

PRACTICE BRIEF

SELECTING TECHNOLOGY FOR INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORT

BOSTON COLLEGE CENTER FOR THRIVING CHILDREN

Technology tools can play a vital role in an effective system of integrated student support. The right tools enable staff working with students to gather, organize, track, and share information. Since each community has distinct views about the use and sharing of data, as well as existing technology systems, the information below should be adapted to local context. Technology that is thoughtfully implemented will enable staff to craft plans that are responsive to individual students, efficiently leverage resources in schools and the community, ensure feedback and follow up, and allow for data-informed decision making. The right tools can help enable a customized and comprehensive approach to student support for each and every child. They can also provide school and community leaders with aggregate information that is useful for supporting students and families more broadly.

PURPOSES OF TECHNOLOGY FOR INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORT

Serving students and families:

While respecting district privacy policies and state and federal law, staff such as school-based coordinators can develop a more complete understanding of each student by centralizing information already collected by the school, including quantitative data such as test scores and attendance rates and qualitative data such as knowledge and insights that teachers, families, and others may have. Developing a comprehensive understanding of every student is a prerequisite to developing responsive, tailored plans to optimize each child's readiness to learn and engage in school. As discussed in more detail in *Reviewing Every Student*, plans should be:

- comprehensive and address all domains of development;
- designed to cultivate student strengths as well as address needs;
- reflective of the intensity of need or risk that the student may be experiencing in any domain.



Technology to support an integrated and comprehensive approach to student support would:

- allow access to relevant child-level data already collected such as school records on academic performance and attendance;
- allow appropriate sharing of formal assessments, screeners, and qualitative and observational student-level information supporting a holistic review of students;
- provide a template for the creation of individualized student support plans;
- rapidly identify school-, community-, and web-based resources relevant to student and family needs;
- track service availability and utilization;
- provide for ongoing review to ensure that services are delivered and that plans change in response to students' needs over time; and
- accumulate data to inform school-based decision-making.

Informing school and community leaders:

In the aggregate, information about student strengths, needs, and services delivered or not delivered can be valuable to school, district, and community leaders.

As a real-time source of information about students and families, aggregated data can be used to identify trends, resource gaps, and improve the distribution of resources and services in a manner that is aligned with demand. For example, school staff may notice that a large number of students would benefit from a drama club, and create one; or school coordinators may notice an increase in homelessness in a section of the district, spurring school leaders to seek partnerships with agencies serving homeless and housing-insecure families to respond.

Data can also be used to guide implementation and evaluate impacts. Incorporating process benchmarks that are designed to assess the quality of implementation allows for continuous progress and improvement. As noted in *Using Data to Inform Practice*, examples of process benchmarks include:

- percentage of individual students reviewed
- percentage of students with a personalized plan
- number of services referred and delivered
- number of services provided
- number of agency partners
- number of agency partners delivering individualized services
- level of satisfaction with implementation



Outcome benchmarks, designed to determine expected long-term changes across all domains of student and school development, may also be reviewed using appropriate data. Examples of outcome benchmarks include:

- attendance
- report card grades
- teacher rating of effort
- social emotional development metrics
- statewide test scores on reading and math
- Youth Risk Behavior indicators
- school climate indicators
- percent retained in grade
- dropout rates
- number and type of disciplinary incidents.

These data can assist school personnel in understanding opportunities to improve implementation of an approach to integrated student support, respond to current and changing student needs, more closely align decision-making with demand, serve as an accountability measure, and track outcomes for children, youth, and families over time. For more information see *Using Data to Inform Practice*.

BUILDING TECHNOLOGY FOR INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORT

A practical starting point:

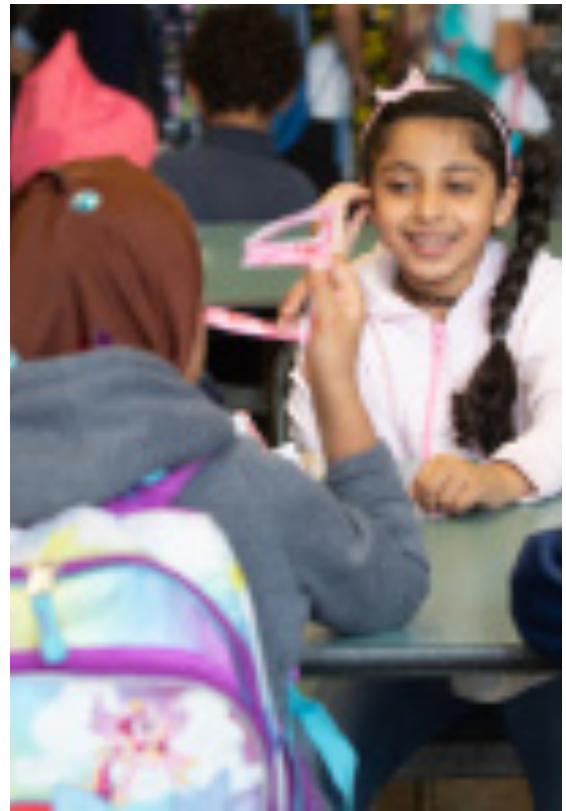
Technology plays a valuable role in facilitating effective and efficient integrated student support practices. Here, discussion is limited to outlining components of a robust system and recommending a high-leverage, pragmatic starting point in the absence of a more ambitious technology infrastructure.

If development and utilization of a complete technology infrastructure is not possible in the near term, school leaders may choose to begin with two pragmatic and high-value targets for change: establishing a centralized way to create individualized student support plans and centralizing information about available resources.

Individualized support plans should be informed by both formal and informal sources of information. Formal sources might include student records, assessments, and health forms; informal sources might include observations by teachers and other adults in the school. Even simple and common technology tools can aid in bringing this information together for the purposes of helping staff to create individualized student support plans. For more, see *Reviewing Every Student*.

Contributing to the disconnect between children in need and resources and programs available, many schools lack easy access to relevant, updated information about community-based programs and services. In some cases, communities are creating local documents or databases for general use. This is especially true during the Covid era, when service providers and resources are shifting frequently.

School staff, like school-based coordinators, may capitalize on existing resources and databases, such as 211, to identify areas where there may be gaps. This can also ensure that schools in rural areas with less access to comprehensive supports identify and connect with all possible resources and services. For more on identifying resources, see *Analyzing the Resource Landscape*.



A MORE ROBUST SYSTEM

Many technologies currently in use in schools have add-on capabilities that can be capitalized on to create a more robust technology infrastructure for student support. Alternatively, new systems can be adopted or extended. Considerations when selecting technology to support implementation of a system of integrated student support include:

- Ease of use: How intuitive is the system and what are the “start-up” costs required for training users?
- Security and privacy: Does the system align with district and school data security policies?
- Collaboration: Who are the anticipated users of the technology system and does the system allow for collaboration? Can limitations on users be restricted to protect sensitive student information?
- Ability to update over time: Does the system allow a team of users to easily update and share information over time? What about across school years? Can it support transitions?

ADDRESSING STUDENT PRIVACY

Implicit in the development and use of technology tools to enable a system of integrated student support are questions related to student privacy. As with any technology related to education, the decisions regarding data collection and access must be made in the context of local governing laws, policies, and attitudes. For integrated student support, approaches range from intentionally hiring licensed social workers or school counselors as coordinators, in part because they are trained to responsibly manage confidential student and family information, to seeking parent or guardian permission to allow electronic information exchange about specific students between service providers inside and outside of schools.

When determining the nature of collection and sharing of student data, schools should consider:

- Leveled access to different data
- Who will have the ability to edit and add data
 - Teachers and staff who interact with the student
 - Administrators
 - Community partners
 - Parents and families
- FERPA, COPPA and district specific privacy policies

CONCLUSION

Technology that enables data collection, organization, and analysis in ways that are aligned with existing school technology, culture, and needs can help to support implementation of effective systems of integrated student support that benefit the whole child.



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