THE CHALLENGE

Despite district-wide efforts to improve achievement in reading, a large percentage of Providence students continued to score below proficiency on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) State Assessment for Reading and on the Stanford 10 Reading Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension tests. There was a long pattern of cumulative deficits in reading as students moved through the grades. The district had invested considerable resources in establishing a balanced approach to literacy at the elementary level and a disciplinary approach to literacy at the middle and high school levels, but had no information about the quality of implementation or instructional effectiveness. The district had also initiated a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach in the elementary schools with no assessment of school readiness to implement RTI. In 2006, the concerns of the school board and district leaders led to a mandate to conduct a K-12 Reading Program Evaluation.

THE PCG APPROACH

In 2006 Public Consulting Group's Center for Resource Management (PCG-CRM) conducted a comprehensive K-12 reading program evaluation utilizing an evaluation approach that triangulated data from three sources: 1) robust analyses of student achievement patterns; 2) an integrated analysis of program, school, and district factors that had an impact on instructional effectiveness; and 3) best practices from the research and practice knowledge base that could inform program improvement. The evaluation provided a longitudinal growth analysis of the progress of specific student cohorts over time, and identified factors that contributed to less than satisfactory levels of achievement in reading. The evaluation provided an analysis of reading instruction at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and identified implementation issues schools were experiencing with RTI. The comprehensive evaluation report provided action-oriented recommendations for improvement.

THE RESULT

The PCG-CRM K-12 Reading Program Evaluation contributed to the development of the Providence K-12 Comprehensive Reading Plan in 2007. The plan proposed a more integrated vision of K-12 reading instruction and the strengthening of the multi-tiered RTI approach to reading. Key elements included the addition of a core reading program at the elementary level, supplemental instruction, and intensive interventions for struggling readers. A new elementary structure was created that allowed strategic support to schools where reading achievement was the lowest, and the district allocated resources to hire reading specialists for the 2007-08 school year. A District Literacy Leadership Team was created to establish a unified leadership structure to support reading instruction across the schools.