Chapter 9

The Roles and Practices of Student Services Staff as Data-Driven Instructional Leaders[1]

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The idea of accountability is not new in educational institutions, but the emphasis on using student achievement data to hold schools accountable is a recently emergent phenomena. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) outlines many of the same aspirations as previous initiatives, such as Goals 2000, but with demands for local schools and districts to measure performance with student achievement data. For many of us in education, NCLB represented the first time that student data had been presented to us in such a way. Meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

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goals forces school leaders to understand how to develop local systems to translate summative testing data into the kinds of information teachers and staff can use to improve student learning. This change has pushed school leaders into the new data driven paradigm, which calls on schools to understand and use this new data to inform instruction. This is not an easy transition, considering that most educators are only now beginning to receive training on the use of data in schools.

As part of a five year National Science Foundation Study, the authors have been collecting data that examines how school leaders create social and technical systems to help teachers use achievement data to improve instruction at their school. In this research it has become apparent that school leaders have turned to the practices and expertise of student service personnel in their efforts to develop schools that use data effectively. We found that while schools already had significant capacity to design *curriculum-level* interventions to address the needs of groups of students, leaders in our schools turned to special education practices and professionals to provide the in-house expertise necessary to create a variety of *student-level interventions*. This chapter will highlight one of our schools, the Harrison School (all pseudonyms), to understand how the roles and practices of student service staff shifted to help use data to improve learning. Harrison provides a picture of the

increased role that student service staff has had in developing and maintaining program and student level support programs. Specifically, we will investigate two central issues:

1. **Student service *practices* provide a precedent for student-level intervention design.** School leaders are reshaping Special Education practices to help all students and teachers meet the demands of high stakes accountability. The emergence of Problem Solving Teams (PST) provides a good example of how special education practices, specifically the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process, is being adapted for general educational issues with individual students.
2. **Student service staff play new *roles* as data-savvy instructional leaders.** Student service staff are trained in using data to diagnose and guide learning plans for individual students. The need for data-driven student-level interventions invites a new range of staff, including social workers and school psychologists, to play key leadership roles in revising core instructional practices of schools.

In addition to showing how schools utilize expertise at-hand to build data-driven instructional systems, our findings begin to provide insight into how schools might unite internal instructional systems, such as instructional and student

services staff, that have been historically separated. This new melding of practices promises to reshape both instructional leadership and special education. As school leaders draw data-driven special education practices into the core instructional program, student service staff offer access to a better range of services to children. The capacity to identify and help students before they fail not only fulfils accountability demands but also changes how schools view teaching and learning.

Student Services and Instructional Leadership

The press to use assessment data has led school leaders to seek out data analysis and implementation expertise. Some of this expertise, to be sure, has been provided by district assessment specialists and external consultants. Student service staff such as special educators, school psychologists and social workers had been trained in using achievement data for years prior to NCLB. Since the 1997 reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), educators have been trained to write measurable annual achievement goals for individual students on each child's federally mandated Individualized Education Programs (IEP). IEP goals must address both academic and functional needs of the child to measure progress through the general school curriculum. Special education teachers and school psychologists are typically

responsible for the assessment activities that contribute to developing IEPs.

Student services staff have often received training in the use of assessments and data collection as a part of their professional training programs, which is not the case for many teachers and administrators receiving their general education licensure. Student services staff have also acquired additional data analysis expertise as a result of the IDEA and NCLB mandates that all students participate in state and district-wide assessments. In the past, students with special needs were often tested out of grade level when taking state achievement tests. Now NCLB requires that all students be assessed using achievement tests at their grade level. Independent of the 1% of students with the "most significant cognitive disabilities," all special education students are expected to take grade level achievement tests (Huefner, 2006). While IDEA 1997 required state level testing for special education students, it was not until the requirements of NCLB that testing of special education students truly became a school concern.

Studying Data-Driven Instructional Leadership

Our study was designed to investigate the practices of schools with strong records for improving student achievement scores and reputations for using data effectively. We focused our site selection on the practices of elementary and middle

schools leaders in a Midwestern state. We also collected information on data-based practices at the district level for each school. Elementary and middle schools with increasing test scores and school leaders with a reputation for effectively helping teachers to use data were included in the sample.

Our data analysis draws on data sets collected at each school composed into individual school case studies. Yin (1994) proposes a variety of data be collected to insure the accuracy of case study representation. We conducted interviews, field observations, and examined a variety of artifacts from each school. In our initial paper on this research project (Halverson, Grigg, Pritchett & Thomas, 2005b) we developed a Data-Driven Instructional System framework (see Figure 9.1) to trace how school leaders design for data-driven organizations. As described, these functions include:

1. *Data Acquisition*: How schools collect, store and represent the variety of information used to guide student learning;
2. *Data Reflection*: How schools made sense of the data collected and set instructional goals;
3. *Program Alignment*: How schools used data to determine instructional program adequacy and coherence;
4. *Program Design*: How schools developed new program initiatives based on data-driven discussions;

5. *Formative Feedback*: How schools developed processes to measure the success of program design in terms of student progress;
6. *Test Preparation*: How schools prepared students to generate new achievement results.

To make sense of our field notes and artifacts collected, we used a qualitative data analysis program to make sense of our data. The data we present here reflects the practices of formal and informal leaders and staff who took on key roles in facilitating data-driven conversations, reflections or redesign efforts in their schools.

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Adapting Student Services Practices at Harrison School

Our DDIS study revealed several kinds of social and technical systems school leaders developed for using data to improve learning. The student service staff appeared to play important roles in the program design and formative feedback DDIS functions. This short description of the school's context was developed as a result of our data analysis:

Harrison School is a culturally diverse K-8 school serving more than 500 students in a large urban Midwest city. Harrison serves a diverse population with nearly 30% Asian, 10% African-

American, 20% Hispanic, and 50% White students. 70% of Harrison students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 30% have English as a second language. Once identified as a "school in need of improvement" under the NCLB criteria, the Harrison staff applied for and received a Comprehensive School Reform grant to reorganize the school around the Direct Instruction curriculum. Harrison's transformation began with a focus on literacy and curriculum alignment while at the same time developing an elaborate academic and behavioral support system that used data to help determine program and student level intervention needs. The school piloted a district—wide initiative to use the problem solving method to provide school-wide support for struggling children. Harrison's use of the problem-solving model provides insight into how special education practices are used for the purposes of school-wide data-driven decision making. Harrison's student service staff, particularly the school psychologist, helped the school progress in its data-driven model.

Our research at Harrison illustrated how student services staff are relied upon to provide data-driven instructional leadership services beyond traditional job descriptions. To be sure, much of the work of school psychologists and social workers in the school has persisted. However, we found that staff members in each of these areas, staff with expertise in using data to help customize and implement student learning

plans, were acting as instructional leaders in the schools. In these next sections of the chapter, we will describe how first the *practices*, then the *roles*, of student services staff are being transformed by the need to develop capacity for data-driven instructional practices. We will then describe the implications for these changes in the instructional practices of the school.

Individualized Education *Programs* as a Precedent

Special education's Individualized Education Program (IEP) served as a powerful precedent for organizing student level data-driven instructional practices at Harrison. IEPs have served as core practices for providing special education services since the advent of the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act. An IEP describes the services customized to meet the special needs of a student. Broadly speaking, prior to the advent of the IEP, school instructional interventions were primarily assembled at the curricular level. Student support staff, such as school psychologists or social workers, helped students meet the demands of the instructional program. If students struggled with their courses they would be tracked into remedial classrooms, moved to another school, or they would simply be failed. The IEP, in particular, and special education in general, constituted an important, data-driven precedent for individual student program planning. With the IEP,

schools could legitimately pursue a student-centered path to instructional interventions by customizing existing (and new) resources to the needs of individual students.

The significant aspects of the IEP we wish to highlight are the mandatory, data-driven components of the process: identification and evaluation, staffing, plan construction and plan review. In the *identification and evaluation* processes, teachers or school staff members use classroom assessment data and informal observational data to determine that students struggling in the general education program receive more comprehensive evaluation, often in the form of specialized assessments. The assessment results are then referred to a *staffing* team. IDEA requires that each team include parents, regular education teachers, special education teachers or service providers, and a school representative, often a school leader, who is qualified to commit the resources and sign off on the IEP. Often school psychologists or social workers serve as the members of the team responsible for communicating evaluation results. The team reflects on the data and the perceived needs of the student to determine the student's eligibility for special education services, and to develop an *action plan* that includes a) statement of the student's present levels of performance; b) annual achievement goals; c) a description of services; d) the setting in which services will be provided, and

e) when the services will be provided. The team then agrees to a means of evaluation and a process for revisiting the goals and services specified in the IEP.

To be sure, the IEP as implemented in many schools is far from a model practice. IEPs have been used to over identify students of color as qualifying for special education services (see, for example, Losen & Orfield, 2002; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002; Blanchett, 2006). In practice, the IEP process was often merely seen as step toward assigning a student for special education. This reactive model is often referred to as the "wait to fail" model of special education because if classroom interventions did not change student outcomes then the next step was to wait for the child to fall far enough behind for him to qualify for special education. Even if used effectively to identify students, IEPs have often been used to marginalize students into pull-out programs that cut off access to general education classrooms (Capper, Frattura & Keyes, 2000). For the purposes of this chapter, we are less interested in the history of IEP usage than in the precedent IEPs provide for using data to address student-level learning issues. The now commonplace IEP process illustrates a powerful prototype of how school staff use data to design learning plans for individual students. In our research, we found examples of how schools extended quasi-IEP processes into school-wide programs designed to use data to

identify, design and evaluate new kinds of student-level interventions. The Problem-Solving Team at Harrison fulfilled this function.

Problem-Solving Teams: Taking the IEP School-Wide. Problem-solving teams extend the IEP process to address learning issues for students across the school. We found there were different understandings and uses of the problem-solving model at the district and school levels. Reschly, Tilly and Grimes (1999) describe problem-solving as a systemic, non-categorical approach to delivering special education services. In a traditional special education model, students need to be assigned to disability categories in order to receive services. Problem-solving processes allow schools to diagnose learning issues with the assessment tools used with all students, and to customize learning plans for students based on the existing instructional program (Jankowski, 2003; Yssledyke & Marston, 1999). Although problem-solving, like the IEP, is rooted in special education, many districts have extended the scope of problem-solving activities to address planning and student learning activities across the school.

Harrison's Easton district leaders approached problem-solving as "a school improvement initiative based on the problem-solving process." Problem-solving at the district-level is described as:

> a collaborative, outcome-based intervention process that utilizes continuous progress monitoring to drive instructional decision making and resource allocation based on student needs.

The advent of NCLB pressed Easton's problem-solving process from a special education intervention to a school-wide data-driven decision making model that integrated school improvement planning, aligning resources with standards and instructional priorities, and developing professional learning communities. One Easton district leader noted:

> I think that data use is something that's evolving in a positive way. I think that the No Child Left Behind with all of its weaknesses, one of the really positive things that it has fostered is an increased awareness of . . . data in general. [I]t fostered an increased awareness of and appreciation for accuracy in data.

NCLB has pushed the district schools to take data seriously and to understand how measures of student achievement are linked to core instructional processes. The district leader explained:

> Understanding how (data use) fits into the whole strategic planning process for the school, I really think that this is a result of No Child Left Behind…We really wouldn't have been able to create that kind of urgency for schools to pay attention to it if it weren't for No Child Left Behind.

NCLB pushed the district to develop a model to integrate problem identification, planning, solution development and assessment into a school-wide process. The urgency to meet the demands of high-stakes accountability called for the capacity of schools to change instructional practices accordingly (Abelmann & Elmore, 1999). Adapting the problem-solving model from a student-level to a school-level intervention pointed toward how schools might integrate these processes across the school.

At the school level, Harrison's implementation of problem-solving demonstrated the link between current practices in special education and traditional classroom practices. While the district model used problem-solving to describe a more general, school-wide intervention strategy, the problem-solving team (PST) at Harrison was more firmly rooted in the special education model. Starting with the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, schools had been required to collect data on students before placing them in special education. Many schools responded by developing school-based teams, modeled on IEP staffing teams, that were composed of the classroom teachers and student service staff members such as the school psychologist and special education teachers (Reschly, Tilly & Grimes, 1999). Harrison's version of problem-solving echoed the IEP process of *referral*, *team staffing*, and *intervention plan* that includes data-based

criteria for success. The following narrative synthesizes our experience with the PST process at Harrison.

According to the Harrison school psychologist, “anyone in the school can make a PST referral . . . based on either (student) learning or behavior.” When a teacher observes academic or behavioral problems with a student, a referral is made to the school psychologist. The psychologist then uses available information to assess the condition and specific needs of the child, and will then decide who should be present at the PST meeting and when the problem will be discussed. A team composed of the school psychologist, special education teachers, classroom teachers and the parent then meet to determine which kinds of data will help to construct a learning plan for the student.

The school psychologist would begin the meeting by providing a summary information packet for each student referred to the team. As a Direct Instruction (DI) school, Harrison teachers and staff use a variety of formative assessment tools to assess student learning and determine student learning goals. This data rich environment allows the school psychologist to develop a sophisticated data profile of how a student is learning in terms of the DI curriculum. The discussion is further strengthened—in terms of data use—through the use of the readily available district and promotion data kept in district

data warehouses. This data is often used to make a correlation between the student's current problems and her or his past attendance, standardized testing, etc. This information supplements the team's experiential knowledge of student. The team then reviews the information packet compiled by the school psychologist. The PST delves into whether anyone had observed anything different in the student's recent behavior. The classroom teacher reports whether there are any behavioral disturbances recorded through the DI marking process. The social worker describes the student's behavioral record, and the parent, if present, is asked about issues at home. The psychologist will then hone in on the behavioral problem in terms of academic achievement by comparing current DI measures with other assessments, such as DIBELS[i] testing. These measures are checked with the perspectives of classroom teachers.

The PST develops a series of measurable academic and behavioral goals and interventions for the student. Because the PST works in the data-rich DI environment, many of these goals can be measured in terms of the school's existing assessment tools. The PST then sets up a follow-up meeting to monitor the student's progress towards his learning or behavioral goals. If the goals are met, then the student will be released from the PST plan. If the student has not met adequate progress toward

the PST plan goals, the PST will develop further intervention, including the possibility of a special education placement.

The PST thus acted as an intermediate structure intended to provide a non-categorical customization of the school instructional resources to meet the needs of students. The PST served as an intermediate adaptation of the IEP that allowed the school to develop data-based interventions to address emergent student behavioral and learning issues. One teacher commented that "certainly anyone involved in a PST is discussing data on some level because you have to keep track of some kind of data." The central role of the PST is evident in both how the student is discussed, as well as in the data used to look at a respective student. The school's social worker discussed how problem-solving:

> brings it all down to the individual student level…every problem solving team meeting involves deciding what kind of data we're going to collect on that particular issue and then usually in three or four weeks we all meet back together to look at it and figure out what to do with it.

In the past, the staff might have assumed that something was wrong with the student when meetings such as this were held. The data-based PST meetings have started to change the conversation to focus on the supports students need to be successful. A Harrison kindergarten teacher summarized the influence of

problem-solving at Harrison: “problem-solving is the overall way to approach everything in the building.”

The transition to problem-solving at Harrison has highlighted the difficulties of bringing together the previously separated roles of teachers, special educators and school psychologists in to create student learning plans in the PST. The psychologist acknowledged that many teachers continued to struggle with the transition from reading achievement data to diagnosing student learning issues. “Even though my brain works that way, I find it very confusing that other people don’t get the sort of logical connections between it, but everyone's different.” The psychologist described the difficulty of getting teachers to integrate data into the student evaluation process:

> [I] try to keep people on track of “why do you think that we're getting this particular data?” and “what do you want to be different?” and then “what is our plan?” and “how are we going to make it different?” So, any discussion that I’m involved in, I try to focus it back to data because it leads us beyond just admiring the kids or (saying) “we're working really hard and yet its not coming out” to focusing on who) didn’t do well.

Another problem in using data to address student learning issues across the school was the current role-bound silos in which existing data were organized. The PST described how “trying to

get the data . . . out from pockets of people to the broader staff . . . continues to be a big problem because some people really get it now and really know how to use it, but it is often times not the classroom teachers." Reconciling the tension between traditional instructional practices and the data-driven problem-solving process is a continuous aspect of her work at Harrison. "It's not so much that people aren't capable of analysis," she explains, "but a lot of times they just want to jump to 'okay what are we going to do and how are we going to fix it,' and this, unfortunately, leads to lousy solutions."

Part of her difficulty was helping teachers shift to a special education perspective of data use from a more informal approach to assessing students. Here the gap between special education and general education training became apparent. As one teacher commented:

> When we were first trained in problem-solving, we were unfortunately trained from more of a special education point of view instead of the overall school approach and so we're still struggling to get everyone looking at how we deal with problems and that method because there's still people who think that its special ed—its not a way of how we work in the school so its something that we're still learning how to do.

Emphasizing the data-driven practices both in DI and in other parts of the school has helped teachers to make the transition to the special education model. Teachers have used several kinds of formative assessments to gauge the success of reading interventions. The principal described how:

> [O]ur problem-solving model (gives us) a bigger picture of a kid. Rather than just saying "the kid can't read," we can ask "what are we going to do?" Now we have a couple snapshots of how kids are doing: maybe it's a grade level thing, or maybe a classroom level thing. Maybe it's a school wide level thing.

Situating the PST process in this data rich environment has helped teachers and staff see how assessment data can be used across the instructional program to shape plans for student learning.

Adapting student services *roles* for instructional leadership

The new PST leadership roles put additional pressure on Harrison student services staff. Behavior and learning problems that were once dealt with through informal processes are now subject to PST interventions. The PST structure allows for a small group of teachers and parents to work together in developing a data-driven plan with the assistance of student service staff with extensive training in working with data. The Harrison student service staff have taken on these roles.

However the assessment and intervention expertise of the school psychologist and the social worker is stretched thin in efforts to evaluate learning for all students in terms of achievement data. The school social worker, for example, described that, as a result of PST: “there's not a real clear line between psychologist and social worker.” While the psychologist “provides guidance (and) does IQ tests” and the social worker continues to do “home visits for attendance,” when it comes to working with assessing student learning, “both of us are involved.” This emphasis on the use of data and the PST has meant that some of student support service responsibilities have been pushed to the margins: “if you mean clinical therapy . . . [then], no, that doesn’t happen here because neither of us has the time that we could commit.”

Student service staff have also taken on more formal leadership roles in the school. Another Easton district initiative calls for the establishment of Learning Teams at each school. The Learning Team is organized to use data to improve student learning through developing the school education plan, organizing professional learning for teachers, and cultivating safe learning environment. Learning Teams must include the principal, the literacy coach and at least six teachers. The Harrison Learning Team also includes the school psychologist, the social worker and a special education teacher. The Learning

Team plays a central role in coordinating how data are used to support learning through the school. As the school principal explains,

> I know our Learning Team is really key [for] looking at data . . . They're the ones who develop the planning for the school. The people on the Learning Team . . . are familiar with it, are trained in data collection and analysis, and [they] can help to move the others along.

The student service staff play central leadership roles in the Learning Team. A part of this formal leadership role has been to help colleagues learn to use data effectively to develop and analyze the school educational plans. The school psychologist, for example, sees her role as helping the Learning Team to become more data focused:

> We do a pretty good job of using [data] in problem solving teams . . . We're now using it a little bit more in the Learning Team. That has been a bit of a challenge, to tell you the truth, despite the fact that that's really what [the Learning Team] is trying to do—problem solve all the time and use the data and what the data tells us [to do]. It's coming, but that's been kind of a slow process.

Although she served in a leadership role to help the Learning Team use data effectively, the school psychologist was still limited by her position to do anything about the ways other

committees, primarily the teacher-driven grade level teams, used data to inform their practices. Part of the problem in using data at this level was the gulf between the data expertise of the student service staff and the teachers. The school psychologist related that:

> It was very frustrating because I think “here's this great data and we're not using it.” I said “Let’s look at where the kids are falling apart on the test . . .” There was a small [teacher] committee that looked at it (last year). They looked at the math test . . . they discovered a pattern which I had been aware of for a number of years.

Fortunately, the school principal has been able to build links between the support staff and the teachers. As the school literacy coach commented “I’d say the principal always gives the direction . . . She's a great thinker who always sees the big picture.”

The PST process at Harrison has made student service practices and staff central to the school instructional program. The need to meet accountability challenges pushed school leaders to develop instructional programs that could yield predictable results in terms of student learning. Analyzing the role and function of the PST demonstrated how the school relied upon the IEP precedent and student service expertise as critical resources for developing the capacity to diagnose and address

student learning issues. The school principal emphasized how Harrison worked to develop a program to serve all children:

> It depends on what the PST figures out (about) where we're really struggling. Is it just looking at the data, and trying to figure out what's going on with this child and then figuring out different strategies and interventions. Are we effective with every single strategy? No, but I've never seen a school that tries so hard. We don't give up because (a student) doesn't qualify for special ed. When I was a teacher in another school, there were these "grey area" kids, and they would just say, 'sorry, we can't help you there, they don't qualify for special ed so just deal with it.' We don't do that here. We work through the process and all of the kids get supported.

Adapting Student Services Practices for Data-Driven Leadership

The Harrison case illustrates how formal leaders in schools rely on student service personnel and practices to create data-driven instructional systems in their schools. The pressure to use data effectively means that schools must not only receive reliable student achievement data, but must also develop the capacity to intentionally adjust instructional practices in order to reach accountability goals. Some researchers have emphasized the unsavory nature of this leadership work as a matter of gaming the system, to unfairly categorize students in

order to evade the demands of accountability, to spend exorbitant time drilling students on sample test items, or simply to cheat (Jones, Jones & Hargrove, 2003; Ryan, 2004; Noddings, 2001; Leavitt & Dubner, 2005). Our research on how leaders build data-driven instructional systems revealed that, in some schools, leaders and teachers work to create socio-technical practices for generating and acting on formative data about student learning and behavior (Halverson, et. al. 2005b). We found that school leaders did not create these new practices from scratch, rather, they turned to the local expertise of student service staff, and to the powerful precedent for organizing student level interventions, the special education IEP.

In light of these examples, we would like to make several observations about how data-driven practices are organized around IEP-like structures:1) while these types of practices might not be new, reframing around data might represent a common solution to an NCLB policy problem; 2) Student-centered assessment practices require schools to reallocate internal resources both in terms of human and material capital; and 3) if special education practices are being adapted for new purposes, why are school psychologists' and social workers' roles changing, but not necessarily those of special educators?

Common Solution to New Design Problem. The 1997 IDEA required schools to describe prior interventions put into place to aid student learning as a part of the referral/evaluation process. This need pressed the student services staff to develop practices for documenting the interventions used to support students. Schools throughout the country created team structures to evaluate and discuss whether these interventions were successful. These types of programs were called, for example, Teachers Helping Teachers, Student Study Teams, Building Consultation Teams, or, in Harrison's case, Problem-Solving Team. However, since special education continued to serve as a method to pull students out of school-wide assessment system, these team conversations remained largely in the realm of special education, and did not affect the general education program (Frattura & Capper, in press).

NCLB changed the function of these team conversations about intervention success. Previously, teams may have engaged in perfunctory conversations about adequacy of the school's interventions as a preliminary step to special education assignment. Now, with NCLB, simply assigning students to special education does not help evade the whole school-level accountability requirements. IDEA 1997 required that all students with disabilities be tested, and with NCLB, schools were required to have at least 95% of the total school

population take the state exam. With many schools assigning between 10-20% of students to special education, this meant most students assigned to special education must take the state exam.

The quality of the interventions taken to improve learning for students who struggled now mattered at the school level, and those responsible for designing and measuring the success of these interventions took on a new school-wide leadership prominence. In fact, the very students who may have been written off before as special education students are now the group the school receives the most attention for moving toward proficiency. Schools are judged by their ability to move as many of these "bubble students," as described by Jennifer Booher-Jennings (2005), across the line from basic to proficient performance on the exams. While researchers debate whether this form of "educational triage" offers an effective model for organizing school practice, in our cases, we have seen how the social workers and school psychologists played a central role in developing these quasi-IEP student assessment processes to build learning plans for students who struggle. We suggest that as schools continue to develop new capacities for using data to improve teaching and learning, structures like the PST, and positions like school psychologists and social workers, will become more prominent aspects of the general education program.

Reallocating Internal Resources. The cost estimates of NCLB are often modestly calculated in terms of testing and constructing an external accountability system (see, for example, Hoxby, 2002). For local school leaders, however, accountability costs need to include resources for reallocating existing assessment and instructional expertise. Allan Odden's work on resource reallocation (Odden & Archibald, 2001; Odden, 2004) suggests schools may already have the resources necessary for making this transition. Odden and Archibald (2001) describe how schools create several kinds of specialist positions to deliver services to students who traditionally struggle, including *categorical* specialists, such as special educators, to provide remedial instructional services directly to students, and *pupil support* specialists, such as school psychologists, social workers and assistant principals, to address student non-academic issues. In our schools, leaders repurposed the *practices* of categorical specialists, and the *roles* of pupil support specialists, to create new forms of data-driven student interventions. Instead of focusing only on students designated for special education, the IEP process at Harrison was adapted to serve as an intervention strategy for proactively developing learning plans before students were assigned to special education. In our school, psychologists and social workers adapted their assessment expertise to provide critical

instructional assessment support for students in need *before* they were placed into special education, rather than non-instructional assessment services *after* students had already received special education services.

No gain in organizational capacity comes for free. At Harrison, for example, the social worker commented that her case load for individual student counseling had disappeared, and she did not say whether anyone had stepped in to provide this vital service. The student support staff we interviewed appeared to have high levels of dedication and a commitment to reframe their practices. Still, the principal pursued and received comprehensive school reform funding to train teachers and staff in new practices, and was able to redesign staff positions to engage in the quasi-IEP initiatives. Since the previously existing resources, in the form of faculty and staff positions, were already encumbered and embedded in existing school cultures, resource reallocation at Harrison was as much about changing professional culture as drafting a new budget. The ability to reallocate (and redeploy) existing staff resources to provide a critical instructional support system for all students pointed toward a significant aspect of principal leadership expertise (Halverson, 2004; Halverson & Rah, 2005a). The costs, here, can be figured in terms of the human capital, the expertise of the school leadership team to recognize which staff

members would be able and willing to step into new instructional leadership roles in the school. As with other examples of leadership expertise, it is difficult to translate this ability into a cost-estimate or to construct a model that would scale to effect similar practices in other schools.

Special Education Practices, but not Special Educators? We began our study with the hypothesis that special educators, as well as special education practices, would play a key role in these new data-driven, student instructional support systems. Instead, we found that categorical staff played a surprisingly small leadership role in the PST program. We suggest that the ability of special educators to redefine their roles says more about their current job responsibilities than their willingness to engage in school-wide leadership. Like classroom teachers, the special educators in our case schools defined their job responsibilities in terms of time spent with the specific students in their care. Some of this time was spent working with students in inclusive classrooms, other time was spent serving students in resource rooms and keeping up with the considerable paper trail required to deliver special education services. The special educators at Harrison found little discretionary time to participate in school-wide leadership activities.

The school psychologists and social workers, also intimately involved in the special education IEP process, framed

their job responsibilities in terms of providing services to students as needed. Psychologists and social workers often treated acute student needs on a day-to-day basis. Students who needed more intensive services were referred to the PST processes, largely conducted by the student service staff, and, if necessary, assigned to special education. In the IEP process, student service staff, especially the school psychologist, already provided diagnosis and assessment expertise in identifying students for special education. By intervening in classrooms across the school with a wider variety of students than the special education staff, student service staff were able to develop a school-wide perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the instructional program. And since the student service staff in our school had already served in leadership roles by creating school-wide learning and behavioral reports and helping staff interpret the results of standardized tests, it appeared to be a relatively small step for them to take the new school-wide role of developing learning plans for struggling students.

Lessons for Instructional Leadership

Schools and districts have faced growing pressure to use data for improving student learning. These pressures have come from high stakes accountability in NCLB as well as from research supporting the use of data-based decision making. The shift

towards data use has brought student service staff to the forefront because of their expertise in working with data. Understanding data and how to use it has become a part of the way schools are doing or being required to do business. This shift toward data has pushed school leaders to rely on data-savvy staff members. Several members of a school community, such as social workers and school psychologists typically have considerable experience generating data to measure and improve student learning. The practices of special education, for example, are framed by the assessment and diagnostic processes of the IEP. School psychologists and social workers, typically trained in both psychology and education, help students through counseling, evaluation, and designing interventions for academic and non-academic issues. These practices and positions comprise a significant resource for school leaders to design systems for using data to improve student learning.

This new melding of practices promises to reshape both instructional leadership and special education. As school leaders draw data-driven special education practices into the core instructional program, student service staff can provide a better range of services to children. The capacity to identify and help students before they fail not only fulfills accountability demands but also changes how schools view teaching and learning. This past year a new wrinkle, the

Response to Intervention (RtI) model, was added to these challenges with the 2004 Reauthorization of IDEA:

> In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention [italics added]. (20 U.S.C. § 1414(b)(6)(B)).

The RtI Model suggests a continuum of services which serves all students based on their current needs. The move to RtI represents a major shift in how we will view the role of special education in schools today. School leaders must recognize the possibilities that exist for change through this model because they will be expected to build RtI-like structures at their schools. RtI is a proactive model that works to identify students in need of interventions from the time they enter school and determines the instructional or behavioral interventions a student needs to be successful in the general education classroom. We suggest that the case we describe provides an example of a program that anticipates how schools might change to meet the demands of RtI and of how the practices of special education diagnosis, assessment, and intervention might come to characterize the general education program in schools.

[i] DIBELS, or Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, are a set of standardized, individually administered measures of early literacy development. They are designed to be short (one minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of pre-reading and early reading skills.

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Figure 9.1: The Data -Driven Instruction al System Model