

Demystifying Standards, Part IV: Interventions

The last two letters discussed grading in a standards-based program. There is another aspect of a standards-based education that's critical to its success, and that is a timely, directive, systematized set of interventions.

Interventions

Interventions are structures and dedicated resources that are designed to help students meet standards whenever the student(s) need additional support beyond the regular program. Interventions can be skill based, effort based, and/or social/emotional based.

Why are interventions crucial in a standards-based program while considered optional in a traditional program? First you have to consider that in most traditional schools there is an unstated belief at work that *time is constant while learning is variable*. What this means is that students are given a limited amount of time (175 days per year, 6 ½ hours a day) during which they can learn everything the teacher requires of them. Starting in early September the clock is set to ticking and when that last day of school in June arrives the alarm rings and students in these systems put their pencils down and know that some of them will make it academically and some will not (meaning that the learning is variable), but the time is up and that can't be changed (so time is constant).

In a truly standards-based program the opposite is true, so that *learning is constant while time is variable*. When students in this system sit down in September, they look at the categories of Does Not Meet, Partially Meets, Meets, and Exceeds the standards for each learning goal, and they know that before they're done with the particular level of education they're currently at (1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th year of high school) they will have all standards in the Meets or Exceeds categories (meaning that learning is constant). Until that happens, time will continue to expand (so time is variable).

How can time expand? The answer is that it expands through interventions. It is incumbent on the system and on students and parents to commit (thus the interventions are directive) to meeting all standards and accept that it's everyone's responsibility to make this happen and that no one can give up, ever, until that happens. It is also assumed that the worst option for meeting standards is repeating a course, a technique that has proven to be ineffective. Interventions instead create support as close to the real learning time (thus the interventions are timely) as is possible in order to make sure all students meet all standards without course repetition. The interventions have to be well coordinated and fit together in a logical way that everyone can see and understand (thus the interventions are systematic).

Furthermore, standards-based schools believe that the reasons students aren't meeting all learning goals the first time out don't matter so much as the fact that it isn't happening. The interventions are not a punishment but support to learners and represent a collective commitment to the learning. In this system points are not deducted for late work. Instead, students are immediately entered into the system of interventions. Teachers don't need to distinguish the reasons for late work or work that is not up to meeting the standard (*he's lazy; she ran away from home; he's been sick; she's a behavior problem*). Students don't get extra points for perceived positive (but non-academic) qualities, and they don't lose points for the opposite perception. There is no extra credit. All that matters is that a student is or is not meeting each standard based on specific criteria in the rubrics. Interventions are critical to a

commitment to have all students meet all standards.

While the explanation for all our interventions, and a flow chart, are attached a brief description of the different categories of interventions is given below.

Skill-Based Interventions

Skill-based interventions are for when students cannot meet all standards because they lack basic skills necessary for some content area work at certain levels of the curriculum. Examples at SDHS are the Reading is FAME literacy program in which all freshmen participate in order to increase reading levels; numeracy (using ALEKS) for basic math skills intervention; and writers' workshop (using A+) for writing skills intervention. All of these interventions are in addition to students' regular coursework (so a freshman student takes both English and Reading is FAME).

Sometimes a student needs a significant adjustment in schedule in order to focus on fewer courses, for instance, that includes more direct guided study help. These kinds of more intensive interventions, based on skill development, are part of the system of interventions. Also included are some alternative structures like for instance, at SDHS, a program titled Project SUCCESS.

Effort-based Interventions

Often students have the skills and abilities to meet standards but just need additional time and/or instruction beyond the normal time provided in the course(s); again, this is evidence of time being variable in a standards-based system.

At SDHS, during the regular school day, we have lunch time academic interventions and also LABS for every grade level, which is dedicated time when both students and their core grade level teachers are free to work together on interventions around technology, organization, study skills, etc. and also when direct help is available to every student for each core course.

SDHS also has three after school effort-based interventions (still considered as mandatory for all students who want to stay on track for graduation with their class) including Block 5 (from 2:10 – 3:00 with grade level core teachers and/or teams when direct help and instruction is given), Guided Study (from 2:10 – 3:00 for students don't need any additional instruction or help but only a quiet room to complete work), and Academy (from 2:10 – 4:00 for six days at the end of each quarter that combines direct, core teacher instruction and help with quiet rooms for work completion) and also including a summer Academy that happens during the month of July.

Social/Emotional Interventions

Some students may have the skills necessary to meet all standards, but face significant social/emotional barriers to their success. For these students, an intervention plan may need to include alternative structures (like Project SUCCESS or Job Corps) or counseling, or other individualized approaches that are included in the overall system of interventions. Special student assistance teams will convene to create a plan for interventions that will also conclude with these students meeting the standards.

Students are supported through active student assistance teams, when a student is not identified, where plans are created and monitored to assure students meet standards. Support can include a variety of options including scheduling adjustments, counseling, a mentor, etc.

Other social/emotional interventions include using restorative justice options, like peer mediation, justice circles, reality therapy sheets, and other mechanisms that help solve behavioral issues and keep students in school where they can meet standards.