Chapter 4

How Will We Respond When Some Students Don't Learn?

Part One
The Case Study: Systematic Interventions Versus an Educational Lottery

Professional learning communities create a systematic process of interventions to ensure students receive additional time and support for learning when they experience difficulty. The intervention process is timely and students are directed rather than invited to utilize the system of time and support.

Marty Mathers, principal of the Puff Daddy Middle School (nickname: the Rappers), knew that his eighth-grade algebra teachers were his most challenging team on the faculty. The team was comprised of four people with very strong personalities who had difficulty finding common ground.

Peter Pilate was the most problematic teacher on the team from Principal Mather's perspective. The failure rate in his classes was three times higher than the other members of the team, and parents routinely demanded that their students be assigned to a different teacher. Ironically, many of the students who failed Mr. Pilate's class demonstrated proficiency on the state math test. Principal Mathers had raised these issues with Peter, but found Peter to be unreceptive to the possibility of changing any of his practices. Peter insisted that the primary reason students failed was because they did not complete their daily homework assignments in a timely manner. He refused to accept late work, and he explained that the accumulation of zeros on missed assignments led to the high failure rate. He felt strongly that the school had to teach students to be responsible, and he made it clear that he expected the principal to support him in his effort to teach responsibility for getting work done on time.

Alan Sandler was known by the students as the "cool" teacher. He had excellent rapport with his students and a great sense of humor that made his classroom an entertaining environment. Most of his students earned As and Bs in his course; however, each spring, almost half of them would fail to meet the proficiency standard on the state exam.

Principal Mathers was aware of yet another trend in Charlotte Darwin's math classes. He knew they could start out with a large number of students in her algebra sections each year because by early October she would recommend that many of them be transferred to the pre-algebra program. She felt it was unfair to keep students in a program where they lacked the skills for success. The students who remained in her algebra class usually scored slightly above the state average on their proficiency examination.

Henrietta Higgins was a true joy to have on the faculty. She was relentless in holding students accountable but perfectly willing to sacrifice her personal time to help students be successful. She monitored their achievement constantly, and if a student began to fall behind, she required the student to meet with her before or after school for intensive tutoring. Her students always met or exceeded the proficiency standard on the state assessment.

Principal Mathers was increasingly uncomfortable knowing that students' experiences in the eighth grade math program varied so greatly depending on which teacher they had, but he was uncertain of how to address the situation. Two parent phone calls in late September convinced him he could no longer ignore the disparities in the program.

The first phone call came from a parent who objected to Charlotte Darwin's recommendation to move her student to pre-algebra. The parent was familiar with the math program at the high school and recognized that if her son did not complete algebra in the eighth grade, he would never have access to the honors math program there. She was certain her son could be successful if he was given some extra time and support to master content in which he was experiencing some initial difficulty. She had asked Ms. Darwin to tutor her son after school, and Ms. Darwin had flatly refused to do so. The parent was aware that Ms. Higgins routinely tutored students after school, and she demanded that Principal Mathers either direct Ms. Darwin to provide the same service for her son or transfer her son to Ms. Higgins' class.

Principal Mathers knew he could not demand that Ms. Darwin extend her contractual day to tutor students after school. He also realized that she was a single parent who constantly struggled to find quality day care for her preschool-aged child. He felt the only solution was to transfer the student to Ms. Higgins class.

Before he could make the transfer, he received a second parent complaint, but this time Ms. Higgins was the target. The parent objected to the fact that Ms. Higgins was demanding her son stay after school to get extra help in math.

She needed her son to come home immediately after school because he was responsible for caring for his younger sister until his mother came home from work. She did not want her daughter left unsupervised. Her son could not come in before school either because he walked his sister to school. She argued that none of the other math teachers required students to stay after school, and she felt it was unfair for Ms. Higgins to do so.

Principal Mathers certainly did not want to undermine Ms. Higgins. His initial thought was to pursue the easy solution: transfer the two students into the other teacher's class. He recognized, however, that this strategy offered only a temporary solution and left the real problem unresolved. He was uneasy about a program that was, in his mind, inherently unfair in its treatment of students. It was as if the school was playing an educational lottery with the lives of children—rolling the dice to see which students would receive an excellent opportunity to learn algebra and which would not. He was determined to address this inequity, but he was not sure how.

Reflection

Consider the dilemma presented in this case study; it is a dilemma that is played out in schools throughout North America each day. Assuming that Principal Mathers has no additional resources to hire after-school tutors, how can he best address this problem?

Part Two
Here's How

Principal Mathers and his school are confronting the question, "How will we respond when our students don't learn?" Each individual teacher has been left to resolve this question on his or her own. The result is that students who experience difficulty in learning are subject to very different experiences. The solution requires a *systematic* process of intervention to ensure students receive additional time and support for learning according to a school-wide plan:

- The process should ensure students receive the intervention in a *timely* fashion—at the first indication they are experiencing difficulty.
- The process should *direct* rather than invite students to devote the extra time and take advantage of the additional support until they are experiencing success.

- Most importantly, students should be guaranteed they will receive this time and support *regardless of who their teacher might be.*

If time is a constant then learning becomes a variable

When time is the variable learning becomes the constant

80-20

Principal Mathers should present the current reality to the staff and ask them to assess that reality in terms of its effectiveness, efficiency, and most importantly, its equity. An honest evaluation of the facts could only lead to certain conclusions. The current practice is ineffective as demonstrated by both local and state indicators: a high failure rate in some classes and a high percentage of students failing to meet the state proficiency standard. It is inefficient: Some teachers give up personal time, the school staff has to make schedule changes, and students sacrifice time in the summer to repeat failed courses. Finally, it is patently unfair.

Once the staff has confronted the "brutal facts" of their current situation, Principal Mathers could lead them through an analysis of best practices in responding to students who are not learning. The research in this area is clear: In order to help all students learn at high levels, schools must provide students who are experiencing difficulty in learning with additional time and support for learning in a timely, directive, and systematic way.

The next step in this process requires the principal and staff to brainstorm ideas to create an intervention system that is timely, directive, systematic, and within the school day. Then staff members would identify the collective commitments essential to the success of their new intervention system. They would set specific, results-oriented student-achievement goals to help monitor the effectiveness of the system. Finally, they would implement that system, monitor its impact, and make adjustments and improvements based on their results.

In order to help all students learn at high levels, schools must provide students who are experiencing difficulty in learning with additional time and support for learning in a timely, directive, and systematic way.

In our video program *Through New Eyes: Examining the Culture of Your School* (2003), we ask audiences to view a scene of a student who experiences difficulty in making the transition from middle school to high school and, very importantly, to view the scenario through the eyes of the student. Three different teachers respond to the student in three very different ways, but in each case the burden for addressing the student's problems in the course falls to the respective teacher. In fact, the individual teacher is the only person in the school who even realizes the student is having difficulty for the first 9 weeks of the school year.

After viewing and discussing the scene, teachers acknowledge that the *school* never responded to the student. There was no *collective* response. What happened when the student struggled was left to the idiosyncrasies and beliefs of each of the school's overburdened teachers. We then ask the question, "Is what you saw in the scene a fairly accurate account of what typically happens in school?" Every audience has answered in the affirmative.

We then show a second scene with the same student experiencing the same difficulty in school; however, in this school, there is a collective response to the student. He is provided with a study hall to ensure he has extra time during the school day to receive additional support. He also meets daily with a faculty advisor and an upperclassman mentor. His counselor visits with him each week. His grades are monitored every 3 weeks. When he continues to experience difficulty, he is assigned to a tutoring center in place of his study hall and his grades are monitored on a weekly basis. When his struggles persist, he is moved from the tutoring center to a guided study hall where his homework is monitored each day and all materials are provided to ensure he will complete his work. He is required to join a co-curricular activity, and his coach advises him he must be passing all of his classes if he wants to be on the team. His progress is monitored on a weekly basis by a Student Support Team led by his counselor. In short, he is *surrounded* by caring adults, all of whom are attempting to help him be successful in his classes and who consistently express their confidence in his ability to be successful through additional effort.

Audiences invariably acknowledge that the caring environment created through this timely, directive, and systematic intervention plan benefits the student far more than what traditional schools typically offer. *But it is not just the student who benefits from this systematic support.* In the first scene (and in most schools), the only person who knows the student is struggling in algebra is the algebra teacher. The only person responsible for resolving the student's algebra problem is the algebra teacher. In the second scene, an army of adults is there to help the algebra teacher help the student. The teacher is not alone.

It is not just the student who benefits from this systematic support. An army of adults is there to help the teacher help the student. The teacher is not alone.

The good news is that the second scenario is not merely a dream, but something that is happening in schools throughout North America. In *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn* (2004), we describe four very different schools that have created systematic interventions to ensure their students receive additional time and support for learning. In each case, the schools created their systems with their existing resources. In each case, however, it was imperative that the staff agree to modify the schedule and assume new roles and responsibilities.

We know of schools at all levels that have built systems of time and support within the constraints of union contracts, central office guidelines, and state mandates. Although it is impossible to anticipate all the nuances of all the schedules of all the districts in North America, and then offer specific solutions to scheduling questions, we can offer this generalization: Faculties determined to work together to create a schedule that ensures students will receive extra time and support for learning in a timely, directive, and systematic way will be able to do so. The key question the staff of any school must consider in assessing the appropriateness and effectiveness of their daily schedule is, "Does the schedule provide access to students who need additional time and support during the school day in a way that does not require them to miss new direct instruction?"

Part Three

Here's Why

We have known for more than 30 years that effective schools create a climate of high expectations for student learning; that is, such schools are driven by the assumption that all students are able to achieve the essential learning of their course or grade level (Brophy & Good, 2002; Cotton, 2000; Georgiades, Fuentes, & Snyder, 1983; Lezotte, 1991; Newmann & Wehlage, 1996; Purkey & Smith, 1983). One of the most authentic ways to assess the degree to which a school is characterized by "high expectations" is to examine what happens when some of its students do not learn (Lezotte, 1991).

When schools do not create systems of time and support for students who experience initial difficulty in their learning, teachers are forced to enter into an unstated, implicit contract with their students. We described this subtle message in *Whatever It Takes: How a Professional Learning Community Responds When Kids Don't Learn* (2004):

> Kids, there is a very important concept in this unit we are about to begin, and I really want all of you to learn it. But I can only devote 3 weeks to this concept, and then we have to push on to cover all the other concepts I am supposed to teach you this year. The schedule limits us to 50 minutes a day, and I can't make it 55 minutes. So, during this unit, time to learn will be constant: you all will have 50 minutes a day for 3 weeks. When it comes to giving you individual attention and support, I'll do the best I can. But I can't spend a lot of class time helping a few of you who are having difficulty if the rest of the kids have learned it. That is not fair to those students. So, in effect, you will all have essentially the same amount of support during this unit. (pp. 34–35)

Whenever a school makes time and support for learning constant (that is, fixed), the variable will always be student learning. Some students, probably most students, will learn the intended skill in the given time and with the given support. Some students will not. What happens to those who do not learn is left to the discretion of the individual teachers to whom they are assigned.

"In the factory model of schooling, quality was the variable. . . . We held time constant and allowed quality to vary. We must turn that on its head and hold quality constant, and allow time to vary." (Cole & Schlechty, 1993, p. 10)

Professional learning communities make a conscious and sustained effort to reverse this equation: They advise students that learning is the constant—"All of you will learn this essential skill"—and then recognize that if they are to keep that commitment, they must create processes to ensure that students who need additional time and support for learning will receive it.

Schools must come to regard time as a tool rather than a limitation. For too long learning has been a prisoner of time with students and teachers being held captive by clock and calendar (Goldberg & Cross, 2005). Of course schools could lengthen the school day or the school year to create more time, but faculties typically are not in a position to do so unilaterally and are understandably unwilling to do so unless they are compensated accordingly. Faculties can, however, examine the way they are using the existing time available to them to create more opportunities for students to learn.

Schools must come to regard time as a tool rather than a limitation.

"Opportunity to learn" has been recognized as a powerful variable in student achievement for more than 30 years (Lezotte, 2005; Marzano, 2003). Research on the topic has typically focused on whether or not the intended curriculum was actually implemented in the classroom; that is, were the essential skills actually taught? We are arguing that opportunity to learn must move beyond the question of "Was it taught?" to the far more important question of "Was it learned?" If the answer to that question is no for some students, then the school must be prepared to provide additional opportunities to learn during the regular school day in ways that students perceive as helpful rather than punitive.

In the previous chapter, we made the case for the use of common, formative teacher-developed assessments as a powerful tool for school improvement. These assessments help collaborative teams of teachers answer the question, "How do we know if our students are learning?" It is pointless to raise this question, however, if the school is not prepared to intervene when it discovers that some students are not learning. The lack of a systematic response to ensure that students receive additional opportunities for learning reduces the assessment to yet another summative test administered solely to assign a grade. The response that occurs *after* the test has been given will truly determine whether or not it is being used as a formative assessment. If it is used to ensure students who experience difficulty are given additional time and support as well as additional opportunities to demonstrate their learning, it is formative; if additional support is not forthcoming, it is summative.

Many teachers have come to the conclusion that their job is not just difficult—it is *impossible.* If schools continue to operate according to traditional assumptions and practices, we would concur with that conclusion. Individual teachers working in isolation as they attempt to help all of their students achieve at high levels will eventually be overwhelmed by the tension between covering the content and responding to the diverse needs of their students in a fixed amount of time with virtually no external support.

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> *It is disingenuous for any school to claim its purpose is to help all students learn at high levels and then fail to create a system of interventions to give struggling learners additional time and support for learning.*

We cannot make this point emphatically enough: *It is disingenuous for any school to claim its purpose is to help all students learn at high levels and then fail to create a system of interventions to give struggling learners additional time and support for learning.* If time and support remain constant in schools, learning will always be the variable.

Furthermore, we cannot meet the needs of our students unless we assume collective responsibility for their well-being. Sarason (1996) described schools as a "culture of individuals, not a group . . . [with] each concerned about himself or herself" (p. 367), a place in which "each teacher dealt alone with his or her problems" (p. 321), an environment in which teachers "are only interested in what they do and are confronted within their encapsulated classrooms" (p. 329). The idea so frequently heard in schools, "These are *my* kids, *my* room, and *my* materials," must give way to a new paradigm of "These are *our* kids, and we cannot help all of them learn what they must learn without a collective effort." As Saphier (2005) writes, "The success of our students is our joint responsibility, and when they succeed, it is to our joint credit and cumulative accomplishment" (p. 28).

Part Four
Assessing Your Place on the PLC Journey

The PLC Continuum

Working individually and quietly, review the continuum of a school's progress on the PLC journey (on page 79). Which point on the continuum gives the most accurate description of the current reality of your school or district? Be prepared to support your assessment with evidence and anecdotes.

After working individually, share your assessment with colleagues. Where do you have agreement? Where do you find discrepancies in the assessments? Listen to the rationales of others in support of their varying assessments. Are you able to reach agreement?

Where Do We Go From Here?

The challenge confronting a school that has engaged in the collective consideration of a topic is answering the questions, "So what?" and, "What, if anything, are we prepared to do differently?" Now consider each indicator of a professional learning community described in the left column of the Where Do We Go From Here? Worksheet on page 80, and then answer the questions listed at the top of the remaining four columns.

Have on CD

The Professional Learning Community Continuum

Element of a PLC	Pre-Initiation Stage	Initiation Stage	Developing Stage	Sustaining Stage
Systematic Interventions Ensure Students Receive Additional Time and Support for Learning	There is no systematic plan either to monitor student achievement on a timely basis or to respond to students who are not learning with additional time and support. What happens when students experience difficulty in learning will depend entirely upon the teacher to whom they are assigned.	The school has created opportunities for students to receive additional time and support for learning before and after school. Students are invited rather than required to get this support. Many of the students who are most in need of help choose not to pursue it.	The school has begun a program of providing time and support for learning within the school day, but unwillingness to deviate from the traditional schedule is limiting the effectiveness of the program. The staff has retained its traditional 9-week grading periods, and it is difficult to determine which students need additional time and support until the end of the first quarter. Additional support is only offered at a specific time of the day or week (for example, over the lunch period or only on Wednesdays), and the school is experiencing difficulty in serving all the students who need help during the limited time allotted.	The school has a highly coordinated, sequential system in place. The system is proactive: It identifies and makes plans for students to receive extra support even before they enroll. The achievement of each student is monitored on a timely basis. Students who experience difficulty are required, rather than invited, to put in extra time and utilize extra support. The plan is multi-layered. If the current level of support is not sufficient, there are additional levels of increased time and support. Most importantly, all students are guaranteed access to this systematic intervention regardless of the teacher to whom they are assigned.

Where Do We Go From Here? Worksheet
Systematic Intervention

Describe one or more aspects of a professional learning community that you would like to see in place in your school.	What steps or activities must be initiated to create this condition in your school?	Who will be responsible for initiating or sustaining these steps or activities?	What is a realistic timeline for each step or phase of the activity?	What will you use to assess the effectiveness of your initiative?
The school has developed a system of interventions that guarantees each student will receive additional time and support for learning if he or she experiences initial difficulty. The interventions are timely and require, rather than invite, students to devote the extra time and receive the additional support for learning. The intervention plan is multi-dimensional. If one intervention strategy proves unsuccessful, the plan provides for alternative strategies to be used.				

Part Five
Tips for Moving Forward: Creating Systematic Interventions to Ensure Students Receive Additional Time and Support for Learning

1

Beware of appeals to mindless precedent. Appeals to mindless precedent include the phrases, "But we have always done it this way," "We have never done it that way," and the ever-popular, "The schedule won't let us." These appeals pose a formidable barrier to the creation of a PLC.

We have carefully perused both the Old and New Testaments and can find no evidence that any school schedule was carved into stone tablets and brought down from Mount Sinai. Yet in schools throughout North America, the schedule is regarded as sacred—an unalterable, sacrosanct part of the school not to be tampered with in any way. The reverence afforded the schedule is puzzling. A mere mortal created it, and educators should regard it as a tool to further priorities rather than as an impediment to change.

Surfacing mental models

One way to address mindless precedent is to invite those who resort to it to reflect upon and articulate the assumptions that led them to their position. In effect, they are invited to bring their perhaps unexamined assumptions to the surface for dialogue. Advocates for change can inquire about and probe those assumptions, articulate their own assumptions, and invite others to inquire about them as well. The likelihood of well-intentioned people learning from one another and arriving at similar conclusions increases when individual thinking is in clear view and accessible for examination and dialogue (see chapter 5, page 105, for a helpful guide in the use of advocacy and inquiry from Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994).

An advocate for a schedule that provides additional time and support for student learning might present the following argument:

- We contend that our fundamental purpose and most vital priority is to ensure all students learn at high levels.
- Research, as well as our own experience and intuition, make it clear that it is impossible for all students to learn at high levels if some do not receive additional time and support for learning. Even the most ardent advocates of the premise that all students can learn acknowledge that they will not learn at the same rate and with the same support.

- If the only time we offer this service is before or after school, some of our students cannot or will not utilize the services. It will be difficult for us to require those students to do what is necessary to be successful if our only access to them is beyond the school day.
- Therefore, the priority in designing our schedule should be ensuring we have access to students for intervention during the school day in ways that do not deprive them of new direct instruction in their classroom.
- Help me clarify my thinking. Where do you see errors in my logic? What priorities have you identified that are more significant and should take precedence over interventions for students as we build our schedule?

2 **The system of intervention should be fluid.** The system of intervention should not be designed as a permanent support for individual students. When students are experiencing difficulty, they should be directed to the appropriate level of intervention, but only until they have acquired the intended knowledge and skill. Once they have become proficient in the problem area, they should be weaned from the system until they experience difficulty in the future. There should be an easy flow of students into and out of the various levels of the program of support.

3 **Systems of intervention work most effectively when they are supporting teams rather than individual teachers.** We know of a school that convinced the Board of Education to provide additional funding to create a support system for students during the day. Three certified teachers were hired to provide tutoring throughout the school day and each created a sign-up sheet that stipulated designated blocks of time they were available to work with students. The sign-up sheets were posted in the faculty workroom, and teachers signed individual students into a designated block on the schedule to utilize the service. This process often proved problematic because the only time available to tutor a student in reading might occur when the classroom teacher was teaching math. Providing the student with extra time in one area meant a loss of instructional time in another. Furthermore, the teachers had not created common essential learning, pacing guides, or assessments. As a result, tutors were often uncertain regarding the specific skills with which a student required assistance. Therefore, teachers were asked to provide materials when they assigned a student to tutoring to ensure the tutor was focused on the right skills and concepts. As time went on, teachers began to regard the tutoring program as a burden that was creating more work for them rather than a helpful service. At the end of the year the program was abandoned.

This example stands in stark contrast to one of the schools featured in *Whatever It Takes* (2004). This rural school had access to very limited resources, and there were no additional dollars available for funding an intervention program; however, the staff chose to re-allocate discretionary funds in their site-based budget and to shift dollars from their state remediation funds in order to create a system of interventions. Two part-time, "floating" tutors were hired to support that system, but neither was a certified teacher.

The teachers in this school were organized into six grade-level teams of four or five members, and each team had clarified the essential learning, adhered to a common pacing guide, and administered common assessments throughout the year. Furthermore, each team had designated a specific 30-minute block of time during the school day when no new direct instruction would take place so students could be provided either additional time and support or enrichment depending upon their demonstrated proficiency.

Range . day in min
270 - 330
min
11% - 9%

30 min / day

Following each assessment, the teams identified the students who had been unable to meet the proficiency standard on a particular skill. The tutors would report to the team at the designated period of the day and would typically release the two teachers who had been most effective in teaching that skill to work with struggling students. Thus, the students who experienced the greatest difficulty in mastering a concept were given small-group instruction and individual tutoring by the strongest teachers in that particular concept. During this same 30-minute tutorial block, the tutors and remaining teachers of the grade level provided a variety of enrichment and extension activities to students who had mastered the skill. Each team created its own activities, such as learning centers, silent sustained reading, teacher read-alouds, junior great books groups, computer-based learning activities, and so on. The one rule observed by each team during this tutorial time was that no new direct instruction would take place.

The floating tutors and teaching teams were assisted by a cadre of volunteers recruited by the school: college students, high school students, employees from area businesses, parents, and grandparents. Volunteers were assigned to a specific grade level during the tutoring period and supported both students in the tutorial program and students in the enrichment activities. Most importantly, the volunteers were assured they would able to work directly with students while they were in the school.

Thus, a school with significantly fewer resources but coordinated collaborative teams was able to be successful in creating a system of interventions for students, while a school with extraordinary resources failed because it could not break free from its traditional structure of 28 classrooms that functioned as 28 independent kingdoms. We have witnessed the same lesson repeated over and over again in our work with schools: A school can dabble in PLC concepts or any other school improvement model of their choice; however, they will never experience significant gains in student achievement if they value individual teacher autonomy more than helping all students learn.

4 **Ensure common understanding of the term "system of interventions."** When Kildeer Countryside School District 96 in suburban Chicago asked each of its schools to create a "system of interventions" to provide students with additional time and support for learning, district leaders discovered schools were interpreting the term in very different ways. Therefore, district leaders worked with representatives of the schools to create the SPEED Intervention Criteria to guide the process. According to the criteria, interventions must be:

- Systematic
- Practical
- Effective
- Essential
- Directive

SPEED Intervention Criteria

Systematic: The intervention plan is school-wide, independent of the individual teacher, and communicated in writing (who, why, how, where, and when) to everyone: staff, parents, and students.

Practical: The intervention plan is affordable with the school's available resources (time, space, staff, and materials). The plan must be sustainable and replicable so that its programs and strategies can be used in other schools.

Effective: The intervention plan must be effective and available and operational early enough in the school year to make a difference for the student. It should have flexible entrance and exit criteria designed to respond to the ever-changing needs of students.

Essential: The intervention plan should focus on agreed upon standards and the essential learning outcomes of the district's curriculum and be targeted to a student's specific learning needs as determined by formative and summative assessments.

Directive: The intervention plan should be directive. It should be mandatory—not invitational—and a part of the student's regular school day. Students should not be able to opt out, and parents and teachers cannot waive the student's participation in the intervention program.

Used with permission from Kildeer Countryside School District 96, Buffalo Grove, Illinois.

An intervention plan should recognize the unique context of the school. Faculties should create their own plans rather than merely adopting the program of another school. In *Whatever It Takes* (2004), we offer specific and detailed explanations and examples of how an intervention plan operates in elementary, middle, and high schools. It is important that faculties realize, however, that eventually they are called upon to create their own systems of intervention within the context of their own schools. Once again, engaging staff in the process of exploring and resolving the question, "What will we do when students do not learn in our school?" creates far more ownership in and commitment to the resulting plan than the adoption of someone else's plan.

5 **Realize that no support system will compensate for bad teaching.** A school characterized by weak and ineffective teaching will not solve its problems by creating a system of timely interventions for students. Eventually, that system will be crushed by the weight of the mass of students it is attempting to support. At the same time the school is creating its system of intervention, it must also take steps to build the capacity of every teacher in the school to become more effective in meeting the needs of students. The battle to help all students learn must be fought on both fronts: support for students and support for the professional staff. To focus on one and exclude the other will never result in victory. Principals and teachers must engage in a process of continuous improvement, constantly examining their practices and expanding their repertoire of skills. But no matter how skillful the professional, at the end of each unit of instruction, it is likely some students will not master the intended learning. At that point the system of interventions comes to the aid of both students and teachers. Schools need both skillful teachers and effective, school-wide interventions.

#1
Intervention

Two Column
Activity - Column One
List the ideas that would significantly improve learning for students who are not achieving satisfactorily

Column Two
List the reasons why these ideas cannot be implemented

Mental Model
Activity
Identify the mental models that are driving the reasoning you list in column two

Now surface and critically analyze each of these mental models.

(continued)

Part Six
Questions to Guide the Work of Your Professional Learning Community

To Develop Systematic Interventions That Ensure Students Receive Additional Time and Support for Learning on a Timely and Directive Basis, Ask:

1. How do we respond in our school when students don't learn?

2. How timely is our response? How quickly can we identify a student who is experiencing difficulty?

3. How proactive are we? What steps do we take to identify the students who will need us most before they come to our school?

4. How directive is our response? Do we require students to put in extra time and utilize the extra support, or do we merely encourage them to do so?

5. How systematic is our response? Is there a plan in place that ensures students will receive additional time and support for learning independent of the classroom teacher?

6. Who oversees the system of response? Who makes the determination to move a student from one level of intervention to another?

7. How extensive is our response? How much time do we have each day and each week to support student learning through our interventions? Do we have multiple layers in our intervention plan?

8. How might we adjust our schedule to give us greater access to students who are not successful within the traditional school schedule?

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9. How fluid is our response? Can we easily move students in and out of interventions based on their demonstrated proficiency?

____

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Final Thoughts

A school-wide system of interventions requires a collaborative culture: a school culture in which staff members work together to provide each student with access to the same essential learning and a culture in which the proficiency of each student is assessed in a way that is timely, authentic, and consistent. In many schools and districts, however, educators squander precious time that has been provided for collaboration on topics that have no impact on student achievement. Chapter 5 delves into this problem and offers strategies for creating high-performing collaborative teams.