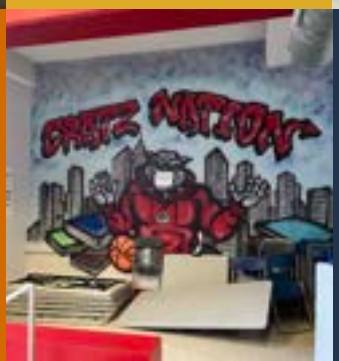






Marshall Street

Anchoring Emotions

ONE SCHOOL'S SKILL-BASED PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL-BASED DISABILITIES

A Collection of Research-to-Impact Practices Developed with the Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities

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Preface

In *Anchoring Emotions: One school's skill-based practices for supporting students with emotional-based disabilities*, we share a set of best practices for improving learning outcomes in secondary students — particularly Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty — through an emotional support program for students in special education with emotional or behavioral disabilities or other health impairments integrated within neighborhood schools. The Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities (NIC), a group of 10 public charter school networks serving more than 75,000 students nationwide, identified the best practices through their work between 2019 and 2023.

Led by **Marshall Street** at Summit Public Schools, in partnership with technical assistance providers NIRN, RTI International, SRI International, and SWIFT Education Center, the purpose of the three-year NIC was to systematically improve the way our education system serves Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty and share these solutions with school systems everywhere. This report is funded by the Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Gates Foundation.

The NIC used continuous improvement to translate existing research for improving learning outcomes into best practices and to iterate the practices to ensure they worked in a variety of school contexts.

In ***Anchoring Emotions: One school's skill-based practices for supporting students with emotional-based disabilities,*** we share the results of this vital work:

- Two **best practices** that Mastery Schools used as part of their supplemental behavioral support model while in the NIC to successfully improve outcomes for students who need emotional support. Each best practice includes:
  - Case studies highlighting how Mastery's Simon Gratz High School implemented the practices while in the NIC
  - Step-by-step implementation guidance
  - Key prerequisites and accelerants for successful implementation in any context
- Two **case studies** that explain how Mastery Schools uses data to make decisions for each level of their network: central office, schools, Anchor programs, and students.

We share these best practices so that any school in the country can leverage the learning from the NIC to accelerate dramatic gains in learning outcomes for their students with disabilities. We hope that administrators and educators across the country can use the stories within this guide to build their school cultures of continuous improvement as well.

Acknowledgments

About Marshall Street

Marshall Street is a division of Summit Public Schools based in Redwood City, California. Marshall draws from more than 15 years of institutional knowledge and extensive experience in school improvement. Through our programs, we increase the capacity of our school partners to carry their work forward in the ways most meaningful to their communities.

Continuous Improvement is a set of principles and practices to help educators "get better at getting better." Marshall's Continuous Improvement team uses these tools to tackle intricate, systems-level problems in K–12 education. From 2019 to 2023, Marshall led a multi-year Networked Improvement Community (NIC) to make dramatic gains in the learning experiences, environments, and outcomes for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty.

About the Anchor Emotional Support Program at Mastery Schools

The Anchor program at Mastery Schools — a comprehensive therapeutic support program for students receiving supplemental emotional support — is a unique, one-of-a-kind program that was developed to disrupt national and local outcome disparities related to students with emotional disabilities. By joining the NIC, the Anchor team set out to explore how they could create school-wide programmatic supports to significantly increase student attendance rates and decrease suspension rates for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, ensuring this group of students had equitable access to their education. This project engaged a diverse array of leaders, educators, and practitioners at Mastery Schools and Simon Gratz High School who were instrumental to its success.

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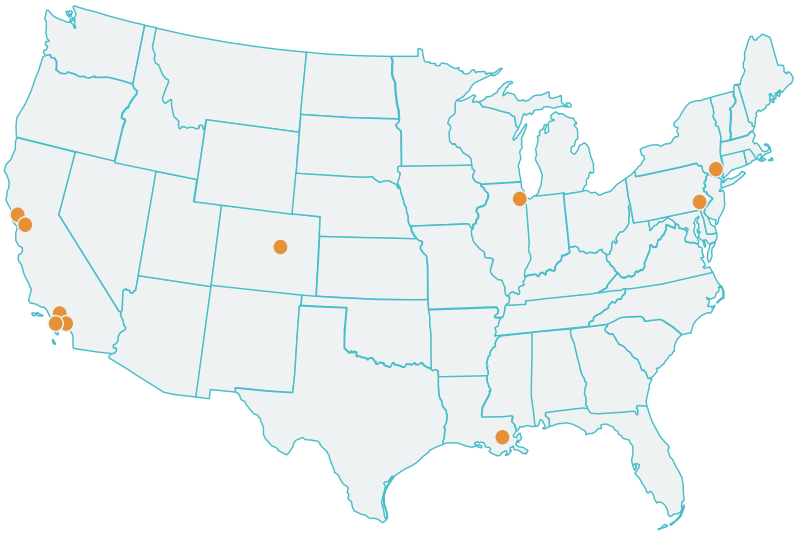
Denver, CO
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Marshall Street

Overview

ANCHORING EMOTIONS

A collection of research-to-impact practices developed with the Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities

COLLECTION OVERVIEW

Anchoring Emotions

Introduction



The Challenge

America's public schools struggle to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Public schools across America struggle to meet the diverse needs of students, particularly those furthest from opportunity. When marginalization intersects with disability, students often face low expectations, are systematically segregated, are denied access to college and career curricula, and do not receive sufficient support to obtain a high school diploma and pursue their dreams. In the 2017–18 school year, **8th graders with disabilities performed 39–41 points lower than their peers without disabilities in reading and math**,[1] illustrating just how deeply schools are failing students with disabilities.

Students of color are over-identified as needing emotional support.

In the last few decades, there has been a growing concern regarding the disproportionate number of students experiencing poverty, particularly students of color, found eligible for special education services.[2] Data continues to show that students of color and those living in poverty are also disproportionately identified as having emotional disabilities or other health impairments.[3] These same students are also more likely to be placed in educational settings that are more restrictive learning environments. Students who are inappropriately placed in more restrictive environments may not receive the level of rigor or expectations academically or behaviorally that they would when educated along with their peers without disabilities, putting them at greater risk of negative outcomes.

Suspension and expulsion are more likely for students with emotional support needs.

Researchers have also found that students with emotional and behavioral disabilities and other health impairments are also far more likely to be suspended or expelled than their peers with and without

disabilities.[4] This is particularly striking because it may be ineffective to use suspension as a form of punishment for students with behavioral or emotional disabilities[5] or students with aggressive, hyperactive, and social skills concerns.[6] Students with these disabilities often also have academic challenges, which can be exacerbated by excluding them from educational experiences.[7]

Exclusionary discipline contributes to a school-to-prison pipeline.

Research also shows the way in which suspension of students increases their likelihood of entering the juvenile justice system or being incarcerated later in life.[8] This school-to-prison pipeline is thus even more concerning for students with disabilities who have an increased likelihood of experiencing suspension or expulsion, particularly students who need additional emotional support. These concerns are warranted because there is a clear overrepresentation of students with disabilities in the juvenile justice system compared to their peers without disabilities.[9]

Mastery Schools' Solution

Mastery Schools developed a program to address these important realities for their students in special education with emotional support needs and to help improve their future outcomes. Mastery's program focuses on using interventions and best practices rooted in research, such as positive behavioral support, differentiated instruction, developmental therapy, and life space crisis intervention, for addressing challenging behaviors. The program's intent is to help students in special education receive learning within Mastery's network and to provide them the opportunity to access the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment possible. By addressing problem behaviors and educating students in the most rigorous academic setting possible, Mastery is able to reduce the likelihood that their students with emotional support needs will require more restrictive levels of support.



Mastery's continuum of special education emotional supports includes four tiers, as shown in the figure above — from least restrictive to most restrictive. Within each tier, program teams plan for each student's academic needs in addition to the therapeutic system of supports.

Itinerant Emotional Support

Students who receive itinerant emotional support are educated within the general education setting between 80% and 99% of the day. The student appropriate for this tier of support has a diagnosed school-based emotional or behavioral disability that requires mild therapeutic and behavioral interventions to meet academic and behavioral goals. The core components of the itinerant emotional supports include a functional behavior assessment and a positive behavior support plan, as well as aligned behavioral interventions and case management.

FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENTS AND POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT PLANS

A trained individual assesses each student's unique behavioral and emotional needs to determine the most prevalent negative behaviors the student displays, to establish the function of those behaviors, and to identify an aligned replacement behavior. Within the positive behavior support plan, the IEP team decides how the student will receive interventions to learn the discrete skills and replacement behaviors and what reinforcement will help the student generalize new skills across all settings.

WEEKLY 1:1 COUNSELING AND/OR SOCIAL SKILLS IN A SMALL GROUP

Students gain awareness of their negative behaviors and practice appropriate replacement behaviors through counseling and discrete skill instruction. Mastery meets each student's needs by employing social workers for each school at a 300:1 ratio and using an evidence-based counseling model or a research-based, CASEL standards-aligned social-emotional learning curriculum. Social workers are also responsible for many of Mastery's multi-tiered system of supports' Tier 2 interventions, as well as crisis response and targeted social work case management.

CASE MANAGEMENT

Each student receiving itinerant emotional support is assigned a special education case manager whose role includes managing the positive behavior support plan across all settings, ensuring that interventions are in place, and providing more intensive reinforcements than are provided as part of Tier 1 systems. Additionally, case managers are responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of plans, sharing progress with families, and supporting the IEP team in determining if the plan and associated interventions should be reduced, maintained, or intensified.

Full-Time Emotional Support

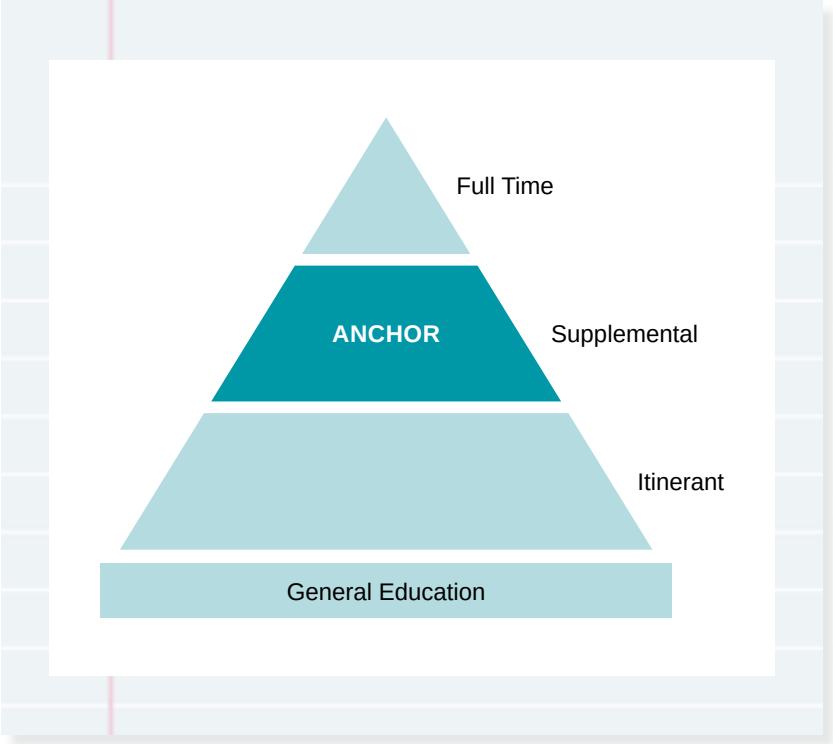
Students receiving full-time emotional support are not educated within general education. Students with this level of need require significant therapeutic and behavioral interventions to meet their academic and behavioral goals. Mastery contracts with a variety of providers for full-time emotional support, including a private school that aligns with Mastery's suite of curriculum, instruction, and assessments. Students at this level access a curriculum that is modified to provide a higher level of daily therapeutic programming. The benefit of this private school partnership is that students can return to a less restrictive environment with less interruption to learning.

Approved Private School

Some students do not respond to placement with the full-time emotional support providers and subsequently are placed by the IEP team in approved private schools that offer more intensive therapeutic environments.

Anchor: Supplemental Emotional Support

Anchor is Mastery Schools' program to provide supplemental emotional support for students in special education with emotional or behavioral disabilities or other health impairments. Students in Anchor are educated within general education settings between 20% and 79% of the day. Students in Anchor require moderate therapeutic and behavioral interventions to meet their academic and behavioral goals.



The Anchor program includes 11 components, known internally as ***The Must Haves***, the most central of which are the following:

- Schedule & Staffing
- Level System
- SAM Skills & Behavioral Feedback
- Daily Skills Class
- Counseling Services

Elements of Anchor's core components were initially developed in partnership with **Greentree School**, an approved private school providing full-time emotional support programming in a private setting. Greentree developed their model based on the **Student Achievement Model** (SAM), the **Boys Town Education Model**, and **Life Space Crisis Intervention**. Core components of the Anchor model are described in depth below and in the collection's chapters.

Schedule & Staffing

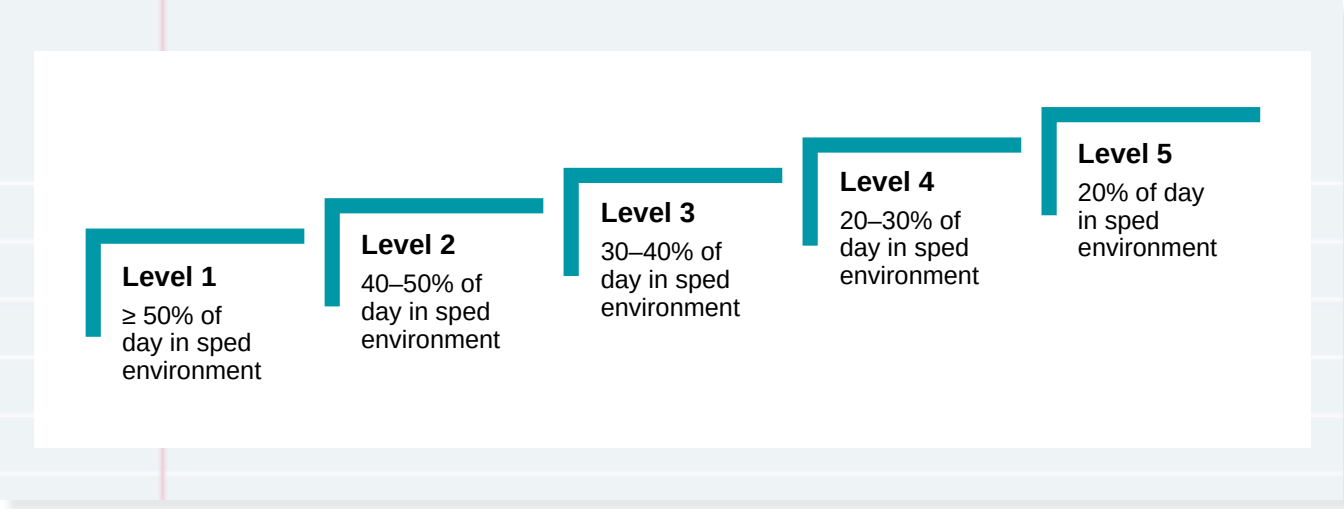
To ensure appropriate, proactive, and responsive adult support is available for students based on need, an increased staff-to-student ratio exists in Anchor compared to similar programs. For every 12 students within three consecutive grade bands, Anchor has:

- 1 full-time emotional support teacher who is also a case manager,
- .5 clinician (20 or 29 hours per week), and
- 2 classroom counselors.

This staffing ratio makes it possible for students to spend between 20% and 60% of their day receiving emotional support in either a general education or a special education environment. Students' levels of support are determined by their current performance. Staff schedules regularly adapt to meet changing student needs.

Level System

Anchor's level system has five total levels, with Level 5 being the highest (most independence and greatest inclusion) and Level 1 the lowest (most dependence and least inclusion).



Levels are representative of students' current two-week performance based on attendance, discipline, and behavioral feedback data. A student's level reflects the current adult support and therapeutic programming required for them to demonstrate success. Performance is monitored, analyzed, and responded to during biweekly level meetings. Read the case study on **Maximizing Student Progress Through Data-Informed Systems** for more information on Anchor's level system.

SAM Skills & Behavioral Feedback

A behavioral skill is made up of a chain of individual, discrete actions or cognitive operations performed in specific situations. Instruction on behavioral skills must be explicit, intensive, comprehensive, and reliant on antecedent control, reinforcement, and generalization programming. The SAM Model identified 34 behavioral skills across three domains (see the table on the following page) and broke them down into discrete teachable steps known as the SAM skills. Students have from one to five individual SAM skills they are working on at any given time.



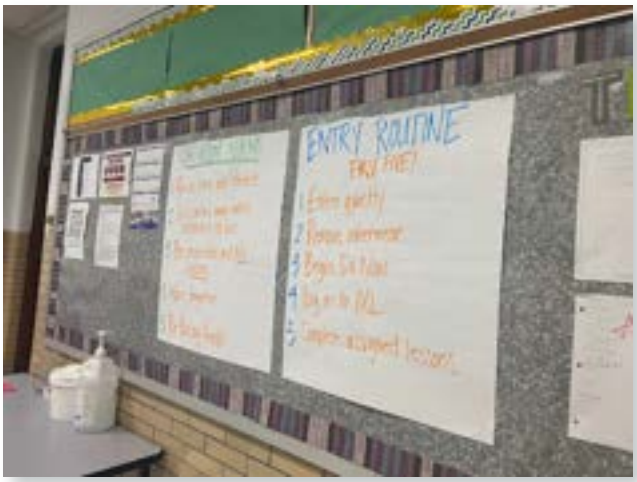
Social Skills	Self-Control Skills	Active Learning Skills
1. Keep all Perspectives in Mind	1. Ignoring Negative Behavior	1. Assignment Completion
2. Following Directions	2. Controlling Your Emotions	2. Homework Completion
3. Accepting Feedback/Criticism	3. Self-Control	3. Initiating a Task
4. Accepting “No” for an Answer		4. Remaining on Task (independent work)
5. Getting the Teacher’s Attention		5. Asking for Help
6. Making a Request		6. Answering Questions
7. Greeting Others		7. Asking Questions
8. Disagreeing Appropriately		8. Checking Your Work
9. Making an Apology		9. Asking for Feedback
10. Volunteering		10. Working Cooperatively with Others
11. Talking with Others		11. Writing Neatly
12. Giving Compliments		12. Completing Accurate Work
13. Accepting Compliments		
14. Introducing Yourself		
15. Resisting Peer Pressure		
16. Reporting Other Youths’ Behavior		
17. Appropriate Conversation (School)		
18. Maintaining Physical Boundaries (school)		
19. Treating Others with Respect		

Behavioral feedback is the intervention used to reinforce and generalize students’ use of SAM skills across all settings. Behavioral feedback is a form of behavioral teaching, which, to be effective, requires timely and specific delivery of feedback targeting the correct behaviors. “Positive Praise” scripts are based on research to support increasing student motivation, and “Learning Point” scripts provide a systematic method to address inappropriate behavior and teach replacement skills.

Daily Skills Class

Daily Skills Class is the time and space where students in Anchor are provided explicit instruction and practice opportunities on discrete skills to promote the learning and generalization of skills across all settings. Daily Skills Class is required five days per week for a minimum of 25 minutes per day. The course is taught by a special education teacher or clinician and uses evidence-based curricula that have shown success as Tier 3 interventions.

Counseling



Mastery Schools staff a half-time licensed clinician for every 12 students in Anchor. This clinical staffing ratio allows for students to receive 1:1 counseling a minimum of once per week as well as therapeutic small groups as determined appropriate by the IEP team. The primary focus of individual counseling is school-related, including appropriate classroom behaviors, coping skills, and social functioning. Individual counseling supports SAM skill acquisition, skill maintenance, and skill generalization across multiple settings. Therapeutic small groups support social, emotional, and behavioral skill acquisition, maintenance, and generalization. Clinicians use modalities and evidence-based social and emotional curricula designed for schools to support skill development.

Enabling Conditions

Each of the aforementioned Anchor components contributed to improved experiences and behavioral outcomes for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty within the NIC. The effective implementation of these practices was made possible because of three core enabling conditions that were in place in Mastery Schools' emotional support programming: a program designed for each individual student's needs, effective data systems, and network-level support. Without these three conditions, the impact of the practices is dramatically reduced.

Program Designed for Students

Mastery developed Anchor as a supplemental emotional support program that individualizes its services to meet each student's needs rather than expecting students to fit within the program as designed. Mastery's full range of emotional and behavioral support programs, and the Anchor program within it, embodies the true intention of providing a full continuum of services for students. Anchor is successful because it attempts only to support students who need the level of support that the program was designed for. Students requiring less support are served with itinerant services, and those benefiting from more support are served in Mastery's specialized school setting. Anchor itself was designed to be flexible, adapting to each student's individual needs as they progress in the level system. By analyzing student data every two weeks — as opposed to waiting for a school suspension or manifestation of determination like many emotional support programs — Anchor staff ensure that students always receive a level of support that corresponds to their current needs.

Mastery wanted to ensure that the mindsets held by Anchor staff were shared by all school staff as they interact with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, so they created their Modified Anchor Response Plan (MARP) as an adaptation to their existing culture plan. All students at Mastery are held to behavioral expectations, but for students in the Anchor program, school staff might need to respond differently to behaviors, which MARP helps define. To help all staff understand MARP and feel confident

implementing it, Anchor network and campus leaders led professional development for assistant principals of school culture and specialized services. Anchor and the assistant principals then planned training for their school teams. Now, as new leaders Mastery, this training is part of their onboarding process. Mastery has also started requiring assistant principals of school culture and specialized services to submit annual plans for their implementation of MARP so that network-level leaders can support campuses throughout the school year as they work to differentiate how they respond to the behavioral needs of students in Anchor.

Effective Data Systems

Many of Anchor's systems rely on constant data collection from school administrators, special education teachers, classroom counselors, and other school and network staff. Mastery has been able to include the data necessary for Anchor's success in their existing school and network-wide student information systems. When adding Anchor-specific data to these systems, a concerted, network-wide data integration effort ensured that existing data and new, Anchor-specific data could work together.

To successfully align the existing student information systems to Anchor program data, Mastery Schools spent considerable time and effort developing a network culture that understands emotional and behavioral disabilities. A key way in which this was accomplished was by making it possible for network staff to analyze the network's key performance indicators for the subset of students in Anchor. This analysis not only allows the network to better respond to trends related to students' emotional support needs, but it also allows network and building leaders to focus on academic growth and proficiency for these students. In addition, Mastery has been able to build a system that allows Anchor staff to collect granular, real-time data around behavioral feedback. All stakeholders, from network leaders to students and families, can view data in real time to see how students are demonstrating their prosocial behaviors.

These additions to Mastery's data infrastructure have been invaluable to the continued success of emotional support programming, making it possible for network staff to analyze Anchor data by aggregating the data from multiple schools' Anchor programs to determine areas of strength and opportunities for growth within the Anchor program as a whole. They are also able to compare the different schools' Anchor programs to learn from programs that are seeing positive outcomes for their students and to more intentionally support programs that have additional needs. Each school's Anchor program can similarly analyze data to identify needs within the different areas of their program or to respond appropriately for individual students. This type of data support makes it possible for Anchor staff to tailor their program to students' needs and ensure that each student is receiving what they need to make progress academically as well as emotionally.

Network Support

Mastery Schools, as a network, has invested significant time and resources into building their full continuum of emotional support programs to meet the diverse needs of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. The Anchor program has a team of three network-level staff members who oversee and support each school's Anchor program. These team members have successful school-based experience working with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities that lends them expertise and credibility. The network team members provide direct coaching and support to each school's Anchor team, provide professional development throughout the school year, document the core program components, develop implementation guides, and continue to research and modify the

current model to ensure it is meeting the needs of each student. In addition, the network team engages in ongoing cross-collaborative and teaming structures with other network-level departments to ensure Mastery Schools is providing a fully aligned continuum of therapeutic services.

This mindset within network leadership means that there is also considerable investment in staff development, technology, and new strategies. These investments increase programmatic capacity and improve outcomes for students, which further demonstrates the effectiveness of providing their full continuum of services for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Continuous engagement from network-level leadership ensures that Anchor programs continue to receive guidance, support, and investment.

Mastery's Role in the NIC

The partnership between Mastery Schools and the NIC stemmed from a shared commitment to tackling systemic inequities in the US education system, particularly for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Mastery joined the NIC to refine and improve their Anchor program model in a way that allowed them to spread it across their organization and, ultimately, to share it with schools nationwide. The program was already well-established and showing promising gains for students at Mastery Gratz. Yet, Mastery and the NIC recognized the program's potential to impact the broader field of education by sharing it with schools nationwide.

Participation in the NIC provided Mastery with dedicated improvement coaching, continuous improvement tools, and data support to refine and improve their model; access to a community of experts and practitioners with whom to learn and collaborate; and resources to help codify the Anchor program to share and spread it broadly with schools nationwide. Engaging with the NIC spurred the evolution of Mastery's practices, which led to the piloting and adoption of initiatives such as behavioral feedback and peer-to-peer mentorship. During this time, Mastery addressed barriers like staff capacity, mindsets, and training, improving staff awareness of how best to serve students with emotional and behavioral disabilities across the school. With the benefit of coaching, data assistance, and peer networking, Mastery refined its model, increasing student access to general education settings, boosting student attendance, and reducing suspensions, while also gearing up to expand the program's impact beyond its current schools.



Members of Mastery, Marshall, and Gates Foundation teams together on the NIC New York learning tour

The Collection

This collection includes **two best practices** that support the education of students with emotional or behavioral disabilities on behalf of improving learning outcomes for all students and **two case studies** on larger macro-level practices to support a full continuum of services for students with emotional or behavioral disabilities.

Each of the practices detailed in this book is an independently strong and valuable practice. However, each practice is most effective when built on a programmatic foundation that provides opportunities for academic learning and disability-related skill development.



Enabling Conditions:
Program Designed for Students
Effective Data Systems
Network Support

The audience for this collection is educators, schools, and districts who believe that all students are capable of increasing their academic achievement, who fundamentally believe that it is the system's responsibility to ensure this is a reality for all students it serves, and who are looking for ideas on how to initiate or refine their approach to this work. While a great many research papers, reports, and technical assistance centers provide guidance on practices for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, this collection is unique:

- It ties together the multiple elements critical to addressing the needs of all students, specifically for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty.
- It emphasizes the importance of using data at all levels of the school system to improve outcomes for students.
- Each chapter is grounded in both the foundational and current research on the practice but emphasizes (1) detailed, real-world examples of the practice as implemented at Mastery Schools and (2) a step-by-step guide to implementation of the practice.

Chapter 1: Building Student Leaders: Peer-to-Peer Mentorship for Secondary Students

Student mentorship is a peer support structure pairing two students together in a mentee/mentor relationship for regular formal and informal check-ins to build positive peer relationships and increase student sense of belonging. Mentees in Mastery's peer mentorship program were able to develop relationships with older students whom they could look to for guidance and rely on for additional emotional support. This chapter offers the learning from Mastery's implementation and the steps to implement a peer mentorship program in any school context.

Chapter 2: Providing Timely Behavioral Feedback Across Classrooms

Educators follow a defined protocol to provide immediate feedback to students on their application of taught behavioral skills, enabling them to effectively apply these skills in various contexts. To successfully implement behavioral feedback, program leaders must also devote time to the training, observation, and coaching of staff so that feedback is provided consistently and with fidelity. This chapter is a guide to setting up the necessary conditions and implementing behavioral feedback. When implemented with quality, behavioral feedback can have significant positive impacts on student skill development and overall behavior and, subsequently, on academic learning.

Case Study: Maximizing Student Progress Through Data-Informed Systems

This case study describes Mastery's goal-setting, collection, analysis, decision-making, and reflection of and based on data at essential programmatic points to ensure fidelity, quality, and outcomes at all levels of the program. Mastery's investment in data systems that support data specific to the Anchor program ensures that the needs of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities are not overlooked by school or network staff. The case study highlights the importance of creating clear systems and structures that make it feasible for staff and students alike to make data-informed decisions.

Case Study: Refining Program Implementation Via Quarterly Collaborative Evaluation at Mastery Schools

This case study explains how Mastery's network leaders use rubrics to evaluate and design programmatic support for each school's Anchor program on a quarterly basis to create accountability and continuous improvement cycles for programs. Network- and school-level Anchor leaders collaborate with one another using data from this program evaluation to highlight areas of strength and identify areas for further growth. Mastery's network leaders also use this data to ensure fidelity across their schools' Anchor programs and to identify individual exemplars that can demonstrate excellence across the network.

How to Approach this Collection

The pieces in this collection can be read in any order, as one is not necessarily dependent on another. Chapters are written to help the reader replicate the practices in their own context. Case studies can be read to inspire ideas but will not necessarily give the depth needed to implement the practice.

Further Reading

Mastery Schools' Modified Anchor Response Plan

Mastery Schools' Anchor Program Guidebook



Appendix

Notes

1 US Department of Education, “Focus on NAEP: Students With Disabilities”

2 Artiles and Trent, “Overrepresentation of Minority Students”; Hosp and Reschly, “Disproportionate Representation of Minority Students”; Ladner and Hammons, “Special but Unequal”; Harris-Murri, King, and Rostenberg, “Reducing Disproportionate Minority Representation”

3 Grindal et al., ”Racial Differences in Special Education”

4 Achilles et al., “Sociocultural Correlates of Disciplinary Exclusion”; Anderson, “The Relationship between Inclusion, Absenteeism, and Disciplinary Outcomes”; Bowman-Perrott et al., “Patterns and Predictors of Disciplinary Exclusion”

5 Krezmien et al., “Suspension, Race, and Disability”

6 Atkins et al., “Suspensions and Detentions in an Urban, Low-Income School”

7 Kutash & Duchnowski, “The Mental Health Needs of Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities”

8 Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson, “Breaking the School to Prison Pipeline”; Fabelo et al., *Breaking Schools’ Rules*

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Marshall Street



Building Student Leaders: Peer-to-Peer Mentorship for Secondary Students

A RESEARCH-TO-IMPACT PRACTICE DEVELOPED WITH THE NETWORKED IMPROVEMENT COMMUNITY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Building Student Leaders: Peer-to-Peer Mentorship for Secondary Students

Implementation Level

- ☐ District/Central Office
- ☑ School
- ☑ Program/Department
- ☐ Classroom

Who Implements

- ☑ Teacher(s)
- ☐ Instructional Coach
- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Central Office Leadership
- ☑ Specialist: Classroom Counselor

Practice Overview

What is the Practice?

Student mentorship is a peer support structure that pairs two students in a mentee/mentor relationship for regular formal and informal check-ins to build positive peer relationships and increase students' sense of belonging.

Why is Peer-to-Peer Mentorship Important?

Developing strong relationships with peers and staff at school is important because it can impact students' sense of belonging and connection to their community, factors essential to students' success for persistence to and through K–12 schooling.[1] Strong relationships are especially important for students with disabilities who are increasingly included in educational and community settings, yet may not always feel a sense of belonging and inclusion socially and emotionally with peers. Students with emotional and behavioral disabilities may particularly struggle to connect and relate to their peers. This struggle may be related to their disability, the way peers react to their disability, and sometimes a combination of related factors. Peer-to-peer mentorship provides opportunities for students to develop social bonds, create community, and learn new ways of relating to other students.

Why it Works

TEACHING AND MODELING DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS

Students participating in peer-to-peer mentorship have the opportunity to work on important prosocial skills that many students need modeled and reinforced as they develop relationships with peers. Peer mentorship focuses on building prosocial skills that all students need to learn in school and that specialized programs for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities work to teach, such as:

- offering to help someone,
- considering the feelings and needs of others,
- sharing and kindness,
- volunteering time,
- self-efficacy, and
- self-awareness.

These skills can be taught through explicit instruction in the classroom, but it is essential that students have opportunities to practice skills in a supportive environment that provides feedback and allows for them to make mistakes. Implementing skills with supportive peers can help students, particularly students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, generalize their learning to their interactions with other students and enhance their application of prosocial skills in other contexts.

STUDENTS BUILD CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNITY AT SCHOOL

As students build these interpersonal skills in their peer-to-peer mentorship program, they also gain a sense of belonging with students who were not part of their typical social groups at school.[2] Developing these relationships with other students with disabilities enables students to relate to peers with similar experiences and can also help them gain a positive identity and pride related to their disability.[3] The feeling of understanding from peers and the sense of belonging within a group of students create important connections between students and their school, helping them feel more engaged, respond more positively to authority, and improve academic achievement.[4]

MENTORS GAIN CONFIDENCE AND LEADERSHIP

The positive messages students receive about their disability from peer mentorship can help combat negative and exclusionary social messages students may have previously internalized.[5] Mentors also have the opportunity to build new leadership skills as they learn how to coach and support their peers with a similar disability.[6] As mentors see the positive effects of their leadership, their confidence grows, helping them in and out of the classroom. This creates a virtuous cycle, in which mentors' growing confidence helps them to further build up and support their mentees.

Implementation at a Glance

The information in this section provides a high-level view of what to consider when implementing this practice. **Enabling Conditions** describes the minimum conditions needed for successful implementation, including resources, mindsets, staffing, and recommended time allocation. **Steps to Implement** presents a concise checklist of action items, which are explained in detail in **How to Implement this Practice**, below.

Enabling Conditions

Prerequisites	✦ Network support through financial resources, time, and space to operate sessions, onboard staff to lead the program, and support for student attendance ✦ Private space for students to meet ✦ Staff member leading the program (mentorship lead) has: – Relationships with students – Deep awareness of students' needs and personalities – Level of proficiency in SEL, emotional intelligence, and other core program skills
Recommended Materials	✦ **Data collection tools** and processes (e.g., surveys distributed at the beginning and end of each grading period) ✦ Materials to motivate students and support relationship building (board games, snacks, bean bag chairs, etc.) ✦ Incentives for students
Staff Commitment	✦ Designated part-time mentorship lead to oversee program implementation at the school ✦ School-level leader to coordinate resources, training, implementation quality, and continuous improvement
Recommended Time Allocation	**Student Participants** ✦ 1 hour mentorship period weekly for mentors and mentees to meet formally and program lead to monitor **Program Lead** ✦ Train, monitor, and adapt the program (1–2 hrs/month) ✦ Regularly observe and monitor formal and informal check-ins and respond to student needs (1–2 hours weekly)

Steps to Implement

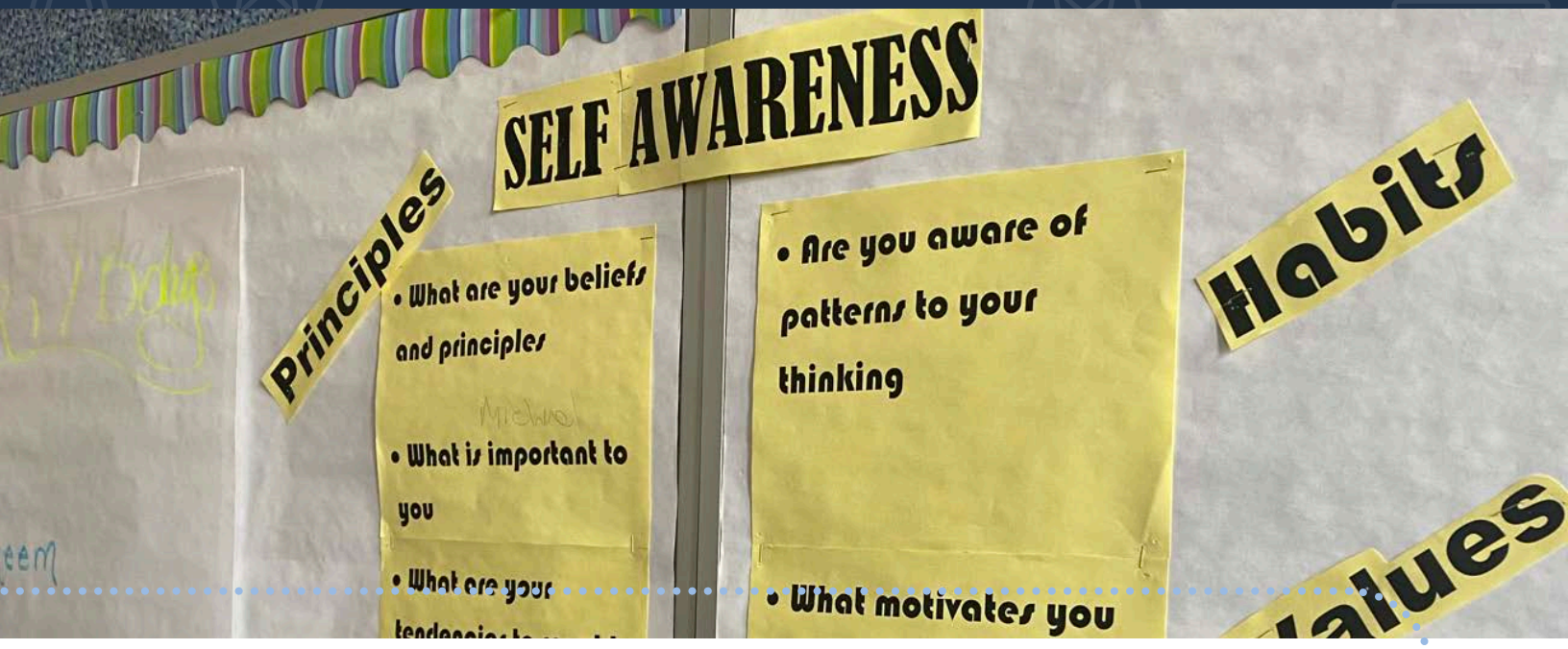
PREPARE NEEDED STRUCTURES

- [ ] Identify a peer mentorship lead
- [ ] Design tools, protocols, and norms
- [ ] Recruit students
- [ ] Get permission from families
- [ ] Create student pairs
- [ ] Create mentorship schedule

PUT PEER MENTORSHIP INTO PRACTICE

- [ ] Train student mentors
- [ ] Hold pre-meetings
- [ ] Hold mentorship sessions





Bringing this Practice to Life

FROM PILOT TO PROGRESS: THE SUCCESS OF PEER MENTORING AT MASTERY SCHOOLS

Mastery Schools' Simon Gratz High School in Philadelphia, PA, began piloting a peer-to-peer mentorship program in the 2021–22 school year to cultivate a sense of belonging among students in their school community. The program paired older students from their Anchor emotional support program with younger students, aiming to foster authentic relationships between them. Each week, mentors and mentees meet formally and informally to nurture their relationship and collaboratively address any barriers to learning experienced by the mentees. Over the course of two years, the Gratz team has expanded and refined the program based on insights gained from the pilot, enabling them to involve more students and better address student needs through this initiative.

Starting Small and Seeing Big Problems

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Gratz was separated into two campuses. Vernetta Newman, one of Gratz's emotional support counselors, ran a meet-and-greet day bringing together the upper- and lower-level students in the Anchor program. The meet-and-greet day was a time for celebration, socializing, playing games, and presentations by upperclassmen about the Anchor program on the upper campus. Vernetta and the Anchor staff found that these one-day events were insufficient to create a sense of belonging and community connection for their students. This need for community was particularly acute for students in Anchor who came from alternative placements, and others who experienced so many suspensions that they did not feel connected to school or their peers.

The team also reflected that students in Anchor were not attending school often enough and thought giving students a non-academic reason for coming to school might help. The team needed to find a strategy to help their students make connections at Gratz that would help them feel connected and want to come to school more regularly.

Getting Peer-to-Peer Mentorship Started

Once students returned to campus for in-person learning during the 2021–22 school year, Vernetta began building Anchor's peer-to-peer mentorship program as a way to connect older students in the program with younger ones. Vernetta recruited outgoing, assertive students with strong attendance records and demonstrated success within the program to serve as mentors. In the first term, three students became mentors, each with one mentee. In order to pair mentees with their mentors, Vernetta spoke with Anchor staff and, in some cases, staff at the middle schools attended by the students, to deeply understand students' personalities and needs. Unfortunately, Gratz continued to experience temporary school closures due to COVID-19, and the mentorship pairs could only meet regularly for about a month. However, during this time, Vernetta was able to learn important lessons about matching students, logistical needs, and structures for formal mentorship sessions that she could apply to the next school year.

Mentorship as a Way to Build Connection

For the 2022–23 school year, Vernetta took a different approach to identifying mentors for the program. She realized that less outgoing students could learn the skills for good mentoring — like how to communicate with new people — and that the program itself could teach those skills. Vernetta developed a mentor training curriculum and guidelines with explicit expectations for mentors. Twelve students engaged in peer-to-peer mentorship in the second year, and formal sessions were able to happen more regularly from the start of the school year. Along with formal sessions, Vernetta worked to build informal texting into mentor-mentee relationships to create less structured interactions between students. Reworked meeting protocols and solutions for logistical barriers meant that mentors and mentees were able to benefit considerably in the second year of the mentorship program.

By the end of this second year, the peer mentorship program was running more consistently. In end-of-year surveys, students expressed its value in helping them build connections:

- "I've learned how to control my emotions."
- "I can build a relationship with other people. Let's say I've been through a struggle, and they are going through it now; I can tell them how to get out of it cause I've been there, done that. Like having a problem with a teacher. I told [my mentee] to sit there, do the work, and follow the teacher's directions. You'll be out of that class in no time."
- "I was mad one day, and [my mentor] talked to me, 'Do you need anything? Do you need space to calm down?' Then we just started talking about what happened."
- "I always used to get in trouble, and he told me how to act over there, that fighting isn't worth it. Ain't gonna get you nowhere."

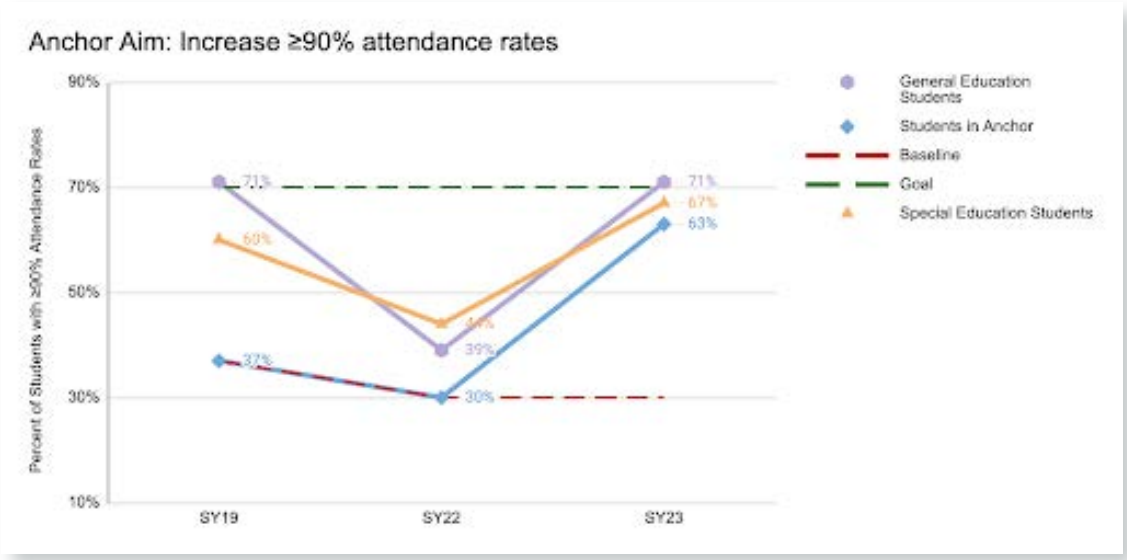
Learning to Improve

As Vernetta became more skilled at mitigating some of the barriers that hindered students from attending all their formal meetings, students voiced the value they saw in peer mentorship and expressed a desire for more mentoring sessions.

First, through some trial and error, she worked out how to ensure that mentoring sessions were held when students could all attend. This meant making sure that sessions were not during classes that students could not or did not want to miss. Finding a schedule that worked helped increase student attendance at sessions. Second, to increase attendance, Vernetta created permanent laminated passes for students to keep for the day and time peer-to-peer mentorship would be held. This way, students did not have to request permission from teachers for a pass each time, and access to passes was not a barrier for mentor pairs. In the end, Vernetta also realized she needed a backup plan for mentors or mentees who ended up without their partners due to an absence.

Students reported that they valued their connections and interactions with peers that resulted from mentorship even though pairs were not always perfect. Vernetta started to develop a rubric for determining which students could make good mentors. She realized that some of the mentees in the program could eventually transition to become mentors instead because of how their behavior had progressed in the Anchor program. After the first year of implementing explicit mentor training, Vernetta had insight into the amount and types of training and support mentors needed to build and maintain relationships with their peers.

Whether they felt they were gaining communication, self-regulation, or leadership skills, Gratz students enjoyed and benefited from the Anchor program's peer-to-peer mentorship. From 2019 to 2023, during which time Gratz implemented peer-to-peer mentorship, the percentage of Anchor students attending school at least 90% of the time increased by 26 points.



Mastery Gratz significantly reduced the attendance gap between student groups between 2019 and 2023.

How to Implement this Practice

This section provides step-by-step guidance for implementing a peer-to-peer mentorship program, along with accompanying resources to get started.

Prepare Needed Structures

Step 1: Identify a Peer Mentorship Lead

Identify a staff member who can lead the mentorship program. School leaders can support this program lead by giving them the authority to make decisions in the best interest of the peer mentorship program (e.g., giving students permanent hall passes or creating a schedule for formal mentorship sessions). The peer mentorship lead will also be more effective when given a clear set of roles and responsibilities for their role that empower them to oversee the effort. Some of the tasks they will be responsible for include:

- coordinating program schedules,
- creating student pairings,
- raising awareness and promoting the program among teachers,
- relaying expectations to mentors and mentees,
- monitoring formal mentorship sessions, and
- managing ongoing communication with families and students.



Because this role requires a considerable amount of time, it is important to consider other staff responsibilities when assigning the role. If existing responsibilities cannot be reassigned, consider whether a stipend can offset the additional tasks for the program leader. Mastery Schools provides a $2,000 stipend for their mentorship lead.

It is helpful to choose a program lead who deeply understands students' backgrounds and needs so that they can properly match mentors and mentees, address any emotional or behavioral needs during sessions, and communicate easily with students and families. A staff member who does not know students well will likely need to spend additional time talking to other staff members to gain insight into potential mentors and mentees.

Step 2: Design Tools, Protocols, and Norms

In order to plan and implement a successful mentorship program, it is important to create specific materials and resources that give mentors and mentees an understanding of the structure and expectations for their participation, such as the following:

- **Mentorship agreement form** to set expectations for participation in the program
- **Mentorship training materials** (e.g., presentation, worksheet, readings) to help students understand the purpose of peer-to-peer mentorship, their role, and how it can benefit them
- **Mentorship protocol** that gives students a structure to follow during their sessions to ensure they are communicating and collaborating with their mentor or mentee
- Attendance logs to track attendance at mentorship sessions to identify which students need help mitigating barriers

Establishing and communicating norms for the program's operations can build buy-in among school staff and minimize conflicts related to students missing class for mentorship sessions and submitting make-up work. Consider a regular communication strategy to remind teachers about sessions and obtain information about students' make-up assignments. With teachers' active support for the program, some absences from mentorship sessions can be avoided.

Because other absences are unavoidable, have concrete plans in place for mentor or mentee absences from formal mentorship sessions. Such plans might include alternative activities students do independently or an alternative meeting protocol for temporary pairings of students who are not in an official mentorship relationship.

Step 3: Recruit Students

The ideal recruitment strategy will depend upon the size of the population from which mentors and mentees will be identified. If students come from a large set of over 100 students or even an entire school, it can be helpful to have teachers make announcements, make school-wide announcements, and put posters up around school. For smaller populations, such as those within one program or classroom, it is best to use existing adult and student relationships to talk directly to students about the opportunity to participate in the peer-to-peer mentorship program. This strategy can be effective when recruiting students for a larger mentorship program as well. Encourage staff members to consider all students as potential mentors who could benefit from developing self-confidence and leadership skills, not just those who may already demonstrate those abilities.

Consider offering incentives to students to recruit their participation and retain them in the program long-term. Effective incentives may differ for mentors and mentees. For example, in the first year of their mentorship program, Gratz gave mentors a $25 gift card each quarter if they regularly participated in mentorship (i.e., they attended 75% of mentorship sessions) but chose not to give incentives to mentees. Mentors could earn a bonus $25 gift card if they met certain criteria (see mentorship competencies in **Step 7**). The Gratz team found that students enjoyed the program enough that these incentives were unnecessary going forward.

Step 4: Get Permission from Families

Engaging with families from the start of the program can be helpful in building buy-in and ensuring they can support the program implementation, particularly to encourage their students' attendance at sessions. At the start of any peer mentorship program, schools should provide detailed information about the program to families, including its goals, structure, activities, and expected outcomes. This information can be shared through written materials, presentations, or virtual meetings. This communication also allows staff to highlight the potential benefits of participating in the program for both mentors and mentees and address any concerns about how the program will be implemented and monitored. Mastery Gratz required all mentees and mentors in their program to have parents or caregivers sign a consent form in order to participate. Once the program begins, regular communication with families can provide updates on activities, progress, and any changes to the program as needed.

Step 5: Create Student Pairs

Creating cohesive student pairings is an essential part of having a successful mentorship program. Consider the factors that most often connect students at school, such as:

- neighborhood,
- cultural factors (e.g., religion, ethnicity, traditions)
- interests (e.g., video games, the military, hiking),
- TV shows,
- music,
- behaviors exhibited, and
- student schedules (e.g., out-of-school responsibilities, hobbies).

Using Data to Pair Mentors and Mentees

Mastery Gratz initially used student attendance and tardy data to pair students so that mentors and mentees would not be alone during sessions. For the second year of implementing peer-to-peer mentorship, Vernetta met with Anchor staff to gain more anecdotal and qualitative data to better understand which mentors and mentees would be best matched. They found this strategy to be more effective for matching students than solely relying on quantitative data.

When creating peer mentor pairs, it can be helpful to survey participating students to gather specific information about them to guide their pairing. An alternative strategy could be to allow students to meet in an informal setting and observe which students naturally gravitate toward one another. A more structured version of this approach would involve a "speed dating" scenario where mentees engage in five-minute conversations with each mentor, aided by prompts, to determine which pairs interact most effectively together.

Have a plan for how to respond if pairings are not working and need to be changed. Pairings may not work for a variety of reasons; it is a good exercise for both students in an unsuccessful pairing to meet together with the mentorship lead to discuss why the pairing is not working. In situations where there is a sensitive personal issue, one-on-one conversations with the mentorship lead can also be very helpful. Empower the students by asking what characteristics they now know they need in a mentor or mentee, as well as whether there is another student they think may be a better match. It is not recommended to change another successful pairing to rematch students. Instead, look for a student not currently engaged in peer mentorship to create new pairings.

Step 6: Create a Mentorship Schedule

Schedule times for formal mentorship sessions that are regular and consistent. Use student schedules to help determine the best day and time for these sessions so they are least likely to impact high-needs academic courses (i.e., English and mathematics). It will be important to communicate this schedule with teachers, particularly general educators, who will need to excuse students from class to attend mentorship sessions.

Consider what time of the day mentorship sessions will be least disruptive to student learning while also encouraging students to attend school. Gratz strategically chose to have the formal mentorship sessions during the last period of the day to support students' timely arrival and consistent attendance at sessions. Holding sessions at the end of the day also prevents students from struggling to re-regulate for a return to an academic setting after the relative downtime allowed by the mentorship check-in (e.g., eating a snack together or playing a game).

Put Peer Mentorship into Practice

Step 7: Train Student Mentors

In order to act as an effective mentor to peers, students acting as mentors will need training to help them build competencies that will allow them to facilitate conversations with their mentees. A helpful first step before designing mentor training is to know what competencies students should have when they finish the training. The specific competencies will depend on the mentorship program's purpose and goal. Competencies might include:

- leading a conversation with a peer,
- filling out protocols for sessions,
- making eye contact,
- requesting adult assistance,
- using technology for effective informal communication,
- creating SMART goals, or
- asking probing questions.

Plan to conduct mentor training before the first peer-to-peer mentoring session so mentors are ready when formal mentoring begins. Some mentors might need continuing training or support after the initial session(s). Consider having mentors identify areas of growth they hope to work on. Use these areas to coach them throughout the semester or year. This type of self-reflection and goal setting for mentors can help them build important leadership skills that will help them as mentors as well as outside of the program.

Step 8: Hold Pre-meetings

Every mentee should have a pre-meeting with their mentor and a staff member before mentoring begins. Use this pre-meeting to make sure students know that participation is voluntary, relay clear expectations for the program, have students sign their mentorship agreement form, and set up a communication plan. Encourage students to exchange contact information, and remind the mentor to reach out to their mentee before the first formal session. Starting the informal communication between mentor and mentee during pre-meetings can be very helpful to the success of mentorship. For example, using informal communication (e.g., text messaging), mentors can make sure mentees are at school for formal mentorship sessions in the future. This can immediately lessen potential attendance issues during formal sessions.

Step 9: Hold Mentorship Sessions

Peer-to-peer mentoring can happen through formal and informal interactions. Both types of interactions are important for the mentor and mentee to bond, transfer skills, and create routines.

FORMAL SESSIONS

Students can be required to meet for formal sessions on a weekly or biweekly basis, depending on the schedule devised. Set an expectation that students will all arrive on time to maximize the session. Formal sessions can be as short as 15 minutes or as long as a class period, depending on the protocol developed and the ability of the mentor to facilitate the protocol. Initially, mentors may require more time to navigate the protocol during the first sessions. Regular, informal interactions can also reduce the need for lengthy formal sessions.

Make sure students have comfortable seating in private, non-classroom spaces to meet with one another. Mentoring spaces should allow conversations to be confidential. Consider having snacks available for students to help them feel more at ease while talking.

INFORMAL SESSIONS

Informal interactions between mentors and mentees can be used to help mentees move forward with any goals or action items that come out of formal check-ins. Ideally, mentors are informally communicating with their mentees at least once a week through text, in-person check-ins, or emails.

It is helpful to have a document or structure for mentors to communicate to the mentorship lead that an informal check-in happened. The mentorship lead can then easily follow up with mentors, remind them to check in on their mentees, and address any barriers they are having with informal check-ins.



Summary

Mentorship can be a powerful way for students with common backgrounds and experiences to support one another. Peer-to-peer mentorship programs that pair students who have similar disabilities give participants additional common ground. This type of program empowers older students to be leaders to younger students, to help teach skills, and to provide support as someone who understands the mentees' disabilities. Younger students have the opportunity to connect to older students whom they can look up to and use as part of their support system, increasing their sense of belonging at school. Participating in mentorship provides another chance for both mentor and mentee to gain new social, academic, and leadership skills that will help them navigate personal and professional relationships in the future. Mastery's peer-to-peer mentorship program was correlated with a substantial increase in the number of students attending school at least 90% of the time. Their success shows the potential for using mentorship as an effective intervention for improving attendance for students with disabilities, especially students with emotional and behavioral disabilities.



FURTHER LEARNING

5 Strategies to Build Student Belonging
PANORAMA EDUCATION

Building Effective Peer Mentoring Programs in Schools
EDUCATION NORTHWEST

Anchoring Emotions

BUILDING STUDENT LEADERS: PEER-TO-PEER MENTORSHIP FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS

Appendix

How to Measure

When implementing student mentorship, monitoring how useful, usable, and utilized the practice is by participants and across the school system's programs can accelerate learning to improve outcomes for students. Be aware that improved process measures are usually necessary to ensure a high enough level of fidelity before outcomes will see improvement. At minimum, these measures are most essential:

PRIMARY MEASURES					
Measure Type	**Data Collection Type**	**Question Asked**	**Results**	**What does success look like?**	**Examples and Notes**
Process	Attendance tracker	Are students attending formal mentorship sessions? Yes / No	Average percent of students attending formal mentorship sessions	Increasing average percent of students who attend mentorship sessions until reaching 100%	It is also useful to collect data on the reason for absences to help determine the appropriate way to intervene if necessary.
Process	Check-in tracker	Are mentors conducting informal check-ins at least once a week? Yes / No	Average percent of mentors conducting informal check-ins at least once a week	Increasing average percent of mentors conducting informal check-ins until reaching 100%	It may be helpful to document the method used for informal check-ins to assess the variation in methods over time.
Outcome	Student survey Student interviews	Do students in mentorship feel an increased sense of belonging? Yes / No	Percent of students who report feeling a sense of belonging	Increasing percent of students feeling a sense of belonging until reaching 100%	Panorama, CASEL, and other surveys can measure sense of belonging. This could also be a process measure depending on the theory of action.
Outcome	Kickboard Feedback tracker	Do students increase prosocial behaviors aligned with their IEP goals? Yes / No	Percent of students who have an increased percent of positive points for behaviors aligned with IEP goals	Increasing percent of students who have a higher rate of positive points until reaching 100%	
Outcome	Student information system	How do attendance rates change for participating students?	Percentage point change in the attendance rate	Increasing attendance rate for participating students until reaching 100%	

Additional measures can guide a team to know whether peer-to-peer mentoring is leading to the desired improvements for students:

SECONDARY MEASURES					
Measure Type	**Data Collection Type**	**Question Asked**	**Results**	**What does success look like?**	**Examples and Notes**
Process	Attendance tracker	Are students arriving on time to formal mentorship sessions? Yes / No	Average percent of students arriving on time to formal mentorship sessions	Increasing percent of students on time to session until reaching 100%	It can also be helpful to calculate the average number of minutes that students are late to sessions.
Process	Mentorship observations Mentor protocols	Did mentorship pairs complete the formal session protocol? Yes / No	Percent of mentorship pairs who completed the entire mentorship session protocol	Increasing percent of pairs completing the protocol until reaching 100%	This measure is good for tracking how productive sessions are for students.
Process	Check-in tracker	Are mentees responding to informal check-ins from their mentors? Yes / No	Average percent of mentees responding to informal check-ins from their mentors	Increasing average percent of mentees responding to informal check-ins until reaching 100%	
Process	Student survey Student focus groups	Do students (both mentor and mentee) feel there is a benefit to the mentorship relationship? Yes / No	Percent of mentors and mentees who feel that they benefit from mentorship	Increasing percent of students who feel there is a benefit until reaching 100%	Analyze mentors and mentees separately as they have very different roles in mentorship.
Process	Student survey	Do students feel like they were well matched to their mentor or mentee? Yes / No	Percent of students who feel that they were well matched to their mentor or mentee	100% of students feel they were well matched to their mentor or mentee	Disaggregate mentors and mentees to determine if one group may have a different perception than the other.

Notes

1 Beck and Malley, “A Pedagogy of Belonging”

2 Welkowitz et al., *Students Speak Out*

3 Mejias, Gill, and Shpigelman, “Influence of a Support Group

4 Thapa, Cohen, and Gufffey, “A Review of School Climate Research”

5 Mejias, Gill, and Shpigelman, “Influence of a Support Group”

6 Welkowitz et al., *Students Speak Out*

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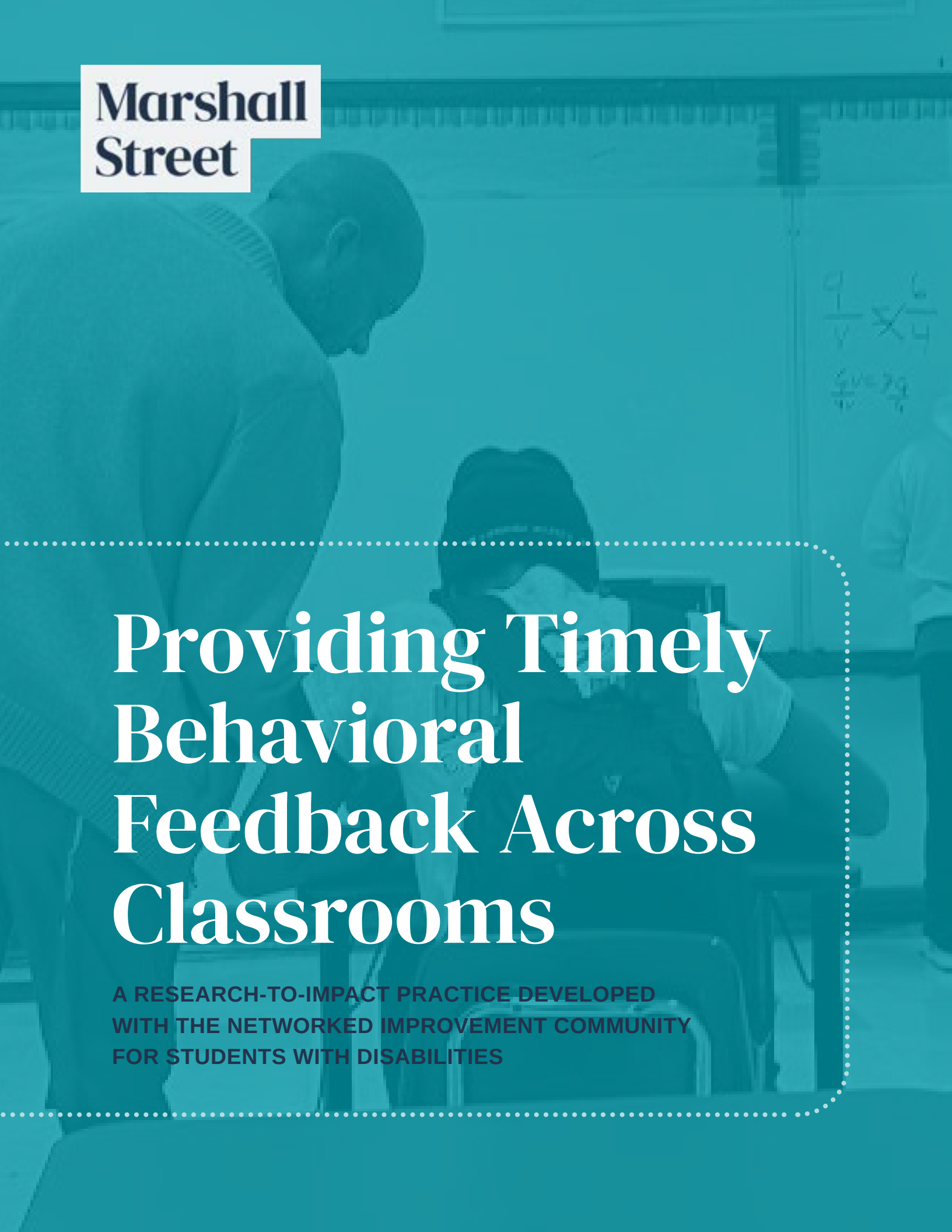
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Marshall Street



Providing Timely Behavioral Feedback Across Classrooms

A RESEARCH-TO-IMPACT PRACTICE DEVELOPED WITH THE NETWORKED IMPROVEMENT COMMUNITY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Providing Timely Behavioral Feedback Across Classrooms

Implementation Level

- [ ] District/Central Office
- [x] School
- [x] Program/Department
- [x] Classroom

Who Implements

- [x] Teacher(s)
- [ ] Instructional Coach
- [ ] Principal
- [ ] Central Office Leadership
- [x] Other: Classroom Counselor

Practice Overview

What is the Practice?

An intervention in which educators follow a defined protocol to provide immediate feedback to students on their application of taught prosocial behavioral skills, enabling them to effectively apply these skills in various contexts.



What is a Prosocial Behavioral Skill?

A prosocial behavioral skill is a chain of individual, discrete actions or cognitive operations performed in specific situations that demonstrate helping, sharing, or caring for others.[1] The teaching of prosocial skills must be explicit and comprehensive, and it relies on control of the environment, reinforcement, and generalization of skills across all settings.

Why is Behavioral Feedback Important?

When school teams provide direct instruction on the prosocial behavioral skills students need, partner that instruction with discrete practice, and offer generalized feedback on those skills across settings, schools can reduce the number of disciplinary consequences students experience. That reduction can have a significant impact on students' short- and long-term outcomes. Students with emotional and behavioral disabilities receive, on average, seven disciplinary consequences (suspension or expulsion) per year. Over 60% of students with emotional or behavioral disabilities receive at least one disciplinary consequence per year. And almost three quarters (73%) of students with emotional or behavioral disabilities are suspended or expelled at least once during their school careers.[2] Disciplinary consequences can increase negative stereotypes about students with emotional and behavioral disabilities and reduce their opportunities for learning by removing them from their classroom settings. Furthermore, it is unlikely that these types of consequences help change behavioral outcomes for students with emotional or behavioral disabilities.[3] Instead, exclusionary practices likely contribute to the **school-to-prison pipeline** — that is, the way in which disciplinary systems in K–12 schools increase the likelihood that students will enter the criminal justice system.[4]

Why it Works

INTERVENTIONS IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS HELP GENERALIZE LEARNING.

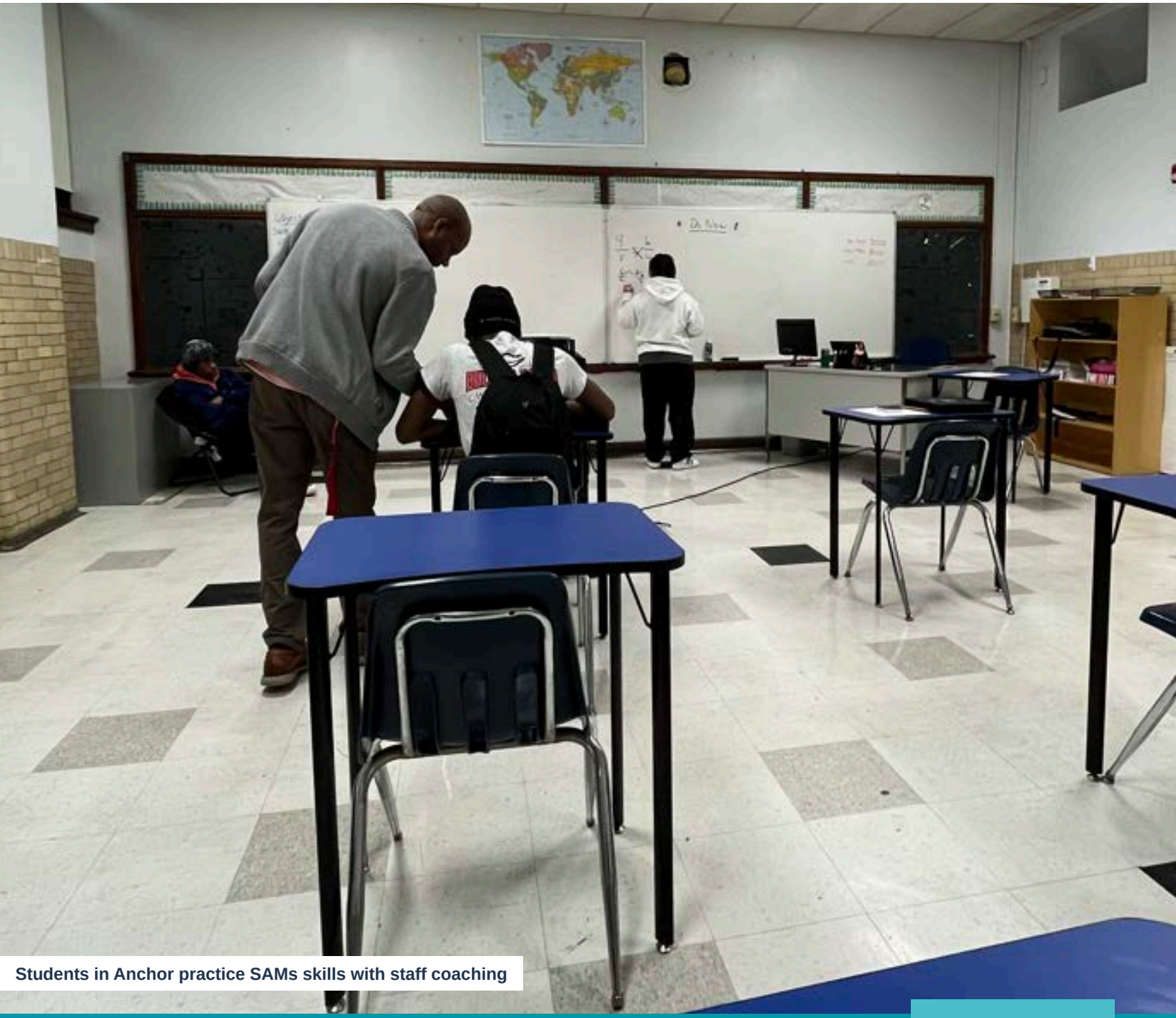
Direct instruction on prosocial skills and how to generalize behavioral strategies, as well as feedback on the use of strategies, can be more effective when students learn as often as possible in inclusive settings, where they can encounter authentic opportunities to apply the prosocial behaviors they have been taught. When students spend more time in inclusive settings, they interact with a more diverse set of students. As they encounter a wider range of behaviors from these peers, they also learn and have the opportunity to apply new strategies for engaging with these diverse behaviors.[5] In addition, by receiving behavioral feedback in an inclusive setting, students with emotional and behavioral disabilities can experience education that is academically rigorous while also improving behaviors long-term.

REGULAR FEEDBACK POSITIVELY REINFORCES PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS.

Positive reinforcements (e.g., Positive Points, Kickboard Points, Dojo Points, WOW Points!) and real-time feedback (e.g., "Nice job walking into class on time," "I appreciate you being in your seat") for even small steps of a behavior are effective interventions when working with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities.[6] Recognizing small gains helps maintain students' motivation to continue to improve toward the target behavior. Behavioral feedback has also been found to increase student engagement in learning, while decreasing the number of times teachers attempt to correct behaviors.[7] As these students spend more time focused on learning, and their teachers spend less time addressing behavior, all students benefit from additional learning opportunities.

STAFF TRAINING LEADS TO BETTER FEEDBACK.

When schools implement deliberate staff training on how to deliver high-quality, timely, and targeted behavioral feedback, staff are better equipped to respond to students in ways that reinforce prosocial behaviors. With regular, high-quality feedback over time, students can develop skills to address areas of need that result from their disability and can better use those skills in a variety of environments. Increasing prosocial behaviors through equitably implemented feedback can lead to fewer of the disciplinary consequences that can put students with disabilities into the school-to-prison pipeline. Behavioral feedback instead increases the amount of time students spend in the classroom to learn academic skills for future success.



Students in Anchor practice SAMs skills with staff coaching

Implementation at a Glance

The information in this section provides a high-level view of what to consider when implementing this practice. **Enabling Conditions** describes the minimum conditions needed for successful implementation, including resources, mindsets, staffing, and recommended time allocation. **Steps to Implement** presents a concise checklist of action items, which are explained in detail in **How to Implement this Practice**, below.

Enabling Conditions

Prerequisites	✦ Student IEPs clearly state present levels of performance and goals for emotional and behavioral needs. ✦ Students are receiving discrete skill instruction on current target behaviors in a special education setting. ✦ Staff have a set of scripts to use when addressing specific behaviors, both positive and negative. ✦ Schools have access to data systems specifically designed for behavioral data (e.g., Kickboard, ClassDojo, and BehaviorSnap).
Recommended Materials	✦ Paper- or technology-based tools (e.g., iPads) for documentation and data collection ✦ A school "store" with a variety of items for students to purchase with earned points ✦ **Communication tools** and systems to guide staff response and monitoring of student progress
Staff Commitment	✦ Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for: – School-based lead to oversee, coach, observe, and support staff; strengthen implementation; and provide proactive and crisis-related individualized student supports – Counselors that are aligned with educators in classroom settings – Network-level personnel for oversight to ensure quality, measure progress, support implementation, and coach school-based leads ✦ Appropriate staffing per 12 students (**Anchor staffing example**): – 1 full-time emotional support teacher/case manager – 1 part-time clinician (20 or 29 hours per week) – 2 part-time classroom counselors
Recommended Time Allocation	✦ Counselor training in all elements of the program model – 1 hour biweekly training of counselors – 1 hour biweekly meetings to review data and address needs and issues with all counselors and program lead ✦ Scheduled time in the school day (about 3–5 min. per student) for daily cashout and conferencing ✦ Whole school training on behavioral feedback concepts and the role of counselors (1 hour per semester)

Steps to Implement

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- [ ] Train program staff
- [ ] Create a schedule for staff rounds and manager observations
- [ ] Introduce counselors and behavioral feedback to all school staff

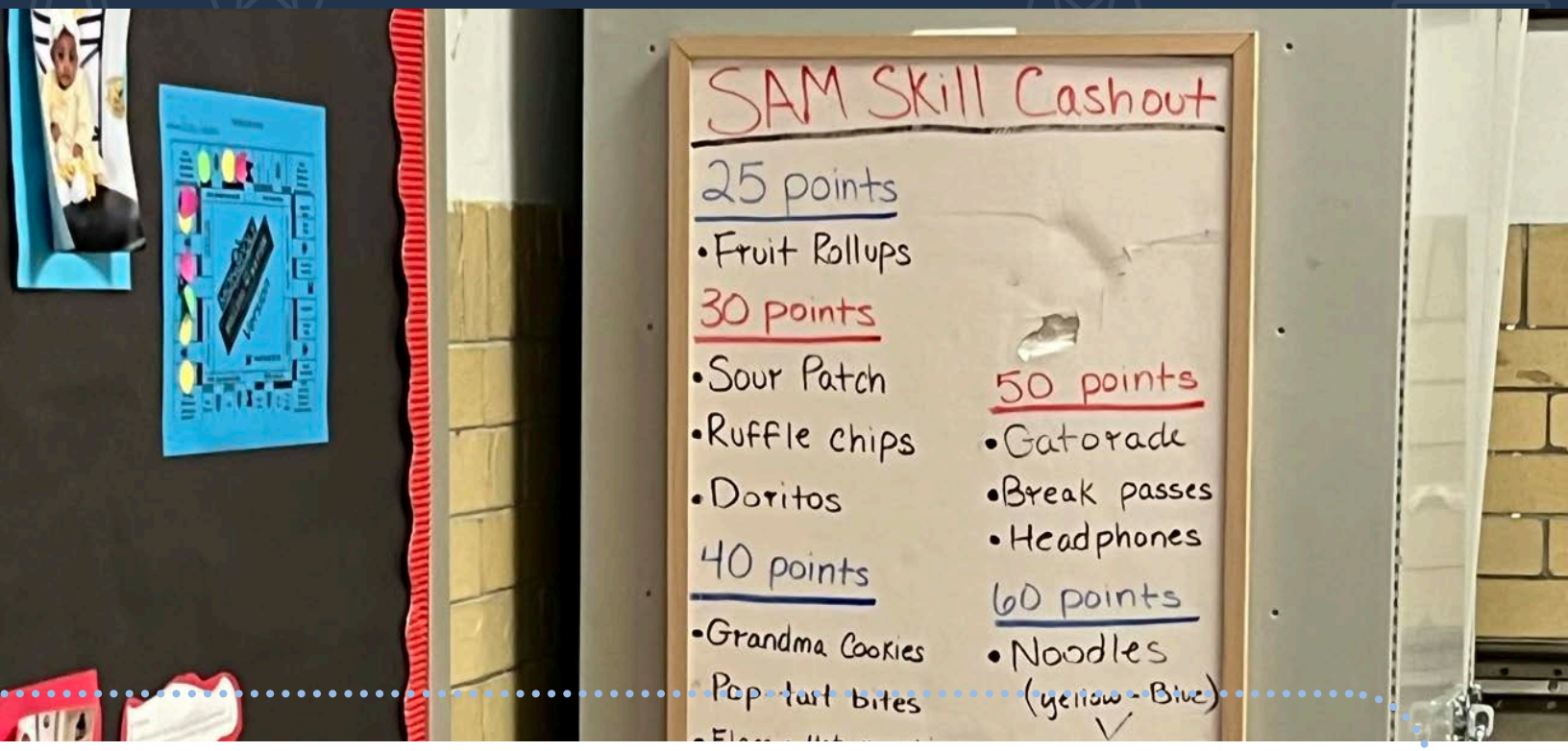
IMPLEMENT BEHAVIORAL FEEDBACK

- [ ] Staff identifies skills based on students' needs
- [ ] Teach students skills and behavioral feedback routines
- [ ] Staff follows rounds schedule to observe and support students
- [ ] Students conference and reflect with staff
- [ ] Staff reviews data and makes changes as needed

Creating a Fully Integrated Emotional Support Program

Behavioral feedback is just one evidence-based practice in Mastery's supplemental behavioral support model. **Mastery's Anchor program** is a larger structure that uses evidence-based interventions to support and strengthen the impact that behavioral feedback has on students. These practices include daily conferences, discrete skills instruction of the **Student Achievement Model** (SAM) and a **CASEL**-aligned curriculum, IEP goals aligned to individual student SAM skills, therapeutically trained education and clinical staff, de-escalation structures, a token economy, differentiated instruction, and data-driven decision-making in meetings. While research demonstrates that behavioral feedback alone is an effective practice for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, its effectiveness is amplified by the structured implementation of all of these practices.





Bringing this Practice to Life

TEACHING BEHAVIORAL SKILLS ONE PIECE OF FEEDBACK AT A TIME

At Mastery Schools' Simon Gratz High School, in Philadelphia, PA, classroom counselors provide behavioral feedback to students as part of the Anchor program, a structured program that supports students to learn and practice important prosocial behavioral skills. The case study below describes how Mr. James, one of Anchor's classroom counselors, interacts with William, a 10th grade Anchor student in Ms. Smith's science classroom.

Behavioral Feedback in the Classroom

On a regular Tuesday morning, Ms. Smith is teaching students about DNA as students create double helixes out of strips of paper. The classroom door opens, and Mr. James, one of Anchor's classroom counselors, joins the class. Mr. James's entrance is unremarkable because he is a regular member of the classroom on most days.

As he enters the room, Mr. James walks over to a table grouping to see what students are working on. He talks quietly with one student, William, who is working diligently on his double helix. Mr. James enters something into his



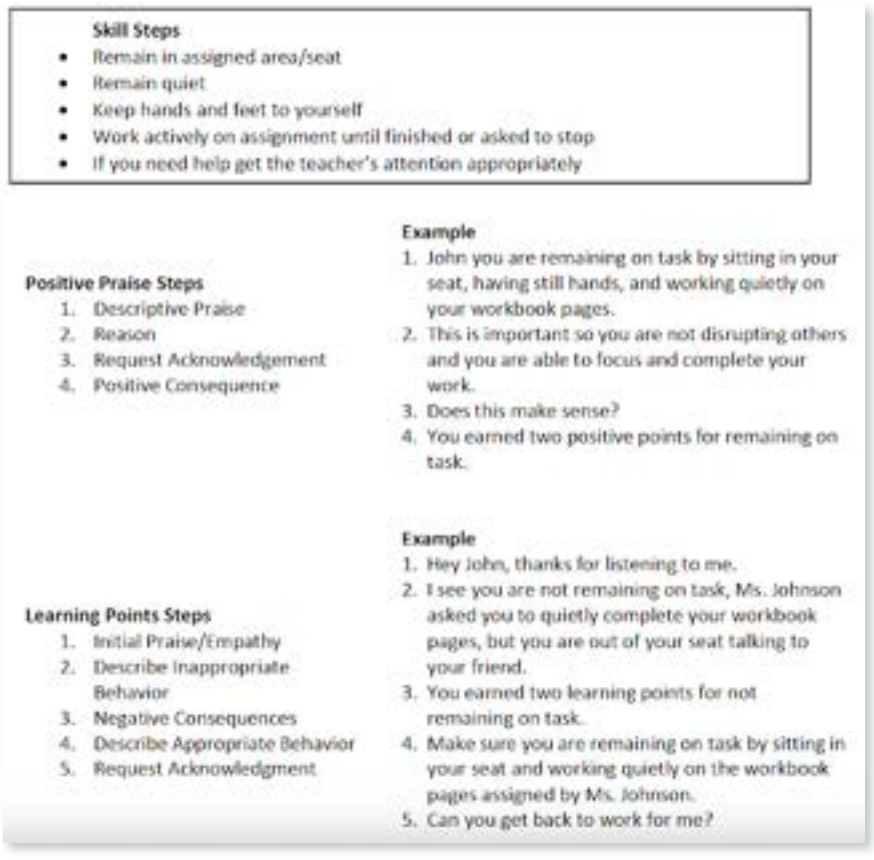
tablet before moving around the classroom, talking to a few other students one at a time. During the ten-minute period Mr. James is in the classroom, he and William interact in this way several times. When he is finished, Mr. James leaves with as little fanfare as when he arrived.

Individual Student SAM Skills

The interactions between Mr. James and William were opportunities for William to receive high-quality, specific feedback from Mr. James on his behavior goals and priority SAM skills. **SAM skills**, also called prosocial behaviors, are a collection of 34 social, self-control, and active-learning skills important for success in any environment. Per William's IEP, Mr. James and William are currently building the SAM skills of initiating academic tasks and remaining on-task for extended periods of time.

The interactions between Mr. James and William occurred during Mr. James's rounds in general education classrooms, when William was presented with opportunities to initiate work and remain on-task with his double helix. When William demonstrated his use of each of these skills, the classroom counselor issued "positive points" using the behavioral feedback script for positive praise. If, when the opportunity was presented, William had not used the skill, Mr. James would have issued "learning points" using the behavioral feedback script for learning points. In that instance, the counselor would have prompted William again to practice his use of the skill.

The figure at right shows Anchor's positive and learning scripts for the SAM skill of remaining on task.



Skill Steps

- Remain in assigned area/seat
- Remain quiet
- Keep hands and feet to yourself
- Work actively on assignment until finished or asked to stop
- If you need help get the teacher's attention appropriately

Positive Praise Steps

1. Descriptive Praise
2. Reason
3. Request Acknowledgement
4. Positive Consequence

Example

1. John you are remaining on task by sitting in your seat, having still hands, and working quietly on your workbook pages.
2. This is important so you are not disrupting others and you are able to focus and complete your work.
3. Does this make sense?
4. You earned two positive points for remaining on task.

Learning Points Steps

1. Initial Praise/Empathy
2. Describe Inappropriate Behavior
3. Negative Consequences
4. Describe Appropriate Behavior
5. Request Acknowledgment

Example

1. Hey John, thanks for listening to me.
2. I see you are not remaining on task, Ms. Johnson asked you to quietly complete your workbook pages, but you are out of your seat talking to your friend.
3. You earned two learning points for not remaining on task.
4. Make sure you are remaining on task by sitting in your seat and working quietly on the workbook pages assigned by Ms. Johnson.
5. Can you get back to work for me?

Collecting Essential Feedback Data

As classroom counselors like Mr. James interact with students in classrooms, they use a tablet to document the students' behaviors, responses, and the points that go into the program's level system.

Behavioral feedback is most effective when students not only receive verbal feedback but also have ongoing visual access to the points they've been issued. Originally, Mastery used a student point card that remained with the student all day, but had to adapt that system due to COVID-19 restrictions. Mastery's integration of tablet technology to record and display student points and feedback has been an essential part of modernizing the behavioral feedback system. It allowed Anchor staff to continue to implement the intervention with fidelity while moving away from paper-based tracking. In addition to being able to see their feedback and points as counselors input them, students can also use their own devices or tablets available in Anchor program spaces to look at their data throughout the day.

Mastery uses an app called Kickboard to input behavioral feedback and points across the school. Kickboard can be used as a Tier 1 universal positive behavioral intervention support, as well as a Tier 3 behavior support tool as it is at Gratz. Anchor and network-level staff can also easily pull reports to understand school- or program-level issues that arise and determine how to best respond.

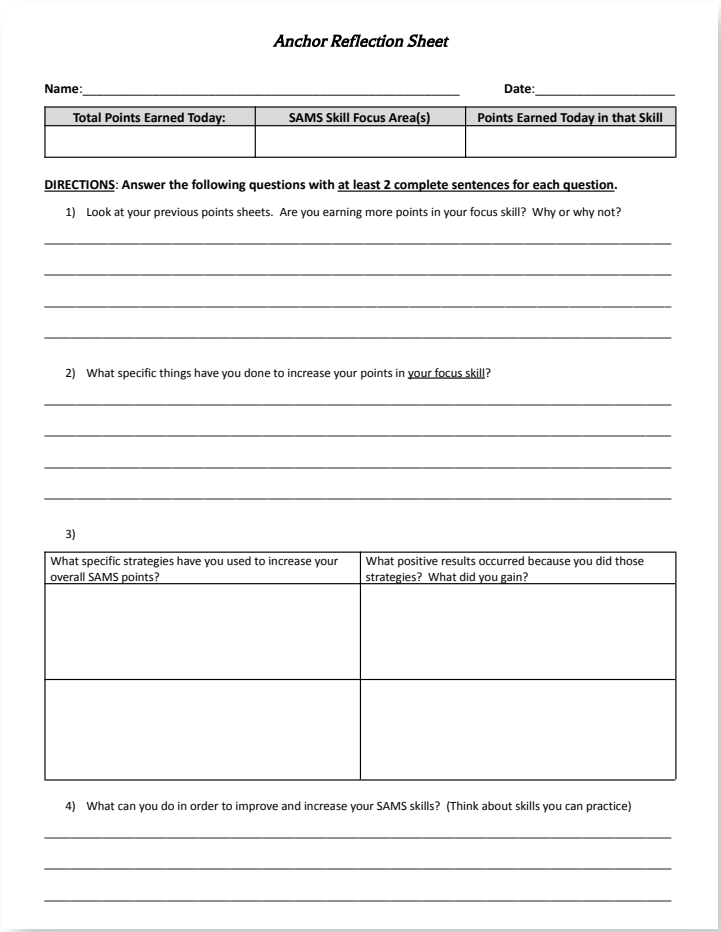
ANCHOR'S LEVEL SYSTEM

Anchor places students in levels (1–5) based on the amount of support each student needs. A student's current level is representative of the student's most recent two-weeks' performance on attendance, discipline, and behavioral feedback measures. The level reflects the current adult support and therapeutic programming required for the student to demonstrate success. See ***Maximizing Student Progress Through Data-Informed Systems: Mastery Charter Schools*** to learn more about this practice.



Reflecting on the Day's Behavior and Setting Intentions for Tomorrow

At the end of every school day, a **conference** is held with each student in the Anchor program. The student sits with one of the Anchor staff members to reflect on the day, set goals for the following day, and cash out their positive points. The goal of daily conferences is for students to understand how each individual event during the day fits into the bigger picture of their progress and highlight small changes as they occur.



Anchor Reflection Sheet

Name:_____ Date:_____

Total Points Earned Today:	SAMS Skill Focus Area(s)	Points Earned Today in that Skill

DIRECTIONS: Answer the following questions with at least 2 complete sentences for each question.

1) Look at your previous points sheets. Are you earning more points in your focus skill? Why or why not?

2) What specific things have you done to increase your points in your focus skill?

3)

What specific strategies have you used to increase your overall SAMS points?	What positive results occurred because you did those strategies? What did you gain?

4) What can you do in order to improve and increase your SAMS skills? (Think about skills you can practice)

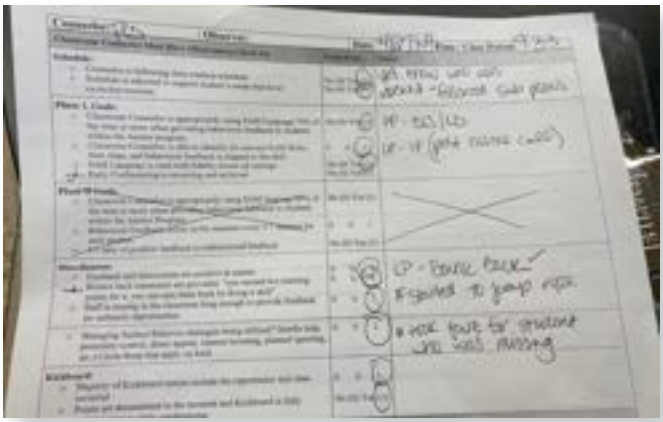
The student and staff member use a tablet to look at the student's data for the day on Kickboard. They discuss when positive and learning points were earned, celebrate successes, and create concrete next steps to continue to build the student's skills. In every conference, staff attempt to keep student data front and center and to have the student carry the cognitive load while reviewing the day's performance.

When Mr. James and William meet at the end of the day described above, Mr. James congratulates William on the positive points he earned for staying on task with the double helix work. He also probes William on the learning point he earned in Algebra II for the skill of remaining on task, when William put his head down during independent work time. Mr. James asks William to reflect on that instance and share what, if anything, he might do differently tomorrow to earn positive points in a similar situation.

Through the conference, William realizes that, overall, he did a good job initiating and remaining on task — his target SAM skills. His goal is to try to do the same thing the following day. He notes these findings on a daily conferencing sheet that goes into his Anchor program binder.

Nearing the end of the conference, Mr. James and William look at William's positive points balance. William is a saver, so he decides not to use his points to buy anything from the school store just yet. Instead, he will save his points for another time. The school day ends on a positive note as William departs with an increased bank account of positive points and the realization that he is making small, positive changes to his behavior every day.

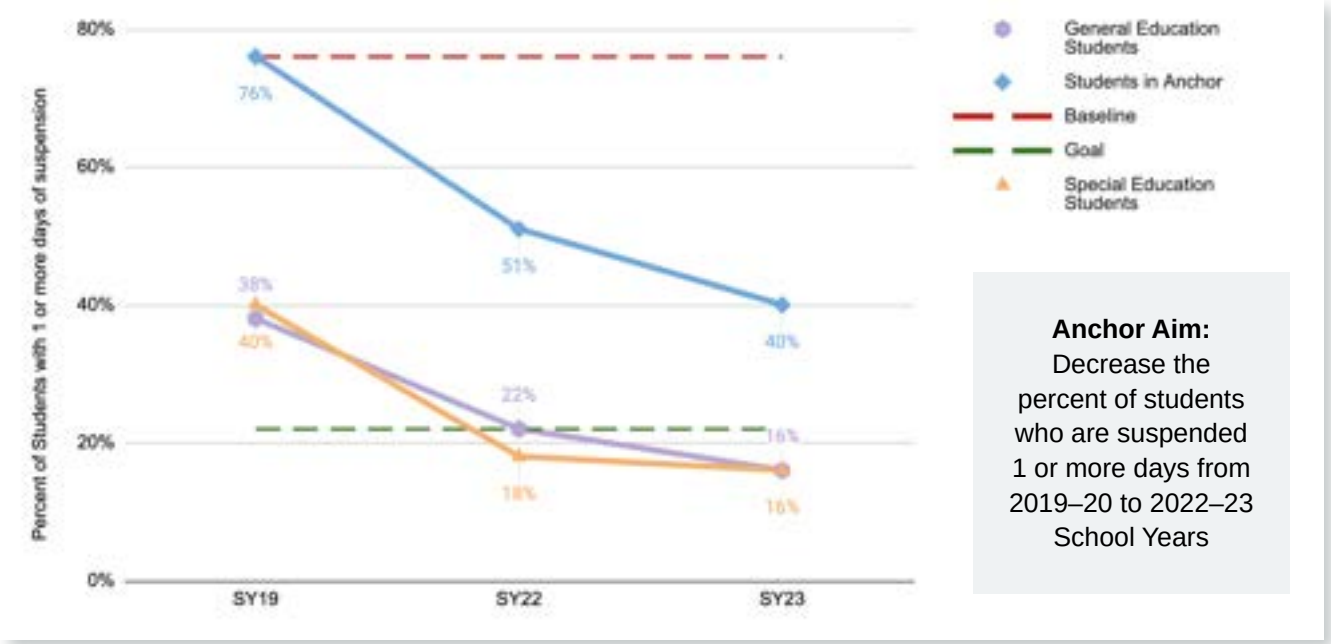
Using Data to Keep Improving



Observation rubric for assessing a counselor's fidelity of implementing behavioral feedback

Mastery uses data from the behavioral feedback process to improve the implementation of the practice. On a biweekly basis, the Anchor team uses Kickboard data to track the number of positive and learning points each student receives per period and per day and analyzes how that data relates to attendance, disciplinary referrals, and suspensions. They also look at student responses on daily conferencing sheets as part of this analysis. The program lead conducts regular observations of counselors while they are giving behavioral feedback. These observations ensure students are receiving feedback for their behavioral skills, that counselors are using the feedback scripts with fidelity, and that counselors are accurately identifying opportunities for students to demonstrate SAM skills across settings. This observational data is used for biweekly counselor training so implementation of behavioral feedback continues to improve.

The impact of the behavioral feedback practice at Gratz's campus has been significant. Decreases in the number of suspensions for students in the Anchor program are much larger than those seen for other students in special education. Since 2019, the percentage of students in special education who have at least one suspension has declined by 22 points, while the percentage of students in Anchor who have at least one suspension has declined by 36 points.



How to Implement this Practice

This section provides step-by-step guidance for implementation of a behavioral feedback program specific to a school and community context, along with accompanying resources to get started.

Lay the Groundwork

Step 1: Train Program Staff

Program staff will benefit from training on the following:

- The skills that they need to teach students (e.g., SAM skills, Collaborative Problem Solving)
- How to recognize opportunities for students to use their skills in different types of classroom settings (e.g., specialized program classes, interventions classes, core general education classes, electives)
- How to provide learning and positive feedback with the use of a script
- How to enter data into a shared system
- How to use data with students

When training staff in the practice of behavioral feedback, it is essential to identify priority behavioral skills for the start of the year and focus training on how staff can provide targeted feedback to students on those skills. Staff training also needs to cover the skills necessary for staff to implement the program. For example, staff may need to know how to enter data into data systems as soon as school begins but can learn how to use data with students later in the school year. Throughout the year, training can build the full set of behavioral skills staff should know and continue to strengthen the implementation of the feedback routine with students. This training should be incorporated into regularly held team meetings, along with the review of data from feedback. Consider how a coaching structure might also be used to ensure that staff continue to learn and grow in their implementation of the practice.

All school staff, particularly classroom teachers, can benefit tremendously from training on the basic concepts of behavioral feedback. Teachers can also benefit from understanding the types of skills their students may be learning throughout the year and the scripts that program staff use daily. Whole-school training requires coordinating with school leadership, but training can also be done during grade-level meetings or even through individual coaching sessions.

Leveraging Team Meetings for Reflection and Growth

At **Gratz**, weekly team meetings alternate between two purposes: (1) reviewing student data and (2) assessing students' levels to home in on areas for program improvement through staff training. This biweekly cadence for student data review and staff training allows the team to meet various needs for the program, including evaluating the effectiveness of behavioral feedback, without taking additional staff time.

Step 2: Create a Schedule for Staff Rounds and Manager Observations

Scheduling staff so that they can support students both in general education classes and in specialized program classes can be very challenging. It is important to individualize the amount of support provided to each student in classrooms when creating the schedule for staff rounds. A student's level of need likely varies by class period, by subject area, and with regard to different adult and peer relationships. This might mean, for example, that a given staff member visits one student for 30 minutes each period of the school day but visits another student for only 15 minutes during one class period in which that student has particular challenges. Over time, data on how students respond to feedback can help teams adjust the schedule to most effectively meet students' needs.

Ensuring Sufficient Staffing

Adequate **staffing** ensures successful implementation of behavioral feedback and that students receive the necessary support to acquire new behavioral skills. **Mastery** generally recommends that for every 12 students in three consecutive grades (i.e., K–2, 3–5, etc.) Anchor staffing includes:

- 1 full-time emotional support teacher/ case manager
- 1 part-time clinician (20 or 29 hours per week)
- 2 part-time classroom counselors

The team also regularly analyzes outcome data (e.g., student infractions, amount of behavioral feedback, teacher and staff perceptions) to assess whether the staffing of each role is sufficient to support students.

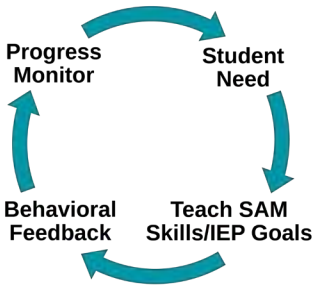
Within the schedule, program leads can identify regular opportunities to observe staff enacting behavioral feedback. Observations will allow them to provide real-time coaching and to collect data on the implementation of the behavioral feedback practice. This data can be tracked both for individual staff members and at the program level.

Step 3: Introduce Counselors and Behavioral Feedback to All School Staff

It is important that classroom teachers and staff implementing behavioral feedback are aligned on what this intervention looks like across classrooms. General education teachers may only receive minimal professional development around how to provide students with behavioral feedback in their classrooms. In addition, **modified schoolwide behavior systems** can help teachers and staff understand the alternative ways they may need to respond to students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, as these may be different than their standard behavioral response. These teachers can gain considerable knowledge about behavioral skills and how feedback is implemented through regular interactions with the program staff who implement the behavioral feedback practice.

Program staff implementing behavioral feedback can themselves be more effective when they have the opportunity to communicate with classroom teachers. Schools may want to schedule regular time for program staff to formally collaborate with classroom teachers. These structured meetings can be used to discuss individual student needs, the different skills behavioral feedback addresses, and

any important programmatic updates (e.g., staffing issues, schedule changes, new resources). If 1:1 meetings are not possible, program staff can be included in regular grade-level meetings so that they are able to communicate student needs to teachers and learn about upcoming activities that will affect students.



Implement Behavioral Feedback

The implementation of a behavioral feedback practice establishes a continuous cycle in which student needs are identified, students are taught skills, students receive behavioral feedback across instructional settings, and data is used for progress monitoring and identification of student needs for the next cycle.

Step 4: Staff Identifies Skills Based on Students' Needs

Utilizing student individualized education plans, transition goals, or other data sources, the staff identifies a limited and tangible set of skills to emphasize in behavioral feedback intervention with the student. The figure below shows some examples of how Mastery aligns students' SAM skills with IEP goals and pairs them with data collection tools daily, weekly, or per reporting period (RP).

It is important to backward-plan from the skills stated in IEP goals the specific prerequisite skills students need to learn. For example, a student whose IEP has identified the skill of assignment completion will need to first master the following skills:

1. Find out exact expectations or instructions for the task.
2. Assemble necessary materials.
3. Carefully begin working. Focus attention on the task.
4. Continue working until the task is completed or criteria are met.
5. Check work.

Using IEPs to Determine Student Skill Needs

Use student IEPs — specifically, present levels of performance and social and emotional goals — to identify the initial skills that students will work on with staff for targeted behavioral feedback. Present levels and goals are best determined using data from tools like functional behavior assessments, behavior scales, and observations. The data from these tools will also act as baseline data for measurement of students' responses to behavioral feedback and can be used as additional data points to supplement behavioral feedback for future progress monitoring.

Each of these prerequisite skills will first need to be addressed and mastered with the support of behavioral feedback before the student will be able to master the skill of completing assignments.

Mastery staff all know each student's target skills so that they can support in addressing them as needed during the school day. On the Mastery staff identification badge, shown in the picture below, the names of Anchor program students are listed along with abbreviations for the different skills the students are working on. This resource allows staff members to easily give any student feedback on their target skills whenever they see them, in or out of classes.



*Mastery Charter School's **Alignment between IEP goals, SAM Skills, and Progress Monitoring***



Mastery staff identification badges list the names of Anchor program students, along with abbreviations for the different skills the students are working on.

Step 5: Teach Students Skills and Behavioral Feedback Routines

Create structured times for explicit instruction of behavioral skills, sub-tasks, and prerequisite skills. Just like academic skills, explicit instruction is a necessary step in helping students learn new skills and behaviors. Structured times may include specific courses, pull-out small groups, or individual counseling sessions.

These taught skills will be reinforced by behavioral feedback, so students will need to learn what that feedback will look like in the classroom, as well as the appropriate way to respond to feedback. They should know that when they have the opportunity to demonstrate the skills they have learned in real time, they will receive praise along with either positive or negative consequences. Students will also need to understand that through positive feedback they can earn positive points for the program store.

Skills Class

Mastery's Anchor program offers a specific skills class that groups students based on the skills they are working on, as well as their levels of performance. During the class, students are explicitly taught the various SAM skills and have opportunities to apply that learning to books, movies, and their own lives. This instruction builds upon and reinforces the behavioral feedback students receive throughout the day.

Step 6: Staff Follow Rounds Schedule to Observe and Support Students

Program staff follow the predetermined schedule to join students in their classrooms throughout the day. Staff enter classrooms to observe specific students during parts of the school day when the students are likely to have opportunities to demonstrate the skills they are working on. If necessary, staff can also create opportunities for students to demonstrate skills if they do not naturally happen. For example, staff can ask a student to work actively on an assignment until finished or to get the teacher's attention appropriately if they have a question. When the student correctly demonstrates their skill (e.g., remaining on task), behavioral feedback using positive praise language helps reinforce the skill. The staff member gives this praise using predefined steps and an example script, such as the following:

Steps	Example Script
1. Descriptive praise	John, you are remaining on task by sitting in your seat, having still hands, and working quietly on your workbook pages.
2. Reason	This is important so you are not disrupting others and you are able to focus and complete your work.
3. Request acknowledgement	Does this make sense?
4. Positive consequence/reinforcer	You earned 2 points for treating others with respect.

If the student has the opportunity to demonstrate the skill but is unsuccessful (e.g., does not remain on task), the staff member provides behavioral feedback using "learning language" to redirect the student, explain the appropriate behavior, and prompt the student again to practice the skill. Learning language includes the following steps:

Steps	Example Script
1. Initial praise/empathy	Hey John, thanks for listening to me.
2. Description of inappropriate behavior	I see you are not remaining on task. Ms. Johnson asked you to quietly complete your workbook pages, but you are out of your seat talking to your friend.
3. Negative consequence	You earned two learning points for not remaining on task.
4. Description of appropriate behavior	Make sure you are remaining on task by sitting in your seat and working quietly on the workbook pages assigned by Ms. Johnson.
5. Request acknowledgement	Can you get back to work for me?

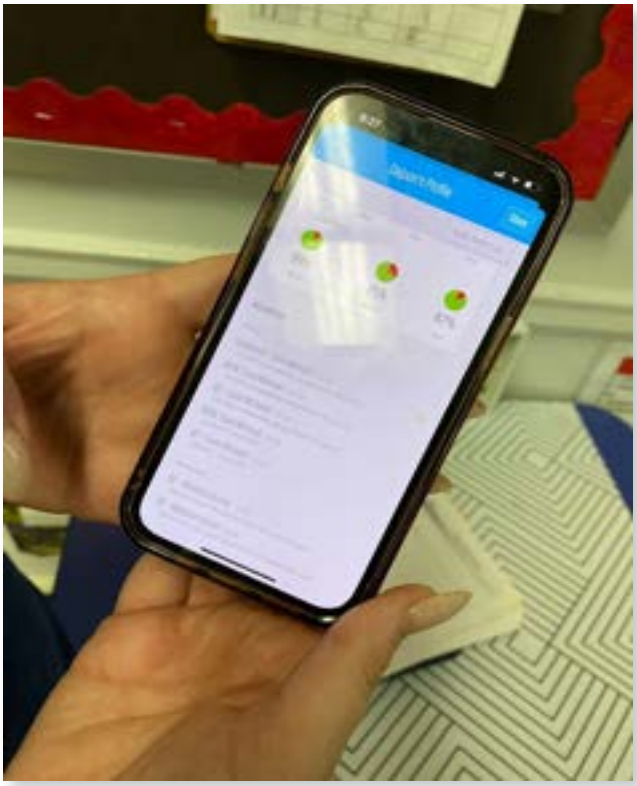
For progress to occur, students need multiple opportunities each day to practice skills with the support of behavioral feedback. Ideally, the established daily rounds schedule accommodates multiple opportunities for practice and behavioral feedback from staff.

Step 7: Students Conference and Reflect with Staff

Students' daily reflection on their behavior and data is important for learning prosocial behavioral skills and for changing how they respond to antecedents in the future. At the end of the school day, conduct end-of-day conferences with students to facilitate reflections on:

- points and feedback they received,
- the reasons why they received them,
- what they should have done differently, and
- what they plan to do the next day.

After conferencing, students also have the opportunity to add up all of their positive points and subtract the learning points they earned that day. With the net points calculated, students can purchase items from the school store or choose to save their points, which accumulate over time. Regardless, students should be given a daily opportunity to use points to make purchases, though students with greater behavioral needs may require conferences and cashing out multiple times per day. The school store can offer high-interest items, such as snack foods or school supplies, or privileges like free dress days. These tangible rewards can be essential for many students to feel successful and stay motivated.



Anchor staff and students can view behavioral feedback data easily on digital devices throughout the day.

Step 8: Staff Reviews Data and Makes Changes as Needed

Behavioral feedback data can be used to help an emotional support program continuously adapt and improve for students. Program leads, network leaders, or teams can analyze measures like these on a weekly or biweekly basis:

- Total number of feedback opportunities
- Ratio of positive to learning feedback
- Percent of feedback that is positive
- Percent of feedback that is learning
- Total number of opportunities for each student to practice skill(s) across settings
- Consistency of feedback throughout day (i.e., a similar amount of feedback given each class period)

Data can be disaggregated by program staff member, class subject, class period, skill addressed, grade-level, or classroom teacher to understand how different staff members and classroom teachers are implementing behavioral feedback. This analysis can help program leads identify topics for training both the team and individual staff members to improve the fidelity of implementation of behavioral feedback.

			Attendance		Culture				SAM Skills		Behavioral Feedback Interactions			
School	Grade	TargetSkill	Days Absent	Days Tardy	Level 2 Prior Cycle	Level 2 Current Cycle	Level 3 Prior Cycle	Level 3 Current Cycle	Current Target Skills %	Target Skills % Change	Target Skill	All Skill(s)	Prior Cycle Rating	Current Cycle Rating
Gratz HS	11	ROT	2	0	1	3	0	0	92%	-1%	25	26	4	2
Gratz HS	12	IAT	1	4	1	0	0	0	100%	14%	14	14	1	1
Gratz HS	12	INB	0	4	1	0	0	0	88%	-7%	22	23	1	3
Gratz HS	11	ROT	0	4	0	0	0	0	50%	-33%	4	23	1	1
Gratz HS	12	INB	1	1	0	0	0	0	86%	8%	14	14	2	3
Gratz HS	09	FD	0	2	0	0	0	0	94%	21%	32	35	1	3
Gratz HS	09	FD	5	0	0	0	0	0	100%	50%	1	1	1	1
Gratz HS	10	SC	0	0	1	1	0	0	82%	16%	44	48	1	4
Gratz HS	11	ROT	0	5	0	0	0	0	50%	-50%	4	8	1	1
Gratz HS	10	FD			0	0	0	0	79%	11%	38	43	1	2

Gratz's data tracker shows which students are making progress on their SAM skills.

The team also needs to review individual students' data on a regular basis (e.g., weekly or biweekly) to track how behavioral feedback is (or is not) changing student behavior. The data can help the team determine whether:

- students have demonstrated mastery of their current skills,
- students need additional explicit instruction around specific skills, or
- students need more opportunities to demonstrate skills.



Mastery coach models behavioral feedback for counselor

Summary

In order to implement a full continuum of services for students with more intensive behavioral needs and to ensure these students have access to general education classrooms, schools must design and implement high-quality behavioral interventions that are adaptable across environments. Behavioral feedback uses the underpinnings of research on positive reinforcement and token economies to help students recognize when they have used the skills they are working on or missed an opportunity to respond differently. Behavioral feedback also helps students learn how to generalize their skills to a variety of classrooms and groups of students in general and special education settings. Students also work with staff on daily reflections of their behavior and planning for the next day, setting themselves up for more successful days.

By investing in their school staff through initial and continuous training, schools can implement behavioral feedback with fidelity and quality across learning environments. With these supports in place, students can internalize their areas of growth, reflect on their actions, and see positive change in their behaviors over time. Mastery School's reduction in the percentage of Anchor program students who experience a suspension demonstrates the potential that effective implementation of behavioral feedback can have for students with disabilities in inclusive settings.



FURTHER LEARNING

"Providing Positive Feedback"
THE IRIS CENTER

"Provide Positive and Constructive Feedback to Guide Students' Learning and Behavior"
THE COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

"The Power of Effective Praise: A Guide For Teachers"
UNDERSTOOD.ORG

PROVIDING TIMELY BEHAVIORAL FEEDBACK ACROSS CLASSROOMS

Appendix

How to Measure

When implementing behavioral feedback, monitoring how useful, usable, and utilized the practice is by team members and across the school system can accelerate learning to improve outcomes for students. Be aware that improved process measures are usually necessary to ensure a high enough level of fidelity before outcomes will see improvement. At minimum, these measures are most essential:

PRIMARY MEASURES					
Measure Type	**Data Collection Type**	**Question Asked**	**Results**	**What does success look like?**	**Examples and Notes**
Process	Feedback data collection system	How frequently do students have opportunities to demonstrate their behavioral skills?	Average amount of time between opportunities for students to demonstrate skills	Students should have opportunities to demonstrate their skills every 5–7 minutes when receiving support in the classroom.	The actual number of opportunities a student receives depends on: (1) how easily authentic opportunities arise, which varies by type of skills being worked on; and (2) student need — students with higher needs receive more support time and therefore more opportunities to receive feedback
Process	Feedback data collection system	What percentage of feedback given to students is positive versus learning during each class period?	The ratio of positive to learning feedback received in a class period	Students should work toward receiving six positive points for every learning point (6:1 ratio).	Consider analyzing individual student data as well as data disaggregated by class, level, or staff member giving feedback.
Process	Observation notes	When observed, how often are staff using the feedback script as written?	The percent of time during observations that staff read the positive and learning feedback scripts as written	Increasing percent of observations in which staff read the script as written until reaching 100%	Use data to see how fidelity varies by staff member, as well as by the classroom where feedback is given.
Outcome	Discipline records	How many suspensions do students receive over time?	The average number of suspensions students receive on a weekly, monthly, or semesterly basis	Decreasing number of suspensions received until there are no suspensions for students	

Outcome	Feedback data collection system Discipline records	Did students meet their IEP goals? Yes / No	The percent of students who met their emotional and behavioral IEP goals	Increasing percent of students who met their IEP goals until reaching 100%	

Additional measures can guide a team to know whether behavioral feedback is leading to the desired improvements for students:

SECONDARY MEASURES					
Measure Type	**Data Collection Type**	**Question Asked**	**Results**	**What does success look like?**	**Examples and Notes**
Process	Feedback data collection system	Are students presented with the opportunity to use the skill they did not previously use to earn a positive point? Yes / No	Average number of times students are given a chance to use a skill after not successfully using it during the class period	Increasing percent of time students receive opportunities to use skills after not using them until reaching 100% of the time	
Process	Feedback data collection system	Is feedback given for all skills at the same rate? Yes / No	Average number of occasions for feedback given by skill	A similar average number of occasions for feedback given for each skill	Some skills will naturally not be demonstrated as often as others. For example, apologizing to others may not need to happen as often as writing neatly.
Process	Feedback data collection system	How long does it take students to master skills?	Average number of school days until students master skills	Decreasing number of days for students to master skills	
Outcome	Discipline records	How many referrals do students receive over time?	The average number of referrals students receive on a weekly, monthly, or semesterly basis	Decreasing number of referrals received until there are no referrals for students	

Notes

1 Dunsfield, “A Construct Divided”

2 Institute of Education Sciences, “Disability Category Differences”

3 Anderson, “The relationship between inclusion, absenteeism, and disciplinary outcomes”

4 Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson, “Breaking the school to prison pipeline”

5 Lamport, Graves, and Ward, “Special needs students in inclusive classrooms”

6 Frey and Nichols, “Intervention Practices”

7 Allday et al., “Training General Educators”

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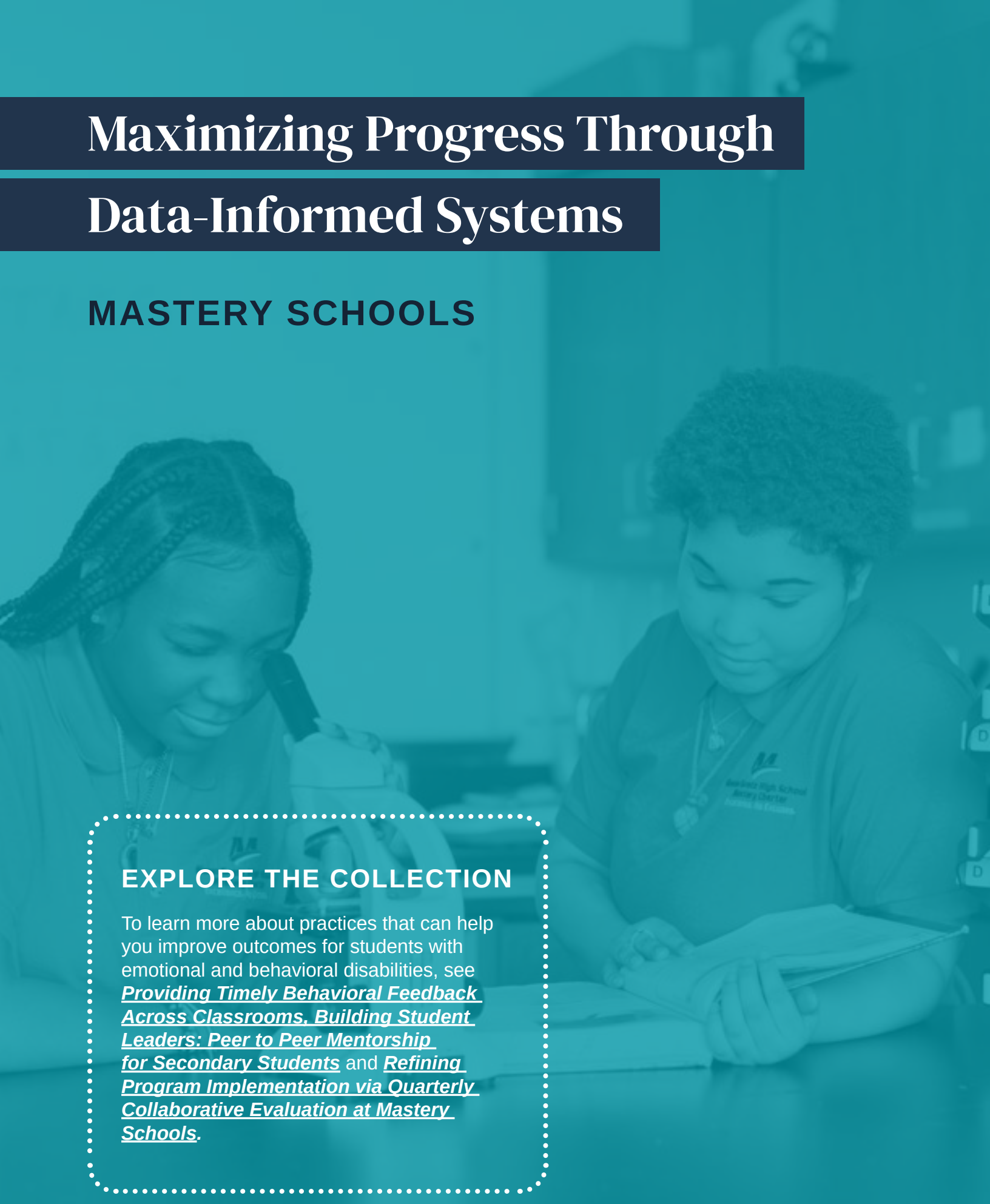
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Maximizing Progress Through Data-Informed Systems

MASTERY SCHOOLS



EXPLORE THE COLLECTION

To learn more about practices that can help you improve outcomes for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, see ***Providing Timely Behavioral Feedback Across Classrooms***, ***Building Student Leaders: Peer to Peer Mentorship for Secondary Students*** and ***Refining Program Implementation via Quarterly Collaborative Evaluation at Mastery Schools***.

Snapshot

WHAT IS THE PRACTICE?

The regular collection and analysis of data for goal-setting, decision-making, and reflection to ensure fidelity, quality, and outcomes at all levels of any program.

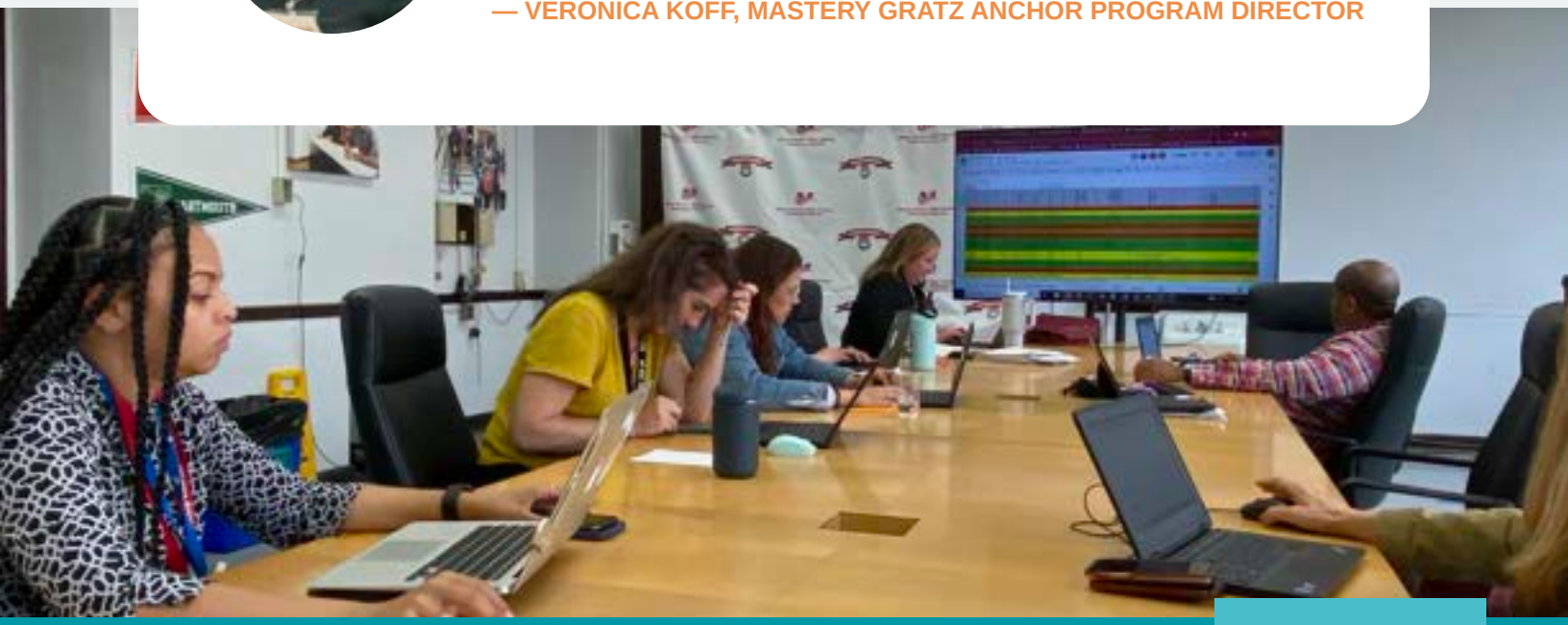
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- The purpose of data-based decision-making is to set goals, adapt instruction, evaluate the effectiveness of programs and practices, improve policy, and reallocate resources to improve student outcomes.[1]
- Data-based decision-making is particularly important when supporting students with disabilities, to ensure that interventions, instructional strategies, and accommodations have their desired effects.
- It is best not to use just one type of data to provide the necessary information to make decisions but to include various types of data.[2]
- In the case of Mastery's Anchor program for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, as with all special education supports and services, it is important to know whether students are in the least restrictive environment possible for them to make appropriate academic progress. Data needs to be collected and analyzed regularly to ensure that students are making progress and are receiving the appropriate level of support to do so.



"There are times when data may look a little off, but we can look at other data to understand what's going on."

— VERONICA KOFF, MASTERY GRATZ ANCHOR PROGRAM DIRECTOR



The Challenge

Ensuring Students Are Receiving the Appropriate Level of Support and Services

Data-driven decision-making has always been a key component of special education when students are initially assessed and re-evaluated every three years to determine their eligibility for services. Between evaluations, schools do not always make frequent use of data to ensure that they are providing students with an education in the least restrictive environment possible for the students to make educational progress. As a result, schools often keep students in programs or provide interventions and services that are overly restrictive and limit the amount students are educated with their peers without disabilities.[3] When educators do not collect and review data to take action for their students in a timely manner, they often overlook students' real, current needs.

At Mastery Schools, using data to make decisions about students' supports is an essential component of their Anchor program. In order for their team to meet the needs of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities in their highly individualized program, they need to look at data daily and weekly to responsively adjust their programmatic supports for students. The Anchor team also reviews data monthly and quarterly to look at the bigger picture of their program in order to monitor its effectiveness and identify longer-term improvements they can make.

At Mastery's Simon Gratz High School, Specialized Services Program Director Veronica Koff needs to ensure that students are continuously receiving the most appropriate level of support within the program. The only way Veronica can be confident that students are getting what they need is to know with certainty that each component of the program, as well as the overall program, is working. Data is critical for her as she makes decisions about what students and the program need.

The Practice

Using a Variety of Data Sources to Make Decisions about Students, Practices, and Programs

Mastery Schools created a network-wide data infrastructure that makes it possible for each school's Anchor program to make data-driven decisions for students. Veronica and her Anchor team at Gratz collect, analyze, and respond to data on a regular basis to help students make progress. But their use of data doesn't stop there. The team regularly aggregates data for analysis at the program and network level and uses structured meetings to look at the results and address the needs that arise.

Veronica and her team collect multiple types of data to make decisions about what students, staff, and the program need to be successful. Three particular systems exemplify their use of data to make decisions at different levels of their program:

1. A **behavioral feedback** system, supporting daily analysis that includes data from a behavioral feedback app, daily conferences, and staff huddles
2. A **level system**, which evaluates, in two-week cycles, the data from the system's leveling criteria and student support provided, as well as team meetings and students' level conferences
3. A system for **program evaluation** using quarterly reporting-period analyses of data from a "Must Haves" rubric and student progress on IEP goals

Enabling Conditions

Enabling Conditions describes the minimum conditions needed for successful implementation, including resources, mindsets, staffing, and recommended time allocation.

Prerequisites	✦ Network-level leaders set expectations around data culture as a foundational program component. ✦ A system of coaching is in place to help all staff members improve their practice. ✦ A system-wide belief exists that students with disabilities are best educated when they are with their typically developing peers to the greatest extent possible. ✦ Individual staff members, along with entire programs, are capable of changing when data indicates it is necessary.
Recommended Materials	✦ Pre-existing tools or applications (e.g., Must Haves rubric, Kickboard, student information systems) to support data collection, visualization, and analysis
Staff Commitment	✦ Program lead who analyzes data regularly and supports the team to reflect on trends and devise how to respond to data ✦ Network-level staff who analyze school-level and aggregated data to determine school and network supports and professional development ✦ Staff members who regularly collect data that can be analyzed from the student level to the network level
Recommended Time Allocation	✦ Training (staff at all levels of the system, from instructional assistants to department directors) – Collecting valid data: 30–60 minutes at least quarterly – Analyzing data: 30–60 minutes at least quarterly ✦ Meetings to set goals, analyze data, and respond to data – School/program level: 1 hour biweekly or weekly – Network level: 1–2 hours monthly ✦ Coaching to improve data collection and implementation of responses to data – 1 hour weekly for all staff

Behavioral Feedback: Using Daily Data for Immediate Action

Anchor staff use **Kickboard**, an app for collecting data on student behavior throughout each school day, as they observe, support, and coach students on the **SAM skills** identified in their IEPs. Students and staff can use the app to see data from feedback given to students in real time. Counselors enter information on tablets, which are also available in Anchor classrooms for students to use throughout the day to look at their feedback and at the end of the day to cash out points they earned from their behavior. In daily conferences with a staff member, students reflect on their behavior, progress, and goals for the next day.

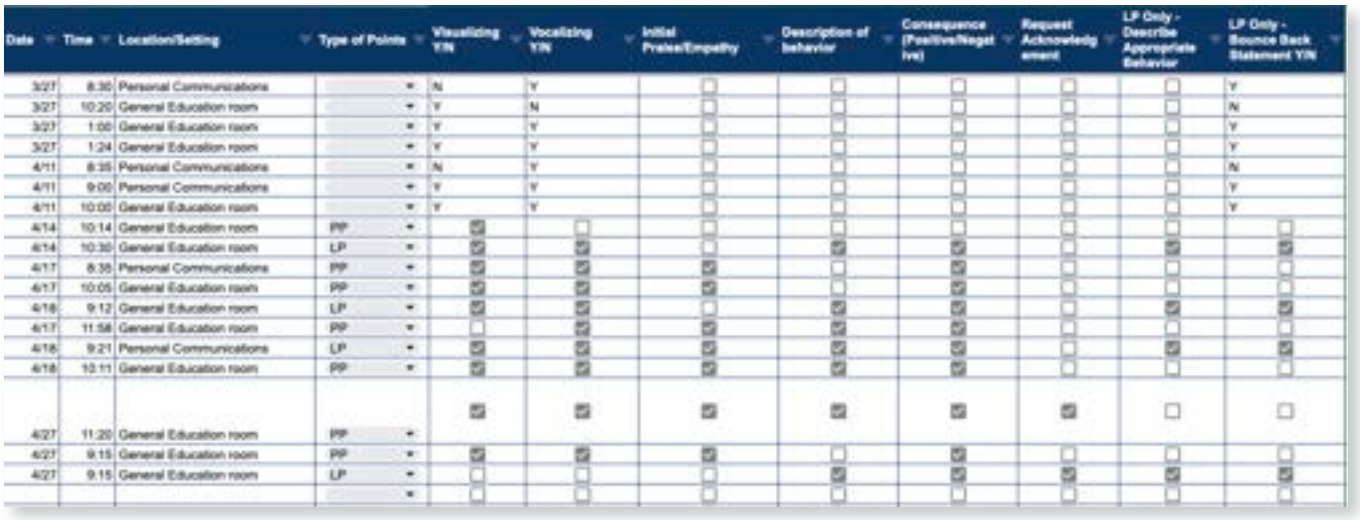
In the same way that students use the data from Kickboard to reflect and plan, Anchor staff use the data from behavioral feedback to make important decisions about students, staff, and the program. During short daily huddles, the Anchor team meets to discuss the specific and daily needs of students:

- They share information they each know about students' specific situations that can impact the students during the day (e.g., Marquis left his phone in the car; Jenna is absent due to a death in the family).
- They ask questions about upcoming schedule changes and related needs and suggest students who may need check-ins during that day.
- They reflect on previous student-teacher interactions, behaviors, and any changes that can be made to improve interactions in the future.

To get a more holistic picture of student progress on behavioral outcomes, Veronica also regularly conducts observations of the behavioral feedback intervention to compare qualitative observation data with the student performance metrics tracked in Kickboard. The figure on the following page shows an example of observation data collected. Alternating weeks, Veronica uses qualitative and quantitative data to identify bright spots for celebration and prioritize areas for further development of staff. Her observations are shared with staff in Anchor team meetings and drive decisions for professional development to continue to improve how they implement behavioral feedback.

Using Daily Behavioral Feedback Data to Make Programmatic Decisions

The Anchor team repeatedly saw data showing that students were struggling behaviorally in math classes. Notes recorded in Kickboard clearly indicated that a number of students in Anchor needed more support with their foundational math skills, making math classes particularly challenging because academic frustration was often the antecedent to students being redirected by counselors. In response to the data, Anchor added a math skills class to their academic offerings to help students increase their foundational math skills and feel more successful in their math classes.



Date	Time	Location/Setting	Type of Points	Visualizing Y/N	Vocalizing Y/N	Initial Praise/Empathy	Description of behavior	Consequence (Positive/Negative)	Request Acknowledgement	LP Only - Describe Appropriate Behavior	LP Only - Bounce Back Statement Y/N
3/27	8:30	Personal Communications		N	Y	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Y
3/27	10:20	General Education room		Y	N	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	N
3/27	1:00	General Education room		Y	Y	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Y
3/27	1:24	General Education room		Y	Y	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Y
4/11	8:35	Personal Communications		N	Y	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	N
4/11	9:00	Personal Communications		Y	Y	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Y
4/11	10:00	General Education room		Y	Y	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Y
4/14	10:14	General Education room	PP	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4/14	10:30	General Education room	LP	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑
4/17	8:35	Personal Communications	PP	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
4/17	10:05	General Education room	PP	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
4/18	9:12	General Education room	LP	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑
4/17	11:58	General Education room	PP	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐	☐
4/18	9:21	Personal Communications	LP	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑
4/18	10:11	General Education room	PP	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐	☐
4/27	11:20	General Education room	PP	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
4/27	9:15	General Education room	PP	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
4/27	9:15	General Education room	LP	☐	☐	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
				☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Anchor's observation data tracker on counselors' implementation of behavioral feedback

Level System: Using Data Regularly to Adapt the Support Students Receive

The Anchor program uses a level system to determine the amount of support each student receives. Every two weeks, Veronica leads her team in making the important decision of whether students need more or less support to make progress on their goals. To make a level decision, the team uses three types of data:

1. Behavioral feedback data — specifically the ratio of positive to overall points a student received in the previous two weeks
2. School discipline data, such as referrals or suspensions, input by any Mastery staff member
3. Attendance data

At the end of each two-week period, students can move up, move down, or stay at the same level. While

Modifying How Staff Respond to Students Based on Their Disability and Needs

All students at **Mastery Schools** are held to behavioral expectations. For students in the Anchor program, school staff need different ways to respond to schoolwide "culture" infractions to support students' therapeutic needs. To that end, Mastery created the **Modified Anchor Response Plan** (MARP) as an adaptation to their existing culture plan. The MARP provides questions and protocols to guide staff responses, which vary based on the level of infraction:

- Level I Infraction: A behavior that disrupts the learning environment or that is insubordination
- Level II Infraction: A behavior that impacts the school culture and community of safety, respect, and cooperation that is fostered at Mastery
- Level III Infraction: Serious violations of the Mastery Disciplinary Code of Conduct and/or behaviors that are criminal violations

The level and frequency of a student's culture infractions impact the student's Anchor program level.

changing levels can be perceived as a reward or punishment to students, the purpose of leveling is to determine the amount of support students receive from Anchor staff. After leveling decisions are made, Anchor staff hold a conference with each student to review their data and discuss their upcoming level so students understand why they are placed at that level and how they can continue to grow in the program. Students' levels amount to their least restrictive environment for the subsequent two-week period of time. The frequent review and adjustment process ensures that students receive the necessary support at that moment, enabling them to track their progress and overcome setbacks promptly. Additionally, the level system provides valuable data for the Mastery team to assess the overall health of the Anchor program and identify any changing resource needs.

The Data Used to Make Level Decisions

Criteria for each Anchor program level fit into three categories: attendance, culture, and SAM skills. A student's performance in all three categories helps the team determine **which level the student is in** and **how** the team will provide the appropriate support to help the student move up levels. The following table shows the criteria in each category for students in a high school Anchor program. (See the **Appendix** for elementary and middle school criteria).

Anchor Level Criteria for High School

	Attendance	Culture*	SAM Skills
Level 5	90% attendance or more (1 day or less unexcused absence out of cycle) or 2 or fewer tardies	No level II infractions within the cycle	90% or more of one individualized target skill
Level 4	90% attendance or more (1 day or less unexcused absence out of cycle) or 2 or fewer tardies	One level II infraction or fewer	80–89% of one individualized target skill
Level 3	80% attendance (2 days or less out of cycle) or 4 or fewer tardies	Two level II infractions or fewer per cycle, OR 50% decrease in level II infractions per cycle	80–89% of one individualized target skill or 40% increase
Level 2	80% attendance (2 days or less out of cycle) or 3–4 tardies	Three level II infractions or fewer, OR 25% decrease in level II infractions per cycle	70–79% of one individualized target skill or 20% increase
Level 1	70% attendance or less (3 days or less out of cycle) or 5 tardies or more	Any level III culture infraction* Four level II infractions or fewer	0–69% of one individualized target skill

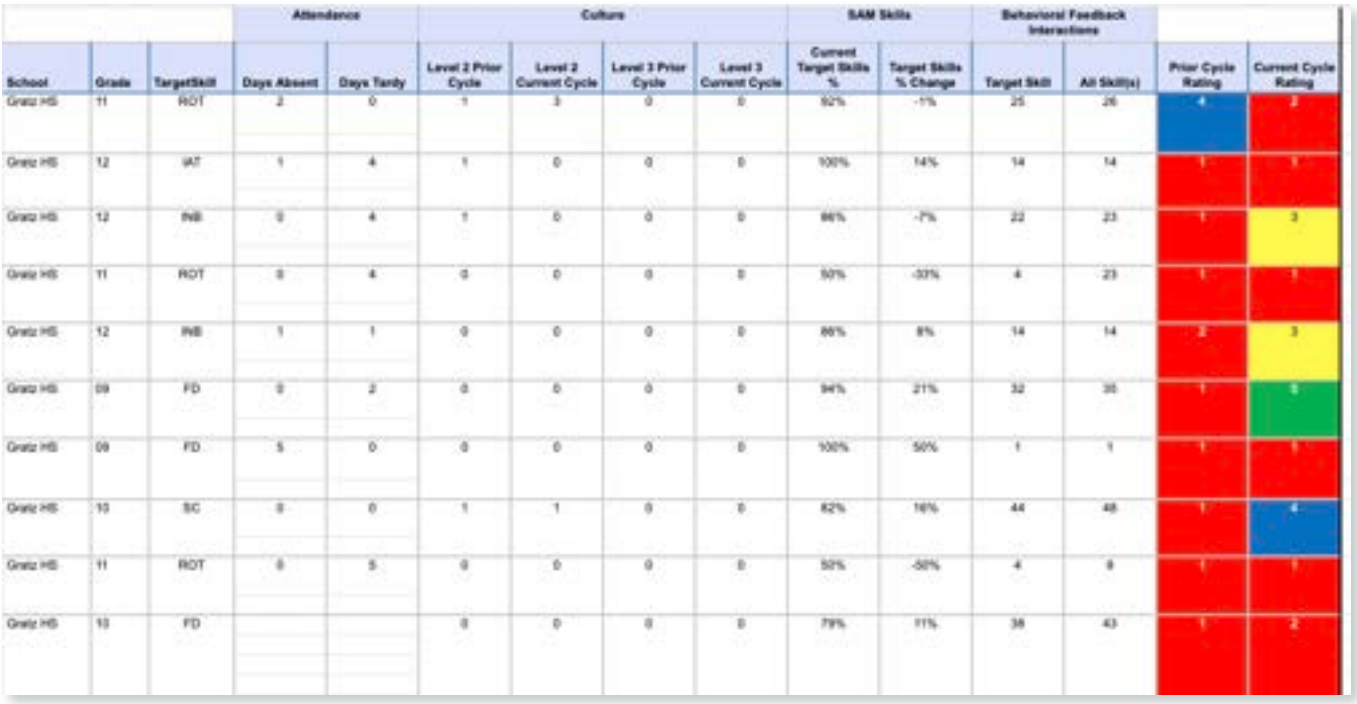
** Any level III culture infraction will move the student to Level 1 in Anchor, and supports will be adjusted immediately. All level III infractions require an IEP meeting where student supports and privileges are adjusted. At a minimum, the student will move to Level 1 for one cycle.*

How the Team Uses this Data to Place Students into Levels

When measuring data against the criteria for leveling, the team balances how each student is progressing in the three categories to determine the appropriate current level. A spreadsheet tracks all of the students in the Anchor program, using color coding to indicate at a glance each student's level for each time period:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5

The tracking tool allows the Anchor team to easily see which students are progressing through the levels, who is consistently struggling or succeeding in the program, and who has had some good and some challenging weeks. An example is shown in the table below.



			Attendance		Culture				SAM Skills		Behavioral Feedback Interactions			
School	Grade	TargetSkill	Days Absent	Days Tardy	Level 2 Prior Cycle	Level 2 Current Cycle	Level 3 Prior Cycle	Level 3 Current Cycle	Current Target Skills %	Target Skills % Change	Target Skill	All Skill(s)	Prior Cycle Rating	Current Cycle Rating
Grelz HS	11	ROT	2	0	1	3	0	0	92%	-1%	25	26	4	2
Grelz HS	12	IAT	1	4	1	0	0	0	100%	14%	14	14	1	1
Grelz HS	12	INB	0	4	1	0	0	0	86%	-7%	22	23	1	3
Grelz HS	11	ROT	0	4	0	0	0	0	50%	-33%	4	23	1	1
Grelz HS	12	INB	1	1	0	0	0	0	86%	8%	14	14	2	3
Grelz HS	09	FD	0	2	0	0	0	0	94%	21%	32	35	1	3
Grelz HS	09	FD	5	0	0	0	0	0	100%	50%	1	1	1	1
Grelz HS	10	SC	0	0	1	1	0	0	82%	16%	44	48	1	4
Grelz HS	11	ROT	0	5	0	0	0	0	50%	-50%	4	8	1	1
Grelz HS	10	FD			0	0	0	0	79%	11%	38	43	1	2

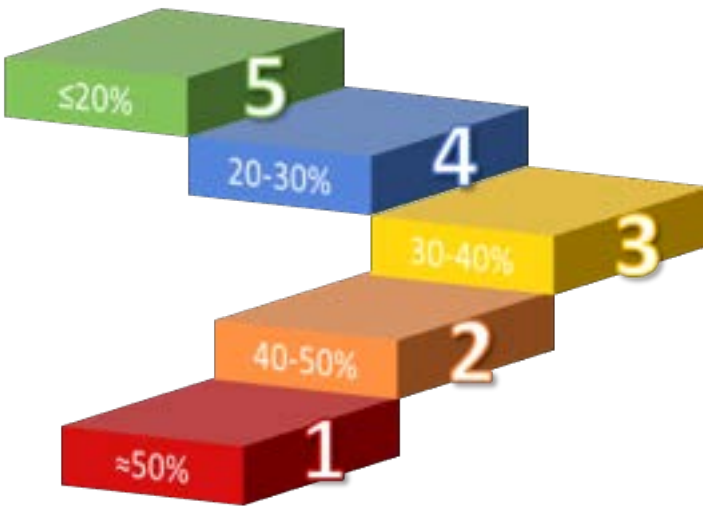
How Level Decisions Inform Student Supports and Services

Students in Anchor receive a different amount of support and different privileges at each level in the system. The supports provided by the Anchor program are in place to help students learn the necessary skills to make progress. Privileges vary at each level and serve as incentives for students to work on the skills that will help them behaviorally. The table on the following page shows how supports decrease and privileges increase as students move up the levels.

Anchor Program Supports and Privileges by Level

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Supports	1. Check-in each period 2. Only shop at the end of each day 3. Supported breaks 4. Complete daily conferencing sheet (with staff) 5. AM check-in 6. Cannot purchase gym and game time	1. Check-in each period 2. Only shop at the end of each day 3. Supported breaks 4. Complete daily conferencing sheet (with staff) 5. AM check-in	1. Decreased push-in support 2. AM/PM Check-ins 3. Daily conferencing sheet independently	1. Decreased push-in support 2. Daily conferencing sheet independently 3. Break independently	1. Decreased push-in support 2. Daily conferencing sheet independently 3. Break independently
Privileges	1. Access to store (with support)	1. Access to store (with support) 2. Can purchase gym/ game time 3. Can attend field trips/ school events (with staff)	1. Can attend field trips/ school events independently 2. Can shop independently (once a day) 3. Can purchase gym/ game time	1. Can attend field trips/ school events independently 2. Can shop independently (2 items) 3. Can purchase gym/ game time/ dress down 4. Break outside (1) 5. Homework passes 6. Can receive credit for mentorship	1. Can attend field trips/ school events independently 2. Can shop independently (two items) 3. Can purchase gym/ game time/ dress down 4. Break outside (1) 5. Homework passes 6. Can receive credit for mentorship 7. Can leave early (with permission from family) 8. No skills classes

Based on the amount of support students need at each level to make progress academically as well as behaviorally, students in Anchor may spend more or less time in a general education setting. The ultimate goal for the level system is to provide an individualized set of services that ensure students can be successfully served in their neighborhood school and make progress that enables them to be educated in an increasingly less restrictive environment with their peers.



Anchor's estimate of the percentage of the day students at each level will be outside of the general education classroom

Program Evaluation: Improving a Program Using Multiple Sources of Data

Once each quarter, each campus Anchor program director meets with the network-level director of specialized services, Ann McKetta. Together, they use Anchor's **program evaluation rubric** to look for specific programmatic elements — their "Must Haves" — within the campus's Anchor program. The rubric is broken into two phases of progress: Phase 1, in which the program meets the minimum requirements of each criterion, and Phase 2, in which the program exceeds the minimum criteria. A major purpose of these evaluations is to create consistency across Anchor program student experiences so that students receive high-quality intervention and support regardless of the school they attend. The practice ensures campus and network teams partner together to identify bright spots within the program implementation they can celebrate, as well as to consider opportunities for growth at the campus level and the network level support needed to progress in priority areas.

At Mastery Gratz, Veronica and Ann walk through Anchor spaces to check for specific program elements in the rubric before sitting down to review all the data Veronica and her team have collected. They look at Gratz's data to look for specific areas to celebrate or elements for growth that Veronica can work on with her staff or students. While this time gives Veronica a chance to zoom out and look at her program's progress and areas for improvement, Ann is able to observe Gratz as a data point from the network's point of view, as just one of Mastery's Anchor programs. Currently, Gratz is scoring mostly at Phase 2 on all the rubric criteria, so Ann can learn from Gratz's implementation of the program and practices to consider how other campuses can learn from the areas in which Gratz excels.

The Impact

Using Data to Improve Student Outcomes

Veronica and her team at Gratz have made data-based decisions to improve Anchor's systems and structures. They have also been able to increase attendance and reduce the number of suspensions for students in their program. The percentage of students in Mastery Gratz's Anchor program attending school at least 90% of the time has increased by almost 30 percentage points since 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, the percentage of students in Anchor who received at least one suspension declined by about 35 points. By using data to drive decisions on the quality and fidelity of program implementation, Veronica and her team have also helped improve student outcomes that will make a difference in those students' lives for years.



This practice directly supports the use of data to make decisions about supports and services for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. For more specific information on practices to support students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, see *Anchoring Emotions*.

Mastery Schools *serves approximately 14,000 students in grades K–12 across Philadelphia, PA, and Camden, NJ. The focal school for the practice was Mastery Simon Gratz High School in Philadelphia.*

Mastery Schools is a part of the ***Marshall Street Networked Improvement Community,*** *a three-year intentional community of 10 public charter school networks nationwide aiming to make dramatic gains for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty. Collectively, the 10 networks identified over 20 best practices that improve learning outcomes and school culture for students positioned furthest from opportunity. Learn more here.*

FURTHER LEARNING

Significant Disproportionality in Special Education

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

What is Data-Based Individualization?

THE NATIONAL CENTER ON INTENSIVE INTERVENTION

Appendix

Mastery Anchor Level Criteria for High School

	Attendance	Culture*	SAM Skills
Level 5	Elementary: 90% attendance or more (1 day or less unexcused absence out of cycle) Middle: 90% attendance or more (1 day or less unexcused absence out of cycle) Or 2 or fewer tardies High: 90% attendance or more (1 day or less unexcused absence out of cycle) or 2 or fewer tardies	No level II infractions within the cycle	90% or more of one individualized target skill
Level 4	Elementary: 90% attendance or more (1 day or less unexcused absence out of cycle) Middle & High: 90% attendance or more (1 day or less unexcused absence out of cycle) or 2 or fewer tardies	One level II infraction or fewer	80%–89% of one individualized target skill
Level 3	Elementary: 80% attendance (2 days or less out of cycle) Middle & High: 80% attendance (2 days or less out of cycle) or 4 or fewer tardies	Two level II infractions or fewer per cycle, OR 50% decrease in level II infractions per cycle	80%–89% of one individualized target skill or 40% increase
Level 2	Elementary: 80% attendance (2 days or less out of cycle) Middle & High: 80% attendance (2 days or less out of cycle) or 3-4 tardies	Three level II infractions or fewer, OR 25% decrease of level II infractions per cycle	70%–79% of one individualized target skill or 20% increase
Level 1	Elementary: 70% attendance or less (3 days or less out of cycle) Middle & High: 70% attendance or less (3 days or less out of cycle) or 5 tardies or more	Any level III culture infraction will move the student to level 1 in Anchor* Four level II infractions or fewer	0%–69% of one individualized target skill

** Any level III culture infraction will move the student to Level 1 in Anchor, and supports will be adjusted immediately. All level III infractions require an IEP meeting where student supports and privileges are adjusted. At a minimum, the student will move to Level 1 for one cycle.*

Notes

1 Skiba et al., “Disparate Access”

2 van Geel et al., “Assessing the Effvects”

3 Hamilton et al., *Using Student Achievement Data*

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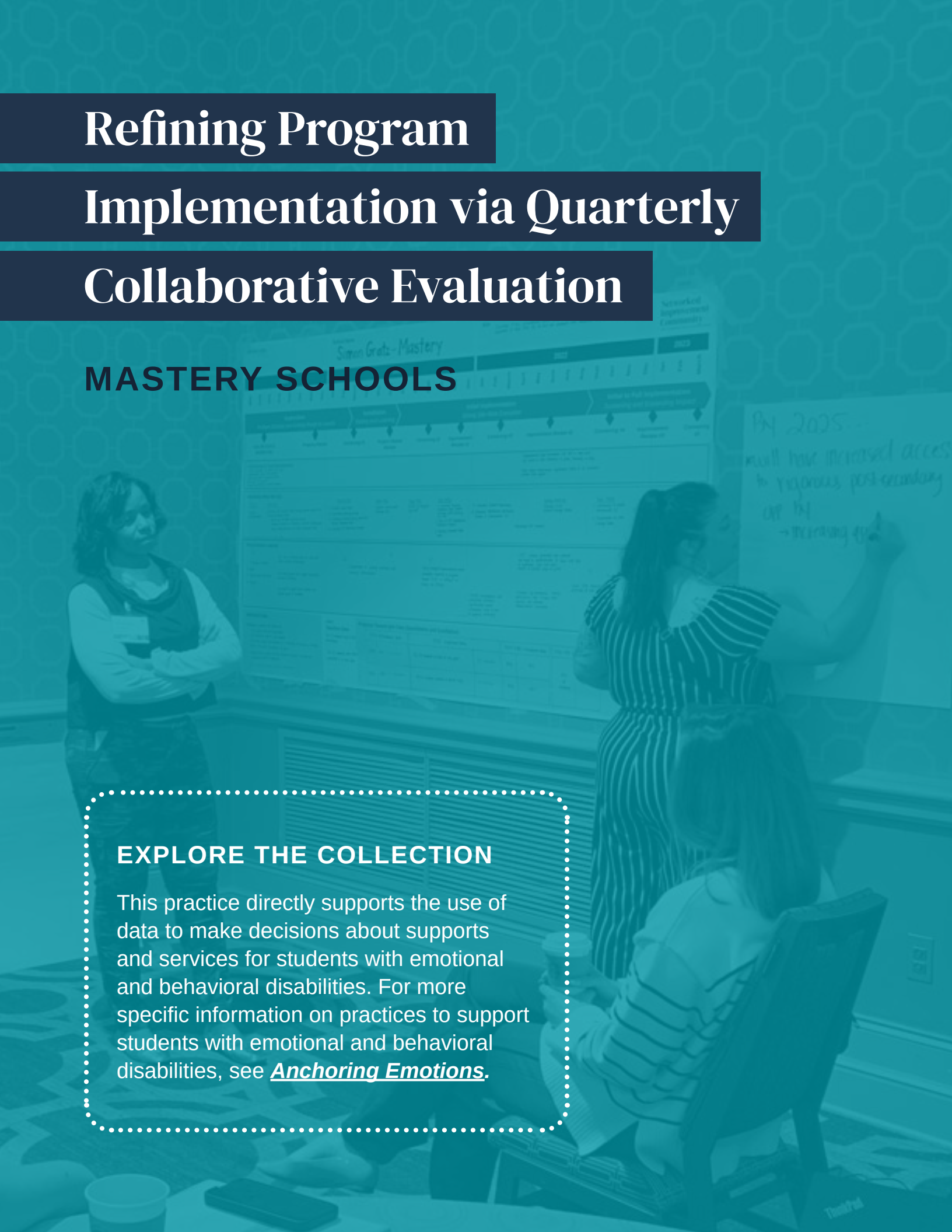
Hamilton, Laura, Richard Halverson, Sharnell S. Jackson, Ellen Mandinach, Jonathan A. Supovitz, and Jeffrey C. Wayman. *Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making* (NCEE 2009-4067). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2009. **https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/dddm_pg_092909.pdf**

Skiba, Russell J., Lori Poloni-Staudinger, Sarah Gallini, Ada B. Simmons, and Renae Feggins-Azziz. “Disparate Access: The Disproportionality of African American Students with Disabilities across Educational Environments.” *Exceptional Children* 72, no.4 (2006): 411–424. **https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290607200402**

van Geel, Marieke, Trynke Keuning, Adrie J. Visscher, and Paul Fox. “Assessing the Effects of a School-Wide Data-Based Decision-Making Intervention on Student Achievement Growth in Primary Schools.” *American Educational Research Journal* 53, no.2 (2016): 360–394. **https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216637346**

Refining Program Implementation via Quarterly Collaborative Evaluation

MASTERY SCHOOLS



EXPLORE THE COLLECTION

This practice directly supports the use of data to make decisions about supports and services for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. For more specific information on practices to support students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, see ***Anchoring Emotions***.

Snapshot

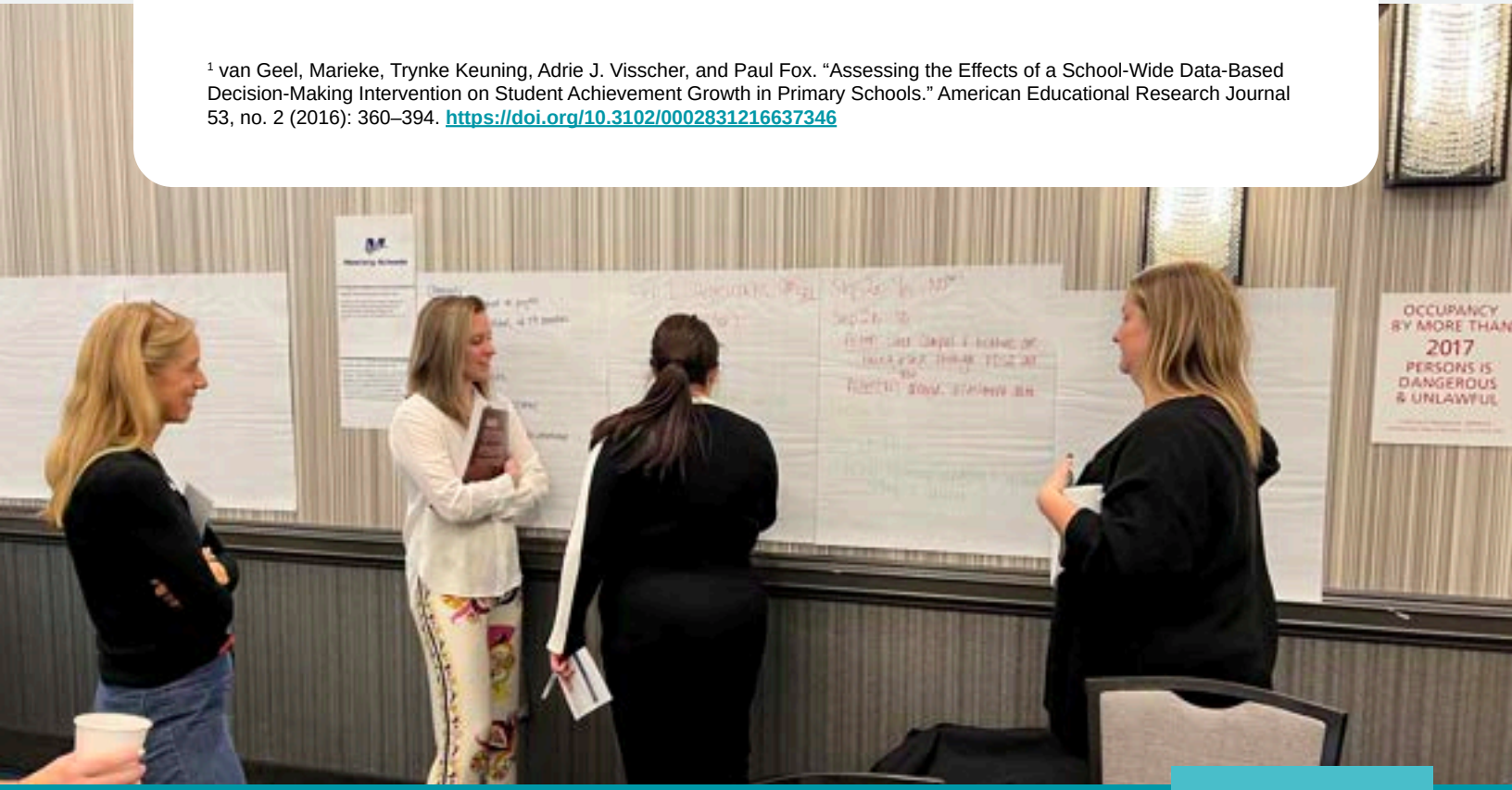
WHAT IS THE PRACTICE?

On a quarterly basis, network leadership and campus leaders collaboratively conduct observations and review data against a multi-phase rubric to evaluate the effectiveness of program implementation and develop prioritized goals for improvement.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Networks with multiple schools need systems and processes to ensure fidelity and quality of program implementation, particularly for programs like Anchor.
- Across a network, outcomes can vary for students based on the way programs are implemented. This variation in outcomes may be even greater for students with disabilities and those in emotional support programs.
- Networks need ways to identify positive examples of programs and determine how to allocate resources to ensure students are well served. Networks can measure programs against these exemplars and use them to devise action plans for program improvement.
- Importantly, program improvement using a variety of data sources on an ongoing basis helps improve the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral learning that students experience.
- Networks can use data from program evaluation to inform network-level support, coaching, and professional development.

[1] van Geel, Marieke, Trynke Keuning, Adrie J. Visscher, and Paul Fox. "Assessing the Effects of a School-Wide Data-Based Decision-Making Intervention on Student Achievement Growth in Primary Schools." American Educational Research Journal 53, no. 2 (2016): 360–394. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216637346



The Challenge

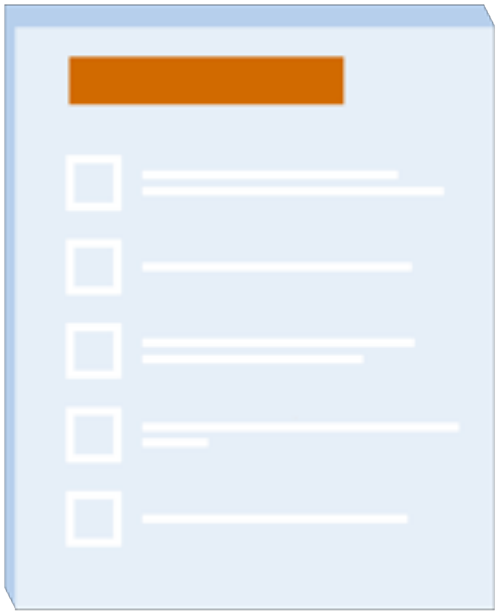
Ensuring High-Quality Programming Across the Mastery Network

Mastery Schools created the Anchor program to provide an educational environment where students with emotional and behavioral disabilities can explicitly learn skills that meet their IEP goals. Mastery created Anchor to be a supportive setting that can flexibly increase the amount of time students receive education in general education classrooms. To accomplish this, Anchor has multiple levels of programmatic support and intervention, ranging from students receiving direct support for 20% of their day to others receiving support for more than half the day when needed. Mastery now offers Anchor programming at each of their secondary campuses.

School-level program directors need to ensure that the skills students are working to master align with their IEP goals, that staffing is adequate to provide various levels of support and education for those skills, and that students have the necessary reinforcement and opportunities to master them. Mastery's network-level director for Anchor needs to oversee program implementation fidelity and student outcomes across campuses so that all students in Anchor programs receive a high-quality program. To make this possible, Mastery needed a valid and reliable way to monitor program effectiveness, provide feedback on strengths and growth areas, and provide targeted support for each school's Anchor program.

The Practice

Using a Program-Specific Rubric to Identify Areas of Strength and Need



To keep the Anchor program consistent in implementation and outcomes for students, the Mastery network team developed a "**Must Haves"** rubric. The rubric is aligned with the Anchor program components that are essential for students to experience the program's full benefits. The Must Haves show that the program is implementing each component as intended. The rubric also pushes each school's program to progress from meeting minimum expectations — referred to as Phase 1 on the rubric — to a higher level of implementation that can result in the best outcomes for students — the rubric's Phase 2. The table on the following page presents each Must Haves component and what it shows about the implementation.

Mastery Schools Anchor Program Must Haves Rubric Components

Rubric Component	Must Haves Show
Schedule & Staffing	There is intentionality given to both student and staff schedules; staffing and schedules allow student programming to be responsive based on data trends and needs.
Goal Alignment & Progress Monitoring	Student programming is data-driven and aligned. Students' present levels of need drive the SAM skills they are working on, the behavioral feedback they are receiving, and the IEP goals being progress-monitored. When students' needs change, programming adjusts accordingly and is accurately documented.
SAM Skills	SAM skills are the foundation of the Anchor program and visible to all stakeholders. SAM skills are aligned to student needs and at the forefront of student development.
Data Collection & Point Card	Student data is front and center, and Kickboard/Point Card is the system to ensure strong data collection. The Kickboard/Point data allows staff/student to reflect on student performance during the daily conference. This data will be used to reinforce student behavior through a token economy. Archived data provides longitudinal data to analyze trends over time.
Behavioral Feedback	Behavioral Feedback is the evidence-based intervention that we use to change student behavior. We use the intervention with fidelity across all settings.
Behavioral Escalation Response Plan	Trained professionals are available and skilled at supporting our students during all phases of the Crisis Development Model. Those trained professionals have a school-normed process and designated area(s) where this support occurs. Professionals will manage students' surface behaviors in order to maximize their time spent learning in the classroom.
Level System	Multiple data points are consistently collected, analyzed, and responded to in an effort to provide appropriate support and reinforcement to students based on trends in their skill acquisition. Student's level is a reflection of their current performance and demonstrates the level of adult support and therapeutic programming that is required for the student to be successful.
Safety Planning & Therapeutic Holds	In the rare instance when a student in the Anchor program is displaying significant risk behavior(s), members of the Anchor team have both the skills and resources to ensure student safety 100% of the time.
Daily Skills Class	Students in the Anchor program receive social and emotional skill development through a daily skills class in order to promote the transition of skill acquisition across multiple settings. Curriculum should be aligned with SAM skills and adjusted to meet trends and students' skill development needs. Participation is based on the student performance data (student Level and behavioral goal growth).
Individual Counseling	Students receive quality school-based counseling as a related service based on their individual needs. Counseling goals are aligned with the students' IEP goals and should be determined by the IEP team by referencing assessment data, observation data, and performance data.
Small Therapeutic Groups	Small therapeutic groups (STG) are readily available to all students within the Anchor program and are strategically and effectively used to address targeted student needs.

At Mastery's Simon Gratz High School in Philadelphia, Veronica Koff manages all of these pieces with expertise. Her network-level manager, Ann McKetta, helps her keep the program improving through regular meetings to evaluate the program's health and determine what types of campus support and ongoing professional development are needed. Ann and Veronica meet quarterly to document artifacts and analyze data demonstrating how Anchor is being implemented using the Must Haves rubric. This routine allows Veronica and Ann to set goals for Gratz's program together and ensure the best outcomes for students.

Collecting Data Across the Program

The quarterly meetings provide the school and network leaders opportunities to gather data across Anchor's whole program for measurement against the rubric's criteria. To gather evidence on the school's performance on the program components, Veronica leads Ann through various Anchor program spaces to observe and collect data together.

For example, during a recent third-quarter visit to the school, Veronica and Ann focused on Gratz's current performance on Goal Alignment & Progress Monitoring. Ann could see that Gratz had not yet set up systems to conduct ongoing progress monitoring three or more times per quarter and therefore was performing at Phase 1 of Goal Alignment (see the table on the following page for rubric details). In their walkthrough debrief, Ann and Veronica used their observation data to develop a plan for how Gratz could progress toward Phase 2 on the program component.

As Gratz implements the plan, Veronica can ask Ann to come back at any time to observe the changes they have made, rather than waiting for the next quarter's formal observations.



Mastery Schools

Program Component: Goal Alignment & Progress Monitoring

Student programming is data-driven and aligned. Students' present levels of need drive the SAM skills they are working on, the behavioral feedback they are receiving, and the IEP goals being progress-monitored. When students' needs change, programming adjusts accordingly and is accurately documented.

PHASE 1	PHASE 1 LOOK FORS
• 1 or more student behavioral goals in the student's IEP are aligned to a target SAM skill and accurately represent frequency and type of data collection. • Students in Anchor have one or two relevant and aligned behavioral goals listed in CMSAT.	☐ Audit 3–5 current IEPs and look for each IEP to have 1+ IEP goals aligned to SAM skill(s); confirm student is receiving consistent BF on those skills via Kickboard. ☐ Review Cognos - Case Manager Student Achievement Detail Report and confirm all students in Anchor have 1–2 SAM skills listed for behavior.
PHASE 2	**PHASE 2 LOOK FORS**
• If/when a student requires the addition/ removal of a SAM skill based on current need, programming and documentation is adjusted to reflect those changes. • Anchor team members are utilizing appropriate progress monitoring tools to collect progress monitoring data a minimum of 3x per report period	☐ Provide evidence of objective progress monitoring data collected at 3 intervals throughout current and/or previous report period. ☐ Student "Target" SAM skill is aligned across all areas: Eschools, IEP, CMSAT, and Kickboard.

The Goal Alignment & Progress Monitoring criteria of Anchor's Must Haves rubric with Phase 1 criteria at the top and Phase 2 at the bottom of the table.

Looking for Areas of Growth

During each quarterly meeting, Ann and Veronica look for places where there are opportunities for growth or for greater focus on a component of the program. First, they look for program fidelity, that is, whether the Must Haves are present (Phase 1). Then they work toward program quality (Phase 2). Gratz's program has already met Phase 1 expectations across most of the program components, so when Veronica and Ann meet, they look down and across the entire rubric to find components where the program is not yet at Phase 2.



Adding Context to the Data

Ann and Veronica review the observation data and discuss questions based on their observations. Using both their observation data and quantitative data from the program, they align on what they believe to be the program's strengths and areas for improvement. This is also an opportunity for Veronica to discuss barriers that she and the program are experiencing.

At the example visit described above, the pair also used rubric components to examine how Veronica was reviewing and using behavioral feedback data collected in Kickboard to make programmatic decisions. (Read ***Providing Timely Behavioral Feedback Across Classrooms*** to learn more about this practice.) Together, they pulled up Gratz's behavioral feedback data to see how the team and individual counselors were implementing the program. By looking at the frequency of positive and learning feedback, they could identify trends in what feedback is given, and in which settings, that might indicate areas for program improvement. On this occasion, the data led them to examine the coaching Veronica was providing. Veronica had been reviewing each counselor's feedback before checking in one-on-one. Coaching meetings were focused on ensuring that counselors provided adequate feedback to students and used the feedback scripts that increased consistency across the staff. Through the data, Ann and Veronica discovered that the Gratz counselors would benefit from additional coaching to work on the quality of the behavioral feedback they give students specifically related to discrete skill development and giving praise. This discovery led Veronica to train the Anchor team on how to better identify skills and effectively use behavioral feedback scripts to give praise.

Making Use of Data to Drive Program Improvement

The Anchor program has a substantial amount of data that staff use to evaluate the program's health and identify goals for improvement. The team sees all of the data, both qualitative and quantitative, as valuable.

- Call logs (between school leaders, teachers, and Anchor staff)
- Leveling reports (behavioral feedback points, infractions, and attendance)
- Calm Corner logs
- De-escalation Room log
- Student information system (grades, behavioral feedback from Kickboard)
- Student perception survey
- Daily conferences during cashout
- Behavioral feedback points (ratio of positive to negative feedback, with the goal of 5:1; timing of feedback, with the goal of every 7 min.; notes on class and opportunity)
- Phone calls home

Making Plans for Improvement

After analyzing the data at each visit, Ann and Veronica devise a plan to reach their improvement goals, and they discuss how they will measure improvement.

In the example visit, for the goal of improving the behavioral feedback students receive, the pair came up with a few specific action steps that Veronica could take going forward:

- Train staff on the quality of discrete skill feedback.
- Have staff implement discrete skill feedback.
- Monitor data at the staff and student levels in Kickboard.

To measure the effect of these changes, they would look at:

- the change in the frequency of interactions and
- the change in the quality of interactions.

By analyzing quantitative and qualitative data, they will be able to discern how effective the action steps were and understand how to improve for better results going forward. They will also be able to see whether the focus on this component of the rubric makes a difference to the implementation of the behavioral feedback program and, ultimately, student outcomes.

From the quarterly program evaluation visits, Ann also accumulates data that she can bring back to her team at the network. She reviews Gratz's rubric along with those from Mastery's other Anchor programs to prioritize areas of support for program implementation and drive decisions for the types of support and coaching each program needs to receive. Ann can determine whether program directors, counselors, or school administrators need additional training or other resources in order to implement Anchor with quality and fidelity across the network.

The Impact

Using Data to Drive Program Improvement Across Schools

The Anchor Must Haves rubric drives goal setting and focus areas for progress for program staff. While the data helps identify areas for program improvement at each school, it can also be analyzed at the network level to ensure programmatic alignment across Anchor campuses in the Mastery network. Over time, Mastery has been able to improve the Anchor program design, fidelity, and quality across their network to better educate students with emotional and behavioral disabilities.

FURTHER LEARNING

Successful K–12 Program Implementation Toolkit

HANOVER RESEARCH

Program Evaluation

THE VIRTUAL LAB SCHOOL

To learn more about how emotional support programs can help you improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities, see *Anchoring Emotions*.

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Marshall Street

Conclusion

ANCHORING EMOTIONS

A collection of research-to-impact practices developed with the Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities

Conclusion

Black and Latinx students with disabilities who are experiencing poverty sit at the intersection of three of the most pervasive systemic barriers to a high-quality education in the United States. Add this reality to the fact that students of color are disproportionately identified as having emotional disabilities[1] that lead to their placement in restrictive learning environments away from their peers, it is clear that this specific population of students faces significant obstacles before even entering the school building. Furthermore, the **school-to-prison pipeline** is well documented by the ACLU and others and disproportionately affects students with emotional support needs based on their over-suspension and expulsion.[2] It is clear that, while there is no one-stop solution to this problem, schools need to be taking steps to ask themselves, "How can we best serve our students?" and perhaps more importantly, "Which of our students are we failing to serve at all?"

Mastery Schools recognized these problems and created the Anchor program — a comprehensive therapeutic support program for students who receive supplemental emotional support. Students in the Anchor program receive an individualized functional behavior assessment and positive behavior support plan as well as supports that may include, but are not limited to, an emotional support classroom, access to a clinician and classroom counselor, individual therapy, group therapy, and communication with the school social work team and outside mental health service providers.[3] When Mastery joined the Marshall Street Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities (NIC), they set out to refine the program and expand it to more schools within their own network, and to disseminate it broadly to further the reach of its impact. This collection highlights the work that Mastery's Anchor program did within the NIC and the promise Mastery and Marshall observed in pilot efforts between 2019 and 2023.



The improvement team at Mastery's Simon Gratz High School, one of the 25 schools in the Mastery network, pushed themselves to consider how students in the Anchor program were situated within the larger school community. By joining the NIC, the Anchor team set out to explore how they could create school-wide programmatic supports to significantly increase student attendance rates and decrease suspension rates for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, ensuring this group of students had equitable access to their education. This collection identifies two best practices that support students with emotional and behavioral disabilities in the general education setting: **Building Student Leaders: Peer-to-Peer Mentorship for Secondary Students** and **Providing Timely Behavioral Feedback Across Classrooms**. There are also two case studies, **Maximizing Student Progress Through Data-Informed Systems** and **Refining Program Implementation via Quarterly Collaborative Evaluation at Mastery Schools**.

The improvement team at Gratz focused on practices that would increase attendance and decrease multi-day suspensions for the students in their program. They hypothesized that they could achieve these outcomes by increasing students' sense of belonging to the school community, working with staff to unpack biases, adjusting school policies that deal with how suspensions are approved, and explicitly teaching coping skills and strategies to students with academic and behavioral needs. In 2019, prior to participating in the NIC, only 37% of students in Anchor had 90% attendance rates, compared to 71% of general education students. By June of 2023, after careful implementation and adjustment of these strategies, that number had increased from 37% to 63%. Over the same time period, the students in Anchor who were suspended one or more days decreased from 76% to 40%, and the average suspension duration decreased from 3.8 days to 1.5 days. Mastery's impact continues to trend positively, showing further improvements in the first semester of the 2023–24 school year in attendance rates and ongoing reduction in days of suspensions for students in Anchor.

Though the Anchor program is comprehensive, the practices that Mastery has implemented are accessible to schools and networks of all sizes and could be put into place individually rather than all at once. When done well, each of these practices can lead to positive outcomes for students with disabilities and for the overall student population. Considering the key lever of ensuring that all students feel a sense of belonging and that this target population spends at least some time away from the general education setting, implementing peer-to-peer mentorship is a way to build important connections, foster a sense of community, and support leadership growth for mentors. Additionally, explicitly teaching behavioral skills throughout the year can lead to life-long learnings that are transferable across groups and settings. As one student in the Anchor program shared, "Here I can be motivated to do the right thing… When my non-Anchor peers get in trouble, I tell them to use the things [our counselor] tells us, like calm down and get water or something… I think I will still use what Anchor is teaching me throughout my life."

Key Takeaways

IT IS POSSIBLE TO SERVE STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISABILITIES IN NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS.

Too often, schools push out students with emotional and behavioral disabilities to more restrictive settings. Yet Anchor demonstrates that many of these students can thrive in traditional schools alongside their peers. When schools rethink their policies and interventions to maximize inclusion – and educators embrace aligned mindsets, habits, and beliefs – it is possible to create an environment that sets up students with emotional and behavioral disabilities for success.

DATA IS A KEY LEVER IN SUCCESSFULLY SUPPORTING STUDENTS.

The use of timely, relevant data is crucial in ensuring that all students are receiving the support that they need. Too often, schools fall into the trap of infrequent monitoring and static support, leaving students stuck at a support level that no longer meets their needs. By using shorter data cycles and fluid resource allocation, schools can ensure that their model fits their students, instead of trying to force all students into a pre-existing model. As students' quantitative and qualitative data demonstrate progress, they can be gradually integrated into less restrictive environments within their neighborhood school setting.

CHANGING THE CULTURE CAN DISRUPT THE STATUS QUO.

The school-to-prison pipeline is pervasive and disproportionately affects students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Only by shifting the culture of how we see and treat students can we begin to disrupt the status quo. Programs that focus on acknowledging and eliminating bias in classroom discipline, policies that favor additional support rather than longer suspensions, and mentorship programs that encourage students to attend school more frequently are all ways that schools can begin to change this culture.

The practices laid out in this collection are examples of how a school has dedicated time, personnel, and resources to addressing inequity within its community.

Not all schools will be able to make all of these shifts, especially considering the multitude of challenges that each individual school faces. However, it is crucial that schools push themselves to ensure that each of their students is being supported and that students' needs are being addressed regardless of what has been done in the past. Perhaps that looks like using data more frequently in evaluating the level of support students receive. Perhaps it involves mentorship. Or perhaps this collection provides inspiration for a new program. Start by asking, "Which of our students are we failing to serve?" and then make a plan for how to start.

Appendix

Notes

1 Grindal et al., “Racial Differences”

2 Achilles, Mclaughlin, and Croninger, “Sociocultural Correlates”; Anderson, “The Relationship between Inclusion, Absenteeism, and Disciplinary Outcomes”; Bowman-Perrott et al., “Patterns and Predictors”

3 Mastery Schools, “Specialized Services”

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Networked Improvement Community

FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities (NIC), a group of 10 public charter school networks serving more than 75,000 students nationwide, identified the best practices through their work between 2019 and 2023.

Led by **Marshall Street** at Summit Public Schools, in partnership with technical assistance providers NIRN, RTI International, SRI International, and SWIFT Education Center, the purpose of the three-year NIC was to systematically improve the way our education system serves Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty and share these solutions with school systems everywhere.

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