needed for effective implementation of any RtI model, as well as probable challenges systems will face. Three key themes emerged from the literature: the need for collaborative problem-solving team cultures, strong data analysis skills and systems, and coherence across district initiatives.

In their case study of teacher teams implementing RtI, Meyer and Behar-Horenstein (2015) comment that the framework is “grounded in the practice of collective responsibility for student learning, [which] is a radical departure from how most schools have functioned for decades” (384). Effective RtI requires a “systems approach” in which separate yet interdependent activities function cohesively to improve student learning (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2016, 229). This requires a high degree of staff collaboration, which is not easy to accomplish because teachers have historically worked in isolation from each other. T.M. Skrtic (1991) argues that serving students with diverse needs, such as those targeted by RtI, requires a significant shift away from schools’ traditional bureaucratic structures toward adhocracies, characterized by teams who problem-solve together in pursuit of a common goal (171). Hehir and Katzman (2012) also refer to adhocracies as collaborative problem-solving cultures, and they stress that the leader of the school or organization must drive the creation and reinforcement of this kind of culture (37).
Collection and analysis of data for universal screening and progress monitoring are two of the activities done collaboratively in an RtI system. Throughout the RtI process, information about students’ performance and responsiveness to instructional intervention is the driver of all decision making (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, 95). While use of data-driven instruction has become increasingly prevalent in the wake of accountability-focused NCLB, effective use of data collected from assessments or student work requires a set of skills and structures. A case study about successful RtI implementation at Tucker Elementary School in Milton, MA, emphasizes this. Recognizing the importance of data to RtI, Principal Drew Echelson leveraged a Title One teacher with strong data skills to collect and organize progress information, and support teachers with interpreting it. This work was continued by his principal successor, who initiated regular meetings to review data with all staff (Ng, 2011, 10, 16). While this capstone does not address best practices for data analysis, it is clear that a foundation for collecting and analyzing information about student performance and progress is necessary to execute RtI in schools well.

Lastly, RtI must be integrated with a school’s other day-to-day activities in order to be effective, and the model chosen should reflect the school’s capacity and needs. Attempts to reform and improve education often take a “bandwagon” approach, in which educators adopt new initiatives frequently, without necessary regard for how these initiatives will work together (Ikeda, 2012, 275). The teacher teams in Meyer and Behar-Horenstein’s (2015) study expressed frustration about RtI because they perceived it as additional work, impossible to complete during regular school hours (390). Viewing RtI as an isolated initiative can create “reform fatigue,” cause confusion about priorities, and lead to less effective implementation (Hayes & Lilienstein, 2015, 9). Hayes and
Lillenstein (2015) suggest that intervention systems’ focus on quality core instruction make it a natural complement to other common reform initiatives, such as college and career readiness standards, and educator evaluation systems. However, coherence does not happen naturally, which I will explore further in my discussion of the PELP Coherence Framework. Yet pursing this coherence is necessary for interventions to be seen as an integral part of an educator’s work, rather than an ancillary initiative.

Organizational Frameworks: Coherence and Change

The PELP Coherence Framework, displayed in Figure 2, is a tool that was developed to support district leaders in managing their districts to achieve high performance. In this framework, coherence “means that the elements of a school district work together in an integrated way to implement an articulated strategy” (Childress, Elmore, Grossman & King, 2007, 1).

![Figure 2: PELP Coherence Framework](source)

Classrooms, where the interaction between teachers, students, and content occurs, are the heart of the instructional core and the Coherence Framework. However, they don’t exist in isolation. They are part of schools, which are part of districts, that exist within a broader external environment that affects the work of educators every day. These external influencers can place a good deal of pressure on educators, particularly on district leaders, and make it very tempting to adopt whatever new or popular initiatives emerge in an effort to address problems quickly (Childress, Elmore, Grossman & Johnson, 2007, 1, 11). However, as discussed in my review of intervention research, that approach is ultimately ineffective to create real improvement.

Instead, district leaders must design a strategy for improving the instructional core that “is guided by a sensible, realistic theory of change” and “includes actions and activities that are coherent and mutually reinforcing” (Johnson, Marietta, Higgins, Mapp & Grossman, 2015, 38). District leaders must then examine all elements of the district to assess whether their activities are serving the strategy. Resources, structures, and systems are the “how” of achieving strategy, and these elements are high-leverage for accomplishing the district strategy when they “work together harmoniously… [and] reinforce, rather than contradict or undermine, each other” (Johnson et al., 2015, 65, 85). However, a culture that supports high performance is also vitally important to district improvement. These cultures have not historically existed in education; effort, rather than results, was valued. Therefore, leaders must use a variety of strategies “to build new organizational systems and structures that require and prompt people throughout a district to behave in new ways” (Childress, Elmore, Grossman & Johnson, 2007, 160).
In *Leading Change* (2012), John Kotter describes the common barriers to creating this kind of organizational change, and presents a model of eight successive steps that leaders must take to enact this change (Figure 3). Kotter argues that leaders must begin by establishing urgency, because one of the biggest barriers to change is organizational inertia. It is impossible to succeed at any other steps of the change process unless people truly believe they must change, and fast (Kotter, 2012, 38). Without an obvious threat, people’s natural urge is to stick with the status quo, so leaders must actively create urgency in their organizations. They can do this by making people confront data that indicates problems in the organization, or which shows that the organization is being outpaced by those in a similar field. They can also establish urgency by setting goals so high that real changes must occur in order to meet them (Kotter, 2012, 46).

Investing employees in change efforts also requires a guiding coalition of leaders in the organization who can compellingly communicate the change vision. While an ideal guiding coalition has both leaders and managers, Kotter highlights the particular importance of the former to the success of a change process. Leaders are the drivers of change, because a “managerial mindset will develop plans, not vision; it will vastly undercommunicate the need for and direction of change; and it will control rather than empower people” (2012, 61). The later stages of the process, including generating short-term wins and consolidating gains, are designed to solidify change in the organization. However, Kotter cautions not to move away from the earlier phases too quickly. Until urgency and the change vision are pervasive in the organization, “they are always subject to degradation as soon as the pressures associate with a change effort are removed” (2012, 14).
Figure 3: Eight Phases of Change

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
   - Examining the market and competitive realities
   - Identifying and discussing crises, potential crises, or major opportunities

2. Creating the guiding coalition
   - Putting together a group with enough power to lead the change
   - Getting the group to work together like a team

3. Developing a vision and strategy
   - Creating a vision to help direct the change effort
   - Developing strategies for achieving that vision

4. Communicating the change vision
   - Using every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies
   - Having the guiding coalition role model the behavior expected of employees

5. Empowering broad-based action
   - Getting rid of obstacles
   - Changing systems or structures that undermine the change vision
   - Encouraging risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions

6. Generating short-term wins
   - Planning for visible improvements in performance, or “wins”
   - Creating those wins
   - Visibly recognizing and rewarding people who made the wins possible

7. Consolidating gains and producing more change
   - Using increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don’t fit together and don’t fit the transformation vision
   - Hiring, promoting, and developing people who can implement the change vision
   - Reinvigorating the process with new projects, themes, and change agents

8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture
   - Creating better performance through customer- and productivity-oriented behavior, more and better leadership, and more effective management
   - Articulating the connections between new behaviors and organizational success
   - Developing means to ensure leadership development and succession

Takeaways

In summary, academic interventions serve a crucial function in ensuring a high-quality education for students. By identifying students who are struggling to master grade level skills and standards and intervening early, schools and districts can support these students’ long-term academic success. However, implementing a system of interventions that accomplishes these goals presents many challenges. Conditions such as strong data systems and coherence with other initiatives are necessary to achieve full success.

Prior to Dr. Osborne’s arrival, the City School District of New Rochelle had a history of exercising very different instructional practices across schools. It also had a history of introducing initiatives that were ultimately discarded before full implementation, a problem that is quite common in American education due to the constant barrage of reforms introduced into the sector. However, this indicates that creating coherence in the system, which is necessary to successfully implement an intervention model and accomplish strategic roadmap goals, will likely also require leading a change process.
**Theory of Action**

Based on my early takeaways about the CSDNR context, project scope, and desired outcomes, I developed a theory of action for accomplishing the goals of the strategic project that drove my initial planning and leadership actions:

If I…

- Build trusting relationships with elementary school teachers, leaders, and district staff such that I can collect robust and accurate information about current AIS practices,
- Collaborate with stakeholders across schools and departments to define the purpose and practices for AIS according to district needs, including tools for measuring progress and effectiveness,
- Create and pilot a plan to implement the refined AIS purpose and practices in elementary schools,

Then… CSDNR will have an achievable and sustainable plan for implementing and monitoring AIS practices that meets the needs of students in the district, and that is supported by school and central office leaders.
Description of the Strategic Project

In this section of my capstone, I expand upon the information included in the Introduction regarding the purpose and parameters of my strategic project. I also present the phases of work I undertook to create an implementable plan for effective interventions in CSDNR.

Project Purpose

Shortly after I began my residency at CSDNR, Dr. Osborne and Dr. Parvey, the district’s Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, presented Academic Intervention Services as an area of focus for the district. Their overall goal is to use AIS as a lever to provide appropriate academic supports that help CSDNR students master grade level skills and standards. In accordance with the strategic roadmap, they also want consistency in intervention practices between schools. CSDNR dedicates time, capital and human resources to AIS. However, when I began this project, Dr. Osborne and Dr. Parvey didn’t know the details of current AIS practices across schools, whether these practices are consistent and effective, or how to best support AIS so these services improve students’ academic performance.

Because my residency tenure with CSDNR was only ten months, we set three shorter-term goals for the strategic project that support the overall goal of effective academic supports. The first goal, which addressed the information gap at the district level, was to uncover, analyze and report a range of information about current AIS practices, including the procedures in use to identify students for this service, and the specific interventions being offered to students. The second goal, addressing the concern about AIS
effectiveness, was to evaluate the initial information gathered to determine what was working well, and what the AIS practices in the district should be going forward. These practices would by driven first and foremost by student and school need, but also meet state-mandated obligations. The third goal for the project was to create a plan for how the district would implement any changes necessary to transition from the current way of executing AIS to newly-defined practices.

*Project Parameters*

The open-ended nature of this project presented a significant opportunity to impact a crucial role of CSDNR schools - supporting their most vulnerable students. However, it also created the need for a significant amount of fact finding before taking action. At the time of this writing, CSDNR does not have a centralized platform for collecting student instructional data, such as reading levels or history of receiving intervention services. As described in my RKA, information and data are crucial to making effective decisions about interventions. As a result, I would need to collect, process and review substantial amounts of qualitative and quantitative evidence in order to analyze current practices.

Given the breadth of the information necessary to gather and analyze in this project, I decided, along with Dr. Osborne and Dr. Parvey, to limit the scope of the project to elementary schools. There would be lessons learned for secondary schools, but their needs and systems are so distinct from those of the elementary schools as to make it inviable to address both in the duration of my residency. Given the district’s strategic roadmap objective to ensure all students can read independently by the end of 3rd grade,
along with the literature’s emphasis on early interventions, we determined that elementary schools were the most appropriate place to begin focusing on AIS.

**Project Phases**

*Phase 1: Building Context, Relationships, and Trust (July-September)*

Beginning in July and continuing through the start of the school year in September, I scheduled in-person conversations with CSDNR school principals, district assistant superintendents, and other school leaders involved with academic interventions. The purpose of these conversations was to build relationships, and I started my strategic project in this way for two reasons. Building trust during entry, particularly by inquiring about context and key players in the district, creates a path for accomplishing goals down the road (Jentz & Wofford, 2012, 15). Further, it became apparent early in my residency that relationships are a particularly important lever in CSDNR. As a retired CSDNR principal advised me, “You cannot forget to start with relationships here. People are still getting over their old habits, when they did everything in isolation. You’ll need to move fast to get things done this year, but take the time to make these connections. This will make or break what happens” (K. Levy, personal communication, July 21, 2017). A list of sample introductory questions I asked leaders is attached as Appendix A.

While these initial meetings focused on building relationships, I also learned about AIS during my conversations. Before talking with principals, I assumed that AIS was simply a different term for RtI, but during these meetings I discovered that AIS and RtI are considered separate systems in CSDNR elementary schools. When using the term AIS, principals described out-of-classroom, small group reading support provided by
reading specialists. This is aligned to the standard protocol model of Response to Intervention described in my RKA. However, when I inquired about the purpose and structure of RtI, particularly the rationale for its separation from AIS, principals presented different, and sometimes conflicting, responses. As noted in the RKA, confusion around RtI is common given the dual purposes of interventions. But these conversations led me to realize I could not investigate AIS in isolation from the broader system. Its connections to other school structures, especially RtI, would also be important.

Phase 2: Investigating Current Practices (September-November)

2a: Academic Intervention Services

Throughout September and October, I investigated AIS practices more deeply. I did this by meeting with every elementary AIS teacher in CSDNR, observing lessons, and exploring artifacts such as schedules and data spreadsheets. Similar to my approach with principals, my interactions with AIS teachers and other school staff always began with relationship building. There was substantial curiosity about my background and role in the district. Engaging in these conversations helped to satisfy people’s interest and aided me with understanding their perspectives. This began to establish a base of trust.

My conversations and observations were a significant source of qualitative information about AIS in the district. I captured the information I gathered about AIS programs and procedures in a table (Appendix B), which I shared with Dr. Osborne and Dr. Parvey in November. These meetings also gave me insight into the teachers’ views on AIS and their roles as reading support teachers. While AIS teachers displayed dedication to their students and a passion for their content area, they raised concerns reminiscent of
those presented in the research literature. For example, these teachers felt unsure about how the interventions they provide align with Tier 1 instruction now that a new literacy curriculum is being taught in classrooms. They presented communication challenges, particularly around sharing information with classroom teachers. They also expressed confusion about their role in the broader RtI process.

Perhaps most importantly, while the teachers stated excitement to have someone at the district focused on AIS and reading, several also expressed skepticism that anything would actually change in this area. Teachers who had been with the district for more than a few years had been involved with previous initiatives related to interventions, only to see them dropped before full implementation. Given my transparency about the ten-month duration of the residency, they expressed concern that their ideas and concerns would ultimately be dismissed again when I departed.

2b: Response to Intervention

During this time, CSDNR welcomed a new Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services, Amy Goodman, who quickly expressed interest in my project. In October, I met with Ms. Goodman and several district special education leaders, whom she supervises, to learn about the district’s special education systems. In CSDNR, a centralized Committee on Special Education (CSE) receives all requests for evaluation when a student is suspected, by either his/her parents or school, of possibly having a disability. They also manage the process of meeting with parents and school staff to determine whether a child meets eligibility requirements for special education services.
From these conversations, I grew particularly interested in the interaction between schools and the CSE when school staff request an evaluation. When reviewing examples of requests sent to the CSE, I saw substantial variance in the information included about interventions tried at the school. In some cases, no information about interventions was included at all. This prompted serious concerns among the Student Support Services team about the quality, consistency, and effectiveness of interventions provided in the schools.

These conversations, as well as principals’ and teachers’ confusion about the intersection of AIS and RtI practices, ignited my interest in further exploring interventions in the district more broadly. I felt that investigating the district’s RtI practices, in addition to AIS, would help me to better understand the challenges of providing effective academic supports in CSDNR. Following a similar process to my exploration of AIS, I met with specialists, attended RtI team meetings, and reviewed artifacts in October and November. I learned that CSDNR’s self-termed RtI practices, which include referrals from classroom teachers to discuss individual students with a team of specialists, align with the problem-solving model of RtI.

Essentially, I discovered that New Rochelle employs a version of the hybrid model of RtI discussed by Shapiro (2009). However, the district faces many challenges in implementation, because of varying understanding of purpose, teams working in isolation, and systems that are inconsistent and inefficient. Simultaneous to my process of on-the-ground learning, I researched New York state’s policies about AIS and RtI, and discovered separate sets of regulations, which arguably contribute to educators’ confusion. However, I also learned it has been permissible since 2010 for districts to incorporate AIS into a broader RtI framework.
From my perspective, the information I gathered from both policy and the district’s practice presented an opportunity to reorganize the broader intervention system in CSDNR for greater coherence. This prompted a pivot in my strategic project, and I revised my theory of action to better align with new project goals and the research on effective RtI implementation:

If I…

- Build trusting relationships with elementary school teachers, leaders, and district staff such that I can collect robust and accurate information about current AIS and RtI practices,
- Recruit a task force/working group of stakeholders from the district and schools who represent the range of roles and perspectives involved in student interventions, and invest them in the goal of improving CSDNR’s approach to student interventions,
- Collaborate with these stakeholders to define common purpose and practices for student interventions according to district needs and research-based best practices, and determine what tools and structures are needed to support these practices and monitor progress towards purpose,
- Create a plan to build and implement the necessary tools and structures, and to communicate the refined intervention purpose and practices to staff,

Then… CSDNR will have an achievable and sustainable plan for implementing student intervention best practices in elementary schools, and monitoring their effectiveness, that is supported by a representative group of leaders, teachers, specialists and support staff from across the district.
A summary of my findings, as well as an explanation of my new project proposal and theory of action, were shared with Dr. Osborne on November 30, 2017. This complete policy memo is attached as Appendix C. Dr. Osborne supported the rationale for the change, and I moved forward into the next phase of the project.

**Phase 3: Creating an Interventions Committee (December-February)**

This phase, driven by my revised theory of action, began the process of planning for the future of intervention practices in CSDNR elementary schools. Accomplishing this would require both expertise about RtI best practices and knowledge of each school’s assets and needs. As such, I proposed to form an Interventions Committee to move the work forward, comprised of a cross-section of staff from the district office and CSDNR elementary schools.

My rationale for recruiting the committee was guided in part by John Kotter’s framework for leading change, in which he argues that change initiatives fail without the involvement of a guiding coalition who have sufficient power to promote and implement change (2012, 6). Especially in light of concerns about how the project would progress after my departure, I viewed the committee as not only participants in the work, but also as a guiding coalition who could continue to implement change far into the future.

I aimed to recruit members both with formal power, including school leaders, and those with informal power resulting from their expertise, role in the RtI process, and relationships with other staff at their schools. In addition, given my short timeline and the many other responsibilities staff have at their schools, I focused my committee recruitment on staff members who had already expressed enthusiasm about helping to
refine some of CSDNR’s intervention practices. To identify these individuals, I leveraged recommendations from principals and the district Student Support Services department, as well as my own insights into each school team.

Though I crafted this recruitment plan in early December, the process extended through early February. I discussed my plan with Dr. Parvey, who manages CSDNR principals, in December. She was supportive, but requested that I present my work so far and my next steps to elementary principals as a group before engaging their recommendations. Due to school breaks and other trainings and activities, the next meeting of elementary school principals was scheduled for January 23, 2018. This became the next major benchmark in this phase.

During this time, I developed a document providing an overview of the Interventions Committee’s purpose, which is attached as Appendix D. I met with Student Support Services leaders to get their recommendations, and many requested to join the committee as well. When I met with principals on January 23 to share my findings and explain my request for Interventions Committee members, they responded positively. Their only stated concern was limiting the amount of time their staff members would spend away from schools. I had anticipated this concern; as reflected in the overview document I shared, my plan for working with the committee involved mainly 1-on-1 meetings and digital project management.

From January 24-January 26, 2018, I followed up with elementary school principals via phone and email to finalize their recommended committee participants. The following week, of January 29-February 2, 2018, I contacted all CSDNR educators who

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1 This document was influenced by the work of Sarah Warren, a 2017 Ed.L.D. graduate. She published a similar document in her capstone paper, which is included in my complete list of references.
were invited to serve on the committee. All individuals contacted agreed to serve, and a kickoff meeting was scheduled for February 13, 2018. A full list of Interventions Committee representatives is attached as Appendix E.

**Phase 4: Working with the Interventions Committee (February-present)**

On February 13, 2018, I led a meeting of the Interventions Committee to kick off our work for the spring. Sixteen out of twenty-one members attended, and all others met with me individually in the days following. One goal for this meeting was to facilitate face-to-face connections between members, especially since much of our work going forward would be remote. It gave me an opportunity to explain the logistics of how we would work together digitally. But most importantly, the meeting provided a key opportunity to establish collective purpose – of our committee, and of interventions in New Rochelle. The agenda for this meeting is included as Appendix F.

During the meeting, the Interventions Committee co-constructed a statement of purpose for interventions in CSDNR, as well as a priority list of systems, tools and materials that could support the district’s ability to achieve that purpose. However, a few major challenges were also raised during the conversation. These were generally aligned with trends I had previously identified in CSDNR, specifically the need for a central data management system, and requests for greater support of Tier 2 and 3 providers. But the most significant themes that re-emerged were the issues of consistency and follow-through. Several committee members shared that the district undertook a similar effort to create consistency in the RtI process about six years ago. Yet, tremendous variability in
practice was evident today. They wanted to know how to ensure things would turn out differently this time, especially given the time-bound nature of my residency.

The committee’s discussion about the challenges of consistency in this area added another dimension to my understanding of the problem. As described in my Introduction, I discussed their concerns with Ms. Goodman, the Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services. I also realized that the leadership of principals was going to be crucial to the consistency, continuity, and long-term success of new RtI practices. I discussed this at a follow-up meeting with Dr. Parvey, whose role as the principals’ manager makes her support vital to investing them in this work. These initial conversations did not result in immediate solutions, but Dr. Parvey, Ms. Goodman and I did establish a shared commitment to tackling the question of how district leadership would make sure this committee’s efforts were not in vain. I then set out to tackle dual strands of work: tools, materials and an implementation plan that would be sustainable and helpful to schools, and a strategy to support sustained, consistent execution of practices over time.
Results of the Strategic Project

In this section, I summarize evidence showing the results of my strategic project to date. I use my theory of action as an organizing framework, and identify evidence indicating progress towards my project goals.

As noted in the Description of the Strategic Project, the focus of my project broadened from AIS to RtI during the fall. I updated my theory of action at this time to better align with my research and the new project goals. Given that most of my project leadership was guided by the revised theory of action, the evidence presented here is aligned to the components of that theory.

If I… Build trusting relationships with elementary school teachers, leaders, and district staff such that I can collect robust and accurate information about current AIS and RtI practices

The first piece of evidence showing that I collected robust and accurate information is a table (Appendix B) that displays details about AIS in CSNDR elementary schools, including reading programs used and criteria for selecting students to receive reading support. However, viewing this table alone does not provide all relevant information I collected about schools’ AIS practices. For example, all schools articulated that they monitor the progress of students receiving small group reading support every 1-2 weeks. However, the specifics of this, including the assessments used, where results are recorded, and who receives the data, vary substantially between schools.

To provide further details, I also wrote a policy memo (Appendix C) shared with Dr. Osborne and Dr. Parvey in late November. This document presents additional qualitative information about AIS, including the variable data practices described above. I also present relevant trends I discovered about RtI practices in CSDNR. Notably, RtI is
also an area challenged by inconsistency, including how RtI team meetings are facilitated and how teams follow up on interventions they recommend.

In itself, the shift in my strategic project is a by-product of collecting robust and accurate information. Digging deeply into research, policy, and practice in these areas created a broader view of the district’s challenges and guided my decision to expand the project’s focus. Though trust is difficult to measure, I believe people’s candor during our conversations, which allowed me to identify many of the trends shared in the memo, provides evidence of the trusting relationships we established.

If I… Recruit a task force/working group of stakeholders from the district and schools who represent the range of roles and perspectives involved in student interventions, and invest them in the goal of improving CSDNR’s approach to student interventions

I was successfully able to recruit a working group of stakeholders, which I called the Interventions Committee. A full list of committee members is attached in Appendix E. This group included roughly equal representation from every elementary school, and a range of roles, including school leaders, special and general education teachers, and other service providers. At the school level, reading specialists and literacy coaches seem somewhat over-represented as a group on the committee. However, all of these individuals have been either special education or general education classroom teachers prior to their reading roles, which adds greater diversity to the groups’ collective expertise.

Among district leaders, members of Student Support Services team – whose jobs are closely linked with special education – are also over-represented as a group on the committee. Out of five district office representatives, four have roles involving special education. This disparity is connected to self-selection rather than my recruitment, as
most of these individuals asked to join the committee. However, I believe this reflects an ongoing tension over responsibility for the RtI process that I will explore further in the following section, Analysis of the Strategic Project.

Investment, like trust, is difficult to measure. However, participation in the Interventions Committee was voluntary, and 100% of individuals I contacted about the committee agreed to join. Further, all school-based committee members completed a follow-up survey sent after the kickoff meeting. Each member signed up to help with at least one specific system or tool in the next phase of work. Results of this survey are included as Appendix G. Their responsiveness provides evidence that the stakeholders involved with the committee are invested in this work.

If I… Collaborate with these stakeholders to define common purpose and practices for student interventions according to district needs and research-based best practices, and determine what tools and structures are needed to support these practices and monitor progress towards purpose

Purpose was the first topic tackled with the Interventions Committee. As captured in the February 13 kickoff meeting agenda (Appendix F), committee members worked in small groups to draft a statement of purpose to guide future decisions regarding CSDNR intervention practices. These drafts were shared in the whole group and used to create one unified statement of purpose. I also discussed purpose with committee members who could not attend the kickoff when I met with them later that week. This resulted in the following collaboratively drafted statement of purpose:

School leaders and staff in the City School District of New Rochelle will use a collaborative process and multi-tier systems of support to provide all students with the appropriate and tailored supports necessary to ensure their growth, progress, and success as learners.
Following a similar process of small group conversations and whole group discussion, the Interventions Committee also created an initial list of systems, tools, and materials needed to support and monitor progress towards the collectively-defined purpose. The list included updated and digitized forms for teachers to complete before referring students to the RtI team, RtI team meeting protocols, and updated training materials for CSDNR staff about interventions for struggling students.

**If I… Create a plan to build and implement the necessary tools and structures, and to communicate the refined intervention purpose and practices to staff**

This work is ongoing, however there are pieces of evidence that indicate that I will be able to complete this implementation plan by the end of my residency. Specifically, committee members have committed to building and piloting several tools and structures, as indicated by the survey results. In addition, two of these tools are updated training materials and a manual to be shared with staff, both of which will be vehicles for sharing the refined purpose and practices.

**Then… CSDNR will have an achievable and sustainable plan for implementing student intervention best practices in elementary schools, and monitoring their effectiveness, that is supported by a representative group of leaders, teachers, specialists and support staff from across the district**

The outcomes of my theory of action will be fully evident only after the work is completed. However, based on evidence of the inputs above, there are indicators this outcome will be achieved. There is a representative group of leaders, teachers, specialists and support staff who are involved and invested. Their ideas and feedback are informing both the refined practices and the implementation plan, helping to ensure these are feasible and sustainable in both the elementary schools and the district office. If this
group continues to be involved in the process of creating a plan for new and/or updated intervention practices, they are likely to support it.

Yet, despite evidence of progress towards this theory of action, evidence has also emerged indicating these intervention practices may not ultimately be implemented with consistency across the district. The concerns raised by school and district staff members regarding the outcomes of past efforts signal that even a well-reasoned and sustainable plan may be discarded. This insight suggests that my theory of action may have been insufficient to set the district on a course to tangible change. This will be further discussed in the following section, Analysis of the Strategic Project.
Analysis of the Strategic Project

At this moment, my strategic project is at a crossroads. I have experienced a good deal of success at leading this project according to my theory of action. With the support of the Interventions Committee, the project is on track to achieve the goals I established with Dr. Osborne and Dr. Parvey. However, I have also come to realize this may not create a sufficient foundation for CSDNR to achieve longer-term goals for interventions. Reflected in the strategic roadmap, these goals are to provide appropriate academic supports such that CSDNR students master grade level skills and standards, and to create consistency in intervention practices between schools.

In this section, I explore how the project reached this crossroads. First, I analyze the factors contributing to successful results so far. These include Dr. Osborne’s leadership in laying a foundation for coherence in the district, and my work to build trust, deeply understand context, and lead collaboratively. Then I analyze factors that pose a challenge to full implementation of consistent RtI systems and practices. These include low urgency to change intervention practices, insufficient leadership investment in this area, and incoherence between interventions and CSDNR’s other initiatives. This analysis will then be connected to implications that this project has for the City School District of New Rochelle, the education sector at large, and my future leadership in the field.

Laying the Foundation: Dr. Osborne’s Leadership Actions

As described in the Introduction to this capstone, Dr. Osborne worked from the start of his tenure as Superintendent to increase consistency and coherence in many aspects of the district. This is immediately evident in his decision to adopt consistent
curricula for use in all district elementary schools. It is also evident in his decision to hire an Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Parvey, to lead implementation of this curricula and investigate alignment of the K-12 program in the district. These decisions also demonstrate a focus on the instructional core that the PELP Coherence Framework shows must be at the heart of any district improvement strategy (Childress, Elmore, Grossman & King, 2007, 4).

The progress CSDNR elementary schools made towards instructional coherence prior to my arrival laid a particularly important foundation for my work with CSDNR’s interventions. As described in my RKA, ensuring strong, evidence-based instruction is delivered in classrooms is a critical first step to providing adequate support to students. In the RtI model, it is the foundation of Tier 1. Without Dr. Osborne’s leadership to establish this foundation across the district, I would not have been able to focus on the tiered supports provided AIS and RtI in schools.

Dr. Osborne also laid an important foundation for coherence by frequently bringing school principals together to share and collaborate. This is particularly important given the history of silos in CSDNR, and the diverse needs and populations served by each of the district’s schools. In Managing School Districts for High Performance, the authors argue that some differentiation between schools is natural and not incongruent with coherence. However, district leaders must “create forces that pull schools together” in order to create a system out of distinctive individual schools (Childress, Elmore, Grossman & Johnson, 2007, 290). Forces that Dr. Osborne created to accomplish this included regular meetings of the full School Leadership Team (SLT), attended by both principals and district leaders. At these meetings, leaders come together to share practices
and discuss the work of establishing consistent practices across their buildings in a way that also addresses individual school needs.

By leading processes to bring consistent Tier 1 instruction to elementary schools, and establish a sense of partnership and trust between school and district leaders, Dr. Osborne created an important foundation for me to build upon with my strategic project. These actions were critically important to success with my theory of action.

Trust, Context, and Collaboration: My Leadership Actions

Trust was a crucial element in every accomplishment of this strategic project, manifesting in two different ways. The first was trust that teachers and leaders could share openly with me, without fear of judgment or consequence. Many of the opinions and concerns shared with me required vulnerability to discuss, since they often involved admitting that an area of a person’s work was not going well. Examples include a reading teacher who told me she was unsure that she was delivering a reading program correctly, and a social worker who shared that she wasn’t confident in her leadership of RtI team meetings at her school. This honesty was vital to my ability to understand the challenges surrounding intervention practices in CSDNR.

The second manifestation of trust was people’s confidence in my ability to lead work in this content area. This type of trust supported people’s willingness to put their own time and energy towards my project. Every contribution made to my project by CSDNR staff members was voluntary. This includes the time special education leaders spent advising me, the Interventions Committee’s contributions to refining RtI systems,
and leaders’ responsiveness to my requests throughout the year. All of these means of support were necessary to moving the work forward according to my theory of action.

There are two leadership actions in particular that I believe helped me to earn this trust from CSDNR community members. The first and simplest action was taking the time to build authentic relationships before jumping into my project, by getting to know leaders and other staff members as professionals and people. These conversations laid an important foundation. As one principal remarked, he never felt our conversations were merely transactional, but rather that I genuinely cared about his students’ success. As a result, I had an open invitation to visit his school and speak to staff whenever I wished. In addition to building personal connections, I consistently kept my commitment to only share insights anonymously or in the form of trend information. Both of these actions allowed me to earn the trust needed for honest and vulnerable conversations.

Second, I progressively increased my expertise about interventions throughout the course of my residency. I shared my learning in both formal and informal ways, such as shortened versions of my November policy memo, or more casual conversations with staff members. My dedication to learning as much as possible about intervention practice and policy greatly increased my legitimacy as a leader in the district, and of this project in particular. It translated to principals asking for my support with building-specific intervention questions, and being invited to give input in meetings about RtI and AIS with district special education leaders. Confidence in my expertise earned me the trust I needed as a leader for people to willingly contribute time and energy to my project.

This project was also supported by my commitment to understanding the greater context surrounding interventions. This included digging deeply into the CSDNR context,
including the district’s organizational structure, the realities of day-to-day school operations, and the personality of each leader and school. It also involved investigating the state and national context around RtI, specifically relevant policies and best practices. Working to understand this context before creating plans or taking action allowed me to see the bigger picture around my strategic project. As previously noted, this led me to broaden my focus from AIS to intervention processes in CSDNR overall. It also helped me to understand the system surrounding this work when planning the steps of my project. This was particularly beneficial when collaborating with people whose work affected, but was not directly tied to, interventions. A salient example of this is working with the Technology team to begin setting up systems for RtI record-keeping, while keeping in mind their larger goal to streamline information management in the district.

Lastly, my focus on leading collaboratively also contributed to this project’s success to date. Engaging people across a diverse range of roles and departments throughout the course of my project was crucial to gaining the detailed understanding of context I described above. Further, collaborating with others on both plans and products made these as well-reasoned and informed as possible. My efforts to lead a collaborative process are most evident in my decision to recruit an Interventions Committee comprised of diverse perspectives from across the district. Working together with this team has already resulted in a draft purpose statement for interventions, and a plan for building important systems and tools to improve RtI in CSDNR schools. I would not have been able to accomplish this without the committee’s contributions, and continuing to collaborate with this group is likely to yield great resources for the district as a result of their collective expertise.
Challenge 1: Urgency

The work that is done by the Interventions Committee can only provide value to CSDNR if it is executed fully in all elementary schools. The evidence I’ve gathered so far strongly suggests that implementing any new practices the committee designs will involve a change process, especially given the failure of these efforts in the past. Schools will need to move away from variable approaches toward a unified understanding of purpose, and commitment to using new systems, tools, and materials. This change will require substantially more energy than is currently directed to RtI in the district at large. According to John Kotter’s eight phase model for change, the first step toward creating the energy for this process is establishing a sense of urgency.

As Kotter (2012) states, complacency about changing current practices is extremely common in organizations, even among highly intelligent and talented people (40-41). To overcome this natural tendency, people in an organization, especially its leaders, must believe change is an urgent priority. The most obvious catalyst to create urgency is a visible crisis in the organization (Kotter, 2012, 47). However, visible crises are not a sustainable way to ignite change because of the stress involved. Also, it’s quite unlikely that such a crisis would ever occur around RtI. Other methods for creating urgency hold more promise. These methods include presenting data to employees, relentlessly, that displays where there are problems or potential problems stemming from an organization’s current practices. Another method is to set goals so high that they cannot be achieved without changing practices (Kotter, 2012, 46).

Establishing urgency to change RtI practices in CSDNR would first require the top leaders of the organization to believe this area is worthy of bold action and significant
energy, at this time. As the Superintendent and the principals’ manager, respectively, Dr. Osborne and Dr. Parvey’s investment in this is particularly important. During the year, each leader has afforded me opportunities to speak to school leaders about my project, and voiced their support for it on those occasions. However, support did not equate to urgency.

I did not have enough positional or informal power as a resident to make RtI an urgent priority throughout the district on my own. However, I likely did have more ability to influence this than I exercised. In hindsight, I could have used more of the methods for creating urgency that Kotter describes to influence the priority level of this project among district leaders. For example, I could have made a stronger case for the project’s vital importance to the strategic roadmap by using data to show how the duplication of efforts in the elementary schools’ current approach to interventions drains vital resources needed for programs and services.

It is important to note that improving RtI practices may actually not be the most pressing area for CSDNR to prioritize at this time. Only Dr. Osborne and other senior district leaders will be able to make a fully informed decision about that, in light of other initiatives they’re taking on to achieve the strategic roadmap objectives. However, when it is the right time, creating urgency will be crucial to ensuring changes in intervention practices are fully implemented.

As Kotter notes, without sufficient urgency, “it’s difficult to put together a group with enough power and credibility to guide the change effort” (2012, 38). This leads to the next challenge facing intervention implementation: leadership investment.
**Challenge 2: Leadership Investment**

As presented in my RKA, the second phase of Kotter’s change model is creating a guiding coalition that will lead this work in the organization (2012, 23). Kotter describes that successful guiding coalitions have four essential qualities. One of these is “Expertise,” which includes broad enough representation of disciplines and perspectives to be sure decisions are well-informed (Kotter, 2012, 59). With the diversity of current and former roles, as well as school sites, present on the Interventions Committee, I believe that the guiding coalition I formed meets this criteria. A second characteristic is “Credibility,” meaning that members of the guiding coalition are respected among others in the organization (Kotter, 2012, 59). I also believe the Interventions Committee meets this criteria. All members of the committee came recommended by their school leaders as people who are highly respected in their school communities. My own observations support these recommendations. I have seen nearly all the committee members in action at their schools, and have observed both their peers and managers seek their opinions and defer to their judgments regarding academic interventions.

However, two characteristics that the Interventions Committee may not embody are “Position Power” and “Leadership” (Kotter, 2012, 59). These criteria require having “enough key players,” meaning people with positional authority, and “enough proven leaders” to actually move a change process forward (Kotter, 2012, 59). Considering the obstacles facing full and consistent RtI implementation, it seems I may not have accurately defined the meaning of “enough” in the CSDNR context when forming the committee. I now believe that instituting real change in intervention practices across the district requires leaders from every school, as well as Dr. Parvey, to be involved. Only
then will there to be enough positional power and leadership to succeed in the change process. I say this because school principals are the executives of their building, and ultimately determine the priorities for their teachers and staff. Their leadership is necessary to elevate the importance of this initiative, and ensure practices are implemented consistently, while still meeting the distinct needs of their schools. Similarly, Dr. Parvey’s involvement is crucial, particularly for investing principals to follow through with the changes. This is due both to her positional authority and her proven ability to drive change, displayed through her leadership of common curriculum implementation.

Based on my ongoing conversations with school leaders, both individually and as a group, I believe I gained their support for my strategic project. This was vital to gathering information about AIS and RtI, and to recruiting staff members for the Interventions Committee. However, just as support did not equate to urgency, it doesn’t equate to investment. Principals may like the systems and tools that result from this project, and encourage their teams to adopt the new practices recommended by the Interventions Committee. But implementation will require leaders to expend significant time and energy on training their staff, monitoring progress, removing barriers that arise, and possibly rethinking some of their school structures. Without being fully involved and invested in the work, this project is likely to fall short of full implementation.

In Kotter’s change model, urgency and leadership go hand in hand. Without urgency, it would have been difficult to convince all leaders to make academic interventions in their schools a top priority. However, I could have focused more of my initial recruitment energy on the leaders themselves, and planned more carefully for how
their involvement in the committee could create mutual value. Because the project is ongoing, this will be an important step for me to consider in the next phase of work.

While urgency motivates leaders to invest in a change effort, coherence makes this sustainable by integrating initiatives into a district’s overall strategy. Next I examine the role of coherence in my project results to date.

*Challenge 3: Coherence*

The research literature shows that full success of an intervention model is often impeded by the perception that RtI is just one more thing added to educators’ already full plates. But in fact, RtI can quite naturally integrate into a district’s other priorities, particularly educator evaluation systems, and standards-based curriculum implementation, both of which are currently priorities in CSDNR (Hayes & Lillenstein, 2015, 4). Effective academic interventions can be an influential and helpful component of the district’s overall improvement strategy.

Yet, in CSDNR, RtI is still largely viewed as an area that is the responsibility of specialists, existing outside the core of the general education classroom. This is illustrated particularly clearly by the substantial involvement of Ms. Goodman and other members of the Student Support Services team in my strategic project. Their involvement, including joining the Interventions Committee, was driven by their own interest in improving academic interventions in the district. The same interest did not come naturally to other district departments.

This issue is not unique to New Rochelle. The dual purposes for interventions, represented by NCLB, ESSA, and IDEA, contribute to ongoing tension over who “owns”
intervention systems in schools and districts. But discussions over whether instructional interventions should be the responsibility of a general education leader, or a special education leader, reveal a deeper structural issue that affects coherence in many areas. As is common among public school districts, CSDNR’s district office staff are divided into departments, each led by an Assistant Superintendent. These are Student Support Services, Business and Operations, Curriculum and Instruction, and Human Resources. The practice of establishing separate departments likely developed as a way to clearly delineate areas of responsibility in a district and make work more efficient.

However, RtI does not fit neatly into one department or category. As discussed in my RKA, by its very nature, RtI requires collaborative problem solving across teams and roles to be successful. In addition, effectively executing student interventions requires the support of all district departments. Successful interventions involve not only instruction, but also systems related to technology, hiring, training, and purchasing materials that fall under many different departments, in CSDNR and districts around the country. This is actually true of most initiatives a district implements as part of its improvement strategy, because the core elements of a district’s functioning – structure, systems, stakeholders, resources, and culture – also do not fit clearly into any one department or category of work. Yet, even though the work of departments is interdependent, “Too frequently they end up operating separately and sometimes at odds in bureaucratic silos” (Johnson et al., 2015, 66).

RtI implementation, then, is more than a question of whether general or special education leadership should be ultimately responsible for its success. It becomes a matter of coherence. The roles that each part of the system have to play in supporting successful
interventions have yet to be clearly articulated. Clearly mapping out how interventions can be integrated with other activities that are part of CSDNR’s strategy will be necessary to support full implementation, and to address staff perceptions that RtI is separate from their other responsibilities. Doing this will also allow RtI to fulfill its full potential as a system that supports student academic success, and contributes significantly to CSDNR achieving the district’s strategic roadmap objectives.

**Takeaways and Moving Forward**

This analysis highlights the importance of trust, collaboration, and understanding context to successful leadership of any project or initiative. It also shows that leading change and creating coherence in a district are closely linked. These elements, and the relationship between them, played a role in both the successes and challenges facing this project. Just as districts can choose to employ a hybrid of two RtI models, I now see the relationship between the components discussed in this analysis as a kind of hybrid process for the pre-implementation stages of successful project leadership:

Out of this analysis, some implications have emerged for the future work of CSDNR and the education sector at large, and my own future leadership. These implications are addressed in the following three sections of my capstone.
Implications for Self

Build Authority through Expertise

When I first began my residency in New Rochelle, many people advised me that relationships would be crucial to my success in the district. This certainly proved to be true in my experience, and my relationships with others helped me to gain access and insights in CSDNR. However, as the project unfolded, I also realized that knowledge and expertise were equally crucial to establishing myself as a leader in the district. Through the process of writing my RKA for this capstone, I became conversant in the latest policy and research about interventions. As I shared my learning and continued to build this knowledge base over time, my legitimacy in the district greatly increased. I began to be invited to meetings with people who have many more years of experience than me, and leaders reached out for my opinions about instructional supports.

While relationship building contributed to my success, in my opinion, actively developing my knowledge was what truly helped me to establish legitimacy and informal authority as a leader in CSDNR. Looking ahead, I will not underestimate the power of expertise in my growth as a leader. Just as I will create time to build strong professional relationships in my future roles, I will also create ongoing time in my schedule to expand my own learning. Keeping up with developments in the field and continuing to expand my subject-matter expertise will be crucial ways to bolster my growth as a leader.

Embrace Context as a Strength

At the beginning of our first year in the Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.) program, all students in my cohort took the Gallup Strengths Finder assessment. The assessment is designed to identify a person’s natural strengths, so they might be
developed and leveraged to accomplish goals. My top strength when taking this assessment was “Context.” According to the Gallup description, people with this strength instinctively adjust to new situations by investigating the past to understand the present. The Gallup description continues that if you have a strength in context, “you make better decisions because you sense the underlying structure… And counterintuitively you become wiser about the future because you saw its seeds being sown in the past” (n.d.).

When I first received these results, I didn’t fully appreciate the value of this strength. However, my experiences during residency have shown how important a commitment to understanding context is to my leadership. The strength of context is particularly relevant in the education sector, plagued by a patchwork of initiatives that have been piled on for many years. In my residency, the process of trying to understand how current systems came to be – not just in New Rochelle, but at the federal and state levels as well – led me, over time, to see my project in a whole new light.

I have also learned that digging into context is not just something a leader does at the beginning of a new role. It’s valuable as a practice for strategically understanding root causes for other problems that emerge over time. This became important when more information came to light several months into my project about past problems with RtI implementation in New Rochelle. Investigating this history further was critical to my analysis of my project’s current results, and will be used to craft a plan that hopefully allows the district to avoid the same problems in the future. As I continue growing as a leader, I will embrace Context as a strength that supports my ability to lead organizations into the future by understanding the past.
Become a Tempered Radical

My analysis of the strategic project’s results provided me with greater insight about opportunities I may have missed to influence greater change earlier in my residency. One example of this is the possible missed opportunity to increase urgency around the area of interventions among other CSDNR leaders.

Reflecting on this led me to two realizations that are somewhat at odds with each other. First, as part of building relationships and understanding context, I took my time learning about the norms of behavior in the district. As an outsider trying to build trust and legitimacy, I was careful not to push the envelope too far while I was still trying to understand the district’s culture. In some ways, this caution benefited me, by allowing me to establish trust and relationships that ultimately served many of my project’s goals. But on the other hand, the level of caution I took in this process led me to dedicate tremendous energy to avoiding mistakes and being sure not to step on any proverbial toes. In hindsight, some of this energy may have been better put towards activities intended to create as much positive change as possible.

I believe the tension between these two realizations is best addressed through the leadership style of a tempered radical. Tempered radicals “create opportunities for change” in their organizations by acting as “cautious and committed catalysts that keep going and who slowly make a difference” (Meyerson, 2004, 16). In other words, these leaders are able to balance being part of an organization’s culture and still creating change, by doing so in subtle ways that create small wins. Looking ahead in my leadership development, I am committed to practicing the techniques of the tempered radical, both during the remainder of my residency and beyond.
Implications for Site

*Invest in Data and Information Management*

Throughout all parts of this capstone, the collection, management, and analysis of data – specifically student academic data – are a recurring theme. In all the research literature, using data consistently and wisely is discussed as an inarguably crucial part of strong intervention systems. It is also crucial to monitoring the progress of a district improvement strategy. Therefore, I recommend that CSDNR make the district’s data and information management systems a top leadership priority. This is definitely an area that involves leading the district in a change process, since there has not yet been a unified approach to data collection and management, and many district employees will need to change their current practices. However, the district’s other strategic activities will be made substantially more effective by investing in data management.

Focusing on data in CSDNR will mean developing an educator-friendly student information platform to house data points such as assessment results, attendance, behavioral infractions, and history of support services. It is fortunate that the Technology department has already begun to work on this. However, from my observations, their attention is currently pulled in a number of directions. I recommend that Dr. Osborne set a time-bound goal for the full buildout of a data system that can be piloted by school-based staff. I also recommend supporting the Technology team in reorganizing time and responsibilities to be sure that key people can devote sufficient attention to this project.

Focusing on data management also means designing protocols for how information will get uploaded to this system. This will involve the Technology team, to determine how information can be transferred between systems. It will also involve
school leaders, who will need to agree on common assessments being administered and
the timeline for administration. Additionally, leaders will need to determine school staff
members’ responsibility for uploading this information. Depending on these decisions,
the teachers’ union may need to be involved. Finally, these protocols should be piloted
before full implementation, so teacher feedback can also be incorporated into the final
plan.

Uploading data is only useful if the district’s employees know how to use it to
inform instructional decisions. As Sharkey & Murnane (2009) write, for assessment data
to be valuable, staff members need to have assessment literacy skills and be able to create
instructional action plans in response to the data (184). From my observations, both
teachers and school leaders have varying levels of experience analyzing student
performance results and using them to create data-driven plans. Therefore, ongoing
training and support will likely be necessary. The tools and professional development
provided by the Data Wise Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education are one
place to begin exploring possible training options, especially since some CSDNR schools
already use elements of Data Wise in their buildings.

Perhaps most importantly, the process of implementing centralized data and
information management systems will involve a cultural shift. People may resist this
process for a number of reasons. One is simply the time it takes to upload information
and to analyze it thoughtfully. Like interventions, this may be seen as something “extra”
unless staff can see how it is integral to their work. But the second reason for possible
resistance is that open conversations about student performance require vulnerability, as
this process often reveals gaps in instructional practice. If teachers are unused to this,
they may become defensive (Sharkey & Murnane, 2009, 185). There is further guidance in the literature on change and coherence about how to successfully lead a change in culture. But I think it will be especially crucial that CSDNR school and district leaders model vulnerability, to show how openness about growth areas allows them create smart action plans that lead to improvement.

**Conduct a Coherence Review**

As noted in the Analysis of the Strategic Project, RtI may not be the most critical lever at this time for CSDNR to achieve the strategic roadmap objectives. To determine this, as well as to assess the priority level of all other district activities, I recommend that CSDNR conduct a coherence review.

First, Dr. Osborne and other district leaders should share widely the key activities and initiatives CSDNR will prioritize to meet roadmap objectives. Then, I recommend expanding on the strategic roadmap objectives with measurable goals, including interim benchmarks this will be used to measure progress towards the goals. In the previous section, I recommended a centralized, rather than school-based, data platform so Dr. Osborne and other district leaders can have quick and ready access to a full range of information. This will facilitate ongoing analysis of progress to benchmarks and goals. This data can also provide insights that guide appropriate differentiation between schools and the equitable allocation of resources to support schools in reaching district goals.

Next, all district departments should produce an inventory of their ongoing activities and initiatives. Together with other leaders, Dr. Osborne can review these to determine which are essential to the district’s strategy and operations, which are not, and
which may actually be working in opposition to the strategy. Ideally, any activities falling into the third category can be suspended. But most critically, district leaders can examine essential activities with the support of the PELP Coherence Framework, and discuss how to best work together to be sure those activities and initiatives are integrated and supported by the structures, systems, stakeholders, resources, and culture of the district.

*Continue Working Across Silos*

A focus on data and reviewing current activities will help the district to plan for coherence. But to actualize this, staff members need to proactively partner with people across departments or schools to accomplish the strategy. I’ve personally seen the power of this kind of collaboration in the deep insights, strong ideas, and commitment to collective action that developed from the work of the Interventions Committee.

Dr. Osborne has laid a strong foundation for bringing people together across traditional silos in CSDNR. One example of this is School Leadership Team meetings, a practice now continued by Dr. Parvey at the elementary and secondary levels. He also established Cabinet meetings, attended by all Assistant Superintendents, and periodic Extended Cabinet meetings, which are attended by both the Assistant Superintendents and the leaders of the teachers’ and administrators’ unions.

The district now has the opportunity to build on this foundation, by spreading these practices to employees further down the organizational structure, and leveraging them strategically to accomplish roadmap goals. For example, one of CSDNR’s strategic objectives is for all students to read independently to learn by the end of third grade. The district might develop a working group tasked with developing a strategy to accomplish
this. It could be comprised of both school-based instructional faculty, such as classroom teachers and reading specialists, and staff members from a number of district departments. For example, a Human Resources specialist could examine each school’s current allotment of reading teachers to devise staffing solutions. A representative from the Business office can analyze schools’ spending patterns on reading materials and discuss with school staff whether these materials are effective. The Technology department could present the current reading software programs in use and gather advice on which are most beneficial to instruction. Together, this team could investigate current reading professional development activities and explore opportunities to streamline training or turnkey content to others in a systematic manner. CSDNR has a wealth of talented and dedicated staff members. If people come together across silos, the opportunities to make New Rochelle an even stronger district are endless.
Implications for Sector

*Synthesize Policies*

Throughout this capstone, I discuss the importance of coherence to district improvement. Leading districts to high performance requires a focused, well-articulated strategy, and coherent activities across all areas of the district’s functioning to achieve that strategy. This is crucial for RtI, and all activities supporting the instructional core.

The policy environment, however, is not particularly friendly to coherence efforts, including those related to RtI. The dual purposes for RtI reflected in NCLB, ESSA, and IDEA create confusion about how to execute interventions in practice. In addition, AIS and RtI are essentially two complementary intervention models, but separating them in the New York Commissioner’s Regulations makes it difficult to see this connection. It also makes it challenging for schools to execute AIS and RtI as coherent structures.

The challenge that policies pose to coherence are articulated in the research literature. In *Managing School Districts for High Performance* (2007), the authors argue that policymakers often pile on new regulations without regard to the old. These leaves districts “with the task of how to reconcile all the previous demands of competing constituencies and fragmented policies, while at the same time building a coherent strategy” (Childress, Elmore, Grossman & Johnson, 2007, 424). Further, even new policies may be at odds with coherence when they establish “categorical programs and policies that require local education agencies to create separate functions within their organizations” (Childress, Elmore, Grossman & Johnson, 2007, 424).

In light of these facts, to facilitate success with RtI, or any part of a district’s work, it will be crucial for education policymakers to view regulations and legislation...
with a lens of coherence. In some cases, existing policies should be synthesized to make these connections clear. For example, it is both possible and sensible to streamline the separate policies for AIS and RtI into one unified set of regulations. In other cases, changing or streamlining existing regulations may not be practical. In those cases, however, policymakers can still support practitioners by articulating and explaining the connections between various sets of policies. This would go a long way to helping leaders discern how to translate policy to action as part of a district strategy. It would also reduce the fatigue that develops when educators must contend with seemingly incongruent policies that affect their work every day.

*Research Successful District Implementation*

When researching RtI best practices and successful implementation, I found many examples of individual schools with RtI systems that were effectively supporting student achievement. Lessons from those schools are reflected in the RKA and throughout the capstone. But notably, my research did not yield examples of *districts* who are implementing RtI successfully. When the research literature did not generate compelling information on RtI implementation at the systems level, I turned to my professional networks to seek information about districts who’ve had success in this area, even if nothing had been written about them. My colleagues replied with many more examples of individual schools, but could not identify any exemplar districts.

While this is simply my anecdotal experience, I believe it illustrates a trend in existing research about RtI. There is a broad base of knowledge about specific practices – in other words, strategies to use when students struggle with reading or behavior. There is
also research about the systems that best support academic interventions in schools, such as universal screening and the other components discussed in my RKA. Mostly in the form of case studies, there is also literature about the process schools go through to successfully implement RtI systems and instructional practices. However, a deep research base has not yet been developed about implementing RtI well at the systems level. I believe that school districts would greatly benefit from further research about how they can best support all the structures, systems, and practices involved in successful RtI implementation. Believing, as I do, that interventions are an important lever for academic success, I argue that further developing this knowledge base can positively influence student achievement across the sector at large.

*Increase Inclusive Educational Practices*

As I described in my analysis section, the tension between the respective responsibility of general educators and special educators for interventions is an issue of coherence. However, this particular tension is also deeply rooted in the belief that special education and general education are distinct and separate entities. Education for students with disabilities has come a long way in the past several decades, in large part due to landmark pieces of legislation, such as the IDEA, that protect the rights of students with disabilities to a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment possible. Yet the notion that special education is something separate and apart from mainstream education persists in classrooms and districts across the country.

In many cases, this separation affects not only students with disabilities, but any student who is having difficulty in the classroom. Interventions, as well as special
education services, are often offered in a separate place outside the classroom, and get disconnected from the core curriculum. This challenges instructional coherence for the very students who most need the connections between skills and content areas to be made explicit, clear, and transferable for them.

There is a way to address this gap between special and general education through inclusive instructional practices. Across the country, there are a number of highly effective schools in which students with disabilities are educated alongside their nondisabled peers. Several examples from the Boston area are described in Hehir and Katzman’s book *Effective Inclusive Schools* (2012). In these schools, skilled leaders have created collaborative problem-solving cultures. Instruction there is tailored to meet the needs of all students – both those with disabilities, and those without. The unnecessary divide between general and special education instruction is diminished in these schools, and their inclusive practices have led to impressive academic results, as well as positive social and emotional outcomes, for all their students.

Throughout this capstone, the importance of creating coherence across traditional silos is a recurring theme. But this is particularly important for supporting students throughout our country who struggle academically. Inclusive education practices have proven to be a powerful force for educating vulnerable students, driving instructional improvement, and bridging the divides between parts of the education system that remain all too separate in the sector at large. Therefore I believe that expanding access to quality inclusive school models should be a top priority for leaders at all levels of the sector.
Conclusion

Public school districts are responsible for ensuring that their students receive a high-quality education and achieve academic success. Supporting students who struggle to master grade level skills and standards is a vitally important aspect of this responsibility. Research indicates that an effective and fully implemented Response to Intervention model can support students’ academic success. This is accomplished through identifying students at-risk early, providing instruction targeted to their needs, and adjusting the intensity and frequency of this instruction based on their response.

However, despite its value to students, effective and full implementation of RtI is difficult to accomplish, especially throughout an entire district. Challenges to this effort come from a complex combination of factors, including confusing policies, competing priorities, staff complacency, and a long history of educators working in isolation from each other. These are in addition to the innate instructional challenge of devising strategies that will help struggling students to learn.

The focus of this project was to improve the academic interventions provided to students in the City School District of New Rochelle by exploring both best practices in this area, and the role a district office can play in this work. I took the approach of, first, gathering a broad base of information about the current intervention systems, processes, and practices in use at CSDNR. I then formed an Interventions Committee comprised of staff members with diverse perspectives and areas of expertise to determine how those systems and practices can be improved. Finally, I began to lead them in the process of updating and creating the necessary tools to translate our collective vision into action.
But as the project progressed, the challenges that face RtI implementation became increasingly apparent. These challenges threaten the ability of CSDNR to implement a vision for academic interventions fully and consistently across schools. Fortunately, the district has many assets that can be leveraged to address these challenges. These include structures supporting coherence and collaboration that were established by the district’s current Superintendent, Dr. Brian Osborne. They also include faculty and staff who are both experienced and invested in the goal of providing excellent instructional supports to students. Lastly, CSDNR has a strategic roadmap that can help to focus the district’s priorities as staff continue their efforts to improve student learning.

To leverage these strengths, CSDNR leaders should, first, invest in data collection, management, and analysis. This will support the ability to monitor progress at the student level – a crucial component of RtI – and at the district level, as leaders consider how to best support schools. Data can also be used to establish a sense of urgency for change around the district’s top priorities. CSDNR should also continue creating opportunities for people to work across schools, roles, and departments at all levels of the organization. This will support coherence in the district’s improvement efforts, and ensure key decisions have been well-informed by a variety of perspectives.

Finally, this is not just a challenge that affects the City School District of New Rochelle. Across the country, the sector needs more support in expanding inclusive practices and mindsets about instructing students with learning difficulties. More research into effective implementation and support of interventions at the systems level is needed. So too is an effort by policymakers to clearly articulate the connections between policies currently on the books, and streamline these policies where possible.
As my strategic project continues, I will need to confront the challenges that face full RtI implementation in collaboration with other leaders at my site. I hope the learning and leadership journey presented in this capstone can help future leaders who work with academic interventions to see this work as not only an issue of instructional practice, but also an area in which the dynamics of change and coherence must be addressed in order to reach full success.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Introductory Questions for CSDNR leaders, summer 2017

Appendix B: K-5 AIS Program Details

Appendix C: Interventions Policy Memo

Appendix D: Interventions Committee Overview

Appendix E: Interventions Committee Member List

Appendix F: Interventions Committee Kickoff Meeting Agenda

Appendix G: Tools and Materials Survey Responses
Appendix A: Sample Introductory Questions for CSDNR leaders, summer 2017

District History
- How long have you been with the district?
- What interested you in coming to New Rochelle and what keeps you here?
- What do you think are the biggest challenges the district is facing?
- What are some of the most significant changes you’ve seen during your time in New Rochelle?

Individual Schools or Departments
- What are you proudest of at your school or department, and what are some things that make it special?
- What are some of your priorities for 2017-18?
- What goals do you have for your school or department this year?
- What supports do you feel you’d need to accomplish those goals and priorities?

Miscellaneous
- As someone who is new to the district, what are some things you think I should know?
- In addition to my strategic project area, are there ways I can help you or your school or department this year?

Academic Intervention Services (for school leaders)
- What is the goal of Academic Intervention Services at your school?
- How are students identified to receive AIS?
- How would you describe the processes or practices used for AIS at your school?
- What challenges have you encountered executing AIS?
- Who is most important for me to connect with to learn more about AIS at your school?
| Week |Course Details | Progress
|------|---------------|----------
| 0 | Start refresh prep. (1 week) | Non-existent
| 1 | Core, LFF preparation | Non-existent
| 2 | Non-existent | Non-existent
| 3 | Non-existent | Non-existent
| 4 | Core, LFF preparation | Non-existent
| 5 | Core, LFF preparation | Non-existent
| 6 | Core, LFF preparation | Non-existent
| 7 | Core, LFF preparation | Non-existent
| 8 | Core, LFF preparation | Non-existent
| 9 | Core, LFF preparation | Non-existent
| 10 | Core, LFF preparation | Non-existent
| 11 | Core, LFF preparation | Non-existent
| 12 | Core, LFF preparation | Non-existent
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| 52 | Core, LFF preparation | Non-existent

**Notes:**
- LFF: LFF Preparation
- Core: Core Program Details
- Appendices: Appendix B: K-5 AIS Program Details
Appendix C: Interventions Policy Memo

TO: Dr. Osborne, Superintendent
FROM: Kate Cunningham, CSDNR Resident
SUBJECT: Findings and Recommendations regarding interventions in CSDNR
DATE: November 30, 2017

SUMMARY
This memorandum summarizes information gathered regarding the current Academic Intervention Services (AIS) and Response to Intervention (RtI) practices in place throughout CSDNR elementary schools. This evidence was collected through personal interviews with teachers, school leaders, and district administrators, in addition to observations and review of documents. In addition, the memo provides context regarding relevant policies and guidelines for student interventions. As a result of my findings, I am recommending a pivot in my strategic project to focus on RtI broadly in addition to AIS. I also provide recommendations for possible next steps in the district’s practice that fall outside the scope of my project.

CONTEXT: AIS AND RTI
I began my work in CSDNR with an initial focus on Academic Intervention Services (AIS). Interviews with leaders and teachers indicated confusion around the definition, goals, and requirements of AIS, especially in relationship with the parallel structure of RtI. To help clarify these topics, I examined the guidance, recommendations, and regulations for AIS and RtI in state and federal policy. Below is a summary of my research.

State Regulations on AIS
AIS was introduced in New York via Part 100.2(ee) of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education in 1999. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) defines AIS as “services designed to help students achieve the learning standards in English language arts and mathematics in grades K-12 and social studies and science in grades 4-12” (2000, 4). Such services should include both additional academic instruction targeted to student needs, and support services that address non-academic barriers to student success, such as issues related to health, attendance, or discipline.

For many years, school districts were required to provide AIS to all students who fell below a state-determined score on state assessments at their corresponding grade level. Districts were also required to develop their own process and criteria for determining AIS eligibility for students in grades with no state assessments, and for students who performed above the state cut score on the exams but still below proficient.

An August 9, 2016 memorandum from Renée Rider, the Assistant Commissioner for the Office of Student Support Services, advised school and district leaders of a regulatory change regarding AIS eligibility. The memo advised that students who performed below the state-determined score on the ELA and Math assessments should now be considered for AIS, rather than mandated for these services. Each district’s procedure for selecting...
students to receive AIS should include review of “a student’s scores on multiple measures of student performance” (Rider, 2016, 1).

This updated guidance, which was renewed for the 2017-18 school year, increased districts’ autonomy for determining which students will receive AIS. This is in addition to the autonomy districts already had to determine program details, such as scheduling and intensity of services. AIS guidelines suggest that a full range of options in these areas be considered; for example, districts might utilize scheduling options that include before-and-after school sessions, additional staffing within the classroom, or even evening, weekend or summer services (NYSED, 2000, 16-17). Whatever their chosen approach to AIS identification and service, school districts are required to share a description of their plan with the public, and update this description annually (Rider, 2016, 1).

RtI in State and National Policy
The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) introduced the idea of Response to Intervention into federal regulation. Specifically, the 2004 Act shifted identification of specific learning disabilities from requiring a documented discrepancy between a child’s academic performance and his/her intellectual potential (known as the discrepancy model), to allowing a process that examines a student’s response to scientific, research-based interventions. While RtI is not mandated, its systematic process of screening, intervening, and monitoring progress is a commonly accepted approach for determining whether students need, and respond to, research-based interventions before referral for evaluation.

New York adopted a version of RtI a few years later. A December 2010 memo sent to school and district leaders by Ken Slentz, then Associate Commissioner of the Office of District Services, indicated that early reading was the state’s priority for RtI. The memo stated that by July 1, 2012, all districts must have RtI in place “as part of the process to determine if a student in grades K-4 is a student with a learning disability in the area of reading” (Slentz, 2010). However, his memo also noted that beginning with the 2010-11 school year, districts may opt to fully adopt RtI as their approach to interventions in all subject areas, in lieu of AIS.

In September 2015, the New York Board of Regents called for a committee to investigate the effectiveness of AIS and prepare recommendations on how the state’s regulations in this area should change (Ebert, 2016, 3). The committee consulted many districts in this process, including districts similar to New Rochelle in size and/or student demographics. The committee’s presentation to the Board of Regents in April 2016 addressed the parallel structures of AIS and RtI, stating, “Many districts questioned whether there should be separate regulations pertaining to AIS and RtI rather than a single set of regulations addressing the provision of additional support to students” (NYSED P-12 committee, 2016, slide 7). In addition, their recommendations urged the Board to discuss how the state can “promote the use of RTI programs as an effective research-based way to provide AIS to students” (NYSED P-12 committee, 2016, slide 13).
Note: MTSS
An additional recent development in federal policy is the use of the term “multi-tier system of supports” in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). A multi-tier system of supports, or MTSS, is an approach to screening, intervening and monitoring progress that addresses both academic and social-emotional needs. While Congress is not mandating that states and districts use MTSS specifically, its appearance in ESSA may indicate this term will become increasingly common over time; it is already used in many districts in New York.

Summary
In summary, AIS was introduced in New York as a regulation requiring school districts to provide support to students who perform below grade level academically. At first, this mandate measured academic performance primarily by state assessment scores, but over time that has become just one recommended measure of performance, with increased district autonomy over how students are identified for additional interventions. Later, the State Department of Education introduced a requirement for Response to Intervention screening, tiered interventions, and progress monitoring in the area of K-4 reading. However, the state also provided the option for districts to adopt RtI on a broader basis, and incorporate AIS into an overall RtI framework. The Board of Regents recently heard stakeholder feedback that future regulations should simplify the state’s approach to interventions rather than having two parallel systems, with the specific suggestion to promote RtI as a way to also accomplish the goals of AIS. More recently, multi-tier system of supports (MTSS) has emerged as a framework to consider tiered interventions that address both academic and social-emotional needs.

TAKEAWAYS
Given the overlap of AIS and RtI in policy, I expanded my information gathering process in the district to incorporate both practices. Several important trends and insights were raised during my interviews and observations at elementary schools and the district office.

Definitions
In New Rochelle schools, AIS is synonymous with pull-out small group reading support. It functions in practice as a Tier 2 or 3 reading intervention. Last spring, Ken Levy asked reading teachers to provide information about the identification criteria, reading programs, and progress monitoring assessments in use at their schools. In my exploration of schools’ practices, I verified the accuracy of this information. This overview is captured in 2 tables, to be shared in a separate document.

While Response to Intervention practices in CSDNR vary by school, the term RtI is generally used to describe the process of a classroom teacher bringing concerns about a student to a support team at his/her school. After the initial referral, the team may recommend additional Tier 1 interventions for the teacher to try, begin or modify Tier 2 or 3 interventions, or decide to request an evaluation from the Committee on Special Education (CSE). The title of this team varies by school; for consistency I refer to the “RtI team” or “RtI meetings” in this memo.
Assets
There are many practices in place at CSDNR that align with both policy guidelines and research-based best practice. In addition, the district’s staff members expressed deep dedication to their work and openness to suggestions for improvement. Evidence of these assets include:

- All schools have a data-based process for determining which students receive reading support, and all reading teachers are monitoring progress regularly.
- All RtI meetings I observed involved discussion of non-academic factors, such as attendance and social-emotional concerns, in addition to academic factors when planning next steps for individual students.
- At all schools, administrators either attended RtI meetings or there is a protocol in place for how they review and follow-up on cases discussed with the team.
- There were team members at every school who articulated interest and urgency in improving CSDNR’s systems and structures for intervention.
- A number of challenges to executing RtI and AIS effectively were raised during my observations and interviews, but there were clear trends in the challenges raised, and no significant outliers. This is an asset because it suggests the challenges can be addressed through collaborative, systemic changes.

Challenges
As noted above, common challenges emerged from my interviews and observations. These fall into four major buckets: mindset, communication, consistency and information management. Evidence of these challenges include:

- District special education leaders raised a worry that students are being referred to the Committee on Special Education (CSE) prematurely, before sufficient interventions are tried with fidelity. They also felt school staff, including administration, view special education as “extra help,” and may be treating RtI as a formality. My observations indicated that this may be a correct inference, at least in some cases.
- With few exceptions, the conversations about students I observed were deficit-based and did not include discussion about a student’s strengths. Many teachers and specialists used the phrase “he/she can’t do…” when discussing a student, revealing a possible fixed mindset about both student abilities and their own abilities to support the student. Only one administrator I observed corrected this.
- RtI teams expressed that following up on Tier 1 interventions to assess fidelity is challenging. Reading teachers noted limited opportunities to communicate with classroom teachers and other interventionists. They are worried that these communication challenges may mean that people involved with the same student may be working at cross-purposes or presenting conflicting strategies.
- The process teachers follow to refer a child to the RtI team and the documentation required vary substantially by school. CSE chairs also noted that documentation they receive from schools differs substantially by case, and believe greater consistency would reduce the amount of time needed to process referrals.
- There is not a standard protocol for how RtI meetings will run, leading to differences in the quality and specificity of next steps for the students discussed.
• Progress monitoring data, RtI meeting notes, and other documentation are maintained very differently from school to school. If a student moves, there is not an electronic record regarding interventions that follows him/her, and there is lag time for sharing paper-based files. RtI follow-up relies upon the personal organization of the person chairing the meeting, which would be problematic in a case of unexpected turnover.

NEXT STEPS
Based on my research and conversations with staff across the district, AIS fits naturally within a broader umbrella of RtI. I believe focusing on effectively implementing a multi-tier system of supports will better set the district up for success with all interventions, including reading. As such, I propose a pivot in my strategic project. If approved, I will focus on CSDNR’s RtI practices, one of which is Tier 2 reading supports, rather than solely on AIS.

Revised project goals
1) uncover current AIS and RtI practices in the district, including the rationale for these (done),
2) determine what the RtI practices in CSDNR elementary schools should be going forward, and what structures, supports, tools, etc. will be necessary to implement and sustain such practices with coherence/consistency,
3) create a plan and timeline for how the district will build and implement these structures, supports, etc. across elementary schools,
4) Execute early phases of this plan, which may include tool creation, training materials, etc. and pilots/tests of these things to iterate and improve in real time.

Theory of Action
If I…
• Build trusting relationships with elementary school teachers, leaders, and district staff such that I can collect robust and accurate information about current AIS and RtI practices,
• Recruit a task force/working group of stakeholders from the district and schools who represent the range of roles and perspectives involved in student interventions, and invest them in the goal of improving CSDNR’s approach to student interventions,
• Collaborate with these stakeholders to define common purpose and practices for student interventions according to district needs and research-based best practices, and determine what tools and structures are needed to support these practices and monitor progress towards purpose,
• Create a plan to build and implement the necessary tools and structures, and to communicate the refined intervention purpose and practices to staff,
Then… CSDNR will have an achievable and sustainable plan for implementing student intervention best practices in elementary schools, and monitoring their effectiveness, that is supported by a representative group of leaders, teachers, specialists and support staff from across the district.
Draft timeline from here

December: Recruit a working group of stakeholders to collaborate on redefining CSDNR’s approach to elementary school interventions. Conduct initial meeting(s) to set purpose and goals.

January-February: Using brainstorming meetings, individual assignments and feedback cycles, revise guidelines for the purpose and practices of RtI (or alternately named intervention framework), and detail the most important tools and structures needed to support this (may include new referral documents, training, electronic record keeping etc.)

March: With a smaller team of stakeholders, create the plan for how the revised guidelines will be communicated and the necessary tools will be built and implemented.

April: Begin creating the tools, beta testing as necessary in pilot schools.

FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

There are next steps that I believe would support a stronger approach to academic interventions, and instruction overall, but which fall outside the scope of the strategic project. I would happily assist in this work in any way possible if you choose to implement these recommendations.

- **Centralized collection of student performance data**: Collecting benchmarking data for a few select assessments will allow for quick transfer of student information if a student moves, and allow school/district leaders to quickly analyze data at a high level, to then determine those areas they would like to examine more closely.

- **Assessments**: Related to the above, to support instructional consistency and the ability of the district to analyze student performance, all elementary schools should be using the same assessments, administered around roughly the same time. I also recommend reviewing the assessments currently being used to determine whether they provide useful instructional information; in particular, staff across schools raised concerns about the usefulness of AIMSWeb.

- **Leverage Google and set norms around its use**: ESchools Plus does not work well as a place to keep descriptive notes, the site navigation is not intuitive, and adding any new functions requires a Technology team member to build them, approve them, etc. which can create a bottleneck. Google, in contrast, is extremely user-friendly, makes information sharing easy, and is accessible for school staff to create tools on their own. However, with easy sharing and document creation, there’s also the potential for information to be less secure or to be managed inconsistently between offices and schools. I believe the district has many opportunities to use Google to support its work. I also recommend the Information and Technology department set clear guidelines and parameters for using Google and create tools to train staff in effective and responsible Google use.

- **Supporting the Reading Department**: As noted during previous conversations, reading teachers have some unique needs with regards to development, planning, and problem-solving. I recommend that the team have some type of department
chair that can support their work through coaching, plan professional learning, and officially liaise with Dr. Parvey’s office to help ensure this team is integrated into larger instructional initiatives in the most effective manner possible.

- **Growth (and Inclusion) Mindset:** This may end up being a part of re-training materials that I work on, but I have been concerned to hear many staff, including leaders, using fixed mindset language about students (“X can’t do…”), and discussing special education as a destination rather than a set of services. I believe this has implications for equity, and strongly recommend that you, with the support of Cabinet, address this with leaders in the near future.

- **Thinking outside the (Staffing and Scheduling) Box:** Staff, including leaders, expressed strong attachment to many existing structures and ways of doing things in their schools. There certainly may be compelling reasons to keep particular structures in place, but at times this attachment may impede the development of creative solutions to challenges. I recommend that district leaders model and support the practice of frequently questioning current practices to determine whether they are still in the best interest of students.

REFERENCES


Appendix D: Interventions Committee Overview

City School District of New Rochelle
Interventions Committee 2018: Scope of Work

Background and Purpose
The City School District of New Rochelle (CSDNR) has been implementing academic and behavioral interventions for many years, and greatly benefited the leadership of school-based employees in establishing tools and systems to support these interventions, including a Response to Intervention Manual published in 2012.

Advances in technology and information systems, changes in staffing, and updates to policy have created opportunities to build upon the current systems. In accordance with the district’s 2017 strategic roadmap, CSDNR aims to ensure its intervention practices are consistent and equitable between schools.

The activities of the Interventions Committee will be guided by the Office of Curriculum and Instruction and Office of Student Support Services. Initial coordination and leadership will be provided by Kate Cunningham, a resident administrator collaborating with both offices.

Committee Roles and Responsibilities
The Interventions Committee will perform a critical role in informing the evolution of the CSDNR’s intervention practices. Members will have the opportunity to contribute in a number of ways, based on interest and availability.

Examples include, but are not limited to:
- Participating in a kickoff meeting to define challenges, goals and desired benchmarks in the scope of work. (February 2018)
- Contributing to the creation or update of specific tools and materials, such as intervention referral forms (February-April 2018)
- Providing feedback on and/or piloting any new or updated tools or materials (February-June 2018)
- Advising district leaders on an implementation plan for full adoption of any new practices or procedures (April-June 2018)
- Sharing best practices between elementary school campuses (ongoing)

With any questions, please contact Kate Cunningham at kcunningham@nredlearn.org.
Appendix E: Interventions Committee Member List

District Office:
Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services
Director of Pupil Services
Director of Instructional Supports
Elementary Assistant Director of Special Education
Committee on Special Education Supervisor

Schools:
*Henry Barnard School* Instructional Facilitator
*Henry Barnard School* English as a New Language/Reading Teacher
*Columbus Elementary School* Assistant Principal
*Columbus Elementary School* Reading Specialist
*George M. Davis Elementary School* Social Worker
*George M. Davis Elementary School* Classroom Teacher
*Jefferson Elementary School* English as a New Language Teacher
*Jefferson Elementary School* Special Education Teacher
*Trinity Elementary School* Literacy Coach
*Trinity Elementary School* Reading Specialist
*William B. Ward Elementary School* Bilingual Reading Teacher
*William B. Ward Elementary School* School Psychologist
*Daniel Webster Magnet School* Principal
*Daniel Webster Magnet School* Literacy Coach/Reading Specialist
*Multiple Schools* Speech and Language Pathologist
## Interventions Committee Kickoff Meeting

**February 13, 2018**

### Meeting Objectives:
- Connect with one another and establish our purpose as a group
- Set a collective vision for interventions in New Rochelle
- Determine priority action steps for achieving the vision

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:30-10am</td>
<td><strong>Who are we and why are we here?</strong>&lt;br&gt;-Committee Purpose&lt;br&gt;-Introductions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-10:15am</td>
<td><strong>Intervention Findings</strong>&lt;br&gt;-Trends from observations and survey responses&lt;br&gt;-Quick snapshot of interventions policy and research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15-11:30am</td>
<td><strong>Small Group Discussion: Purpose &amp; Practices</strong>&lt;br&gt;-Explanation of activity&lt;br&gt;-Small group discussions of key questions (on next page)&lt;br&gt;-Share out of headlines from each group&lt;br&gt;-Synthesize statements of purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30-11:50am</td>
<td><strong>Where do we go from here?</strong>&lt;br&gt;-Follow-up survey&lt;br&gt;-Digital workflow&lt;br&gt;-Major touchpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:50am-12pm</td>
<td><strong>Feedback &amp; Questions</strong></td>
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</table>
Interventions Committee Kickoff Meeting
Small Group Discussion Questions

In your group, identify:
- Notetaker
- Timekeeper
- Who will share out

Questions for Discussion
- In your own words, how would you describe what the purpose of interventions in New Rochelle elementary schools should be? (think broad: mission statement)
- What could be some measurable goals of the intervention process, that would help us know whether interventions are achieving their purpose?
- What systems, processes, or procedures would be necessary to support those goals? Of these, which does New Rochelle have in place? Which are not in place?
- Other than more money or staff, what are some tools, materials, or resources that would help the district, or your school, develop the systems, processes, and procedures you identified?
- What should be consistent across schools when it comes to intervention systems and procedures? What can or should be different?
- How can interventions be more connected to other school/district systems and initiatives? In other words, how can we integrate these systems so they don’t feel like something “extra?”

Appendix G: Tools and Materials Survey Responses
### Tool 1: Digitized form for referral to RtI Team

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<th>% who selected</th>
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<tr>
<td>Provide feedback on draft</td>
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<td>73.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot in my school</td>
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### Tool 2: Information Management Systems

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<td>Provide feedback on draft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot in my school</td>
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<td>40.0%</td>
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### Tool 3: Updated and Digitized RtI Manual

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<td>Provide feedback on draft</td>
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<td>Pilot in my school</td>
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<td>40.0%</td>
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<td>20.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
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### Tool 4: Reviewing Team Meeting Practices (protocols, attendess, note taking, etc.)

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<td>Provide feedback on draft</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot in my school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
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<tr>
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Tool 5: Training for teachers and leaders on the RtI process

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Tool 6: Training for teachers and leaders on intervention best practices

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