MOVING YOUR NUMBERS

Tigard-Tualatin School District: Achievement Profile

Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students With Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement

In collaboration with:
Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)
National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)

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About Moving Your Numbers

Moving Your Numbers: Improving Learning for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Reform, examines how school districts with vastly different demographics increase the performance of students with disabilities and other at-risk learners as part of whole-district reform efforts. Case studies of featured districts, as described in the full report, provide evidence that students with disabilities, like all other students, can learn at higher levels when adults focus their collective efforts on improving instructional practice, consistently implement core work across the district, and use assessment and accountability as a lever for ongoing system and student learning and improvement.

Moving Your Numbers identifies six essential practices that must be in place to improve the performance of students with disabilities. Evidence suggests that these six practices, when used in an aligned and coherent manner, are associated with higher student achievement. These practices are use data well, focus your goals, select and implement shared instructional practices (individually and collectively), implement deeply, monitor and provide feedback and support, and inquire and learn.

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Photographs used in this publication have been provided courtesy of the districts featured and the Ohio Department of Education.

Additional case studies of featured districts will be added to the Moving Your Numbers website as they are developed. Go to www.MovingYourNumbers.org for the complete report and additional tools and resources, and to submit success stories.

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In the Tigard-Tualatin School District (TTSD), it’s about “never giving up; nothing matters as much as teaching every child to read at grade level,” said former district superintendent Rob Saxton, newly appointed in September 2012 as Oregon’s first Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction. TTSD’s mission to educate every child is operationalized through a collective commitment to focused work; continuous improvement and refinement in instructional practice on a district-wide basis; and a pervasive attitude on the part of district and school personnel to ensure that all students leave TTSD able to be highly successful adults. The refusal to allow any child to fall through the proverbial cracks and, instead, to make sure all students are learning, is described as a kind of “shared relentlessness” among adults in the district.

Begun as a log schoolhouse in 1853, TTSD is now the ninth largest district in Oregon and the fifth largest in the Portland metropolitan area, serving approximately 13,000 students in 10 elementary schools, three middle schools, two high schools, and an alternative school program. And, despite serving a large and growing number of English Language Learners, the district has made substantial progress in narrowing the achievement gap between the performance of children from underrepresented groups (e.g., minority, students with disabilities) and their typical peers. Over 50 percent of TTSD’s student population is projected to be comprised of students of color by 2020.

Moving from Idiosyncratic to Common, Shared Goals
The use of resources to support the goals for instruction and achievement was identified by Waters and Marzano (2006) as an attribute of superintendents of high-performing districts. These superintendents “ensure that the necessary resources, including time, money, personnel, and materials, are allocated to accomplish the district’s goals” (School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement, McREL, p. 13). In The Challenge of Change: Start School Improvement Now!, Michael Fullan (2009) describes components of system reform, which include mobilizing capacity, developing/rellying on a strong infrastructure to support implementation, and managing distractions (p. 7). The willingness to minimize activities that fragment the work (i.e., distractions) is a prerequisite to gaining the focus needed to make and sustain improvements.

Focus Your Goals. TTSD’s intentional efforts to improve the coherence and consistency of instruction in all classrooms in the district is highlighted by the use and alignment of a limited number of district goals with associated strategies/actions that are implemented at the departmental, school, and classroom level. For example, the primary responsibilities of the Curriculum and Instruction department is to assist teachers in facilitating exceptional academic and social progress for each and every student through such actions as the: provision and organization of focused staff development for principals, teachers and other licensed personnel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tigard-Tualatin School District Demographics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment: 12,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Students Identified as Students with Disabilities: 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged: 38</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Students Identified as Minority: 37</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Students Identified as English Language Learners: 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Students Identified as Talented/Gifted: 14</td>
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The Oregon legislature recently passed major changes to the administration of the Oregon Department of Education, one of which resulted in the designation of the Governor as the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the appointment, rather than election, of a Deputy Superintendent.
and classified staff; the administration of the district’s student-focused academic and behavioral assessment systems, and the coordination of rigorous and ongoing school improvement efforts.

A focus on improving reading/literacy and closing the achievement gap among subgroups of students (e.g., between students with and without disabilities, between Latino and white students) is front and center in the district’s work. “It’s important that goals are goals for all children so we can close the racial achievement gap,” said Dan Goldman, Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

“We’ve come a long way from having a long list of goals to focusing on one or two high-leverage actions that impact core instruction, and having fewer and fewer goals at the school level,” he added. “Grade-level goals are aligned to school goals, and school goals are aligned to district goals,” explained Kraig Sproles, Principal of Metzger Elementary School. Sproles elaborated: “We also had idiosyncratic goals and while they were sometimes good, there was no coherence across schools in the district. We’ve worked toward shared goals.”

“We’ve been intentional about coming back to our goals. We used to put them in a drawer; now we want common instructional strategies” reflected Julie Walker, Literacy/Title 1 Coordinator. The use of focused goals to improve the quality, coherence, and consistent delivery of instruction is supported through the district’s theory of action and five-year (2012-2016) strategic plan. This theory of action asserts that rigorous instructional standards, the delivery of high-quality instruction, the effective use of data to make instructional decisions, and a commitment to continuous improvement all contribute to closing the achievement gap and maximizing student growth. And, when TTSD says all children, it really does mean all children. As an example, special education is defined as a service that should be brought to the student in the typical environment and the district believes that students with disabilities should be held to rigorous academic standards. A commitment to ensuring that each child can fully access rich curricular, instructional, and social opportunities in general education, coupled with accountability for meaningful progress, guides district practice.

TTSD – District Goals

- Every student will achieve academic success.
- Highly qualified teachers, administrators and support staff will be recruited, retained and supported.
- The district will make decisions and take actions that maintain public trust.
- The school district environment will support student learning, positive behavior, staff collaboration and productivity.

Tigard-Tualatin School District

Theory of Practice

- Educate Every Child
- High Quality Instruction
- Data-Based Decision-Making
- Continuous Improvement
- Rigorous Instructional Standards
- Closing the Racial Achievement Gap - Maximizing Student Growth - Evidence-based Practices
“There is not an ‘except for’ attitude here,” explained Petrea Hagen-Gilden, formerly the Director of Special Education and Director of Elementary Education, for the district. “With the exception of one self-contained class at each level for students with the most challenging behavior/emotional problems, most of whom came from residential settings, we don’t have self-contained classes. All kids are included, including medically fragile children and children with significant disabilities. They are all important to the school community; we feel passionately about this,” said Hagen-Gilden.

Part of the district’s challenge involved providing the right supports to students and teachers. “If we don’t have a pull-out resource room, then how do we support teachers?” posed Sproles in describing the kind of question principals asked. “Well, the EBIS Team does that and you’re not on your own; teachers feel supported,” he added. Effective Behavior and Instructional Support (EBIS), begun in 2001 when reading achievement was added to the district’s original focus on behavior (i.e., EBS), is a Response to Intervention (RtI) approach and the primary strategy used by the district to establish a common framework for delivering effective instruction and intervention to all children. Research-based core curriculum; leadership and data-based teaming; screening; progress monitoring; and research-based interventions are the core elements of EBIS. “We continually ask, ‘what do we need to do to improve?’” said Goldman. “Within the RtI system, we can hang our big three - RtI-positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS), and our racial equity work – off the framework, and operationalize our foundational principle of using data, for example, to develop a refined district-wide system for data use. Our task is then to do this with a high level of fidelity,” said Goldman.

Strategies, objectives, and measures for achieving each goal have been delineated by the district. The academic priorities of the School Board are also aligned with district goals with objectives delineating directives such as: “staff will have sufficient time to collaborate with peers,” “all employees will be provided with high-quality professional development opportunities to promote individual and organizational effectiveness,” and “use student, school, and district performance data to monitor and improve student achievement.”

TTSD - Measures of Success (Sample)

**GOAL:** Every student will achieve academic success.

**Measure of success:**

- Each year, all students will make significant individual academic progress.
- Each year, 90% of our students will meet or exceed benchmarks in reading/literature, writing and mathematics.
- All schools will meet the Adequate Yearly Progress requirements of the No Child Left Behind law.
- The district’s drop-out rate will be at or below 2.25%
- By 2010, the percent of district 11th grade students meeting the “College Readiness Benchmarks on the ACT test will have increased by 10% in each area of the assessment (English, Math, Reading, Science).

**Use Data Well.** “The district has a culture of continuous improvement and that means K-12 data use is critical. We decided what data are important, for example DIBELS data\(^2\), and we stressed that they need to be administered with fidelity. District-wide protocols are in place for how teams will use data; we don’t leave a child’s academic or social development to chance based on whose classroom or which school they happen to attend,” said Goldman.

TTSD has used its EBIS framework to systematize the effective use of data at all levels of the organization, ensuring the use of what Goldman refers to as a “lock-step decision-making process.” And, while district leadership believes that student

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\(^2\) Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) measures skills in identifying word sounds, letters and parts of words, as well as reading speed and fluency.
growth overrides conversations about the number of students who meet/exceed state performance standards, the district monitors closely state assessment results, using the data to take the temperature of the district.

TTSD’s improvements on state assessment (i.e., Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, or OAKS), and in other areas (e.g., reduction in discipline referrals) are evident for all children. For example, the passing rate in writing assessment increased from 32% in 2010 to 50% in 2011. Similarly, the gap between Latino and White students on fifth-grade reading and math state assessment is narrowing. While only 47 percent of Latino students met/exceeded standards in reading in 2006-07 as compared to over 86 percent of their white counterparts, by 2009-2010, 77.3 and 93.2 percent of Latino and White students, respectively, met/exceeded the standards.

The gap in mathematics has been narrowed even more. The gap, while still large between students with and without disabilities, is also narrowing as the district puts processes and structures in place to improve outcomes for all children. Over the past three years – from 2008-09 to 2010-11 – the percentage of students receiving special education services that has exceeded and met OAKS performance standards has increased from around 41 percent to a little over 49 percent.

Goldman, who was a special education teacher and school psychologist prior to assuming his current post, believes that TTSD’s “growth mindset around student learning allows staff to have different conversations about what kids can do.” “Seeing the
for other districts who chose to use this option, pre-populating the tool with TTSD assessments, benchmarks, and decision rules that can be customized by participating districts.

The progress of all children is monitored through the tool and if a child’s score on a particular assessment falls below the aim line (using established decision rules), then a red box appears with guidance on next steps. The district and its schools use the University of Oregon-developed School-Wide Information System (SWIS) to collect/analyze office discipline referrals, as well as other assessments at various levels (e.g., MAZE – a curriculum-based measurement of reading used in middle schools and the results of which are collected and scored at the district level). TTSD administers the ACT battery EXPLORE to all eighth- and ninth-graders to gauge student preparedness in reading, math, English, and science. TTSD is one of only 10 districts in Oregon that has a waiver to use ACT; all other districts use the state-adopted SAT by College Board.

The Notion of Radical Differentiation

About six years ago, TTSD district leadership examined student assessment data and discovered that they could predict with 80 percent probability that when a third-grade student did not meet the benchmark on the Oregon Reading Assessment, that student was almost always Latino. This realization led to a reexamination of the system, the development in 2007 of a District-wide Equity Transformation Framework, and a commitment to address the educational needs of all of the district’s students in culturally relevant ways. In its call to action, the district noted “…we recognize that our school district is a complex system of many people and processes. But we also recognize that these very systems, through their design, are perpetuating the results we are currently getting... if we desire different results, we must change ourselves first because WE ARE THE SYSTEM.” (p. 7)

Rather than blame children, the district took steps to change the way in which instruction was delivered, developing structures to support more collaborative learning among central office personnel, principals, teachers, and other staff members. Sproles and Walker, both starting their third year with the district, said “we’re constantly amazed that there’s not a lot of discussion about what to teach. Rather, there is a lot of discussion about HOW to teach, and WHO we’re teaching it to.”

Select and Implement Shared Instructional Practices. “Individual teacher discretion or choosing your own adventure is not a good thing,” said Tiffany Wiencken, new to the district in 2011-2012 as Principal of Deer Creek Elementary School. “Instead of trying different things and seeing if they make a difference, the system in place here forces consistent, collective implementation. I had four new members of a six-member core team and if we hadn’t had the system in place, we would not have achieved the gains we did. I’m completely in awe of the system; there are no invisible kids here,” she said.

Using EBIS, we differentiate for every single kid – gifted, special education, all of them; we talk about the notion of radical differentiation,” said Sproles. “It’s not just a word, it’s a system,” he added. Eric Nesse, Principal of Hazelbrook Middle School, described the difference in reading instruction prior to district-wide use of EBIS, stating “we have a more systemic way to teach reading and had a big shift in just one year after instituting tiered reading instruction.”

EBIS followed the district’s use of EBS (positive behavior intervention supports) and was adopted by the TTSD board for use in every school in 1997. Now, consistent team structures are in place in every school to support implementation of EBIS with fidelity. Each school has a core team (AKA the “80 percent” team). Grade-level teams at the elementary level meet every six weeks, while the EBIS (multidisciplinary) team at the middle school level meets once a month. The high schools have core EBIS teams comprised of general and special education teachers (i.e., learning specialists), counselors, ELL teachers, and others, and meet every month alternating their focus on reading, math, and attendance issues.

In addition to a District Equity Leadership Team (DELT), a district-level Instructional Improvement Team meets weekly to look at data, gauge progress of schools, and identify gaps that need to be addressed through professional development (PD) and/or other strategies. “The connection between the departments of Curriculum & Instruction, and Student Services is strong and characterized by a common focus around instruction,” said Goldman and Tricia Clair, Director of Student Services. An elementary administrative team, comprised of elementary principals, also meets to review each other’s data, and identify ways they can support each other in their collective focus on learning. School-level Collaborative Action Research for Equity (CARE) teams are merging with EBIS teams to further focus the district’s work on instruction and student learning.

Learning specialists are on every team as regular members. Sproles noted that “the role of the LS in this district is very different than in other districts. They are truly integrated, interfacing specialists.” “We have to attract and train a different type of person here,” he said. According to Goldman, the district’s focus on hiring people is really different. “We’re looking for instructional leadership and people whose core beliefs are consistent with the district’s beliefs,” he said. Central office is ‘flat’ without a lot of gates and teachers frequently call Goldman and Clair directly. “But, having a flat central office means our principals have to be real instructional leaders,” he said. “There is no other role but instructional leader for principals here,” said Sproles.

**Implementing deeply** agreed on practices means limiting the number of initiatives to which principals have to attend and moving from what Hagen-Gilden described as “every school having its own empire with widely varying roles of principals to a much more coherent approach across schools.” Deeper implementation of focused actions is also supported by the district’s intentional use of school psychologists. Goldman explained: “Before every elementary school had a 1.0 counselor and a .25 school psychologist. Now, as counselors retire, the positions are filled with school psychologists who provide counseling and other services, not only assessment for special education eligibility purposes. This improves efficiency and provides support for teachers, families, and others through on-site coaching, the development of behavior plans, and other activities related to the district’s instructional priorities.”
Chasing the golden ticket. “When we identify a student as a student with a disability, it’s not necessarily about more intensive service; it’s more about procedural safeguards,” said Sproles. “It used to be heartbreaking when a kid that wasn’t making academic progress didn’t qualify for special education,” he added. Now, the district spends its time on instructional issues, rather than ones involving placement. “If you pull anyone out, you cannot be systemic,” said Goldman. “The energy and resource put into the discussion about where kids should go comes right out of the time and resources available for deciding the right way to deliver instruction to that child. Focusing on where kids should go takes away from the right work and is debilitative. If we pull them out, there’s always that psychological out,” he explained.

Sproles agrees, remarking “the placement mentality changes the discussion for teachers too. Kids receiving special education services are going to be here, sitting side-by-side with other kids. We don’t spend time playing ‘let’s find the golden ticket,’ that is, the best placement option. Without this being a conversation at the table, the focus is on each individual kid and teachers take ownership,” he said. “We pull kids out for more intensive reading instruction, but we do that for all kids,” added Hagen-Gilden. Clair concurred, explaining that “learning specialists don’t use co-teaching; rather we push-in and pull-out based on each individual child’s needs. We just look at children with disabilities as general education students first and design instruction that way,” she said.

Monitor and Provide Feedback and Support. We used to have way too many actions; now the school improvement plans are similar across buildings and there are four actions related to implementation of the school-wide plan,” said Sproles. The superintendent demanded that whatever was agreed on and/or adopted had to be implemented with 100 percent fidelity across the district. One example is flexible skills grouping, a strategy that allows for grouping and regrouping students according to specific goals, activities, and individual needs. Flexible grouping allows students to work in differently mixed groups depending on the goal of the learning task at hand (Opitz, 1998)

“It became apparent that flexible grouping was in place in some schools, but not in others,” said Saxton. “I felt that key actions needed to be implemented across schools so we could

make decisions about what needed to be done, and what was and was not working,” he said. Goldman elaborated: “Rob (Saxton) wanted the core to be really solid, structuring flexible skill grouping, expecting every teacher to team, and requiring everyone to hold each other accountable for delivering the curriculum as a team, rather than fostering an ‘every teacher for him/herself’ mentality. We took a hard line on the use of data and teaming – everyone had to do it – and the results were ridiculously good; it was hard to argue with them,” said Goldman.

Focusing principals on fewer things related to instruction, and directing them to “clean out the plans” was done to ensure that implementation of the important pieces of focused work could be monitored effectively. Instructional rounds during which principals and other personnel observe classroom practice using “look fors” (e.g., is explicit vocabulary being used) to support the shared understanding of what constitutes high-quality instructional practice in TTSD.

Standing by the Non-Negotiables

Principals and others agree that the role of the superintendent is to establish what is and is not negotiable and to hold the vision, deciding whether and when to intervene. “Rob (Saxton) was courageous; he upheld the beliefs of the district even when it was really hard to do so and, no matter at what level, the decisions he made were based on kids,” said Kintz.

Inquire & Learn. “We don’t really have professional learning communities in the traditional sense as we’ve focused intensely on a different kind of team process that is a bit more systemic and a bit less autonomous,” explained Goldman. “One of our next steps is to augment our teaming processes to include collaborative teacher teams using standards-based common formative assessments focused on how students are progressing toward the Common Core State Standards. We strive to continuously refine our approach as the research community establishes new best practices yet, as an organization, we try to only take on new practices that are vetted in rigorous research,” he added.

TTSD has written the RtI manual for the state of Oregon and work with state officials to provide training to other districts interested in replicating the practices TTSD has put into place. “Our big adjustment for the 2012-13 school year involves reviewing how explicit we are in ELL instruction and we’re embedding an ELL protocol to support instruction in the core,” said Goldman. “Our commitment is to always strengthening core instruction is challenging but invigorating,” he added.

“Every district in the country says, ‘we’re here for kids,’ but many districts try to mitigate what’s right for kids by making the adults happy,” offered Goldman. “We prioritize systems around the skill attainment of children – a growth mindset – and believe that when
kids do better, adults are really happy. Students do better when we're systemic about identifying the current skill level of each and every student and having high expectations for their success. Our staff really want to be here; we need courageous leaders who are willing to make decisions and stand by them,” he said.

**Advice from Tigard-Tualatin School District**

1. It can be done.
2. Identify and focus all efforts on core work and leave other activities behind.
3. Use common vocabulary, common language, and common instructional strategies – don't be an island.
4. Make data use a foundational practice at all levels of the district.
5. Ask the hard questions. For example, is what you're doing about curriculum and instruction? If the answer is “no,” don't do it! 
6. Make all decisions about resource (e.g., time, money, personnel) use based on the district’s core work.
7. Support principals to be real instructional leaders.
8. Build trust through strong ties with the community.

Supplementary information related to TTSD’s efforts to improve the attainment of knowledge and skills for all children can be found by clicking on the Additional Resources tab. For additional information about TTSD, contact Dan Goldman, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, TTSD Administration Office, 6960 SW Sandburg Street, Tigard, OR 97223; Phone: (503) 431-4000.
Available *MOVING YOUR NUMBERS* Publications:

- Administrator Preparation Guide: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement.
- District Self-Assessment Guide for Moving Our Numbers: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.
- Moving Your Numbers: A Synthesis of Lessons Learned from Districts Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.
- **Moving Your Numbers: Five Districts Share How They Used Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.**
- Moving Your Numbers: The Critical Role of Regional Providers in Facilitating School District Capacity to Improve Achievement for Students with Disabilities.
- Moving Your Numbers: The Critical Role of SEAs in Facilitating School District Capacity to Improve Achievement for Students with Disabilities.
- Parent/Family Companion Guide: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.
- Teacher Preparation Guide: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.

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