INITIATIVE STATUS REPORT ™

Rush Neurobehavioral Center
Executive Function
Learning Management System II

Initiative Status Reports

Initiative Status Reports™ (ISR) were created to take a fresh look at ongoing efforts to improve Chicago schools. Recognizing the need for accurate information – by teachers, parents, decision-makers and the general public – ISRs offer timely and objective analysis of a particular initiative, program or policy. ISRs answer the question: What's happening today?

Perhaps most important, the status of each initiative is assessed relative to its own goals. Using standard research methodologies, ISRs help fill the gap between journalistic reporting and long-term research. They provide a depth of analysis and quick turn-around time that make ISRs useful tools in any accountability process. The prompt feedback can be used: by program participants to explore mid-course corrections and enhance program effectiveness; by program supporters – both public and private – to assess how well their time, energy and money are being spent; and by policy makers and the general public to be kept apprised of ongoing progress.

Each ISR is clear, concise and objective and adheres to a consistent format. A brief *Introduction* and *Background* provide an overall context for the initiative being examined. Specific questions to be answered are laid out clearly. Each criterion for analysis, or *Status Point*, is addressed individually, while a separate category for *General Status Points* allows for inclusion of information outside the original scope of the report. Important questions discovered during the course of the report which may be useful to program participants, supporters and others are contained in the final section, *For the Future*. These questions have the potential to be answered by participants and supporters themselves, through future ISRs, or through longer research projects.

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education (2000) reported that during the 1998-99 school year over 2.8 million children with learning disabilities received special education and related services. Brain-based research is having a profound impact on those numbers and continues to improve efforts to understand how children learn and should be taught.

One of the outcomes of brain research has been the cataloging of certain learning proficiencies into a group called *executive functioning skills.* Executive functions – time management, planning, prioritizing, goal setting, and problem solving – constitute fundamental skills which affect human behavior over a life time. Executive functioning skills deficiencies have come to refer to problems directly related to memory, organization, and planning.

Early on, children with these deficiencies struggle to establish long-term goals; they are not readily able to define or prioritize the steps to take; and they find it difficult to get started on activities such as homework and long-term projects. They have trouble organizing, planning ahead, and developing strategies to manage their time, space, and activities. They often give inappropriate responses to stimuli and have difficulty shifting their attention from one task to another. They struggle with setting priorities and breaking down assignments into manageable tasks.

Many children with executive functioning skills deficiencies go undiagnosed. They manage to stay just below the radar in terms of needing special services. Frequently they are labeled – without any evaluation – as under-achievers or just plain lazy. Their deficiencies are seen as behavioral or even intentional as opposed to being a motive for evaluating brain function. Throughout the educational process, children struggle without understanding why. Many cannot demonstrate their talents because executive functioning skills deficiencies get in the way.

Unable to identify a technique appropriate to the needs of their clients, Rush Neuro-behavioral Center (RNBC) – a division of Rush Children's Hospital – created a learning management system to provide corrective action for children with diagnosed and undiagnosed executive functioning skills deficiencies.

Through its clinical practice, RNBC staff began developing its executive functioning learning management system. As their work expanded – and knowing that lessons learned about special needs children could be applied to the general population – RNBC sought out partnerships with area schools to broaden the base of those who could be helped.

This Initiative Status Report™ examines RNBC's partnership with three Chicago area schools: Sunset Ridge School in Northfield, Illinois, and Ogden Elementary School and Children of Peace School in Chicago, Illinois.

Background

The mission of the Rush Neurobehavioral Center (RNBC), a section of the Department of Pediatrics at Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center in Skokie, Illinois, is to: *serve the medical, psychological and educational needs of children with brain-based learning and behavior problems.* This is accomplished by developing innovative approaches to their diagnoses and treatment.

The RNBC goal regarding executive functioning services and programs is to: *intervene multi-dimensionally with the child, the school, and the family to establish regular behavioral and cognitive routines that maximize planning, organization and decision making thus building a brain basis for success* [1]. (A brief literature review, suggests that RNBC is among the first to create, systematize, and pilot an approach addressing executive functioning skills for children with and without diagnosed deficiencies.)

Using the executive functioning (EF) learning management system, RNBC expects children to expand their knowledge of and gain competence in:

- *Efficient time management*
- *Improved organizational proficiency*
- *Sustained motivation*
- *Effective planning*
- *Pro-active behavior and self-discipline*
- *Goal setting*
- *Awareness of learning styles and coping strategies*
- *Reduction of fear of failure*
- *Academic and social balance and growth*
- *Renewed excitement for learning*

Early in 2003, RNBC initiated conversations to establish partnerships with area schools to bring its clinical practice experience into the schools. The first school relationship was begun with Ogden Elementary School – a Chicago public school on the city's near north-side.

Planning centered on identifying and working directly with children who had learning disabilities associated with executive functioning skills. As talks progressed, school and RNBC staffs realized the potential to have an impact – not only on children with diagnosed deficiencies – but also on others who might have trouble getting organized and completing work. At the principal's urging and with agreement from RNBC, the system was introduced to all children in 6th through 8th grades.

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[1] Rush Neurobehavioral Center website http://www.rnbc.org/execfunct.asp.

During the 2003-04 academic year at Ogden, RNBC staff reached 225 children, provided technical support to thirty-three teachers, and gave workshops for 150 parents. RNBC also provided technical assistance throughout the year. Students attended a weekly executive functioning class where they learned about the brain function, types of learners, and use of the system along with related meta-cognitive skills such as note taking, listening and reading to learn, and study and test-taking strategies.

In 2004-05, RNBC expanded its relationships to include three schools: Sunset Ridge Elementary in Northfield, IL, Ogden, and Children of Peace – a Catholic school on Chicago's near west side. In these partnerships, RNBC provided students and teachers with a learning management system to help them:

- organize time and materials
- monitor grades
- manage homework
- break down projects into manageable tasks
- set priorities and long- and short-term goals
- plan ahead
- reduce school related stress

EF System Impact School Year 04-05

	Children of Peace	*Ogden*	*Sunset Ridge*
Children Served	190	572	250
Grades Served	Pre-K-8	K-8	3-6
Teachers Trained	11	31	10
Parent Workshops Given	1	3	3

Demographics 04-05 School Year [2]

	Children of Peace	Ogden	Sunset Ridge
School Type	PreK-8	K-8	4-8
Student Enrollment White African-American Hispanic Asian Native-American Other **Total**	 13 123 37 8 0 9 **190**	 235 192 75 67 3 0 **572**	 312 0 13 12 0 0 **337**
Deaf Student Enrollment	20	0	0
Total Number of Teachers	21	31	28
Average Class Size	20	26	20
Mobility Rate	25%	22.6%	1.5%
Attendance Rate	99%	95%	95.6%
Low Income	61%	18.4%	1.8%
Limited-English Proficiency	0%	17.3%	2.7%

[2] Demographic information for Children of Peace was provided by the school principal. Ogden and Sunset Ridge demographics were gathered from the 2004 Illinois School Report Cards (http://statereportcards.cps.k12.il.us/Default.aspx and http://www.sunsetridge29.net/info_center).

Status Points

By relying on interviews, observations and questionnaire data, the status of the following five aspects of the executive functioning (EF) skills system is offered:

1. **MATERIALS**
2. **METHODS**
3. **IMPLEMENTATION**
4. **SUPPORT**
5. **IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY**

1 MATERIALS

All three schools utilized a basic set of supplies to manage their EF system:

- Planner – Daily/weekly/monthly calendar used by each student to plan and track long- and short-term projects, homework assignments, and other activities.
- Binder – Portfolio used as a central storage system for the planner, homework, and subject area notes and handouts; served as the student's carry-all.
- Filing system (storage containers) – Bins in the classroom where students file their completed homework. Work is saved and available for student/teacher/ parent reference.
- Assignment boards – Dry-erase boards found in each classroom with weekly homework assignments.
- Timers – Countdown clocks indicating the time available for completing tasks.
- Classroom/model planners – Master copy of all homework and activities.

Students used planners to keep track of both school and personal activities.

- One student explained how the planner was used to organize schoolwork, "In our planner, if we have homework we write it down, if we don't, we write NH (no homework). We write a or b – a is for things due the next day and b is for long-term assignments. And then we put numbers for easiest to hardest. [For example,] A1 is what we have to do first. That system really works for me."

- Other students used the planners to track after school activities, birthdays, and appointments. "I use the planner for personal information and weekend plans. When baseball season started, I wrote down when and where all the baseball games were."

Students reported that the binder was useful and an effective way to store their school supplies and homework in one location.

- A student summarized, "I love the binder. You have two pocket folders for each of your classes and you put all of your work in the binder so you don't lose anything. At the end of each quarter you empty the binder and start again. It's awesome, by actually putting everything in there you don't lose anything." Another added, "I like the binder because it keeps my stuff organized; I can keep things filed and categorized."

The binder's durability, size, and weight were cause for concern.

- Students commented that the binders broke easily and others thought the binders were too heavy. One said, "My back is so sore. I walk to and from school… it's heavy."

The assignment boards and classroom planners helped save time when students missed an assignment or were absent.

- One student explained, "The homework is on the dry-erase board. [The teacher] writes the homework down everyday. There is a planner for the class on a table right next to the door just in case you were absent and missed your work. Last year, we would ask our teacher or friends for assignments. This year, we just look in the model planner."

Students and teachers wanted materials to be readily available.

- Several teachers suggested that the school pre-purchase necessary supplies and have replacements available.

- One teacher said that to avoid any confusion, "The best thing would be for the school to supply [the materials] and the parents buy it from the school." A student suggested, "[The school should] have the proper supplies provided. It is not easy to find all of the items."

- Others added that a school supply store would be helpful so students would have quick access to what they needed.

2 METHODS

Teachers, parents, and students identified the following as elements of EF:

Prioritizing
- Seventy-one percent of teachers believed that students understood how to prioritize. One teacher explained, "The kids have learned to prioritize. I tell them they can choose what their priority is, the hardest or easiest activity. We write E or A on the bottom of the assignment; E equals estimated time and A equals actual time. It helps them dive in and do their work without being overwhelmed."

- More than eighty percent of parents reported that students understood what it meant to prioritize; 38% agreed that their child was actually doing it.

- Over one-third of 6-8 graders said they knew how to prioritize activities.

Long-term planning
- More than 80% of teachers and parents agreed that students understood how to plan ahead. One teacher said, "Long term projects are a part of our calendar. For example, when we were reading a novel, we wrote in our planner exactly how much to read every day."

- A student added, "EF helps with planning and it helps with long-term projects... The teacher gives us the dates for when certain parts of the project need to be done, and then we write it [in the planner]. So when we look at the planner we can see exactly when things are due. It makes things easier."

Goal setting
- Ninety percent of teachers and parents agreed that students understood how to set goals. One teacher explained, "At the beginning of the year, every child makes a goal chart. Five areas – personal, family, social, school, physical. Every week [students] revisit the goals. They love to listen to others' suggestions and are so respectful. It has really helped the emotional climate of my class. Kids feel safe and support one another. Goal setting is very important."

- Another teacher added, "It's been a wonderful tool to build the type of classroom atmosphere I like. It offers a lot of support for kids to see that others have similar obstacles and it provides a very supportive community."

- One student elaborated, "Our teachers help us write weekly and monthly goals. They always make us start the sentence with *I will*, and make us write how/when/where. Then, they ask us if we accomplished our goal."

Teachers, parents, and students identified activities associated with the system and agreed they were incorporated into the classroom on a regular basis:

- Monthly calendar of events – Compiled at the beginning of the month; included half days, long-term assignments, special events, birthdays, and other activities.
- Agenda of events – A daily to-do list posted in each classroom highlighting the activities for the day.
- Grade-reporting sheet – Document used to track completed and graded assignments; used so that students were aware of their grade.
    - ° One teacher reported, "I grade their papers every week and they record their grades, when we get to the monthly progress report and report card, it becomes a math lesson. They now realize that I don't just give them their grades, they earn their grades. It becomes very visual and they love the ownership."
- Time for organizing/filing/cleaning desks and lockers
    - ° Teachers allowed time for general maintenance of the system. They encouraged students to remove papers from their folders at the end of each unit, to file them in the appropriate place, and to clean their desks and lockers periodically.

Teachers and parents agreed students could receive grades for executive function skills as they do in other subjects. A majority of students believed they should not be graded on EF skills.

- Teachers suggested that the *uses organizational skills/life-skills* category on report cards could be utilized for grading EF skills.

- One teacher suggested that EF assessment be clarified, "The kids need a rubric for how they are getting that EF grade. I remember last year being surprised about who got the grades they got." A student agreed by saying, "Expect the system to be mandatory, check the binder and planner regularly, and provide a more specific grading system."

- Students commented, "I don't like to get graded for EF because we organize ourselves the way we think we need to. The way I organize is different than others… and I might not like the way they organize. But if it is good for them why should I comment." "I don't think we should get grades in EF because we each have our own way of being organized." "[The teacher] puts pluses and checks on the report card, which will keep us from the honor roll. EF is helping, but it's like an extra-curricular activity."

3 IMPLEMENTATION

Though similarities between the executive function systems existed at all three schools, differences were also observed.

Similarities
- Administrators were supportive of EF system implementation and recognized it as valuable.

- RNBC was involved, in some capacity, in the introduction and on-going implementation of the system.

- Teachers spent time at the end of class reinforcing the system (reminding students where to put their work and where to write their assignments).

- An individual (either internal or external) was identified as the primary point-person to organize supplies and address immediate concerns.

- In-services were held for the faculty and parents to educate them on the system.

School 1
- The EF system was implemented in grades K-8.

- The principal was directly involved in most aspects of the system including facilitating student/teacher training, addressing teacher questions and needs, and modeling and reinforcing the system.

- RNBC staff maintained a strong presence at the school through weekly visits. Consultants helped teachers set up their classrooms, conducted observations, and mentored teachers who needed additional assistance.

- A teacher served as an EF liaison to RNBC consultants, the administration, other teachers, and parents; responsibilities included overall support of the system, teaching the weekly executive function class, managing the supplies, and providing necessary help and training to the faculty and students.

- Students in grades 6-8 attended a weekly executive function class facilitated by the EF liaison. They reported that class time was primarily used to organize binders and planners, prioritize assignments, and work on goal setting. Periodically time was devoted to strategies for note- and test-taking.

- Several teachers wanted a guide or curriculum to help them reinforce the skills. One teacher said, "I don't know what I'm supposed to do in my classroom to support what they're doing in the EF class."

- Teachers reported that parents were supportive and involved.

School 2

- The EF system was used for students in grades 3-6.

- The administration encouraged interested teachers to pursue training on EF and supported the dissemination of information to the rest of the faculty. The administration was not directly involved in the day-to-day activities, but served as a liaison for faculty and parents.

- The RNBC consultant met with the staff 4 or 5 times over the course of the year. During these visits, the consultant made recommendations, observed classrooms, and provided RNBC expertise and research.

- The school did not have a weekly EF class and used time during language arts to teach students about the system. Sixth grade teachers used student/teacher/ parent conferences to explain the system.

- A teacher brought the system to the school and continued to serve as a liaison to RNBC staff, the administration, other teachers, and parents.

- Teachers and administrators reported that parents were involved and supportive. In order to answer parent concerns regarding EF, the school assembled a parent liaison group.

School 3

- The EF system was used with students in grades pre-K to 8.

- The administration helped initiate the system but was not involved in day-to-day activities. The administrator served as a liaison to RNBC.

- The RNBC consultant acted as the primary EF contact at the school and visited the school on a bi-weekly basis.

- Students in grades 3-8 attended an executive function class taught twice a week by an external consultant. The class included setting goals, checking planners, assisting students with calendar updates, reviewing the binders and filing systems, and showing students how to start and finish a project.

- Teachers attended the EF class with their students.

- Teacher opinion regarding parent involvement was mixed. One reported that parents were "pretty supportive"; while another commented that involvement was "not very good at all."

Ninety percent of teachers reported they regularly utilized, modeled, and reinforced the executive function techniques and practices appropriate to their students' grade level.

Opinion regarding the effectiveness and necessity of an EF class was varied.

- One teacher emphasized, "The class is necessary. Students get more in-depth monitoring."

- Others felt the EF class was only necessary for students who need additional help. One said, "We could use some of the EF class-time maybe to target a few [students] who need it."

- A teacher suggested holding an EF class in the evening for parents, teachers, and students. The session could focus on the planning and completion of a specific school-wide assignment, such as the history or science fair project. EF could then be utilized to outline the necessary planning, prioritizing, and goal-setting activities.

- Another teacher said, "No class is necessary. I think [EF] can be implemented in the daily routine, and not seen as a burden."

- Students thought that the class was helpful because it provided the time necessary to organize and clean their binders and planners.

- Twenty-five percent of 6-8 grade students reported that the class was not interesting. One said, "This is where a conflict comes. We miss French for EF… The system is good, but I think instead of having a whole class, we should work it into our daily schedules of maybe 5 minutes a day."

The EF system provided consistency and uniformity throughout the school.

- An administrator commented, "[EF] is now part of our vocabulary, and it's no big deal. It's a given now, because we're utilizing it throughout the school."

- Teachers reported the system provided a shared vocabulary and consistent terminology. One explained, "It gave us a common language, common supplies… which makes things much easier." Another said, "It's given everybody something in common."

- Several believed the consistency provided by the system was beneficial to the students. "I believe in consistency, and I know that the students I've encountered need it to succeed. If they see it every year, they can only get better. As they get older, they should internalize it and they shouldn't need to be reminded as often. They are going to have the knowledge to do it themselves."

- Teachers acknowledged that similar expectations throughout the school assisted with student transition between classrooms and grades. "We… have a certain homogeneity among classes and grade levels which really facilitates student transition." "It helps to have the same theme throughout the grades."

- "Expectations are clear. The planner is consistent. [Students] don't expect something new every year. The same basics are in place." "In my opinion, it's a way to get everybody on the same page… from year to year."

Several teachers wanted the EF system to be flexible and adaptable to different teaching and classroom management styles.

- Five teachers said that freedom to make modifications to the system was important. One explained, "We had to make some modifications so as not to overwhelm [the students]. The freedom to do that is why it worked."

Younger students (grades 3-5) more readily implemented EF. Some sixth-eighth graders reported already having their own organizational system.

- Teachers commented that their 3-5 graders never questioned the practices associated with EF. "It's good that it starts in the primary grades, before they are set in their ways." "The kids, at this level, never question it, they just do it." "In first grade, the students don't really realize that it's a different system. They just think this is the way it is."

- Upper grade teachers reported some of their students were hesitant about EF because they already had their own organizational system. One said, "My 5th graders have trouble with it, but if they had started in first grade, they would be used to it by now."

Teachers and students believed that general acceptance and implementation of the EF system would improve over time.

- Some teachers suggested that student acceptance of the system would improve each year and less teacher time would be required to reinforce it. "Next year, they will have it down pat. They're going to know the game before it's even explained to them."

- A teacher commented, "There were some complaints at the beginning when EF was new. But now people are proud of the school and of using the system. Lots of visitors come to school and are impressed that it's used school-wide."

- One student explained, "Thinking back on 6th grade, I had my own style of organizing. It took a lot of adapting at the beginning. I didn't like it when I first heard about it; I liked how I was doing things. We wanted to be unique and on our own, and we were used to what we were doing. But, as we continue, it definitely helps."

Over ninety percent of parents and school staff believed parent involvement was important to the implementation of EF; thirty percent of students agreed.

- An administrator commented, "The obligation of the school is to let the parents know about EF. Parents need to be aware of everything."

- Teachers believed parents should augment what was being done in classrooms by reviewing the planner and binder, checking homework, and securing the necessary supplies.

- One student said, "My parents do not play a role in EF. I've told them about the system and they agree with it. But they don't go through and check my binder."

- Eighty-three percent of parents understood the system's components and 76% agreed they should be involved in EF.

Use of the grade reporting sheets and the filing system varied.

Grade reporting sheets [3]
- One teacher suggested, "I use an [online grading system]; parents can check grades at anytime." Another observed, "The grade reporting sheets help with reviewing grades. But, some kids lack motivation to do the recording."

- Students commented that some teachers required them to record their grades as soon as their papers were returned. Other asked to have grades recorded monthly. "It just depends on the teacher."

- One student said, "The grading sheets… they give them to us, but we don't use them. We don't spend any time doing it even though we are supposed to."

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[3] Please see page 8 for additional information on grade-reporting sheets.

Filing system [4]

- A student explained, "Every quarter we file the things we are not going to use any more." Another stated, "There is a file system in the back of the room where we put our papers. We do that about once a month – basically every time we have a test. We save it in the back of the room to use for parent-teacher conference."

- Some teachers reported being confused by the filing system and that the storage bins were going unused.

- Students confirmed that across classrooms, the frequency of filing was not consistent, "With some of our teachers we file every three weeks, in other classes they leave it up to us to do what we want." "Some teachers let us file and some don't."

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[4] Please see page 5 for additional information on the filing system.

4 SUPPORT

Participating schools introduced and funded EF differently.

School 1 – administration driven:
- The principal sought out and identified a school-wide organizational system that would give teachers and administrators common vocabulary and supplies.

- The school partnered with RNBC to introduce the system and for ongoing training and consultation. The principal continued to be directly involved in most aspects of the system.

- Funding was provided by RNBC; additional resources were made available through the school budget.

School 2 – teacher driven:
- Several teachers learned about EF at workshops they attended. They presented the information to their administration who agreed the system would be beneficial.

- Teachers worked with the administration and RNBC to introduce the system.

- Parents were asked to buy the supplies for their students and additional funding was provided by the school.

School 3 – grant driven:
- Based on a previous relationship with RNBC, the school and Rush agreed to pilot the system in the school.

- RNBC provided all training and consultation.

- Necessary grant funding was made available through RNBC.

Teachers considered RNBC to be a helpful component in implementing the system.

- An administrator explained, "Having [someone] from Rush come in one day a week to work with the teachers has been helpful. Teachers need more support. It's a change in practice, and for some teachers who have been doing things differently for a number of years, it may be difficult."

- Several teachers suggested that schools with limited resources might need a partner to provide funding for supplies to implement the system.

- Teachers commented that RNBC provided the credibility and research necessary for teacher and student buy-in. One teacher said, "I think we needed to work with Rush in the beginning. Maybe now I could do it on my own, but I think it's important to have them come in every week. It shows the students why it's important and how they do it."

- A few teachers reported feeling frustrated because they were already implementing many aspects of executive function prior to their involvement with RNBC. One teacher said, "I already did a lot of this; I just added new vocabulary." Another said, "[External support] was not necessary at all. I think it's a lot of money to spend when we could have figured it out ourselves."

Most teachers agreed that the EF in-servicing was excellent.

- "We received an in-service at the beginning of the year. At first it was overwhelming, but it was good because we were able to see how other teachers organize their classrooms. At the end of it all, I felt prepared."

- Some would have preferred a more practical experience. Teacher comments included, "It wasn't a hands-on training; it was more of an informative talk… " "[There was] a lot of information on brain-based learning, the necessity of the brain to function a certain way; that's great, but that's not what I need in the classroom."

A majority of teachers reported that they received the support, materials, and planning time needed to implement executive function.

- Teachers reported, "There is strong support from the administration for EF." "[This school is] supportive and team oriented. Any needs of teachers are met. Office and administration are supportive. Collegiality and working together are also good."

- One stated, "We have a common planning period where we discuss homework, tests, etc. We talk about how the schoolwork is going. We totally collaborate. It's helping the kids out that these conversations are happening."

- At one school, a teacher explained, "We don't have a lot of time to talk amongst ourselves because there are no prep periods; we don't even eat lunch together. We have a faculty meeting once a week which is directed by the principal. We don't have a lot of time to discuss things that really need to be discussed."

Teachers, parents, and students agreed that EF was an important part of their curriculum. They also reported that the school community was generally supportive of new initiatives.

- Teachers remarked, "[The school] engenders quality education through having the tools that we need to teach." "The staff is very positive. Teachers feel supported by the administration." "It's a supportive atmosphere and we are willing to change and go with new ideas to accommodate students and teachers."

- Student comments included: "It is a very warm school, everyone helps each other out. It's a safe and comfortable place to be. The teachers create a really nice environment for the students." "This is an excellent school. All of the teachers are very nice – they interact with the students." Another student said, "Not many students like [EF], but it sticks anyway. You're always reminded of it so eventually you do it."

Teachers wanted an active role in the design and implementation of EF at their schools.

- An administrator said that the school was successful in introducing EF because teachers identified, researched, and introduced the system. "Change [at our school] is implemented gradually and is teacher driven. We do all of our staff development that way. If you do global broad-based things before the staff is ready, it will fall short and fail."

- One teacher explained that acceptance of the system improved once teachers understood it was a school-wide learning management system.

- Another suggested that some dissension regarding the system could have been prevented if teachers were included on the planning committee.

- One added that though teachers saw the need for the system, some reported feeling concerned because it was mandated. "It's really been shoved down everyone's throat; especially the lower grade levels."

5 IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Parents and teachers attributed positive changes in their child's behavior to executive function. Student opinions varied.

Attitude toward schoolwork:

	Greatly Improved %	Improved %	No Change %	Worsened %
Parents	14	49	37	0
Students (*grades 3-5)*	32	38	25	5
Students (*grades 6-8)*	19	39	38	4
Teachers	25	45	30	0

- Several teachers observed that EF contributed to student responsibility and accountability.

- Others thought it was hard to determine if executive function had an impact on student behavior. One teacher said, "There are so many factors that contribute… I think it's one of many components changing behaviors for the better."

- One parent wrote, "He is very proud of the whole system… [He] loves to keep it neat and be organized. [He] wants to always be prepared, and this system ensures that he is."

- Students explained, "I was disorganized before… now I know what's coming up, what I'm going to need, my homework is right there, I never have any more problems with that. It's made me feel better about myself. I'm prepared and I don't have to be scared that I don't have my assignments." Another said, "It helps me keep up with all my work and lets me know what all my grades are so I'm not surprised. It keeps me very organized. I think EF has made completing assignments easier."

Anxiety about schoolwork:

	Greatly Reduced %	*Reduced %*	*No Change %*	*Worsened %*
Parents	6	50	36	8
Students (*grades 3-5)*	35	29	29	7
Students (*grades 6-8)*	16	31	44	9
Teachers	19	43	38	0

- One student said, "I feel less stressed out. In 6ᵗʰ grade, I came in and I wasn't used to all the big projects… Now, these projects don't seem so big… they seem doable. I enjoy coming here, I know I can finish things on time."

Cleanliness of lockers/desks/classrooms:

	Greatly Improved %	*Improved %*	*No Change %*	*Worsened %*
Parents	18	55	27	0
Students (*grades 3-5)*	45	27	22	6
Students (*grades 6-8)*	27	39	29	5
Teachers	24	62	14	0

Over half the parents and students agreed that academic achievement improved after executive function was implemented.

Study habits have changed because of executive function:

	Strongly Agree %	*Agree %*	*Disagree %*	*Strongly Disagree %*
Parents	22	42	28	8
Students (*grades 6-8)*	16	39	29	16

- A student said, "Now that I have everything prioritized, I do my homework with a clear mind and get it done. Flow is a lot easier; it's definitely helped me."

Turned-in completed homework:

	Greatly Improved %	Improved %	No Change %	Worsened %
Parents	19	47	31	3
Students (*grades 3-5)*	47	29	22	2
Students (*grades 6-8)*	28	36	33	3
Teachers	38	48	14	0

- Teachers reported students finished work more consistently and fewer failed to complete their homework.

- One teacher commented, "Kids used to come to school and not know where the homework was... That just doesn't happen anymore." Another said, "There are less classroom distractions. With the binders, I think that everything is more organized. Because of the folders they know where everything is. Fewer materials are lost."

Organization and neatness of schoolwork:

	Greatly Improved %	Improved %	No Change %	Worsened %
Parents	14	61	25	0
Students (*grades 3-5)*	42	33	22	3
Students (*grades 6-8)*	28	39	31	2
Teachers	10	76	14	0

- When 3rd-5th grade students were asked how the binder helps them, over a third reported they were more organized/neater.

- One student said, "I know I was not the most organized person in the world. Before, I would forget where I left things, or forget to write down homework. Now, I always know what I have to do because of the planner. It definitely helps me."

Ability to set and accomplish goals:

	Greatly Improved %	Improved %	No Change %	Worsened %
Parents	14	58	28	0
Students (*grades 3-5)*	30	36	25	9
Students (*grades 6-8)*	23	37	34	6
Teachers	15	60	25	0

Students and parents credited EF skills with having an impact on aspects of their home life.

Students regularly utilized executive function components at home:

	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
Parents	24	54	19	3
Students (*grades 3-5)*	23	47	21	9
Students (*grades 6-8)*	14	44	29	13

- Fifty-seven percent of 3rd-5th graders and forty-four percent of 6th-8th graders said they had more free time because they were more organized; thirty-three percent of the parents agreed.

Students were more organized at home:

	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
Parents	19	52	24	5
Students (*grades 3-5)*	28	33	23	16
Students (*grades 6-8)*	22	42	22	14

- Thirty-nine percent of 3rd-5th graders, and forty-one percent of 6th-8th graders said that their rooms at home were cleaner than before they began using executive function; only twenty percent of the surveyed parents agreed.

The use of EF planners improved students' ability to organize daily, weekly, and monthly activities.

- Over 90% of the parents said that their children utilized the planner to organize their activities.

- One student stated, "I never forget things having to do with school that are important because I have my planner to remind me." Another commented, "EF helped me because I have to plan all of my extra curricular projects."

Seventy-four percent of students (grades 6-8) planned to use the executive function system again.

- Students commented about future use, "I wouldn't use the same exact thing, but I will use something similar. I'll use the ideas and concepts." And, "As much as I hate to admit it, I will probably use EF in high school."

A majority of teachers agreed that standardization provided by the EF system made it easier for them to teach.

- "It makes my job easier because I can say the same thing to every class and they know what I mean. You develop a certain vocabulary with EF, and the expectations are the same for the kids using it." Another added, "I'm not constantly repeating the same things. The first couple months, it was something else I had to do… and [now the students] are so comfortable with it, which makes it better for me."

- Other teachers said that the system forced them to become more organized. "I love [EF] because I can visually see what we're doing, this is the homework for the day, this is the calendar for the week, and so on. It definitely has helped me; I don't have to refer back to my own documentation or duplicate efforts."

- A few thought it took up time they just didn't have. One teacher explained, "[It makes my job] both easier and more difficult. We have to focus a lot of time to make sure the students are doing everything. It's more time consuming."

The extent to which teachers collaborated was unaffected by the implementation of the EF system.

- In two schools where collaboration was already high, teachers reported that EF had no impact on their working together. In another where the climate for collaboration was less developed, staff agreed collaboration remained unchanged.

- "Teacher collaboration was happening before EF. I don't think it has impacted that at all."

- A teacher said, "EF has not had much of an impact on teacher collaboration yet; we're just getting used to it. It doesn't make a difference; it's time we just don't have."

- Another said, "EF does provide the opportunity to collaborate."

More than fifty percent of teachers believed some form of executive function would still be utilized at their school in five years.

- "EF will be around [in 5 years]. The teachers have seen it as valuable, the administration is supporting it, and we have parent buy-in too."

Teachers believed that EF can be replicated at other schools.

- One teacher said, "[EF] would be beneficial for any school to have. It's not overwhelming, or hard to implement." Another expressed, "I think every school could improve their organization; I think it could be [replicated] if the school really bought in."

A majority of teachers agreed that some form of the EF system could be introduced and sustained without external training, assistance, and support.

- One teacher said, "[Staff from Rush] are trained in starting and implementing a system. I don't think they are necessary in continuing it." Another suggested that a simple guidebook be developed explaining how schools can set-up and administer the system.

- Several teachers noted that administrative buy-in and support were important in sustaining EF. One commented, "You need an administration that buys in and that convinces the faculty to buy in."

- A few teachers said that EF could be administered using school staff. "I think [a school] could do it without a partner. You could do it with one committed and trained teacher; I think this person could be an *on-call* person to train new students and teachers."

- Some teachers identified funding and supplies as a potential obstacle to sustainability. "It's good to have some help at start up and on-going if possible, but it's not absolutely necessary. Supplies are the big thing – without supplies or money [for the supplies], it won't work."

Eighty-six percent of teachers agreed that skills associated with executive function should be taught to aspiring teachers at the collegiate level.

- "College doesn't prepare you for organization of your classroom."

For the Future

► What first steps should be taken in overcoming resistance to the RNBC executive function system?

► What provisions will allow for the system to be sustainable and institutionalized at a school? What barriers limit the scope and impact of the EF system?

► At what grade level should EF first be introduced?

► How much time is needed and should be alloted for the EF system on a daily,weekly, monthly basis?

► How important is the information on brain research in the pre-implementation training process? How can the training be structured to be more practical and hands-on?

► Would parents play a more active role in implementation if they were required to assist with managing materials and monitoring portfolios and planners?

► What is the level of outside support necessary for a school to initiate, train for, and sustain the EF system?

► How effective are full-time, in-school coordinators and liaisons to the implementation and sustainability of the system?

► How can supplies and replacements be made more readily available to students? Would an in-school store be an effective way to purchase materials?

► How are student and teacher differences accounted for in implementing EF? What can and cannot be standardized? Should all students be required to use the same system?

► What role should the executive functioning class play? How can its function be more easily conveyed to and understood by school staff?   What should the curriculum look like? Is the class connected to student work in other subjects?

► What steps should be taken to improve collaboration between those who teach the EF class and other teachers who reinforce the system in their content areas?

► Should consistent maintenance of the grade record sheets be required by teachers?

Notes

Notes

Description of Methods

The qualitative and quantitative information in this ISR was gathered by *Education issues and answers* staff through visits to Children of Peace, Ogden, and Sunset Ridge Schools, interviews with staff, and questionnaires given to teachers, students and parents. The information was gathered between February and June 2005. Thirty teachers and administrators were interviewed. Fifty-three students were interviewed individually and in focus groups. Surveys were distributed to teachers and approximately fifty percent responded. 654 student and 37 parent surveys were collected and evaluated.
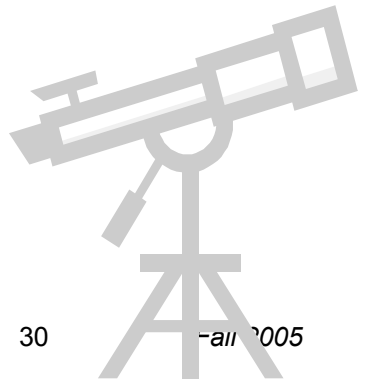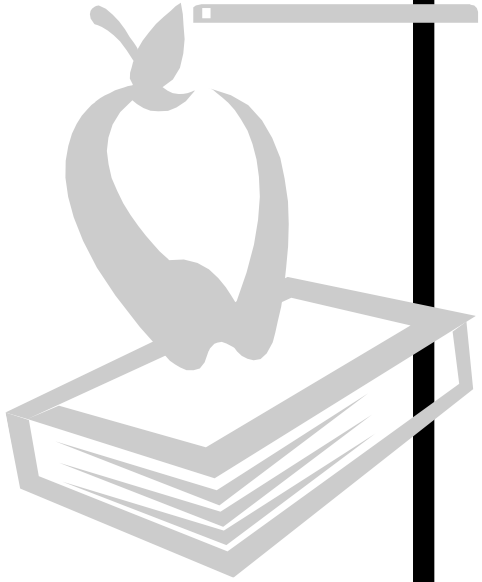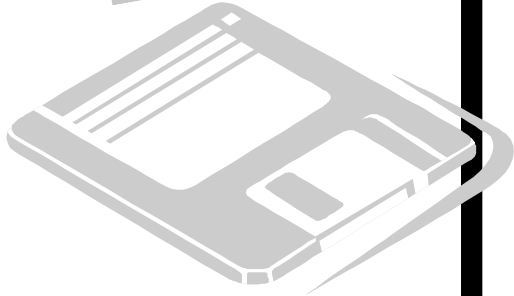
More about *Education issues and answers*

Barbara Buell started *Education issues and answers* in 2003. She continues to work to ensure that the best possible education be available to children in Chicago public schools. She has, for more than twenty-five years, consistently played an important role in framing public discourse on school improvement issues. Her work assesses and monitors school policies, programs and practices; analyzes school practices, makes policy recommendations, and engages in advocacy to assure that students receive the highest priority and benefit from school policies and management decisions. She increases public knowledge of those decisions by providing objective information, training and technical assistance. More than twenty Initiative Status Reports have been published.

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