

TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: House Education Committee

FROM: Meagan Roy, Director of Student Support Services for CSSU/President Elect, VCSEA

TOPIC: District Management Council Analysis - CSSU/CVSD Update

DATE: February 7, 2017

Review of CSSU's Work with DMC:

CSSU chose to engage with the DMC in order to inform our ongoing and long-standing efforts to better understand what works for our most struggling learners. Their analysis took place during the 2014-15 school year and, along with our own systems of data collection and analysis, has helped inform CSSU's efforts in a number of areas. The opportunities identified by DMC and selected as the highest priority for CSSU include:

1. Redefine and revise the role and training of special education teachers and intervention professionals
2. Redefine and revise the appropriate role for general and special education paraprofessionals.

Current Implementation Work:

- *CSSU Design Teams:* After receiving the results of the DMC analysis, CSSU convened a leadership design team to create a 3-5 year MTSS implementation plan emphasizing the opportunities highlighted in that report. The implementation plan synthesizes the recommendations from DMC along with ongoing (at this point decades-long) implementation work regarding service delivery at all tiers of our intervention system. The design team continues as the leadership structure that keeps the implementation plan at the forefront.
- *Embedded Intervention Model:* The DMC analysis confirmed our ongoing efforts to reduce our reliance on paraprofessionals to provide intervention and instead develop a system with more professionalized instruction. After much study of this issue, we identified a need to create an "embedded support model" in all of our schools. We use this term to describe a teaching model wherein a team consists of a small number of classroom teachers (4) and a professional intervention teacher (special educator) working together to ensure the needs of all of their students are met. This model allows teachers to dynamically codesign their instruction, embedding high level intervention (including additional intervention time) into the classroom instruction. Students are pulled out less frequently, we limit the use of paraprofessionals to provide instruction, and teams are better able to respond to the changing needs of the students in their classroom.
 - As part of our movement toward this model, our schools have been systematically reallocating staffing resources to decrease the number of paraprofessionals and increase the number of professional level teachers available to achieve an embedded model. Our efforts toward this end preceded the DMC analysis. Over the past 5 years, a total of 21 paraprofessionals have been reduced to gain 7 professionals in CSSU. This work is not without challenge but we believe will result in improved outcomes for our most struggling learners.
- *Common Educational Support System/MTSS Practices:* We recognized that in order to maximize our resources and deliver the most effective services to students, there was a need for coherence across our member schools. The design team, informed by the DMC report and our Guiding Principles, developed a common EST plan template, phased in over time, so that all of our schools are documenting supports in a similar fashion. This year, the focus has been on developing a common MTSS framework so that each of our schools have a similar approach to identifying and intervening to support struggling learners.
- *CSSU Guiding Principles for Instruction & Intervention:* Prior to engaging the DMC, CSSU had been developing a series of high-level standards of practices that would identify key evidence-based practices for systems that are able to accelerate learning for students who are struggling. This work resulted in the development of the CSSU Guiding Principles for Instruction & Intervention. One of the ways we

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analyzed our DMC data was to compare those recommendations with those driven by our own analysis of practice against our Guiding Principles; we found significant commonality between the two.

- *Role & Function of School Psychologists:* The DMC model identified the high percentage of time our schools were utilizing school psychologists to conduct assessments and evaluation related to special education eligibility and caused our team to explore ways to maximize their expertise in supporting students and teams in our MTSS. Since reshaping our service model, our school psychologists have reduced by more than half the number of assessments provided, and shifted a focus to sitting on problem-solving educational support teams, developing behavior plans and otherwise supporting instruction for students.
- *Speech-Language Pathologists Service Delivery:* The DMC recommendations recommended a closer look at how to maximize the expertise of our SLPs, prompting the start of a professional learning series about service delivery models in an MTSS

DMC Implications & Vermont Legislation

It is important to highlight several relevant legislative issues that impact our ability to move the recommendations forward and/or could have significant impact on Vermont's ability to generalize the work of the current study, which spans a larger group of districts. These are offered based solely based on CSSU's experience in implementation.

- *Proficiency Based Learning:* In addition to our ongoing efforts in establishing a multi-tiered system of supports, CSSU has been fully engaged in the work of implementing proficiency-based learning for several years. One of the most significant impacts of this work is that we are fostering a culture in which teachers understand that they are collectively responsible for supporting *each* of their students to reach proficiency. In our schools, the emphasis on high expectations and then quality, differentiated instruction has revolutionized instruction and therefore supports our efforts of establishing an MTSS framework. It is critical that this important work be allowed to continue, with support from the Agency of Education.
- *Generalizability of Recommendations:* Each district exists within its own unique context. It is important that legislators understand that even when recommendations (from DMC) may appear similar, the path to selecting priorities and implementation of those recommendations will vary greatly between districts. CSSU found success by deeply analyzing what we learned and collectively making a decision about what to prioritize and why. In some cases, we implemented differently than the way that DMC recommended; in other areas we determined not to implement a recommendation altogether. It's critical for policymakers to be cautious about sweeping recommendations or "one-size-fits-all" answers that may come out of a multiple-district analysis.
- *Special Education Funding:* The limitations of our categorical funding model continue to be significant and impact how easily districts can implement the DMC recommendations. I look forward to the results of the funding study that was convened last year.
- *Act 46 & Governance:* Within CSSU (soon to be CVSD), our consolidation efforts had significant positive impact on our ability to implement the recommendations. Our system is far better equipped to share resources and implement agreed-upon standards of practice when we operate as a single entity.
- *Supporting Students with Mental Health Needs:* Despite all of this work, our special education budget has not gone down. It is not news that in Vermont many students come to us from very challenging and

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traumatic situations. We are working to implement systems and structures but it is difficult work; it is slow work. We are highly aware that our costs are increasing. Sweeping cuts to educational funding without the long-term efforts to address the systems and structures we have in place will not be effective in meeting the needs of all learners. Further, our state as a whole needs to address the broader issues related to children and families having access to adequate mental health supports.