

Case Study: Maynard Public Schools shifts funds to enhance SEL supports in grades K-3



Executive Summary

- Maynard Public Schools' leadership team noticed an increase in behavior referrals during unstructured time at the district's elementary school, Green Meadow.
- Few staff who monitor students at recess, lunch, and transitions received training around behavioral de-escalation.
- Maynard had a higher ratio of paraprofessionals to students with disabilities than most districts and few were trained.
- The district also recognized that many students were referred to special education evaluations for behavior and SEL-related challenges.
- The district hired two SEL-specific paraprofessionals who received training around social thinking and SEL strategies, and supported students through positive behavior management during coverages.

FAST FACTS

Maynard Public Schools

SY 2016-17

Schools

3

Teachers

110

Students

1,439

SWD

17.0%

District Leadership

Robert J. Gerardi, Superintendent

Jennifer Gaudet, Asst. Superintendent

Carol Gahan, Director of Student Services

Michelle Resendes, Business Manager

Case Study Authors

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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 directing 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 reallocating 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: Maynard developed a plan to proactively support elementary students' SEL needs by hiring SEL-specific paraprofessionals

Assistant Superintendent Jennifer Gaudet, Director of Student Services Carol Gahan, and Business Manager Michelle Resendes had led efforts to improve social-emotional learning (SEL) before. Prior to 2017-18, Gaudet and the leadership team recognized that Green Meadow, the only elementary school in the district of 1,400, employed more paraprofessionals for their number of students with disabilities than other schools, and that these paraprofessionals were often responsible for providing tier three behavior interventions. However, students' behavior had not improved - bullying referrals and suspensions often happened during recess, lunch, and transitions - and increasingly more students were being referred to special education for behavioral challenges.

At the beginning of 2017-18, Maynard rolled out Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) at Green Meadow. This included training teachers to use zones of regulation and de-escalation strategies. Then, later in the fall of 2017, Gaudet, Gahan, and Resendes applied for and received grant funding to cover the cost of hiring two paraprofessionals who would be trained in strategies to address students' social-emotional needs. This investment in paraprofessionals was part of the larger PBIS effort to strengthen behavior and social-emotional services at Green Meadow.

The SEL-trained paraprofessionals would receive training to use targeted SEL strategies to encourage positive student behavior. The grant would cover the cost of online trainings for the paraprofessionals and their annual salaries. The SEL-trained paraprofessionals would be hired in the winter of 2018 and would deliver mini-lessons on social thinking, and monitor students during unstructured times of the day. Separate from the grant, in 2018-19, district leaders also amended

Exhibit 1 | Maynard Enrollment

Exhibit 1.a Total district enrollment

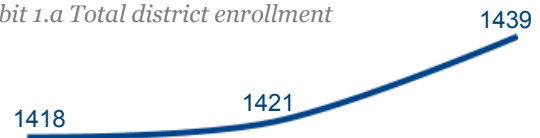
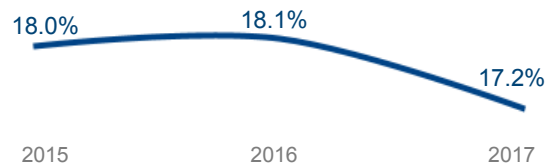


Exhibit 1.b Students with disabilities (% of total enrollment)



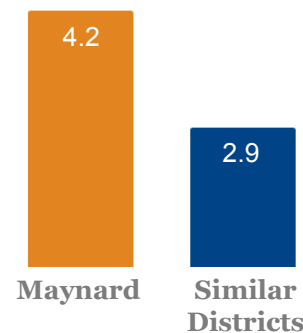
Green Meadow teachers' contract to include daily recess duty so teachers could embed positive behavior supports during time previously monitored by untrained staff.

After hiring the SEL-trained paraprofessionals in the winter of 2018 with RADAR grant funding, Green Meadow's leadership team adapted the plan for the SEL-trained paraprofessionals when they realized paraprofessionals needed to provide classroom coverage for absent teachers due to staffing constraints. Although this meant the paraprofessionals were not leading mini-lessons, SEL paraprofessionals built relationships with most Green Meadow students through lunch monitoring and classroom coverage. Leadership developed a schedule for the SEL-trained paraprofessionals that allowed them to observe the guidance counselor implementing mini-lessons on social thinking and SEL in classrooms, then infuse these strategies in their interactions with students during their duties and coverages.

By the spring of 2019, district and school administration made it a goal to develop a schedule that would allow the SEL-trained paraprofessionals to deliver SEL mini-lessons in alignment with the original plan. Green Meadow administration reduced the paraprofessionals' classroom coverages, and the SEL-trained paraprofessionals

Exhibit 2 | RADAR Analysis – Staffing

Paraprofessional staff (FTE) per pupil (2016-17)



professionals began to deliver mini-lessons to groups of four to five students in pull-out settings with oversight from the guidance counselor.

Measuring: Maynard used data to measure the impact of the two SEL-trained paraprofessionals on student behaviors in grades K–3

The Maynard team worked with DMGroup and DESE to define success for these two SEL-trained paraprofessionals. The team developed the following definitions of success for K–3:

- 50% decrease in suspension rates from 2017-18 to 2018-19.
- 30% decrease in the number of bullying referrals from 2017-18 to 2018-19.
- 20% decrease in the number of behavior referrals to the student support team for special education evaluation from 2017-18 to 2018-19.
- Reduction in special education inclusion paraprofessional support for behavioral needs as measured by 30% reduction in IEP minutes for paraprofessional support from spring 2018 to spring 2019 for students in grades K–3.

The team collected data from grades K–3 at Green Meadow, in which there were 430 students in 2018-19 school year. Historically, Green Meadow tracked most data on paper. To analyze changes in student behavior, Gahan developed an interactive Google Drive spreadsheet where she input related behavior data. The team could then reference all data in one location and quickly track changes in student behavior.

Using a process from DMGroup, the team brainstormed the fully loaded cost related to the SEL-trained paraprofessionals’ work, including staff time devoted to the program. Resendes calculated the cost of the SEL-trained paraprofessionals, their professional development, and the time administration dedicated to recruiting, on-boarding, and supervising the SEL-trained paraprofessionals.

The cost of teachers’ time dedicated to recess duty was included in the fully loaded cost. Amending teachers’ contracts to include recess duty and hiring SEL-trained paraprofessionals were both part of an effort to infuse positive behavior support in unstructured time. Leadership hoped both changes would have positive impacts on student behavior. Because adding structure

to recess likely impacted the identified outcomes, the team included this cost in the analysis.

After calculating these costs, the Maynard team determined that the total cost was \$270,000, which equated to a per-pupil cost of about \$630.

Exhibit 3 | Fully Loaded Per Pupil Cost

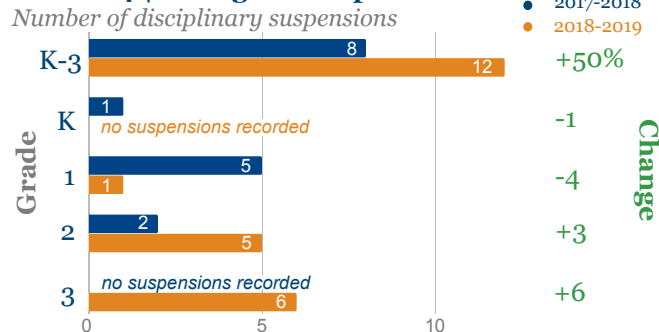
Time Investment	
Category	Amount
Staff Time*	\$160,000
Administrator Time*	\$53,386
<i>*includes time spent in direct service, trainings, meetings, and recess coverage</i>	
Cash Investment	
Category	Amount
SEL-Paraprofessionals’ Annual Salaries	\$36,000
Professional Development	\$21,000
Estimated Per-Pupil Cost	
Green Meadows K-3 Students (2018-19)	Annual Cost Per-Pupil
430	\$630

Evaluating: Maynard observed growth in two of the four metrics identified

Recognizing anecdotally the positive changes in school culture, district and school leaders reviewed the data DMGroup collected on each of their measurable goals for the year to assess how well the SEL-trained paraprofessional program met its objectives.

Suspension rates: The number of K–3 suspensions increased from eight to 12 between 2017-18 and 2018-19. Suspension rates tend to vary by grade level cohort. Maynard plans to reduce suspensions over time through equipping teachers to use preventative measures to support positive behavior in the classroom.

Exhibit 4 | Change in Suspensions



Bullying referrals: Bullying referrals in grades K–3 dropped from eight to four between 2017-18 and 2018-19, meeting the district’s goal of a 30% decrease. Leadership plans to continue to track data to understand when and why bullying occurs, hoping to reduce this number further over time.

Behavior referrals to student supports team: The number of behavior referrals to the student support team for potential special education evaluation decreased from 11 to six over the two school years. Maynard hoped to see a 20% decrease, and met this goal. Moving forward, the team hopes to see a higher percentage of referrals resulting in evaluation and an IEP.

Special education inclusion minutes with paraprofessional support: In grades K–3, the number of IEP minutes with paraprofessional support in an inclusion setting increased by 2% between 2017-18 and 2018-19. Leadership plans to explore the amount of paraprofessional support students with different disability types receive, aiming to adjust the classroom environment so students learn to manage their own behavior better.

Looking ahead: The Maynard team takes action to improve programs in 2019-20

In 2019–20, the SEL-trained paraprofessionals will continue to deliver SEL mini-lessons to small groups of students in pull-out settings. The paraprofessionals will begin pushing into classrooms and leading mini-lessons during elementary centers early in the school year so that more students can learn the SEL and social thinking strategies.

Maynard plans to pay for ongoing social-emotional professional development by reallocating professional development funds. Long term, the district hopes to reduce the number of non-SEL trained paraprofessionals needed to support behavior in classrooms.

Gaudet and Gahan shared that investing in SEL-trained paraprofessionals required operational changes to Green Meadow’s staffing and scheduling process, as well as mind-set changes among staff about the importance of embedding behavioral supports in inclusive environments. District leaders plan to continue to adapt school structures to meet the needs of students with behavioral challenges, using PBIS and the SEL-trained paraprofessionals as part of this effort.

Gaudet and Gahan believe the grant evaluation process forced them to develop and execute a clear plan for the SEL-trained paraprofessional role. The team

Exhibit 5 | Change in Bullying Referrals

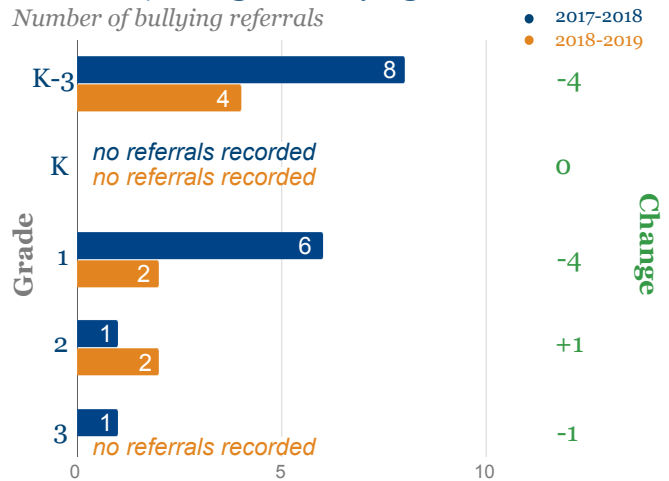
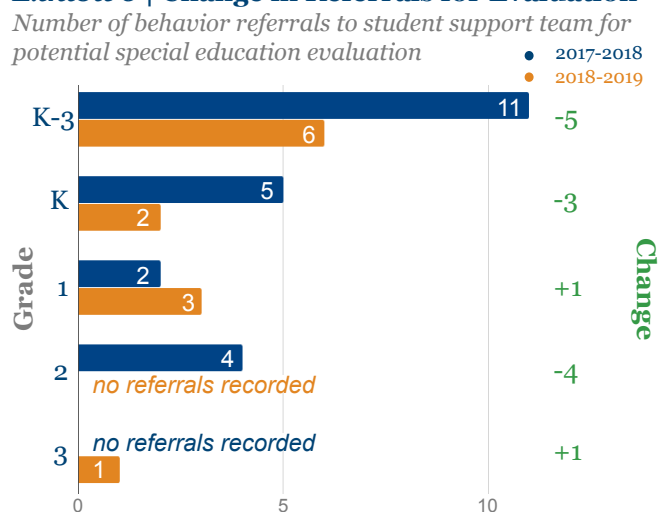


Exhibit 6 | Change in Referrals for Evaluation



appreciated the process of analyzing specific data to track outcomes and impact. Gaudet noted “We want to continue to track the impact [of changes] and be disciplined about how the administrative team uses data to make decisions.” Although the sample sizes were small, leadership wants to move away from making decisions based solely on anecdotal feedback about programs, and to introduce data as part of the discussion. Moving forward, the team hopes to build strong behavioral supports at Green Meadow through widespread investment in SEL and inclusion, and continue to track the impact of their work through thoughtful analysis of outcomes.

“Investing in SEL-trained paraprofessionals required operational changes [...] as well as mind-set changes.”