CASe Study: Coventry

For the past few years, Coventry has been working on a comprehensive assessment system for their elementary schools. In their presentation to the Coventry School Committee in January 2012, Assistant Superintendent Jim Erinakes and Professional Development Coordinator Amy Anzalone describe the process of developing this system and many of its key features. These include:

LOCAL ASSESSMENTS

- Target Maps – developed for each grade level in math by Professional Development Coordinator (PDC) with input from teachers. They grouped GSEs into curricular targets. Targets spiral through curriculum at least twice, occasionally three times.

- Used NECAP released items and mapped them to the target maps.

- Created local interim and pre and post unit tests.

- Used data from Year 1 to estimate Expected Rates of Growth.

"We have tools to use to intervene and monitor progress."

-Coventry teacher

"It breaks big tasks and skills into smaller pieces."-Coventry teacher

SWAT PROCESS

- SWAT (School Workers Armed with Timers)- universal screening using local interim assessments in math, reading, and writing. Administered 3 times per year (fall, winter, spring) to all students. In grade 1, an additional interim assessment is administered in late fall. This assessment is administered by SWAT Team (3 or 4 reading specialists, special educators, math interventionists, coordinated by PDC and principal), not teachers. They arrange schedule with teacher and pull students for assessments. It takes about 1 week to "SWAT" an entire elementary school.

- Data are entered into Data Management System and given to teachers so that they can start interventions with students who are at risk (as identified by a particular score on the SWAT).

- They use a Data Management System (RTIM Direct) which shows them if students are on the proper trajectory. As a team (at Data Meetings), they can determine if the student needs more or less intervention, if it is the wrong intervention, if the student might have a learning disability, or if the intervention is being implemented with fidelity.

- In Year 1 they did one school per week in math, reading, and writing. In Year 2, they were able to "SWAT" two schools per week. Assessments are staggered throughout the week so that students aren't being assessed in all content areas at once.

PRE and POST TESTS

- They developed common math assessments that include pre and post tests for each unit.

- Teachers report pre and post data on each unit to principal (coded as P–in need of prerequisite, or E–in need of extension)

DATA TEAM MEETINGS

"At first I would get nervous to see the data. Then I realized, it's not about what the data say, it's about what you do with it."

-Coventry teacher

-They hold Data Team Meetings with grade level team, principal, and PDC every three weeks to review data and plan interventions.

-In addition, teachers have daily common prep time and a weekly after school planning block.

-Teachers conduct regular "probes" to monitor progress of identified students between Data Team meetings.

OTHER

- Principal completes Dana Center Classroom WalkThroughs (5 per week as a school goal). He/she then charts or graphically displays the observed behaviors to show faculty how they are progressing on certain data practices.

- They are continually revising their forms and organizational systems. They are currently using common data tracking forms. The next step will be for teachers to start using computer-based tracking systems (currently the PDC enters data at Data Meetings).

- District leaders admit that Year 1 was difficult. There was a lot of push back on targets and questions about how to assess them. Push back went away when teachers started to respect "the authority of the data" and appreciate what it could do for them.

BENEFITS

- Conversations about student achievement are based on data. Teachers can speak from a place of knowledge about where students are with respect to the targets.

- Teachers find it easier to differentiate homework and tell parents specifically what to support their student with, because they have the specific data.

- Students are more likely to receive the intervention they need, no more and no less. They are exited out quickly when they have reached targets. This avoids placing students in classes/tutoring that is redundant of classroom instruction and beyond or not aligned to what they truly need.

> *"I feel more informed."*
>
> *"Instruction becomes much more focused."*
>
> *"It's easier to differentiate when you're looking at specific data."*
>
> *- Gr. 1 Team*

7 Keys to Success

While Coventry leadership and teachers agree that the system is still evolving and improving, they also agree that there were several factors that contributed to the successful development and implementation of their elementary CAS.

1. LEA leadership has a consistent vision.

The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent agreed that this was a priority area and allocated time and resources accordingly.

2. They figured out how to hire additional personnel to support teachers.

The district hired Professional Development Coordinators (PDCs). Currently, there are three in the district, shared among the schools. They also "re-crafted" roles of people already in place, such as school psychologists, reading teachers, and interventionists.

3. They carved out time for regular meetings.

Assistant Superintendent rearranged specialists' schedules to allow K-5 teachers to be released every three weeks for Data Meetings. There are two data blocks per school per week, so that every grade level meets every three weeks.

4. Administrators and PDCs received professional development.

It is hard for administrators to lead new initiatives when they don't feel they have a firm understanding of the content. Recognizing this, Coventry provided five days of intensive professional development to PDCs upon their hiring. Data training included defining what data is and isn't, how to analyze data, how to triangulate data, how to assess where schools are and where they need to go. Principals also received professional development on the use of data. This helped to build the skill set of administrators in the district.

5. Their assessments and systems are "homegrown".

Prior to implementation of new system, Coventry felt that the math assessment series that they were using didn't align perfectly with the GSEs. To remedy this, they created local common math assessments at each grade level that included pre and post tests for each unit, aligned with their GSEs (they are beginning to transition to CCSS).

Though labor intensive and admittedly imperfect (they are constantly refining and improving their assessments, forms, systems, etc.), building these systems **in the district** enables district staff to develop these skills. It also forced the right conversations because they had to continuously reflect and revise on what worked and what did not. Because it was locally-developed and not purchased, they felt empowered to make changes as they saw fit.

6. They developed and refined organizational systems.

They have forms, acronyms, coding symbols, and a Data Management System to help keep it all straight. Teachers each have their own systems for staying organized, but all agreed that having a system that worked for them helped to manage the paper and make the data easy to record, access, and interpret.

7. They really know their evaluation system.

This allowed them to make clear connections between what they were asking teachers to change about their instruction and assessment and how they were being evaluated as professionals. These are not separate initiatives but clearly aligned. District and building leaders feel confident illustrating this alignment to teachers.