Case Template: Educating the Whole Child: Conditions for Learning Matter!

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> I. Identifying the Issue that Needed to Be Addressed
> A. Describe what you determined to be the fundamental issue in this case and how you arrived at that interpretation.
> B. Explain the pertinent facts and events that drew attention to the problem. What data sources did you consider key and how did you make sense of them? If applicable, share how SchoolNet aided you in this process.
> C. Briefly summarize any competing explanations of the issue that were considered and share the rationale for the explanation of the issue selected as most critical.

On Wednesday, October 10, 2007, one of our students entered Success Tech Academy and commenced to shoot two students and two teachers before taking his own life. Success Tech Academy, at the time, was a well rated high school with solid attendance (92.1%) and a 94% graduation rate. This was one of our better schools at the time. So, how did this tragedy come to pass? And, what were we going to do to minimize the likelihood of a tragedy like this in the future?

This type of event led to significant introspection on the District's behalf. Trying to identify a cause, after the fact, is difficult at best. However, the following potential contributing factors emerged regarding the young man (Asa Coon) who had committed the shooting:

1. Asa reportedly had been a target of bullying at the school.
2. There were reported conflicts with his teachers and a recent suspension.
3. Asa reportedly had made prior threats of violence, and
4. He reportedly had a history of mental illness.

These factors all pointed to a need to adapt and change the culture of our schools; we needed to make an investment to improve how our students perceived the conditions in which they were expected to learn. While tragic, this event was the catalyst for this investment which has led to significant changes in the cultures of our schools and continues to focus our work as we move forward.

II. Determining the Guiding Principles and Criteria for Approaching the Issue
A. Summarize the principles or criteria regarding the district goals and mission, professional knowledge, and processes, and/or values that guided your decision making.
B. Explain how these guided your decision making.

How does one significantly impact the culture of schools?

There was an immediate investment to place metal detectors in all of our schools and to increase a security presence in our District. While this was certainly necessary for many reasons, investing in security does not, in and of itself, necessarily bring about the changes needed to make the conditions in our schools conducive to learning.   While a metal detector would likely have prevented Asa from bringing a weapon into the school, it would not have addressed any of the underlying motivations that led him to bring a weapon to school in the first place.

Therefore, we also needed to make a specific investment to make the conditions in our buildings more conducive to learning. The four underlying dimensions that we sought to impact were:
1. Safe and Respectful Climate – how physically and emotionally safe students feel.
2. Challenge – how much students perceive that teachers and other adults in the school encourage them to think, work hard, do their best, and connect what they are learning to life outside of school.
3. Support – how much students feel listened to, cared about, and helped by teachers and other adults in the school.
4. Social Emotional Learning – how students perceive their peers' social and problem solving skills.

Cleveland Metropolitan School District engaged two partners to assist with this initiative which was titled Humanware. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) provided a tool for measuring these fundamental conditions in our buildings and was a general partner in the implementation and evaluation of the Humanware initiative. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) provided resources, curriculum, and ongoing guidance with strategies to support Humanware.

> III. Determining a Plan of Action
> A. Explain briefly the logic model (inputs, outputs, outcome) for your intervention to convey how you intended to achieve the desired results (see also http://tinyurl.com/ms2sj)
> B. What enablers and constraints (e.g., school-, district- or community-based programs, practices, tools, structures, procedures, policies, systems, and so forth) were most relevant in shaping the particulars of your intervention(s) for this issue and in achieving fidelity in its implementation?

Inputs:

The following is the model that we have used to organize our academic achievement planning for the past five years. It places the conditions for learning on equal and parallel footing with our traditional academic focus.
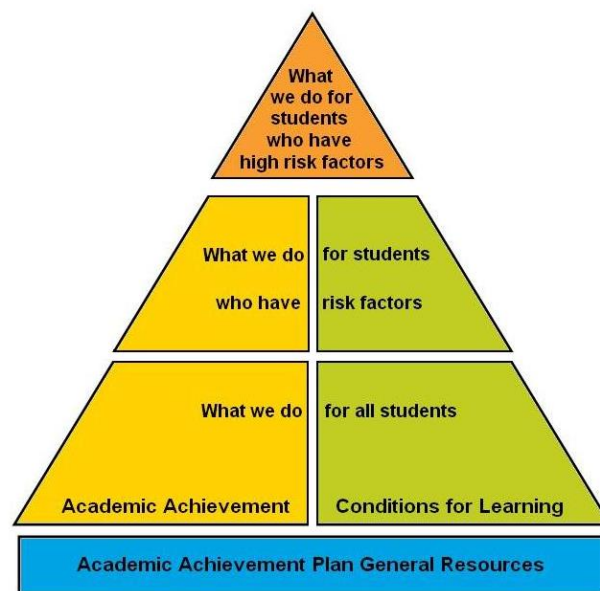
The key initiatives aligned to improvements in conditions for learning included (Osher, Poirier, Jarjoura, Brown, and Kendziora, 2013):

1. Implementing a universal evidence-based SEL program (PATHS) in all elementary schools (universal),
2. Building an early warning system and replacing in-school suspension with planning centers (universal for students whose attendance and behavior indicates that they are at risk).
3. Replacing ineffective special education driven intervention teams with student support teams (universal for students who are at risk and at elevated levels of risk).
4. Using conditions for learning surveys to frame planning, monitoring, and evaluation for all students and schools.

Outputs:
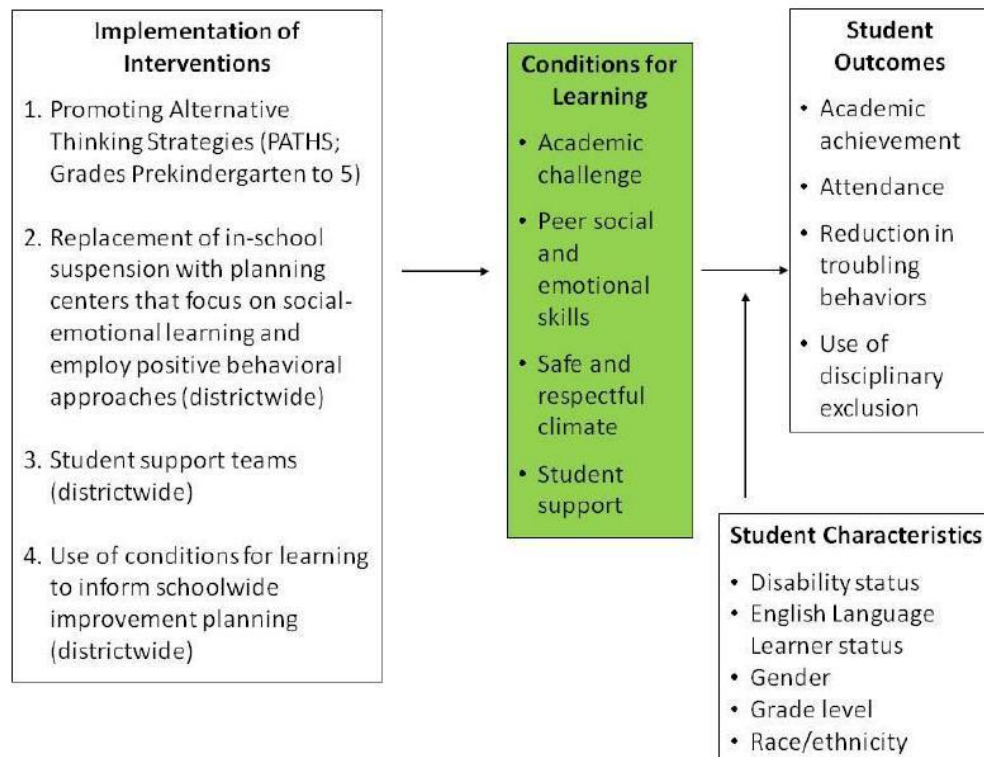
As outlined in the model above, these interventions were anticipated to impact academic achievement, attendance, troubling behaviors, and use of disciplinary exclusion.   Each of these outputs was also to be considered in context of a variety of student characteristics to ensure that the efforts were having an equitable impact.   This work simply could not have occurred without external funding support to bring national expertise to shape and sustain the initiative over time.

Constraints:

Changing a culture doesn't happen easily! There have been a variety of challenges that have been addressed as we have moved forward.   First and foremost, this required a very different type of relationship with our collective bargaining units. To effect this broad series of interventions required the active partnership with our collective bargaining groups.   These partnerships are ongoing and continue to shape the work.   Our second hurdle has been tied to data.   In order to support and deepen this work, we needed to build our capacity to collect, manage, and effectively use data regarding these interventions. While we had well developed tools for the provision and support of academic data, we had little structured to support the use of data with the Humanware initiative!

IV. Implementing Your Plan of Action
A. Describe how you developed a shared vision for the district about this issue, communicated about it to generate stakeholder buy-in, and monitored organizational performance relative to this vision.
B. Relate how you prepared people for new duties or roles relative to this issue by supporting reflection, learning, or growth to foster improvement.
C. Discuss how you strengthened the district culture, modified organizational structures, built collaborative processes, handled internal marketing and PR, and managed the district environment so that your district works to support your intervention for this issue.

If there is any benefit to a tragedy, it is in the fact that it will unite people to a common cause.   The American Institutes for Research was quickly engaged to help better understand the nature of the change that we needed to effect.   This led to the following recommendations that were widely communicated throughout the organization and community:

Box 1. Recommendations of AIR's Audit

- Build a climate for change and sustain it over multiple years using data on a small number of metrics to refine interventions and enhance the CMSD's approaches to improving student outcomes and well-being.

- Use data for planning, monitoring and evaluation.

- Employ a three-tiered approach to building conditions for and capacities to learn and teach.

- Avoid single solutions or unaligned multiple solutions for complex, but interrelated problems.

- Eliminate ineffective or counterproductive practices and behaviors.

- Align promotion and prevention, early intervention and treatment in a manner that will both address immediate needs as well as prevent the incidence and magnitude of problems.

- Support the ability of schools, agencies and staff to systematically implement proven practices and programs with quality.

An executive committee comprised of representatives from student support services, security, and our collective bargaining groups was composed to guide this work.   This group continues to exist and has broadened to include representation from our assessment and accountability departments for data support as well.

Finally, as mentioned previously, Humanware became a partner in the academic planning process. All our schools are required to go through an iterative series of academic planning meetings throughout each academic area.   These meetings and all planning documents were structured to place Humanware on equal footing with traditional achievement planning.   We literally began to plan for the whole child as part of this process.

V. Reflecting Upon The Plan of Action, Its Implementation, And Its Effectiveness
A. Looking back, describe any lessons learned about the conditions that contributed to the creation of this issue, its identification, or handling.
B. Looking forward, describe any new systems were established or more routinized to improve the ability of the district to deal with this issue in the future.
C. Highlight how data or SchoolNet (product, services, or implementation) helped you in recognizing and addressing this issue.

As we looked back at the implementation of the Humanware initiative, we were encouraged by some of the changes and successes that we have observed. From 2008 to 2012, the District saw significant positive changes in attendance, disruptive behavior, referrals for violent behavior, and out of school suspensions.

While this is encouraging, there is much work that remains to be done. Cultures do not change over-night. To that end, there are a number of core recommendations that were made in a recent paper provided by AIR on the Humanware initiative. While these were broad recommendations for those seeking to enter the work, they are relevant to our ongoing work:

1. Assess factors contributing to disparities in school safety,
2. Expand collection and use of data on on non-academic conditions in schools
3. Apply tiered approaches to prevention and addressing mental health challenges, including those related to trauma
4. Implement evidence-based social and emotional learning
5. Broaden investment in Humanware student support activities
6. Support the development of individual and organizational capacities to reduce disparities in implementation.

During the past year, we have built the foundation for data and intervention support for the Humanware program through an active partnership with SchoolNet. In the coming year, our staff will have Conditions for Learning data available as a Key Performance Indicator which can be followed to the student level like any other academic indicator. In addition, our Student Support Teams will be using SchoolNet's response to intervention tab. The investment to develop a more robust and timely means to deliver and monitor data tied to Humanware activities is crucial to addressing each of the recommendations of AIR. In the end, our ability to provide data on the activities of the Humanware program is as critical to the education of our children as the provision of assessment information. To educate the whole child, we must have both sets of information if we wish to be successful.