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Overview of Program Monitoring

Program monitoring is the systematic and continual observation and recording of key program aspects (Malone et al., 2014). The data gathered through program monitoring is used to appraise whether a program is on track to meet its expected outcomes. Frequent, intermittent assessment of program implementation and outcomes provides leaders and program administrators with timely information and performance feedback that can guide programmatic decisions. For many SSD programs, including those for which evaluation is required by MSIP-5, monitoring of activities, action plans, and key outcomes represents an efficient and actionable approach that is preferable to less frequent, more in-depth evaluation. Effective program monitoring is contingent upon a well-developed program plan that clearly defines program mission, resources and activities, goals and objectives, and expected outcomes. As one component of program monitoring, it is recommended that some form of voice of customer (VOC) feedback be solicited at minimum annually. When monitoring indicates that a program is consistently failing to meet expectations, an in-depth evaluation or some other corrective action may be recommended.

High quality program monitoring requires the identification and specification of outcomes, indicators, measures, benchmarks, baseline, and targets. The following definitions of these components are adapted from Malone, Mark,& Narayan (2014).

**Outcome:** An expected result in an individual’s behavior, knowledge, or skills, or the change in practices or policies attained as a result of participation in an activity or program. In other words, what is expected to happen as a result of a program.

**Indicator:** An observable and measurable behavior or finding used to understand information about complex systems. Indicators are used to show whether progress is being made and the extent to which outcomes are being achieved.

**Measure:** An instrument, device, or method that provides information, often quantifiable data, on an outcome/indicator. A measure, or metric, provides data that allows for judgments regarding the progress and goal achievement.

**Benchmark:** A standard against which a program’s results and progress can be compared. Often performance by similar groups, programs, or organizations can serve as a benchmark.

**Baseline:** The level of performance indicated by a measure prior to the implementation of a program or intervention. Baseline is used as one reference point for measuring future progress.

**Target:** A desired value or level of a measure at a specified time in the future. The target is a measurable result being sought. Actual progress is measured against the target to determine achievement of program outcomes.

These abbreviated reports review performance data from the previous fiscal year (as well as the current fiscal year, if available/applicable) for programs designated by DESE and/or the District as requiring at minimum a biennial evaluation. Monitoring results for all programs will be provided to the Board of Education across several separate reports submitted throughout the year.
Summary and Recommendations

All action plans developed through the prior program evaluation have been completed.

Staff climate survey results in 2017-18 were somewhat less positive for Bridges staff than for other SSD schools, though results should be interpreted with caution given the low number of respondents (7). Families of Bridges students reported having positive relationships with school staff, being informed of their child’s progress, and being provided with useful information on how to support their child’s learning at home on a recently-administered family engagement survey.

Reading and math growth among students attending Bridges was relatively comparable to that of students attending other SSD special education schools who take the same assessment. A portion of students demonstrated strong growth. Modifying performance target to reflect intra-district norms is recommended. The numbers of students with scores available for analysis increased over prior years, suggesting greater consistency in assessment administration.

The Bridges 90/90 attendance rate declined in 2018 after a marked increase in 2017. Performance remains well below both the established target and the 90/90 rates typical of other SSD special education schools.

The percentage of students who reached the highest level of Bridges’ student progress/behavior assessment system within 90 days of enrollment was 11.5% in 2018, an increase over the prior year but below the established target of 25%.

The percentage of students who transitioned to a less restrictive environment was 31% in 2018, surpassing the established target and representing an increase over the prior year’s rate.

Bridges costs have increased 52% over 2 years. Cost increases are largely associated with higher transportation and staffing expenditures.

New action plans have been developed pertaining to staff climate and student attendance.

New Action Plans Required as a Result of Evaluation Findings: (previously-developed action plans will remain in effect unless identified as complete)

1. Undertake additional research on effective practices in student attendance promotion, particularly in alternative school settings. Explore novel methods of encouraging attendance that have proven successful elsewhere and that might be adapted for use at Bridges; this may include seeking out exemplar programs serving students with social-emotional difficulties. Investigate and document common barriers to (and enablers of) consistent student attendance, conducting focus groups with students (and/or families) if needed to formulate additional hypotheses. Implement new/revised practices beginning no later than year-start 2019-20. (Objective 2.1)

   Anticipated Date of Completion: June 2020

2. Engage in structured discussions with staff around climate survey results to better understand the trend and hypothesize root causes. Identify actions that can be taken to address/improve factors underlying the trend. Re-assess
program-specific climate results following the spring 2019 and subsequent administrations of the survey. Encourage comprehensive staff participation in the survey. (see Voice of Customer Assessment section)

Anticipated Date of Completion: December 2019

**Brief Program Description**

Bridges is a public separate school placement option that is provided when an IEP team determines that a student needs an intensive therapeutic setting due to behavioral and emotional needs. The purpose of the Bridges Program is to provide a structured learning environment where staff work intensively with small groups of students in the areas of social skills training, conflict resolution and aggression replacement training. In addition, academic instruction, paralleled with the curriculum of surrounding school districts, is provided in order for students to progress through middle school (grades 6, 7, and 8) and earn high school credit (grades 9 through 12). Bridges provides services to approximately 40-50 students per year who have documented needs in the areas of social skills and behavior regulation. Student scheduling at Bridges is flexible in order to meet individual needs of students, whether full day or partial day. Students placed at Bridges are expected to learn appropriate self-regulation and social-emotional skills and to generalize these skills in order to transition to a less restrictive environment, graduate, and/or enter the workforce. Families are expected to become active participants in their child/student’s education and support students in the community and workplace.

The key, broad goals of this program include:

1. Students will make academic progress.
2. Student attendance will improve.
3. Students will successfully transition to a more inclusive, less restrictive environment.

Please consult the At-Risk Program Plan for a detailed description of this program and its intended outcomes. Program Plans are available through the SSD Department of Evaluation and Research.

A biennial report of the progress and status of the At-Risk program is required under Board Policy IM. The most recent full/comprehensive evaluation of this program was approved by the Board on January 10, 2017.

**Action Plans From Most Recent Evaluation/ Monitoring Report(s)**

Action Plan 1 (expected completion date December 2017): Continue to work with teachers and implement practices designed to improve effectiveness of academic and behavioral instruction.

Status of Action Plan: Complete. Completed book studies on restorative discipline and trauma informed practices. Working with Cambio organization around equity and staff wellness. Staff have participated in suicide prevention trainings.

Action Plan 2 (expected completion date December 2017): Create and implement strategies/interventions designed to improve student attendance.

Status of Action Plan: Complete. Case managers call when students are absent. Building data team addresses attendance issues. The Bridges social worker is completing truancy referrals for all students under 17 who have missed 10+ days. Working with a judge from Family Court to implement an “encouragement” program to address attendance.

Action Plan 3 (expected completion date December 2017): Monitor students on Level 4 during transitional period.

Status of Action Plan: Complete. A process is in place to monitor students at Level 4 who are dually enrolled or have recently transitioned back to the home school.
Action Plan 4 (expected completion date December 2017): Increase transportation reliability by training bus divers/aids on strategies to use when working with students who have documented needs in the areas of social skills and behavior regulation (not associated with an objective or OFI).

Status of Action Plan: Complete. Open communication has been established between Bridges staff and transportation staff. Bridges staff meet with transportation staff at arrival and dismissal to discuss concerns. Staff are able to provide transportation staff with information about the students who receive transportation as a related service, including strategies for working with the students at Bridges.

Action Plan 5 (expected completion date June 2018): Increase family engagement by implementing student-led conferences (not associated with an objective or OFI).

Status of Action Plan: Complete. Spring 2018 conferences were student-led. Bridges staff identified alternative locations for conferences to be held.

Descriptive Program Data:

The total counts of students attending Bridges from 2015-16 to 2017-18 have been 43, 49, and 45, respectively. A demographic summary of 2017-18 attendees is provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Program Cost

Fiscal Year 2018 Expenditures:

- Salary and benefits: $ 924,184.14
- Security: $ 40,228.00 (estimate)
- Other costs: $ 10,768.87
- Student transportation costs: $ 303,981.13
- Total Costs: $ 1,279,162.14

Estimated cost per FTE1 student (12.18): $ 105,021.52
Cost per student served (45): $ 28,425.83

Bridges Transportation costs over 3 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>$ 303,981.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>$ 345,147.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>$ 143,592.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excluding security expenses2, 2017-18 costs exceed those appearing in the previous evaluation (with reported on school year 2015-16) by $424,027.37, representing a 52% cost increase over 2 years. Cost increases can be largely attributed to higher transportation expenses, along with the addition of several new positions and a physical education curriculum.

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1 Bridges’ unique attendance schedule, frequent dual enrollments, and shifting schedules of students transitioning to less restrictive settings all pose barriers to precise FTE calculation.
2 Security expenses were omitted from the cost calculation in the previous evaluation report.
Bridges staff as of fall 2019 include one full-time administrator, five teacher positions (increase from 4 in 2017), 5 paraprofessional positions (increase from 4 in 2017), one full-time nurse, one full-time social worker (increase from .60 FTE in 2017), and a .20 FTE counselor. In addition, the school staffs a full-time security officer. Note that, in general, providing services to half-time students across a.m./p.m. sessions (vs. a single student over an entire day) requires greater resources and staff time with respect related to IEP management, parent correspondence, instructional planning, transition planning, etc.

Monitoring Results

Voice of Customer Assessment

Sources of voice of customer feedback include the District climate survey and a family engagement survey. Staff climate survey results in 2017-18 were somewhat less positive for Bridges staff in many climate-related domains than was typical for other SSD schools, though results should be interpreted with caution given the low number of respondents (7). For example, 57% of teachers and paraprofessionals assigned a grade of C or worse to the overall quality of their school. Students attending Bridges (at the time of the survey administration; n = 21) reported lower levels of satisfaction and perceived support based on climate survey items, on average, than did students attending other SSD schools. No parents of Bridges students completed the climate survey in 2017-18. Perceptions of school climate may be influenced by the physical conditions and location of the program (in comparison to other SSD sites). Repainting occurred in the summer 2018 and new furniture will be purchased in 2019 in an attempt to address these issues.

Eleven parents/families of Bridges students completed a Family Engagement Survey conducted as part of CSIP Strategy Team 1.6 work in the fall of 2018. The majority of families reported having positive relationships with school staff, being informed of their child’s progress, and being provided with useful information on how to support their child’s learning at home. The survey provided information on strengths and opportunities for improvement, based upon which action plans designed to enhance family engagement will be developed this school year.

Objective 1.1: Students will demonstrate meaningful gains in reading across the school year.

Measure: STAR Reading % of students that have greater than zero within-year normal curve equivalent score (NCE) change. Positive NCE indicates that students are making gains relative to norms across the year.

Performance Target: 80% of students

Other Comparative Benchmark(s) (if appropriate/applicable): SSD separate public schools.

Monitoring Schedule: Twice per year following winter and spring benchmarks.

Results: Results appear in the table below. In addition to NCE change, average annual student growth percentile results are provided. The 80% target was not met, though in light of SSD school comparison data this target may be overly ambitious and warrant adjustment. Reading growth of students attending Bridges was relatively comparable to that of students attending other SSD separate schools. Notably, 7 of 18 students achieved a student growth percentile exceeding the 80%ile in 2017-18, which is indicative of fairly strong growth.

Achievement data reported here should be interpreted with some caution given that definitive conclusions regarding instructional effectiveness based on STAR scores are difficult to draw when the analysis includes low numbers of students with multiple scores that allow for assessment of growth over time. In addition, eliciting full participation in the assessment is often a challenge at Bridges, as it is not uncommon for students to either refuse to complete an assessment or to complete the assessment haphazardly/with minimal effort. However, the numbers of students with multiple scores for analysis has increased over the prior two years, which suggests greater consistency of testing and might be viewed as a positive.

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3 The Student Growth Percentile reflects a student’s rate of growth relative to same-grade peers. For example, a growth percentile of 35 would indicate that that student demonstrated progress across the year equal to or greater than 35% of same-grade peers.
Objective 1.2: Students will demonstrate meaningful gains in math across the school year.

**Measure:** STAR Math % of students that have greater than zero within-year normal curve equivalent score (NCE) change. Positive NCE indicates that students are making gains relative to norms across the year.

**Performance Target:** 80% of students

**Other Comparative Benchmark(s) (if appropriate/applicable):** SSD separate public schools

**Monitoring Schedule:** Twice per year following winter and spring benchmarks.

**Results:** Results are provided in the table below. See notes provided above regarding interpretive caveats pertaining to STAR results for Bridges. Whereas a somewhat lower percentage of Bridges students exceeded zero NCE growth on the STAR math assessment in comparison to other SSD separate public schools in 2017-18, Bridges students made somewhat greater gains, on average, than students at other schools in 2016-17. Results suggest that STAR math gains made by students at Bridges are roughly on par with those attending other SSD special education schools who take the same assessment. Similar to that noted above regarding the reading target, a lower performance target for STAR math may be warranted given comparison data available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Bridges Students With 2 or More Scores</th>
<th>Bridges % with NCE Increase &gt; Zero</th>
<th>SSD Schools % with NCE Increase &gt; 0</th>
<th>Bridges Avg. Student Growth Percentile</th>
<th>SSD Schools Avg. Student Growth Percentile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>42.9 %ile</td>
<td>48.4 %ile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
<td>48.1 %ile</td>
<td>40.1 %ile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. For students with three scores, goal attainment was determined based on whether the growth slope/trend exceeded zero. For students whose baseline level of performance is very far below average (i.e., 1.0 NCE) making the level of progress that moves them to a higher NCE can be challenging. Analyses included only scores identified as occurring in a benchmark period. The purpose of this limitation is to ensure comparisons are based on a similar period of time between benchmarks, though it also results in the scores of some students being omitted.

Objective 2.1: The proportion of students at Bridges with attendance of 90% or higher will increase.

**Measure:** Proportional % above 90 attendance.

**Performance Target:** 70%

**Other Comparative Benchmark(s) (if appropriate/applicable):** Other SSD separate schools

**Monitoring Schedule:** Monthly

**Results:** Results are shown in the chart below. Bridges 90/90 attendance rate declined in 2018 after a marked increase in 2017. Performance remains below the 70% target and the average 90/90 rates among other SSD separate public schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Bridges Students With 2 or More Scores</th>
<th>Bridges % with NCE Increase &gt; Zero</th>
<th>SSD Schools % with NCE Increase &gt; 0</th>
<th>Bridges Avg. Student Growth Percentile</th>
<th>SSD Schools Avg. Student Growth Percentile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
<td>38.7 %ile</td>
<td>43.1 %ile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>41.7 %ile</td>
<td>38.7 %ile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. 2016-2018 data for SSD separate schools was retrieved from the DESE comprehensive data site. Bridges data and 2018-19 separate schools data are estimates derived from internal student information systems. For state reporting purposes, SSD includes the data of students who attend Bridges in the school category of “external sites” (along with Transition, Homebound, Purchase of Service, etc.), and thus official Bridges-specific results are not available in DESE datasets. The 90/90 calculation changed in 2018-19 to allow partial credit for students who attend between 85% and 90% of school days, and thus 90/90 percentages would be expected to increase, all else being equal.

**Objective 3.1:** A greater proportion of students will reach Level 4 (the highest level) in the school’s progress assessment system.

**Measure:** Percentage of students who have reached Level 4 within 90 school days (approximately one semester) from the time of enrollment.

**Performance Target:** 25%

**Other Comparative Benchmark(s) (if appropriate/applicable):** None available

**Monitoring Schedule:** At semester (twice year)

**Results:** Bridges’ progress assessment system is used to reinforce goal attainment and inform determinations regarding readiness to transition to less restrictive settings. The percentage of students who reached Level 4 in 90 days was 11.5% in 2018, and increase over the prior year but well below the performance target of 25%. One potential explanation for this the trend of enrolling more students with significant mental illness who show progress but require in excess of 90 days of instruction and therapy to build coping strategies necessary to reach Level 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Reaching Level 4 Within 90 School Days</th>
<th>2016-17</th>
<th>2017-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Students</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Objective 3.2:** The frequency at which students transition from Bridges to a less restrictive setting will increase over time.

**Measure:** Percentage of enrolled students who transition to a less restrictive setting.\(^4\)

**Performance Target:** 25%

**Other Comparative Benchmark(s) (if appropriate/applicable):** None available

**Monitoring Schedule:** At semester (twice year)

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\(^4\) Less restrictive setting transitions included the following change of placement types: From Bridges to a partner district school; from Bridges to an SSD separate public school; from half-day Bridges only to half-day Bridges and half-day partner district school or SSD separate public school; from half-day Bridges to full-day Bridges. Transitions to Purchase of Service (private separate) or homebound instruction were not considered less restrictive placements, nor were graduations.
**Results:** Bridges is designed as a short- to moderate-length placement option, and thus successful student transitions to less restrictive settings and/or the home district represents a key outcome. The percentage of students transitioned to a less restrictive environment was 31% in 2018, surpassing the established target and representing an increase over the prior year rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent Transitioned to Less Restrictive Setting</th>
<th>2014-15</th>
<th>2015-16</th>
<th>2016-17</th>
<th>2017-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ongoing Evaluation Planning:** (select all that apply)

- [ ] Continue to monitor using same metrics and schedule.
- [x] Revise evaluation indicators and metrics.
  - **Proposed revisions:** Modify STAR targets to reflect local comparisons.
- [ ] Conduct an in-depth evaluation.
  - Estimated month/year the evaluation is to be completed:
- [ ] Revise the program description/plan.
- [ ] Other action(s) for improvement:

**Rationale for Selection(s):** Change will improve/provide context for interpretation of performance trends.