

## A Tale of Two Schools



### Cowan Elementary School

During Summer 2020, Cowan Elementary's Special Education Director set two goals for her 4th grade team: 1) provide special education teachers with training on the intervention programs they would teach next year, and 2) schedule students with disabilities into best-fit classes. To meet goal #1, all special educators received three days of intervention training in August. To meet goal #2, the leaders and case managers used the two most recent data sources they had - RIT scores from the MOY (2020) MAP assessments and the students' most recent IEPs - to strategically place them into one of three groups:

- 1) **Core Instruction:** Students in this group engaged in grade-level content using a high-quality curriculum and were taught by one of three 4th grade ELA teachers.
- 2) **Core Instruction and Intervention Combination:** Students in this group would spend the first half of ELA in core instruction and would receive small-group intervention during the second half. This intervention will primarily consist of a computer-based decoding program along with a guided reading block led by a special educator.
- 3) **Intervention (specially designed instruction) only:** Students in this group were pulled out of the ELA block and received intensive decoding instruction with a special educator.

With this planning complete, teachers were ready to teach interventions to their specific groups of students on the first day of school. However, starting in late October, the school had a COVID-related, month-long closure. All students were sent home with work packets that aligned with their current placements, and distance learning mirrored in-person support offered to the leveled groups described above.



Greenbrier  
Elementary School

During Summer 2020, Greenbrier Elementary's Special Education Director listed pre-existing data sources that she and the teachers could use to identify the ongoing needs of their 4th grade students with disabilities. They landed on using the MOY (2020) MAP data as well as students' IEPs and evaluations, formative assessments, and teacher notes from the spring. They identified three overall trends in student groups across the data:

1. Students who need additional support with foundational reading skills support in order to read grade-level text
2. Students who need fluency and comprehension supports
3. Students who would benefit from additional support to comprehend grade-level content

As they considered the data of the students with disabilities compared to the other fourth graders, they realized that many of the students who didn't qualify for special education had similar areas of need.

Although students had varied needs, all students were placed into general education sections to receive core instruction. The Director of Special Education strategically placed and supported students as follows:

- Group 1 (students with foundational reading needs) were all placed in one of the three 4th grade ELA sections. These sections were taught by a general education teacher and received push-in support from a special educator. These students also received supplemental instruction outside of the core to support their decoding needs.
- Groups 2 & 3 were placed in the other two 4th grade sections.
  - During PLC time, the special education teacher supported general educators to identify opportunities for differentiating instruction and offering fluency supports and knowledge-building supports as "core supports" to be taught within core instruction.
  - Students with the highest levels of need (such as students needing explicit fluency supports) received additional support from the special education teacher during a weekly intervention block.

To ensure success with this plan, the Special Education Director worked with the principal to identify additional professional learning time to train all of the 4th grade teachers on how to engage all students with grade-level complex text. During trainings and ongoing PLCs, general and special educators internalized and annotated core instructional materials with a focus on identifying scaffolds to support comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency.

In addition to core instruction, the special education teacher was trained on a decoding intervention program for the Group 1 student who needed additional support with reading foundational skills.

In order to ensure continued collaboration during the school year, the 4th grade team (including the special education teacher) met weekly during PLCs to discuss the upcoming unit and lessons and identify supports for students with disabilities.

During a month-long COVID-related school closure in October, students were sent home with texts across various levels to read and build knowledge about their current unit and distance learning supports mirrored the supports offered in-person.