

## Coventry Public Schools

### Goals: 2021-2022 School Year

By: Beth Giller, Director of Pupil and Staff Support Services

**1. Identify, define, and measure the critical skills and attributes that are required for success and align systems to continuously improve student performance and achievement.**

- In collaboration with district specialists and building administrators, disaggregate the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC) data to inform tiered instruction, more specifically types and frequency of interventions, pacing, and pedagogy.

During my tenure as Director of Pupil and Staff Support Services, there has been continuous collaboration among the Director of Teaching and Learning, building administrators, teachers, district specialists and myself to reduce the achievement gap between high needs students and typical peers as measured by SBAC. A couple of years ago, an area identified in need of refinement was to determine the extent to which there is a correlation between intervention services, classroom support, and a student's IEP goals, as goals are written in specific areas in need of improvement. Noting this, and knowing the importance of maximizing the use of instructional time, IEP goals are now aligned with the Connecticut Core Standards, and intervention services that students receive are aligned with both.

There are several types of standardized and formative assessments, as well as checklists and observations used as data points in special education. SBAC data is one of those data points. For the most part, students' programming is the result of evaluations, assessments, and progress monitoring indicators on Individual Education Plans (IEP) goals and objectives. In addition to that quantifiable data, the benefit of a small district allows educators to learn and understand individual student's stories: strengths, challenges, and differing abilities.

SBAC data offers a different lens through which to view students' profiles. Receiving this data in the summer offers the opportunity to review the prior year's students' progress based on the type of interventions and services each student received. This look back, coupled with the SBAC data, is then used to make any scheduling adjustments for the upcoming year, whether it is type of intervention, frequency of interventions, pacing, and/or pedagogy. This year, for example, given the unique needs of students, our district specialists developed hybrid math classes at the middle school. Students were in mathematics class for exposure to grade level content and concepts, and then grouped for practice at independent ability levels to support IEP goal work. This aligns with best practices of exposure for all to grade level curriculum, while practicing at an independent level to ensure growth.

- Prioritize and address the action steps in the Special Education Plan developed in

response to the areas of opportunity identified in the District Management Group (DMG) study with a singular focus on support for students with intensive needs.

Several years ago Coventry contracted with the District Management Group (DMG) to engage in a comprehensive review of our practices and procedures. Since then, a priority for Coventry Public Schools has been to maximize the use of all our resources. To support the needs of our students and to comply with the legal requirements under IDEA, a priority for the PSSS department has been the effective use of our staff. We continue to look systematically at special education resources and the delivery model, continually assessing if there is more to be done to build on the great services we have and to maximize those resources to reduce expenses.

One focus area this year was the MapHabit's pilot. MapHabit is a visual mapping system built to promote independence. The innovative application utilizes a system of personalized maps that outline step-by-step instructions to reinforce routine habits and help individuals accomplish tasks independently. The MapHabit platform utilizes a patented visual mapping system with smart devices to improve cognition and reinforce routine habits.

In this pilot, students, with the assistance of school personnel, will utilize the MapHabit technology to gain independence with key tasks in the school environment. Tasks targeted will be chosen specifically for a student and will be individualized to meet their exact needs. One clear goal of the special education department is to foster as much independence as possible for every child in the district. This pilot project involves five CGS students.

Case managers and BCBA's continue to collaborate to determine the extent to which a 1:1 student support could shift to a 1:2 (teacher:student) student support. A checklist reviewed three times a year gauges students' independence level and the extent to which support could be faded. This work will continue moving forward as the new IEP platform requires specificity for the student's skills that are in need of adult support. The goal is to provide students with the skills and strategies to increase the settings and tasks in which students can be confident in their ability to be independent.

The needs of our students identified for special services are closely monitored for resource allocation purposes. PSSS staff play an integral role in the development of class groupings K-12 to ensure our students' needs are well supported. This school year, in light of new registrations early in the school year, there were several shifts in special education positions during the school year, both certified and noncertified staff. Included in the shifts this year was a special education position reallocated from CGS to CNH which provided the opportunity to shift a shared CNH/CHS special education teacher to CHS full time due to students' needs. In addition, our CNH Speech Language Pathologist helped support the high needs at GHR this year. Finally, para-educators have shifted within and among buildings due to the shifts in students' needs. PSSS has fostered the mindset that while we have building teams, PSSS staff is one great team, where flexibility is key to ensure students' success.

In collaboration with building principals, transition plans are refined annually for students transitioning, Pre-K to K, Grades 2 to 3, 5 to 6, and 8 to 9. This is critical for students' continued success, as supports and services do differ from one level to the next. Classroom groupings are determined by considering all of the factors that affect scheduling, and for special education, include grouping students by type and amount of support needed and the possibility of 1:2 or 1:3 student support in order to maximize the use of all resources.

- Prepare for the large-scale change from Frontline's IEP/504 Platform to the Connecticut Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS) for effective full implementation July 1, 2022.

“The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) entered into a partnership with the Public Consulting Group (PCG) to support its goals and vision of developing a comprehensive statewide Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS) to make available to all of its local school districts July 1, 2022. CT-SEDS adaptive electronic individual education program (IEP) document is being designed to improve format and flow of information with intuitive, easy to use displays. The new system will include a parent portal for families to access their student's IEP.”

This is a significant change for the PSSS department. To support this transition from Frontline IEP/504 Direct to the CT-SEDS platform, the Bureau of Special Education Director, Bryan Klimkiwicz, holds weekly hour-long meetings to update directors on progress for implementation July 1, 2022. Initially, these meetings were held to update directors on progress. Over the past couple of months the meetings have shifted to IEP Preview sessions, reviewing one component of the IEP each week, more specifically reviewing the changes in formatting and new terminology that coincides with the new document.

During this year, all certified PSSS staff participated in eight 90 minute sessions for CSDE IEP Quality Training. While the trainings were referenced as an IEP level 101 course, the training sessions provided opportunities for case managers to compare the way in which they currently draft IEPs. Currently, Frontline houses drop down choices for several sections of the IEP: goals, objectives, and accommodations. In CT-SEDS the only drop down will be the Connecticut Core Standards. This will provide the opportunity for case managers and service providers to truly individualize goals, objectives, and accommodations.

Special Education Data Application and Collection (SEDAC) system data managers have also participated in weekly, one hour information sessions with staff from the CSDE Performance Office. These sessions are intended to keep data managers informed on critical steps for the transition to CT-SEDS. One of these critical tasks is the October 1, 2022 Child Count submission. Normally this is completed in the Fall; however, it has been rescheduled for Spring 2022. The initial submission was due May 13, 2022; with the final submission due no later than June 15, 2022. The CSDE has set a goal to have 50-70% of student records at a status code of 1 by May 13<sup>th</sup>;

Coventry will exceed the target by having 87% of student records at a status code of 1. Status code 1 signifies data reported by the district met all CSDE requirements.

CT-SEDS platform opens July 1, 2022. Depending on district size and the population of students who have an IEP, the CSDE allocated a determined number of seats for Expert Trainers in each district. Coventry has been allocated 10 Expert CT-SEDS Trainers. The trainers receive a \$500 stipend from the CSDE and are responsible for attending a 4-hour training session between July 5 and September 1, 2022. These expert trainers will have access to a library of resources and a direct contact line with CT-SEDS/PCG representatives for assistance needed. The expert trainers will familiarize themselves with the self-guided resources to support staff in IEP development. As this is a Train-the-Trainer model, these Expert Trainers will be responsible to train all PSSS in IEPs and 504s. CT-SEDS training and implementation is a priority area for PSSS moving forward.

The transition from Frontline to CT-SEDS requires data transfers (IEPs, PPT documents in the document repository, and contact logs). Frontline has agreed to download three years of data (IEP PDFs and contents from the document repository) that our Technology Department will then upload to CT-SEDS. Any download of information beyond three years will be the district's responsibility. In addition, inactive files will not be part of Frontline's download. PSSS and the Technology Department have been meeting monthly to develop workflows to ensure we have access to all of the information needed. It has been confirmed that Frontline's plug-in to PowerSchool will remain in effect with our membership, so general education staff will have access to existing IEPs/504s.

IEPs resulting from Planning and Placement Team (PPTs) meetings from July 1, 2022 forward will be developed in CT-SEDS. Given that staff will not have training on CT-SEDS until summer/early fall, PPTs scheduled for September and October have been moved back to this spring.

Coventry was selected to participate in the CT-SEDS 504 Pilot program in April. Four 504 Accommodation Plan case managers participated in this pilot, providing them with direct access to CT-SEDS. The purpose of the pilot is to provide PCG with feedback on the workflow within the system. Participation in the pilot was voluntary. Given that our school counselors are 504 case managers and their time is usurped at the beginning of the school year by new registrants' scheduling, we were eager to participate to become familiar with the platform in advance. This gave this team a jumpstart on knowing how to maneuver the CT-SEDS system, so their time can be devoted to student scheduling upon return to school.

- Continue the three year School Improvement Plan for Coventry Academy that aligns with National Alternative Educational Association (NAEA) Fifteen Research-Based Practices for Effective Alternative Education Programs to ensure increased student engagement and improved attendance as measured by attendance and Coventry Academy graduation rate.

Students in alternative education programs often have a history of school avoidance and/or lack of engagement in their education. Given this, the priority is to combat this with flexibility, high interest curricular units, and fostering positive relationships. It is also important to establish clear expectations for students: social, emotional, academic, and behavioral.

Of utmost importance are the mentor/mentee relationships fostered at Coventry Academy. The Coventry Academy Team ensures that all students have an adult member with whom they meet weekly to develop and review both short and long term goals. Goals may focus on managing emotions and/or behaviors, or meeting percentages for completion of GradPoint classes. Student's goals are individualized, agreed upon, and revisited to identify goal progress, successes and/or barriers to achievement.

Implementation of clear and consistent expectations for students' behavior and academics is a continuous goal of the Academy Team. In collaboration with the high school administration, the Team developed Behavior Protocols to discern between those behaviors to be managed by the Academy Team and those that rose to the level of administration intervention. Additionally, students are not only enrolled in Coventry Academy classes, but they are also enrolled in GradPoint classes, and several students take classes at the high school. This requires effective management and organization throughout every day. The Team has also established recommendations for GradPoint course completion each quarter. Flexible scheduling also provides students with the prospect to take advantage of vocational opportunities. These practices align with strategies to foster student engagement and attendance at school.

A review of attendance expectations and protocols was an area of focus this year as well. While the pandemic resulted in challenges for many students and families, for those students who thrive on structures, consistency, and connection, it became overwhelming. Mentors review attendance as a routine agenda item during weekly meetings, establishing goals as warranted. The Academy Team is in close contact with parents and guardians to keep all apprised of progress or lack thereof as a result of poor attendance.

Not only does the Academy Team practice the Best Practices of Alternative Education Programs, they also hold strong beliefs in the program and the students. The Team realizes the importance of recognizing and celebrating the small wins, attendance and engagement being among those.

- Network with Local Education Agencies (LEA) with the intention of attracting out-of-district students to Coventry's specialized programs.

Coventry's specialized programs include our Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Program for students with intensive needs. In addition, Coventry Academy is an alternative high school for students who do not thrive in a traditional high school setting. Finally, our 18-22 Transition Program develops students functional life skills

and provides vocational opportunities for students requiring additional support after high school.

As a member of the Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education (ConnCASE), a regional group of Directors of Special Education, I have regular opportunities to network with LEAs. Requests for programming are often disseminated in our group directors' email. Coventry responded to several to discuss programming, but transportation was a barrier this year. Transportation companies have been understaffed throughout this past year, resulting in a challenging barrier for welcoming tuition students from out of district. Coventry currently has one tuition student for whom we provide programming.

Not only can we market our programs to LEAs, but developing these programs in-district has provided us with the opportunity to have students placed in Private Special Education Program (APSEP) students return to their community for their education. The *Least Restrictive Environment* (LRE) is a vital component in the development of a child's IEP and influences where a child spends his or her time at school, how services are provided, and the relationships the child develops within the school and community. This year we have had students move into Coventry who had been educated in an APSEP as agreed upon by their former district. During transition into Coventry PPTs, Teams review and discuss programming needs, progress, and potential outcomes and if appropriate, develop a transition plan to transfer the student from the APSEP into district. Not only is this a financial benefit to the district, but is most beneficial to the student being educated.

Finally, and to note, PSSS has fielded several calls this year from families interested in moving to Coventry due to the reputation of our special education programming. This has resulted in new student registrations, and has potentially reduced the possibilities of tuition students.

- Explore opportunities for students in our 18-22 year old program to attend college courses.

Coventry's Transition Program not only supports students 18-22, but high school students whose transition goals and objectives are best serviced by this program. Given the wide range of ages, abilities and interests, we continue to explore opportunities that establish high expectations for life after Coventry education. Coventry's 18-22 Transition Lead Teacher continues to explore college opportunities for students in our 18-22 Transition Program.

Manchester Community College's opportunities for students ages 18-22 are well suited for Coventry students for multiple reasons: tuition, financial aid, and the proximity to Coventry. MCC's annual Transitioning to College for Students with Disabilities event (webinar this year) occurred March 30 at CHS. Attendees included 22 students, 6 teachers and 2 parents. MCC provided participants with valuable information to assist students with disabilities when entering

college. Currently, one of our students plans to attend MCC in the fall. The intent is for this student to go to MCC part-time and attend Coventry's Transition program. Connections have been made with Goodwin College. Now that Goodwin has transitioned to a university status, the cost of tuition has become a barrier.

Our Transition Coordinator has assisted one family with applications to Mitchell College (New London, CT) and Landmark College (Putney, Vermont). Staff attended a webinar with Landmark College in October; their supports and services are wide and varied for students with disabilities.

On Monday, April 25 Patricia Malone Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor 2 with Level Up Aging and Disability Services through the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services provided our Juniors and Seniors with information regarding the services they provide for students with IEP and 504's during their senior year and after graduation. All special education case managers and guidance counselors were aware in advance for any students to also be included that may benefit from the services. Patricia supplied each junior student that has an IEP with an application and release of information requests to apply for BRS. She informed the seniors that they are able to contact adult services and gave them each a business card with the appropriate number to call.

Coventry will continue to explore opportunities for students in our 18-22 program to attend college courses. In addition, Coventry will assist students in expanding and developing their skills and shifting their dispositions, so they are open to the endless possibilities that await them.

- Develop a comprehensive plan to manage and monitor the ARP IDEA funds to intertwine resources and build a functional plan with a management timeline.

Pupil Services receives Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) grants from the federal government annually. In order to receive these grants, PSSS develops goals and activities that support our district's current needs. As a result of the COVID pandemic, the Connecticut State Department of Education and the federal government have provided districts with the opportunity to obtain additional funding. This year, not only did we submit grant applications for IDEA Part B, applications were submitted and approved for American Rescue (ARP) IDEA, as well as three grants under Special Education Activities. The ARP IDEA grant money is designated to support students with IEPs and for special populations that are identified as being significantly impacted by COVID -19.

After exploring several viable options worthy of this grant funding, it was determined that our district goal for this grant would be to, *Expand the instructional space of Coventry Academy to support all students in need of secondary alternative education.* The restructuring of Coventry Academy continues to evolve as outlined in the Coventry Academy School Improvement Plan. Due to the structures in place and the individualized programming including hybrid programming with Coventry High School classes, students experience success, have improved their attendance and are

more engaged in school. The only barrier to providing opportunities for more students, is the limited space of the current facility. This grant funding as approved will provide an additional space of 700 square feet in order to establish three distinct instructional spaces providing increased opportunities for students' access to programming that support individual needs.

CPS Facilities department has the lead on the building construction. Collaborative planning meetings with administration and the Coventry Academy team have guided the implementation plan. The functional plan moving forward is aligned with the ARP IDEA's grant's written objectives which include: continue to refine outreach protocols for truant and/or chronically absent students to re-engage students in school, continue curriculum revisions in core classes and counseling sessions to meet the unique needs of the alternative education population, and develop a formal transition planning process to include entrance meetings to review program expectations and promote student goal-setting.

## **2. Maintain and promote a positive and respectful learning community.**

- Provide guidance and support to the (new) District-wide Social Worker to revise and refine scheduling and job responsibilities as student and family needs shift throughout the year.

As a result of Coventry's former district-wide social worker relocating last summer, this goal was reinstated to provide guidance and support to the new district-wide social worker. Bi-weekly meetings were held with the social worker to review scheduling, attendance, counseling caseloads, and mentorships. Many of the responsibilities of this position correlated with her prior non-school experiences and some responsibilities requiring new learning.

Responsibilities of school social workers are many and due to students' ages/grade levels, practices vary from one building level to the next. Given that this is a fluid position, meaning the extent of specific student/building support may vary throughout the course of the year, it is important to have some consistency to foster connections with key staff.

The district wide social worker accepted a position mid-year in which she would be solely responsible for one school. The need for connections is strong among educators and will be considered when the role of this position is redefined. Discussions continue regarding the extent to which the role and responsibilities of this position could shift to support students and staff.

- In collaboration with building administrators, provide structures for related services staff to review and disaggregate the data from the results of the Aperture Education CASEL-aligned social and emotional learning system to inform Coventry's tiered interventions for social and emotional learning.

New legislation enacted July 1, 2021 required the Connecticut State Department of



Education to provide and assist public school districts in administering a social emotional learning screener to students for this school year. CSDE partnered with Aperture to provide a strengths based screening system aligned with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning (CASEL) at no cost to districts. As noted on Aperture's website, "Directly aligned to the CASEL™ framework, the DESSA is a nationally standardized, strength-based behavior rating scale that assesses students' social and emotional competence with editions that support students K-12. . . The DESSA provides a common lens and language for crafting an SEL program that involves educators, parents, and students. The DESSA is commonly used to inform the delivery of SEL at Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3. . . The DESSA is entirely strength-based; meaning that the items query positive behaviors (e.g., get along with others) rather than maladaptive ones (e.g., annoy others). For each behavior, the rater (a teacher or parent) is asked to indicate on a five-point scale how often the student engaged in that behavior over the past four weeks."

Upon initial introduction to the Aperture system and the Devereaux Students' Strengths Assessment (DESSA), Coventry applied for participation in the state's first cohort to implement this screener. Coventry was in the first cohort of 25 districts to administer the DESSA with the purpose of supporting our students in social emotional learning and development. The CASEL competencies include, self-awareness, self management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, social awareness, goal directed behavior, personal responsibility, and optimistic thinking.

A district team and school based teams were identified. Staff members in need of training were identified and participated in numerous training sessions to deepen their understanding of the screening's purpose, how to administer and review the data. K-8 teachers completed the 8 question screening of students and students in Grades 9-12 completed the self-inventory. Students who scored in the red range were administered the full DESSA. To note, across the district, there were very few students who scored in the red range who were not already in informal or formal counseling with the school social worker or school psychologist. In this instance, the results informed the counselors of targeted areas identified by the DESSA administration. For those students who were not previously identified as needing support, tiered services were explored and provided if deemed appropriate.

Structures for related services staff and building DESSA leadership teams to review and disaggregate the data included time during professional development days, faculty meetings, and additional collaboration meetings. Building teams developed Action Plans to document and address students' needs as a result of the comprehensive review. At each level lessons were created for whole school implementation based on the identified area of weakness. For example, at GHR areas of weaknesses identified included "goal directed behavior" and "personal responsibility". The Aperture system includes lessons and resources for easy access for Coventry's related services team to review and revise to tailor to our students.

At the secondary level, data collected was analyzed by school teams to determine Tier I - Whole School Advisory lessons and which students were in need of a boost

for an 8 - 10 week Tier II support. Again this data informed counseling goals for students already receiving counseling services through a 504 plan or IEP.

- Increase opportunities for Coventry families to engage in community networking and access school supports during *Family Outreach Saturdays*.

ARP ESSR funding, Coventry's Priority 2: Family and Community Connections, supported our Family Outreach Saturdays. Connecticut's ARP ESSR Guidance specifically identified that schools, families and communities are interdependent and have a stake in students' wellbeing. The purpose of this goal was to strengthen the school-family-community partnership. The intent of programming was to engage families in family-school activities while simultaneously providing information and access to supports related to parenting. Coventry families were surveyed in the fall to elicit interests for these family activities.

All CPS families were invited to participate as flyers were e-blasted multiple times for each session. Schools' newsletters also advertised the Family Outreach Saturdays. Feedback was solicited from parents during the events. Those who attended thought the events were well organized, they had a great time, and they were surprised that there were not more families in attendance.

The activities scheduled in the fall, Fall Crafts and Yoga & Zumba were well attended, primarily by elementary families. Coventry Public School's Literacy Breakfast and Game Day were held in the winter. Many *Game Day* registrants chose to attend the Coventry's Girls' Basketball Team Final Division game at Mohegan Sun, resulting in lower attendance than expected. Disappointing, but understandable. Nature Walk at the Riverview Trail led by Eric Thomas, *Protected Spaces Stewardship Subcommittee*, Coventry, was well received by the group who attended as the tour guide is quite knowledgeable and entertaining. Two of the scheduled Saturdays were postponed due to inclement weather.

The onset of spring is busy. Knowing this we shifted to evening presentations in hopes of enticing parents to come out in the early evening. The *Youth Trends in Substance Abuse* sponsored by Parent Partnerships was an excellent evening presentation; unfortunately, it was not well attended. If the presentation makes a difference in one life it is worth holding. There are two remaining sessions as of this writing: A Mindful Morning, May 21, and an evening Social Emotional Learning presentation with Kate Fields.

- Continue the work of the District Attendance Committee to explore and identify research based tiered strategies to implement at the building levels to increase student engagement and to reduce chronic student absenteeism and work toward the state target of 10%.

*Across the country, more than 8 million students are missing so many days of school that they are academically at risk. Chronic absence — missing 10 percent or more of school days due to absence for any reason—excused, unexcused absences and*

*suspensions, can translate into students having difficulty learning to read by the third-grade, achieving in middle school, and graduating from high school. Data on chronic absence and lack of participation in school are clear indicators of where to invest outreach and support and address gaps in implementing a comprehensive tiered approach to improving student attendance and engagement (attendance works.org).*

Coventry Public Schools has taken a systemic approach to addressing chronic absenteeism through the work of our District-wide Attendance Committee. Committee members attend monthly CSDE Student Attendance and Engagement Community of Practice Meetings co-sponsored by Attendance Works and State Education Resource Center (SERC). Research based practices, coupled with practical application of data analysis provides our team with valuable next steps in addressing students' chronic absenteeism.

Understanding that all members of our learning community have the opportunity to make a difference in the life of a student, an Attendance Presentation was shared at the building levels during the first two days of professional development. Simple strategies such as greeting students as they walk in class, making eye contact and fostering connections through common interests can make a difference in students' level of engagement and attendance in school.

In addition, the Attendance Team continues to make refinements to the Chronic Absenteeism Protocols. Attendance codes are noted in PowerSchool, so that teachers know if their current students were truant or chronically absent in the year prior. Unfortunately, attendance patterns repeat themselves if interventions are not implemented and barriers to attending school are identified.

As school attendance has been identified as a state and national concern, school based Attendance Teams have been diligent in addressing attendance concerns this year. Tiered interventions are well established and followed. Interventions include phone calls, emails, letters, parent meetings, home visits, school mentors, and 504 Accommodation and PPT meetings. All 504 and PPT meeting agendas now include discussion of attendance. Technology department staff are key members of the district Attendance Committee. While other members of the committee brainstorm 'what' we could do to refine our attendance processes, the technology team identifies 'how' we can make that happen. This collaboration also guided us to the PowerSchool Attendance Monitor Plug-in, which is currently being piloted at the high school.

In addition, Coventry has partnered with EASTCONN for Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) training. LEAP training builds on home visits that are already happening in the district and are *focused on families' strengths and capabilities, as well as their aspirations for their child. LEAP home visits are voluntary, scheduled opportunities for a school district member or partner to go, in pairs, to the home of a student with prior chronic absence to meet with a parent or guardian for the purpose of strengthening the school-family relationship in a positive and relational manner. The visitors are there to learn from families, not to enforce attendance policies*

or sanctions.

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Chronic-Absence/TalkTuesday/Talk-Tuesday-June-29-CT-Data-and-LEAP.pdf>).

Attendance data will be reviewed and analyzed this summer to identify students/families with whom a visit would be mutually beneficial. LEAP training is scheduled and should put us in a good position to engage in this variation of home visits.

Based on information from support staff, we believe we are seeing a decrease in chronic absenteeism, but due to the impact COVID-19 protocols have had on student attendance, it is difficult to validate this with data. Comparison in attendance from one year to the next since the onset of the pandemic, does not yield reliable results. Refinements in our monitoring students attendance will continue.

### **3. Recruit, retain and develop high quality staff at every level.**

- Using internal expertise to guide refinements in our ABA program, implement practices and procedures to ensure systemic alignment K -12.

Coventry received five years of consultation support from EASTCONN's Psychological and Behavioral Consultation Services to train and build the capacity of our staff to effectively manage our growing Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Program. This support was faded at the end of the 2020-2021 school year with the understanding that the district would seek an ABA Sustainability Assessment from EASTCONN in the 2021-2022 school year. The ABA Sustainability Assessment assessed the degree to which supports developed and overseen by EASTCONN from 2016-2021 continue to be implemented by the current staff at Coventry Public Schools. This assessment included a review of the *Autism Program Quality Indicators* (APQI: Colorado State Autism Task Force, 2016), which is a compilation of best practices in educating students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and is often used as a means of guiding quality improvement for programs serving students with ASD. The indicators include Systems Level Supports, IEP Development, Curriculum and Instruction, Review and Monitoring of Progress, Family Involvement and Support, Transition, Behavior, Teaming, and Training.

Under the leadership of our district Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) these indicators are continuously reviewed and refined to promote consistent systemic practices and procedures throughout the K-12 program. Structures have been established to provide collaboration time for the ABA team monthly. As students have transitioned through the program from one building level to the next and the team members continue to refine their skills in providing quality individualized instruction, refinements and revisits have been made throughout the year.

The ABA team started with revisiting the ABA entrance/exit criteria, embedding this into PPT agendas for discussion when appropriate. This ensures that parents are fully aware of the programming options available and most appropriate for their child. Program Books and Discrete Trial Instruction (DTI) Lesson Components are frequently monitored; this year Program Book Checklists, Prescription Sheets and data collection have been areas of focus. In addition, the Team has developed a K-12 *ABA Program Assessment Continuum* for vertical progressions of skill assessments as well as a *Student Readiness Assessment for Faded Support Checklist* to determine the extent to which adult support is needed throughout the day.

Continued areas of focus is continuous training of all personnel involved with students in our ABA program. In development is a timeline of trainings for newly hired staff to engage in prior to supporting a student directly. Our BCBA's have also been in collaboration with our technology team to identify the most efficient and effective method for electronic data tracking.

The work with EASTCONN has been invaluable. An ABA Sustainability Assessment was agreed upon during the summer with the intent of three times per year to ensure the maintenance and sustainability of best practices in ABA programming. The initial visit reviewed all *Best Practices in Educational Programming for Complex Learners*. Focus areas for a deeper dive were identified from this comprehensive review in the fall. Given this, the area of focus mid-year was training on prescription sheets. Prescription sheets are tools used by the special education teacher to guide the dosage at which a student practices a particular lesson. They also can also be used to establish clear expectations for implementing staff and as well as an accountability tool.

- Retain quality staff by providing individualized professional support, collaboration opportunities and recognition of individual efforts and successes.

PSSS welcomed several new staff members this school year; eight special education teachers and two social workers (one building level and one district-wide). New staff that start off the year in Coventry are very appreciative of Coventry's New Teacher Orientation (NTO) held the week before school starts. The NTO Committee covers all the Coventry need-to-know practices, procedures and initiatives; it is a great jumpstart for new staff.

In addition to all the professional learning opportunities staff have during professional development days and faculty meetings, the district works diligently to provide individualized support. For the new special educators, if they are scheduled to be reading and/or math interventionists, additional trainings include Fontais and Pinnell's Leveled Literacy Intervention, Orton Gillingham, Bridges, and Just Words. Coventry's Technology Coach meets individually with new teachers to review and discuss his or her technology training needs. This year, consultations with our contracted Neuropsychologist and Family and Community Engagement Specialist were offered as new staff members were supporting students with challenging

behaviors and/or situations.

New teachers are assigned a district mentor not only for Teacher Educator and Mentoring program (TEAM) and/or Durational Shortage Area Permit (DSAP) support, but for district/school based questions regarding practices and procedures. Mentors across the district have been instrumental in assisting new special educators with IEP development and PPT planning, preparation, and implementation, as well as providing the social supports that help to ensure success. New teachers have sung the praises for their mentors this year.

In collaboration with building administrator colleagues, structures have been re-established (this was a challenge during COVID) to provide collaboration opportunities for teams of teachers. As you would expect, this looks different from one building to the next, but included are either weekly or bi-weekly team meetings, special education meetings, and related services department meetings. In addition, special education staff are included in building administrators New Teacher meetings. In addition, for teachers associated with the ABA program, weekly consult time with the BCBA is ongoing.

For the first semester this year, I chose to meet with new staff either bi-weekly or once a month. In some instances, I met more frequently to review specific cases and/or procedures. This was beneficial as it fostered a trusting relationship so new staff members know they can contact me with questions or concerns any time. In addition, it provides me with direct insight as to the needs of special educators, so I can provide the support that will foster their confidence and success.

Individual efforts and successes are in the forms of phone calls, cards, and emails. Positivity emails go far to help shift mindsets when faced with challenges, but I have found the face-to-face meetings most effective. PSSS has been most fortunate this year to have great new staff on board.

- Provide differentiated professional development opportunities to para-educators.

Para-educators are valued members of our learning communities, and their roles vary across the district. Para educators provide 1:1 adult support for students with high needs, serve as classroom support to general education teachers, and serve as reading and/or math interventionists. Given this, in the beginning of the school year, para-educators have the opportunity to complete a survey to share what type of training they feel would be beneficial to effectively perform their current job responsibilities.

Para-educators were involved in many professional development opportunities at the building level throughout the year. While para-educators have only two contractual days of professional development, professional development is offered, provided the interest level, on the same days professional development is scheduled for certified staff. Offerings aligned with the survey outcomes: behavioral strategies,

technology training, building level offerings, including DESSA and the *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* book study. The personalized learning opportunities consisted of individually selected virtual learning opportunities via EASTCONN and Pennsylvania Training and Assistance Network (PaTTAN). Topics covered and completed include Confidentiality, Roles & Responsibilities, Fostering Independence, Positive Relationships, Instructional Strategies, Understanding Positive Behavior Intervention, and Understanding Behavior. In addition, TEACHCT provided in district training to para-educators to review pathways to becoming a certified teacher.

Finally, those para-educators who work in our ABA program have ongoing training from our ABA teachers and BCBA's. Routine training included, behavior supports, Program Wide Behavior Intervention Plan, fading support, EdMark, ABA Program Books, and collaborative time to review how to maximize time in the general education classrooms.