TEACHING THE SLOW LEARNER

Making Intervention Work for All Students
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How nontraditional intervention methods work in a traditional math lab.

Kyle Bower

**IN BRIEF**
The author describes an effective math intervention program that allows for maximized classroom time with students who need help while providing extended enrichment opportunities for students already performing at grade level.

**“Why do I have to go to math lab?”** We’ve all heard complaints like that from frustrated students who find their classroom instruction interrupted several days a week when they are pulled out to work on remedial activities. They return to the classroom having taken one step forward, but two steps back. Yet we continue to assign students to remedial settings for extended periods of time with the ambiguous goal of raising achievement.
Data-driven intervention is an ideal that is very difficult to implement. While most elementary schools use performance data to target Title I students and evaluate program success, the Glenn H. Curtiss Elementary School in Hammondsport, New York, has gone a step further. We have put in place an intervention model that enables us to maximize classroom time with students who need help while providing extended enrichment opportunities for those who are already performing at grade level.

This model incorporates Academic Intervention Services (AIS), a New York state-mandated program to assist those who need extra support in the areas of English language, math, social studies, and science. Students are required to be provided with AIS if they score below a designated performance level on a state assessment or if the school believes they are at risk of failure on a future assessment. Because the structure and design of these services is under local...
control, we have taken a creative, non-traditional approach in trying to avoid the long-term stigma and stagnation of the traditional math lab.

In order to maximize classroom time and meet the needs of all students, we first added 15 minutes to the daily math block four days a week. During the four days of regular math instruction, our AIS staff and teaching assistants provide push-in classroom support, monitoring students’ performance and reinforcing skills in which they have demonstrated weaknesses. We use the remaining 45 minutes on the fifth day to create an AIS/enrichment block. During this period, the AIS staff deliver skill-specific, data-driven instruction to targeted groups of students while our classroom teachers design and supervise enrichment lessons and activities for the remaining students.

Our intervention system is based on the following components:

**Detailed data analysis.** We have made a commitment to continuously gather and analyze detailed student performance data. This helps us target specific content and identify weaknesses. We are able to make accurate decisions based on current data.

**Small, flexible groupings.** These groupings allow students in need of intervention to receive individualized instruction in small-group settings, while those not in need have an opportunity to engage in teacher-designed enrichment activities. In this way, students of all ability levels receive individualized instruction appropriate to their instructional levels.

**Short intervention periods.** Our typical math intervention unit consists of four or five sessions. After this time, students are regrouped and may attend either AIS or enrichment activities, based on their performance in the next targeted area.

**Area-specific units.** A four-session unit on a specific area (e.g., measurement) offers student-focused instruction and reinforcement, as well as multiple strategies for approaching problems within this area. Lessons are based on evidence of students’ past performance in the area. In this way, we don’t start from the beginning but build on their current knowledge and understanding.

**High-level summative assessments.** In order to demonstrate math competence, each student must perform satisfactorily on a grade-level assessment targeted to a specific area. They must be able to demonstrate that they can be successful on tasks they had struggled with earlier. If they aren’t successful, they receive additional classroom sup-

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Recording the Results

In 2006–2007, 93 percent of our students in grades 3-6 scored at the proficient level on the New York State Math Assessments. We were also extremely pleased that at least 20 percent of our students in each of those grades met the state standards with distinction. This data shows us that our at-risk students are receiving the help they need not just to meet state standards but to master grade-level content. As we began the 2007–2008 school year, only seven of our 175 students in grades 3-6 were required to receive AIS services in math.

As administrators, we often forget that we have great influence over the programs and structures in our buildings. While a state mandate such as AIS can be seen as an intrusion in an already full school day, the key is to make it the starting point of a flexible and streamlined intervention program. The phrase “think outside the box” is a cliche, but it applies to the strategy we have used to develop innovative solutions to some difficult problems.

We believe we have created an intervention system that allows us to best serve all of our children. Our data over four years with this system show annual improvements in our students’ performance. More students are achieving at a proficient level in previous areas of weakness, while many previously proficient students are attaining excellence. Through teamwork and a focus on what is best for all students, we will continue to refine our intervention program to ensure that we will no longer hear that unhappy complaint, “Why do I have to go to math lab?”

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WEB RESOURCES

Articles from the fall 2006 issue of NAESP’s Leadership Compass, which focused on response to intervention, can be accessed on the NAESP Web site. www.naesp.org/contentload.do?contentID=2131

The New York state PTA has a “Guide to Academic Intervention Services” brochure for parents and teachers to help children reach their potential. www.nyspta.org/educationResources/academicintervention.php
KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Daniel Pink
Saturday, April 5, 3:30-5:30 p.m.
Change your views about how you work with the expert on innovation, competition, and the world of work, Daniel Pink. His latest book, A Whole New Mind, charts the rise of right-brain thinking in modern economies and explains the six abilities individuals and organizations must master in an outsourced and automated world. Learn what you can do now to help your students learn the skills they will need in the future.

James Carville and Mary Matalin
Sunday, April 6, 1-3 p.m.
Get the inside scoop on the 2008 presidential elections and insight from both political parties! Political pundits James Carville and Mary Matalin will share personal experiences from the campaign trail and give principals the opportunity for Q&A.

Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch
Monday, April 7, 3:30-5:30 p.m.
Born and raised in a tiny Texas barrio, Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch overcame the fierce challenges of poverty, discrimination, and illiteracy to become the highest-ranking Hispanic woman in the Combat Support Field of the U.S. Army. Because of her strong dedication to saving the youths of America living in the same barrios she did as a child, Kickbusch has worked with more than 1 million children, their parents and educators, providing inspiration and encouragement to take charge of their lives, make a real difference in their families/communities, and follow a disciplined road map to success.

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