Early Warning System Toolkit

How to Promote Success for Every Student in a Multi-Tiered System of Supports

By **Panorama Education** with **Waltham Public Schools**

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Case Study

How Waltham Public Schools Uses Early Warning Indicators to Provide Targeted Student Supports

In Waltham, Massachusetts, school and district leaders have a vision to deliver excellence and equity for every student. Implementing an early warning system has been a key part of working towards this vision across the district.

THE CHALLENGE

Waltham Public Schools (WPS), a district serving 5,600 students in Massachusetts, has grown student achievement tremendously over the past few years. In 2017, WPS outperformed the state average on Advanced Placement (AP) tests and sent a higher percentage of students to college than the state average for the first time.

At the same time, however, Waltham leaders have identified several inequities in the system. Led by Superintendent Drew Echelson, the district has a vision to deliver excellence and equity for every student—but graduation rates remain lower for underrepresented student groups, and there are academic and extracurricular opportunities with which some students do not actively engage.

"Our system can't be excellent unless it's excellent for everyone. There are inequities in our system that we need to address," explained Echelson.

Determined to close these gaps, district leaders knew they needed a research-backed, data-driven way to monitor student progress and guide supports. WPS had a lot of data about students in different places, but educators lacked a streamlined way to use the data and insights in their day-to-day student supports and practices.

"Early warning indicators and intervention work are really important to our conversation about equity and excellence. We know we need to do more to ensure that all students engage with the opportunities that Waltham Public Schools provides."

–Dr. Drew Echelson, Superintendent, Waltham Public Schools

LAUNCHING AN EARLY WARNING SYSTEM IN WALTHAM

To help educators understand where students are "on track" or "off track," district leaders rolled out an early warning system (EWS) that integrates attendance, behavior, and coursework data. The indicators—known as the "ABCs"—were developed based on research from Dr. Robert Balfanz of the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University.

> *"Programs that track and aggregate our student data allow us to think about the data that matters for student success and put it together in one place."*
>
> *–Dr. Liz Homan, Interim Assistant Superintendent and Former Administrator of Educational Technology Integration, Waltham Public Schools*
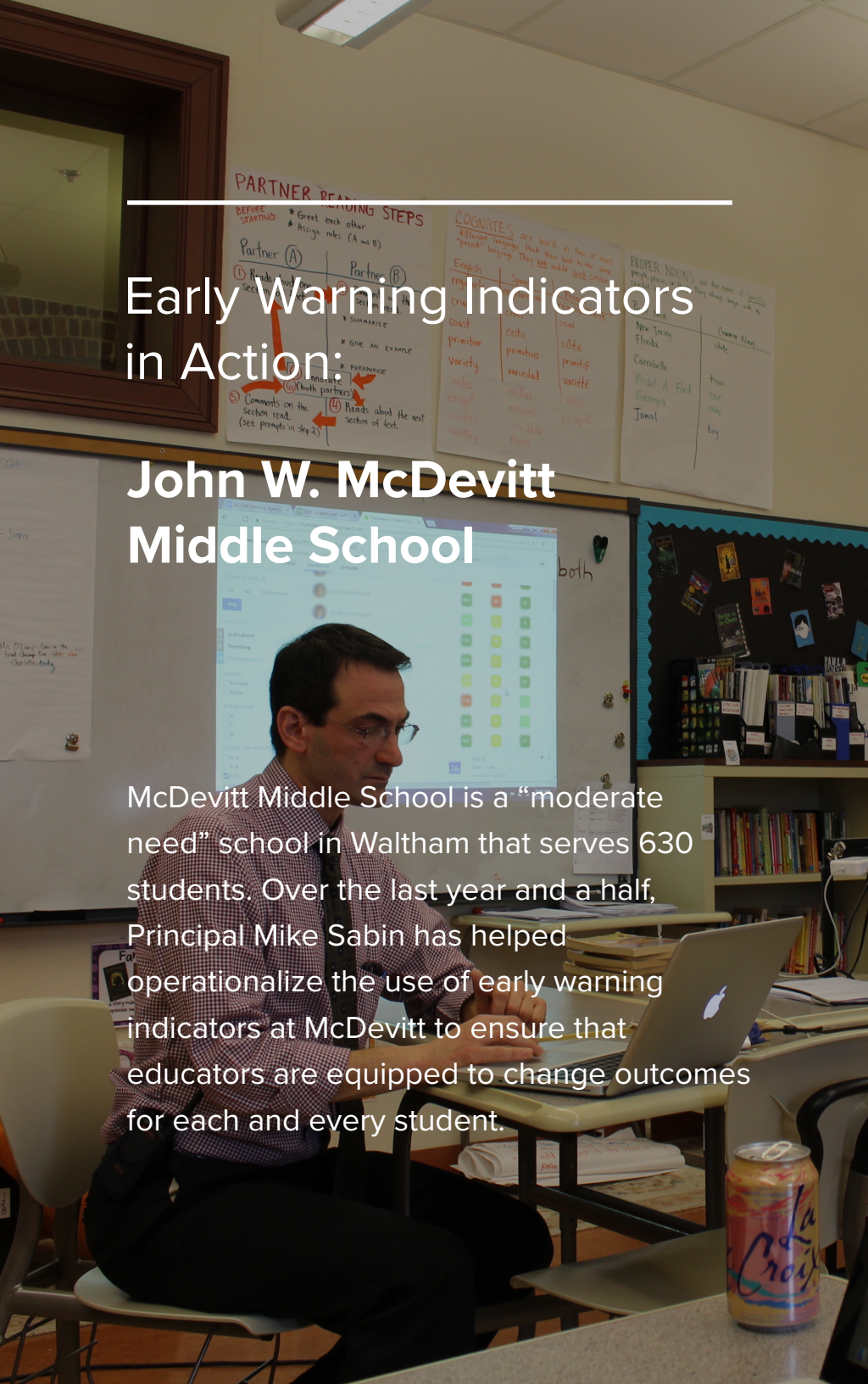
The process of implementing early warning indicators had two key components:

1. The Technology

The district chose Panorama Student Success as the tool to accompany its early warning system. Now, educators monitor students' ABCs and life skills data on a daily or weekly basis with one-click access to data dashboards. Instead of sifting through spreadsheets, educators can spend time proactively planning interventions and supports for at-risk students. The system also supports the district's focus on equity by enabling educators to track trends across specific demographics and student subgroups.

2. Teaching and Learning Cycles

"Human processes," such as EWI meetings and action planning with teachers, have been critical to successfully implementing an early warning system in Waltham. "We're looking at what we're doing in the classroom and how student data reflects what we're doing in the classroom," said Homan.

Early Warning Indicators in Action:

John W. McDevitt Middle School

McDevitt Middle School is a "moderate need" school in Waltham that serves 630 students. Over the last year and a half, Principal Mike Sabin has helped operationalize the use of early warning indicators at McDevitt to ensure that educators are equipped to change outcomes for each and every student.

IMPORTANT FEATURES OF MCDEVITT'S EWI APPROACH

- Structured EWI Meetings: McDevitt educators and staff are divided into eight grade-level teams, or clusters, that each meet once a month. Cluster members follow a set agenda to review the EWI data in Panorama and design action plans for students who are slipping in the ABCs. Each teacher attends about 10 cluster meetings in a year.

- Adult Advocates: Once students are identified, McDevitt's teachers take one-on-one responsibility for at-risk students. This creates a sense of shared ownership; all adults in the building, not just counselors, are responsible for supporting students.

- Tiers I & II Intervention Menu: Faculty members and teachers collaborated to develop a Tier I and Tier II intervention menu that provides actionable strategies for supporting at-risk students.

- Student Recognition and Incentive Program: McDevitt runs a recognition program that rewards students for improving or excelling in the ABCs.

6 KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL-WIDE EWS IMPLEMENTATION

1. EWI Champions

Identify school leaders or teachers who are passionate about promoting the EWI philosophy, sharing the latest research, and driving the work forward across the school.

2. One-Click Early Warning Platform

Give teachers and staff access to an integrated data system that updates daily with students' indicators available in one click.

3. Collaborative Meeting Schedule

Dedicate time for staff members to organize around EWI work. For example, McDevitt's EWI meetings are part of the existing middle school meeting structure.

4. Strong Meeting Facilitation

Develop school leaders' and faculty members' capacities to lead EWI meetings. Assign a facilitator for each meeting and use protocols to define action steps and check-in points to track progress.

5. District-level Support

Cultivate buy-in at the district level to ensure resources and a smooth implementation process.

6. Intervention Strategy

Data inquiry is only the first step; focus everyone's efforts on interventions and support planning. Set goals and deadlines to keep people accountable.

"An early warning system is a great tool to use to focus on our neediest students, but the systems don't run themselves. Dedicated leaders, teachers, and advocates are needed at the school level to translate the research and data into our daily practices to help students."
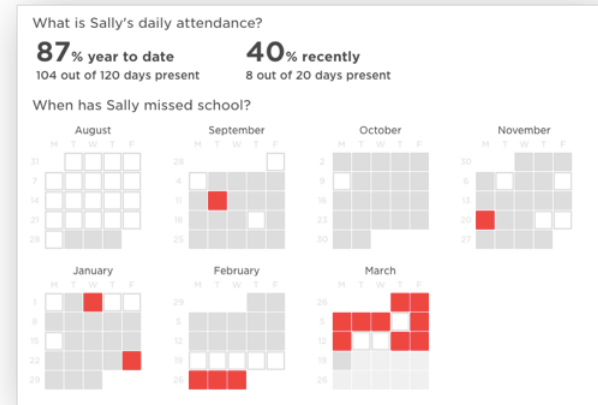
–Mike Sabin, Principal, McDevitt Middle School

The Teacher's Perspective:

Impact on Students at McDevitt Middle School

Teachers at McDevitt share how early warning indicators have helped them take their buddy students from "at risk" to "on track" across academics, attendance, and behavior.

"My buddy student from my special ed caseload was struggling in social studies and science and had attendance issues. My first step was to connect with his mother. She shared that he was missing days for medical treatment. This helped me understand what was going on and got the mom working on our team.

The second step was lunch group meetings, where he'd come with one or two friends. We'd have a nice time, but also get 15 or 20 minutes worth of work done.

He's done great in the last two terms, so we're planning to remove some of his special services. You can really see the maturity level; his attendance and academics have improved."

Nick Freehling
8th grade special education teacher

MORE TEACHER PERSPECTIVES

"Whenever I talk to a buddy student, I'll show them Panorama. The green, yellow, and red indicators make it very clear why they've been selected.

I've worked with two girls who were failing fine arts, and showed both of them Panorama. I also opened up communication with their fine arts teacher. Every day in my class, I would ask the girls how things were going in the fine arts class... just a daily conversational check-in. Those classes ended up turning around."

Ryan Hanlon
8th grade social studies teacher

"My buddy student struggles with the amount of work that a seventh grader needs to be able to do. He comes to our Homework Club a lot, and I've sat with him and coached him in reading comprehension.

I showed him Panorama and said, 'Let's make a plan. You have three F's this quarter. What can we do about that?' I found that to be very helpful. He reacted positively and did better the second and third quarters."

Daphne Meredith
7th grade social studies teacher

"My buddy student is a sixth grader who comes to the library in the mornings. His ELL teacher left halfway during the year, so that was an adjustment and some of his grades were dipping.

My approach is building a relationship with the student. I'll reach out to say, 'How are your grades? I noticed you're struggling in math; what's going on? Are you missing your teacher who left?'

I also reached out to the cluster leader and math teacher involved to be sure he was getting after-school tutoring and the supports he needed.

He's now a happier kid. He feels supported by adults in the building. It isn't just one person reaching out as an EWI connection; it's many people."

Lucy Clerkin
Library teacher

"Two of my buddy students had been getting A's and B's in the beginning of the year but dropped to C's and D's. For both students, we implemented an intervention around Homework Club. I also started positive, and if needed, negative communication home. We use the Google Voice text messaging app to provide regular updates to parents about whether the students are attending Homework Club or whether they had a good day at school.

Both students have been successful with some ongoing support. I'm pleased we were able to catch them early in Panorama and provide them with interventions to help them improve their grades."

Margaret Simeone
6th grade ELA teacher
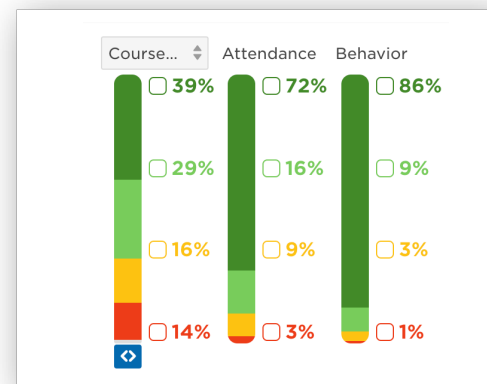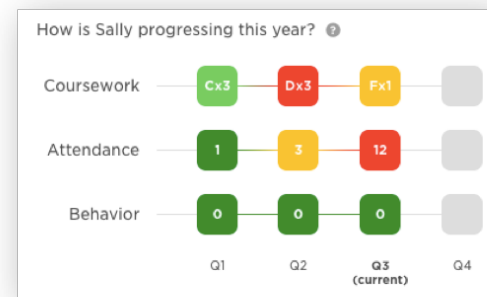
Looking Forward

Based on the success of McDevitt's EWI implementation, district leaders in Waltham have plans to roll out the early warning programs at all middle and high schools. The district also plans to integrate **school climate data** into its data dashboards to help educators better understand why students are struggling or slipping in the ABCs.

Early Warning System (EWS) Meeting Agenda

McDevitt Middle School

Objective: By the end of the meeting, each participant will walk away with a data-driven action plan for supporting one student in the next month.

Agenda

15 min.   **Launch and Update**

- [2 min.] Review the meeting objective
- [6 min. / 3 min. per teacher] In pairs, evaluate action plans from the last meeting
  - "What are some action steps you've tried out?"
  - Look at the data to answer, "Does this student still have EWI risk factors?"
- [7 min.] Regroup; each teacher shares a favorite action step and whether the student they advocated for last cycle needs an advocate again and why (using data)

15 min.   **Review and Match**

- [7 min.] Each adult analyzes the data to identify two students with EWI risk factors
- [8 min.] Each adult is assigned to advocate for one student

10 min.   **Plan and Share Student Supports**

- Develop a plan to support each identified student. Ask, "What can we do about this?"

5 min.   **Pluses and Deltas**

- "What did you find helpful or valuable about this meeting?"
- "How can we make the next meeting even better?

Download this agenda as a Word document to customize it for your own school.

Tips & Best Practices:

How to Facilitate an Early Warning System Meeting

Early warning system (EWS) meetings are a valuable opportunity for educators and staff to review data and create action plans for at-risk or struggling students. If you are facilitating an EWS meeting, follow these best practices to help your colleagues make the most of the time.*

*Boudett, K. P. (2014). Meeting Wise: Making the Most of Collaborative Time for Educators. Harvard Education Publishing Group (HEPG)

BEFORE THE MEETING:

- Review the meeting agenda. Make sure you are familiar with each agenda item and the start and stop times for each section.

- Print out copies of the agendas so that participants can reference the agenda during the meeting. (Consider collecting these at the end of each meeting to minimize printing in the future.)

- Using your early warning system, identify one data finding to celebrate with the team.

- Arrive at the meeting a few minutes early so you have time to hook your laptop up to the projector. Display your early warning system and the meeting agenda on the screen.

- Remind everyone to bring laptops.

- Review feedback from the last meeting so you can make small improvements to the discussion process.

DURING THE MEETING:

- Before the meeting starts, make sure participants have their laptops open and the agenda and early warning system pulled up.

- Keep conversations grounded in data and model this for the group.

- Stick to the start and stop times of each agenda item. Before giving participants work time, let them know how long they'll have and give them a 1-2 minute reminder.

- During the "Launch and Update" section, use your early warning system to show the data point you pre-identified and want to celebrate with the team.

- During the "Plan and Share Student Supports" section, project the action planning template as a Google Document on screen so teachers can fill it out and see each other work.

- During the "Plus/Delta" section, assign a note-taker to jot down teachers' feedback.

AFTER THE MEETING:

- Schedule time in the next team meeting for teachers to partner up and discuss the progress they're making on their action plans.

- Highlight successes in a group email, in 1:1 conversations, or in upcoming meetings.

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Sample Intervention Menu

Download this menu as a Word document to develop your school's own intervention menu.

What is this? A menu of interventions to use with the students you support. This menu is adapted from the Intervention Menu that teachers created at McDevitt Middle School in Waltham (MA).

How should I use it?

- When you're developing an action plan during Early Warning System (EWS) meetings, reference this menu for ideas on how to support your assigned students.

- Even better—use this template to empower teachers to develop their own intervention menu! It can be even more powerful and effective when teachers bring their own ideas and learnings to the menu.

☐ Parent contact (email, phone, etc.)

☐ Student and/or parent meeting with Cluster Team

☐ Student goal-setting meeting

☐ Review cumulative folder

☐ 2x10 relationship building

☐ Daily homeroom check-in

☐ Enroll in a positive activity

☐ Student self-advocacy email to teachers

☐ Binder or locker organization session

☐ Buddy student

☐ Substance abuse counseling

☐ Weekly academic check-in

☐ Homework club

☐ Before/after school meetings

☐ Lunch group

☐ Advocate check-in with teachers

☐ Positive phone call

☐ Working lunch (make-up work)

☐ Academic CICO plan (check-in/check-out)

☐ Office folder review for EWI buddy

☐ Match with role model/mentor

☐ [Your Ideas]

Worksheet: EWS Intervention Action Planning

Download this worksheet as a Word document.

<table>
<tr><td>What is this? An action planning worksheet to use during EWS meetings when developing intervention plans for students.

How should I use it? Fill out this worksheet during the "Plan and Share Student Supports" portion of the meeting.</td></tr>
</table>

				Intervention Action Plan - [Date]		
					Intervention Plan	
Student Name	EWI Risk Factors	What else do we know?	Teacher Advocate	*Goal*	*Action Items (Action Owner)*	*Time*
EXAMPLE	• *8 absences this year* • *Failing math*	• *Did well in math last year* • *Shy*	*Sally*	*Increase attendance, no more than 2 additional absences*	*1. Student goal-setting meeting to discuss absences* *2. Call home to discuss absences* *3. 2x10 relationship building with math teacher*	*Oct. 15*

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About Panorama Education

Panorama Education helps educators act on data to improve student outcomes. Panorama has supported more than 15 million students in 25,000 schools across all 50 states, including those in the New York City Department of Education, Dallas Independent School District, Seattle Public Schools, and San Francisco Unified School District.

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