

Resource Reallocation to District Priorities

Case Study: SEEM Collaborative harnesses collective resources to enhance inclusion across its districts



Executive Summary

- Seven districts in the SEEM Collaborative pooled resources to hire a shared inclusion coach and provide common training to general education and special education teachers across districts.
- Working together across seven districts was initially challenging, and SEEM had to coordinate three different coaching models.
- The team won a DESE grant to cover some start-up costs and the districts also shifted funds to make the investment sustainable.
- Districts had to agree on the measures they would use to assess the success of the coaching and training, and decided to set targets for staff satisfaction with the coaching, improvements in students' feelings of inclusion, and a long-term reduction in special education referrals.
- In the first year, most districts had strong results for teacher satisfaction and students' feelings of inclusion. Some districts saw the anticipated reduction in referrals while others experienced increases. The districts are now continuing the coaching and spreading successful practices.

SEEM Collaborative Leaders

Cathy Lawson, Executive Director

Emily Patt, Inclusion Coach

And representatives of:



Melrose



North Reading



Reading



Stoneham



Wakefield



Wilmington



Woburn

FAST FACTS

Seven Participating Districts
SY 2016-17

Schools

43

Students

24,528

Teachers

1,870

SWD

15.4%

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Resource Reallocation to District Priorities Grant Program

A competitive two-year program supporting school districts to make substantial changes in resource allocation and direct more resources toward evidence-based improvement strategies. This grant program also encourages districts to use the new suite of Resource Allocation and District Action Reports (RADAR) tools to analyze how they use resources.



Overview of Grant

This case study is one of nine in a series showcasing the work of recipients of a 2017 DESE two-year grant for real-locating resources to align with district priorities. The case study explains how the participants used state data tools such as RADAR and DART to identify an area of need, determined an evidence-based investment, shifted resources in their existing budget to make the investment, and then evaluated the cost and impact of the investment.

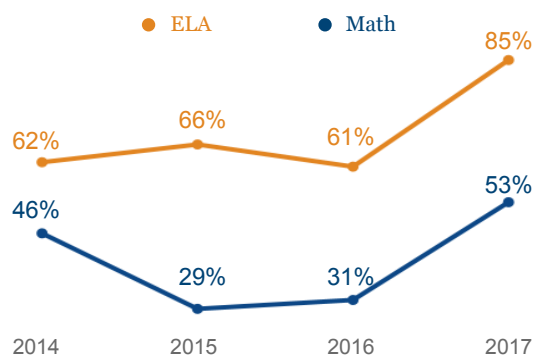
Planning: Seven districts collaborate to hire an inclusion coach

Through SEEM Collaborative, ten districts in northeastern Massachusetts (combined enrollment 33,961) share resources and provide educational programs serving students with disabilities. A group of leaders from each district that met regularly at SEEM sought reflected on the low achievement of students with disabilities in many of the districts. To strengthen instruction for students with disabilities included in general education classrooms, they decided to provide training directly to general education teachers.

One member district, Wakefield Public Schools, offered compelling evidence for the positive impact of inclusive practices. Since investing in a co-teaching model starting in 2014-15 that increased students' time in general education classrooms, Wakefield saw improvements in both ELA and math scores for students with disabilities in 2017, along with a reduction of paraprofessional support. Recognizing they did not have the budget for a dedicated coach in each district, the SEEM Collaborative team and leaders from Melrose, North Reading, Reading, Stoneham, Wakefield, Wilmington, and Woburn applied for the grant to hire a shared inclusion coach (Lynnfield, Saugus and Winchester are part of SEEM but did not participate).

Exhibit 1 | Wakefield MCAS Proficiency

Percent of SWD scoring proficient or higher



SEEM contracted with Katie Novak (Founder and President of Novak Educational Consulting) to provide a professional development session on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to lay the groundwork for coaching throughout the year. District leaders found that this training was integral to developing interest and excitement about inclusion among the staff who would go on to receive coaching. Leaders were pleasantly surprised by the amount of momentum the UDL training created around inclusive practices. Reflecting on the training, SEEM's executive director Cathy Lawson remarked that it "ignited something in [teachers] and was a nice hook for people. Anytime you start a large-scale initiative, an important piece of the work is buy-in," and the training built that interest in inclusive practices among teachers. Nearly 200 staff participated in the UDL training with Novak, including general and special education teachers, psychologists, instructional coaches, principals and members of each district's child study team.

To hire an inclusion coach, Lawson had to coordinate the hiring processes and coaching models to meet the needs of the seven districts. When the initial hiring round proved unsuccessful, the districts nearly abandoned the plan before finding a strong applicant in Emily Patt (hired in June 2018). Six of the seven districts agreed that UDL was the top priority for coaching, and one district focused on behavior. Given the strong momentum behind UDL, Patt planned to use DESE's UDL framework as a basis for the instructional strategies she shared with teachers. "People were buzzing [about inclusion] when I got to schools in the fall," Patt shared.

Leaders in the participating districts had differing visions for how to structure the coaching for teachers. SEEM allowed each district to choose from one of three support models: (1) teachers receive in-class coaching once every seven weeks, used in five districts; (2) teachers receive a single, intensive week of coaching once during the year, used in one district; (3) the coach trains in-district coaches through PD sessions throughout the year, and coaches

Exhibit 2 | Participants' Roles and Grade Spans

Participant Role	Elem.	Middle School	High School
Special Education Teachers	16	5	3
General Education Teachers	44	13	6
Staff, Paraprofessionals, and Administrators	5	1	2

then share UDL strategies with teachers through in-class coaching, used in one district. Patt visited each district once every seven weeks, and leaders chose the frequency and type of coaching support teachers would receive. Patt decided to arrive in each district on a Friday to meet with teachers and set up the coaching work for the following Monday through Thursday, a decision that proved especially effective in helping her maximize the impact of a single week.

Each district identified schools to receive coaching and up to 15 interested teachers self-selected to take part, with the expectation that they could later serve as mentors for others in the building who had not received coaching. Reflecting later, leaders agreed that the voluntary and non-evaluative nature of the coaching was critical to building initial buy-in.

Measuring: Districts use data to measure the impact of UDL practices on student learning and feelings of belonging

As part of the grant, SEEM leaders worked with consultants from District Management Group and DESE to assess the impact of their work. District leaders collaborated to identify relevant measures that could be used across the seven districts, ultimately agreeing on four measures:

- All coaching and training sessions are delivered as expected
- 85% staff satisfaction with the training or coaching as measured by a spring 2019 survey
- 10% increase in students’ feelings of inclusion as measured by a student survey
- 5% reduction in special education referrals in classrooms of teachers who were coached

Tracking these results required coordinating and collecting data across districts and designing uniform surveys of staff and students to ensure comparability. District leaders wanted to learn from surveys if staff valued the coaching support they received, or if sharing the position spread the coach too thin. The survey also asked teachers about the amount of coaching and training they received to help gauge whether the single coach could support so many teachers.

District leaders also calculated the total cost of the initiative using a process from DMGroup, including staff and administrator time, fees, stipends, consultants, materials, and operations. SEEM Collaborative managed the \$100,000 in

DESE grant funds, which covered the UDL summer institute led by Novak, staff’s time for attending the institute, \$600 stipends for the over 100 teachers who received coaching, and materials and supplies.

Each of the seven districts then reallocated \$13,546 from their budgets to cover the inclusion coach’s annual compensation. These funds were typically reallocated from other professional development, instructional supplies, and contracted services. Districts hoped to see reduced costs for special education over time as teachers learned to meet more students’ needs in the mainstream classroom.

DMGroup worked with districts to calculate the cost of staff time dedicated to the coaching work over the course of the year. Each district shared the average hourly rate of all staff involved in the program, and the average time dedicated to the coaching work annually. Using this information, DMGroup calculated the total investment in staff time allocated to the coaching work in all seven districts, which was approximately \$390,000.

After collecting all costs associated with the new inclusion coach role, which included the coach’s salary, teacher stipends, related professional development, and staff time dedicated to the program, the team determined that the total cost of the program was approximately \$580,000. DMGroup estimated that approximately 2,500 students in the seven districts worked with a staff member who received coaching support and calculated a per-pupil cost estimate of about \$230.

Exhibit 3 | Fully Loaded Per Pupil Cost

Time Investment	
Category	Amount
Staff Time	\$390,000
Cash Investment	
Category	Amount
Investment in Coach	\$94,822
Stipends	\$83,200
PD/Trainings	\$15,600
Materials and Supplies	\$1,000
Estimated Cost Per Student	
Students	Per-pupil
2,500	\$230

Evaluating: The SEEM Collaborative assessed the impact on staff and students, reflecting on what made the coaching successful

Lawson and district leadership representatives are excited about the success of the coaching program and early results. “The large majority of teachers were really bought into this work from the get-go [...] the inclusion coach program was successful because teachers who participated were invested and interested in the work,” Lawson observed.

Recognizing the importance of the summer UDL training institute led by Katie Novak, SEEM leadership concluded “teachers needed a baseline understanding [of inclusion] going into the year.” Teachers had mostly entered the training familiar with UDL vocabulary but reported on the survey that seeing the concepts in action during the training was eye-opening.

Leaders attributed much of the program’s success to Patt giving staff the opportunity to reflect on their own practice and identify the type of coaching support that would benefit them. As part of the coaching model, Patt asked teachers and school leaders to set goals for themselves using DESE’s UDL framework, and then worked with them in the classroom and provided strategies directly relevant to the identified needs. Reflecting on this approach, Patt felt that “teachers appreciated having this opportunity built into their day rather than out-of-school training. This is truly job-embedded PD. [...] This has been pretty essential to keep people interested.” Patt remarked that using DESE’s UDL framework ensured that there was an “anchor to direct teachers back to the [UDL] focus of coaching.”

In addition to the training and coaching, the districts reiterated the importance of inclusive practices and highlighted the coaching work. Patt created a Twitter account that allowed her to easily share resources with many teachers and highlight individual educators’ use of inclusive practices across districts. She developed a website that spotlighted specific teachers’ work, and connected teachers from across districts via email when they had similar areas of

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interest or could share resources. Teachers who worked with Patt also presented at faculty meetings, building buy-in among their peers.

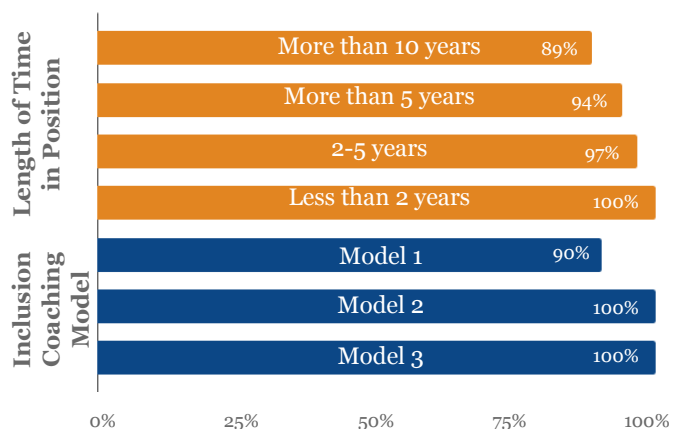
District leaders sensed that teachers had a positive response to the coaching, with one leader reflecting “She was so good at customizing her work at every school and meeting teachers where they were.” They reviewed the data that was collected by DMGroup on each of their goals for the year to assess the measurable impact.

Delivery of coaching: Based on an end-of-year staff survey, all inclusion teachers indicated that they worked with Patt at a frequency aligned with their districts’ coaching model. SEEM leadership shared that the biggest implementation challenge initially was scheduling and time management, given the three different models and the need to divide coaching time as evenly as possible across seven different districts. Teachers also indicated that they would benefit from more time with the coach. However, survey data shows that the three distinct coaching models allowed Patt to allocate her time to districts based on their priorities and PD needs.

Staff satisfaction: Surveys of participating staff showed that 93% of mentors would opt to receive coaching support again, exceeding the goal of 85%. Teachers with less experience in their current role responded slightly more positively to coaching support than staff with more longevity in their current role, but leaders were pleasantly surprised that 89% of teachers who served in their current position for more than ten years would opt to receive coaching support in the future. Especially given the stigma around coaching in some districts, leaders were pleased with these positive results.

Exhibit 4 | Staff Satisfaction

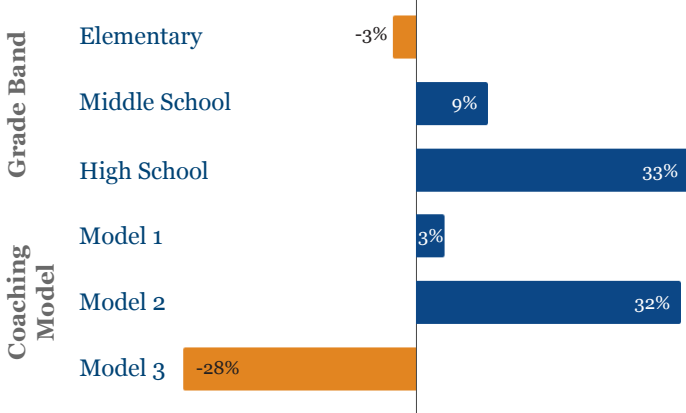
Participants rating the PD opportunities ‘valuable’



Special education referrals: Overall, in schools supported by the inclusion coach there was a 1% increase in school-based referrals to special education between 2017-18 and 2018-19, which didn't meet the definition of success set at the beginning of the year. While some districts saw a reduction in referral rates to special education, others saw a more significant increase. District leaders believe a decrease in referral rates is a long-term outcome and anticipate seeing more movement in this indicator in future years.

Exhibit 5 | Special Education Referrals

Percent change in referrals from 2017-18 to 2018-19



Feelings of inclusion: The districts had originally set a goal to see a ten percentage point increase in students' response to inclusive practices over the course of the year. However, the initial baseline survey in October 2018 found that 89% of the over 1,400 students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Students get different kinds of help depending on what they need in my classroom." Leaders acknowledged that a ten point increase was unlikely on such a strong baseline. In May 2019 they found 92% of the approximately 1,200 students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed, an increase of three percentage points. Leaders took away a lesson that goal-setting should be done with baseline data in hand.

Reflecting on the survey, Patt noted that administering it across seven districts and all grade levels was a complex and time-consuming task. Patt communicated with teachers she supported to ensure smooth administration of the survey and data collection. Some teachers administered paper surveys, while others administered surveys online. Patt remarked that collecting survey data was a significant time investment, and it was necessary to have a point person responsible for coordinating survey administration and data collection.

Looking ahead: SEEM Collaborative plans to expand direct training and coaching based on initial success

All of the seven participating SEEM districts are continuing to work with Patt in 2019-20, given teachers' overwhelmingly positive responses to inclusion coaching. District leaders chose to continue to pool their resources to fund the shared inclusion coach position. SEEM's district leaders see potential to continue tracking the impact of their investment in coaching, focusing on longer-term outcomes like special education referrals in the coming year.

Although in the first year of coaching, teachers who were directly coached received a \$600 stipend, some districts are unable to sustain funding for staff stipends in 2019-20 school year. One district reduced the stipend to \$500, which was achievable given their budget, while other districts eliminated the stipends altogether. Leaders remarked, however, that the vast majority of teachers, even in districts that would be able to provide stipends, have opted to continue to work with Patt. The original plan was for teachers who received coaching to share inclusion strategies with other teachers. However, teachers responded so positively to Patt's direct, in-class coaching, that most leaders plan to continue with direct coaching in 2019-20. In future years, the districts may consider implementing a structured train-the-trainer model, whereby Patt supports in-house coaches who then deliver instructional coaching to teachers.

Reflecting on keys to success, one Leader commented that there were "differences in understanding and embracing the work among principals, and they should have been included more from the start." Leaders remarked that they will work with principals in schools that receive coaching early in 2019-20 to lay the foundation for the coaching model.

SEEM leadership and participating districts noted that rolling out coaching in seven districts simultaneously was at times messy and led to intense discussions among leaders about what coaching should look like and how its success would be measured. However, the process of developing a shared coaching model was a beneficial learning experience and one that districts believe will inform shared programming in future years. Leaders are encouraged by teachers' positive response to coaching, the shifts they've witnessed in teachers' willingness to share strategies, and in the excitement coaching has built around inclusive practices.