

MA Charter School Collaborative Access Network (MassCS-CAN) 2015-16 Summary

Document Overview

In March 2015, the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association (MCPSA) was awarded \$2M from the US Department of Education through the competitive National Leadership Activities grant program to develop the Massachusetts Charter School Collaborative Access Network (MassCS-CAN). This document outlines the program goal, objectives, and activities, and provides an overview of accomplishments and lessons learned through June 30, 2016.

MassCS-CAN Program Goal

The goal of the three-year MassCS-CAN program is to work collaboratively with member charter schools to expand high quality services, programs, staff, and specialists available to serve students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) enrolled in MA charter schools. Through enhanced coordination among charter schools, MassCS-CAN aims to facilitate the scaling of effective charter school programs, increase timely access to specialists and other critical staff, and ultimately, support charter schools in achieving enhanced student outcomes.

Program Objectives

In support of the above goal, MassCS-CAN will boost its support for member schools by:

- enhancing the capacity of MA charter schools to develop, or access, a continuum of services in order to better serve all students, especially students with high needs/low incidence disabilities and ELLs; and
- expanding charter school access to a broad network of high-quality specialists, so that they can provide enrolled students with disabilities and ELLs timely access to high-quality providers.

In addition, MassCS-CAN will provide the local and national charter sector with exemplars and models of support, to ensure charter schools have access to the requisite knowledge and support structures that enable them to serve all students effectively.

Year 1 Activities

Through this program, MCPSA staff members continue to work collaboratively with the field and external partners to facilitate statewide support for charter schools, bringing evidence-based strategies to bear on some of the major challenges encountered by MA charter schools, while remaining flexible enough to differentiate services and support individual schools' unique goals.

To meet the needs articulated by the field, MassCS-CAN facilitates:

- The formation of "cluster partnerships" whereby charter schools that share geographic proximity collaboratively build and share resources for students with disabilities and ELLs;
- The creation of a MA charter school specialist network, a centralized, online solution to locate, screen, and contract high-quality specialists who support students with disabilities and ELLs; and
- The delivery of intensive professional development and on-site coaching to support MA charter schools in delivering a continuum of high quality services to all students, including students with disabilities and ELLs.

MCPSA works collaboratively with charter school leaders and staff to develop these activities, as well as leverage new partnerships with outside experts from the National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools, Portland State University, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Landmark Outreach, Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL), the May Institute, and more.

New Program Name:

The program name, MassCS-CAN, created confusion for many stakeholders so the MCPSA Board of Directors voted to change the name to Capacity Building Network. We plan to rebrand our program in Fall 2016.

September 2015 - June 2016 Accomplishments and Lessons Learned

Cluster Partnerships

Accomplishments:

- Formation of “Year 1” cluster working groups: The first cluster groups formed in Boston/Cambridge (19 charter schools) and rural western MA (4 charter schools). Each group met once per month from September-May with MCPSA staff and consultants from the National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools (NCSECS).
- Creation of a needs assessment tool: These two groups collectively created and implemented the School Asset Analysis Tool (SAAT), a survey that collects quantitative and qualitative data regarding student enrollment and staffing. The SAAT identifies school-specific and cluster-specific strengths, needs, and gaps in services and technical assistance that support students with disabilities and ELLs. The goal of this tool is to provide accurate data to be used in creating collaborative service structures to help leverage assets already present within schools and identify where collaborative service sharing may mutually benefit the schools.
- Partnership activities resulting from cluster working groups:
 - Shared professional development:
 - The Boston/Cambridge group arranged a school visit to UP Academy Dorchester focused on Inclusion Classroom and Co-Teaching.
 - The Boston/Cambridge and rural Western MA groups participated in shared workshops facilitated by the PEAR Institute: Partnerships in Education and Resilience. The workshops focused on the following: The Clover Model, a framework that helps understand human developmental needs and establishes a common language with which to communicate with and about children and youth; The Holistic Student Assessment (HSA), a tool developed by PEAR to help schools tailor services to better support the social and emotional well-being of students in school and afterschool settings; and the Holistic Classroom Assessment (HCA), which is an assessment tool completed by educators about their entire class, indicating the strengths and struggles of each individual student.
 - In August 2016, there will be two Boston/Cambridge and western MA workshops, collaboratively designed by school representatives and MCPSA staff. Landmark Outreach consultant will lead the workshops and will train general education and special education teachers to create and implement curricular accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities in inclusion settings.
 - Shared programming:
 - Several Boston schools, with technical assistance from MCPSA staff, NCSECS consultants, financial modeling consultants, and attorneys, are creating a Memorandum of Understanding for potential cross-enrollment opportunities for students with low-incidence disabilities that will be available to students upon parent/guardian consent in the 2016-17 year and beyond.

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- Formation of “Year 2” cluster working groups: In May, a southeast MA cluster formed (10 charter schools), and charter schools in Springfield, Holyoke, and Chicopee were invited to join the rural western MA cluster instead of creating a separate, urban cluster as originally planned (13 charter schools total).
- Needs assessment tool revision and implementation: Based on lessons learned from implementation of the SAAT, MCPSA staff and NCSECS consultants created a streamlined version. New cluster schools completed version two of the SAAT, which will be analyzed this summer to identify strengths, needs, and gaps in each cluster in time for the first cluster working group meetings in September.
- Sample participant quotes (from UMass evaluation team case studies):
 - “I love the Cluster Working Group. Lina, Laura, and Nicole are amazing. They are so organized. I have found the PD workshops on RTI and PBIS to be incredibly helpful. They bring in experts within the community and there are chances to connect with other people in schools.”
 - “It was also helpful to have 2 hours every month to go and talk with other people about the challenges doing the same work I’m doing. I don’t have any peers here at the school. I had so much to learn that I needed peers. I wrote in to my new job description for next year that continued involvement with MASS-CS CAN is part of the job.”
 - “I think it’s essential that our school coordinates and collaborates with other charter schools. We aren’t part of a network like KIPP.”
 - “The CWG meetings are just perfect opportunity to come together and share. It’s also nice to commiserate, too. Spending some of the time just talking about what is hard about this job. I need to hear that other people struggle with this, too. I honestly don’t know what I would have done without the CWGs. Other new people coming into charter schools, I would guess that they would need it, too.”
 - “My experience is that I learn more about the other schools. It’s good for me to know how they are structured.”
 - “Independent of this whole initiative, the western Mass charter schools needed to do a better job at networking. It was extremely inefficient. We were all these independent operations doing things separately. Surely there were things that we could share, but nobody had found a way to pull it all together, so this federal money was a good start-up.”

Lessons Learned:

- It is critically important to provide a high degree of clarity to schools about program goals and activities up front, as well as the purpose and use of the School Asset Analysis Tool data.
- Rural Western MA cluster group feedback strongly indicated that meetings serve as a beneficial opportunity for professional connections. Boston/Cambridge cluster group feedback was mixed in this area. Members of both groups indicated that they valued hearing about “universal issues and problems” and “different perspectives.”
- MassCS-CAN and NCSECS facilitators were perceived as prepared, respectful, and responsive to groups’ needs.
- Attending to human resource needs was appreciated by participants (e.g., providing healthy food, considering overall workload and conflicts when scheduling meetings, using adult learning principles, etc.)
- An ideal size for a cluster working group is approximately ten to twelve schools.

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- Cluster working groups do not need to meet as a whole group each month. Instead, they should meet a few times per year as a whole group to build relationships, and then meet in strategic pairs and small groups focused on specific action plans.
- Cluster needs assessment should occur early in the school year to allow schools to work immediately toward short-term action plans, in addition to engaging in long-term action planning for the following school year.
- Most schools are interested in building internal capacity to support all students, as opposed to creating shared programs for low-incidence, high-need disabilities.

Model Demonstration Schools

Accomplishments:

- School selection for 2015-16: Eleven schools that had participated in the MCPSA's Special Education Capacity Building Project in 2014-15, funded by a grant from the MA DESE, continued as Model Demonstration Schools (MDS), and two new schools joined the program (13 schools total).
- On-site coaching: Each MDS school received 3-5 half-day, intensive, on-site coaching sessions with a professional consultant selected based on her or his expertise in the area of each school's self-identified area of priority improvement. Coaches worked with cross-functional teams at each school toward goals to build schools' capacity to support all students, including students with disabilities and/or ELLs with effective structures, systems, and practices.
- MDS dissemination: Most of the MDS school teams presented their work with their colleagues at the spring SpEd Directors Community of Practice meeting. MDS work focused on topics such as: Designing/implementing school-wide behavior systems and supports; Creating systems to use data to inform student placement in Tier 2 interventions; Developing differentiated instructional strategies for elementary level reading and consistent instructional practices for elementary level writing; Codifying practices for Student Support Teams and RTI Model; Developing systems to conduct Functional Behavior Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans; Strengthening Student Support Team systems for Tier 1 interventions; Refining and codifying Tier 1, 2, and 3 structures, systems, and practices.
- MDS Materials developed are archived in the online MCPSA Charter Knowledge Center for use by all members. These schools will additionally share their exemplary practices at future CoP meetings, statewide professional development sessions, and school visits.
- School selection for 2016-17: All 13 schools from 2015-16 elected to continue as participants. Five new schools were selected through a structured and highly competitive application process (18 schools total in 2016-17)
- Sample participant quotes (from UMass evaluation team case studies):
 - “[Our MDS coach] gives a lot of feedback on the things we’re working on. We are able to use those resources and information. He has the expertise and feels like a consultant. For example, if someone is working on an FBA he is willing to look at it, give feedback, and provide concrete resources and advice.”
 - “Setting a goal and then working on it also forced teachers to sit down and work on it together. That sort of collaboration kind of gets lost in the hustle and bustle of the school day.”
 - “We had to participate in the MDS program for the past couple of years to come to this point [in reaching these goals]. I really like the Model premise. I would like this school to be a test kitchen to

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come in and see how we are doing things, and I would love to go to other schools to observe such things as positive behavior systems in their schools.”

Lessons Learned:

- It is critically important to provide a high degree of clarity to schools about program goals and activities up front.
- Quality professional development and access to expertise is appreciated, as participants would not otherwise have access.
- MDS participants appreciate the focused time this program provides for complex work, and the fact that they are held accountable through concrete action plans
- The word “Model” is confusing for some participants, and it is important to ensure schools understand that they are expected to build a model that they can share with others by examining and improving structures, systems, and practices that support all students, including students with disabilities and/or ELLs.

Statewide Professional Development

Accomplishments:

- Overall number of charter school participants in statewide PD sessions: 405
- Overall number of participating charter schools/charter networks in statewide PD sessions: 58
- Statewide workshops available to employees at all member and Horace Mann charter schools:
 - September 17: Webinar on Updated Physical Restraint Regulations: How should charter schools prepare? (prepared for MCPSA by Krokidas & Bluestein, LLP)
Charter school participants: 98; Participating charter schools/charter networks: 47
 - November 18: Creating and Implementing School-wide Behavior Supports by Dr. Sheldon Loman of Portland State University
Charter school participants: 59; Participating charter schools/charter networks: 24
 - January 20: Supporting Students with Social-Emotional Needs: Integrating Behavior Intervention Plans and Accommodations into Classroom Structures by Dr. Sheldon Loman of Portland State University
Charter school participants: 81; Participating charter schools/charter networks: 26
 - February 22 and March 18: Unpacking an Effective Response-to-Intervention (RTI) Program (school visit at Lawrence Family Development Charter School)
Charter school participants: 34; Participating charter schools/charter networks: 20
 - March 16: Models for Inclusion and Differentiated Instruction by Adam Hickey and Ariel Martin-Cone of Landmark Outreach
Charter school participants: 54; Participating charter schools/charter networks: 20
 - April 6: Addressing Individual Student Needs Within School-wide Systems for Students Needing Extensive Supports in Inclusive Classrooms by Dr. Sheldon Loman of Portland State University
Charter school participants: 47; Participating charter schools/charter networks: 18
 - June 9: Student-Driven Secondary Transition Planning (joint workshop with DESE)
Charter school participants: 32; Participating charter schools/charter networks: 16

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- Sample participant quotes (from UMass evaluation team case studies and end of training evaluation forms):
 - “We’ve received a lot of support from the Association, mainly through the expertise of the people they were bringing in to provide training. Plus there were some phenomenal PD trainings. They offer these trainings free of charge. That’s huge.”
 - In response to “What influenced your decision to attend today’s meeting”：“The need to learn a better way to do my job.”
 - "I appreciate seeing some of the examples and doing the exercises as a group; I like being able to leave with resources."
 - "I have been working within the realm of special education for a while now and the detailed information given today opened my mind up to a completely different perspective of how my students learn."

Lessons Learned:

- Quality professional development is appreciated, as participants would not otherwise have access.
- We can provide even more opportunities for schools to network with one another during sessions.

Communities of Practice

Accomplishments:

- Overall number of charter school participants in CoP meetings: 184
- Overall number of participating charter schools/charter networks in CoP meetings: 55
- Community of Practice (CoP) meetings available to employees at all member charter schools:
 - October 7: Principals & Heads of School Annual Meeting: Innovating Towards Excellence
Priority topics: teacher retention and compensation, alternative assessment practices, college completion, personalized learning, professional culture, school culture
 - October 27, April 13: Deans of Students CoP meetings
Priority topics: supporting students’ social-emotional learning, reducing suspension rates through disciplinary practices that are aligned with school culture, restorative justice practices, positive behavioral supports and interventions
 - December 3, March 30: ELL Directors/Coordinators CoP meetings
Priority topics: full inclusion instruction for ELLs, aligning ESL curriculum and instruction with core academic content, understanding DESE guidelines for English language education, building teacher capacity to support ELLs
 - November 13, June 14: Special Education Directors/Coordinators CoP meetings
Priority topics: Response-to-Intervention programs, collaboration and co-teaching, supporting students’ social-emotional learning and mental health
- Sample participant quotes (from UMass evaluation team case studies and end of training evaluation forms):
 - “Right now I can send a general question, for instance on transition or SPED, I ask Laura or Nicole, they send it out to the network. People respond back to Laura or Nicole. They then send responses, but only to the person who asked the question. It’s very helpful to be able to ask Laura and others quick questions.”

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- "I feel like I have an open dialogue with [MassCS-CAN staff]. They have always been receptive to hearing ideas. It's been a nice experience working with them. It's been a collaborative process. They've taken my feedback seriously."
- "Both trainings were excellent! I will follow up by email to see about bringing this to my school and teachers!"
- "Great networking and brainstorming."
- "I felt less isolated knowing other schools are having similar struggles."
- "As a newcomer to MA, I appreciate learning the state's ELL lingo and interacting with other ELL colleagues."
- "[The presenter] was great - inspiring me to get back to my teachers and get them pumped up for more successful SEI."
- "I felt like we accomplished a lot and I never felt like my time was being wasted."
- "I made valuable connections with multiple professionals."
- "I loved the way [the presenter] broke down ALL the steps in the RTI process. It helped me realize where we're struggling."
- "It was awesome to hear about the outcomes tied to PBIS techniques."
- "Both trainings were excellent! I will follow up by email to see about bringing this to my school and teachers!"
- "Great networking and brainstorming"
- "I felt less isolated knowing other schools are having similar struggles"
- "As a newcomer to MA, I appreciate learning the state's ELL lingo and interacting with other ELL colleagues."
- "Leslie was great inspiring me to get back to my teachers and get them pumped up for more successful SEI."
- "I felt like we accomplished a lot and I never felt like my time was being wasted."
- "I made valuable connections with multiple professionals."
- "I loved the way Marcie broke down ALL the steps in the RTI process. It helped me realize where we're struggling." "It was awesome to hear about the outcomes tied to PBIS techniques."

Lessons Learned:

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- We can provide even more opportunities for schools to network with one another during sessions.

MCPSA Specialist Network

Accomplishments:

- Created online platform to be accessible at www.MCPSASpecialistNetwork.org and through MCPSA website
- Solicited individual specialists and agencies recommended by charter school leaders in Boston/Cambridge and western MA to join the Specialist Network

Pilot scheduled for September 2016

Lessons Learned:

- Significant interest among charter school leaders for this type of resource.
- Significant interest among invited specialists and agencies to join.

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- Original plan to use NYC Special Education Collaborative platform concept not viable for MA charter school needs.

Excerpts from Three Sample Case Studies: Year 1 Evaluation Team Findings

The Center for Educational Policy at UMass Amherst, under the direction of Dr. Sharon Rallis, conducted MassCS-CAN program evaluation with a developmental approach. The evaluation team reviewed program documents (e.g., completed participant feedback forms, attendance records, meeting notes), and met several times with the MCPSA team to check their interpretation of these artifacts and gather additional qualitative data. In addition, the evaluation team independently conducted six case studies of schools that participated in a cluster working group, and/or as a model demonstration school using school visits and interviews to collect qualitative data.

The team presented the following overall positive gains by schools in the MassCS-CAN program:

- professional development,
- opportunity to network with peers,
- learning from job-alike colleagues,
- time off-site for quality interaction,
- being held accountable through action plans,
- access to expertise,
- experience of receiving actionable feedback, and
- the potential to be a Model for other schools.

Some of these gains may be more directly measurable than others, but each of the identified areas of gain may contribute to substantial practice change at the school and thus eventually affect student outcomes. At this point in the program development, the team is not comfortable attributing change in student outcomes to programmatic activities, as these are in various stages of development. However, because these are high-leverage practice changes supported by evidence, gains at these schools are likely to positively support student learning.

Sizer School

Gains: Concrete resources and advice; Management Plan; Functional Behavioral Analysis Tools; Behavior Support Plan; PD opportunities off-site; Functional Behavioral Analysis specific training; PBIS manual for use in school; Improved Student Support Team Capacity

Sizer School has benefitted from the Model Demonstration School program component through the professional development provided. Staff members have been able to jointly collaborate and plan to address schoolwide behavioral needs through meeting in regularly planned out sessions around an identified goal. Some of these meetings have been off-site, which allows uninterrupted planning time. Planning from these meetings have had follow-through because of built-in opportunities for accountability, both to the program and the coach. Beyond providing a structure and opportunity for these conversations, concrete resources and advice to inform these conversations has been critical: “Sheldon gives a lot of feedback on the things we’re working on. We are able to use those resources and information. He has the expertise and feels like a consultant. For example, if someone is working on an FBA, he is willing to look at it, give feedback, and provide concrete resources and advice.” Another participant stated: “I use Sheldon’s stuff because it is practical – I can use it right away.”

Sizer School emphasizes that while they had identified behavior as a key goal in their improvement plans, the facilitation by the coach allowed them to focus on tools that were likely to help within the context of the school. Other more immediate effects included: changing their handling of behavioral issues because of the process; and

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contracting a school psychologist to help with behavior. Sizer emphasized that working with MassCS-CAN provided facilitation and allocated appropriate time to work on these goals.

Boston Collegiate Charter School

Gains: Awareness of Language Based Disabilities in student body; Interactive professional development for all Special Education teachers with representation from other content areas; Humanizing presentation of experience of students with Language based disabilities; Access to relevant materials; Supportive Network through Lina and Nicole; Practical strategies for teachers in classrooms; Networking to other charters by them coming to their PD; Actionable “look-fors” in classroom teaching to inform practice; PD above and beyond normal planned staff development; Possibly, change in classroom practice (referenced in interviews, although not observed by evaluators).

BCCS has gained an understanding about the needs of some of the students in their school, with whom they were less familiar in the past, that is, students with language-based disabilities. While this area of focus was different than the area of focus that this year’s school leaders had anticipated, they recognized the pressing need within the school to address this goal. The initial chosen goal was to create a sub-separate program to meet the needs of incoming students with Autism. By joining the MDS program, the school was provided with a coach, Caitlin Parker, who organized PD around Language Based Disabilities for the lower school at BCCS.

South Shore Charter Public School

Gains: Strategies for tier 1 and 2 supports within Response to Intervention (RTI); Knowledge and strategies for implementing Universal Designs for Learning (UDL); Opportunity, facilitation, and space to discuss necessary issues in the school; Restructured Student Support Team; Access to expertise and resources; Access to professional development; Opportunity to focus on a specific goal identified as relevant to multiple school needs; Potentially, fewer students with less intensive needs utilizing special education services.

South Shore School acknowledges that they have received much support from the association through the MDS program. While initially reluctant to join, they especially value access to expertise and opportunities to receive high quality professional development that they would likely not have been able to access without Association support. Interview data support that this program provided time, opportunity, space, and expertise that would have not been available to the school without the support of the Association. A participant, when asked what was the most beneficial aspect of the program, responded: “Setting a goal and then working on it – also, it forced teachers to sit down and work on it together. That sort of collaboration kind of gets lost in the hustle and bustle of the school day.” Also, this school highlighted that they feel like they could lead or set a model for these strategies for other schools, through serving as a “test kitchen.”

This school operates a full inclusion model for serving students with special education needs at all levels – a mission that provides some unique challenges from schools that follow the more traditional models of pull-out and sub-separate classrooms for higher needs special education services. The access through the coach to Universal Designs for Learning (UDL) expertise as well as solidifying tier 1 and 2 supports for their Response to Intervention (RTI) teams has been applicable to improving educational access for students of all intensities of need level. In addition, RTI has likely reduced the number of students “fast tracked” into special education services by helping teachers make adjustments to classroom practices to better serve these students before reaching the threshold for special education services. Use of RTI provides the school with more capacity to serve those with more intensive needs, by not over-utilizing resources for students with less intensive or minimal needs.