

Tier 1 Problem Solving for SWD: Case Study



All grade level teams at Sunnyville Middle School participate in weekly PLC (Professional Learning Community) meetings, with an agreed upon mission: for all students to achieve or exceed grade level expectations. Each grade level PLC includes general education teachers, ESE teachers, instructional coaches and intervention providers. Staff members share the belief that every educator is a contributing and valued team member, and that all tiered instruction and supports provided to students should be integrated and aligned.

Step 1: Problem/Goal Identification

Following the first universal screening of the school year, the 6th grade PLC met to review and discuss data related to Reading/ELA. The team understood that universal screening data would provide information regarding their students' progress toward end-of-year standards, as well as identify students who may benefit from intervention.

The first step in problem solving at the Tier 1 level is establishing the expected and current levels of performance for all of their students. This helps them identify how many of their 6th graders are at-risk versus on-track for meeting end-of-year grade-level expectations. They reviewed the table below which displays the performance for all 6th grade students who took the universal screening assessment.

Performance of All 6th Grade Students on Fall Universal Screener

	Lo %ile < 21		LoAvg %ile 21-40		Avg %ile 41-60		HiAvg %ile 61-80		Hi %ile > 80	
	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%
Overall Performance										
Growth: Reading 6+	18	4%	47	11%	91	22%	153	36%	114	27%
Instructional Area RIT Range										
Informational Text: Key Ideas and Details	32	8%	51	12%	90	21%	124	29%	126	30%
Vocabulary: Acquisition and Use	13	3%	56	13%	92	22%	147	35%	115	27%
Literary Text: Language, Craft, and Structure	16	4%	79	19%	85	20%	128	30%	115	27%
Literary Text: Key Ideas and Details	31	7%	61	14%	94	22%	125	30%	112	26%
Informational Text: Language, Craft, and Structure	21	5%	65	15%	89	21%	127	30%	121	29%

They noticed in the table showing “Overall Performance,” the cut score for “Average” or better was at or above the 41st percentile. While this seemed reasonable, they consulted the assessment’s Florida Linking Study Report to make sure that the *expected level of performance* they were establishing would accurately predict the likelihood of a student reaching Level 3 or better on the end of the year ELA test in the Spring. They found that, according to the linking study, the 54th percentile predicted a student would likely reach Level 3 on the end of the year statewide assessment. Therefore, they identified the expected level of performance as at or above the 54th percentile.

To determine the percent of students scoring at or above the 54th percentile they generated a *Student Data Sheet* report. This report is available through the district-developed data system and pulls from various sources (including FAST, universal screener, EWS data, etc.). They sorted the data using the 54th percentile as the cut score for the expected level of performance. They found that 79% of 6th grade students were on track to meet grade level expectations in the Spring.

Tier 1 Problem Solving to Improve Outcomes for SWD: Case Study

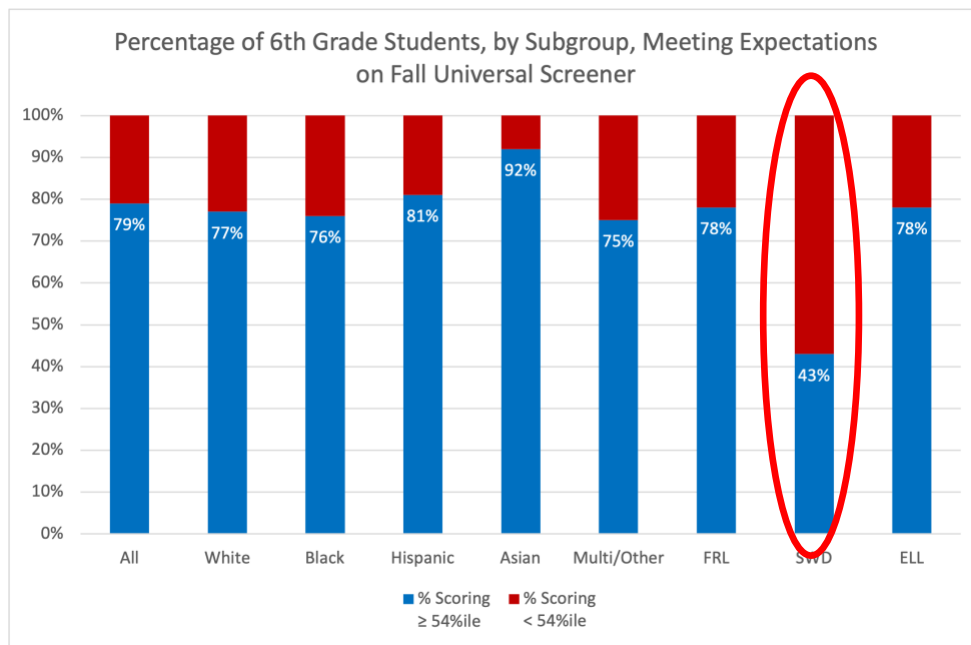
Total number of 6 th grade students	Number of students scoring at or above the 54 th ile	Percent of students scoring at or above the 54 th ile	Number of students scoring below the 54 th ile	Percent of students scoring below the 54 th ile
423	334	79%	89	21%

The 6th grade PLC was pleased to see that 79% of their students were currently meeting the expected level of performance. They continued by sorting the data several ways, looking for variability by teacher or class period, and found no significant differences. Still, measuring current levels of performance doesn't stop at the 'All Students' level. Examining performance and achievement gaps for student subgroups is a regular part of Tier 1 problem solving and allows teams to examine the degree to which Tier 1 instruction is sufficient for subgroups of students, including students with disabilities.

To accomplish this, they returned to the *Student Data Sheet* and filtered the data to determine the percent of students scoring at or above the 54th percentile, by subgroup. The data indicated that current levels of performance were fairly consistent across all measured subgroups, except for students with disabilities (SWD), of whom only 43% of students scored at or above the 54th percentile.

6th grade ELA Fall Universal Screener, by Subgroup

Subgroup	Total number of 6 th grade students in subgroup	Number of students scoring at or above 54 th ile	Percent of students scoring at or above 54 th ile	Number of students scoring below 54 th ile	Percent of students scoring below 54 th ile	Subgroup
All	423	334	79%	89	21%	All
White	257	199	77%	58	23%	White
Black	17	14	82%	3	18%	Black
Hispanic	101	81	81%	20	19%	Hispanic
Asian	28	25	89%	3	11%	Asian
Multi/Other	20	15	75%	45	25%	Multi/Other
FRL	90	70	78%	20	22%	FRL
SWD	60	26	43%	34	57%	SWD
ELL	9	7	78%	2	22%	ELL
Non-SWD	363	308	85%	55	15%	Non-SWD



To summarize, for Step 1: Problem/Goal Identification, the 6th grade PLC identified the following:

Expected Level of Performance:

Students will demonstrate grade-level comprehension, scoring at or above the 54th %ile, as measured by the universal screener.

Current Level of Performance:

43% of students met or exceeded expected level of performance,

57% of students did not meet or exceed expected level of performance,

Appropriate Tier of Problem Solving:

- Less than approximately 80% of students are meeting or exceeding expected levels of performance, continue problem solving to develop Tier 1 instructional/intervention plan.
- Approximately 80% or more of students are meeting or exceeding expected levels of performance, consider Tier 2 problem solving for students not meeting expectations.

To establish a goal for students with disabilities, the PLC considered several factors, including the number of students scoring below the expectation and how far from the expectation students had scored. They determined that increasing the percentage of students with disabilities scoring at or above expectation to at least 70% on the last assessment period at the end of the school year was ambitious but also reasonable.

Therefore, they established the following goal statement for students with disabilities:

Goal (SMART): By the end of the school year, at least 70% of students will demonstrate grade-level comprehension, scoring at or above the 54th %ile, as measured by the universal screener.

Step 2 – Problem Analysis: Why is the problem occurring?

With support from the reading coach, the 6th grade team examined the universal screening data and discussed the possible reasons why only 43% of SWDs were meeting expectations. Together they considered multiple educational domains (i.e., instruction, curriculum, environment, and learner) and generated four educated guesses (i.e., hypotheses) as to why the problem was occurring, being intentional to focus on hypotheses for which they had control (specifically the instruction, curriculum, and environment). The team considered high probability barriers that contribute to low achievement such as absenteeism and lack of high-leverage teaching practices. After generating the hypotheses, they identified what specific information they would need to gather to validate or confirm each hypothesis, and the process they would use (review, interview, observe, test).

Once the team reconvened with the gathered data, they determined the validity of each hypothesis.

The summary for each hypothesis is below:

Hypothesis #1:

Domain: Instruction Curriculum Environment Learner

Hypothesis: A lower percentage of students with disabilities are meeting grade level expectations in reading because there are not clearly established and positively stated expectations, routines, and procedures within the 6th grade ELA classrooms.

Prediction Statement: If the student learning environment includes clearly established and positively stated expectations, routines, and procedures within the 6th grade ELA classrooms, then their grade level reading performance will improve.

Assessment Method(s): Review Interview Observe Test

Specific Data to be Collected: The PBIS Coach will conduct an observation in the 6th grade ELA classrooms using the Expectations and Rules section of the [5 Essentials PBIS Classroom Practices Observation Tools](#).

Validated: Yes No

The classroom observations indicated that across all 6th grade ELA classrooms, classroom rules were defined, observable and positively stated. Additionally, classroom routines and procedures were succinct, positively stated, and prominently posted in respective locations.

Hypothesis #2:

Domain: Instruction Curriculum Environment Learner

Hypothesis: A lower percentage of students with disabilities are meeting grade level expectations in reading because they are absent from school.

Prediction Statement: If attendance improves for students with disabilities, then their grade level reading performance will improve.

Assessment Method(s): Review Interview Observe Test

Specific Data to be Collected: The 6th grade team will review the “MyEWS” report for 6th grade to determine if a significant number of SWDs who scored below average in reading are chronically absent.

Validated: Yes No

The EWS report indicated that 80% of students with disabilities scoring below average in reading missed no more than one day of school (more than half missed zero days of school).

Hypothesis #3:

Domain: Instruction Curriculum Environment Learner

Hypothesis: A lower percentage of students with disabilities are meeting grade-level expectations in reading because sufficient opportunities to practice identifying key ideas and details within both literature and informational text are not provided.

Prediction Statement: If students are provided with increased opportunities to practice identifying key ideas and details within both literature and informational text, then their reading performance will improve.

Assessment Method(s): Review Interview Observe Test

Specific Data to be Collected: Reading assessment data and teacher lesson plans.

Validated: Yes No

Reading assessment data indicate that identifying key ideas and details within both literature and informational text was the highest area of weakness for 6th grade students. Additionally, lesson plans indicated that students were not provided with multiple opportunities to practice these skills. Instead, it appeared on average to be practiced 0-1 times/week.

Hypothesis #4:

Domain: Instruction Curriculum Environment Learner

Hypothesis: A lower percentage of students with disabilities are meeting grade-level expectations in reading because the ELA curriculum does not include accessible instructional materials (AIM), which are known to improve independence, participation, and progress, as well as augment access and engagement for students.

Prediction Statement: If students are regularly afforded access to AIM, then their reading performance will improve.

Assessment Method(s): Review Interview Observe Test

Specific Data to be Collected: Teachers will review the texts planned for the school year to determine if they are available digitally, and what accessibility features are available for each. Teacher interviews will be conducted to determine how widely AIM is used in their classrooms, and observations will be conducted in classrooms where teachers report regular use of AIM. The District Technology Support Specialist will be consulted to support the review, interviews, and observations.

Validated: Yes No

All texts planned for the school year are available digitally and do have adequate accessibility features. However, during the curriculum review and teacher interviews with the District Technology Support Specialist, it was determined that teachers have superficial knowledge and understanding of AIM, and therefore aren't able to teach students how and when to use the features available. SEE NOTE

Notes: Hypothesis #4 - Team decided addressing teachers' knowledge and understanding of AIM was a priority, so they can effectively teach students how and when to use the AIM features available.

Step 3 – Intervention Design: What are we going to do about it?

As the PLC was beginning to develop the Tier 1 intervention plan, they reviewed the four hypotheses. The hypotheses considering poor attendance and lack of classroom expectations and routines (Hypothesis #1 and #2) were found to be invalid, so those were discarded. The hypothesis considering a lack of AIM built into the curriculum (Hypothesis #4) was also found to be invalid, however during the interview conversations with the District Technology Support Specialist, they realized that they had insufficient understanding of all the AIM features available to students. They determined it was necessary as a team to receive training so they could teach and encourage students’ use of AIM features throughout instruction. Based on the hypothesis of insufficient opportunities for practicing identifying key ideas and details (Hypothesis #3), the reading coach suggested the use of Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS). PALS is a class-wide program that compliments the existing reading curriculum by providing research-based learning strategies through peer-tutoring, which provides increased opportunities for practice with structured feedback.

As a result, the 6th grade PLC developed the comprehensive intervention plan detailed below. The plan represents adjustments to core instruction that will be delivered to and received by all 6th grade students.

Intervention plan developed for: All 6th grade students		Content area/focus of improvement: ELA/Reading	
Validated hypothesis: A lower percentage of students with disabilities (compared to all students) are meeting grade level expectations in reading because (1) the students are not provided sufficient opportunities to practice identifying key ideas and details within both literature and informational text and (2) teachers and students lack knowledge of and support for AIM.			
Intervention Plan	Support Plan	Fidelity Documentation	Progress Monitoring Plan
<p>Who is responsible? All 6th grade ELA teachers</p> <p>What will be done? Students will engage in 6th grade Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) focusing on the activities of Partner Reading with Retell and Paragraph Shrinking. After becoming well informed about AIM features available in digital texts, teachers will teach, model, and encourage students’ use.</p> <p>When will it occur? At least three days per week, during Tier 1 instruction</p>	<p><u>PALS</u></p> <p>Who is responsible? Reading Coach</p> <p>What will be done? The reading coach will prepare PALS materials and co-facilitate training of students. The reading coach will then observe students and teachers during PALS and help troubleshoot barriers to implementation (e.g., student pairings, text selection).</p> <p>When will it occur? PALS student training begins Oct. 2nd</p> <p>Where will it occur? 6th grade ELA classrooms</p>	<p><u>PALS</u></p> <p>Who is responsible? Reading Coach & 6th grade ELA teachers</p> <p>What will be done? Teachers will collect student PALS materials for review of implementation, Reading Coach will observe during PALS instruction, provide feedback, and help troubleshoot barriers to implementation.</p> <p>When will it occur? Teachers will collect materials weekly.</p>	<p>Who is responsible? All 6th grade ELA teachers</p> <p>What data will be collected and when? Universal screening data will be collected in Dec/Jan (winter assessment).</p> <p>When will team reconvene to evaluate progress? January 9th</p> <p>How will we decide if the plan is effective? RtI determinations will be based on the percent of SWD scoring at or above the 54th %ile.</p>

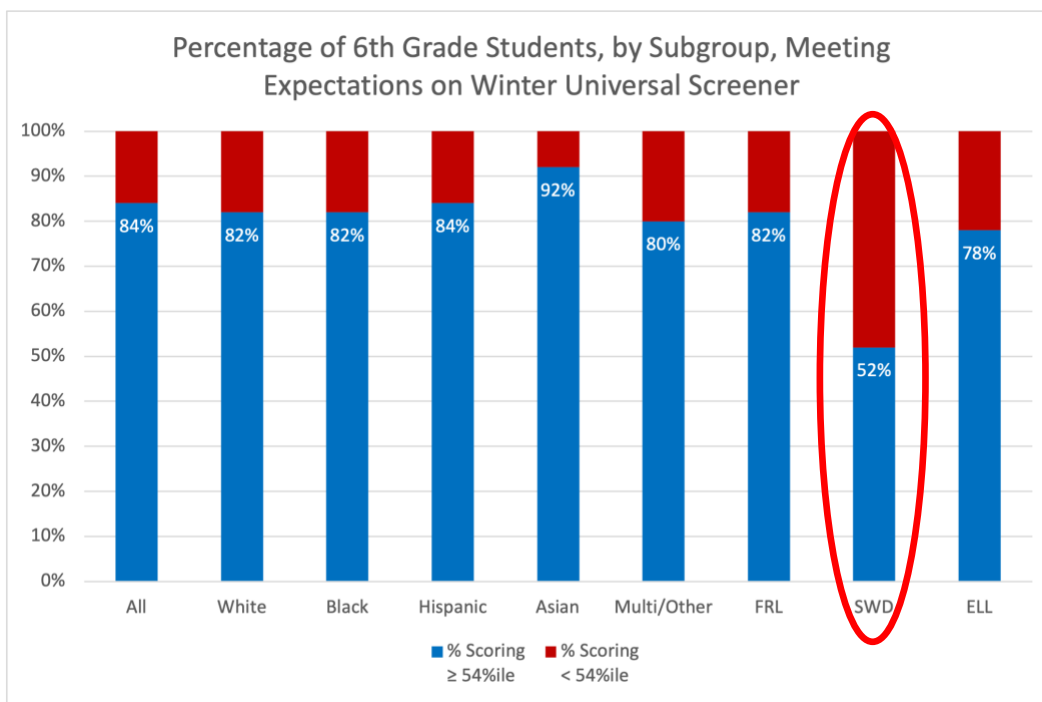
<p>Where will it occur? Classroom</p>	<p>AIM</p> <p>Who is responsible? District Technology Support Specialist</p> <p>What will be done? Demonstrate use of AIM features available in digital texts (to teachers). Observe instruction and provide feedback regarding teachers' teaching and modeling of AIM.</p> <p>When will it occur? Initial training for teachers on AIM materials will occur during PLC meeting on Oct. 3rd. Observations – first observation during the week of 10/9, second observation during the week of 10/30.</p> <p>Where will it occur? Initial training – Mrs. Taylor's room Observations – 6th grade ELA classrooms</p>	<p>Reading Coach observations will occur every two weeks beginning Nov. 4th, then monthly starting Jan. 6th.</p> <p>How will data be shared? The teacher and reading coach will review student materials and observation notes every two weeks.</p> <p>AIM</p> <p>Who is responsible? District Technology Support Specialist</p> <p>What will be done? Initial training - training sign-in sheet Observations will be conducted using an observation checklist and feedback will be provided to teachers.</p> <p>When will it occur? Sign in sheet at initial training Observation checklists to be completed during classroom observations, and feedback provided to each teacher following the observation.</p> <p>How will data be shared? Teacher feedback will be provided following each observation, and the PLC will review the District Technology Support Specialist's observation checklists during the midyear review.</p>	<p>Decision rules: Positive RtI = $\geq 55\%$ Questionable RtI = 43-54% Poor RtI = $\leq 42\%$</p>
<p>Notes: The PLC will collect universal screening data in Apr/May (spring assessment) and meet again on May 12. RtI determinations will be based on the percent of SWD scoring at or above the 54th %ile. RtI will be based on the following decision rules: Positive RtI $\geq 67\%$ Questionable RtI 51%-66% Poor RtI $\leq 50\%$</p>			

Step 4 – Response to Instruction/Intervention: Is it working?

Mid-year Review: Throughout the fall semester, fidelity data was collected as well as formative student data to inform and guide Tier 1 instruction. As planned, they met on January 9th to review the winter universal screening data and plan next steps.

6th grade ELA Winter Universal Screener, by Subgroup

Subgroup	Total number of 6 th grade students in subgroup	Number of students scoring at or above 54 th ile	Percent of students scoring at or above 54 th ile	Number of students scoring below 54 th ile	Percent of students scoring below 54 th ile	Subgroup
All	423	355	84%	68	16%	All
White	257	211	82%	46	18%	White
Black	17	14	82%	3	18%	Black
Hispanic	101	85	84%	16	16%	Hispanic
Asian	28	26	92%	2	8%	Asian
Multi/Other	20	16	80%	4	20%	Multi/Other
FRL	90	74	82%	16	18%	FRL
SWD	60	31	52%	29	48%	SWD
ELL	9	7	78%	2	22%	ELL
Non-SWD	363	324	89%	39	11%	Non-SWD



First, they needed to determine the student response to the intervention. Referring to the decision rules they developed in Step 3, they were able to easily determine that with 52% of students with disabilities scoring at or above the 54th percentile, the student response was *questionable*.

They know that when students’ response to intervention/instruction is determined to be questionable or poor, fidelity of implementation should always be examined before considering a change in intervention. The PLC reviewed the District Technology Support Specialist’s observation checklists and discussed the individual feedback they received following their classroom observations. The observation checklists indicated high

levels of teaching as well as modeling of AIM features for students, and the teachers reported a marked increase in their students' use of AIM in the classroom. They determined that fidelity of intervention specific to AIM was good, and that they would continue modeling and encouraging students to use the resources available. Next, the teachers reviewed PALS student materials and Reading Coach observation notes. The Reading Coach's observation notes were limited as she had not been able to observe and provide support with the frequency initially planned due to frequently being pulled to substitute for teachers who were absent. Conversation with the teachers revealed that they were having difficulty keeping the students engaged in the PALS activities and did not have a plan for students when their partner was absent. The PLC determined that the Reading Coach's inability to provide sufficient support as outlined in the plan had a significant impact on the intervention being delivered as intended.

To address fidelity of their plan, they met with their administration, who agreed to implement a rotating schedule for emergency coverage so that the Reading Coach was not disproportionately impacted. A plan was made for the reading coach to be present for the next 3-4 sessions of PALS to help the teachers address the barriers to implementation and help them develop a plan for what students will do when their PALS partner is absent.

The PLC decided to keep the goal of at least 70% of SWDs scoring at or above the 54th percentile, measured by the universal screening for the spring assessment period, because they felt confident that the adjustments to improve fidelity of implementation, as well as continuing to encourage students' use of AIM, would result in improved outcomes. A summary of Step 4 for the mid-year review is below:

Progress Monitoring Data:

52% of students met or exceeded expected level of performance

48% of students did not meet or exceed expected level of performance

Data-based decision making based on pre-determined decision rules:

POSITIVE

Goal is not met: Continue plan as designed *or* Increase intensity of current plan (document all changes or adjustments)

Goal is met: Fade intervention and monitor *or* Identify new goal, modify plan (document all changes or adjustments)

QUESTIONABLE

Fidelity concerns: Address fidelity, continue plan as designed and monitor (document adjustments to address fidelity)

No fidelity concerns: Increase intensity of current plan and monitor if improvement doesn't occur, return to earlier steps of problem solving (document all changes or adjustments)

POOR

Fidelity concerns: Address fidelity, continue plan as designed and monitor (document adjustments to address fidelity)

No fidelity concerns: Return to earlier steps of problem solving to consider replacing the intervention (still addressing validated hypothesis), revisiting other viable hypotheses, or reassessing problem identification (document all changes or adjustments)

Changes or adjustments to the plan:

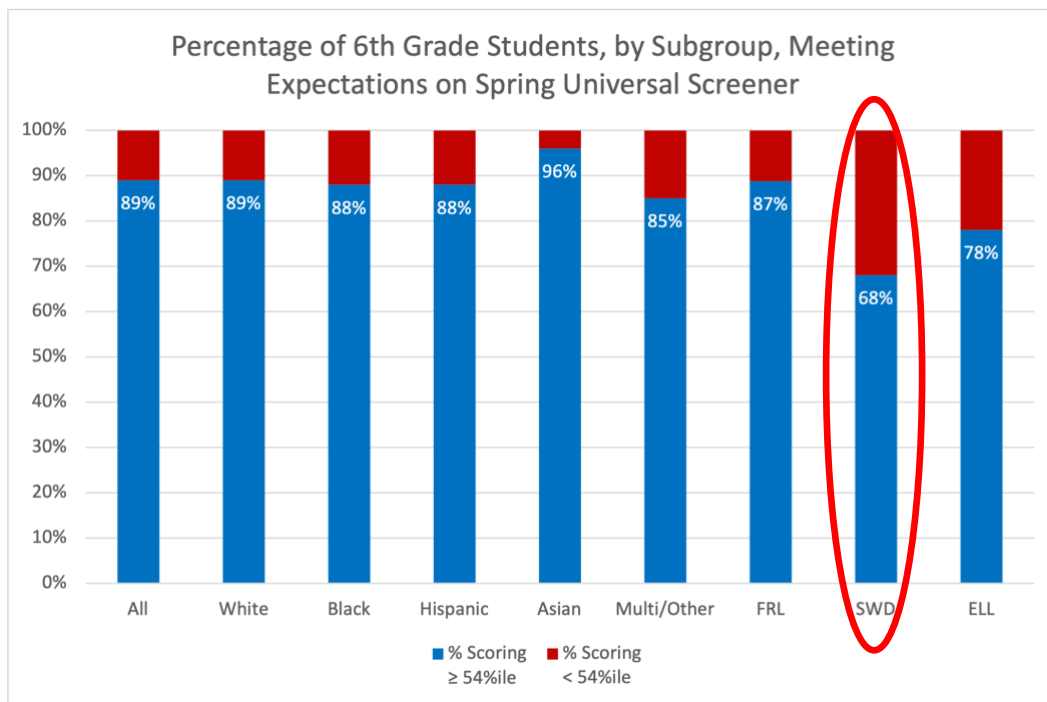
To improve fidelity for implementing PALS, administration will develop a rotating schedule for pulling staff to sub for absent teachers so Ms. Gallo can observe and provide feedback as initially planned. Ms. Gallo will be present for the next 3-4 session of PALS to help teachers with increasing student engagement, and in addition, will help develop a plan for when student partners are absent. The rest of the plan will continue as designed.

Teachers will continue to support and encourage students' use of AIM.

End-of-Year Review: The Tier 1 intervention plan continued through the spring semester, and the PLC met as planned on May 12th. They reviewed the spring universal screening data below to determine the students' response to intervention.

6th grade ELA Spring Universal Screener, by Subgroup

Subgroup	Total number of 6 th grade students in subgroup	Number of students scoring at or above 54 th ile	Percent of students scoring at or above 54 th ile	Number of students scoring below 54 th ile	Percent of students scoring below 54 th ile	Subgroup
All	423	379	89%	43	11%	All
White	257	231	89%	26	11%	White
Black	17	15	88%	2	12%	Black
Hispanic	101	89	88%	12	12%	Hispanic
Asian	28	27	96%	1	4%	Asian
Multi/Other	20	17	85%	3	15%	Multi/Other
FRL	90	79	87%	11	13%	FRL
SWD	60	41	68%	19	32%	SWD
ELL	9	7	78%	2	22%	ELL
Non-SWD	363	339	93%	24	7%	Non-SWD



Using the decision rules they established in September, they were able to determine that with 68% of students with disabilities scoring at or above the 54th percentile, the response to Tier 1 intervention was *positive*. In addition to the increase in the percent of students with disabilities meeting the expectation, they noted that the performance for almost all student subgroups increased by about 10 percentage points. The PLC was very happy with the results and were in complete agreement to use PALS as a class-wide peer tutoring program next year, if the data supported its use. They also decided that they would talk to their administration about offering “lunch-and-learn” opportunities next year for other content area and grade level PLCs to share what they learned about AIM and how to teach, model, and support students’ accessing those available resources.

Progress Monitoring Data:

68% of students met or exceeded expected level of performance

32% of students did not meet or exceed expected level of performance

Data-based decision making based on pre-determined decision rules:

POSITIVE

Goal is not met: Continue plan as designed *or* Increase intensity of current plan (document all changes or adjustments)

Goal is met: Fade intervention and monitor *or* Identify new goal, modify plan (document all changes or adjustments)

QUESTIONABLE

Fidelity concerns: Address fidelity, continue plan as designed and monitor (document adjustments to address fidelity)

No fidelity concerns: Increase intensity of current plan and monitor if improvement doesn't occur, return to earlier steps of problem solving (document all changes or adjustments)

POOR

Fidelity concerns: Address fidelity, continue plan as designed and monitor (document adjustments to address fidelity)

No fidelity concerns: Return to earlier steps of problem solving to consider replacing the intervention (still addressing validated hypothesis), revisiting other viable hypotheses, or reassessing problem identification (document all changes or adjustments)

Changes or adjustments to the plan:

No changes