Identifying At-Risk Students

Early Warning and Intervention Management as a Path to Progress and Equity

By Matthew Korobkin

Proactively identifying students who are at-risk and providing individualized support is essential to ensuring equity and appropriate grade-level progress. However, as many districts use home-grown solutions, they often struggle to easily and longitudinally analyze some of the most critical indicators to assess student risk, including student-level assessments, attendance, and other academic or student behavior data.

One highly effective strategy for monitoring these indicators is to employ an early warning and intervention management system that facilitates awareness and action to address key risk indicators. Effective approaches guide educators through the following three phases:

1. the **identification** of at-risk students, both before and during the time they have been referred to an Intervention and Referral Service (I&RS) team;

2. the documentation of **student interventions** conducted for at-risk students; and

3. the longitudinal **analysis** of student intervention data, at both the student and aggregate levels.

Identification

In New Jersey, I&RS teams are charged with identifying the learning, behavior, and health difficulties of students; collecting information on identified students; developing and implementing action plans; and providing support to school staff about these difficulties. Students receiving supported interventions through I&RS continue to receive supports in the general education classroom. Through this process, students suspected as possibly having a disability are referred to their school's Child Study Team for further assessment.

It is frequently the case that an I&RS referral may be the first time a student is determined at-risk for academic failure. Districts sometimes struggle with making data-informed I&RS referrals because they may not have a graphical, longitudinal snapshot of relevant indicators in one place to proactively identify students at-risk. When districts leverage an early warning and intervention management system that graphically depicts key risk indicators, educators and I&RS teams can more proactively assess risk and promptly begin interventions to support student success.

Intervention

A recent study by researchers at New York University found challenges with intervention and referral teams: inconsistencies and unbalance in team operation and membership, a lack of protocols and processes, poorly maintained records of interventions and their effectiveness, and a failure to use benchmarks or screening tools to identify students in need of interventions.[1]
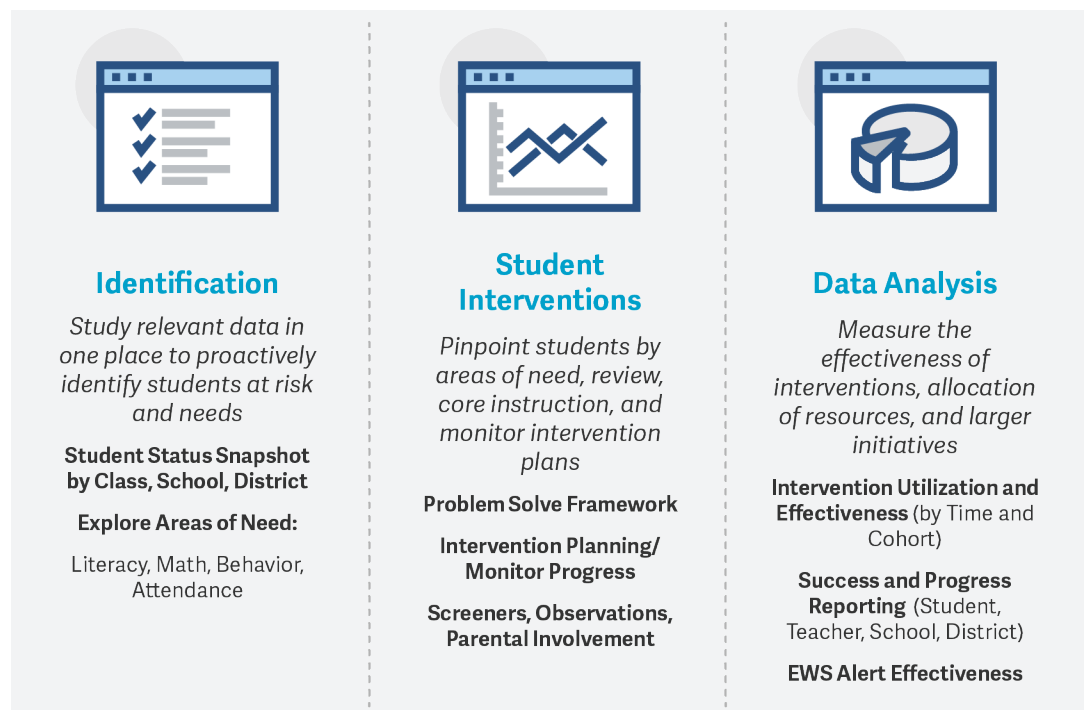
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[1]   Ahram, R., Fergus, E., Niguera, P. (2011). Addressing Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education: Case Studies of Suburban School Districts. Teachers College Record. 113 (10), 2233-2266.

Recognizing a lack of consistency in how New Jersey districts and I&RS teams across the state were supporting struggling learners, the 2015 New Jersey Special Education Task Force on Improving Special Education for Public School Students identified the need for systemic, data-driven services. The Task Force also recommended that student progress with this system be monitored with fidelity and frequency as part of the activities of the I&RS team.[2] In 2016, in partnership with Rutgers University and stakeholders across the state, the New Jersey Department of Education led the development of the New Jersey Tiered System of Support (NJTSS).

NJTSS is a framework of academic and behavioral supports and interventions to improve student achievement, based on the core components of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and the three-tier prevention logic of Response to Intervention (RTI). Designed as a prevention framework to meet the academic, behavioral, health, enrichment, and social-emotional needs of all students, each of the three tiers supports intensity of a child's unique challenges. Core components of NJTSS include: high-quality learning environments, curricula, and instructional practices; universal screening; data-based decision making; and progress monitoring.

NJTSS is meant to be a consistent approach to prevention, intervention, and enrichment, and calls for a continuum of supports at the district- and school-level based on student learning of grade-level knowledge and skills.

Whether or not districts choose to adopt NJTSS, MTSS, or RTI, they must have a consistent system for data collection and documentation that allows for the creation of intervention plans and collection of progress monitoring data to determine a student's response to instruction and/or intervention(s). Engaging in interventions with fidelity and consistently documenting outcomes will further ensure the success of students who are at-risk for academic failure and is a key component of an effective early warning and intervention management system.

Identification

Study relevant data in one place to proactively identify students at risk and needs

Student Status Snapshot by Class, School, District

Explore Areas of Need:

Literacy, Math, Behavior, Attendance

Student Interventions

Pinpoint students by areas of need, review, core instruction, and monitor intervention plans

Problem Solve Framework

Intervention Planning/ Monitor Progress

Screeners, Observations, Parental Involvement

Data Analysis

Measure the effectiveness of interventions, allocation of resources, and larger initiatives

Intervention Utilization and Effectiveness (by Time and Cohort)

Success and Progress Reporting (Student, Teacher, School, District)

EWS Alert Effectiveness

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2   New Jersey Task Force on Improving Special Education for Public School Students. (2015). <http://www.state.nj.us/education/strategic/toc.htm>

Data Analysis

In order to understand the efficacy of interventions for at-risk students, on a student-by-student level or by cohort, educators and school leaders should analyze data such as: the total number of interventions across a district; which interventions are resulting in students being on-track or off-track based upon progress monitoring data; and the average duration for students to reach an on-track status. In addition, it is important to have the ability to study the percentage of students that have reached their progress monitoring targets disaggregated by intervention at the district, school, and classroom levels; and the percentage of students that are in each tier of MTSS/NJTSS.

Having a system that allows for the flexibility of studying intervention efficacy is important for districts to study the outcomes of its interventions at the student, classroom, school or district levels.

Conclusion

An effective early warning and intervention management system serves as a problem-solving solution designed to document and monitor instruction and interventions within a multi-tiered system of supports for both academic, social, and emotional student needs. It serves as a tool to alert teachers and administrators of students who are at risk of failure. Furthermore, it is both adaptable and scalable to provide a comprehensive solution that allows educators to more effectively support student success through integrating key interventions into the curriculum framework.

Want to Learn More?

PCG offers the EDPlan Early Warning and Intervention Management System (EWS/MTSS). This leading-edge technology solution addresses the complexities of running a multi-tiered system of supports for both academics and behavior by providing data-driven planning in the areas of English/Language Arts, Mathematics, and Behavior.

If you are interested in implementing an early warning and intervention management system in your district or would like to learn more about how an effective approach to intervention management supports student success, contact Matthew Korobkin at mkorobkin@pcgus.com or Lauren English-Mezzino at lenglishmezzino@pcgus.com to learn more about EDPlan EWS/MTSS.

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