



Equity and Inclusion

By Dr. Tamara Uselman, Director of Equity and Inclusion

Yeah? But What Did the Teachers Say?

A school cook named Linda once told me, “Change is great, Tamara; you go first.” Truth be told, I fell out of love with change a long time ago. These days, I court improvement along the lines of a learning lab approach. That is to say, let’s define and work toward targets, measure indicators of performance, and monitor results to see what is working.

The word “measure” may make you think of quantitative measures, such as numbers on attendance or scores on state assessments. That’s cool; those numbers matter. Yet we are human beings, (even on those Mondays when we may feel like zombies) so *qualitative* data matters, too. A qual measure important to me at the end of an improvement cycle is, “What did teachers have to say?” Case in point: BARR at South High.

Fargo South High School is the first and only school in North Dakota to become a [Building Assets Reducing Risks \(BARR\)](#) school. Nationally, there are more than 200 BARR schools across 22 states.

“Honestly, BARR has been the best thing I have been a part of in my 14 years of teaching,” South’s lead BARR teacher Molly Lundon said. “I feel like we are very involved with building relationships with our students, which is going to make such a big difference in their success and experience at the high school level.”

South staff know if students do not pass ninth grade classes, they are not on track to graduate – but if so, then so. Ninth grade matters!

“Molly has been phenomenal in her new role of BARR coordinator and invaluable to the successful implementation of BARR,” South Principal Dr. Todd Bertsch said.

Molly schedules and leads small block, large block, and risk review meetings, overseeing the data input, and determining the I-time lesson schedule. (See the links for quick info on each of those terms).

In addition to Molly, Dr. Mortrud has been working side-by-side with the BARR team providing guidance and leadership. Mortrud, whose dissertation is on intervention systems at the high school level, said, “Even without all of the structural pieces in place, this is the first time in my career where I see Tier I interventions developed by teachers happening for high school students across multiple classrooms.”



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So, what exactly is BARR? Well, it is not a miracle; not a one-shot-wonder; it is not program that is fee-based into perpetuity; it does not require tons of new staff. Rather, in BARR students and teachers weave a blanket of support through relationships and data. Relationships are formed student-to-student, student-to-teacher, and teacher-to-teacher through I-time lessons. BARR integrates academic, behavioral, and social-emotional data and education into a single framework. BARR was funded its first year under a ND Juvenile Justice grant, and under an ESSER grant, South will receive external coaching and guidance for two more years, at which point BARR will be how schooling gets done. Data shows students who are successful in school are far less likely to get enmeshed in the justice system.

Though BARR sounds simple, change is hard. That's why Linda suggested I go first. For this change work, shout outs of thanks go to South High Freshman English, science, social studies, and health teachers along with counselors, social workers, and administration. Feedback from the BARR professional development last summer was very positive. Dr. Bertsch reported staff developed an even better way to intervene, collaborate, and empower teachers to positively engage with Freshmen students and respond to their needs.

Dr. Bertsch added, "BARR teachers have been fantastic at collaborating, connecting with students through I-time lessons, and implementing building, district, and community resources to address student needs. South's BARR team meetings begin with a positive comment, embrace and review student data, determine where students struggle, and communicate and implement an actionable plan for each student."

And what about that [quantitative data](#)? "We are wiggling our eyebrows" at the positive arc the data is showing (Even, 2022). The number of freshmen students receiving F's dropped significantly both semesters and more students found success in Tier 1 instruction compared with pre-BARR years. Qualitative data from BARR at South will continue to inform us over the next two years.

As Dr. Mortrud told me, "...our teachers have really done the work and embraced the BARR 'attitude.' They remain optimistic and open to becoming even more effective with their freshmen interventions. It is fun to see empowered teachers use their amazing skills to address students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs. South students are lucky to have their first high school experience lie with such a compassionate and skilled team."

But what did the teachers have to say after a year of BARR? BARR teachers, as reported by Lundon: 1) valued the BARR training; 2) felt increased connections with students and colleagues; 3) saw faster interventions that responded to students' needs; 4) liked I-Time and the autonomy in SEL lesson



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choice; 5) deepened collegial collaboration with peers and admin around difficult student issues; and 6) shared that BARR never felt forced upon them. So, for now, for this one moment in time, let's listen to what the teachers had to say. Qual data matters!

Still, we have improvements to make. Next year 's freshmen students will be scheduled into cohorts, allowing teacher teams to share the same group of students. That way, in small block (problem - solution) meetings, all teachers all have the same bunch of students. In addition to cohorting, plans are to extend parent awareness, involvement, and communication.

In closing, someone once said, "No risk; no reward." Being a professional learning lab involves risk. South High teachers took a calculated risk. The payoff is a trend of increased access to success for South High kids. That – well that, my friends, is equity in action.

