



DISTRICT
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

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Vermont Agency of Education Group Project



Improving the effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and equity of services for struggling students (with or without special needs)

Project Kickoff Agenda

- 1.** Introductions
- 2.** Goals & DMC Philosophy
- 3.** Overview of the Work
- 4.** Detailed Steps for Diagnostic
- 5.** Detailed Steps for Post-Diagnostic
- 6.** Appendices: dmPlanning Overview, Announcements, and FAQs

1. Introductions

DMC Team Members

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2. Goals & DMC Philosophy

2.1 Project Goals

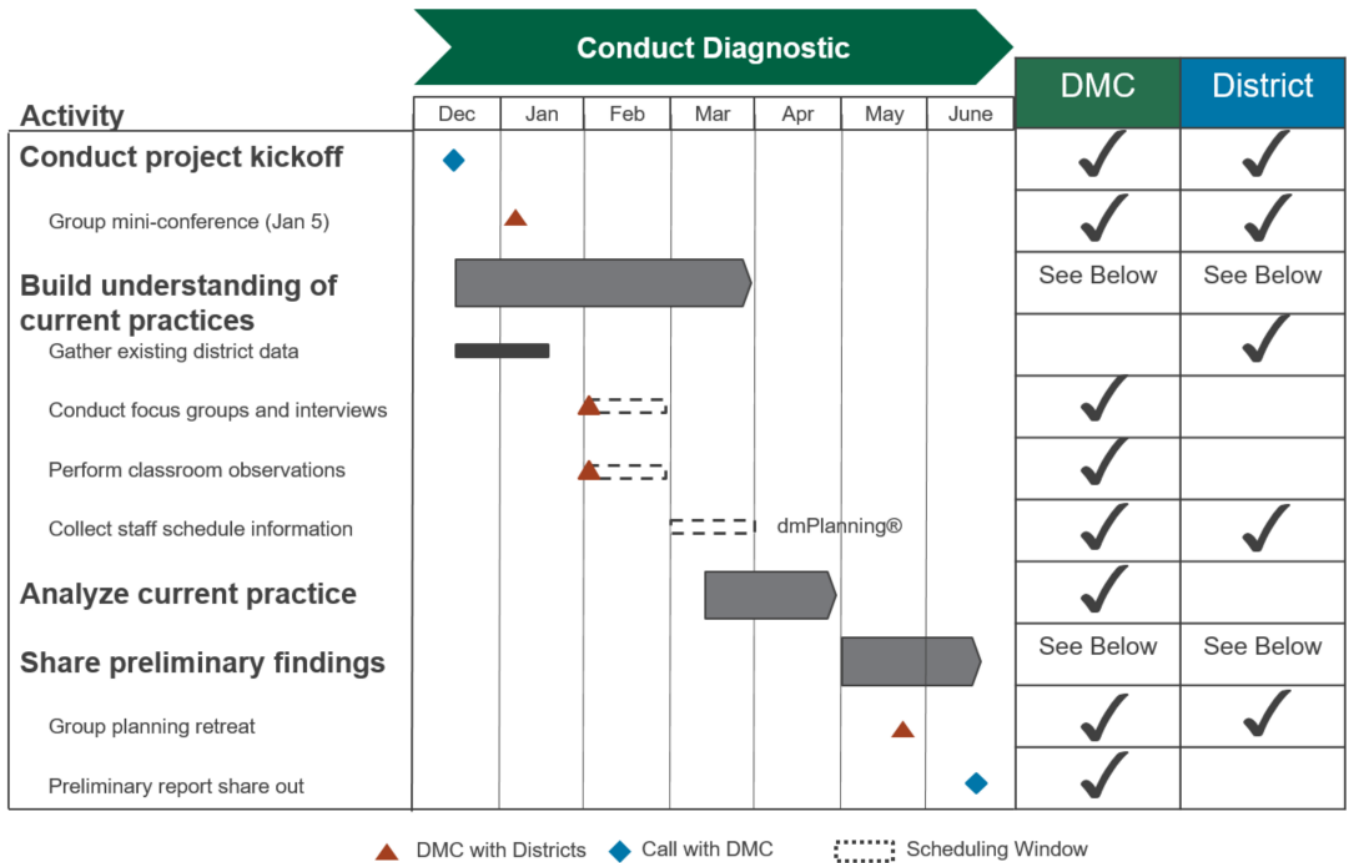
1. Develop an understanding of current practice related to special education, remediation, and intervention in the district.
2. Explore alignment of current practice with best practice research in order to raise achievement of students who struggle, with and without special needs.
3. Align staff practices with best practices and effectively manage staffing in order to create sustained change in schools and classrooms.

2.2 Our Philosophy

1. It is possible for school districts to raise achievement for students with and without special needs within the means of the existing budget.
2. In order to accomplish this, school districts need an integrated set of services, tools, and protocols that incorporate the following three items:
 - i. Better information (what do staff do?)
 - ii. Best practices (what should staff do?)
 - iii. Staffing guidelines (how much staff is required to implement best practices?)
3. General education is a big part of the answer.
4. Every district is different; culture and context matter.
5. No student ever benefited from a consultant's report. They benefit from meaningful changes in the classroom.

3. Overview of the Work

Below is a high-level overview of the preliminary timeline for activities for December 2016 – June 2017.



4. Detailed Steps for Diagnostic

Conduct project kickoff

4.1. Explain process and goals to district leadership

4.2 Select roles to be studied

The group will determine which roles should be studied as part of the schedule collection. While there should be some consistency within the group regarding the roles studied, there will be room for district specific student support roles that can be discussed after the call. Commonly included roles are listed below.

- Special education teachers
- Paraprofessionals - general education
- Paraprofessionals - special education
- Speech and language therapists
- Speech and language therapist assistants
- Occupational therapists
- Certified occupational therapist assistants
- Physical therapists
- ELL teachers
- School psychologists
- Social workers
- Reading teachers
- Interventionists
- Title 1 staff
- Others: _____

4.3 Identify dates for key milestones and meetings for diagnostic

After the kick off conversation with the district leadership, DMC will work with the district to identify dates for key milestones for the diagnostic such as focus groups, and staff schedule collection.

Build understanding of current practice

4.4 Gather existing district data

DMC will collect some service cost and student achievement related data along with data from staff schedules. Data and benchmarking, including focus groups and classroom observations, provide a full picture of special education and supports for struggling students.

DMC will provide data collection templates to the district after the initial kick off call to support the collection process. Although most data requested is already collected in the district, DMC is able to modify or simplify the data request if anything is very difficult to obtain.

4.5 Conduct focus groups

Our goal is to talk to a wide array of people to gain a deep understanding of special education in the district. Each district is staffed and structured differently, so you will know best who can provide this full picture. Based on past experience, a sample schedule is shown on the next page. We encourage you to create the schedule that best mirrors your district.

The focus groups/interviews will be conducted in district. Typically, a team of two DMC staff members will visit the district.

- Most focus groups/interviews are done in small groups of similar participants.
- Groups should not exceed 8 people, smaller groups when appropriate are fine as well.
- DMC will conduct one on one meetings with the Superintendent, senior teaching and learning person, senior financial person, and senior special education person.
- We can start as early in the morning as needed and can meet during the evening of the first day.
- Your input and judgment is critical. A sample focus group list follows. Please modify it to reflect your organizational structure and culture.
- Please schedule at least a 30-minute break for lunch.
- Staff being included in the focus groups should be briefed in advance as to the purpose of the study and the focus groups. This will greatly reduce any concerns or tension.

Sample Focus Group List

Area	Position	Length (minutes)
Central office	Superintendent*	60
	Senior financial person (CFO, Business Manager)*	45
	Senior teaching and learning person (Asst. Superintendent, Curriculum & Instruction Director, Chief Academic Officer)	45
	Others, as appropriate	TBD
Special education	Senior special education person (Director of Special Education, Deputy for Pupil Services)*	45
	Elementary special education teachers (supporting students with mild to moderate disabilities)	45
	Secondary special education teachers (supporting students with mild to moderate disabilities)	45
	Special education teachers (supporting students with severe needs)	45
	Related services staff	45
	School psychologists, behavioral support staff, and social workers	45
	Paraprofessionals (supporting students with mild to moderate disabilities)	45
	Paraprofessionals (supporting students with severe needs)	45
General education	Elementary classroom teachers	45
	Secondary core subject classroom teachers	45
	Interventionists	45
Building principals	Elementary principals	45
	Secondary principals	45
Parents	Officers of special education Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) or others, ideally parents of students with mild/moderate special needs	45
School board <i>(optional)</i>	Less than a quorum	45

* Positions in **bold** will be one-on-one interviews. All roles included in the dmPlanning schedule sharing should be part of focus groups (even if not shown above).

4.6 Perform classroom observations

We would also like to get a feel for the special programs and supports in place for children with disabilities. This includes a sampling of programs for serving across the district in elementary, middle, and high levels, such as:

- General education classrooms
- Inclusion classrooms
- Co-taught classrooms
- Resource classrooms
- Intervention classes
- Substantially separate classrooms
- Classes for students with emotional/behavioral needs
- Any other classes the district feels are important in demonstrating how the district serves students

The goal is not to visit every school and every program, but rather to sample the types of programs available. The data collection will take into account all the programs offered in the district.

Our classroom visits are modeled after a principal's walk through. We spend about 10-15 minutes in each classroom. We will ask a few questions of the staff, if the situation allows, but we are very respectful not to interrupt teaching and learning.

4.7 Set up online tool

DMC will utilize dmPlanning® technology in order to collect staff schedule data. Particular system requirements can be found in the appendix. DMC will work closely with the district's IT department to ensure a smooth roll-out and troubleshoot any problems as they arise.

4.8 Collect staff schedule information using DMC's proprietary technology tool (dmPlanning[®])

Analyze current practice

4.9 Analyze data for trends and opportunities

4.10 Benchmark pedagogical practices to best practice research and current staffing levels to those in similar districts

4.11 Create report summarizing findings and identifying highest leverage opportunities and commendable practices

Share preliminary findings

4.12 Begin an extensive planning process.

Our goal is not to produce a report, but to produce real improvements for students and the budget. Our well-developed approach to the change management process dramatically increases the chances of a successful implementation in the years to come. The general education and special education leadership teams are active participants in the planning process. The report isn't just handed to them at the end; they contribute to it. Frequent sharing of initial findings allows us to confirm our thinking, identify areas of disagreement, and direct further research. Our Opportunities Review includes:

- A full-day group planning retreat that will allow the combined leadership teams to craft detailed action plans that are tightly tailored to the culture of their districts
- An opportunity at the retreat to hear what other districts across the state are experiencing and share in the total learning process

After the planning retreat, a report will be provided for the group and each individual supervisory union or unified school district participating in the program. These reports will include recommendations of best practices, a short list of the highest impact changes to raise student achievement and improve the budget for each district, extensive data about each district's current approach, services, and staffing as well as benchmarking data. A summary report shall be provided to both the Agency of Education and the General Assembly which shall:

- 1.) Identify current practices for the delivery of special education services against research-informed practices
- 2.) Make recommendations to inform improved delivery of special education services in an efficient and cost effective manner
- 3.) Identify patterns and differences in special education delivery practices across the State

Next Steps:

1. Confirm availability of Superintendent and project team for January 5th group meeting (9am – 12pm). 2-3 project team attendees per SU/SD recommended
2. Coordinate with Megan to **begin gathering district data**
 - i. Select staff to participate
 - ii. Select date of dmPlanning schedule sharing
3. Coordinate with Megan to **plan February focus group schedule**

Appendix 1: dmPlanning Overview

With the district’s help we will be using our online platform, dmPlanning, as a tool for remediation and intervention staff to share their weekly schedules in an effort to gain detailed insight into how staff spend their time and serve children.

1.1 Sharing schedules

Staff members will have access to the online tool, which will be set up by DMC to include the information referenced in section 1.3. Practitioners will select all the information related to a specific activity which will then accurately represent their typical weekly schedule.

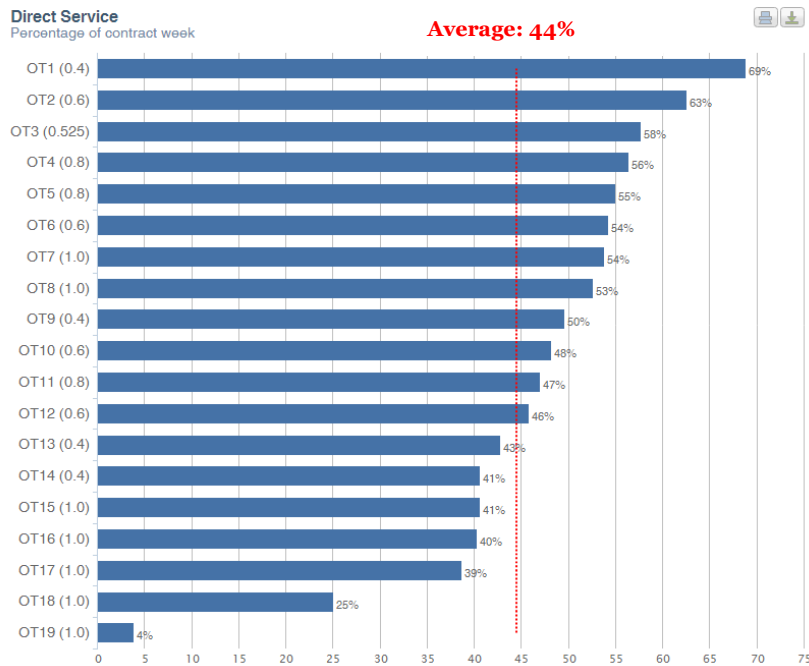
The screenshot displays the dmPlanning interface with the following elements:

- Navigation:** Three numbered steps: 1. Enter your typical weekly schedule, 2. Tell us more, 3. Save & Log out.
- School:** Westwood Middle School (dropdown)
- Day:** Monday (dropdown)
- Start time:** 8 : 00 am (time selection)
- End time:** 9 : 00 am (time selection)
- Primary activity:** Direct Instruction/Support (dropdown menu is open, showing options: Direct Instruction/Support, Assessment/Collect Assessment Data, Assigned School Duties (i.e Bus Duty, Lunch Duty), Attend IEP Meeting, Attend Meeting, Collaborating with Colleagues, Paperwork/IEP Writing, Parent Communication, Personal Lunch, Planning/Preparation, Professional Development, Student Observations, Travel)
- Setting:** General education classroom (dropdown)
- Topic:** Math (dropdown)
- Calendar:** Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday (Tuesday is selected)
- Summary:** Westwood Intermediate School, 8:00 AM, 9:00 AM

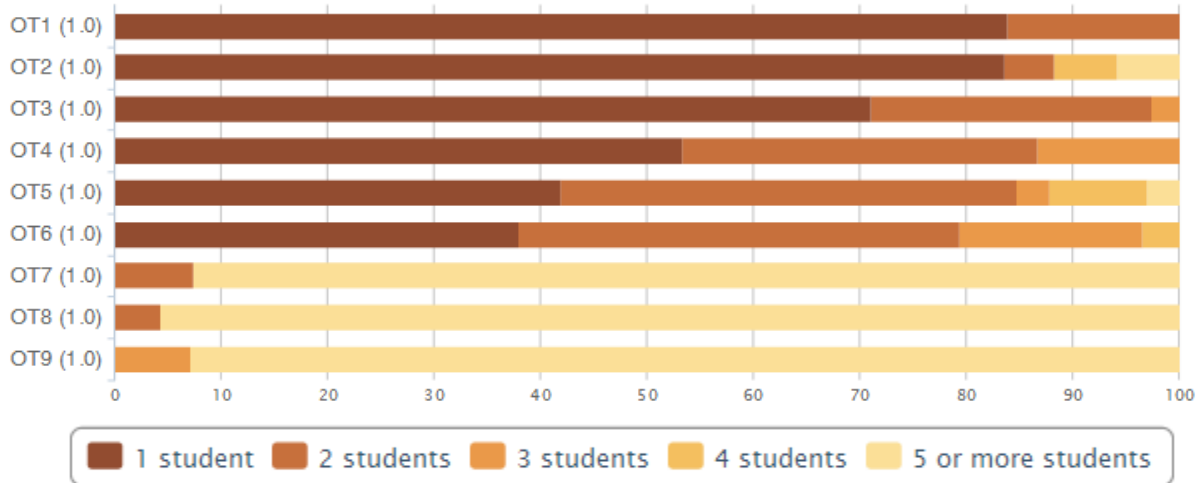
1.2 District reports

Once the practitioners have shared their schedules, we will be able to discuss the results with your district through a variety of charts and graphs. We will use the teaching and learning interviews alongside these reports, to develop a key findings report for your district.

The example graph below shows the amount of time practitioners spend with students in a work week, represented as a percentage.



Additionally, this chart depicts the average number of students seen at one time during the work week. The different colors indicate the percentage of time that a practitioner spends in various student group sizes.



When the practitioners share their schedules, they also describe how time is spent when not with students. The chart below is an example of the activities that a special education teacher participates in during the given week, as well as the average amount of time spent on each different task.

We will work with your staff to customize this list for the specific roles within your district.

Activity	Average Hours per Week per FTE	Percentage of Time Spent on this Activity
Direct Service		
Direct instruction/support	19h 16m	52.5%
Total Direct Service	19h 16m	52.5%
Indirect Service		
Planning preparation	2h 19m	6.3%
Paperwork/IEP writing	2h 13m	6.0%
Lunch	1h 46m	4.8%
Assigned school duties	1h 18m	3.5%
Collaboration with colleagues	1h 4m	2.9%
Assessments/collect assessment data	9h 36m	1.6%
IEP meeting	0h 22m	1.0%
Meeting	0h 20m	0.9%
Eligibility meeting	2h 20m	0.9%
Administering tests	2h 18m	0.8%
Student observation	0h 17m	0.8%
Travel	0h 16m	0.7%
Parent communication	0h 13m	0.6%
Professional development	0h 7m	0.3%
Colleague observation	0h 4m	0.2%
Under reported time	5h 53m	16.0%
Total Indirect Service	17h 22m	47.5%

1.3 Schedule Data Collection Requirements

Using the data listed below, DMC will load the information into dmPlanning to ease the sharing of schedules for staff members and ensure accurate results.

We will send your district an Excel template with the fields listed below, among other items. When the information is complete, please use the secure connection for data transfer.

1. Student information
 - a. All student names
 - b. District ID (can provide state ID as alternative)
 - c. School
2. Staff who will be sharing schedules
 - a. Practitioner name
 - b. School email address
 - c. Role
 - d. FTE
 - e. School (when staff member is based in one building)
3. Schools
 - a. Name
 - b. Grades Served
 - c. Enrollment
4. Student Achievement data
 - a. State test data for ELA for students with and without special needs
 - b. State test data for math for students with and without special needs
 - c. Any additional academic achievement data you may have available

1.4 Method of Sharing Schedules

How would you like the practitioners to share their schedules?

- All practitioners share schedules on an individual basis, using school or personal computers.
- Most practitioners share schedules on an individual basis but some practitioners (e.g. paraprofessionals) fill in the survey in a computer lab or some other central location together with other practitioners at a pre-determined time with assistance from district staff.

1.5 dmPlanning Technology Requirements

□ IT contact for follow up: _____

DMC will be using a web-based application for staff members to share their typical weekly schedules. There are several browser requirements that are necessary for the process to run smoothly:

1. The supported browsers are:

- Internet Explorer 9 and up
- Firefox version 3 and up
- Chrome version 11 and up
- Safari version 4 and up

Please let us know if your district uses any other browsers.

2. Adobe Flash 9 or later is required for an instructional video to be played.

- Are the computers equipped with a recent version of Adobe?
- Note that Flash is not required for iPads.

3. We will require the following domains to be whitelisted in the firewall:

- <http://dmplanning.org>
- <http://permalink.fliqz.com>

4. Click the following URLs to verify access within the district:

- <http://dmplanning.org>
- <http://permalink.fliqz.com/asp/permissions.aspx?at=1effe493165d46808797a9a4c35914cf&a=537cda08f15d48188af10e611041a156>

5. The invitation email will be sent from our email service, please ensure that emails from us reach the staff inboxes:

From: District Management Council <support@dmccouncil.org>
Subject: Your participation is required: Please share your schedule
Sending server: 50.31.50.95 (mailer.dmccouncil.org)

****NOTE:** Since the email invitation will be sent to a large number of staff, please also remove any connection limits for the above IP address.

6. Please whitelist the following email address (DMC uses Zendesk for email support):

support@dmccouncil.zendesk.com

Appendix 2: Example Announcements

Throughout this process, there are various times we recommend you reach out to your staff to notify them of the project and communicate the goals. Exemplar communications from districts whom have previously participated in the review are noted below for your review. As a group, we will determine the best language across districts to ensure alignment of messaging within the communities. Preliminary communication below for reference:

- **Announcement to community from Superintendent:** A general announcement to the community that the district is working with the District Management Council outlining the objectives of the partnership.
- **Announcement to leadership team from Superintendent:** A general announcement to the directors and managers that the district is working with the District Management Council outlining the objectives of the partnership.
- **Interview invitation:** An email or letter sent to 6-10 members within each role, asking them to participate in the focus groups or interviews with the District Management Council.
- **Announcement to staff:** An email that we recommend be sent to staff that will be sharing their schedules one week prior to the official launch. This will prepare the staff for the following week, allow them to raise any questions prior to the schedule sharing.
- **Email invitation and access to dmPlanning:** All participating staff members will receive this email from DMC the first day of schedule sharing with a link to dmPlanning, their username, and their password. This message will also include an overview of the project and support contact information.
- **Announcement to community from Superintendent**

I am pleased to share that the district is undertaking an effort to improve the effectiveness and equity of services for supporting struggling students both with and without special needs. The effort is part of a group study, sponsored in part by the Vermont Agency of Education. Ten supervisory unions and supervisory districts throughout Vermont applied and were selected to participate. What is learned from the study will be shared with other districts across the state.

While we are proud of the quality of services provided to students with disabilities and the hard work of our staff who help all children achieve at high levels, ever-higher expectations require us to look for ways to further increase student learning and improve the way we deliver services to our students. The district has engaged the District Management Council, a Boston based organization to assist with this project.

This systematic study will examine our current regular and special education services, programs, procedures, and staffing for serving struggling students through the use of quantitative (both in-district and benchmark district information) and qualitative data gathering (using focus groups, stakeholder interviews and classroom observations). The review will also help the district understand how various categories of staff use their time as they serve struggling students. With this information, the district will be able to make thoughtful and informed decisions to ensure all of our students receive appropriate support. Later in the process, DMC will help codify practices that will best serve students in the district as well as help with the development of staffing guidelines in accordance with these practices.

The result should be a better picture of what is working well in the district, a better understanding of what the appropriate level of staff and services are, overall improved delivery of services to special education students and parents, and better utilization of district resources.

We are excited to be undertaking this study, and appreciate your support in this process. I will be sure to keep you updated as the project achieves key milestones. In the meantime, please let me know if you have any questions.

For more information: Contact **[Superintendent/Director of Special Education phone & email]**.

Sincerely,
[Name],

- **Announcement to leadership team from Superintendent**

Dear **[Name]**,

I am pleased to let you know that **[District]** is working with The District Management Council (DMC), a Boston based firm, on a project to improve the effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and equity of services for struggling learners both with and without an IEP. The effort is part of a group study, sponsored in part by the Vermont Agency of Education. Ten supervisory unions and supervisory districts throughout Vermont applied and were selected to participate. What is learned from the study will be shared with other districts across the state. As part of this project, DMC will gather detailed information on current practices in the district (i.e. our current services, service delivery models, and how our staff spend their time as well as the various demands placed on their time). With this information, the district will be able to make thoughtful and informed decisions to ensure all of our schools are receiving appropriate support and our students receive the most effective services.

In the coming weeks, we will be introducing this project to the staff who will be participating in the project. Some staff and most administrators will participate in focus groups to share their perspectives and insights, and many staff will be asked to share a typical week's schedule via DMC's online tool. This will require between 30-60 minutes of their time. We are working closely with the team at DMC to ensure that this project runs smoothly for our staff and our team.

I will be sure to keep you updated as the project achieves key milestones. In the meantime, please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you.

Best,
[Name]

- **Focus and Interview Group Invitation**

I am pleased to announce that **[District]** is working with The District Management Council (DMC), a Boston based firm, to conduct a study to help better understand how we support struggling learners both with and without an IEP. They will review our current services and service delivery models, to understand how staff spend their time, both supporting students and completing other important tasks. The purpose of this study is to provide district leaders with a more complete understanding of the many demands and needs of the staff and how we might better support struggling students. With

this information, the district can make thoughtful and informed decisions to ensure all of our schools are receiving appropriate support and students receive the most effective services.

As a first step in the study, DMC would like to speak with a group of staff members to learn more about your work in the district, your insights and your perspective. We would like for you to participate in a 45-minute focus group to share your thoughts, concerns and ideas related to the district's program to support struggling students both with and without and IEP. You will also have the opportunity to share information about your day-to-day activities and responsibilities. DMC has already spoken with district administrators and supervisors to develop a broad understanding of the district, and the purpose of the focus group is to gain a deeper understanding of your unique and important role and thoughts.

The effort is part of a group study, sponsored in part by the Vermont Agency of Education. Ten supervisory unions and supervisory districts throughout Vermont applied and were selected to participate. What is learned from the study will be shared with other districts across the state.

This discussion will be completely confidential. Thank you in advance for your time, and we will be in touch with more detailed information on the time and location of the focus group interview.

- **Announcement to staff (one week in advance of dmPlanning launch date)**

Dear **[Name]**,

I am pleased to announce that **[District]** is working with The District Management Council (DMC), a Boston based firm, to conduct a study to help better understand how we support struggling learners both with and without an IEP. They will review our current services and service delivery models to understand how staff spend their time, both supporting students and completing other important tasks. The purpose of this study is to provide district leaders with a more complete understanding of the many demands and needs of the staff and how we might better support struggling students. With this information, the district can make thoughtful and informed decisions to ensure all of our schools are receiving appropriate support and students receive the most effective services.

The effort is part of a group study, sponsored in part by the Vermont Agency of Education. Ten supervisory unions and supervisory districts throughout Vermont were selected to participate. What is learned from the study will be shared with other districts across the state.

As one of the first steps in this process, DMC will be performing a review of staff schedules for those supporting struggling students both with and without an IEP through an online tool called dmPlanning. During the week of **[date]**, you will be asked to share your typical weekly schedule via dmPlanning. You will receive instructions about how to use dmPlanning and your login information on **[date]** via email. Please note that I understand that this is a busy time of year and we have worked to minimize the time required to complete this task. I expect that this task will take you between 30 and 60 minutes.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this project.

Best,
[Name]

- **dmPlanning Email invitation to staff from DMC**

Dear [Name],

The district is collecting information from staff on their typical weekly schedule. The purpose of this study is to provide district leaders with a more complete understanding of the many demands and needs of the staff and how we might better support struggling students. With this information, the district can make thoughtful and informed decisions to ensure all of our schools are receiving appropriate support and students receive the most effective services. Please follow the link below and log in to access your personalized online survey form:

<http://dmplanning.org>

Your login email: (district email)

Your temporary password is: (TemporaryPassword)

Upon logging in, you will be requested to change your temporary password. Please choose a secure password and do not share it with anyone.

On the welcome page, you have the option to watch a tutorial video which provides detailed instructions on how to use the online form. It is recommended you watch the tutorial, after which you may begin entering your typical weekly schedule by clicking on the green "Enter Activities" button.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding how to use the survey form, please contact The District Management Council (DMC) at support@dmcouncil.org.

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix 3: FAQs

We are pleased to share that the district is undertaking a multi-year effort to expand and strengthen best-practice supports and increase the equity of services for struggling learners (both with and without disabilities).

We are only in the beginning stages of this effort, which will involve better understanding how our students are currently served and how they could be served even better. We are committed to a process that is thoughtful, measured, and inclusive for students, staff and families. We will keep you involved in our work as we move forward to better serve our students.

1. Why is the district undertaking this process?

We believe that all students have the ability to perform at high levels, including the vast majority of students with disabilities. We are undertaking this process to ensure that all of our students have the necessary supports to reach their full potential.

2. What is the goal of this effort?

The goal of this effort is to expand and strengthen the effectiveness of services for struggling learners. This includes students with disabilities, and also includes other students who may be struggling—such as struggling readers, English language learners, students living in poverty, and others.

Furthermore, our goal is to do that in a sustainable way—meaning that services should also be practical given our budget, equitable to students and staff, and transparent.

3. Why is the district undertaking this effort now?

This effort is part of the district’s ongoing commitment to continuously improve. We believe that all school districts have a responsibility to learn from research, build on what is working, and address areas that can be improved. This is our opportunity to do just that for our struggling learners. No one forced the district to begin this work, but we feel our students and families will benefit.

4. Is the district trying to cut costs?

This project is focused on strengthening and expanding supports and services for struggling students. We will examine current allocation of resources with the aim of ensuring that every dollar does the most good for the most students possible, and simultaneously promoting equity in resources for all staff and students. However, the goal is not to reduce resources or spending.

5. Is the district trying to raise standardized test scores?

Standardized test scores are one of many potential long-range measures of the success of the effort, but are not the singular desired outcome. Overall, the district aims to improve supports for struggling students to ensure all students are able to reach their full potential and achieve at high levels.

6. Who is leading this effort?

This effort was initiated by the superintendent and will be led by a guiding coalition of central office leaders, school principals, and district staff.

The district will be partnering with the Boston-based organization, The District Management Council (DMC), which will be providing facilitation support, a deep understanding of best-practice research and a national perspective from other successful school districts. This will allow the district to take a deep, comprehensive look at our current supports for struggling students to identify areas for improvement that have proven to be effective in other districts and supported by a strong research base.

7. What is the work plan?

The district is undertaking a multi-step process, with the aim of incorporating many voices and ensuring we use research and best practices to better serve our students.

This first step will involve a systematic study of the district's current special education and some general education services, programs, procedures, staffing, and spending. This will be achieved through both qualitative and quantitative analysis including synthesis of existing district data, on-site observations, interviews, and focus groups. In addition, the district will collect information from many staff on their typical weekly schedule. Taken together, this will provide us with a more complete understanding of the many demands and needs of the staff, and how we might better support struggling students.

Second, the district will take this stakeholder input and analysis, and combine it with published research, the experience of achievement gap closing districts, and the wisdom of district teachers and administrators. We will identify and codify which practices will best serve struggling students in our district. The process will also highlight commendable practices already in place.

Third, the district will then create a phased roadmap for implementing any desired practices and service delivery models in a cost-effective manner across schools. Throughout the entire process, we will be meeting with stakeholders to share our plans and collect feedback. The district, not DMC, will decide what changes are appropriate for our students.

8. How will parents be involved?

Parents will be engaged throughout this process. First, parents will be invited to participate in focus groups with DMC to share their perspective on how the district is currently supporting their child(ren) – what's working well and what could be improved.

Parents will also receive an update on the initial observations which arise as a result of the analysis and have the opportunity to provide additional feedback and input as the district develops a vision and implementation plan to better serve struggling students.