

Resource Reallocation to District Priorities

Case Study: Three northern Berkshire County districts shift resources towards inclusive PK-2 student support



Executive Summary

- Three districts in northern Berkshire County decided to work together to improve inclusive practices for students in grades PK-2 through a special education audit and professional development.
- These districts won a DESE grant to cover some of the start-up costs, but the districts also shifted existing funds to make the investment sustainable, ultimately investing \$143,000 in total (or roughly \$240 per pupil).
- The three districts agreed on how they would measure the impact of their work, setting targets for student language and literacy learning indicators and the implementation of integrated services.
- North Adams and Clarksburg implemented a universal services model where the occupational therapist pushed into PK and K classrooms to work with any student in need and provide consults with the teacher.
- Looking ahead, all three districts are working to deepen and embed inclusive practices within and beyond early childhood grades, both together and as individual districts.

District Leadership

Barbara Malkas, Superintendent, North Adams

Aaron Dean, Superintendent, Hoosac Valley

John Franzioni, Superintendent, Clarksburg

Kim Roberts-Morandi, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, North Adams

Tom Simon, Director of Student Support Services, North Adams

Deb Rosselli, Director of Pupil Services, Clarksburg



North Adams



Hoosac Valley Regional



Clarksburg Elementary

FAST FACTS

Three Participating Districts
SY 2016-17

Schools

8

Students

2,956

Teachers

219

SWD

24.3%

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 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: Three districts in the northern Berkshire region collaborate to improve early childhood inclusive practices

North Adams School District (three elementary schools), Hoosac Valley Regional School District (one elementary school), and Clarksburg Elementary School District (one elementary school) had a common set of challenges: declining enrollment, increasing poverty, and high rates of identification for special education (24% vs. state average of 17%). District leaders had worked together in recent years to improve inclusive practices and interventions, but felt that long-term success would require deeper work in grades PK-2 to reduce referrals. They wanted to see more students on grade level, better interventions and inclusive supports within the general education classroom, and all students being better prepared for success in elementary grades. The three districts applied for and won a DESE grant that encouraged districts to reallocate resources to their priorities.

The districts used grant funding to hire SchoolWorks to conduct an audit of PK-2 special education services and to pay for professional development services. The special education audit included classroom observations, interviews, and document review, culminating in a presentation of findings and recommendations. The audit confirmed the need to focus on approaches to intervention and inclusive practices. The findings helped district leaders, teachers, and related service providers (speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists) prioritize their efforts on professional development and creating a model for inclusive services moving forward.

After completing the audit, district leaders knew that they wanted to focus on improving inclusion, but needed the right partner to help. “Professionally, we don’t have enough models on what good inclusion is. We needed to create a shared vision for that here,” noted one administrator. The team was very deliberate about selecting a partner, taking their time to vet a range of options, and

Exhibit 1 | Participating Districts’ Enrollment

Exhibit 1.a Total combined enrollment

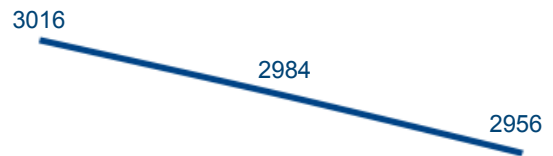


Exhibit 1.b Students with disabilities (% of total enrollment)

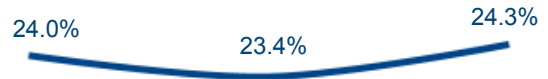
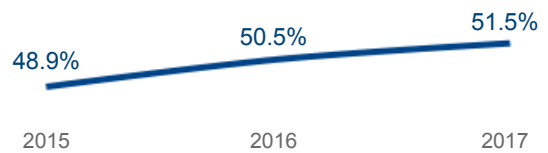


Exhibit 1.c Economically disadvantaged students (% of total enrollment)

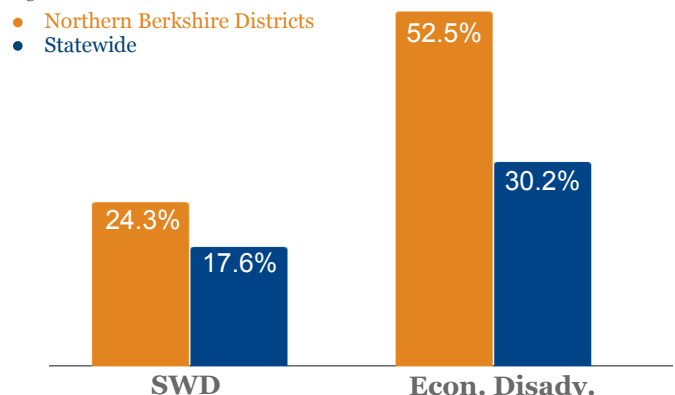


ultimately hiring Dr. Lisa Dieker and Dr. Rebecca Hines to provide cross-district professional development for PK-2 teachers and service providers. After conducting onsite observations, the consultants offered training, coaching, and modeling focused on changes to the instructional environment and interventions. They reviewed materials across classrooms and coached school and district leaders on ensuring environments are inclusive and appropriate for all students. They also supported related service providers to create more effective schedules.

The consultants connected the three districts with the Bailles School, a top-performing school in Florida for supporting students with specialized needs. A PK general education teacher, a PK special education teacher, a speech pathologist, and an occupational therapist, representing

Exhibit 2 | RADAR Analysis – Demographic Data

Comparison of northern Berkshire districts with statewide averages (2016-17)



the three districts, traveled to Orlando to visit the Bailles School and met with educators and administrators there. At first, it seemed that Bailles had far more staff, but the team realized the difference was about how the staff used their time. They learned that a therapist could walk into a classroom and informally work with many kids and give advice to teachers, with the result that more kids got help and teachers saw the therapists model how to help students. One therapist visiting described it as “an intervention SWAT team - they come in quickly, provide help and then they move on.”

This trip proved to be a turning point for the practitioners who attended. At the Bailles School, the service providers saw first-hand how a school can successfully serve students with disabilities in an inclusive model and saw strategies that they could bring back to their respective districts, schools, and classrooms to better serve students. The attendees not only came back with energy and enthusiasm to incorporate what they saw, but also came back with an excitement to continue partnering across districts to implement these practices. “Our teachers who went to the Bailles School came back ready to hit the ground running and helped us engineer our consult model that we now use to work with students,” noted one administrator. Another commented, “The [team that travelled to the Bailles School] wants to get together two to three times a year to problem solve and work together on improving our inclusive practices.”

“We don’t have enough models on what good inclusion is. We needed to create a shared vision for that here.”

One of the biggest changes inspired by the Bailles visit was a shift to a universal services model for occupational therapists. In the new North Adams and Clarksburg model, occupational therapists have a weekly consult in the general education classroom for thirty minutes to one hour. During this time, the OT can model for the teacher, provide differentiated or small group skills, observe and provide feedback for the teacher, and support the teacher in integrating developmental skills into core instruction. The OT still has a caseload and provides services to students with IEPs, but can also provide quick services for any student in the classroom. OTs served as a starting point for the consult integrated services because of the strength of the practitioners and the needs of students in early grade classrooms.

Finally, the three districts provided targeted professional development to paraprofessionals and teaching assistants (TAs) in social-emotional learning (SEL) and behavior sup-

port. Thirty-five paraprofessionals and TAs participated in a training on “Zones of Regulation,” a framework from Kuypers Consulting, to provide consistent language around student behavior. All elementary schools provided follow-up training for TAs and paraprofessionals to apply this framework in their classrooms. This framework has created a team approach and common language for student needs. A new administrator commented, “You walk into our younger grade hallway and classrooms and [you] can see the ‘Zones’ framework being implemented.”

Measuring: Districts use data to measure the impact on students and staff

A team representing all three districts worked with District Management Group consultants and DESE staff to define success measures for their investments. This process was challenging for the districts because ultimately, the districts planned implementation over three to five years and expected to see real results for students later in that timeline. Nonetheless, the districts wanted to set measurable goals that would show earlier whether the initial implementation was leading to the change they hoped to see in three to five years. They identified two leading measures of success:

- The number of students at benchmark for language and literacy learning indicators and meeting readiness targets for the next grade will increase.
- 100% of the PK-1 classes will have regularly scheduled speech services (and potentially occupational therapy) incorporated into the weekly calendar by 2019-20 and shift towards full inclusion from more restrictive placements.

While setting specific targets for success poses a challenge for any district evaluating the impact of an investment, collecting the relevant data is especially challenging across three districts. The districts use different language and literacy assessments and screeners (FastBridge and DIBELS) to track the performance of students over time. Because raw scores cannot be compared between the two assessments, the districts measured growth using each assessment’s comparison to grade-level standards for fall, winter, and spring testing for the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years.

Using a process from DMGroup, the district leaders calculated the fully loaded costs of their initiatives, including staff and administrator time, fees, stipends, consultants, and materials. The professional development and audit of special education services included not only the consultant

costs, but also the time of administrators and staff working with consultants. All districts made a significant investment of staff and leadership time planning, participating in, and providing professional development.

After collecting all associated costs, the three districts invested an estimated \$143,300. This investment impacted all students in PK-1 in North Adams (311) and Hoosac Valley (219) and all students in grades K-2 in Clarksburg (63), for a total of 593 students and a per pupil cost of about \$240.

Exhibit 3 | Fully Loaded Per Pupil Cost

Time Investment	
Category	Amount
Staff Time	\$25,000
Administrator Time	\$17,000
Cash Investment	
Category	Amount
Consultants / Fees	\$93,300
Materials	\$8,000
Estimated Cost Per Student	
Students	Per-pupil
593	\$240

Evaluating: The northern Berkshire County team assessed the impact of their investments

Language and literacy indicators: The northern Berkshire county districts reviewed the percent of students in grades K-1 (North Adams, Hoosac Valley) and K-2 (Clarksburg) who met grade-level standards on language and literacy indicators in 2017-18 and 2018-19. Each district saw slightly different results (noted below).

Hoosac Valley: Overall, 83% of K-1 students in Hoosac Valley met grade-level language and literacy standards on DIBELS composite scores at the end of 2018-19, nearly flat compared to the end of 2017-18 (82%). The percent of students who grew from below grade level to at grade level remained fairly stable from 2017-18 (16%) to 2018-19 (14%).

Clarksburg: 71% of K-2 students in Clarksburg met or exceeded grade-level language and literacy standards on the FastBridge assessment at the end of 2018-19, 10 points below the end of 2017-18 (81%). However, the percent

Exhibit 4 | Language and Literacy Assessments

Exhibit 4.a Hoosac Valley: Percentage of students (K-1) meeting benchmark and readiness targets (on DIBELS)

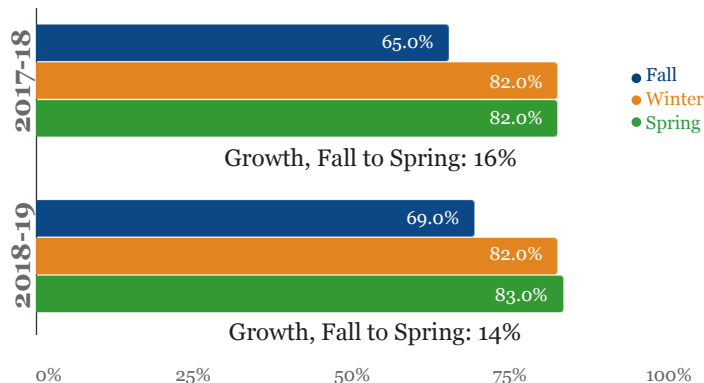


Exhibit 4.b Clarksburg: Percentage of students (K-2) meeting benchmark and readiness targets (on FastBridge)

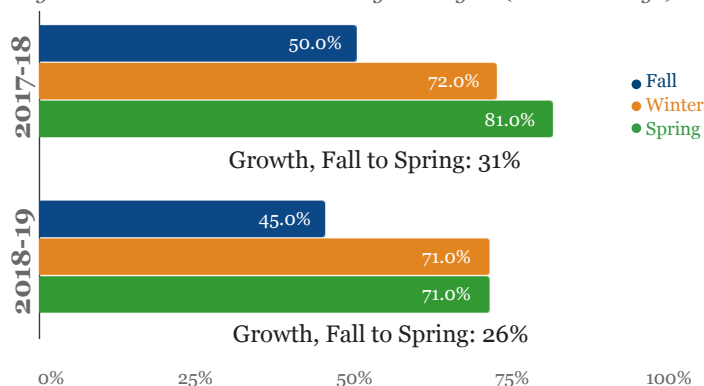
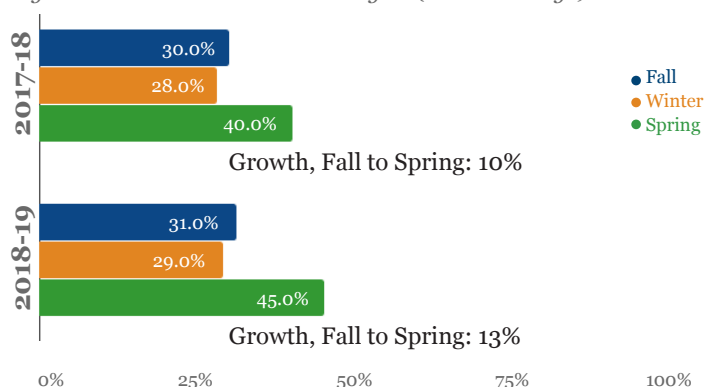


Exhibit 4.c North Adams: Percentage of students (K-1) meeting benchmark and readiness targets (on FastBridge)



of students who grew from below grade level to at grade level remained fairly stable from 2017-18 (31%) to 2018-19 (26%). Fewer students started the school year at or above grade level. For Clarksburg, it is important to note that there is only one cohort of students per grade.

North Adams: Overall, 45% of K-1 students in North Adams met or exceeded grade-level language and literacy standards on the FastBridge assessment at the end of 2018-

19, five percentage points higher than the end of 2017-18 (40%). Similar to the other districts, North Adams saw stable growth from below grade level to at or above grade level between 2017-18 (10%) and 2018-19 (13%).

Because 2018-19 was the first year of implementation, the districts did not expect to see large gains, but hope to see larger increases in 2019-20 and beyond.

Integrated services for core instruction: During 2019-20, all PK and K classes in North Adams and all K classes in Clarksburg have occupational therapy embedded into classrooms. “With this consult model, our students are getting far more time on skill activities - they’re getting 30 hours a week rather than 30 minutes on OT skills,” noted one district administrator. The teachers eagerly incorporated the tips and tricks from the OTs and PTs, gaining a better understanding of the development range for young students and more strategies to redirect student behaviors. As the teachers learned to address disruptions themselves, they reported much calmer classrooms and felt less need for extra TA support.

To make the model work, the three districts also hired a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA). With their tight budgets, it was a challenge to find the funds, but leaders later reflected that the COTA was a critical part of their success and an effective use of resources. This individual supports the OT with their clerical and service responsibilities, which freed up time for the OT to consult in general education classrooms.

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Looking ahead: District and school leaders plan to continue and deepen work on inclusion across the districts

This process helped district leaders focus time, resources, and energy. The special education audit made it clear to district and school leaders that improving inclusive services would be critical. “This [process] pushed us to catch up with others who are getting results,” noted one district leader. “[Our educators] don’t feel like [they] have time to wait.”

Another leader added: “In our first year, we were trying to

fit things into expected outcomes, but we learned that it’s about building professional capacity and teacher ownership in the first year. There are multiple ways to get to the expected outcomes, and we needed to expand our thinking.”

For North Adams, the discoveries made throughout this work continue to support their turnaround work and budget process moving forward. One district leader noted that a greater understanding of their challenges allowed them to redeploy resources from less efficient areas toward areas of highest need. She shared, “We’re able to leverage this process to support our turnaround work that we knew we needed to do.”

Hoosac Valley is focusing their work on growing inclusive practices both within and beyond early childhood grades. One administrator noted, “I see how this work has been integrated into our early grades, but want to see our later grades grow their inclusive practices to serve students within the classroom.”

For Clarksburg leaders, the outcomes of this process helped them think about how they can make better use of existing resources. An administrator summarized by saying, “In such a small district, we need to make the best use of our resources to support students’ social-emotional and academic needs within and beyond early childhood.”

These three districts continue to work together in 2019-20 through cross-district professional development on inclusion and differentiation. Not only do district administrators continue to partner on and deepen this work, but the service providers who helped develop the consult model continue to work together to understand how this work takes shape and can be improved across the schools and classrooms across the northern Berkshire region.

“We were trying to fit things into expected outcomes, but we learned that it’s about building professional capacity and teacher ownership [...] There are multiple ways to get to the expected outcomes, and we needed to expand our thinking.”