

**RESEARCH FOR BETTER TEACHING CASE STUDY  
PITTSFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS (2017-19)**

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**This case study reports on services provided by Research for Better Teaching to the Pittsfield Public Schools and the impact of those services during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years only. It does not report on activities, services, or impact occurring during the current (2019-20) school year.**

**Description of School District**

Pittsfield is a small city in western Massachusetts. It is located about 50 miles northwest of Springfield, near the border with New York. During the 2018-19 school year, the Pittsfield Public Schools reported an enrollment of 5,429 students – making it the 38<sup>th</sup> largest public school district in Massachusetts.

<b>Profile of Pittsfield Public Schools (2018-19)</b>	
8 elementary schools	2 middle schools
2 high schools	
Total Student Enrollment.....	5,429
African American .....	11%
Hispanic .....	15%
White .....	64%
Multi-Race .....	9%
English Language Learners.....	4%
Students with Disabilities.....	22%
High Needs Students.....	61%
Economically Disadvantaged Students .....	51%

The Pittsfield Public Schools have experienced a substantial and consistent decline in overall student enrollment during the last two decades. Enrollment during the 2018-19 school year was 22% less than enrollment during the 1998-99 school year and 11% less than enrollment during the 2008-09 school year.

The demographics of the Pittsfield Public School student population have also experienced significant shifts during this time period. The number of students of color in the district has increased by more than 300% since 1998-99 and by more than 160% since 2008-09. At the same time, the number of White students in the district has declined by 43% since 1998-99 and

by 27% since 2008-09. Growth among students of color has been particularly significant among Hispanic students. This group has increased by more than 4.5 times over the last twenty years.

Under the Massachusetts Accountability Classification system, the district is categorized as making “moderate progress toward targets” and “not requiring assistance or intervention.” However, there are five Pittsfield schools that are categorized by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) as “requiring assistance or intervention” including two elementary schools (Conte and Crosby), both middle schools (Herberg and Reid), and one of the high schools (Taconic).

Over the last two years, Research for Better Teaching (RBT) targeted 2 of the 8 elementary schools, both middle schools, and both high schools for services. The following table provides a demographic profile of the elementary and middle schools targeted for RBT services.

<b>Profiles for SY 2018-29 of Pittsfield Schools Targeted by RBT</b>				
	Crosby ES	Morningside ES	Herberg MS	Reid MS
Total Enrollment	404	355	645	551
African-American	13%	11%	12%	14%
Hispanic	22%	26%	13%	11%
White	51%	49%	67%	63%
Multi-Racial	12%	13%	7%	10%
ELL	6%	10%	3%	2%
Disabled	38%	20%	21%	25%
High Need	83%	82%	57%	65%
Low Income	72%	75%	47%	58%

According to the most recent District Improvement Plan (for the 2019-20 school year), the Pittsfield School District is guided by its belief that “through communication, meaningfully focused collaboration, and significant contribution, we can work to create an effective, safe, and nurturing learning environment for all students, while maintaining our focus on student achievement.” The current district focus is on “examining the equity of every student’s educational experience to develop and refine consistent data-informed systems that provide a culture of continued growth on state assessments.”

### **Description of RBT Programs**

Prior to the 2017-18 school year, the Deputy Superintendent and the Curriculum Director for the Pittsfield Public Schools identified RBT as a potential professional development provider for the school district. Although the district had no prior experience with RBT courses or services, the Curriculum Director had successfully completed an RBT course as a teacher and found the experience very valuable. This experience along with RBT’s positive reputation among other Massachusetts school administrators and educators convinced Pittsfield leadership to investigate the courses and programs offered by RBT.

The original focus of the district in its work with RBT was on administrator training. Based on their own experiences as former elementary school principals, the two district administrators sought training that would (1) improve the quality of teacher evaluations and (2) promote greater alignment and consistency in teacher evaluations across the entire district. Both needs were characterized as significant areas of frustration and concern among leaders and educators throughout the district.

Pittsfield district leaders met with Kathy Spencer, RBT trainer and consultant, to discuss potential RBT courses and programs that would meet district needs. Together, they identified Analyzing Teaching for Student Results (ATSR) as the appropriate RBT course. Implementation of RBT services began during the 2017-18 school year.

The initial ATSR course was taught by Kathy Spencer. In preparing to deliver the course, she met and consulted with district administrators, reviewed the district and individual school improvement plans, and reviewed teacher evaluations by school administrators. This information was used by Spencer to align the ATSR course more closely to the conditions and needs of the district and its schools. All school principals and assistant principals along with all district administrators were enrolled in the ATSR course.

Both the Deputy Superintendent and the Curriculum Director acknowledged that their participation in the ATSR course changed their understanding about the needs and challenges facing the Pittsfield Public Schools in their efforts to improve teaching and learning for all students. Based on these personal experiences, the struggles of some administrators with the ATSR course, and ongoing conversations with Spencer, the district leaders concluded that more than just the ATSR course was needed. In consultation with Spencer and RBT, the district identified six sets of RBT activities to serve as a follow-up to the initial ATSR course:

- On-site coaching and targeted training sessions for principals and coaches to enable them to implement the concepts and practices presented in the ATSR course
- Coaching High-Impact Teacher Teams (TEAMS) course for school administrators and team leaders in several turnaround schools to promote collaborative data use and analysis for actionable outcomes related to teaching and learning
- On-site observation, coaching, and consultation for teacher teams to enable them to effectively use the processes, practices, and protocols presented in the TEAMS course
- Training around unit design, backward planning, and looking at student work with staff at both high schools
- ATSR course completion required for all new administrators and TEAMS course training provided to new team leaders to respond to high staff turnover in the district
- On-going consultation and coaching for district administrators to ensure that they could effectively implement RBT concepts and practices at a district level and support their use in the schools

To complement the RBT services, district and school leaders made changes in policies, staffing, organizational structures, and schedules. These changes and services were designed to provide

some individuals the additional support needed to successfully implement new concepts and practices and to provide others with opportunities to “move their work to the next level.”

*“We started the RBT work with just a focus on teacher evaluation. Over time, our focus expanded to making sure that principals understood and recognized high-impact teaching practices; that they regularly observed teaching in the classroom; and that they gave the right type of feedback to teachers so that they can use those practices regularly with their students.”*

Teachers were not directly involved in the initial RBT program in Pittsfield, but they were directly affected by changes in the teacher evaluation process that resulted from that program. Moreover, some teachers became directly involved in RBT activities through the TEAMS training and the unit design work at the two high schools. District and union leadership acknowledged that initial communications about the RBT program resulted in some misunderstandings and tensions between the district and the teachers’ union early in the process.

In response to these issues, a session was organized in early 2019 for union leadership to meet with Kathy Spencer. During that session, Spencer provided an orientation to the RBT courses and services, its purposes, and anticipated benefits. Everyone agreed that this session was very effective and very well-received by the union leadership. This session opened a series of discussions between the district and the union (supported by RBT staff) on how to effectively engage and inform teachers regarding the RBT program and related activities. In addition, the district and the union discussed how to incorporate the new teacher evaluation methods that emerged from this work into the teachers’ contract.

*“We’re putting it into the teachers’ contract because that’s how important the district leadership feels the model is and that’s how important teachers feel that the model is.”*

The ongoing role of RBT in supporting ongoing district and school change also was formally incorporated in the District Improvement Plan for the 2018-19 school year. One of the Strategic Objectives listed in the Plan promoted “the learning and growth of all students by providing high-quality and coherent instruction, designing and administering authentic and meaningful student assessments, analyzing student performance and growth data, using this data to improve instruction, providing students with constructive feedback on an ongoing basis, and continuously refining learning objectives.” The plan listed several activities explicitly involving RBT and related to this objective including:

- RBT coaching for educators related to (1) developing student friendly learning objectives that are linked to skills within the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks that can be reached by the end of the lesson and (2) strategically utilizing formative assessments throughout the lesson that are tied to the learning objective that is to be reached by the end of the lesson
- RBT training for building and district administrators on use of data-driven dialogue along with other tools and protocols for collaborative data inquiry

- RBT coaching for educators around providing descriptive feedback and engaging students and families in constructive conversation that focuses on how students can improve their performance

<b>Overview of RBT Programs in Pittsfield Public Schools (2017-19)</b>
SY 2017-18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ATSR course for all district administrators, principals &amp; assistant principals</li> <li>• TEAMS training for all administrators &amp; teachers at Morningside School</li> <li>• Training on unit design for staff at Pittsfield HS</li> <li>• Coaching &amp; consultation to district &amp; school administrators as follow-up to ATSR course</li> </ul>
SY 2018-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ATSR course for all new district &amp; school administrators</li> <li>• TEAMS training for administrators &amp; team leaders at Crosby, Reid, and Herberg Schools</li> <li>• Training on unit design for staff at Pittsfield HS &amp; Taconic HS</li> <li>• Training for principals on protocols &amp; tools for collaborative data inquiry</li> <li>• Coaching &amp; consultation to district &amp; school administrators as follow-up to ATSR course</li> <li>• Coaching &amp; consultation to school administrators &amp; teams as follow-up to TEAMS training</li> </ul>

## Assessment of RBT Programs

The assessment of the RBT courses, consultation, and coaching by Pittsfield district and school administrators and teachers was uniformly positive. This assessment was reflected in the direct experiences of the individuals interviewed for this report as well as the information they received from their colleagues and staff. It was also consistent with the survey data collected from course participants.

### **ATSR Course**

Every Pittsfield administrators interviewed characterized the ATSR course as an extremely positive and valuable learning experience. District administrators also reported that “informal feedback from principals about the course was fabulous.” This was true of the administrators who took the original course in Pittsfield as well as new administrators who took the course elsewhere. Participants also consistently praised the work of the RBT trainer (Kathy Spencer) who conducted the course in Pittsfield and provided the on-site coaching and consultation.

Many administrators used superlatives in describing their reaction to participating in the ATSR course and the follow-up activities. One administrator reported that the ATSR and TEAMS courses were the “two best professional development experiences I have experienced because

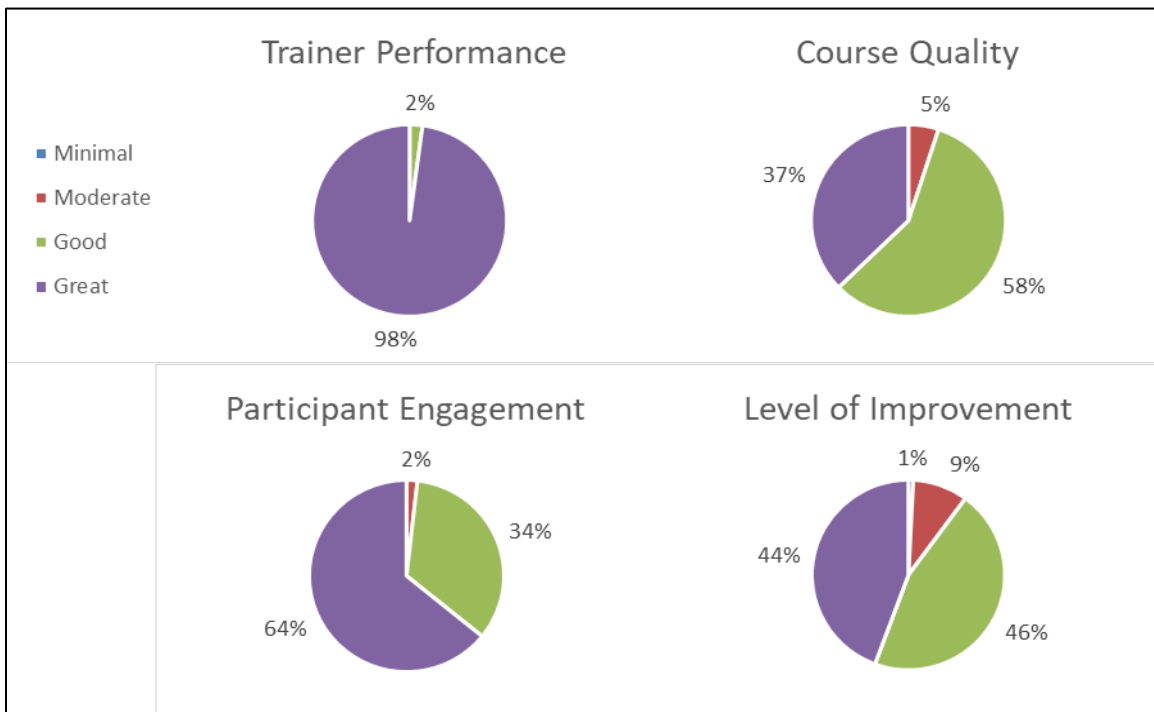
I was able to immediately implement practices in my school and see positive results.” A second administrator observed that ATSR was “life-changing for me and for all of us. Everything about the course and the way it was presented was transformational.” A third administrator described the ATSR course as “very meaningful, rigorous, and real” and “anything but a typical professional development experience.” Other administrators characterized the ATSR course as “extremely valuable” and “a terrific experience.”

In discussing the ATSR course and the follow-up consultation, administrators also cited specific benefits from their participation including:

- Greater understanding and better framework for thinking and talking about what is effective for students in the classroom
- Learning about tools for conducting observations and providing feedback
- Understand the importance and value of planning

*“The ATSR training had a significant impact on my practice in terms of conducting informal observations and providing feedback that was student-centered. It allowed me to be able to communicate with teachers using data that was student-centered and help them have a positive impact on their students.”*

The results of participant feedback forms administered by RBT at the end of the ATSR course were also very positive – as indicated in the table below:



**Pittsfield Participant Rating of ATSR Course**

Pittsfield participants also had more positive assessments of their ATRS courses across all four topics listed above compared to participants in the ATSR courses from all other districts.

According to survey results, the ATSR course had the greatest impact on participants' capacity in the following areas:

- Interpreting the connection between teacher decision-making and student learning
- Defining high standards for teaching and learning
- Noticing and diagnosing the impact of important events within the complex reality of classroom teaching
- Influencing teacher practices to have a positive impact on student performance

### TEAMS Course

Comments by Pittsfield administrators regarding the TEAMS course and follow-up coaching were also extremely positive. School administrators and union leadership reported that formal and informal feedback collected from participating teachers was also overwhelmingly positive. Administrators and teachers both characterized the course as “very valuable” and “immediately relevant” to their teaching. Most participants in each training group were “very engaged” and very few were seen as resistant to the work. Participants praised the “depth” and “intensity” of the course and particularly valued the training, hands-on coaching, and assistance provided by the RBT trainer (Nancy Love).

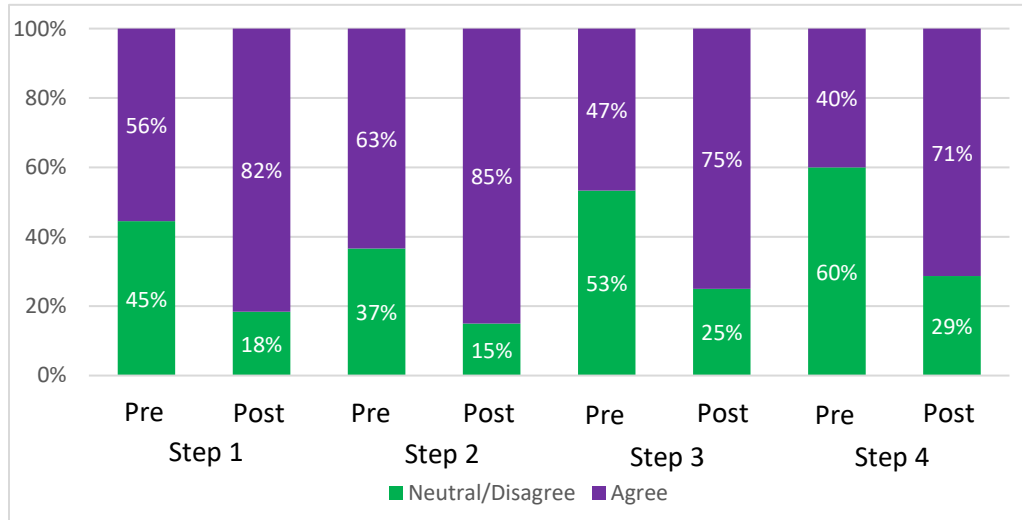
In discussing the impact of the TEAMS training, one administrator reported that he began the course assuming that they would be “looking at spreadsheets and filling out data analysis forms.” Instead, he came to realize that this was “more about process, reflection, conversations with colleagues, and informing classroom instruction.” Most participants also highlighted the value of the protocols and tools presented during the training and reported their regular use in meetings at both the district and school levels.

*“The TEAMS training really brought us to the next level in terms of using data to drive instruction. More than that, it also helped us with effectively teaming in grade level groups. Team meetings have allowed teachers to calibrate and ensure that they have consistently high expectations. Using all the steps in the process and the protocols presented in the training helped us to have a deeper understanding of what we should do for the students.”*

A survey conducted by school administrators at the Morningside Community School documented the growth in knowledge and capacity of teachers from their participation in the TEAMS training. The survey was administered twice – in the Fall 2018 and the Spring 2019 – to assess pre/post results. A greater proportion of Morningside teachers reported having the capacity to carry out activities associated with each of the four steps in the data cycle after TEAMS training and coaching. These proportions increased by:

- More than 25% for activities associated with Step 1 (Learning Targets & Criteria for Success)
- More than 20% for activities associated with Step 2 (Formative Assessments & Diagnostic Hinge Point Questions)
- Almost 30% for activities associated with Step 3 (Data Analysis Protocols to Identify Trends in Student Responses)

- More than 30% for activities associated with Step 4 (FIRME Action, Student Feedback & Responding to Formative Assessments)



Teacher Capacity for Carrying Out Data Cycle Activities at Morningside School

### Overall RBT Program

District, school, and teacher union leadership all agreed that perceptions about RBT and the trainers working in the district (Kathy Spencer and Nancy Love) were extremely positive. All groups of leaders characterized RBT as valued collaborators and advisors in their work. They consistently expressed a strong interest in continuing to work with RBT to deepen their efforts to improve teacher evaluation, classroom instruction, and student learning.

<b>Assessment of RBT Programs in Pittsfield</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent and very positive assessments of both ATSR and TEAMS course by participants as valuable and immediately relevant</li> <li>• ATSR course &amp; follow-up activities improved administrators’ capacity to conduct student-centered classroom observations and provide actionable feedback to teachers</li> <li>• ATRS course &amp; follow-up activities improved administrators’ understanding of high-leverage teaching practices</li> <li>• Protocols &amp; tools provided in TEAMS course were used regularly by administrators in a variety of settings to conduct more effective meetings</li> <li>• TEAMS process helped administrators and teachers gain a deeper understanding of what should be done to support students’ learning</li> <li>• District, school, and teacher union leadership characterized RBT as valued collaborators and advisors in their work</li> </ul>



## Impact on Morningside Community School

Morningside Community School was an early participant in the RBT program. In addition to having its administrative team participate in the ATSR course during 2017-18, it was the only Pittsfield School to receive TEAMS training during that year. Moreover, all of its teachers (not just team leaders) participated in the TEAMS training. School administrators and staff continued to receive on-site coaching, consultation, and guidance from RBT trainers (Kathy Spencer and Nancy Love) during the 2018-19 school year.

During the 2015-16 school year, Morningside was one of five Pittsfield schools categorized as Level 3 schools by DESE – equivalent to the current accountability classification of “Requiring Assistance or Intervention.” After the first year of the RBT program (2017-18), the school was now categorized as “Meeting Targets/Not Requiring Assistance or Intervention.” After the second year of the RBT program (2018-19), Morningside was categorized as making “Substantial Progress Toward Targets/Not Requiring Assistance or Intervention.” These categorizations represent a significant improvement in the accountability classification for the school compared to its previous status.

This substantial improvement in the school’s accountability status was consistent with the results of the annual Turnaround Site Visits conducted by DESE from 2017 to 2019. During that time, the school demonstrated improvement in 6 of the 11 rubric areas. In 2017, the school receive a low rating in one rubric area and intermediate ratings in the other ten. By 2019, the school received no low ratings, 6 intermediate ratings, and 5 high ratings. According to the Site Visit reports, Morningside School made substantial gains in the following areas:

- Teaming, sharing leadership & responsibility, collaboration
- Defining expectations for high quality instructional practices
- Teachers and teacher teams using student data to adapt and improve instructional strategies
- Using data to identify student-specific academic and non-academic needs
- Shared behavioral expectations that support student learning
- Establishing a collegial, respectful, and trusting professional environment

These were all areas that were targeted for improvement through the RBT program. District and school administrators all explicitly agreed that the RBT program made a considerable contribution to the gains made by the school, to strengthening the school culture, and to the improved student achievement outcomes that resulted.

*“Teachers at Morningside School now believe that they can move all students forward to greater success. In some Pittsfield schools, there are many teachers on the transfer list, but not at Morningside. They want to stay and do the hard work because the RBT approach is now part of the school’s culture.”*

The previous Morningside principal (Jennifer Stokes) assembled a strong leadership team and created a strong, shared vision, structure, and plan to drive school change. This included the

creation of a new role for the Assistant Principal (Kristen Palatt) to provide instructional leadership and support school change efforts. Through RBT courses and consultation, the Morningside principal was able to build her own capacity to work more aggressively and effectively to improve instruction in the classroom. The nature of the new Assistant Principal role also evolved dramatically as a result of the RBT program as did Palatt's capacity to carry out that role. They were also able to use the TEAMS process and data protocols to "highlight student growth and provide quick wins to encourage teachers to sustain their work."

The Morningside administrators have emerged as district leaders in implementing a teacher evaluation model that reflected ATSR course concepts and methods. According to the administrators, a particular benefit of the new model was a greater emphasis on student learning and student outcomes. While they previously talked with their teachers about students, the new model helped them better observe student learning, provided better feedback to teachers on it, and helped teachers question and reflect on their practice.

The school leaders at Morningside also saw the RBT program as consistent with and supportive of their own efforts to promote collegiality and collective efficacy in the school. The principal made specific structural and scheduling changes in the school designed to promote collegiality among administrators and teachers. Some changes were made independent of the RBT program while others were made to support its implementation. The school administrators were also active participants in collaborative activities and team meetings at the school rather than simply observers or monitors of the process. They intentionally used these interactions to promote a sense of trust and a positive working relationship with and among the teachers. They held themselves accountable for their own behavior and communicated high expectations for teachers as well.

The Morningside School administrators considered this emphasis on collegiality and collective efficacy to be critical in their success at implementing the RBT approach in their school. The level of trust and cooperation developed with teachers enabled the administrators to intervene when team leaders or teams struggled with the process to model more appropriate actions and then to step back and allow the team leaders and teams to take control again. This emphasis on collegiality also strengthened the teacher evaluation process – allowing them to "provide more authentic feedback" to teachers and to have "hard conversations that go much deeper in discussing their teaching practices and what needs to happen to improve student learning."

According to interviews and observations by RBT trainers and the evaluator, four of the six grade level teams at Morningside School have consistently been highly engaged and successful in implementing the RBT process and methods. Leaders for the other two teams struggled in their initial use of the RBT data cycle and protocols. The school leaders intervened to model the team leader role over several meetings with both teams and then allowed the team leaders to step back into those roles. In order to ensure continuing progress by all teams in the use of the RBT approach, the school administrators put in place regular meetings with all team leaders to provide additional support for them in carrying out their roles with the teams.

School leaders reported that the TEAMS training has a “huge impact on the formative assessment approach” used at Morningside School because new types of assessments were being adopted. In addition, they acknowledged that the data cycle was a new concept and that many Morningside teachers were still becoming familiar with its use. However, immediate implementation of this process and associated protocols and tools had led to “major changes and raised expectations among teachers on how data was used” at Morningside. In particular, many teachers at the school were using data more often, were more thoughtful in their use of data, and were acting on that data. The last point was seen as particularly significant and characterized as “drastically different from previous practices in the school where data was discussed but didn’t affect the teaching that occurred in the classrooms.”

Classroom observations by RBT trainers at Morningside School confirmed that classroom practices and instruction improved regarding differentiation of instruction, successful student engagement, use of clear learning targets, and use of success criteria. Nevertheless, further work is needed to sustain and expand these gains and particularly to ensure effective responses to the needs of marginalized students. These issues were all identified by school leaders as priorities for future work by the teams with support from RBT.

During the 2018-19 school year, Morningside School experienced a significant leadership transition with the departure of the principal and the dean of students – two of the three members of the school’s leadership team. This was a significant test for the sustainability of the change process at the school. The results described previously in this section suggest that the change process was successfully sustained in the midst of this leadership transition. According to a district administrator, “the structure, tools, and strategies from the RBT program and the training of the team leaders really played a critical role in sustaining the effectiveness of the teacher team meetings during the leadership transition.” This view was echoed by school leaders as well and is a very positive sign for the longer term sustainability of this effort.

<b>RBT Program Impact on Morningside Community School</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RBT program made a considerable contribution to improvement in school’s performance on state accountability system and annual state site visit results</li> <li>• RBT program increased frequency and improved quality of classroom observations and feedback and increased focus on student learning and student outcomes</li> <li>• RBT program supported efforts of school leadership to promote collegiality and collective efficacy among school staff</li> <li>• Grade level teams successfully implemented RBT approach with 4 of 6 teams highly successful</li> <li>• Teachers used data (particularly formative data) more often and more thoughtfully and were using data to change their teaching</li> <li>• School successfully sustained RBT approach despite significant leadership transition during the second year of RBT program</li> </ul>

## Impact on Other Pittsfield Schools

### Teacher Evaluation Practices

Despite the very positive response to the ATSR course, implementation of the ATSR model was inconsistent across the district. A few Pittsfield school administrators immediately made substantial changes in their approach to teacher evaluations. Some reported having an interest in changing their approach but lacked the language, process, and structure to do so effectively. The ATSR model provided this. As a result, these administrators substantially increased the number of formal and informal classroom observations and changed how they conducted them and provided feedback to teachers particularly by incorporating literal note-taking and the claim-evidence-impact (CEI) concepts. Other administrators began using some elements of the model but not the entire ATSR model. These elements were used with various degrees of fidelity and success by individual administrators.

District leaders claimed that there was no real resistance to the RBT approach by Pittsfield school administrators. However, they acknowledged that some administrators were struggling to understand and effectively use concepts presented in the ATSR course. Other administrators reported that they simply lacked the time to adopt the new approach.

Inconsistencies in program implementation created problems with teachers and the teachers' union. The union complained that their members were being assessed using different approaches and with different results. Teachers themselves expressed confusion about expectations and standards for their performance.

There were problems even in schools where the model was implemented with fidelity. Based on past experiences, teachers did not have an expectation for receiving honest or actionable feedback on their teaching from administrators as part of the teacher evaluation process. Such feedback was seen as unexpected and intimidating by many teachers. Because the teachers' union had not been involved in the RBT program during the 2017-18 school year, it was not in a position to provide any explanation or reassurance to the teachers.

District leadership worked with Kathy Spencer and RBT to better identify these barriers to program implementation and develop plans for explicitly addressing these barriers by "establishing higher levels of accountability and also providing higher levels of support." To build greater understanding and familiarity with the RBT approach, the district contracted with RBT for direct coaching and consultation for all school administrators during the 2018-19 school year. They also organized principal meetings to share successful practices among principals and promote direct peer support. The district also adopted a series of policy changes to establish clear expectations to promote consistent use of the ATSR model in teacher evaluation districtwide. The district has held principals accountable for application of the ATSR model. In addition, discussions have occurred about how to incorporate the model into the teacher evaluation system as part of the teachers' contract.

These changes resulted in some improvement during the 2018-19 school year. District leaders reported that most administrators in the district were now using at least some elements of the ATSR model on a regular basis. About one-third were using it with a high degree of fidelity and effectiveness. Another one-third were using it with some limitations in scope or quality. The goal is for all administrators will be using the model to some level of effectiveness during the 2019-20 school year.

Although implementation of the ATSR was inconsistent, district and school leaders identified other attitudinal and behavioral changes that were widespread. Due to their work with RBT, there was more professional discourse and dialogue around the evaluation process among district and school administrators. This changed their perception of their role as instructional leaders and helped them develop a shared understanding of what that role involves. Many came to recognize that effective teacher evaluation was not about compliance but rather improving teaching and learning. They also recognized the need to allocate sufficient time to ensure that their observations and feedback are thoughtful. These shifts in attitudes and behavior “have already begun to change the culture in many schools and the district.”

*“Before working with RBT, principals would give you 25 different definitions of an instructional leader and most would have been managerial. Now they use more consistent language and focus on instruction. Most are using the same RBT terminology – from lesson framing to the observation process itself.”*

### **Collaboration & Data Use in Turnaround Schools**

RBT provided TEAMS training and follow-up consultation to three Pittsfield turnaround schools (Crosby Elementary School, Herberg Middle School, and Reid Middle School) during its second year of work in Pittsfield beginning in March 2019. The schools varied in their success at implementing the TEAMS model by the end of the 2018-19 school year.

Unlike Morningside Community School, TEAMS training was limited to administrators and team leaders in all three schools. While this approach was seen as “manageable” by school leaders, there was a perception that the RBT content was “watered down” when conveyed to teachers by administrators and team leaders. At the same time, this approach was seen as building teacher “buy-in” in the program because it involved teachers (as team leaders) in the training alongside the school administrators.

All three schools faced two common challenges in their efforts to implement the TEAMS model during the 2018-19 school year and beyond. First, none of the schools had implemented the changes in structure, scheduling, and collegiality that had been adopted by the Morningside Community School prior to beginning their TEAMS training. As a result, these three schools had to try to identify and implement some equivalent changes as they were participating in the TEAMS course. Second, all three schools experienced substantial staffing turnover after the 2018-19 school year. This turnover affected their ability to build on or even sustain the implementation efforts into the 2019-20 school year.

**Reid Middle School** made relatively appropriate progress in implementing the TEAMS model during the 2018-19 school year. Due to staffing turnovers at Reid Middle School, some team leaders left the school prior to the 2019-20 school year. This affected the work of some subject area and grade level teams at the beginning of the school year.

The school made some structural and scheduling changes modeled after those implemented by Morningside School, particularly in the responsibilities of the Assistant Principal position. However, some of the changes required to effectively support implementation of the model were more difficult to make at a middle school compared to an elementary school and will take more time to put in place. The structural and scheduling changes adopted by the school helped limit the impact of the staffing turnovers at the beginning of the 2019-20 school year. In addition, the school incorporated a series of monitoring checkpoints to assess progress as part of its turnaround plan for 2019-20.

Prior to the 2018-19 school year, teachers at Reid Middle School “had not been planning enough or planning in ways that were effective” according to school leaders. The RBT training changed that by providing a foundation for teachers that wasn’t there before. It provided a greater structure to teacher meetings and helped them define meeting purposes accepted by all teachers within each group. This resulted in discussions that were more student-centered, that focused on how to reach all students, and that used formative assessment results to inform teaching decisions.

School leaders reported that the TEAMS protocols were widely used across many meetings in the school beyond the content and grade level meetings. This allowed teachers to build greater comfort and familiarity with these practices. They also reported being very transparent about these plans and emphasizing the need to “work together with teachers” in learning to use these protocols and practices. As a result, they reported that 80-90% of the teachers responded positively to the model by the end of the school year and that any resistance to the approach declined over time.

District and school administrators observed “real-time applications” of meeting results in the classroom and greater talk about student results. During formal and informal observations, they reported changes in teaching practices linked to the work of the teams and efforts by teachers to adjust practices to meet student needs.

*“At Reid Middle School, RBT training has helped organize content meetings, set consistent expectations for all meetings, and develop shared purposes for these meetings. The protocols have been extremely valuable and now are used to structure most school meetings. There has been a huge shift from unstructured team meetings to highly structured and much more purposeful meetings due to the RBT courses.”*

**Herberg Middle School** made more limited progress in implementing the TEAMS model during the 2018-19 school year. Some of the team leaders were characterized as very effective in using the TEAMS process and protocols. The meetings they conducted included productive conversations among teachers focused on instruction. However, the initial team meetings did not result in plans leading to an impact on classroom teaching. As a result of feedback from the RBT trainer, this improved over time for some teams. The remaining teams did not have effective leaders and made only limited progress.

The school made only limited scheduling changes during 2018-19 to support implementation of the TEAMS model. It also did not adopt the structural changes made by either Reid Middle School or Morningside Community School. There were some plans developed for further changes during the 2019-20 school year. However, the school experienced both leadership and substantial staffing turnover prior to the 2019-20 school year including the departure of several teacher leaders. This meant that the school substantially regressed in its capacity to continue implementation of the TEAMS model and was required to “restart” some elements of the implementation effort.

**Crosby Elementary School** made only very limited progress last year in the implementation of the TEAMS model. While some of the team leaders began to use TEAMS protocols in their teacher meetings, there were no structural or scheduling changes made to support implementation of the model. Moreover, the school experienced both leadership and substantial staffing turnovers after the 2018-19 school year. District and school leaders acknowledged that the school would need to “start over again” with its training and implementation efforts during the 2019-20 school year.

### **Data Use in Other Pittsfield Elementary Schools**

All district and school administrators received initial training during the 2018-19 school year from RBT on the use of data-driven dialogue along with other tools and protocols for collaborative data inquiry. This complemented the ATSR training provided to all administrators. For schools that did not participate in the TEAMS course, this was the only training that addressed data use. Plans were developed by the district for the 2019-20 school year to provide additional support, experiences, and accountability to administrators around collaborative data inquiry.

District leaders reported that data-driven dialogue was generally understood in the elementary and middle schools but that its use was limited to about half of the schools. In addition, the process was generally used by schools with what was characterized as “safe data” (focusing on demographics or attendance) rather than instructional data.

One administrator emphasized that the “power of the dialogue process was that it provided a generalized approach that could be used to analyze and make meaning of any set of data – whether it involved test scores, office referrals for discipline, or student attendance.” In the past, schools had used different processes for different types of data – and used them only once or twice a year. It was claimed that “repetition of use brings expertise in the process” and

promotes “its assimilation into organizational culture.” Such expertise and assimilation had not occurred for these more specialized processes due to their limited use. This was more likely for data-driven dialogue because it could be used by schools in a variety of settings.

**Unit Design Work in High Schools**

Both high schools in Pittsfield have received training from RBT around high-priority standards and backwards design of units. Pittsfield High School started this training during the first year of the RBT program under the leadership of its former principal, Matt Bishop. He left to become the principal of Taconic High School during the 2018-19 school year. However, training and implementation of the RBT unit design work continued at Pittsfield High School under the new principal. In addition, Taconic High School began to receive this training during 2018-19.

District and school administrators reported that significant progress had been made in implementing the unit design process with fidelity at Pittsfield High School over the last two school years across all subjects. Its continuation despite a leadership transition reinforced the conclusion of one administrator that the “unit design work has pretty much become embedded as a part of their culture.”

Administrators reported that implementation of the unit design process at Taconic High School was inconsistent during 2018-19. Some departments embraced the process, used it regularly, and successfully created initial course maps. Other departments had not engaged with the process or demonstrated resistance to its use. Implementation of the process was seen as requiring a larger culture shift at Taconic High School than at Pittsfield High School.

<b>RBT Program Impact at Other Pittsfield Schools</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of ATSR model was inconsistent across Pittsfield schools with steps taken by RBT and the district in 2018-19 to promote greater use</li> <li>• Reid Middle School made appropriate progress during 2018-19 in implementing the TEAMS model due to RBT training and consultation</li> <li>• Herberg Middle School and Crosby Elementary School had more limited success in implementing and sustaining use of the TEAMS model in part due to staffing turnover after the 2018-19 school year</li> <li>• About half of the schools in the district began to use data-driven dialogue during 2018-19 based on initial RBT training but their use of the approach was limited</li> <li>• Pittsfield High School made considerable progress in the implementation of the unit design process over the last two years</li> <li>• Implementation of the unit design process at Taconic High School last year was more inconsistent and encountered some teacher resistance</li> </ul>



## District-Level Impact

In addition to working in Pittsfield schools, RBT trainers also provide training and consulting to district administrators to change district-level practices. District leaders reported that “the RBT approach has really become a core of our work at the district and a core of our school improvement plans.” The RBT program affected district work in several areas including communications, planning, meetings, data use, and organizational culture.

### Common Concepts & Language

Pittsfield administrators have adopted “consistent concepts and common language” based on participation in the ATSR course. This has helped change the nature of the conversation among administrators within the district and promoted greater collective efficacy in their work together. Administrators also made connections to the RBT concepts and language very explicit in regular meetings and in their own learning experiences.

These common RBT concepts and language were shared to a very limited degree with teachers through several avenues. Some school administrators intentionally incorporated the RBT concepts and language into their professional development activities and school meetings. In those schools that participated in the TEAMS course, the team leaders shared the RBT concepts and language with their peers in both formal and informal settings. As noted earlier, this approach was a less effective dissemination method than providing teachers the opportunity to directly participate in RBT courses.

### Communication with Teachers

As explained in the *Description of the RBT Program* (on page 4 of this report), there was general agreement that information about the goals, purposes, and content of the RBT program was not effectively communicated to individual Pittsfield teachers or the teachers’ union during the first year of the program (2017-18). This led to confusion, misunderstandings, and resistance among teachers at several Pittsfield schools during that year, particularly in response to changes in the teacher evaluation process. Presentations were conducted at some schools that year in response to this situation – with mixed success.

During the second year of the RBT program (2018-19), the district and RBT began to conduct outreach to the teachers’ union about the RBT program. In early 2019, union leadership met with Kathy Spencer to receive an orientation to RBT courses and services, their purposes, and anticipated benefits. Everyone agreed that this session was very effective in building understanding and changing attitudes toward the RBT program by the teachers’ union. This session was followed by a series of discussions between the district and the union (supported by RBT staff) about how to incorporate the new teacher evaluation methods that emerged from this work into the teachers’ contract. The district, union, and RBT have also continued to develop plans for regularly communicating with teachers about the RBT program and its impact in the district.

### Coordination & Consistency

There is greater coordination and consistency in the work of principals and assistant principals across Pittsfield schools due to work with RBT. Administrators conducted regular district level meetings throughout the school year to share information and calibrate their teacher evaluation work. This led them to become more comfortable in working together on shared issues and challenges. These meetings also combined with consultation provided by RBT trainers to produce greater consistency in language and practices among the district and school administrators.

Steps were taken to also coordinate among the district's various initiatives and some external partners including RBT. District leaders shared the district and school improvement plans with RBT trainers to inform further development of the RBT program and incorporate RBT program goals into the improvement plans. Meetings were conducted between RBT trainers and a key external consultant, Leanne Nicholson. These meetings were used to share concepts and plans and to identify appropriate connections between the different initiatives.

According to one district administrator, the results of these efforts produced "less isolation, less work in silos, and lots more productive crossovers" for the district. Another district administrator concluded that Pittsfield has begun "operating more as a coordinated district rather than a coalition of individual schools" due to these activities.

*"We know that RBT's programs are a match for what our district needs. They have moved us forward, helped the central office grow to better support our principals, and helped the principals take their work to the next level."*

### Organizational Culture

Pittsfield has adopted a more participatory approach to its work rather than a directive, top-down approach. Meetings and planning sessions were designed to ensure that all voices were heard and that everyone became an "active participant" in the conversations. Internal feedback by participants and external observations by RBT trainers has ensured a continued focus on these efforts.

Pittsfield also made changes in the way it conducted meetings and promoted communication among administrators. These changes involved the incorporation of RBT concepts as well as the regular use of protocols and tools presented in the ATSR and TEAMS courses. It also went beyond that to emulate the specific structures and methods used by RBT staff for their meetings and training sessions. This reflected a recognition by Pittsfield leaders of the effectiveness of those structures and methods and the research that documented their value. However, there was also a recognition that "this was still a work-in-progress and more work needed to be done."

**Use of Data**

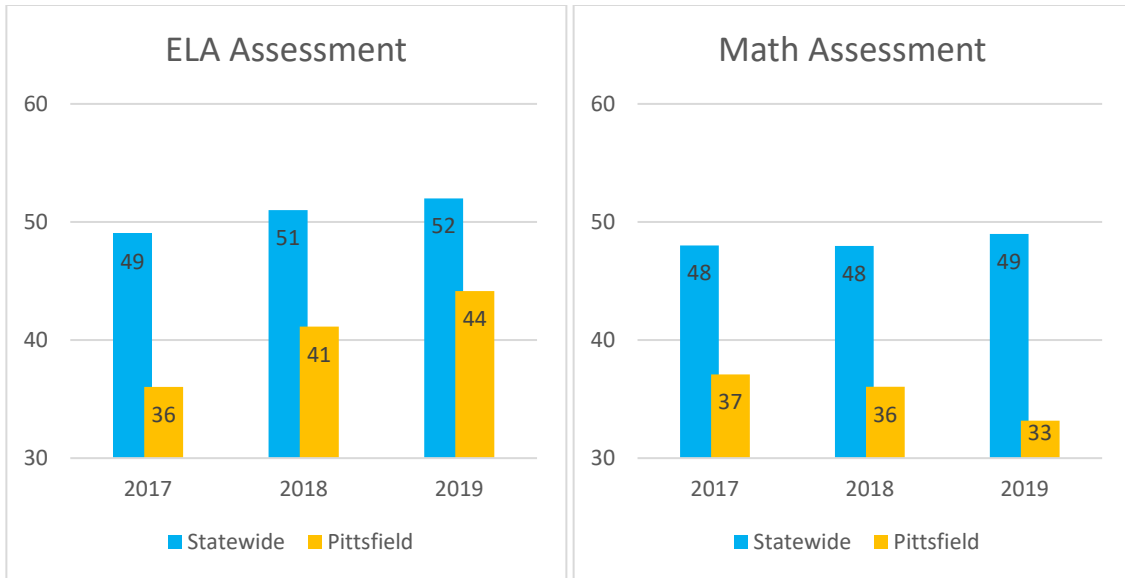
District administrators made major shifts in how they looked at data and how they used it. They began to examine more diverse data sets. Rather than creating data walls with state assessment data, they used collaborative data inquiry protocols to examine formative and benchmark student performance results, teacher fidelity to program data, teacher evaluations, and student referral/suspension results. As a result, data use at the district level became “much more rigorous, much more reflective, and much more meaningful.” In addition, district improvement plans “became qualitatively different and much improved as a result of the RBT program.”

These changes helped district leaders better understand “how each school was different and how principals and teachers had to take different actions to move their students along in their own learning.” It also helped these leaders identify “the inequities that exist at many places in the district and focus on improvement plans to put in consistent and equitable systems in response.”

<b>District-Level Impact of RBT Program</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrators made considerable progress in adopting common language and concepts in their conversations and work but efforts to share language and concepts with teachers were limited</li> <li>• During 2018-19, district leaders and RBT staff successfully informed teachers’ union leaders about RBT programs and engaged them in supporting further development and implementation of the program</li> <li>• District-level meetings promoted greater coordination and consistency among school administrators in their work</li> <li>• District efforts successfully promoted greater coordination and communication among its initiatives and external partners (including RBT)</li> <li>• District began to adopt a more participatory approach in district-level meetings and communications but this remained a work in progress</li> <li>• District expanded and diversified the types of data that were collected and analyzed</li> <li>• Data use at the district level became more rigorous, reflective, and meaningful to support student learning and promote a more equitable system</li> </ul>

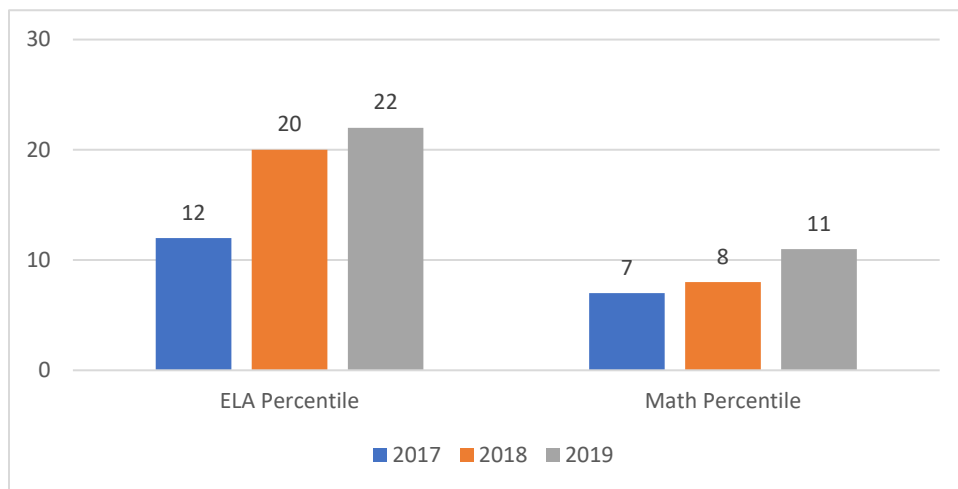
**Student Academic Assessment Results**

Over the last two school years, Pittsfield has made gains as a district on the state ELA assessments in the elementary grades. As indicated in the table below, the percentage of students in Pittsfield meeting or exceeding expectations on that assessment increased by 8% and the gap with statewide performance was reduced by 4%. However, gains were not observed on the state Math assessments.



**Percentile of Pittsfield Students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on State Assessments**

As indicated in the tables below, Morningside Community School made gains on both the state ELA and Math assessments during the two years that it was targeted for assistance by RBT. The percentage of students at Morningside School meeting or exceeding expectations increased by 12% on the ELA assessment and by 2% on the Math assessment. In addition, the School Achievement Percentile (calculated by the state) increased by 10 percentiles for the ELA assessment and by 4 percentiles for the Math assessment. The increases in the School Achievement Percentiles on both subjects during both school years indicate that students in the Morningside School improved their performance in both assessments relative to other Massachusetts public schools serving the same grade levels. These results reinforce the conclusions of district and state administrators RBT programs at the school contributed to improvements in teaching and learning by students.



**School Achievement Percentiles on State Assessments for Morningside School**

Because the three turnaround schools targeted for assistance during 2018-19 (Crosby, Herberg, and Reid) did not begin TEAMS training until March 2019, any impact of that training would not be expected in the state assessments administered during Spring 2019.

<b>Student Academic Assessment Results</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students at Morningside School substantially improved their performance on the ELA and Math state assessments relative to other Massachusetts public schools during both years that it received RBT assistance</li><li>• Pittsfield Public Schools made gains on the ELA state assessment during the two years that it received RBT assistance but not on the Math assessment</li></ul>