



The M Team: Organizing support for targeted students



Cathryn Colley Lambeth, EDLD 655

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Introduction

A system to link volunteer support to targeted student need

At this K-6 elementary school, the Response to Intervention model has been used since 2008 to identify students in need of support in reading. Collaborative teams have used formative assessment data since 2009 to identify individual student progress towards learning goals in all academic areas (Nichols, Meyers & Burling, 2009). Funding provided by the Title I-A program targeted reading in grades K-2.

While student achievement consistently met or exceeded standards in reading, the OAKS statewide assessment data from the 2009-2010 school year revealed an achievement gap in math for low SES students. Low Socio-Economic Status is defined by the state as students enrolled in Free/Reduced Lunch assistance or identified as Title X "in transition" or homeless (Oregon Department of Education, 2010). In Fall, 2010 in reaction to this gap, the school's staff created a goal to improve the math achievement of its low SES students school-wide.

Supports for this goal were limited at that time to collaborative team's instructional strategies and the school wide instructional focus on differentiated instruction. Based on this limited systematized support, an examination of the formative assessment data on the targeted students was conducted. The examination revealed the need for simple skills practice.

In November 2010, the administrator was contacted by a local community college and by members of a local church, both offering itinerate volunteer support for the school. In December 2010, the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) approved the concept of linking the available volunteers with the targeted students on an as-needed basis.

Options for support

The school wide goal and ILT's approval prompted an active search for ways to provide this needed support. Staff researched and considered options including:

-Support provided by classroom volunteers in a traditional model. This option would encourage teachers to individually recruit and train their own classroom volunteers to assist the targeted students with their skills practice. This option would also assign community college and church based volunteers to individual classes to be used as the teacher sees fit.

-Continuing present level of support for reading interventions by certified and classified staff, and attempt to adjust the intervention schedule to include short periods of time for itinerate student assistance for specific skills.

-Including math in the RtI process, including a universal screener administered three times yearly and specific identification of students in the lowest 20% of math performance.

-Creating a structure and system that connects the known volunteers, targeted students and skills practice materials.

Considerations before implementation

Before preparing for implementation, the administrator considered and addressed the following issues:

- Ease of use** - Balancing the need for materials and information from teachers with their limited time. Providing support in short, targeted practice periods without disrupting the daily schedule.
- Scheduling** - Given a schedule based on the volunteer availability, could support be provided outside of core instruction hours?
- Sustainability** - Is a primarily volunteer-based system sustainable in a school setting? Would recruitment interfere with existing class-based volunteering?
- Equity** - How would support be distributed. Would some students get more frequent support?
- Skills practice** - Volunteers with limited training should not be 'instructing' or providing assistance that may/may not be aligned to core instruction. How will the support be defined to ensure the skills support is appropriate.
- Legal and ethical considerations** - Student removal from class must occur outside of core instructional periods, and follow district guidelines regarding volunteers.
- Progress monitoring** - What tool(s) will be used to measure student progress; how do we know its working?
- Resources and Materials** - What materials will volunteers use for skills practice sessions.

Ongoing corrections and adjustments include:

- Streamlining communication.** Currently the M Team relies on teacher's updating their targeted students data on the administrator's master set of cards weekly. Teacher's inconsistently update their data, resulting in M Team volunteers providing interventions to students who have passed a goal.
- Resources.** Communication is required to clarify what the expectations are for individual teachers to provide materials for targeted practice.
- Volunteer Recruitment and Retention.** As the value of additional skills practice for their target students is demonstrated, requests for assistance have increased. Previously non-participating staff are asking for M Team help, and participating staff have requested M Team help for non-targeted students who are not reaching the goals.

Funding and Staffing Factors

Funding and staff were not available to include math in the RtI process. Teacher feedback relating to using classroom volunteers in a new way was mixed. Many teachers stated they used their volunteers similarly already. Others noted the decrease in consistent volunteering overall and the resulting limit on the time volunteer adults worked with students individually overall. Teachers also noted that targeted students already received additional support in the classroom during instructional periods.

Description of M Team as implemented

After addressing the considerations, the M Team was organized with the following components:

Schedules: The primary schedule, provided by teachers, listed the days and times outside of core instruction that students would be available for extra skills practice. For example, students were available during read-aloud, snack breaks and other transitional periods.

These schedules were matched with the schedules of volunteers and work-study students through a master schedule visual.

Volunteers and staffing: The M Team is staffed by volunteers from outside the school community, work-study students from the local community college, and school staff. Current federal work-study regulations require that some work-study hours be dedicated to providing support for elementary reading and math. The community college has elected to channel students in its educational assistant certification program receiving work-study aid to the M Team program.

Volunteers and work-study students receive orientation on the goals and appropriate skills practice strategies. Orientation includes a discussion of the importance of limiting the skills practice, and that this practice does not supplant classroom instruction. School staff who intermittently find gaps in their working day use the M Team schedule to fill the time supporting students.

Using data to identify students: For each short term goal set by collaborative teams, teachers use formative assessments to identify students who have not yet met the goal (Halverson, 2010). For the targeted students, teachers record student data on a card, which are updated at least weekly. The M Team staff transfers the goals and data for each target student from the cards to a binder. The binder is organized by grade level and goals, and lists by goal the target students in need of extra practice. The M Team staff uses this notebook to identify the students, rotate help within the grade level and time, and to record the dates that help was provided.

Resources and materials: For each grade level and goal, resources are organized and maintained in a central area. Teachers are encouraged but not required to provide practice materials on an on-going basis as goals change. Generic resources such as coins, unifix cubes, math fact practice materials and guidelines for deconstructing math word problems are maintained by M Team volunteers.

Progress Monitoring: As student skills improve toward the goal, teachers are notified to reassess. As students pass the goal, their names are removed from the help list.

Contact Information

For further information or sources contact Cathryn Colley Lambeth at lambethc@uoregon.edu

Sample M Team schedule - Times of student availability

Teacher	Time am	Time pm	Bonus Time	Note:
1 J	9:45 - 10:05	1:15 - 1:25	3:05 - 3:20	M - Th only
1 T	9:45 - 10:05	1:15 - 1:30	3:15 - 3:25	M - Th only
2 K	11:20 - 11:40	2:45 - 3:00		
2 S	11:20 - 11:45	2:45 - 3:05	Fun Friday	
3 S		1:05 - 1:30		M, W, F
3 M	9:00 - 9:20	1:10 - 1:30		
4 Ag	9:00 - 9:25	12:05 - 12:30	Fun Friday	
4 Ar	9:00 - 9:25*	12:00 - 12:30	Fun Friday	*except ELD kids
5 S	12 - 12:15	2:45 - 3:15	Fun Friday	
5 H	12 - 12:15	2:45 - 3:20	Fun Friday	
6 B		2:45 - 3:20	9:00 *	*if not in band
6 S		2:50 - 3:20	9:00 *	*if not in band

Sample page - M Team log book

Grade 2	SMART Goal: Repeated addition up to 100 using numbers 5s and 2s (count by's)			
Student 1 (2S)	Count by 5s to 35 2/11	Count by 5s to 75 2/13		
Student 2 (2S)	Count by 5s to 70 2/10	Count by 5s to 85 2/11	Count by 5s to 75 2/12	
Student 3 (2K)	Count by 5s to 150 2/06	Count by 2s to 10 2/07	Count by 2s to 14 2/08	Count by 2s to 20 2/10
Student 4 (2K)	Count by 5s to 75 2/05	Abs 2/06, 2/08, 2/10	Count by 5s to 55 2/11	
Comments: 2/06 - 2S at district swimming lessons through 2/10 2/08 - Student 4 absent for 5 days 2/11 - Student 3 passed goal, refer for teacher retest				

"The M Team has really helped my kids who just needed that little extra practice. I think it's a great idea and the kids are always asking when their M Team helper is coming."

Ms. K., 2nd grade teacher

Sources:

Halverson, R. (2010). School formative feedback systems. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 85, 130 - 146. doi: 10.1080/01619561003685270
Oregon Department of Education. (2010). *2009-2010 School Report Card, Sample School*. Retrieved from <http://www.sample.district.k12.or.us/uploads/Sample-ReportCard-92.pdf>
Nichols, P. D., Meyers, J. L. and Burling, K. S. (2009). A framework for evaluating and planning formative assessments intended to improve student achievement. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 28(3), 14 -23.