

Implementation of the Collaborative Action Process (CAP) 2006–2007: Professional Development

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The Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) is evaluating the Collaborative Action Process (CAP) with a focus on implementation. This brief (the last in a series of four) reports on implementation of the professional development component of CAP.

Background

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) developed CAP to provide an improved service delivery model and to impact overrepresentation of certain student groups in special education (Weast, 2005). CAP is a problem-solving framework for teams of teachers to resolve student difficulties (academic or behavioral) within general education through use of evidence-based interventions and systematic monitoring of student progress. Student response to interventions is the major determinant of the need for special education referral, evaluation, and service.

As of fall 2006, 61 schools were chosen to implement CAP. To do so, a school organizes teams by grade level or subject area with a coach for each team, creates a building-level team, and identifies a facilitator as the key CAP coordinator within the school. District-level CAP consultants support implementation in schools.

The evaluation uses a multi-method data collection strategy to address the following questions:

1. How has professional development (including training and support) been implemented?
2. What challenges with implementation have staff members experienced?
3. What improvements or best practices for implementation have staff members suggested?

Summary of Methodology

Data sources were interviews of school administrators; online surveys of CAP facilitators, CAP coaches, and teachers/staff from a systematic sample of 30 schools (see Appendix); and program documents.

Summary of Findings

The first finding addressed current implementation of CAP professional development. CAP facilitators were expected to attend six districtwide meetings, but

attendance lists did not include names. Facilitators were expected to share information from these meetings at their schools; the majority did so for only three of seven topics presented. No other CAP guidelines for training were available. Descriptions of staff members' experiences with training are presented in the findings.

The most commonly mentioned challenges to implementing professional development for CAP were inaccessibility and inadequate training. Staff members' most common suggestions for improvement were more opportunities for training, more variety of training formats, and a more practical focus to training.

Summary of Recommendations

Based on the findings, recommendations focus on improving the frequency, quality of content, accessibility, and methodology for training to support collaborative problem solving and the leadership that supports it.

Detailed Methodology

Sample

As of September 2006, 61 schools were chosen to implement CAP—47 elementary schools, 10 middle schools, and 4 high schools. A sample of these schools was selected for data collection. Initially, all high schools were included in the sample because there were only four. For elementary and middle schools, the statistical technique of cluster analysis was used to form five groups of similar schools based on the following building-level variables of particular relevance for CAP:

- Number of years implementing CAP
- Student enrollment, 2005–2006
- Combined percentage of African American and Hispanic students, 2005–2006
- Percentage of students receiving special education services, 2005–2006
- Suspension percentage, 2005–2006

Half of the schools in each of the groups formed by the cluster analysis were randomly chosen. Any schools with members serving on the CAP evaluation advisory group were excluded (including one high school). The final sample of 30 schools included 22 elementary, 5 middle, and 3 high schools. (See list in Appendix.)

Data Sources

Three data sources were used for this study: interviews, surveys, and program documents.

In-person interviews were conducted with the school administrator primarily responsible for CAP at each school in the sample. A semi-structured protocol was used; interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes. A total of 29 interviews, including 25 principals and 4 assistant principals, were completed during April and May 2007.

The second data source was online surveys. One survey was developed specifically for each of the following three groups: CAP facilitators, CAP coaches, and teachers/staff. The latter was intended for all teachers plus all other school-based staff on a CAP team. Links to the surveys were sent via e-mail to each CAP facilitator, who distributed the links to other staff members within the school. Reminders were sent via e-mail to facilitators; additional reminders were sent to schools with response rates below 50%. CAP facilitators from 28 schools (93% of the sample), 107 CAP coaches (66% of sampled coaches), and 403 teachers/staff (48% of sampled teachers and CAP team members) responded. All surveys were completed during May and June 2007. Program staff and the CAP evaluation advisory group reviewed the interview protocol and survey instruments to enhance content validity of the items.

The third data source was program documents on attendance and topics covered in district-level, coaching support meetings.

Detailed Findings

During data collection, it was learned that one school had not implemented CAP. Therefore, the findings in this brief are based on 29 schools.

Coaching Support Meetings

District level. MCPS offered six “monthly” coaching support meetings during 2006–2007. The topic of one session and part of a second was collaboration; topics for the remaining sessions were implementation of CAP (Table 1).

Table 1
Topics of Coaching Support Meetings, 2006–2007

Month	Topics
October	CAP forms, Data for submission, CAP goals
December	Group problem solving
January	From hypothesis to intervention, including task analysis, Behavior Intervention Plan, Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)
February	Collaborative approach to analyzing behavior
April	Effective collaboration during meetings, CAP articulation
May	Preparing for continuation of CAP

School level. CAP facilitators were expected to attend the coaching support meetings and share the information at their schools. Facilitators reported on whether they offered training on topics from the coaching support meetings (Table 2). At the majority of schools, there was training on three of the seven topics as follows: CAP forms, data collection and analysis, and moving from problem analysis to intervention.

Table 2
Facilitators’ and Coaches’ Reports of Content of Facilitator-Led CAP Training

Content (multiple-response)	Schools (N=29)	
	Facilitators %	Coaches ¹ %
CAP forms	86.2	93.1
Data collection and analysis	75.8	86.2
Moving from problem analysis to intervention	65.5	72.4
Task analysis	41.4	65.5
Behavior Intervention Plan	37.9	34.5
FBA	27.6	41.4
Effective meetings	41.4	62.1
Other (e.g., interventions)	41.4	31.0
None	3.4	3.4

¹Report is based on the majority of responses at each school.

CAP coaches also reported on the content of the training sessions led by their facilitators (Table 2). Recollections on the topics were fairly consistent; however, coaches were more likely than facilitators to mention three less commonly reported topics (i.e., task analysis, FBA, and effective meetings).

Staff Experiences with CAP Professional Development

Most recent training. Staff members reported on their most recent professional development or training related to CAP (Table 3). Training was ongoing (i.e., during the current school year) for about three quarters of facilitators and coaches, but was ongoing for only about one half of teachers/staff.

Table 3
Most Recent Training Related to CAP by Staff Group

	Facilitators (N=39) %	Coaches (N=107) %	Teachers (N=403) %
Current school year	74.4	75.7	55.1
Previous year	25.6	15.0	25.5
Never, no response	0.0	9.3	19.4

Sources of training. Staff members reported on the sources of their professional development or training related to CAP (Table 4). The district was a common source for facilitators; the majority of this group (71.9%) reported their source as mainly district level or about equal amounts of district level and school based.

Table 4
Sources of CAP Training by Staff Group

	Facilitators (N=39) %	Coaches (N=107) %	Teachers (N=403) %
Only district level	7.7	0.9	1.0
Mainly district level	41.0	19.6	3.7
District level and school based, in about equal amounts	30.8	19.6	4.5
Mainly school based	15.4	26.2	11.9
Only school based	5.1	27.1	59.8
Never, no response	0.0	6.5	19.1

Coaches reported a variety of sources for their training. At least one fifth of this group reported each of four sources: mainly district, about equal district and school, mainly school, and only school.

School was a common source of training for teachers/staff. Close to three quarters (71.7%) of this group reported mainly or only school-based training. Nearly one in five teachers reported that they had never attended training.

Content of training. The expected source for information on the content of CAP training for facilitators was documents from coaching support meetings. However, these records did not identify the name or position of attendees, only the school.

Coaches and teachers/staff reported on the content of the professional development or training related to CAP that they have attended. Coaches reported attendance at sessions on the following topics:

- CAP forms: 90 coaches (84.1%)
- Data collection and analysis: 73 coaches (68.2%)
- Moving from problem analysis to intervention: 52 coaches (48.6%)
- Task analysis: 47 coaches (43.9%)
- FBA: 40 coaches (37.4%)
- Basic CAP summer training: 40 coaches (37.4%)
- Behavior Intervention Plan: 38 coaches (35.5%)

- Reading, math, and/or writing interventions: 33 coaches (30.8%)
- Effective meetings: 17 coaches (15.9%)
- Never attended: 5 coaches (4.7%)

Teachers/staff reported attendance at sessions on the following topics:

- Completing CAP forms: 223 teachers (55.3%)
- Working in teams: 205 teachers (50.9%)
- When to use CAP: 198 teachers (49.1%)
- Four-step problem-solving process: 182 teachers (45.2%)
- Data collection and analysis: 180 teachers (44.7%)
- Interventions: 164 teachers (40.7%)
- Never attended: 78 teachers (19.1%)

New staff members. Building administrators described how new staff members in their schools were educated and trained on implementing CAP. Based on these descriptions, about one third of the schools relied on job-embedded training only and over half of the schools (16 schools, 55.2%) used scheduled training sessions as follows:

- Job embedded only: 10 schools (34.5%)
- School year only: 3 schools (10.3%)
- Preservice only: 7 schools (24.1%)
- District summer only: 2 schools (6.9%)
- School year plus one other type: 4 schools (13.8%)
- No training: 3 schools (10.3%)

Challenges to Implementation

Staff members identified two key challenges to implementing staff development for CAP: accessibility and adequacy.

Accessibility of Training

According to staff members in CAP schools, accessibility of CAP training has been the major staff development challenge. CAP coaches cited a lack of priority for CAP staff development as a key factor as noted in the following comments:

- Staff development for CAP is not the priority.
- There is no staff development [time] set aside for CAP. Teachers select other areas of need for staff development (something they can incorporate into their instruction and teaching).
- There are too many initiatives in MCPS. CAP always gets put on the back burner. Therefore, there is no staff development for CAP.

A related concern was that staff members had varied amounts of CAP training, even within the same school. For example, one coach said, “Staff development was not done schoolwide. It was very fractured and not all team members attended all of the meetings.”

One principal described challenges with summer training. “This summer [2007], CAP training is only offered once. It falls during ELO [Extended Learning Opportunities] session, when my staff are teaching for higher pay, and [it falls] during leadership week. So I can’t send any new administrators to CAP training.”

Adequacy of Training

A second key challenge was the adequacy of CAP training. Several coaches noted their lack of training, especially for their role as a leader. Comments from CAP coaches on this issue included the following:

- I was made a CAP coach without training. Thankfully, another CAP coach attended the meetings to facilitate.
- I was one of the first to be trained, but it has evolved, and I have not been kept current on the new ideas.
- This was my first year in a school with CAP and my first year as a CAP coach . . . I could use more training if I am going to continue as a coach.

Teachers also expressed concern about the adequacy of training. For example, one teacher said, “Teachers were expected to embrace something they received minimal to no training at all in. One year after this, they are expected to be proficient in the CAP process simply because they’ve fumbled with it for a year or two.”

One principal expressed particular disappointment with the quality of training offered to the school. “Early on, four years ago, we had negative experiences. The examples given at initial trainings were too simplistic. We need much more help for more involved issues. Two years ago, the leadership team went back. This was the worst training we ever attended.”

Suggestions for Improvement and Best Practices

Staff members’ suggestions about how to improve staff development reflected the following themes: accessibility and adequacy (as per challenges noted above), support, and sharing best practices.

Accessibility and Adequacy of Training

To improve accessibility, coaches, teachers, and principals asked to make training widely available and to a wider range of staff members. Related comments follow:

- [Offer] ongoing team training for new people in building and veterans. (Coach)
- I think there should be more training available school-based or online. (Teacher)
- At the New Educator orientation, educate people about the CAP process. Avoid “ground zero” every time we get new staff. (Principal)

- We need required/updated training for all classroom teachers expected to use CAP. “Continuous” training is needed. (Principal)

In line with their concerns about adequacy of training, CAP coaches asked for training geared to their role.

Support for CAP Staff Development

Administrators and school staff suggested that concrete support for CAP staff development be demonstrated by devoting release time or funding for staff development. Some of their specific suggestions follow:

- We need staff development days during the school year. A three-day training is too much to pack in all at once. (Principal)
- There should be . . . sub [substitute] time built in, as with all other staff development, to make us truly get our bang for our buck. (Teacher)
- If you want people to attend [training] in the summer, pay them Tier I. (Coach)
- \$20 per hour for after school professional development is insulting. If it’s that important, do it during school or pay teachers at an appropriate rate. (Principal)

Sharing Best Practices for Staff Development

Staff members in CAP schools made the following suggestions on sharing best practices:

- Have teachers observe teachers who are doing interventions consistently in their classrooms so that classroom teachers can see that they don’t need a specialist to conduct the interventions for them.
- Take a practical rather than theoretical approach, such as showing how to use the forms with real students in order to see an impact.
- Veteran coaches should meet, in order to hear from others, share best practices, and bring a concern to share.
- Show us a coach being able to lead a team. Show us what an effective CAP meeting should look like.
- Post issues in a listserv or Outlook folder. Those at other CAP schools could offer suggestions on how to address issues.

Conclusion

The first evaluation question addressed the current implementation status of professional development for CAP. CAP facilitators were expected to attend coaching support meetings and share the information at their schools. MCPS offered six such meetings, but the majority of facilitators offered training on only three of the seven topics from these meetings.

In the absence of other CAP guidelines for professional development, descriptive information was collected. Training was ongoing for about three quarters of facilitators and coaches and about one half of teachers/staff. The source of professional development related to CAP was the district for facilitators, schools for teachers/staff, and both district and schools for coaches. The majority of coaches had attended training on only two topics—CAP forms and data collection/analysis. One fifth of teachers had never attended training. For training new staff members, about one third of the schools used job-embedded training only and just over one half of the schools used scheduled training sessions.

The second evaluation question addressed staff members' challenges with implementation. The most commonly mentioned challenges were inaccessibility of training and the inadequacy of training to serve staff members at all levels of CAP experience.

The final evaluation question focused on school staff suggestions for improvements to implementation. The most common suggestions were more training opportunities, more variety of training formats, and more focus on practical applications.

Strengths and Limitations of Methodology

In interpreting the results, it is important to understand the methodology's strengths and limitations. Self-reporting by any staff member can be affected by perceptions that it is best to appear as engaged as possible with CAP. A strength of the methodology is reports by staff members with different roles in CAP. Convergence between informants increases the reliability of the results, which is the case in this report.

The topics for coaching support meetings listed on staff surveys were based on verbal information from program staff and did not fully align with the topics listed on meeting agendas.

Recommendations

Evaluation findings from this brief (and earlier ones) indicated the following recommendations to improve problem solving in MCPS:

- Develop a broad and repetitive cycle of general training in collaborative problem solving with sessions for new teachers, veteran teachers, and "refresher" trainings for all (also see Cooper-Martin & Hickson, 2008a).
- Provide leadership training to coaches and facilitators to include meeting facilitation, conflict resolution, vision building, and team leading.
- Partner with the Office of Organizational Development to identify existing trainings (e.g., data-driven analysis) that support collaborative problem solving and to incorporate adult learning

models for increased engagement and retention. Utilize the Professional Development Online system where appropriate

- Work with school administrators and central office administrators to ensure time is set aside for collaborative problem solving (see also Cooper-Martin & Hickson, 2008b) and related training.
- Increase accessibility of training. Make training available during the school day (also see Cooper-Martin & Hickson, 2008b). Develop online professional resources.
- Focus training on application-based learning. Use actual cases and data (also see Cooper-Martin & Hickson, 2008a). Model (live or on video) practical examples such as teachers conducting interventions in class and coaches leading teams through problem-solving meetings.
- Develop online forums to share concerns and best practices (e.g., Outlook conference).
- Document attendance at training by name and position, so as to inform future training.
- Provide release time or stipends or both to attend training, as resources allow. Match the pay rate for summer training to other summer pay.

Earlier briefs provided additional recommendations for professional development. For coaches and teachers, increased knowledge and skill about problem solving is a priority for improving implementation (Cooper-Martin, 2008c). Key content areas for training were identified, as follows:

- Best practices identified by respondents and specific requests for clarification and training (Cooper-Martin & Hickson, 2008a).
- The following parts of the problem-solving process: factor analysis, goal setting, intervention monitoring, and intervention decisions based on data (Cooper-Martin & Hickson, 2008a).
- Guidelines on the type of data and number of data points needed for intervention monitoring (Cooper-Martin & Hickson, 2008b).
- Criteria for referring grade/team level cases to the building-level team, referring students to special education screening, and referring students to screening for other services such as crisis or mental health resources (Cooper-Martin & Hickson, 2008a).

References

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Appendix

Appendix

Sample Schools for CAP Evaluation 2006–2007

A. Mario Loiederman Middle School
Bel Pre Elementary School
Benjamin Banneker Middle School
Burnt Mills Elementary School
Cashell Elementary School
Diamond Elementary School
Dr. Charles R. Drew Elementary School
Forest Oak Middle School
Gaithersburg High School
Germantown Elementary School
Goshen Elementary School
Harmony Hills Elementary School
Lakewood Elementary School
Laytonsville Elementary School
Col. Zadok Magruder High School
Maryvale Elementary School
Spark M. Matsunaga Elementary School
Meadow Hall Elementary School
Oakland Terrace Elementary School
Poolesville Elementary School
Redland Middle School
Judith A. Resnik Elementary School
Rosemont Elementary School
Shady Grove Middle School
Strathmore Elementary School
Strawberry Knoll Elementary School
Takoma Park Elementary School
Weller Road Elementary School
Wheaton High School
Woodlin Elementary School