SWIFT Center

Who is My Brother's Keeper?
All of Us

Prepared by
Amy B. McCart
Wayne S. Sailor
SWIFT Center, University of Kansas

Issue Brief #5
July, 2014

Who is My Brother's Keeper?   All of Us

Abstract

SWIFT is a national center whose mission is to help educators provide academic and behavioral support resulting in excellence in education for all students, including boys and young men of color. This mission presumes all educators, school and district staff, family members, and the local community have shared responsibility for the teaching and learning of each and every student, including those who are academically struggling, gifted, living in poverty, students with disabilities, high achievers, culturally and ethnically diverse students, and those with the most extensive needs. Funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, SWIFT shares its systemic approach to widespread school reform, which is closely aligned with the White House's "My Brother's Keeper" initiative to improve academic and social outcomes for boys and young men of color.   This Issue Brief describes this alignment.

Context

My Brother's Keeper (MBK), a recent White House initiative, "aims to break down barriers to success and promote opportunity for all, regardless of sex, race, color, or national origin" (White House, 2014, p. 12), with specific interest in boys and young men of color (i.e., Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans) in communities of greatest need. Indeed, as the name suggests, the education and well being of all children, without regard to their present abilities or personal characteristics, is a shared responsibility.   (For the full task force report, see www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/053014mbkreport.pdf.)

The SWIFT Center shares this belief as captured in the phrase "ALL Means ALL." All educators, school and district staff, family members, and the local community have a shared responsibility for the teaching and learning of each and every student. All students means the full range of academic abilities—students who struggle, gifted, high achievers and those with the most extensive support needs. These students also may live in poverty, have disabilities, or come from culturally and ethnically diverse

backgrounds. SWIFT backs up the words "ALL means ALL" by partnering with public education systems to implement and sustain systemic transformation.

Rather than creating a new set of activities, MBK brings together existing federally funded programs to focus on critical challenges, risk factors, and opportunities for America's boys and young men of color. Among the eleven broad-reaching task force findings are several recommendations closely aligned with the Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT) framework (see Figure 1) and SWIFT Center's intensive technical assistance process, which is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (Grant No. H325Y120005).

Similar Learning Needs

The SWIFT model capitalizes on engaging the WHOLE school community in ways that positively transform learning outcomes for all students. The model is designed to combine the strengths of general and special educators and support them as they work in concert with one another to teach grade level curriculum to all students.

Students need "at the ready" all that education brings to bear. General education offers the core curriculum while Special education simultaneously offers specialized systems that include practices and tools that can support all students, not just those for whom they were developed. For students where poverty, poor health care, crime, lack of employment opportunities, and fragmented community services can combine to create a culture of chaos and despair, being ready to learn as they walk into a classroom is difficult (Warren et al., 2003). In such situations the learning needs of many boys and young men of color can look very much like the learning needs of many students with disabilities. The implication, however, is not that all students have disabilities; rather, it is that all children have learning needs that may run deep and can benefit from specialized supports in services included within a tiered system of academic instruction.

Data show that in many urban schools the typical pyramid representing a multi-tiered system of support—with the base representing most students, who need the least intensive interventions, and the tip representing a few students, who need the most intensive interventions (Sugai & Horner, 1999)—is flipped upside down such that most students need intensive interventions. In fact, in such schools the notion of

"disproportionate representation" can be nearly obsolete because all students need all "hands on deck." Intensive interventions and supports are no longer "special," they are simply the educational mechanisms that most students need for social and academic achievement.

A broad range of systemic and individualized strategies installed to prevent problems and addressed to all students can achieve important academic, behavioral, and social outcomes (e.g., Colvin, & Fernandez, 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2009). Rather than determine educational supports on the basis of student labels, schools that implement systems and learn to use data to make instructional and support decisions are able to direct resources to any student based on his or her specific academic and behavioral needs. As schools begin to operate in this way, data confirm that needs of such subgroups as students with disabilities and boys of color were, indeed, more alike than different—and so were the educational solutions that led to improved outcomes (Sailor, Wolf, Choi, & Roger, 2009).
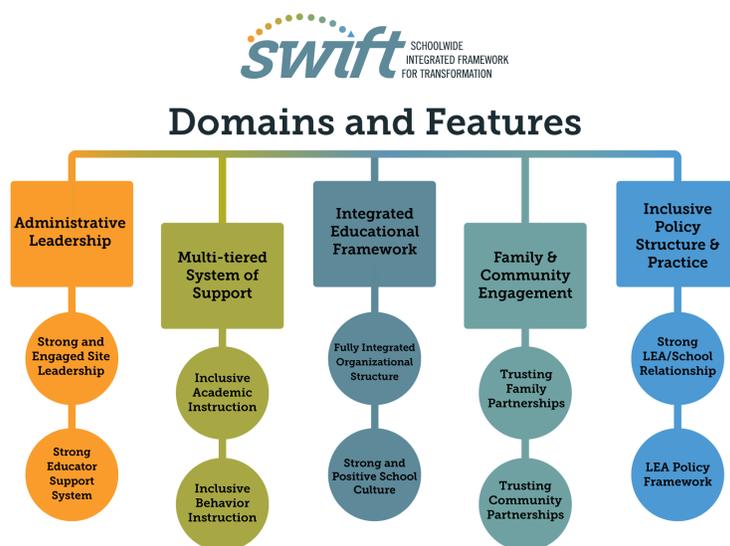

Figure 1. SWIFT Domains and Features

My Brother's Keeper & SWIFT Alignment

SWIFT Center currently partners with 5 state educational agencies and 18 of their local educational agencies to implement unified teaching and learning environments in 68 K-8 schools. This work is based on the schoolwide inclusive school reform

3

model developed during previous work in urban schools, (Sailor, McCart & Choi, 2012; Sailor & Roger, 2005; Sailor et al., 2006), and clear linkages exist between many of MBK task force recommendations and the SWIFT framework (see Figures 1) and intensive technical assistance process.

Multi-tiered System of Support

One of the five core domains (see Figure 1) of the SWIFT framework is Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) (Lane, Oakes, & Menzies, 2010).   The SWIFT framework describes this domain as two intertwined features for academic and behavior instruction as follows:

Multi-tiered System of Support

Inclusive Academic Instruction

Inclusive Behavior Instruction

Grade level and specialized educators work in teams to monitor student progress and to plan academic and behavioral intervention strategies across levels of need. School personnel use universal screening tools to accurately identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes and at-risk social behavior, and ensure ongoing and frequent progress monitoring using grade-level assessments for reading, math, and behavior. School personnel use research-based Tier I core reading and math curricula and school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) with fidelity.   Strategic/group (Tier II) and intensive/individual (Tier III) interventions supplement Tier I instruction in reading, math, and behavior for all grade levels.   Teachers plan for differentiation and flexible grouping to facilitate effective instruction for a range of learners and use the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to provide multiple means of representation, action, expression, and engagement.

Three MBK recommendations closely align with SWIFT MTSS.   These recommendations are:

MBK Recommendation 6.2

Enhance and expand efforts to develop and promote best practices for teachers to address instructional and classroom issues such as early literacy screening. The Department of Education

4

should build on its efforts to develop and share evidence-based best practices to improve reading instruction, drawing on the work of federally funded research, and technical assistance centers…. In addition, districts and schools will need assistance building capacity to support implementation of data-based individualized instruction for students with severe and persistent learning and/or behavioral needs. (White House, 2014, p. 34)

MBK Recommendation 6.3

Establish a "Principal and Teacher Leadership Corps for the Improvement of Early Literacy". The Department of Education should, as appropriate, collaborate with philanthropies and education organizations to study the efficacy and develop effective implementation models for evidence-based practices to improve early literacy, including: universal screening for literacy; routine progress monitoring; multi-tiered, differentiated instruction using evidence-based reading strategies; multi-tiered behavioral frameworks, including evidence-based social and emotional supports; and strong collaboration between special education and general education to improve literacy and close achievement gaps. (White House, 2014, p. 35)

MBK Recommendation 8.4

End discriminatory discipline policies and implement supportive school discipline models…. (White House, 2014, p. 40)

SWIFT MTSS – MBK Alignment

MTSS is an academic, behavioral and social structure for organizing and delivering educational interventions, and widely recognized to be among the best practices for teachers to address instructional and classroom issues, as indicated by MBK. As revealed through research in high need urban school studies, data-based systems of intervention and support can have a powerful effect on academic, behavioral and social achievement of all students without regard to disability status. MTSS enables evidence-based practices originating through research in special education to be extended to a broader class of students in a context of prevention. The system helps practitioners shift their focus from locating learning problems strictly within the individual to a broader concept of examining the measured needs for extra support in the context of particular environments (Sailor & Burrello, 2013).

High need districts and schools often have little or no additional resources with which to enhance and expand efforts. Therefore, a central tenant of SWIFT technical assistance is to ask whole education systems (classroom, school, LEA, SEA) to "imagine new ways to use existing resources (e.g., space, staff, time, materials, technology) to achieve the planned priorities" (McCart, Sailor, Bezdek, & Satter, in press). SWIFT helps schools do this, in part, by helping install or improve a school's existing multi-tiered system of support.

Like MBK, SWIFT also calls for implementation of supportive school discipline models through inclusive behavior instruction, such as School-wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports.

Integrated Educational Framework

The SWIFT Integrated Educational Framework domain features a fully integrated organizational structure, which is described as follows:

Integrated Educational Framework

Fully Integrated Organizational Structure

All students, including students with IEP's and English Language Learners (ELL) participate in the grade level general education curriculum and that of their grade level peers. School personnel support non-categorical service delivery through language, policy, personnel, systems, and practices; ensure strategies to promote collaborative instruction among students of all abilities and backgrounds. Paraeducator responsibilities in the school are designed to support grade level classrooms to enhance inclusive education.

SWIFT Integration – MBK Alignment
MBK recommendation 6.3 calls for strong collaboration between special education and general education. This concept is at the heart of the SWIFT framework. SWIFT's Integrated Educational Framework domain includes a fully integrated educational structure feature that blurs the organizational lines between general and specialized education. As previously described, SWIFT extends specialized educational methods to any student, in some cases in a context of prevention and in others as remediation. Students are no longer segregated by special and general education labels; nor are classrooms, teachers, and resources for teaching and learning.

6

Administrative Leadership

The SWIFT Administrative Leadership domain features strong and engaged site leadership, described as follows:

Administrative Leadership

Strong and Engaged Site Leadership

The Principal is the instructional leader of the school and actively engages with faculty and staff in improving teaching and learning. The Principal and Leadership Team support and promote a schoolwide focus on transforming systems and practices to improve teaching and learning and incorporate family partners; create working environments that support open, reciprocal communication and an exchange of ideas among all members of the school community; empower school teams, instructional coaches and educator leaders by delegating authority for key decisions directly related to their primary functions; and use data to assess fidelity, monitor progress, evaluate outcomes, and revise interventions.

SWIFT Leadership – MBK Alignment

The SWIFT Administrative Leadership feature applies the concepts found in MBK's recommendation 6.3 at the school level. Effective principals, supported by professional learning opportunities and instructional coaches, can establish and empower a Leadership Team comprised of teacher and staff leaders. This team can then use data to assess interventions with fidelity, monitor progress, evaluate outcomes and make revisions to instructional processes.

The SWIFT Administrative Leadership domain also features strong and positive school culture, which aligns with a fourth MBK recommendation (7.2, see below). This feature of SWIFT is described as follows:

Strong Educator Support System

Instructional and other personnel (i.e., security guards, paraeducators, psychologists, administrative assistants) participate in the teaching/learning process and are considered to have shared responsibility for student academic, behavioral, and social outcomes. All students, including those with IEP's, are considered members of grade-level classrooms and the school uses collaborative

teaching at all grades. All students have access to extracurricular (e.g., art, music, movement) and other learning opportunities (e.g., sports teams, clubs, groups, events) that occur both at school and outside of typical school hours. School personnel employ effective culturally appropriate and responsive practices.

MBK Recommendation 7.2

Encourage positive school climates with the social, emotional, and behavioral supports to ensure success for all students. The Department of Education should support new programs that aim to create school environments that focus on social-emotional learning and trauma informed practices, as well as attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers and leaders... (White House, 2014, p. 37).

SWIFT Culture – MBK Alignment

Creating and sustaining positive climate at a school within the milieu of a stressful and unstable community can be challenging. However, SWIFT intentionally and systemically addresses school culture through both engaged leadership and a system of behavioral support (e.g., MTSS with schoolwide, classroom, and individual behavior support for students without regard to their educational labels).

As MBK indicates, one way to encourage positive school climate is to support new programs that attract, develop, and retain effective teachers and leaders. This recommendation aligns with the SWIFT educator support systems and positive school culture features. SWIFT further supports this recommendation through an Inclusive Policy Structure and Practice domain, which may involve teacher certification, job descriptions, compensation, etc. that reward rather pose regulatory or organizational barriers to fully integrated teaching practices. Likewise, SWIFT also features trusting community partnerships between state and local education agencies and institutions of higher education teacher preparation programs, as well as schools with student teachers.

Inclusive Policy Structure & Practice

Trusting Community Partnerships

Leveraging Existing Resources

SWIFT technical assistance builds sustainable change from a strengths-based, human capabilities approach—a sentiment that pervades the MBK recommendations. SWIFT believes that change comes by "readying the people in the school and district to act empowered to implement changes they envision for their school, and to access the resources they need to make these changes" (McCart et al., in press, p. 8). SWIFT begins with "the assumptions that (a) people, organizations and surrounding communities have strengths and resources (Rapp, Saleebey, & Sullivan, 2005), and (b) that they can be resilient, resourceful and capable of learning new strategies to overcome adversity and move in the direction of their shared vision (Pulla, 2012)" (McCart et al., p. 3). Further, SWIFT Center partners have the freedom and responsibility to make meaningful choices about their specific goals and paths to attaining them; the Center's role is to help them extend and clarify their list of choices. Not only does the SWIFT approach leverage existing resources, it builds capacity and sustainability into schools and communities to prevent school failure and to launch students of all abilities, including boys and young men of color, to achieve academic, behavioral, and social success.

Conclusion

"My Brother's Keeper" is a phrase from a biblical narrative that asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Although that text does not directly answer the question, the inference is yes, we have a responsibility to do right by one another. SWIFT embodies this responsibility when we say "ALL Means ALL." That is, in America's public education system all educators, school and district staff, family members, and the local community have a shared responsibility for the teaching and learning among all students, regardless of their abilities, personal characteristics, or backgrounds. As SWIFT continues school transformation in communities where boys and young men of color live, we look forward to contributing to the powerful, positive outcomes envisioned by My Brother's Keeper.

Suggested Citation

McCart, A. B. & Sailor, W. S. (2014). *Who is my brother's keeper? All of us.* Lawrence, KS: National Center for Schoolwide Inclusive School Reform: The SWIFT Center.

References

Colvin, G., & Fernandez, E. (2000). Sustaining effective behavior support systems in an elementary school. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, *2*(4), 251-253.

Lane, K. L., Oakes, W. P., & Menzies, H. M. (2010). Systematic screenings to prevent the development of learning and behavior problems: Considerations for practitioners, researchers and policy makers. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 21*, 160-172. doi: 10.1177/1044207310379123

McCart, A. B., Sailor, W. S., Bezdek, J. L. & Satter, A. P. (in press). A framework for inclusive educational delivery systems. *Inclusion*.

Pulla, V. (2012). What are strengths based practices all about? In V. Pulla, L. Chenoweth, A. Francis & S. Bakaj (Eds.), *Papers in Strengths Based Practice*. New Delhi, India: Allied Publishers.

Rapp, C. A., Saleebey, D., & Sullivan, W. P. (2005). The future of strengths-based social work. *Advances in Social Work, 6*(1), 79-90.

Sailor, W. S. & Burrello, L. C. (2013). Shifing perspective to frame disability policy. In L. Burrello, W. Sailor, & J. Kleinhammer-Tramill (Eds.), *Unifying educational systems* (pp. 21-40). New York: Routledge.

Sailor, W. S., McCart, A. B., & Choi, H. (2012). *A comparison of academic outcomes and implementation of the schoolwide applications model in Washington DC*. Lawrence: University of Kansas.

Sailor, W., & Roger, B. (2005). Rethinking inclusion: Schoolwide applications. *Phi Delta Kappan, 86*(7), 503-509.

Sailor, W., Wolf, N., Choi, H., & Roger, B. (2009). Sustaining positive behavior support in a context of comprehensive school reform. In *Handbook of positive behavior support* (pp. 633-669). New York: Springer.

Sailor, W., Zuna, N., Choi, J.H., Thomas, J., McCart, A., & Roger, B. (2006). Anchoring schoolwide positive behavior support in structural school reform. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 31*(1), 18-30.

Sugai, G., & Horner, R. H. (1999). Discipline and behavioral support: Practices, pitfalls, promises. *Effective School Practices, 17*(4), 10-22.

Sugai, G., & Horner, R. H. (2009). Responsiveness-to-intervention and school-wide positive behavior supports: Integration of multi-tiered system approaches. *Exceptionality*, *17*, 223-237. doi: 10.1080/09362830903235375

Warren, J. S., Bohanon-Edmonson, H. M., Turnbull, A. P., Sailor, W., Wickham, D., Griggs, P., & Beech, S. E. (2006). School-wide positive behavior support: Addressing behavior problems that impede student learning. *Educational Psychology Review*, *18*, 187-198. doi: 10.1007/s10648-006-9008-1

White House. (2014). *My Brother's Keeper task force report to the President*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from
http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/053014mbkreport.pdf

IDEAs
that Work
U.S. Office of Special
Education Programs