

Middle School Indicators for High School and Post-Secondary Success: Program
Implementation Summary

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INTRODUCTION

Shady Point Schools (SPS) is a rural, dependent school district located in Southeastern Oklahoma. We are one of 17 school districts located in Leflore county and are currently the third smallest district and the second largest dependent district. SPS currently has 162 students in grades PK-8. Our students come from diverse socioeconomic and ethnical backgrounds. Over 75% of our students are identified as economically disadvantaged, and 100% of them qualify for free lunches. Currently we have almost 30% of our student population identified as special needs and our enrollment breakdown is as follows: Black 3.1%, Hispanic 6.2%, Multi Race 14.3%, Native American 31.1%, and White 44.7%.

In Oklahoma, dependent districts are responsible for education students' in grades PK-8 that reside within the school district boundaries. We are one of four such district in our county, and one of nearly 100 that exist statewide. Once our students finish the 8th grade, they will continue their education at nearby dependent district. The majority of our students attend either Cameron, Panama, Poteau, or Howe public schools.

We are one of the 39 partner schools that make up of the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) with Eastern Oklahoma State College. Currently GEARUP is serving our seventh and eighth grade students and will continue to for the next two years. At that time, they will continue to offer services to our students at they attend other partner schools in the area. As a dependent district, we were excited to see that Eastern saw the need to include our middle school students in the program and address student performance, graduation rates, and improve family's knowledge of postsecondary options through tutoring mentoring, planning, advisement and workshops at no cost to our students and their parents.

STATEMENT OF OPPORTUNITY (aka THE PROBLEM)

The district's recent exposure to the GEARUP program has changed our way of thinking about college readiness. To be honest college readiness was not a high priority for our district. But one of the things GEARUP and the DLI brought to our attention is that I/we need to look deeper into solutions provided to us and make them work for our district. While college indicators may not be important, an indicator for success in high school or middle school would be.

Recent studies have identified and stressed the importance of intervention points throughout the education of students. These points are so important that if a student is not ready by the time they reach them the impact is irreversible (ACT, 2009). The sooner we identify and work with students, the sooner we prepare them for what is next.

Hein et. al. identifies predictors of postsecondary success in grades as early as elementary (2013). These early indicators are part of a larger set of classroom competencies including math and reading scores (Li-Grining et. al., 2010), social and cognitive development, memory skills, and task engagement (Hair et. al., 2006). These are all skills that are important to the development of our students, but they are not easy to identify and track over time. It is the purpose of this project to develop indicators that we can track.

Middle school indicators are grouped into what Balfanz, Herzog, and MacIver (2007) called school experience variables. These variables include absenteeism, low grades (in reading and math), disciplinary problems, and frequent transfers. Other research builds upon that and adds an absenteeism threshold at 20%, Algebra 1 scores, and passing state or local benchmarks (Hein, Smerdon, & Smabolt, 2013). These are measurable and trackable data that can be obtained from

existing systems or manually as needed and used to develop systems to identify and track indicators of success at intervention points as early as possible.

ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

The goals of SPS have always been centered around student learning. We have not limited ourselves to just the academic needs of our students. We deal with a number of students who have personal issues and home lives that prevent them from being in the best frame of mind for learning. We take Maslow's hierarchy of needs very seriously by providing an environment where the physiological and safety needs are met, a sense of love and belonging is provided, self-esteem is taught, and hope that self-actualization (and a little learning) happens along the way.

Through numerous meetings with parents, community leaders, teachers, and parents, we have attempted to clarify our mission here at SPS. Our role as educators, in our district, is to get our students ready for what is next. For our students, their next is either middle school or high school. The problem arises when that mission is contradicted by today's overreliance on standardized testing, and district and school grading systems that focus too much on the academic needs of the students and overlook the real mission of public school. Shady Point School district's mission is getting students ready for what is next; whatever that next may be.

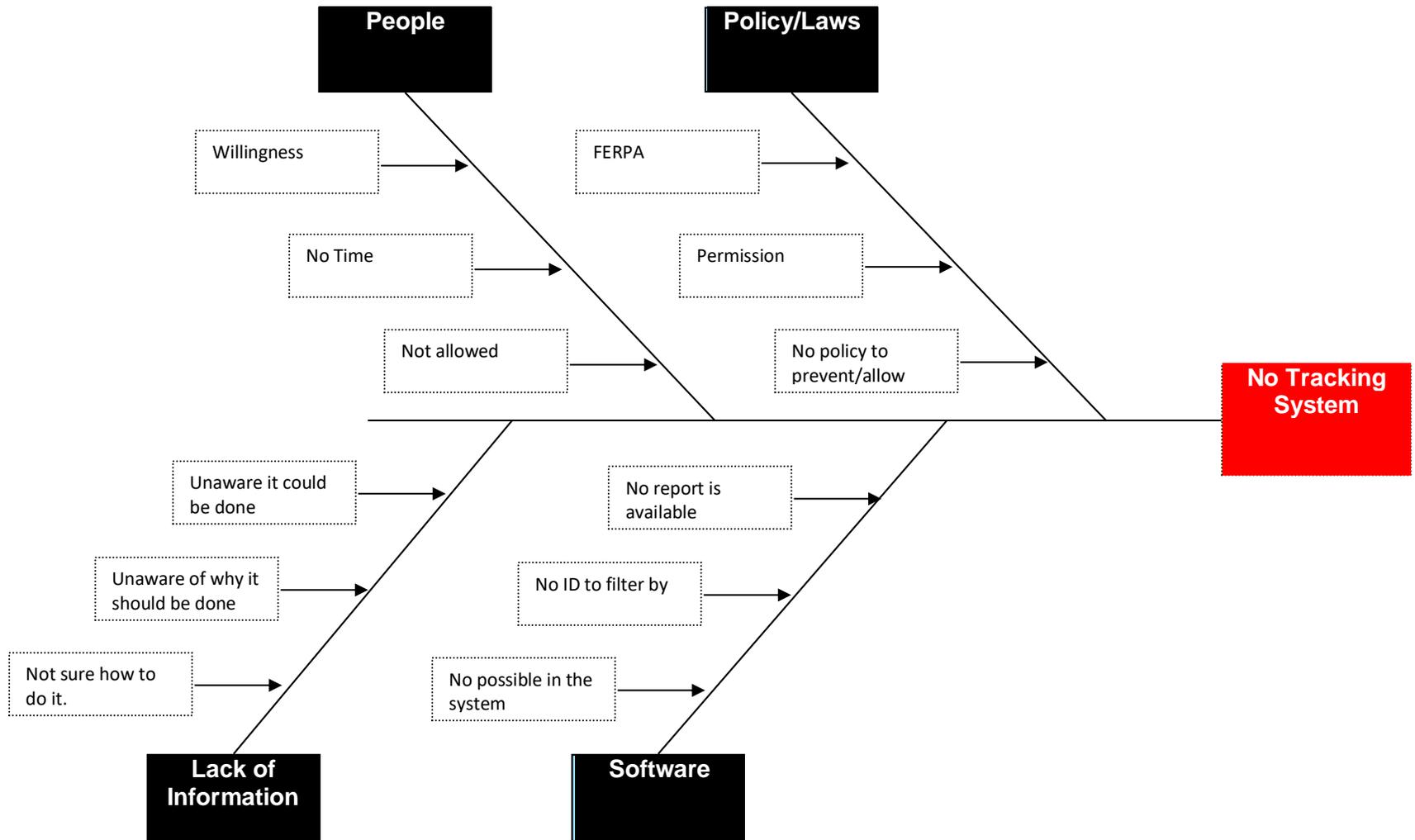
It became apparent to us that, in order to get them ready for what is next, we need to have an idea how they were doing at the next level. This would require us to track student success beyond the confines of our district. During the DLI process information was requested on how our students performed on college success indicators. We were unable to provide that data because we were not collecting it from the schools our students attend after they leave Shady

Point. We might not be able to collect Algebra 1 pass, graduation, or FAFSA completion rates, but we can ask others to do it for us.

SWOT ANALYSIS

INTERNAL	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking our Students through 8th Grade • Small class and district size allow a hand on approach to student tracking • The attention paid to individual students at all districts allows us to be aware of problems they have at other districts • Student are high in the use of social skills especially empathy • We can rapidly implement any change and dynamically change as needed faster than most districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking students after they graduate from the 8th grade • Our small size allows us to rely on personnel and not a system to track info/people • Underperforming in state testing • Limited staff and opportunities for students • Too focused on core instruction and not arts and electives • Not a lot of planning or stakeholder input is done before a project is implemented. • Rapid implementation does not allow us to work through some problems beforehand. We tend to stumble and fix the problems on the fly.
EXTERNAL	Opportunities	THREATS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ID student at other schools to track • Develop middle school indicators of future high school/college success • Broaden curriculum choices (traditional or virtual instruction) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwillingness of other schools to share information • “Turf Wars” between districts • FERPA rules and requirements • Exposure to the possibility of our students not doing well at other schools. • Complacency and not being innovative • Other districts policies that may prevent the sharing of Information • Lack of understanding the need of student performance information.

FISHBONE DIAGRAM



FINDINGS

It became apparent in the 1980 that information that was collected for a single point in time did not tell the whole story. Data that was collected was often for the current school year and did not show patterns over time. That longitudinal data was rarely available and rarely used (National Research Council, 2011). As time progressed we discovered the importance of data to identify temporary and long-term problems. It has become common place in education and it is used for numerous decisions within our district. Unfortunately, longitudinal data can only be collected on students in our district and that data ends when student leaves, or when they graduate the 8th grade.

We now understand the importance of tracking students beyond the 8th grade. Our district need to see how our students perform on success indicators in high school. We do not need to track for college/workplace success, we do need to determine high school success. If our job is to prepare them for what's next, we need to be able to determine if they are being successful at the next level.

A system of this magnitude requires that we identify and track success indicators for all students in all grades. This system will need to be updated on a regular basis as the data changes and will require some type of reporting system to ensure the data is useable.

Using the 10-essential element of a robust longitudinal data system as the basis, we need a system that uses:

1. A unique student identifier
2. Student-level enrollment, demographic, and program participation information.
3. The ability to match individual students' scores from year to year to measure academic growth.
4. Information on untested students.
5. A teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students.

6. Student level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned.
7. Student-level college readiness test scores
8. Student-level graduation and dropout rates
9. The ability to match student recorded between the PK-12 and the postsecondary systems.
10. A state data audit system assessing data quality, validity, and reliability. (Data Quality Campaign, 2007)

In addition, we need to identify and track the following:

- Middle school GPA
- Participation, completion, and passing rates of Algebra 1 taken in the middle school
- State testing scores
- Passing rates in middle school core classes (Math, ELA, Science)
- Early post-secondary opportunities

In short, we need to take our existing 7/8 grade cohort and track them through their first year in college, see what factors led to their success, and apply what we learn to all students from grades PK-12. We need a system that shares data with any other schools' student information systems (SIS), has common fields to collect data, and reports to use it.

IMPLEMENTATION

CHALLENGE

Who would have thought that working with numerous schools, that have various policies, procedures, and ideas on how this should work, would be hard? The challenge we have/are facing revolves around the very basic problem that each school is different. Each school has different rules, policies, interpretations of law, and most importantly

people. Getting them all to agree we should track students is not hard, getting them all to agree on how to do it is.

There is currently not a common SIS system to track students from one school district to another. While there have been attempts made to test data interoperability at the state level, their success and accuracy rate is less than what is necessary to meet the needs of this project. Furthermore, our current SIS does not have fields built in to track the indicators necessary to determine success rates.

The legality of using student data for students not currently enrolled in a district also brings up questions. Permission from parents will need to be gathered before any data is shared and procedures for the storage and transfer of student information will need to be followed and approved by the district and their legal counsel.

SOLUTION

POLICIES/PERMISSIONS

Since the information being used by districts will be shared with other districts it will be classified as a student record and falls under FERPA rules and regulations. This will require permissions be obtained from the parents/guardians before any information is shared. In addition, strict rules will require who and what information is stored or shared.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) will be required from all districts that participate that outlines the roles and responsibilities as well as how information is used, stored, or shared.

SOFTWARE

In order to develop a system to accomplish the tracking of success indicators we will need to expand the capabilities of our existing student information systems. This will require resources, training, and support from all districts and software providers. Changes to the database used by the SIS will be made by the software providers to allow the input of indicator data. In addition, reports and a dashboard of information will be created in order to make the data useable by district employees. This will require extensive collaboration between the districts and the software providers to make the system useable and comprehensive.

PEOPLE

They users of the system will require both training in how to use the system and why a system is necessary. Extensive training will be conducted before any one uses the system. Any training will cover not only how the system works, but also why the system is needed. This will address the need of understanding that was identified in the fishbone diagram.

ACTION STEPS

- Contact area partner schools to discuss the sharing of data for success indicators.
- Meet with GEARUP Personnel in each partner school to see develop a list of indicators to track

- Meet with software providers for student information systems for interoperability and the creation of common reports to use.
- Meet with legal to discuss the legal issues and the necessary permission that need to be in place for a shared system.
- Meet with partner schools and develop policies, procedures to implement.
- Develop timelines and checklist to implement

RESULTS

- Better longitudinal data
- Ability to track former students as they continue their education outside of our district
- Report and or a Dashboard that allows information to be used to predict future college success in HS from former K-8 dependent students.
- Can lead to the development and use of HS success indicators that can be used with middle school
- Can lead to the development of MS success indicators that can be use with elementary students

CONCLUSION

What I learned. As with any project that has multiple districts involved, it is a hard to get started, but easier to maintain. Some parts of the project require micromanagement and other do not. The key is knowing which one is which. Too much here and not enough there can lead to disaster.

With the difference in sizes of each district involved, there are unique problems each will face due to its size. My small size allows rapid development and implementation, but I have a limited staff to do it. A larger district has a larger staff to implement but takes longer in the process to implement. I/we have learned to look at what others do and adapt it to our needs. Some solutions may not fit our district, but parts of it will.

What surprised me. The work involved in getting districts to agree on data, implementation, systems, and rules governing student data. It is hard to get that many staff, administrators, and boards on the same page. In fact, this process is far from done, but we are working on it. Once again, I am spoiled by my size and ability to rapidly implement projects.

Did it work. Wait and see

Best practices. This project was designed and roughed in first before going to partner districts. This allows them to see the solution instead of helping make it. While this may seem backward to some, dealing with multiple districts requires a little more guidance. Had we had a roundtable/brainstorming session, I doubt anything would have been accomplished due to the number of districts involved and their individual needs, policies, and procedures.

Needed Improvements. Time is the single more needed improvement that will lead to the success of this project. My time to spearhead the project, other district's time to implement it according to their needs, and the staff's time to train and use the system.

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