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Supporting ALL Students through MTSS: Multi-Tiered System of Supports
The Utah Special Educator

March 2013

MTSS: Multi-Tiered System of Supports

**On The Cover:**

MTSS: Multi Tiered System of Supports.
The Utah Core Standards represent raising the achievement bar for all students. How do we narrow the achievement gap? The answer: high quality, effective tiered instruction for ALL through MTSS.

The Utah Special Educator accepts manuscripts, artwork, and photographs on topics related to improving educational outcomes for school-age individuals with disabilities and learning challenges.

Submission guidelines and checklists for contributors are available online at http://www.updc.org/specialeducator/index.html. The editorial staff is dedicated to assisting contributors in the successful completion of manuscripts. Please contact either Michael Herbert, Editor, michaelh@updc.org, or Ginny Eggen, Co-Editor ginnye@updc.org for consultation and assistance. Phone 801-363-0822

The Utah Special Educator is a symbol of the leadership of Dr. R. Elwood Pace whose vision made the Consortium, the UPDC,— and this journal possible.

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Why UMTSS, Why Now?

Michael Herbert, Editor, The Utah Special Educator

Welcome to this very special monograph edition of The Utah Special Educator. This issue is supersized to match Utah’s increased focus on and demand for improved student outcomes.

Not familiar with MTSS? MTSS stands for Multi-Tiered System of Supports. MTSS, when applied with fidelity, has a proven track record of improved educational outcomes for ALL children and youth. MTSS is the language that will appear in the reauthorization of ESEA, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, scheduled for Senate approval in 2013. This special issue is dedicated to all things MTSS.

We can, whenever we choose, teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.” (Ron Edmonds)

Utah and the Perfect Storm

In the 2000 film The Perfect Storm, an unusually intense storm pattern was formed and a critical number of factors were present, resulting in widespread destruction. Is there a perfect storm for education in Utah on the horizon? Consider these facts:

• Slowed economy and continued lowest educational funding of all states
• Highest percentage of school-age population of all states
• Largest class size, teacher/student ratio of all states
• Third fastest growing minority population of all states
• Significant need to narrow the achievement gap between highest and lowest performing subgroups (i.e., ELLs, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty)
• Phase in of the Utah Core, with higher standards
• New teacher evaluation system, based in part on student growth
• Low rate of college and career ready high school graduates
• Low graduation rate for minority youth
• Lack of adequate funding for preschool programs

Student Demographics

A decade ago, minority representation in Utah accounted for a small percentage of the school-age population. By 2010, this had increased rapidly to represent 20% of all Utah citizens. In the same time period, the Hispanic population in Utah increased by 77.8%, with a disproportionate number who are school-age children and youth.

Utah has the third fastest growing minority population of all states and this rate is projected to accelerate in the next decade. Utah is designated by the U.S. government as one of a few states nationally to relocate worldwide refugee populations. A large proportion of refugee children and youth have never attended school, or have attended inconsistently, have been disconnected from their traditional culture, and are struggling to learn English and public school norms and expectations. This rapid influx of minority children and youth has presented unforeseen challenges for educators and educational outcomes for all children.

The majority of Utah veteran educators could be characterized as being White and middle class. Decades ago, when the minority population was very low, most did not receive targeted pre-service coursework regarding ethnic studies and culturally competent instruction. As a result, the achievement gap in educational outcomes of minority children and youth and their White counterparts has remained significant, and statistically stagnant for years. A well designed MTSS approach, applied with fidelity, has proven to significantly increase the academic achievement of historically low performing subgroups such as ELLs, and reduce the need and related costs of referral and disproportionate placement in special education.
There are significant differences between Utah’s CRT assessment outcomes and those of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). When achievement scores are further disaggregated, significant discrepancies between the majority white population and all subgroups, including students with disabilities become evident. Student achievement in math, particularly for students with disabilities, has remained stagnant and even evidenced a downward trajectory in secondary. If, as most predict, that the Utah Core assessments will more closely align and even exceed the higher standards of the NAEP, then reported educational outcomes for students with disabilities in Utah would be expected to fall even further behind the general population, further limiting graduation, post-school outcomes, and quality of life issues. Focusing on significantly improving the language arts and mathematics skill levels for all children and youth, especially for those with disabilities who are most vulnerable, must be an urgent, non-negotiable priority, and one that demands our immediate and full attention.

### Why We Need MTSS Now

Teachers need ongoing professional development in quality research-evidenced practices, implemented system-wide with instructional coaching and implementation support to improve outcomes.

Utah teachers face the largest classes in every grade, with the fewest resources of any state. It is not uncommon for teachers to report that they have spent thousands of dollars of their own money each year for essentials, such as books and materials, copy paper, and behavior reinforcers. Fewer available educational funds also equates with fewer instructional aides and support staff, critical to managing and differentiating instruction in larger classes. Still, compared to other states, Utah appears to have done a credible job, considering its challenges.

Decades ago, when Utah demographics were significantly more homogeneous and achievement attainment scores were not dis-aggregated, “credible” proficiency scores may have been acceptable. Today, they are not by any measure, particularly by national standards as evidenced by NAEP scores, and compared with student achievement data relative to our global trading partners.

A system-wide MTSS approach to behavior, literacy and numeracy instruction, and evidence-based professional development for teachers is critically needed. Research and experience show that pilot schools or demonstration projects in selected schools have limited effectiveness in improving the larger system and outcomes for subgroup populations. “Tweaking” a school system, a little at a time has not worked. MTSS works towards systemic change and improvement at the district level, and provides, facilitates and supports evidence-based professional development at all levels. Sound principles of scaling up with fidelity, building on the Implementation Science framework from the National Implementation Research Network will guide MTSS implementation efforts and evaluation criteria. We cannot afford to wait, and if we do, our children and grandchildren will certainly pay the price of inaction. Students who are significantly below grade level in reading by the end of third grade are significantly less likely to ever catch up, graduate, become college and career ready, and make significant contributions to society. Consider these sobering outcomes of the perfect education storm in Utah:

- Dropouts are 4 x more likely to be unemployed
- Dropouts are 8 x more likely to be incarcerated
- 70+% incarcerated; youth are dropouts
- It costs $33K/year to incarcerate: $6,356/year/to keep in school
- Dropouts live 5 years less than graduates

The question is not...do we face difficult problems? We do! The real question is, are they the same questions we faced last year?

### An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13980 or by scanning this QR code.
If the implementation of Utah Core Standards represents raising the achievement bar for all students, what represents narrowing the achievement gap? The answer: high quality, effective tiered instruction for all. Such instruction designed to support the Utah Core must be our primary focus to be successful at doing both. The introduction of standards alone will not improve student outcomes. However, when combined with effective tiered instruction, it has the potential for both raising the bar and narrowing the gap.

We need a strong partnership between special education and general education teachers to improve educational outcomes and raise the achievement bar for ALL students. The population of students with disabilities is changing; we are seeing a decrease in students with specific learning disabilities and an increase in students with autism and other health impairments. At the same time, we are seeing more students with disabilities included and receiving instruction in the general education classroom. Do our current educational and instructional practices address their needs, as well as the needs of other students?

The Utah Core is designed for all students, which requires that all teachers possess adequate content knowledge and be able to provide high quality instruction. As educators, we must go beyond merely gathering and reporting data to effectively utilizing data to improve instruction. The importance of high standards and effective instructional and assessment practices is reflected in Promises to Keep, which is the vision and mission for Utah's system of public education adopted by the Utah State Board of Education. The premise of Promises to Keep is that there are essential, core “promises” that leaders in the public education system should be clear about with citizens of Utah. Utah’s public education system keeps its constitutional promise by:

• Ensuring literacy and numeracy outcomes for all Utah children.
• Providing high quality instruction for all Utah children.
• Establishing curriculum with high standards and relevance for all Utah children.
• Requiring effective assessment to inform high quality instruction and accountability.

We know that quality classroom instruction is the single most important factor for producing student academic growth (Odden & Wallace, 2003). We also know that an effective teacher has six to ten times as much impact on achievement as all other factors combined including: family background, class size, socioeconomic status, and peer group affiliation (Mortimore & Sammons, 1987). Furthermore, we understand that teaching, with a specific academic objective, utilizing a highly interactive process, at an accelerated rate, erases the predictors of poverty and ethnicity (Brock, 2007).

In What Works In Schools, Marzano (2003) identified that two teachers working with the same population can achieve remarkably different results; in one class a 27% pass rate and in another class a 72% pass rate. This is a life changing experience for the students involved and their families. This could mean the difference between preparing students for working in low-paid jobs or for going to college.

Brock (2007) reminds us that, “We must be willing to improve instruction in every classroom—it can’t be an invitational activity, it won’t be a quick fix.” To successfully narrow the achievement gap, our focus needs to be on what many Utah school districts and charter schools refer to as their “non-negotiables.” They include the following:

Provide a Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Tier 1 is the foundation and consists of scientific, research-based core instructional and behavioral methodologies, practices, and supports designed for all students in the general curriculum. Tier 2 consists of supplemental instruction and interventions that are provided in addition to and in alignment with effective core instruction and behavioral supports to groups of targeted students who need additional instructional and/or behavioral support. Tier 3 consists of intensive instructional or behavioral interventions provided in addition to and in alignment with effective core instruction with the goal of increasing an individual student’s rate of progress. Tier 3 interventions are developed for individual students using a problem-solving process.

Tiered instruction helps narrow the achievement gap by identifying students who are at-risk for academic failure through early benchmarking data and providing them with the extra assistance they require. To be effective, core instructional and behavioral supports must be designed to assist approximately 80% of the students with meeting benchmarks. Therefore, the first goal of a multi-tiered system of supports is to ensure that at least 80% of Tier 1 students are at or above minimum proficiency. Furthermore, to make progress, all students must have equal access to the general curriculum. Unless addressed by building leadership teams in a proactive and systemic manner, office discipline referrals, student absences, overreliance on placing students in more restrictive environments, and excessive suspensions will serve as barriers to narrowing the gap.

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Raise the Bar and Narrow the Gap: How do We Successfully do Both?

Lowell K. Oswald, Executive Director, UPDC (Utah Personnel Development Center), and Glenna Gallo, Director of Special Education, Utah State Office of Education (USOE)
High quality instruction is explicit and systematic. It includes:

- Direct Explanation (Identify the specific core content and language objectives, name and define the skill or strategy, and explicitly teach why and when it is used),
- Teacher Modeling (I do it),
- Guided Practice with Feedback (We do it),
- Independent Practice (You do it), and
- Progress Monitoring (Use student data to guide instructional decisions).

Effective, instructionally relevant assessments are used to identify student instructional needs. These include:

- Screening/Benchmark Assessments (Collecting data for the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of core instruction and identifying students needing more intensive interventions and support),
- Formative Assessments (Ongoing progress monitoring to guide instruction and monitor student progress and intervention effectiveness), and
- Diagnostic Assessments (Gathering information from multiple sources to determine why individual students are not benefiting from instruction and what specific areas of need must be addressed).

Create Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) help build staff support, internal capacity, and sustainability over time. PLCs determine their effectiveness on the basis of results and commonly use student data to guide instructional decisions. Such collaborative teacher teams also recognize the importance of focused, ongoing, evidence-based professional development. They understand that instructional coaching is necessary to help facilitate the transfer of newly acquired knowledge and skills to the classroom (Joyce & Showers, 2002), and ultimately to improve the academic, language, social and behavioral performance of all students.

An article in The Los Angeles Times described the three most improved schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District. What school practices did they regularly engage in?

- First, teachers aimed their efforts explicitly at the achievement of measurable learning goals.
- Second, they worked in teams to reach their goals. Teachers talked to one another about their work, met regularly to analyze successes and failures, shared materials, and refined their instruction.
- Third, teachers made regular use of achievement data to identify and address areas of concern. Teacher teams routinely assessed student progress to target deficiencies and buttress strengths (Helfand & Sahagun, 1999).

Build and Maintain Strong District and Building Leadership Teams

If you expect it, then inspect it! Active administrative support and oversight are required for successfully narrowing the achievement gap between the highest and lowest performing subgroups. LEAs provide professional development opportunities; however, they do not always inspect or examine data on the fidelity of implementation. If targeted professional development on evidence-based educational practices for educators is an important component in narrowing the achievement gap (and it clearly is), then the fidelity of implementation (inspecting, collecting, and examining data showing that the professional development is applied and working in classrooms) is essential. Educators who stay current with and strive to implement evidenced-based practices recognize the value of administrative visits to their classrooms and seek feedback designed to improve their instruction.

The Role of District Leadership Teams. An essential component in narrowing the achievement gap is active district administrative support of schools. The development of implementation capacity begins at the district level. The district leadership team builds implementation capacity into schools to help teachers, staff, and building administrators implement a multi-tiered system of supports and other evidence-based practices as intended with good outcomes for students. The district leadership team provides essential implementation supports to all buildings and teachers in the district. The team also ensures that targeted professional development, instructional coaching, and performance assessments are provided to help support the work of school staff and improve student outcomes.

The Role of Building Leadership Teams. As with all educational professionals, building administrators are being asked to do more and more and perhaps stretch in ways not previously expected. For example, the term instructional leader is not an honorary one. To be instructional leaders, principals must play an active role in supporting quality instruction. This can only be accomplished if they are visiting classrooms regularly and having reflective conversations with teachers about their practice. For some, this paradigm is new, however, the advantages far outweigh the challenges. Practitioners report initial resistance from many staff, yet over time, see improved communication, shared purpose and real progress towards narrowing the achievement gap. Instead of being an “invitation” to use high quality tiered instructional practices, teachers are expected to do so and the principal’s role is to ensure that this takes place, with fidelity, in every class.

Conclusion

R. Spencer Darling (2004) reminds us that, “All organizations are designed, intentionally or unwittingly, to achieve precisely the results they get.” Successfully raising the bar and narrowing the gap depends upon the ability of state, district, and building leadership teams to focus on student learning and work collaboratively to support teachers in implementing evidence-based practices with fidelity. If we are not getting the results we want, we must first examine our organizational culture and structures. Establishing a multi-tiered system of supports, creating PLCs, and building and maintaining strong district and building leadership teams help create conditions for increased instructional effectiveness. “These organization supports are critical to establishing, improving, and sustaining evidence-based practices across generations of teachers and students” (Fixsen, Blase, Horner, & Sugai, 2009).
An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13981 or by scanning this QR code.
Utah Multi-Tiered System of Supports
Development Center (UPDC) & Scott Ross, Utah State University

The Utah State Office of Education (USOE) announced in November 2012 that the state had been awarded a five-year, $3,966,275 federal grant to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) proposal was submitted to the U.S. Department of Education in September on behalf of the USOE Special Education Department and subsequently won 20% more funding than what had been awarded for the previous five years. Beginning in 2013, for the next five years these grant dollars will be used to help develop an infrastructure for implementing the Utah Multi-Tiered System of Supports (UMTSS) at the state and Local Education Agency (LEA) level by creating models of successful implementation of evidence-based professional development that can be scaled up across the state. The overall outcome of this project will be to help ensure that all students, especially students with disabilities, benefit from effective instruction and intervention.

Previous State Improvement Grant (SIG)/SPDG Projects

Utah has received three previous SIG/SPDG grants and has factored into the proposed project the lessons learned and successes experienced from previous projects. Furthermore, the success of previous projects demonstrates Utah’s ability to institutionalize best practices and apply lessons learned to its professional development practices.

During the first SIG (SIG1; 1999–2004) Utah faced a chronic shortage of licensed special educators in all areas of disabilities. SIG work concentrated on developing partnerships with institutions of higher education (IHEs) to develop high-quality field-based personnel preparation programs to meet urgent needs across the state. This provided a foundation for collaboration among partnerships that continues today.

During the second SIG (SIG2; 2004–2007) the personnel preparation emphasis shifted to ensuring that new special education teachers had the skills and knowledge to meet the highly-qualified teacher standards adopted by the state. This was accomplished through summer workshops and coaching follow-up support. In addition, a state-wide effort, the Utah Behavior Initiative, provided Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) technical assistance to schools throughout the state. This changed the focus from classroom-centered support to school-wide behavior systems.

During the SPDG from 2007–2012, lessons learned from previous SIG projects were applied. The Utah Behavior Initiative was expanded to include academics, behavior, and coaching (ABC-UBI). Running Start, an intensive summer workshop train-

ing for new special education teachers, brought together teachers and their instructional coaches to work on developing vital teaching behaviors.

In 2009, the Utah Coaching Network (UCN) was created to address the need for skilled instructional coaches. Instructional coaches in LEAs with LEA-level support and infrastructure were able to implement the coaching model with greater impact than those coaches from school districts or charter schools without the system-wide support and infrastructure.

An important lesson learned from the 2007-2012 SPDG was that LEA support of schools is necessary to sustain high levels of implementation and success. Sustainable infrastructures at the LEA and state levels need to be developed in order to ensure ongoing support for implementation and sustainability of evidence-based practices.

Current SPDG Project

In the development of the current SPDG project, three themes emerged: (1) additional emphasis will be placed on systemwide and coordinated implementation efforts, and (2) the comprehensive use of evidence-based practices to (3) improve both academic and behavioral outcomes for students with and without disabilities. This initiative will help develop an infrastructure for UMTSS by creating models of successful LEA implementation that can be scaled up across the state.

The UMTSS project was designed to support the implementation of evidence-based practices through a data-driven, multi-tiered delivery system. It is a continuous improvement model in which problem solving and evidence-based decision-making occur continuously across multiple levels of the educational system. UMTSS will positively impact student outcomes by creating capacity for an integrated academic and behavior support system that can be implemented with fidelity and sustained over time, while utilizing data-based decision making at all levels of implementation.

To initiate this work, all Utah school districts and charter schools were provided with the UMTSS prospectus in the spring of 2012 and invited to submit letters of intent for participation in the project. Eight school districts (Beaver, Canyons, Granite, Ogden, Salt Lake, San Juan, Tooele, and Washington) and one charter school (Summit Academy) completed the process, and have agreed to partner with the UMTSS State Implementation Team and adopt the program initiatives outlined in the proposal. The majority of SPDG funds (90%) will be used for targeted professional development to help support participating LEAs with implementing and sustaining a multi-tiered system of supports.

Continued on page 12
UMTSS State Implementation Team

One critical component of the UMTSS project is the State Implementation Team (SIT). SIT members have expertise with respect to innovation, implementation, and improvement cycles. The SIT meets twice a month and is comprised of the SPDG director, assistant director, project coordinator, specialists, three IHE representatives, and two USOE representatives. The primary purpose of the SIT is to support LEA leadership teams in their efforts to implement UMTSS and provide ongoing technical assistance. Figure 1 on page 10 illustrates the role of the SIT and the management structure being implemented.

Members of the SIT will act as systems coaches for LEA leadership teams. With smaller, rural LEAs, SIT members are actively involved with directly providing professional development, systems coaching, and guiding personnel in the effective use of data, facilitative administrative practices, and systems to help assure the effective and continuing implementation of evidence-based practices. Ultimately, the focus of the SIT is on developing the competencies of educators and the capabilities of school and LEA organizations so that necessary changes can be made in system functioning and best practices can be sustainably implemented with students across the state (Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M. & Wallace, F., 2005).

The SIT has also established linkages and partnerships with other agencies and works collaboratively with these partners to meet the goals and objectives of the project. Key collaborators include the Utah State Office of Education, Utah Parent Center, Utah State University, University of Utah, Brigham Young University, Utah Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Consortium (representatives from LEAs), and the UMTSS advisory council (representatives from IHEs).
Summary

According to Fixsen et al. (2005), “States currently dabble in the use of evidence-based practices and other innovations, often by funding pilots and demonstration projects. While pilot and demonstration projects are a necessary part of system change efforts, unfortunately they rarely lead to widespread or sustainable use.” While Utah has done some fantastic work implementing evidence-based practices to better support thousands of students across the state, there are still definite improvements to be made. The UMTSS project will take on this task over the next five years by supporting LEA leadership teams in the development of infrastructures that can maintain large-scale implementation of the best academic and behavior support interventions available.

LEA leadership teams interested in learning more about the project, or that would like to apply for participation, are encouraged to contact Devin Healey (devinhe@updc.org) at the Utah Personnel Development Center.

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An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13982 or by scanning this QR code.
If one is careful not to take one too seriously, one can gain perspective in a 40-year career in education. Here is mine so far.

I am very tired of ideological arguments. I get that religion is ideological. I do not get that politics are.

It is impossible that EVERY idea coming from a Democrat is wrong. It is impossible that EVERY idea coming from a Republican is wrong.

I used to write a monthly column for the Deseret News. My first was a piece on the need for democracy to have the chaos of a good discussion. We have lost that ability.

In the Congress, it used to be true that Democrats and Republicans would scream at each other and then go have dinner together. No more.

It used to be that political issues could be discussed among friends. No more–unless everyone first shows her/his card proving their pre agreement about every issue.

My wife and I have lost good friends over the politics of the last decade. Tragic. One would think that education, the one chance we have with our treasured children to guide them to caring and competent citizenship, would be immune from ideological disagreements. Of course, it is not. I will note three examples:

Whole language v. direct instruction is the first example. It is not possible that we as a field have not discovered the best ways to teach virtually all children to read proficiently? If one looks at the data, in fact, we have. But, because some of the explicit approaches that work violate the ideology of many professors and some educators, we refuse to implement widely what works. Show me the data!

The use of the IQ/Achievement Discrepancy to identify students eligible for special education in the LD category is the second example. The IQ/Achievement Discrepancy sure looked scientific. When I was Utah’s state director of special education (and I am a school psychologist), we spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on a discrepancy disk using a mile long regression formula from Cecil Reynolds.

In the early part of this century, Jack Fletcher, Matt Burns, and many others showed us unequivocally that the Discrepancy model is not scientifically valid. Did everyone immediately stop using it? Of course not. After all, RtI is not fully developed as an alternative. Besides that, we psychs have to have our WISC kits! The RtI Revolution is way past its tipping point and is now transformed into building a sustainable and coherent Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) for all students. More on MTSS later. Show me the data!

Site-based decision making is the third example. For years, we have tried to make site-based decision making work. Our ideological reliance on this idea has not raised achievement. Marzano and Waters (2009) did a meta-analysis which found that site-based decision making does not work to raise achievement. What does work is for a school district to establish a limited number of non-negotiables and then to have schools innovate in the context of those non-negotiables.

Have we all listened? Oh no. If our ideology is site-based decision making, we keep doing it until we retire. This sort of adult centered decision making is the biggest problem we have in education. Show me the data!

As a past master of corny titles, I think this one wins. “Have we ‘Hattie’ enough debate?” The reason for this cornball title is because of what I think is the most important contribution to education in my career. John Hattie has recently (2009, 2012) published his epic scientific findings. Called Visible Learning, these books describe the results of the following methodology: 800 meta analyses of 50,000 research articles including 150,000 effect sizes from a cumulative sample of 240 million students. Show me the data indeed! Remember that an effect size of 0.2 or more is a significant effect, and that the higher the number, the more significant the positive outcome. Here are the top 15 influences on achievement from Hattie’s research:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Most Influence</th>
<th>ES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Self-reported grades/Student expectations</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Piagetian programs</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Response to Intervention</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher credibility</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Providing formative evaluation</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Micro-teaching</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Classroom discussion</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Comprehensive interventions for learning disabled students</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Teacher clarity</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Reciprocal teaching</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Teacher-student relationships</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Spaced vs. mass practice</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Meta-cognitive strategies</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Acceleration</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note that all of these effect sizes are well above 0.2. Please note that the third most influential factor is RtI. The fifth is providing formative evaluation. The eighth is comprehensive interventions for LD students.

To be complete, here are the bottom 15 influences (least effective) on achievement:

| 136  | Teacher subject matter knowledge                                                 | 0.09|
| 137  | Changing school calendars/timetables                                            | 0.09|
| 138  | Out-of-school curricular experiences                                            | 0.09|
| 139  | Perceptual-motor programs                                                       | 0.08|
| 140  | Whole language                                                                  | 0.06|
| 141  | Ethnic diversity of students                                                     | 0.05|
| 142  | College halls of residence                                                       | 0.05|
| 143  | Multi-grade/multi-age classes                                                    | 0.04|
| 144  | Student control over learning                                                    | 0.04|
| 145  | Open vs. traditional                                                            | 0.01|
| 146  | Summer vacation                                                                 | -0.02|
| 147  | Welfare policies                                                                | -0.12|
| 148  | Retention                                                                       | -0.13|
| 149  | Television                                                                      | -0.18|
| 150  | Mobility                                                                        | -0.34|
So, according to Hattie, whole language has an effect size of 0.06, Student control over learning, 0.04, retention, -0.13. Our ideologies should not pre determine our decisions, my friends and colleagues. If it works, keep doing it. If it doesn’t, we must stop.

This directive is the foundation for the MTSS initiative. Each of our students needs whatever she/he needs to be successful. The only way to be sure that we provide “whatever,” is to collect formative data about the effect of all of our instructional strategies on each of our students. Those that work, we continue. Those that don’t, we stop using. Organizing these strategies into a MTSS (one district-wide system, many data-based supports, directed by district-wide non-negotiables) is a proven transformational strategy that works. Take a look at the 2010 and 2011 Fullan books in the Kukic Collection for examples from all over the country.(See online Essential Educator.)

Because of Hattie’s work, we know what works and what doesn’t. If we really treasure our students, can we do anything other than use these data to direct our efforts? I think not.

Stevan Kukic, PhD, Director, School Transformation National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)

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Effective Practices in High Performing Districts Serving Students in Special Education

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Article Title:
Effective Practices in High Performing Districts Serving Students in Special Education

Authors:
Mette Huberman, Matt Navo & Tom Parrish

Online Link: [http://www.casecec.org/documents/JSEL/JSEL_25.2.pdf](http://www.casecec.org/documents/JSEL/JSEL_25.2.pdf)

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Mette Huberman, M.A. Matt Navo, M.A. Tom Parrish, Ed.D.  
American Institutes for Research, Sanger Unified School District

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Introduction

Today more than ever, schools are responsible for successful outcomes for ALL students. Many schools are adopting a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model to enhance student academic growth. Without district support, the likelihood for durability and scaling of these practices is limited. One example of a district-wide MTSS model is presented by Michigan’s Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (MiBLSi) as a state-wide project supporting districts through stages of implementation.

What are the Stages?

District-wide MTSS application involves a process of moving through stages of implementation (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman & Wallace, 2005; Horner & Sugai, 2006). Each stage is defined by specific activities, outcomes and unique challenges. The stages describe current status of district MTSS implementation efforts. The stages also help in the planning, communication, resource allocation, and evaluation of district-wide MTSS. Attention to activities associated with the stages can reduce the likelihood of “false starts” when an initiative falters due to lack of commitment or poor planning. Additionally, the stages provide teaching opportunities to explain the implementation process to district participants. Although the stages appear linear, events such as leadership changes and economic challenges can cause start overs, or bounce back to an earlier stage.

What do the Stages look like in a District Model?

Five stages of implementation are presented in the table below. These stages can be clustered into three main categories of “Should we do it?” “Work to do it right” and “Work to do it better.” This process takes time. Progress through the stages in district-wide implementation of MTSS will involve multiple years.

### Stages of Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should we do it?</td>
<td>Exploration/Adoption</td>
<td>Decision regarding commitment to adopting the program/practices and supporting successful implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work to do it right!</td>
<td>Installation</td>
<td>Set up infrastructure so that successful implementation can take place and be supported. Establish team and data systems, conduct audit, develop plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial Implementation</td>
<td>Try out the practices, work out details, learn and improve before expanding to other contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elaboration</td>
<td>Expand the program/practices to other locations, individuals, times- adjust from learning in initial implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuous Improvement/Regeneration</td>
<td>Make it easier, more efficient. Embed within current practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exploration/Adoption Stage. Prior to implementation of a district-wide MTSS model, a district exploration team investigates whether MTSS implementation is the right thing to do and can it be supported to do it in the right way. The Exploration/Adoption Stage is complete when the decision makers are adequately informed of the costs/benefits in implementing MTSS and commit to supporting MTSS throughout the school district.

A common problem during Exploration/Adoption is that investment in examining readiness is minimized, leading to frustration and stalling in future stages. It is essential to communicate both costs (e.g., resources, time, potential risks) and benefits. Another potential problem during the Exploration/Adoption stage is a failure to see the relevance of the MTSS work. It is crucial to connect MTSS implementation to student outcomes and the culture of the school/community.

Installation Stage. During this stage, a district implementation team is established to manage and coordinate district-wide MTSS implementation. The implementation team works to integrate MTSS with existing district initiatives. The district implementation team collects, summarizes and evaluates district MTSS relevant data and uses this information to develop a district MTSS plan. The implementation team communicates barriers and possible solutions to district cabinet level administration.

A common problem at the Installation Stage is a failure to provide adequate time for MTSS planning and coordination. Since districts have no new funding, it is necessary to figure out how the planning and coordination can be embedded within existing team member responsibilities. Another challenge involves the establishment of a standard process to provide district administration with updates and resource requests regarding implementation efforts.

Initial Implementation Stage. In this stage, a few schools pilot MTSS. During this process, it is important to start small and learn from those most willing to implement MTSS before expanding to other schools. It is recommended that the entire district does not implement MTSS all at once. During initial implementation, the intent is to develop model demonstration sites for other district schools to study and replicate. It may be necessary to devise a communication strategy to address schools that were not selected for initial implementation.

Feedback loops are established for sharing information between schools, implementation team and district administration regarding MTSS. During initial implementation, school leadership teams from the pilot schools are responsible for management of MTSS at the school level. The school team creates a school-wide plan and embeds this within the school improvement framework. In addition, educators from the schools are provided with training, coaching and technical assistance on MTSS practices.
Initial Implementation represents a fragile stage for those implementing MTSS. Educators are asked to apply practices that are often unfamiliar and require additional effort with much delay in resulting student success. It is important that the implementers who are piloting the work are well supported with technical assistance and guidance from district administration. If districts are unable to get a few schools that are most ready to implement MTSS to fidelity, it will be nearly impossible to get an entire district to implement MTSS with success.

**Elaboration Stage.** During this stage, districts expand the MTSS program to other schools within the district. The implementation process is revised and adapted based on learning from the model demonstration sites. The activities for the elaboration schools during this stage are similar to the activities for the pilot/model demonstration schools. At this stage, implementation support for the additional elaboration schools should be easier due to initial implementation efforts.

One concern of the Elaboration Stage involves scaling up too fast. There may not be enough experience/knowledge gained through the initial implementation stage to adequately understand what is needed to successfully implement MTSS on a larger scale. Additionally, there may not be enough district resources to support elaboration with all remaining schools. A cohort model of staggering implementation may be required.

**Continuous Improvement/Regeneration Stage.** There are always ways to improve implementation of MTSS so that it is easier, more effective and more efficient. MTSS should become the standard framework of how schools accomplish educational practice within the district. During the Continuous Improvement/Regeneration Stage there should be an established process for orienting new staff/students/families to MTSS as well as the provision for on-going professional development to increase the competence of existing staff. There is an ongoing rhythm for reviewing and acting upon MTSS data. Also, the district uses knowledge and experience of MTSS to select and hire new staff with requisite skills.

Districts are never really done with the implementation of MTSS. There is always new learning that can contribute to improvement. There will always be changes in staff, regulatory and economic issues that need to be addressed. When implementation fidelity fades there will be a need to get the process back on track.

**Moving through the stages.** The speed at which schools/districts move through the stages of implementation vary, based on the experience of staff and allocation of resources. The stages do more that just describe the current state of implementation of MTSS within a district. The stages also provide a framework to identify key activities and accomplishments that would expedite progress in implementation efforts.

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**Steve Goodman, PhD, Michigan’s Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative, http://miblsi.cenmi.org**

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13985 or by scanning this QR code.
One state that is serving as a model for other states in developing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is Kansas. A Former Utah educator, Colleen Riley, currently serves as the Director of Special Education Services in the Kansas Department of Education. Colleen has helped to provide the leadership necessary to develop an integrated systematic approach to meet the needs of all students. She explains the Kansas model below.

“The Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) began as a grassroots effort led by schools and supported by the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) to redesign the way in which effective instruction and support for every student was provided regardless of labels. To achieve this, staff from various schools across Kansas came together and combined their learning from student problem-solving teams and Reading First to establish practices and a system to support those practices in a sustainable way. Through the efforts of these schools and technical assistance staff from the KSDE, the Kansas MTSS framework emerged. With it came documents and a state-wide training system that conveyed the lessons learned including how to implement what can best be described as a culture of engagement – engaged staff, students, and families! The focus of the Kansas MTSS framework is changing practices at the state, district, building, and classroom levels to create a system that provides a continuum of effective education, preschool through high school, across reading, math, and behavior.

In Kansas, the MTSS effort is not mandated or required in any way; buildings and/or districts choose whether to participate. Over the last 4 years more than 45% of the buildings in Kansas have participated in formal training and with many others working to improve practices aligned to MTSS on their own. Schools are reporting overall improved student outcomes as well as closing the achievement gap between subgroups. The impact is beyond student achievement alone. Students say they have a greater sense of accomplishment and are more engaged in school, families are seeing the success of their children and less disengagement in school, and school staff are indicating a greater sense of influence over student learning. School staffs also report of finding more support with other staff members and having a clear plan for ensuring each student receives support matched to the need.

While the vision is simple, the creation of a single system that is designed and redesigns itself to support student learning is a complex task. To achieve this vision, the practices being supported must be aligned from the state down to the classroom level. The focus of the work in Kansas is on helping districts establish the capacity to implement and provide ongoing coaching of these practices in every school. It is only through this focused and persistent message we can achieve sustainable change that will positively impact our students and educators.”

You may view the extensive Kansas MTSS materials at: www.kansasmtss.org/

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One of the most positive principles of MTSS efforts nationwide is the fact that collaboration is a core element in developing a model. The creation of a collaborative problem-solving culture in a school district is paramount to success, rather than continuing to operate with “silos” that do not communicate with each other, as is often the case. The emphasis on collaborating extends to the national level—states that have been leaders in building an MTSS are sharing what they have learned with other states.

An essential concept of MTSS is adhering to a set of evidence-based practices. Fidelity to the components, practices, and procedures will result in better outcomes for students. An information brief published on the Kansas MTSS website, *Errors of Implementation* (December 2011), lists some common practices that can sidetrack developing an effective MTSS model in school districts. Several of these include:

- MTSS must not be viewed primarily as a special education or general education responsibility; rather it must be embraced as an instructional responsibility of all adults in a building.
- MTSS is not a “buffet style” initiative where individual teachers choose which pieces they would like to implement. Benefits for students will be most robust when all adults in the building participate in a collaborative manner.
- Tier 3 DOES NOT equal Special Education (although some students receiving special education services may receive Tier 3 supports).
- Students should NOT only be supported by a “Specialist” (e.g., SpEd Students with SpEd teacher, Title I students with Title 1 teacher, etc.).
- Determining student intervention groups and planning intervention instruction based on state assessment indicators does not address the underlying academic deficits or needs for enrichment and therefore is unlikely to impact long term student outcomes.
- Providing intervention time during core instruction is NOT an MTSS practice...the intervention time should be provided IN ADDITION TO the core instruction time.
- Differentiation is a key component of effective core instruction and does not constitute “intervention.”
- Data review must allow for fluid grouping of students based on screening and student progress monitoring data during intervention. Entry and exit criteria for interventions must be established and followed so that students can receive intervention as rapidly as they are identified as needing support, and can be released from intervention when data indicate that intervention is no longer needed.
- MTSS implementation, through the use of universal screening, creates a system in which all students are participants. MTSS is not something that is DONE to students, nor is it the process for the determination of eligibility for entitlement programs. Rather it is a process by which students are identified as needing support and matched with appropriate supports and that provides data to inform entitlement evaluation processes.
- Meeting the needs of ALL students is the primary focus of an MTSS. MOST students should meet basic proficiency with core instruction. When this is not the case, the core curriculum and fidelity to that curriculum in its implementation should be examined rather than attempting to “fix” all of the learning deficits in Tiers 2 and 3.

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Article Title:
Professional Development in the context of Scaling Up

Authors:
Janette K. Klingner and Allison G. Boardman, University of Colorado Boulder, and Kristen L. McMaster, University of Minnesota

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Editors' note: This article consists of excerpts from the original: What Does It Take to Scale Up and Sustain Evidence-Based Practices?
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District Policies: Necessary, but not Sufficient
Many school districts across the state are working to change or improve policies regarding evidence-based practices in their districts. Some districts have resolutions from their boards of education regarding positive behavior interventions and supports, response to intervention and professional learning communities.

For example, in 2011, Tooele County School District added the following policy:

Tooele County School District believes all students shall be provided a safe and successful school environment. In every aspect of education if students lack skills, strategies are taught. Tooele County School District believes the same holds true for student behavior, including self-discipline, citizenship skills, and social skills. In Tooele County School District we will provide support to students and the community at large by teaching students these skills.

1. Procedures and policies shall be developed for classroom and student management at the district and school levels and shall include:
   a. Written standards (3-5) for student behavior expectations, including school and classroom management.
   b. Effective instructional practices for teaching student expectations, including self-discipline, citizenship, civic skills, and social skills.
   c. Systematic methods for reinforcement, as decided by each school staff, of expected positive behaviors.
   d. Uniform methods, as decided by each school administration and staff, for correction of student behaviors.
   e. Uniform methods for at least annual school-level data-based evaluations of efficiency and effectiveness reported in each school’s School Improvement Plan annually. (Section 5.53 of Policy Manual)

In Salt Lake District as part of the School Improvement Plan (SIP), schools have to report on PBIS implementation and goals based on school-wide, classroom and student data.

San Juan School District has adopted the ABCs of Education, where their instructional norms are the following: 1- 90% engagement in meaningful learning activities, 2- Understood learning objective, 3- Supportive learning environment, 4- Monitor student learning, 5- Further highly effective Tier 1 instruction.

Not only have these districts changed policy, but they are working to structure their districts around a multi-tier system of support. The national State Implementation and Scaling up Evidence-based Practices (SISEP) Center states that there are two pieces to consider: 1. using innovations that work and 2. building implementation infrastructure.

Karen Blasé, Associate Director of SISEP, shared the following, “Data are very clear that training by itself will not get you implementation, the data are clear that policies by themselves will not get you implementation, the data are clear that information and dissemination by itself will not get you implementation. Those are all necessary, they are just not sufficient. So, it’s learning to invest in what’s necessary but also invest in what’s sufficient: coaching, data systems, systems change, improvement cycles, communication loops. It’s about changing the system to support new ways of work.”

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Ogden’s Unique Context for Change

I shall no longer ask myself if this is expedient, but only if it is right. I shall do this not because it is noble or unselfish, but because I need for the rest of my journey, a star that will not play false to me, a compass that will not lie. I am no longer able to aspire to the highest with one part of myself and to deny it with another.

Alan Paton – *Cry the Beloved Country*
Brad Smith, Superintendent, Ogden City School District

Introduction

Our students need a star that will not play false with them. That star is the highest quality education we can possibly deliver. Ogden City School District (“OCSD”) has not always delivered on that aspiration, a failure which is unacceptable. Our journey—which has only just started—combines hard-headed, cold, data analysis with passion, demands, and hope. Rigor, demanding the best, highest from every student, is the heart of what we are about.

OCSD’s genuine reform efforts began early in the 2011-12 school year with the realization that years of marginal changes and well-intentioned but diffuse efforts had not produced an acceptable educational product. Doing the same thing and expecting differing outcomes is neither sane nor useful. Since we aspired to fundamentally better results, across our District the realization was made that we would have to do fundamentally different things.

Ogden’s Unique Context for Change

By Spring 2011, the stage was set for genuine change. Three events—painful and difficult—catalyzed change. First, OCSD and our local teacher’s association failed to reach a negotiated contract. The existing contract contained terms that were fundamentally at odds with a highly successful educational endeavor. When the 2010-2011 school ended without a negotiated agreement, the School Board carefully reviewed its options and sent contracts directly to its teachers. The revised contract eliminated some of the provisions that frustrated reform and included the restoration of an eight hour workday. Of OCSD’s approximately 710 teachers, only one refused to sign this contract. This course of events was seismic in its immediate and long-term consequences.

Simultaneously and suddenly, OCSD’s superintendent retired due to serious family health concerns. Faced with a need for an immediate leader (and facing looking for a new superintendent at the least advantageous time of the school year–August), the School Board immediately appointed one of its own members as superintendent. I am not an educator, but a trial attorney. This change, coming on the heels of the contract issue, intensified concern, and punctuated the intensity of expected change.

The third critical factor was OCSD’s participation in the Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE) sponsored by the University of Virginia’s Darden School of Business and its Curry School of Education. OCSD had made a decision to have four of its 23 schools participate in this program in Summer 2011. By Fall 2011, the district’s new leadership made a conscious decision to expand participation in this program by sending a second group of school leaders from the district through this training as well as scaling up the reforms learned to all of our schools. That commitment has now grown to a third group, starting the summer of 2013.

In all of this, OCSD’s School Board saw potential in the chaos; potential to effectuate a fundamental change of direction and tone—

the Board had not merely the vision of the possible, but the courage to act on that vision. With the Board’s support, the new superintendent, aided by very strong senior district leadership, was able to move forward with urgency to reverse course in OCSD.

Our Actions

Where We Were
At the conclusion of the 2010-2011 school year, education in OCSD had the following results:

• Six of the ten lowest performing elementary schools (judged by CRT results);
• The lowest and third to the lowest performing elementary schools in Utah (Dee Elementary and Odyssey Elementary);
• The two lowest performing comprehensive high schools in Utah;
• Graduation rates at our comprehensive high schools in 2011 was 77% for Ogden High School and 78% for Ben Lomond High School.

What We Did

Change was not magic nor was it without both effort and pain. The first and most fundamental change commenced with the appointment of our new superintendent and the explicit expectation that business as usual was over. Change accelerated.

Within the first week of school, at the request of the director of secondary education, long-delayed administrative changes were made. Every secondary administrator in the district, except the head principals of the two high schools, was changed. This set a tone of rapid, immediate, dramatic change that was a substantial break with the past.

Within the first quarter, senior district leadership developed a set of ambitious, non-negotiable attainment standards for OCSD, called our Guaranties, Standards, and Attitudes (“GSAs”). The GSAs were immediately promulgated internally and externally throughout the District. They were explicitly communicated as our Guaranties to our community. These statements codify achievement-oriented expectations (the Guaranties), instruction-based practices (the Standards), and culture-changing alterations (the Attitudes).

Four schools (Dee Elementary, Odyssey Elementary, Ogden High School, and George Washington High School) were in the University of Virginia’s Partners for Leadership in Education Turnaround School Leader program. District leadership immediately commenced the implementation of the turnaround model district-wide.

As part of that district-wide implementation, two difficulties became apparent. First, no district-wide data collection, assessment and analysis system was in place. Second, the structure of the district was simply not aligned to allow district leadership to focus on student achievement and to hold itself accountable for student-oriented results.

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In response, the District contracted with a company, Datawise, to provide a platform to provide actionable, real-time student level data to teachers. It became apparent, however, that no one at the district-level could provide the required leadership to spearhead the creation of common assessments, common pacing guides, common curriculum maps that would be the foundation of the data analysis. Even with a system, data analysis could not occur.

To address this gap, the entire structure of the district was altered. Positions were both added and eliminated. Most importantly, the role of district executive directors was changed. Rather than a focus on management, their focus was refined to student achievement alone.

Demanding expectations were communicated widely and openly. Principals were expected to make fundamental changes in their schools and supported in so doing. In one year, the very dramatic results described above were realized. The primary lessons from one year of this reform process for OCSD include:

- Rapid, meaningful change is possible;
- Sustained change is needed; and
- Much more change and progress is needed in OCSD.

Our Reform Vision

Our reform vision is predicated on three simple points. First, high-quality, supported leadership is essential. Reform requires making very tough decisions and living with the inevitable fall out. Second, high-quality instruction is indispensable. We have been systematically under-educating our children; correcting that course is a key to reform in OCSD. Finally, providing teachers with access to easily understood, actionable student performance data undergirds all other efforts. Data, organized student by student, skill by skill, is a key to meaningful collaboration by teachers, design of interventions, and to fully respecting children.

Standards and Assessments and Data Systems

OCSD’s reform efforts publically began with our GSAs. The point of these ambitious goals was to (1) conscientiously prepare students to be college and career ready and (2) to provide a public commitment to clear, specific and measurable goals. Of themselves, the GSAs are merely intentionally selected milestones. Progress is important provided we understand that it is progress toward proficiency. Proficiency is more important, but only to the extent that we recognize it to a milestone towards excellence.

The GSAs started reform publically and in earnest in OCSD. Simultaneously, student-level data collection, assessment and analysis systems were implemented. This included: (1) a recognition that no systematic collection system really existed; (2) a recognition that data analysis must be more frequent and meaningful; and (3) delivered in real time to teachers. The fruits of these realization were a district-wide clearinghouse to provide data analysis following common (district-wide) formative assessments, which included student by student item analysis, tied to particular curricular standards. A schedule to conduct common assessment on a six-week cycle was established and implemented starting with the 2012-2013 school year.

Measuring student achievement, however, is a fruitless endeavor unless rapid action—within a day or two, at most—is taken based on an analysis of assessment data. In our district, it was essential to establish a system of common formative assessment, administered on a six to eight week cycle. This included establishing time for teachers to meet and review, and providing much support. The system is developing and each iteration involves new frustrations and new possibilities.

Let us be clear about the purpose of assessment, however. The entire and exclusive purpose of assessment is to help the classroom teacher. It is one thing to say that a child is unprepared to learn a concept. It is something else altogether to identify a child’s particularized skill deficit, and to formulate a plan to address those issues immediately. Assessment, properly understood and implemented, actually frees a teacher to address the specific need rather than just pressing on hoping that a particular child will somewhere, somehow, just get it. Assessment empowers action; the alternative is blind hope. Hope is not a strategy.

Many of our children come to school ill-prepared to learn. It isn’t too important whether they arrive unprepared because of their parents, prior teachers, poverty, or some other social pathology. The important point is that they are here, and we are going to do our very best to allow them to learn at a high level. Assessments, in every form, are to facilitate the teacher, who is the expert, the professional, to know students’ educational position and needs intimately—and to take immediate action.

Effective Teachers

High-quality, data-based instruction is a highly effective lever of change. Adoption of curriculum, systematic changes and improvements to leadership, and data systems are nothing but means to support high quality teachers in reaching every child. OCSD has multiple means in place to recruit, develop, reward and retain effective teachers and administrators.

We search nationwide for teacher training programs that closely mirror our particular needs. We routinely recruit teachers from out of state, and have hired many from training programs in Michigan. OCSD has learned that these programs produce teachers that have skills that closely match our needs. While this has met with some resistance from those who feel recruitment of teachers should be local and parochial, such complaints have been rejected in favor of more effective hiring.

Professional development is also a large part of our reform efforts. Teachers are offered substantial professional development, including endorsement certification (gifted & talented, math, and ESL). As we transition to the Utah Core, substantial supports for teachers are needed, particularly to make the move with the rigor we need and expect.
Turnaround

High quality education is the business of OCSD; therefore, school turnaround is its business. With so many persistently underperforming schools, there is unanimous agreement among district leadership and strong agreement district-wide that OCSD cannot conduct its business as it has. That agreement includes both urgency and a cognizance that marginal change is insufficient. “Turnaround” is taken literally; we must reverse course.

My children—all 12,545 of them—need to be prepared. They need to be challenged to the full extent of their potential. My students are profoundly at risk: at risk because of their socio-economic status and because of their educational status. Some are concerned that our focus sets kids up to fail. We recognize, however, that, without a change, we aren’t setting them up to fail, we are setting them up to die. If we do not arrest the educational trajectory they are on, many will drop out, fail in high school, and become another generation tainted with the curse of poverty. As children of poverty, they will be many times more likely to live in poverty, to become victims of crime, to become enmeshed in the criminal justice system. They will be many times more likely to be murder victims, have chronic health problems, and they will live, on average, seven years less than other children. Absent change, we make failure their only option.

Preliminary Results and Conclusion

Change in OCSD has not been painless nor has it been slow. When our GSAs were announced in December 2011, there was widespread bemoaning another set of “goals,” grumbling that they were unrealistic, statements from the “well-informed” that they were impossible. Newspaper articles ran with these statements and online commentary was rife with assertions of incompetency. OCSD persevered and maintained a tough, demanding focus on results.

As of the end of the 2011-2012 school year, these results include:

• Dee Elementary is no longer the lowest performing elementary in Utah, having moved from 545 of 545, to number 390 in language arts.
• Odyssey Elementary is no longer the third lowest performing elementary in Utah, having moved from 543 of 545, to number 399 in language arts.
• Odyssey Elementary ranked third in Utah in progress in language arts, fourth in math, and third in science. In prior years, Odyssey ranked far lower in progress.
• Other schools, with less systematic focus than Odyssey and Dee, also saw some dramatic gains. Sixth grade classes at Madison had double-digit ELA proficiency increases. First grade classes at Horace Mann had equally substantial gains on Dibels results.
• With an intense focus on literacy instruction, OHS increased proficiency in language arts by 12%. OHS ranked fourth among Utah high schools for progress in language arts, and twenty-fourth for math progress.
• Ogden High School made a startling increase in high school graduation rates. With a school-wide focus on moving individual students and with multiple adults (counselors, teachers, administrators, staff assistants) working with each student, the cohort rate increased from 77% in 2011 to 89% in 2012.

• Ben Lomond High School, using a similar modality, increased its cohort graduation rate from 78% in 2011 to 81% in 2012.
• While the cohort rate is important to facilitate comparison of like statistics school to school, state to state, for OCSD, another method of capturing this achievement highlights our student-focused, result-orientation. In 2011, Ogden High School had 252 graduates; Ben Lomond High School had 238. In 2012, Ogden High School had 302 (298 in the cohort calculation) and Ben Lomond High School had 288. Each high school had an increase of fifty students graduation who were not on a graduation trajectory at the start of the 2011-2012 school year.
• George Washington High School, OCSD’s alternative high school, achieved a 23% gain in language arts proficiency and a 19% gain in science proficiency.

These successes have been the cause for great celebration in OCSD. They are, however, at best milestones in our journey. As milestones, these successes validate our approach to turnaround: (1) leadership with an urgent, intense, results-oriented, positive expectation of achievement, (2) a clear, cogent, tough focus on consciously improving instruction, and (3) a drive to provide teachers with immediate, actionable, meaningful student-level data. We have demonstrated, mostly to ourselves, that we can achieve success with the most impacted, lowest performing schools in our district.

Our evidence-based demonstration that OCSD’s model works for us, however, also highlights next steps. The same data that shows these marvelous successes also shows the need to replicate our gains in language arts proficiency in math proficiency. We have immediately adjusted by taking measures to adopt a Singapore math-based math instruction model across our district’s elementary schools. The same data shows that so many other elementary schools are moving side-ways, at best, rather than moving strongly and positively forward. Our model flexibly accommodates itself to these needs. Leadership and teachers, supplied with real time data, adapt immediately to real-time information. Best instructional practices are refined, reshaped and redeployed to address immediate needs. Data development, assessment, and analysis is shaped, reshaped, formed and reformed in response to new needs and developing facility in utilization.

Innovation, immediacy, urgency, change, hope and drive characterize OCSD. We do not seek expediency; we cannot accept a compass that lies. Our results are only preliminary and we have much work to do to scale our successes to each of our students. We are committed to this hard and meaningful work, now, without hesitation, without delay.

An electronic version of this article, complete with the districts non-negotiable attainment standards documents (GSA’s)

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13990 or by scanning this QR code.
One District’s Journey Into Tiered Instruction (RTI/MTSS)

In June of 2009, the Park City Student Services Department and Curriculum Department sat down with our elementary principals to review our elementary language arts CRT data, paying particular attention to subgroups. We asked the question, “Are we happy with our data?” The answer was a resounding, “No!” We were at a crossroads in our school district. With one of the highest second language student ratios in the state of Utah, we were failing to consistently close the achievement gap of our Limited English Proficient (LEP), special education, Hispanic, and low socio-economic students with the performance of our Caucasian students. Our LEP scores were consistently below the state average. District administrators asked themselves, “Why was this happening?” Other districts in the state were showing much better results with far more challenging populations and far fewer resources. While individual schools had put forth efforts in various ways to address their individual needs, the results were discouraging. A decision was made at that meeting that we could not wait another year to act. Serious changes needed to be made and those changes would need to be coordinated and involve all schools.

The District Needed to Focus and Coordinate at Every Level

We realized that our entire system needed to be re-focused. As in many districts, Park City has very hard working administrators who focused on the needs of their schools first. District administrators, wearing many hats, went about their business independent of each other, occasionally working on common projects together. We decided early on that for any meaningful long-term change to happen, there had to be a coordinated effort as a team across the district, which was a new approach for our schools. Student Services had to coordinate with the Curriculum Department. All of our funding efforts needed to be focused on one main goal, which was to close the achievement gap with a vengeance. When principals left our bi-monthly meetings, we all had to be on the same page, disseminating the same message. No longer could the message be, “The district is making us do this.” From that point forward, we were all, “the district.” We also needed the school board and superintendent to be on the same page and support the coordinated efforts to close the achievement gap. They needed to understand the changes we were putting in place and support those changes when things got tough, which they did as a result of several board presentations articulating the plan.

First Things First

Where would we start? We decided immediately that we would have to start at the beginning: Tier 1 instruction. We decided our efforts for year one needed to address how our regular education teachers were providing Tier 1 instruction to all students with consistency and fidelity. Were we able to show that 80% of our elementary students were proficient in language arts? Overall, school-by-school data indicated, “yes.” However, when that data was disaggregated by sub-groups, the answer was clearly, “no.” In 2009, our elementary school’s Caucasian students registered a 95% passing rate on our elementary language arts score. However, our LEP pass rate was a dismal 55%. This data had been fairly consistent for the preceding years as well, and represented a 40 percent gap! Our special education numbers were higher (67%), but still left a lot of room for improvement.

We needed to attack the Tier 1 deficits on many fronts. Listed are the multiple actions we took and continue to take in our efforts to shore up Tier 1 instruction in our district:

- Comprehensive Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) professional development for every elementary staff member. One Friday afternoon per month, September through May, was dedicated mandatory training. This has continued this school year to finish the...
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• We required mandatory weekly grade-level-team Tiered Instruction meetings at each elementary school. Budgets were established using Title 1 ARA funding and district funding to pay for half-day substitutes at each school site on Fridays. The first several months, only the grade level teachers and building principal were invited to attend. With the focus on Tier 1 instruction, we needed to reinforce the idea that all the teachers on a grade-level team were responsible for every student in that grade. During these meetings, the Student Detail Report (described above) is used to evaluate intervention effectiveness for students not meeting benchmark standards. Progress is discussed and all reading instruction is considered including the introduction of more intensive intervention where necessary. Graduate, reading specialists, ESL teachers and special education staff were incorporated. At present, special education staff attend meetings only if the team is discussing the progress of students already identified as eligible for special education.

• Superintendent/Cabinet conducted weekly school visits. One morning per week, the superintendent and cabinet have visited two of our eight schools. The school principal at each site participates in classroom walkthroughs with this district-level administrative team. This has been an incredibly useful activity. Not only has this effort reinforced the importance of the district’s efforts to close the achievement gap, but it has allowed administrators to see all the incredible work our teachers do on a daily basis.

• We began Latinos in Action (LIA) class at Park City High School. LIA students were trained in reading and math tutoring strategies. Then, they were assigned to classrooms in one of our Title I elementary schools to serve as positive role models and to assist struggling students in reading and math. During the 2010-11 school year, a second cohort was established at Treasure Mountain Middle School (grades 8-9) to serve our other Title 1 elementary school.

• Tying our current model of Tiered intervention to the creation of a Response to Intervention process has been a formidable task. We recognized the importance of making data-based decisions about interventions (what and how much?); and ultimately, special education eligibility. It was clear that these data were coming from a number of different sources and complicated to pull together. What has evolved, thanks to our incredibly data manager and web master, is the ability to have a couple clicks of the mouse produce the necessary data to drive decision making about the possible disability status of an individual student following the implementation of interventions over a period of time.

What about Tier 2 and Tier 3?

A great challenge we have faced over a period of several years has been developing interventions. It was important to identify interventions that we could afford, staff, measure consistently, and be able to monitor the fidelity of implementation. Using the problem-solving model, teams continually ran into barriers about what to do for students who continued to struggle. The infrastructure was not in place to deliver interventions. This led to a process that was frustrating to all who were involved. In the problem-solving meetings, teams were feeling the pressure to come up with things that were new and highly individualized for struggling students. We quickly realized that there was not a consistent intervention being used across schools. There were many options available but their implementation varied from school to school. Our ability to measure the effectiveness of interventions was limited because we faced so many fidelity issues and there was only a small group receiving each intervention. We also knew that in a pure sense, Tier 3 interventions were absent from our model. Reading instruction had not been set up in a systematic way to increase the intensity of the intervention when needed. One of our main goals last year was to develop and strengthen our Tiered interventions.

A Committee, What Else?

We established a committee that included ESL, reading and special education personnel, administrators, and Kathleen Brown, Ph.D., from the University of Utah. They reviewed the research on programs that were currently in use somewhere in the district with the goal of recommending standard protocol interventions across the elementary schools. Using the recommendation of this committee, a very limited number of interventions would be used district-wide for struggling readers. The district settled on the following interventions for Tiers 2 and 3:

Early and Next steps—grades 1-3 (at this point, the availability of this intervention is based on trained personnel, but each site was required to begin with at least first grade)

Reading Mastery—grades K, 4-5 (This program may be used for both ESL and special education instruction as well as an intervention within regular education.)

Language!—grades 4-5 (intensive students). 90 Minutes per day

New This Year!

Along with everything else going on last year, the district had already begun the process of adopting a new language arts series. A committee who had piloted several options selected Houghton-Mifflin’s Journeys. One really cool thing about this new series is the inclusion of ESL strategies and SIOP principles built into Tier 1 instruction. Along with the new curriculum comes the mandate that the core language arts instruction be scheduled for 180 minutes per day Monday through Thursday. One hour whole group, one hour small group, 30 minutes targeted Instruction (Tier 2), and 30 minutes language arts (focused writing, vocabulary). Interventions described above are in addition to this core language arts instruction.

Additional Supports

• Along with our Tiered changes we also have three day a week after school programs for our struggling students focusing on specific skills. These are funded through our Education Foundation at one school, Title 1 ARRA funds at another and are supported with our Homeless/Minority funding for another school.

• We ran a six-week summer school for targeted students paid for with Title 1 funds. The last of our ARRA funds have been set aside to help fund the program for a second year. Data will be reviewed to see how effective this proves to be for our students.

• Family Literacy classes are offered at three schools through our state family literacy grant.

• We are in the process of expanding our current preschool offerings and hope to go district-wide next year putting a three and four-year-old classroom in each elementary school. We believe this to be one of the most critical links in closing the achievement gap. Once again, the district has complete support for this project from the school board and superintendent on down.
Results!

As evidenced by the CRT data, our district is on its way to closing the gap. We have a long way to go but feel we have the tools and personnel in place to make a difference with our students.

What Have We Learned?

Developing our Tiered system has been and continues to be a long journey that requires patience, flexibility, and the cooperation/collaboration of everyone in the school district. The buy-in and support of leadership is critical. Changes this extensive could not have been pulled off successfully without the complete support from the entire school district leadership team. This team begins with the school board and includes district-level administration and each building principal. The role of the building principal is critical to district-wide changes. They are the instructional leaders that ensure required professional activities teachers have been trained in are implemented in the classroom. They are able to do this through a systematic plan of accountability that involves all players. The necessity of personnel development, required participation, together with required implementation cannot be overstated. The support of the technology and data personnel has also been immeasurable. We are confident that by training our coaches and our model SIOP classrooms teachers, as well as using a curriculum that we feel confident about, we will be able to fully support the implementation of a strong Tier 1 program in language arts.

The next step is to take what we have learned and apply it to the other academic, social and behavioral areas in which our students struggle.

Editors' Note: The authors presented this paper to the Utah Special Education Consortium on 11/11/2011. To view this archived presentation in WIMBA, go to: http://wiki.updc.org/groups/consortium/blogs

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13991 or by scanning this QR code.
Superintendent VanGorder and Coordinator Todd Stewart, thank you for taking the time to update our readers on Park City’s district-wide MTSS/RtI progress. We have received many positive comments about the Park City plan and your results based on the article originally published in the Utah Special Educator (December 2010). Can you briefly share with our readers if the results presented are stable or have changed?

Over the course of several years, we brought our schools’ CRT scores up to meet or exceed state averages for our sub-groups and have generally maintained that over time. We have found that when we have focused on areas of concern, we have made progress not only in scores, but in attitudes and culture. We are still miles from where we want to be. We have begun the process of looking at all of our data sources to ensure that what we are providing for our students is having the desired effect. Reviewing our Tier 1, 2, and 3 instruction regularly is critical. Data will drive our continued improvement process. It has been a bit of a challenge comparing data as presented in the old AYP reports to what is now available in Gateway, but we have been able to find useful comparisons that will help us improve our instruction. One highlight we are starting to see is that as our students progress out of the ELL subgroup to Hispanic, the proficiency level in our secondary schools has increased to much higher levels.

We are aware that Park City has added several new MTSS/RtI components to your district-wide plan in the past few years. Could you outline these new programs, and perhaps some initial information regarding how they are working?

Since 2010, we added some exciting programs in our quest to close the achievement gap. We are in our second full year of our high quality preschool for 3 and 4 year olds. The program is a sliding scale, tuition-based program offered in each of our elementary schools. The program is open to all on a first-come, first-served basis. It is modeled after the Granite School District program and uses the Essential Preschool Skills as a curriculum framework together with the WE CAN management system. We assess the students 3 times per year (using both CBM and criterion referenced assessments), which allows us to use data to drive instruction on an individual level at each site. We have already seen preliminary results with this year’s kindergarten cohort. Our DIBELS scores for our Kindergarten students have shown a reduction in the number of students scoring below benchmark. It will eventually reduce the need for full-day “at risk” Kindergarten programs as well as reduce the high cost of intervention programs in our elementary schools.
We also now have dual language immersion programs in each elementary school. Two schools are Spanish and two are French. This adds an interesting challenge in trying to ascertain academic growth in our populations who are “at risk” and receiving supports in content areas. We will need to use a variety of data points in these schools to make sure that students are able to manage academic language and content in English while receiving instruction in Spanish and French as well! We are confident that these students will benefit from this program on many levels.

Can you share your thoughts about sustaining these programs and components, and perhaps any next steps in your process?

We are fortunate in Park City to have unified support from our school board, administrators, teachers and support staff in our effort to raise the bar for all students. We have, and will continue to provide the support both monetarily and with human resources to continue programs that are successful as evidenced by multiple data points. When we started this process our first question was, “Are we happy with our data?” That question will continue to drive our efforts to support programs that are proven and eliminate programs that have not shown results.

Utah has embarked on a major state-wide initiative to assist districts in scaling up their school improvement efforts through implementation of MTSS. Might you have any advice to other districts and administration as they move forward?

Each school district has its own issues. Each district needs to craft their own solutions that will best meet the needs within their system. Support and an understanding of the issues is essential. If your district, from top to bottom, does not recognize the systemic problems, you will have only pockets of success. You have to be honest and realize, “If we keep doing what were doing, we’re going to get the same results.” If you can’t be honest as a district and address the issues head on, nothing will change. It’s not easy. It’s hard work. It’s not a fad. And it takes time, but the efforts pay off for those who need it most!

Tom and Nicole, thank you for taking the time to share your process and progress with our readers. Your progress in a system that improves outcomes for ALL children and youth is an inspiration to us all.

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13992 or by scanning this QR code.
All school districts have great visions—on paper. What most do not have is a systematic strategy for getting there. To create the latter, you need a grounded, comprehensive theory of action. In other words, you need to make the four foundational conditions—shared and focused vision, intentional assessment and instruction, strategic leadership, and engagement of students and community—an experienced reality (Sharrat & Fullan, 2009).
If, as Sharratt and Fullan suggest, school districts are to realize the promises that can come from a “systematic strategy” of support for all operating within a system, a “comprehensive theory of action” based on a shared vision of what is important and how to achieve significant results must be developed, and then a plan for follow-through established. Within an environment of increasing accountability, U.S. school systems are examining research and policies surrounding multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), now found throughout U.S. state and local education agencies (Kovaleski & Black, 2010). With the increasing influence of Response to Intervention (RtI) and the mandates of federal accountability systems, MTSS and RtI have been used interchangeably in the education arena (Torgesen, 2007). Many are seeking to reconcile this ambiguity so that one system is in place to support school improvement and increase student achievement (Dulaney, Hallam & Hall, in press). Iron and Beaver County School Districts, located in southern Utah, are two districts that have begun to reconcile this ambiguity and embark on the MTSS journey: Iron County for the last five years and Beaver County the last two. They have caught the vision of systematic support and have developed the comprehensive theory of action that Sharratt and Fullan (2009) have proposed.

To put into place a process that is relatively new and untried, you need some idea of the “terrain that lies between you and your destination and a plan for crossing it. [You] will want…the best information you can get from those who have made the trip before you, and a reliable guidebook if one is to be had” (Brown & Moffett, 1999, p. 38). Iron and Beaver Districts have developed a “guidebook,” or conceptual framework for MTSS, that establishes the foundation for the work they do within their districts to serve all students and educators. Superintendent Jim Johnson in Iron County stated the following in regard to their district MTSS framework development and implementation,

“I’ve learned that the framework is very important because it is the common language. The culture of what you’re trying to create comes from the district level. We’ve tried to establish the guidelines, and then from within the culture of their own schools…[principals] use those guidelines to structure what they do. So we don’t control at the school level, but we create that framework for them to follow, and it seems to work quite well.”

As these two districts began their MTSS journeys, district personnel realized the importance of establishing a team of leaders comprised of individuals who would be responsible for not only putting the framework together, but of implementing its precepts. A district leadership team (DLT) has been established in each district based on this realization. Team members are included based on their expertise and sphere of influence at the district as well as school system level. The following is a list of those who participate on Iron County’s DLT: (Beaver’s team make-up is similar.)

- Superintendent
- School Board Member
- Secondary Education Director/Student Services
- Elementary Education Director/Curriculum
- Special Programs Director
- Staff Development Coordinator
- Gifted and Talented Coordinator
- Title I/Literacy Coordinator
- ESL Coordinator
- Alternative Programs Coordinator
- Preschool Coordinator
- District School Psychologist
- District Technology Representative
- College and Career Ready Coordinator
- School Literacy Specialist
- Secondary School Administrators (Middle and High School)
- Elementary School Administrator
- Secondary General Educator
- Secondary Special Educator
- Elementary General Educator
- Elementary Special Educator

Superintendents are the instructional leaders for their districts and as such have a vested interest in each person served within their systems. Their participation and that of school board members in Iron and Beaver counties has sent a message of care and commitment to the process. MTSS is school reform for improvement on every level. It is essential that those at the district level who influence and support this improvement be involved during each stage of the implementation process: exploration through ongoing and continuous improvement.

Building Consensus for MTSS

As the MTSS implementation journey is begun, a vision and purpose must be established among the DLT members. This vision can then become a part of the district culture. These two districts recognized that it would be critical to their system-wide improvement efforts to attend to the human element of change while the organization was building, promoting and establishing a unified and shared vision for MTSS. When this many educators come together to establish a common purpose, the journey can prove both exciting and challenging. As these DLTs came together, each member brought their own experiences and perspectives to the table—all of which are important to consider. This consideration can at times be “messy” as the “give and take” of consensus building is experienced. However, it was in the messiness of these collaborative efforts that these teams were taken to the edge of chaos where change began to shape practice. These two districts allowed this process to happen in order to ensure they had a cohesive and functional team in place that could move forward when obstacles were faced.

Establishing a Vision

Once these practices were established, both district teams engaged in the conversations about the specifics about designing a MTSS process based on the research. Then the teams moved to a discussion of how this research tied to their beliefs about student learning and each educator’s part in that learning. Next, they examined their district mission and vision statements to Continued on page 40
draw connections between the precepts of MTSS and their district’s established beliefs about learning. Beginning with the end in mind, both districts were able to articulate a statement that would act as the glue to bind MTSS efforts to current district practices. This became the vision for their conceptual framework: empowering all to learn through systematic school-wide support.

**MTSS Foundation Components**

Once the vision was established, the team then turned to the work of building the foundation and establishing the focus for their MTSS framework. Their conversations turned to the educational practices that had been targeted and supported in the district in recent years as well as those who were responsible for the implementation of those practices. It was at this point that the three-dimensional conceptual framework began to take shape.

**The MTSS Framework**

As the DLT conversations in both districts turned to meeting the needs of every student, they began to identify those needs in a very specific way.

Figure 1 below depicts the MTSS conceptual framework that was first developed in Iron County five years ago (http://irondistrict.org/) and that has now been adopted and revised by Beaver County.

The MTSS framework outlines supports to improve learning for all students based on their specific needs. Foundational to this structure is Tier 1 instruction, which serves 100% of the students in the system. Data are collected and examined during collaborative team processes inherent in the PLC structure. Subsequently, decisions are made and actions carried out to increase student achievement by strengthening Tier 1 instruction; providing supplemental interventions for students at the Tier 2 level, usually 10-15%; and/or providing more intensive interventions at Tier 3 for 3-5% of students, as promoted by the RtI literature (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

The MTSS framework extends a system’s use of problem solving and data-driven decision making to include instructional strategies, classroom management, curriculum design, and professional development. These six foundational components are orchestrated through a collaborative PLC at district, school, and classroom levels.

The depicted MTSS structure moves beyond the traditional one-dimensional triangle and identifies four learner facets: academic at-risk learners, self-management learners, advanced learners and English language learners. These learner facets are represented in a classic three-dimensional pyramid structure with a capstone over the top that articulates the district MTSS vision, signifying a unified organization in which all are empowered to learn through systematic school-wide support. Facilitators key to MTSS implementation include teachers, administrators, specialists, support staff, parents/families, and community partners.

**MTSS Implications**

Superintendent Ray Terry from Beaver District noted:

“I believe that we have become more of a team district-wide... from the teacher level to the district level. [We] have become more student focused in our communication. I believe that my principals are becoming better principals because of what we are trying to accomplish systematically. A lot of it has to do with our collaboration in establishing a shared vision to empower all students and educators, but they’re focusing now more on instruction and less on management. This is significant.”

To realize sustainable improvement districts must (1) develop a common language and framework for implementation, (2) work collaboratively within the PLC structure to meet the needs of all students, and (3) purposefully build capacity within the district organization (Dulaney, Hallam and Wall, in press). Iron and Beaver counties have begun the journey toward sustainable school improvement as evidenced in their systemic efforts. Through the organization of district leadership teams, the purposeful development of an MTSS framework based on a common vision, and the implementation of the framework’s tenets, these districts are “becoming” multi-tiered systems of support. The hope is that the tale of these two districts can serve as a model for others as they reform and reorder district- and school-level processes and priorities to empower all within their systems to learn through systematic district-wide and school-wide supports.

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13993 or by scanning this QR code.
Putting Implementation Science into Practice: Canyons’ MTSS Implementation = Working Hard and Getting Better

Amber Roderick-Landward & Hollie Pettersson, Evidence-Based Learning Coordinators, Canyons School District

In her great e-book, Nine Things Successful People Do Differently (published by Harvard Business Review Press in 2011), Heidi Grant Halvorson explains that it is more important to focus on getting better than it is to focus on being good:

“Embracing the fact that you can change will allow you to make better choices and reach your fullest potential. People whose goals are about getting better, rather than being good, take difficulty in stride and appreciate the journey as much as the destination.”

Applying this logic to organizations, Canyons School District, and our 45 schools, are creating a system to support “getting better.” In our organization, the belief that we can always get better, starts from the top, with our Board and Superintendent sharing an ambitious expectation that all “students who graduate from our school system will do so fully prepared for college, careers, and citizenship”—being full-option graduates. To guide our work, we have defined a full-option graduate as an individual who is fully prepared with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to succeed in a full range of postsecondary options—including two- or four-year colleges, certification programs, apprenticeships, military service, or formal job training access for high wage and demand vocations. We are making progress with this goal and recognize that ambitious goals require hard work over the long haul.

School systems will only adequately prepare students for the rigors of life after high school if they are willing to put in the work to learn and grow. As R. Spencer Darling noted, “All organizations [and systems] are designed, intentionally or unwittingly, to achieve precisely the results that they get.” By conducting ongoing inventories of the practices in our district, we are learning that we must increase the rigor of our core instruction, bolster the use of evidence-based instructional and assessment practices, and provide for appropriate supplemental and intensive interventions. Based upon inventory data collected through observations, interviews and focus groups, and review of student achievement indicators, we have organized an ambitious academic achievement plan with commitments, goals, and objectives.

Experience and common sense have taught us that plans don’t spontaneously jump from pages and into action in schools and classrooms. In the cautionary words of Dr. Dean Fixsen, “Students cannot benefit from the interventions that they do not receive (Presentation for Utah school districts, sponsored by the Utah Personnel Development Center, Spring 2012).” We are willing to put in the hard work and support a self-correcting system that is always getting better at ensuring that implementation is happening, so students can benefit!

In 2002, the RAND Corporation reported data from over 4,000 schools documenting implementation efforts to increase student achievement over the previous 10 years. The findings were sobering because many resources had been devoted to comprehensive school reform (i.e. money and personnel time) and the results were minimal. The following summarizes the findings related to implementation gaps:

• Evidence-Based Models
  • Each of the target schools had selected a proven model for comprehensive school reform; meaning, each comprehensive reform model had yielded positive outcomes for students and staffs in target school sites.
  • All of the comprehensive reform models required that 100% of the teachers receive adequate professional development and that teachers receive on going support to learn the skills necessary for implementation.
  • The comprehensive reform models all required implementation of key elements across the school setting.

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Actual Implementation

In the review of thousands of schools’ data, it was found that fewer than 50% of the teachers actually received professional development.

Fewer than 25% of the teachers received on-going support.

Fewer than 10% of the schools implemented all the key elements of the selected comprehensive reform model.

The vast majority of students did not benefit from the comprehensive reform efforts.

What the RAND Corporation found was an example of the implementation gap; for a variety of reasons, ambitious goals were not reached due to lack of implementation in schools and classrooms. According to Dr. Finken and his colleagues at the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), the only proven way to bridge the gap between ambitious goals and implementation in schools is through the development of a coherent framework for practice and skillful use of implementation teams that connect all levels of the district’s system.

The following sections describe how Canyons School District is organizing for implementation and striving to get better by using implementation science.

Academic Framework, Implementation Teams, and Coaching Supports

Academic Framework. Implementation science has taught us that a coherent instructional framework should specify standards in curriculum, instructional strategies, common assessments and decision-making to help ensure consistent implementation efforts in complex systems. Following this logic, our CSD Academic Framework (ebl.canyonsdistrict.org/csd-framework.html) is organized around the essential components of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and our shared beliefs about student achievement. The CSD framework, first developed during the 2009-2010 school year and refined each subsequent year, helps teachers and administrators across our district reinforce the same curriculum standards and high yielding instructional practices, supports use of a common vocabulary for communicating within departments and schools, and facilitates meaningful dialogue and problem solving around student achievement data. This framework drives our school improvement efforts at all levels and serves as a road map for MTSS implementation.

Implementation Teams. Every school in Canyons School District has a Building Leadership Team (BLT). The purpose of the BLT is to:

- Identify, plan, and develop the instruction, intervention, and supports for all students to be successful;
- Sustain improvement over time; and
- Develop collective capacity for quality instruction.

Team membership generally includes a teacher from every grade or department, support specialists (e.g. special educators, school psychologists, and counselors), the school’s achievement coach, external district coach, and the building administrator(s). BLTs attend trainings three to five times per year to deepen their understanding of systems change related to school improvement, build competencies in the practices outlined in the CSD Academic Framework, assess current practices of the school, problem solve around schoolwide data, and determine actions necessary to support school goals. For example, the CSD Academic Framework highlights evidence-based instructional priorities—explicit instruction, opportunities to respond, feedback, vocabulary, differentiation, and classroom positive behavioral interventions. BLTs have engaged in a series of professional development opportunities to learn more about each of the instructional priorities and practice using them. Then, using an observation protocol, BLTs conducted learning walk-throughs in every classroom in their school. Schools were able to use the aggregated data to target professional development needs and set goals for improvement related to the instructional priorities. In addition to attending district-sponsored trainings, BLTs meet at least monthly to problem solve for implementation, review data, and refine their action plans. Often this includes designing on-site professional development. BLT members are expected to communicate directly with staff during PLCs, department meetings, faculty meetings, and/or other designated opportunities.

In a recent TED talk (2012), Atul Gawande, surgeon, author, and public health advocate, suggested, “Making systems work is the greatest task of our generation.” He reasoned that systems improvement is highly complex because it requires diverse people to work together to direct their specialized capabilities towards a common goal. This level of complexity requires GROUP success. In an education system, this translates into coordinated, systemic supports aimed to ensure that students actually experience the intended instruction and interventions outlined in the academic framework because teachers are effectively implementing. We have learned that the greatest variance in improving outcomes for students lies within our teachers (Hattie, 2009), therefore, our coordination efforts center on supporting our teachers to improve their practice. Systemic supports for teachers include implementation teams and coaching.

As the instructional leader in the building, the principal leads each school’s BLT. Principals engage in professional learning twice monthly. In Canyons, all professional learning is directly tied to the CSD framework. Principals’ professional learning is focused on their actions to lead implementation in their buildings. All principals participate on Leadership Implementation Teams (LITs). LITs are comprised of five principals with a designated team leader. The purpose of a LIT is to provide instructional leaders with an opportunity to participate in a professional learning community focused on discussion of what they want their teachers to know and be able to do related to school improvement. They meet monthly and share successes, discuss barriers to implementation and possible solutions, and evaluate implementation progress. The LIT leaders are members of the District Leadership Team (DLT) along with the Chief Academic Officer, Assistant Superintendent of School
The purpose of the DLT is to organize for implementation of the CSD Academic Framework and includes the following functions:

- Develop tools necessary for successful scaling up of CSD Academic Framework (i.e. evidence-based practices)
- Provide consistent feedback loops between school leaders and district leaders
- Provide cascading levels of support to building leaders
- Implement the district academic plan

The DLT meets monthly to discuss the progress of initiatives related to implementation and is currently examining how to evaluate implementation districtwide. Much of our time on the DLT is spent learning and growing together as we continue to refine our supports for our principals and teachers.

Building a structure of coordinated supports through implementation teams could be described as “necessarily messy.” At all levels, it took at least a full year to build a shared understanding of the purpose and function of each team and to determine the scope of work to be accomplished. We continue to follow Dean Fixsen’s advice, “Get started, get better.” Through our messy work, our shared commitment to getting better continues to strengthen.

Coaching Supports. In addition to the peer coaching structures described above (i.e. LIT) and distributed leadership coaching (i.e. BLT), Canyons employs an Achievement Coach in each of the elementary schools and select secondary schools to support implementation of the CSD Academic Framework. Achievement coaches partner with the building administrator to support teachers. Achievement coaches participate in a coaching network with their peers, to continue to develop their skills as coaches and to create resources to support teachers. This is accomplished through bi-monthly professional development, intensive training from national experts (e.g. LETRS), and attendance to national conferences (e.g. Rti Innovations). Additionally, coaches are assigned to peer coaching teams that meet regularly to practice coaching techniques and problem solve challenges related to implementation.

While achievement coaches are school-based educators coaching instruction, each school also has an external coach that coaches the BLT in implementation. External coaches are curriculum specialists in the Evidence-Based Learning department and are assigned to support up to four schools. External coaches develop relationships with their school(s) by participating as a member of the BLT(s) to facilitate alignment between school and district goals, provide technical assistance and connect schools with resources that support implementation of the CSD Academic Framework.

What Have We Learned?

Utilizing implementation science to guide our work has helped our system develop a cycle of getting better. Over the course of the past four years, we have grown as a group of professionals who are committed to developing the skills and attitudes necessary to ensure our system produces full-option graduates. We aren’t there yet – but we are GETTING BETTER!

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13994 or by scanning this QR code.
The Students Know Best!
Will We let them Teach Us?

David E. Forbush, Director of Special Education,
Sandra Cook, Elementary Resource Coordinator and
Induction Leader, Cache County School District
The Talmud says, “I have learned much from my teachers, more from my colleagues and most of all from my students” (Ta’anit 7a). In education, we revere those who’ve taught us, and respect and appreciate colleagues who, speaking from within their own skin and experience, touch us because of the commonality we share across our teaching experiences. But it is our students who teach us most. Our product is student learning and it is our “intentional focus” on student learning and the influence of the practices we employ on student learning that teach teachers the most over time. We like to think of the classroom as a teacher’s learning laboratory with the focus of the teacher’s research on student learning. In the lab, the teacher-researcher, ever vigilant, alters variables (e.g. curricula, procedures, response formats and opportunities...) to determine how these changes will enhance or inhibit student learning or simply leave it unchanged. Teacher-researchers recognize that student learning is complicated and that many practices enhance student learning, but each with various levels of influence (i.e. negative, neutral, positive). Over time, the vigilant teacher-researcher draws together an educational cocktail of sorts, consisting of the most powerful teaching behaviors they’ve identified in their lab-classroom to influence student learning.

It is clear that teacher-researchers spend similar amounts of time in their classroom-labs and yet, in terms of identifying variables which impact student learning, some profit exponentially more from their hours spent than others. Those who profit most do so by exercising great vigilance over their own behavior (i.e. what they teach and how they teach) and how it affects student learning. These teachers have the same physical limitations of sight that their colleagues have and so, their identification of “what works” is not explained by differences in visual acuity, but by the data they collect, graph and inspect. It is data collection and use which “draws tight” the relationship between their teaching behaviors and student learning.

Og Lindsley (1990), a prominent behavior analyst and the developer of Precision Teaching, recognized and promoted the idea that “the child knows best.” More specifically, he directed us to recognize that it’s the student performance data that reveals most clearly practices which differentially influence student learning. Lindsley promoted the idea that, “A general rule of thumb in precision teaching is that if a student is progressing according to plan, then the program is appropriate for the student; otherwise, there is a flaw in the program and it needs to be changed in some way. In other words, the student’s performance determines the right teaching strategy.” He understood that it is the students who teach us most.

Question: Is it really true that student data is “our greatest teacher?” Answer: Not all student data is a “great teacher.” Data must be organized to be a “great teacher.” How do we organize data to be useful in directing instructional decisions benefiting students? Fuchs and Fuchs data (1986) (see figure 1) show that it is “good” to collect data, “better” when we graph it and “best” when we analyze it and take action on it with decision rules. They report that the power isn’t in the data, but in the ways that teachers interact with data which influences student learning.

Figure 1. Impact of formative assessment (progress monitoring) on student achievement. Data are drawn from Fuchs and Fuchs (1986, p. 204).

Figure one shows effect sizes of 0.26, 0.7 and 0.91 and then identifies them as small, medium and large. An “effect size” (ES) is a quantitative measure describing the magnitude (i.e. size) of one variable’s effect upon another variable and in terms of standard deviation units (Hattie, 2009). An effect size of 1.0 simply indicates that an intervention increased student performance by one full standard deviation on a normal curve.

Figure 1 illustrates that teachers who simply collected data improved student learning (ES = 0.26 [Good]), but not as much as those who graphed their data (ES=0.7 [Better]) to expose data trends and allow them to “see” or visually inspect the data. Many have had the experience of looking at a sheet with raw data trying to determine the general effectiveness of instruction/student progress, but when data are charted visually, teachers can quickly see trends and patterns. Finally, if data are collected, charted and analyzed with rules (ES=0.91 [Best]), teachers are able to see more clearly the effect of their teaching behavior on student learning, and then “interact” with student performance data by making data-based decisions. Additionally, with the data package working (data, charting and decisions), the teacher is apt to continue altering teaching behavior until students begin to learn and at a desirable rate. Clearly, each of these activities produces an outcome greater than not collecting progress monitoring at all.

To clarify effect sizes further, consider a third grade student named Jimmy. If Jimmy’s teacher was using progress monitoring as described above with a reading intervention focused on strengthening oral reading fluency, an effect size of 1.0 would move Jimmy from approximately 21 words per minute in the fall if he were at the 10th percentile, to 107 words per minute and the 50th percentile at the close of the intervention in the spring (Hasbrouck and Tindal, 2006). The practical outcome of Jimmy experiencing this level of improvement in oral reading during his third grade year is significant. Jimmy’s acquired skills position him to read far more words during the year, and if he does, his skill in seeing and saying words with automaticity will improve.

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Jimmy will be able to devote far more cognitive resources to comprehending what he is reading, which were previously dedicated to labored decoding (i.e. 21 words per minute). Because reading will come easier and with less effort, Jimmy, drawing on his strong language skills will comprehend more of what he reads, and as a result, will be more likely to select reading as a recreational activity. As a 3rd grader, Jimmy is beginning to read “expository” or explanatory texts (i.e. much greater complexity) and will be able to attend to the critical information with greater ease than when reading 21 words per minute.

This is a short list of potential benefits Jimmy may enjoy as a result of significant improvement in reading skills derived from effective instruction and full progress monitoring. If these benefits are realized, they will reach far into his future and impact his preparation for employment in our increasingly global economy.

Because “full progress monitoring” is powerful in leveraging student outcomes, we offer some initial thoughts to teachers to enhance their interaction with data. Due to the constraints of this publication, additional thoughts and directions can be read in the online version of this document, but note that neither copy is a complete treatment of this rich subject.

**Data Collection**

The type of data collected and the frequency in which it is collected is important. The quality of data collected is vital if student performance data is to be our guide in teaching. The following offers initial direction in the type of data to collect and collection frequency.

**Types of Data**

Some view learning as occurring in three stages. Learning stage 1 is acquisition of skills to a predetermined level of mastery (e.g. 90%) and under pre-specified conditions. Learning stage 2 focuses on fluency building of acquired skills with three purposes. The first is to assist the student in producing the skills at a high rate of speed (i.e. number of repetitions in brief period of time) to produce “automaticity,” or the production of the skill with less conscious thought. Learning stage 3 focuses on application of learned skills under authentic conditions and in authentic settings. Each learning phase requires a different type of data (e.g. frequency, duration, latency…) and collected under different instructional conditions and at times settings (e.g. mastery, fluency, application, regular education, special education, school, community…). For each stage, different data may be collected and the decisions to be made using the data are different.

**Frequency of Data Collection**

Teachers often ask, “How often should I collect data? In response to this question, it is interesting to consider the reaction of the medical field when a patient is hospitalized through emergency admittance. At first, the data collected captures the level of functioning for a broad number of organs and bodily processes and as these data come in, the medical team is watching closely for improvements or decrements in functioning. As data come in suggesting that bodily functions are narrowing and reduced, but not too quickly. However, if the patient experiences a “setback,” the breadth and frequency of data collected describing vital signs increases. In education, we suggest we respond in a similar way and as such, we should collect and use more data than what is collected in regular education and on more discrete skills. Additionally, our attention to our data should be more focused and should direct our instructional actions more completely. In special education, all of our students are admitted through the “educational emergency door.”

**Data Charting**

Referring back to Figure 1, students whose teachers charted performance data over simply collecting it, produced an effect size nearly three times the size of simply collecting data (i.e. .26 vs. 0.70). If charting data is that important, what are desirable “charting features?” I offer some thoughts below and direct readers to the Utah Professional Development Center’s PM Focus: Progress Monitoring Made Easy data system for electronic progress monitoring charts and for models of “charting features.”

1. Charts should have an x and y axis. The date of the data collection should be noted on the x (horizontal) axis. On the y (vertical) axis, the measure of the behavior should be identified (e.g. % correct, frequency of response...).

2. Charts should identify the learning behavior of the student in a title at the top of the chart (e.g. oral reading fluency, explicit reading comprehension, peer requests...).

3. Typically, charts should identify student performance by a visual marker (e.g., a dot or triangle), rather than a number. Excel and PM Focus both provide line charts with visual markers for student performance and connect the visual markers from one date to the next. Visual markers will help you to see learning trends and compel you when to make instructional decisions.

4. Charts which offer brief decision rules benefit the student and all instructional staff (e.g. “Two days of declining student data – instructional decision required – show teacher;” “two days below mastery trajectory line – instructional decision required – show teacher”). Simple decision rules are a reminder that if a student’s performance falls for two consecutive days that some form of instructional decision is required, and directs aides to get data charts in front of their supervising teacher. With our “emergency admitted” students, we wouldn’t want to wait too long to respond to a flat or worsening learning trend.

5. Charts should reflect instructional changes that address the skill being measured on the chart. Generally, changes are reflected in two ways. First, a vertical line is drawn separating data collected prior to an instructional change from data collected following the instructional change. Second, a brief label near the vertical line describes the change made (e.g. instructional time increased to 90 minutes). Over time, phase change lines and labels tell the story of the interventions implemented to address a student’s rate of learning. Importantly, they document interventions that have produced changes in the student and those which have not. These findings may provide a teacher with “practice-based evidence” supporting select interventions for other students.

Made Easy
6. Charts that reflect the IEP goal being addressed remind all instructional staff, parents and the student of the relationship between the data being collected and a goal’s mastery criterion. Please note that the goal may identify a broad skill whereas the chart may reflect a more narrow and prerequisite skill to the broader skill identified in the goal.

Data-Based Decisions

The statement, the pig doesn’t get fatter just because you weigh it,” is a funny but direct reminder that student data do not enhance student achievement, but that it is teachers’ interactions with their students’ performance data which influences student learning (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986). If data are to be our “greatest teacher,” they only teach us if we examine and then respond to them by making instructional decisions. As we implement instructional decisions, our students’ performances teach us how to enhance their learning. We share a few instructional decisions and identify them under the broad categories of instruction, curricula, and student motivation. Please note that each list’s purpose is to generate thoughts about instructional decisions versus providing exhaustive lists.

Instruction (How We Teach)

1. Increase dose of instruction, or increase the amount of instruction in minutes or hours.
2. Increase the intensity of instruction by increasing the student’s opportunities to respond and by increasing the amount of confirming and corrective feedback.
3. Increase the amount of lesson time in “we do” phase to provide more guided responding before going to independent practice.
4. Increase the amount of lesson time in “you do” phase to increase an already relatively accurate student’s practice of targeted skills and to prepare for fluency building.
5. Identify prerequisite skill weaknesses hindering student’s performance and strengthen them.
6. Reduce the amount of time (i.e. hours and days) between practice sessions of mastered skills to ensure they stay firm.

Curricula (What We Teach)

1. Change curricula to one which directly targets the skills you are collecting data. Some curricula attempt to produce a wide range of skills in students and the skill you are directly targeting may get the “short shrift” in terms of coverage.
2. Change curricula to one which has an evidence-base and has shown practice-based evidence with students similar to the ones you are teaching.
3. Determine if the student is correctly placed in a program by utilizing placement or pre-tests that align directly to the concepts or skills to be taught.
4. Monitor fidelity of instruction, whether using commercial or teacher-developed curricula.

Motivation (How We Support a Student’s Best Efforts)

1. Complete a “can’t do, won’t do” assessment to determine if the student has the skills but chooses to not display them.
2. Complete a preference assessment to determine the reinforcers a student is most interested in working for.
3. Increase opportunities for reinforcement by reducing the length of time or amount of work required.
4. Allow students to self-chart their own data so they have increased interest in their performance.
5. Teacher attention when focused on specific behaviors can be very powerful to gain and sustain a student’s best effort. This “attention,” often comes in the form of specific, enthusiastic praise.
6. Maintain quick paced lessons with many student responses with enthusiastic feedback.

To close, we believe that our students “do know best” and that there is promise in their performances and their corresponding data being “our greatest teachers” if we will take action to be taught. Let’s take action by collecting data, charting data, analyzing data and making data-based instructional decisions!

NOTE: This article was abridged to fit the format of this journal. The full article, including references, can be accessed at the Essential Educator online HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13995 or by scanning this QR code.
American Preparatory Academy opened its doors in 2003 to students in grades K-9. Over the past ten years, the school has grown to three campuses in the Salt Lake area, with a fourth opening this fall and a Las Vegas campus recently approved. The waiting list currently represents over 10,000 students in the Salt Lake area.

American Prep is founded on a few basic ideas:

1. A successful school is highly organized. Effective practices must be standardized school-wide, with accountability built into daily school activities.
2. Direct Instruction pedagogy, implemented at a high level of fidelity, and grouping of students into small achievement-leveled groups produces maximum skills acquisition and student academic achievement.
3. Teacher training, coaching and collaboration must be built into the school schedule on a weekly basis.
4. Teachers and students should have fun and enjoy being at school each day. There must be pervasive enthusiasm in the classroom, with intense periods of focus and engagement and frequent break periods of exercise and play.

Our vision was to create a school filled with teachers who know what to teach, when to teach it, and how to teach it, and students who have fun learning in an environment where engagement and participation is expected 100% of the time and is rewarded consistently. Our vision has been realized in our campuses as students and teachers work together to achieve high levels of academic achievement in a very positive environment. Parental satisfaction is over 97% overall and student achievement is strong.

Curriculum and Programs: We built our school plan based upon curriculum and programs that are research-based and have proven effective over many years for students all along the achievement spectrum – from students on IEPs to gifted and talented students. Among these programs are Reading Mastery, Connecting Math Concepts, Shurley Grammar, Saxon Math, and Core Knowledge. We were named the National Association for Direct Instruction’s 2008 National School of Excellence due to our strong Direct Instruction program.

Our teachers developed our 180-day curriculum maps that keep all teachers on the same pace in the program. In addition, our teachers have developed lesson plans for Science and History that are now standardized and used district-wide. This allows all 4th grade teachers, for example, to be teaching the same things at the same time, and ensures high quality education to all students across our system. This equity is important to us and to our parents. Using achievement levels allows all students, including those served by IEPs, to be in the least restrictive environment, and to truly access the general curriculum while receiving whatever instructional supports are needed. Teachers gather in district-wide grade level meetings once each month to review the upcoming month’s curriculum and share ideas on effective practices.

Pedagogy: We realized that teacher training was vital to our model and we committed to intense Direct Instruction summer trainings each year for one week. Our Summer Direct Instruction Training Institute is open to any teachers in Utah who wish to be trained in Direct Instruction. In addition, our staff meets weekly on our short day for ongoing training, and we have an active coaching program. Teachers are also trained and coached in logic and inquiry methods, which are utilized in all of our classrooms.

Organization of the School Day: We organize our school day so that students in grades K-3 attend reading all at the same time, allowing us to provide many reading levels. For example, in a school that has two classes each in grades K-3, we are able to provide 16 different leveled reading groups during the Reading hour. Students are placed in these groups according to their achievement level and the groups are fluid, meaning students may move from group to group depending upon their achievement. 4-6th grade students have the same opportunity during their reading hour. We organize mathematics and spelling instruction in the same way. We believe a key to our success is teaching students for a full hour in reading and a full hour in math at their precise instructional level in these key academic subjects. IEP students benefit from small groups taught at their level, grouped with non-IEP students at their same level.

Administrative Mission: The purpose of the administration of the schools is to “clear the way” for effective teaching to occur. Our administrators are former teachers who focus all their efforts on ensuring that our teachers have everything they need in order to teach effectively. Our administrators create and manage the class schedules and achievement groupings, ensure all needed supplies are available, protect classroom learning time by taking care of students who, for whatever reason, can’t participate in the classroom, and provide the curriculum and training needed to teachers. This approach to school leadership creates a wonderful teaching environment.

Teacher Accountability and Support: Teachers report on their lesson progress and student progress weekly. Teaching teams and administrators meet weekly to review student achievement data and brainstorm ideas to assist struggling students and struggling teachers. Weekly student achievement data is submitted to an administrator who compiles a comprehensive, school-wide student achievement database. Data is analyzed and teams meet weekly to establish individual student learning plans for students not at mastery. Coaches are sent to assist teachers whose students are not achieving mastery. With a fulltime teaching assistant in each elementary classroom and an administration focused on “clearing the way,” teachers enjoy high levels of success in teaching at American Prep. This is vital to our model – we need energetic, skilled teachers to bring their talents to the classroom each day, and they do!

School Culture: Another unique aspect of our school is our emphasis on character development, enthusiasm and positivity. Our extensive character education program is integrated into our school and reinforced in our daily classes. Monthly themes help us focus the students on specific character traits. Awards are given monthly and annually, and students are challenged to prepare themselves to “change the world for the better.”
American Preparatory Academy

Our secondary students spend 4th period each day in Ambassador activities where they learn professional standards of dress, speech, etiquette and conduct. Service learning is a large part of the secondary school experience at American Prep as students actively work to change the world for the better!

American Prep is experiencing high levels of success and we believe it is largely because of our emphasis on standardizing effective practices across the schools, teacher preparation and accountability, administrative support and ongoing training and coaching.

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13996 or by scanning this QR code.
After many years of watching schools implement Student Support Teams (SST), one school rises to the top in their delivery model. Indeed, it is an island of excellence – a model for other schools to consider when looking for a successful model to follow. George Washington Academy, a K-8 charter school in St. George, Utah, is an example for all.

“Building a Strong Foundation” is the school motto at George Washington Academy (GWA). A strong foundation can also be seen in their version of SST – what they call a Student Study Team. During the summer, Anya Yeager, GWA Vice Principal/Special Education Director, creates a profile of academic performance listing every at-risk student ranked according to performance on assessment data gathered from the previous year. This profile, the At-Risk Student Report, identifies students at-risk for academic challenges on both the high and low end. When teachers are given their class rosters at the beginning of the year, they know which students will need differentiated instruction. Teachers are also given a student file, one for each student, from the previous teacher with an array of assessment benchmarks from the previous year. The benchmarks include but are not limited to: SRI levels, fluency and comprehension levels, math end of trimester/year grades, DIBELS, 6 Minute Solutions, 50 word spelling tests and any other important information to provide another clue to student performance. In addition, the state assessment scores from the previous year’s testing are reviewed. Benchmark assessments are given early in the school year to complete the foundational work they do.

It is worth repeating that this foundational work begins BEFORE the intervention process begins. NOW, the response to intervention process can begin. In yet another bold move that distinguishes their commitment to address the needs of students, the weekly PLC meetings become a forum for possible interventions of all at-risk students. Names from the At-Risk Student Report are discussed and possible interventions to use with these students are documented on their weekly PLC Meeting Form. This kind of brainstorming effort produces more interventions than one teacher could identify in isolation. However, if a student still continues to struggle, they begin the referral process for the Student Study Team. Teachers have access to an At-Risk Student Intervention File, which carefully outlines the necessary steps. Immediately after the first step where concerns are identified, parents are notified. The notification is signed by the parents and returned. The Response to Intervention Notification Letter goes into the file. Parents are asked to complete a survey that presents important information about the student’s home life. This, plus an invitation to join the first SST meeting, provides ample opportunity to get input from the parents. To complete the student profile, a Student Academic History is prepared for SST members to review prior to the first SST
meeting. Jennifer McCorvey, the Staff Developer, creates the report from information she finds in the student’s cumulative file. When asked about the content of the report, she said, “the report contains a breakdown of teacher concerns, parent concerns, and then each grade is highlighted – this includes grades from that year, teacher comments, etc. Additionally any state scores are reported here.”

With all of the thought that has gone into interventions prior to this point, one might wonder where new ideas for interventions can be found. Each grade level team has access to the book The Pre-Referral Intervention Manual (PRIM) (Hawthorne Educational Services, 2006). Over 4,000 interventions strategies for over 200 most common problems can be found in the PRIM. The process continues.

Interventions are implemented for 6-8 weeks. At the second SST meeting, the intervention’s progress is discussed. Sometimes another intervention is required to scaffold toward independence. Sometimes it becomes apparent that special education services are needed. With special education teachers present at this SST meeting, the Regular Education Intervention/At Risk Documentation form is given to the general education teacher to fill out and the special education referral process can begin. Several weeks and several interventions have already transpired, and any lack of response to intervention documented.

In the article “Beyond Islands of Excellence: What Districts Can Do to Improve Instruction and Achievement in All Schools” (Learning First Alliance, 2003), several findings are outlined that have the potential to move schools into an area of excellence that is beyond the ordinary way of doing business. Three of the seven findings include acknowledging poor performance and having the will to seek solutions, making decisions based on data - not instinct, and having a vision that focuses on student learning and guided instructional improvement. These efforts can lead to “brighter educational futures for the children involved.” Acknowledging poor performance and having the will to seek solutions becomes the first step in the process. GWA’s bold move to create the administrative support for teachers in identifying struggling students before the students enter the classroom is critical in the process. GWA Principal, Don Fawson, said it is a team effort and he appreciates the detail work by Anya and Jennifer. With careful examination, they do make decisions based on data – not instinct. The focus is clearly on student learning and guided instructional improvement.

These components have led George Washington Academy ahead of the game in their MTSS process and SST Team implementation. Make note: over 600 words have been used before the words “special education” were ever mentioned in this article. Yes, they actually do have special education students – about 9% of their student population. Still, this number is below the state average of 11.54% (USOE, 2010-11). This model is replicable, and benefits all at-risk students, while harming none. Perhaps GWA’s mission statement says it best:

“We are a community of learners. We will do whatever it takes to learn. We are building a strong foundation by believing we can, working our plan, then feeling the power of success.” By all accounts, it would appear to be working well.

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13997 or by scanning this QR code.
Coaching Special Education Preservice Teachers

Darlene Anderson, Michelle Marchant & JoAnn Munk, Brigham Young University
Due to the current emphasis on access to the core curriculum and greater accountability for all learners, there is a significant need for collaborative and well-prepared teachers who positively impact student outcomes and choose to remain in the profession. The large number of newly licensed educators leaving their jobs within the first five years of teaching has given rise to efforts to strengthen preservice teacher preparation and provide increased support for novice teachers. These efforts include the use of research-validated techniques, specifically, instructional coaching and mentoring.

The coaching model implemented in Brigham Young University’s (BYU) special education teacher preparation program is similar to the model developed by Dr. Jim Knight at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning and used by the Utah Personnel Development Center. The terms mentoring and coaching are used interchangeably in BYU’s program. Intensive coaching (mentoring) is provided during the six-week summer practicum, the setting in which candidates receive their first opportunity to teach a small group of grade 1-5 students with mild/moderate disabilities (in the areas of reading, writing, and math) in a highly structured classroom setting. During the practicum, the primary role of mentor teachers (i.e., coaches) is to prepare the candidates for the next step in their training, that is, student teaching or internship. Mentor teachers receive instruction from BYU faculty to help them be more effective in their coaching roles and in the use of essential behaviors, e.g., helping the candidate make data-based decisions, modeling effective teacher behaviors, and providing emotional support. Mentor teachers understand that the ultimate goal of the coaching model is to help preservice teachers develop effective teaching practices and essential behaviors, such as providing high rates of reinforcement, giving 1-6 students frequent opportunities to respond, and following the steps of the teaching cycle.

Each mentor teacher is assigned to a classroom consisting of three teacher candidates and five to eight students in grades 1-5. In daily one-on-one meetings, the mentor teacher and candidate establish daily goals based on data from recent observations. Goals are typically established in three areas, (a) behavior management, (b) lesson planning and delivery, and (c) data collection. These goals and the candidate’s self-reflection provide a starting point for the next day’s discussion. One of the roles of the mentor teacher is to identify candidates having difficulty by midterm and to provide additional coaching as needed.

Supervision and subsequent evaluations are conducted in a formative and summative manner across the summer practicum. For example, in the area of lesson planning, mentor teachers supply formative feedback on weekly and daily lesson plans written in scripted and non-scripted format. Mentor teachers additionally conduct multiple observations on each of the candidates daily, allowing the candidates to receive specific feedback regarding their implementation of effective teaching practices. On the other hand, the university faculty collects summative data in the form of formal teaching observations, heavily weighted in the final evaluation of teacher candidate performance.

Due to the high rate of success achieved by program completers, the implementation of the coaching model with BYU’s special education preservice teachers is likely to continue. Moreover, grade 1-5 student data collected during the summer practicum over the past three years strongly suggest that the coaching model is achieving its overall aim: to improve the capacity of preservice teachers to positively impact learner outcomes.

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Premise

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been posited as essential to promoting increased student achievement. However, a significant challenge in PLC work involves supporting teams in moving beyond simply discussing student data in global terms, or “admiring the problem” (e.g. discussing reasons why performance is not improving). Research indicates a key factor in changing human behavior, including educators, is “actionable performance feedback.” Regrettably such feedback is not routinely a component of the PLC process, or anywhere else in the typical teachers’ daily experience. In other words, to significantly improve teacher instruction, the PLC process must move beyond simply talking about various forms of student data, brainstorming possible teaching strategies and the like to concretely demonstrating/observing/modeling the actual teaching that is producing the data being discussed. This “actionable feedback” provides the context for developing the reflective practice essential to instructional improvement. Connecting the dots, one could say, between our teaching and student learning...or connecting the “talk to the walk.”

Practices Essential to Providing Actionable Feedback:

1) Classroom Learning Walks/Learning Partners – using the “LW tool” (a research based observational guide) to clarify how the teaching is causing observable student engagement/critical thinking/academic language use, etc. Respectful and actionable feedback is immediately provided by the LW team/LW Partner.

2) Classroom Video Clips – 2-7 min. clips demonstrating some aspect of instruction that is of mutual concern (e.g. structuring the use of academic language in discussion) to analyze student response data - using same LW observation tool to guide the giving/receiving of actionable feedback tied directly to what is visible in the video.

3) Mini-lesson demonstration – 3-10 min. modeling some portion of a recent lesson demonstrating the strategy or tactic of interest, not simply describing but actually modeling the instruction provided – debrief using same LW tool.

4) Brief Principal Walk Throughs – focused on key global indicators (e.g. simple indicators of the same LW tool domains (e.g. engagement, academic language, critical thinking, scaffolding support), usually 5-10 min. – provide some form of brief feedback (e.g. 3 x 5 NCR card left on the teacher’s desk).

5) Common Formative Assessment/Problem Solving – examine samples of student work, quizzes, writing, tests, etc. – analyze/discuss what kind of instruction produced these results (e.g. what is working and why so as to scale it up, what is not working and figure out potential alternatives to employ/evaluate in the problem solving or inquiry cycle). ■

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Dr. Feldman will be the keynote speaker, day 2 at the UMTSS Conference on June 13, 2013.

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The work lies in face-to-face interactions among people responsible for student learning around the work, in the presence of the work...If you can’t see it — it isn’t there.

- Richard Elmore
A Key to High Performing PLCs: Connecting the “Talk to the Walk”

Kevin Feldman, Sonoma County School District
Denise, an instructional coach in Uintah School District, comes to the weekly coaches’ professional learning community concerned about Kendra, a first year teacher. Kendra’s academic engagement is consistently low and disruptions are the norm during her instruction. Denise brings these concerns to the coaching team and explains what suggestions she has given to Kendra already. The team then brainstorms some other coaching techniques to try with this struggling teacher. The next week Denise comes back to the team meeting and reports on Kendra’s progress.

Prior to 2011, the district worked under an elementary model of coaching where each of the 7 elementary schools had a part-time coach to focus on literacy elements. It was the work of these coaches that established the foundation for our next coaching chapter. The next phase of coaching in the Uintah School District was to bring together a team of district-wide coaches from not only elementary schools but secondary schools as well. The district aimed to create a coaching team that could instruct all district teachers to reflect on the use of high yield strategies, to be data driven, and to teach the core standards intentionally.

The first goal was to provide quality professional development to coaches to ensure that they were consistent and effective with their coaching skills. District coaches attended training conducted by the Utah Coaching Network (UCN) at the Utah Personnel Development Center (UPDC). Instructors at UCN taught the coaches how to conduct a 3-part coaching cycle. The first part consists of a pre-observation conversation centered around assessment of goals in the classroom. The second part concerns data collection using the Basic Five model. The components of the Basic Five are as follows:

1. Ratio of interactions (reinforcing to corrective feedback)
2. Opportunities to respond (group and individual questions posed by the teacher)
3. Corrections modeled by the teacher
4. Classroom disruptions
5. Academic engagement of the students

The third part is a post-observation conversation centered around the students’ mastery of the goals and achievement on the prescribed assessment. All of this leads back to the coaches’ objective of creating a reflective teaching staff focused on high yield instructional strategies.

The next layer of professional development was to fine tune the coaches’ skills. Annette Brinkman and Ellen Williams, specialists in the field of educator coaching, instructed the coaches in the following areas:

- Conducting coaching conversations with teachers
- The difference between coaching, consulting, and collaborating
- Distinguishing the difference between meaningful observable and goal-oriented data in the classroom
- Creating positive, productive relationships between teachers, administrators, and coaches. Brinkman and Williams used both whole group instruction and one-on-one coaching to refine the coaches’ conversation skills

Through training, an intentional process has emerged for effective coaching. To create a baseline for each first and second year teacher, coaches collect several Basic Five observations. Coaches bring this baseline data to their PLC meetings. Together they determine the level of support each teacher needs. The highest level of support is consult
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Where the focus is classroom management, content, and pedagogy. The second level of support is coaching focused on guiding teachers to find the best solution for a specific problem in classroom management or instruction. The least intrusive level of support is collaborating. Coaches help teachers reflect on their teaching practices. Every six weeks, coaches meet to re-examine levels of support based on progress.

After establishing the needs of the teachers, coaches use a variety of techniques to help them reflect and improve their teaching. They continue the coaching cycle of pre-observation conversations, data collection, and post-observation conversations, but conversations will morph and the type of data collection will also change as teachers’ ability to reflect improves. Coaches and teachers will set goals, create plans, and work together to meet the goals. Data can come in the form of the Basic Five observations, video or audio segments of the teachers engaged with students, or scripted dialogues of classroom interactions and discussions. Pre and post observation conversations also change as the teachers emerge as reflective collaborators who engage in improving their instruction.

In addition to coaching, Uintah School District coaches have several other significant roles in the district. They act as Early Year Enhancement (EYE) mentors helping new and Level One teachers meet state requirements to attain their Level Two credential. Coaches conduct the initial district orientation for new teachers offering professional development in best practices and classroom management. They offer professional development in the following areas:

- Emerging technologies
- Elementary math
- Elementary language arts
- Secondary math
- Secondary language arts
- Utah Core State Standards implementation

The coaches are advocates for teachers; they do not share data or any other information about teachers with administration, and the coaches’ role is not evaluative; it is supportive. The role of a coach is to develop a relationship of trust with teachers so that they will see the coach as an equal colleague and collaborator who they can turn to with questions and concerns. A teacher needs to know that the coaching relationship is a confidential relationship where frustrations and apprehensions will stay between the coach and the teacher.

During professional learning community meetings, Denise reports on Kendra’s progress. With Denise’s support, she tried some of the ideas supplied by the team. Her Basic Five data shows improvement in academic engagement, and her students are reaching learning goals. She is on her way to becoming a competent teacher. This is the power of the coaching process.

The following is a list of texts used by USD coaches:

- Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning by John Hattie
- CHAMPS: A Proactive and Positive Approach to Classroom Management by Randy Sprick
- Coaching Classroom Management: Strategies and Tools for Administrators and Coaches by Sprick, Knight, Reinke, Skyles, and Barnes
- Conscious Classroom Management by Rick Smith
- Class Acts by Gary Forlini, Ellen Williams, and Annette Brinkman
- Research into Practice by Alan Hofmeister and Margaret Lubke
- Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many
- Practice Perfect by Lemov, Woolway, Yezzi, and Heath

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MTSS and the Speech Language Pathologist

The Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) can positively influence a student’s learning trajectory. Using Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), the SLP can provide supports for prevention and remediation before the student is referred for special education. Multi-tiered preventive programs, problem solving, and early intervention in the areas of language and communication, “can serve as the glue that unites the student with his or her environment” (Montgomery, 2005). Working both inside and outside of special education, opportunities for collaborating and consulting can be created.

MTSS can focus educators on effective instruction to help students meet proficiency standards without special education. MTSS can help to prevent the negative consequences of school failure. Skill sets of the SLP that can be utilized in a MTSS model include assessment and intervention for:

• Language development. The SLP is trained to identify the language periods including pre-linguistic, emerging, developing, language for learning, and advanced language (Paul, 2007). The SLP understands how to peel back complex layers of language at each of these language periods to identify which areas should be targeted for the purpose of bolstering weak spots.
• Components of language. The SLP is trained to screen the form (i.e., syntax, morphology, phonology), content (i.e., semantic components, vocabulary), and use or function (i.e., pragmatics, cooperative conversations) of language.
• Speech sound development, consonant and vowel articulation, and patterns of sound that form speech.
• Phonemic awareness and development, and stabilization of the phonological form of words.
• Communication temptations, enhancing communication support, and repair of communication breakdowns.

TIER 1 Core Instructional Interventions and Activities

The goal of Tier 1 is to provide preventative and proactive supports for all students. SLPs work on behalf of students and with students during Tier 1 activities, which may include collaboration, professional development, coaching, problem solving, screening, and group instruction. SLPs can:

• Participate in a coaching partnership. This will encourage collaboration, support reflective practice, and promote positive cultural change.
• Collaborate to identify screening tools for qualifying and quantifying the classroom language learning environment.
• Identify typical trajectories of communication and language development and conduct systematic audits of the general education environment to study language and literacy instruction.
• Collaborate to audit the Tier I language environment. Design interventions to improve Tier 1 language instruction to improve the quality of the environment in which students are learning to read. Provide consultation on improving instructional quality.
• Collaborate to adapt academic language by reducing linguistic complexity, marking important information, providing concrete examples for abstract concepts, giving and requesting elaborations, adjusting the discourse demands to meet the needs of struggling students.
promising results using small-group instruction. In emergent and early literacy development. An extra dose of language 

occur in a small group weekly session for more targeted instruction. Special resources or strategies are not required. The learning goals could be 

instruct struggling learners may accelerate the development of reading. Students not responding to instruction or intervention and students not doing well due to a disability. Other important activities include consultation with special educators to support the student’s special education goals.

Involving the SLP in MTSS may involve special considerations to avoid adding on to existing caseloads. Consider the following:

- Structural conditions that support the involvement of the SLP should be identified. Dedicated time for teacher groups to meet will be more likely to facilitate success. District initiatives and goals should link to expected outcomes.

- A cyclical scheduling approach to increase availability to students may be considered. Two models include 3:1 direct/indirect, or 3X60 minutes for a grading period. Another approach is to create a flexible schedule, changing every nine weeks to be available for classrooms on a rotating basis. A four-day schedule with one day set aside for evaluations, make-up sessions, and 1:1 work could be considered.

- A “workload” approach rather than a “caseload” approach may also be considered. Create a new workload schedule to account for all the tasks such as collaboration, consultation, and support activities that are involved in the MTSS role. Key workload features include:

  - Activities with students (with or without an IEP) that may include direct services such as screenings, observation, evaluations, and small or whole group instruction as sole instructor or as a co-teacher.

  - Activities on behalf of students, which may include indirect services such as participating in child study teams, attending eligibility and IEP meetings, referral discussions, developing IEPs, consultation, document preparation, and generating lesson plans.

  - Other activities, which may include compliance with federal and local mandates, school meetings, (PTA, faculty, committee) clerical, leading staff professional development, lunch.

Utah educators are encouraged to build a sustainable MTSS program from local competence. In other words, start where you are and look for opportunities. Attend team training, meet with teams, and build local capacity. Leverage what is already working. Build relationships and become better at what you do. Be willing to learn. Professionals add value to students’ lives by understanding the principles of MTSS and working for successful application to education.

**TIER 3 Intensive, Individualized Interventions**

Students not responding in Tiers 1 and 2 receive intensive and specialized treatment in Tier 3 interventions. Tier 3 supports are individualized, assessment-based, of high intensity, and of longer duration. Tier 3 can include specialized treatment for poor readers with language deficits who have not responded to universal instruction and targeted interventions. A Tier 3 activity may include collection of data to be used for consideration of eligibility for special education services. Other important activities include consultation with special educators to support the student’s special education goals.

- Assist in providing direct instruction to address high-priority targets in emergent and early literacy development. An extra dose of language instruction to struggling learners may accelerate the development of reading. Special resources or strategies are not required. The learning goals could be replicated using the same materials as the first-tier environment. This could occur in a small group weekly session for more targeted instruction.

- Help with decision-making about which skills to target. Beginning sound awareness has predictive validity for later reading success and may be an important skill to target. Phonological segmentation skills also have promising results using small-group instruction.

- Deliver targeted group intervention before formal referral for speech-language services. Focus on word study (e.g., phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, interactive reading with comprehension instruction, journal writing and dictated writing) has promising results.

- Conduct additional activities, depending on the grade level of the student including: 1) shared storybook reading with discussion of target words, 2) phonological awareness, 3) journal writing, 4) letter-sound mapping activity, 5) articulation elicitation and practice, 6) language and vocabulary comprehension, 7) word study, and 8) explicit vocabulary instruction and elaboration.

**TIER 2 Targeted Group Interventions**

The goal of Tier 2 is to provide a rapid response to some students who may be at risk for failing. The advantage to Tier 2 targeted interventions is that children with mild to moderate language deficits, arising from an experiential base, may be remediated. The SLP can:

- Assist in providing direct instruction to address high-priority targets in emergent and early literacy development. An extra dose of language instruction to struggling learners may accelerate the development of reading. Special resources or strategies are not required. The learning goals could be replicated using the same materials as the first-tier environment. This could occur in a small group weekly session for more targeted instruction.

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Classroom Walkthroughs: Learning to See the Trees and the Forest

Howard Pitler, McREL Senior Director

For some, the practice of classroom “walkthroughs,” where principals or other instructional leaders spend only minutes observing classrooms to form an impression about the quality of teaching and learning occurring in them seems preposterous. But consider the study Malcolm Gladwell describes in the introduction to his book, Blink.

After watching just two seconds of soundless video clips of Harvard professors they’d never seen teaching a class, students rated how effective they thought the professors would be as instructors. The researchers were surprised to find that not only did the students find the task easy, but their instantaneous impressions were highly correlated with end-of-the-semester ratings by those who actually took the classes. So, if college students can accurately assess the quality of professors from just two silent seconds of video, can principals assess the quality of a teachers’ instruction after only a few minutes? Maybe, but short observations also can be badly flawed.

The key to making accurate decisions based on short observations is knowing what to look for. For example, Gladwell notes that when emergency room doctors and nurses in the Cook County Hospital reduced their lengthy interview protocol for chest pain patients down to a quick EKG reading and three simple (but incisive) questions, they dramatically increased their ability to accurately assess whether people with chest pain were about to have a heart attack. Likewise, if principals don’t know what to look for or misunderstand the purposes of walkthroughs, their observations can be useless, or worse, harmful to teachers and students. But if they are equipped with the right set of “look fors” and a clear understanding of purposes, brief classroom observations can, in fact, be powerful tools for promoting great teaching.

What to Look For

Principals should ask these six questions when observing classrooms:

1. Are teachers using research-based teaching strategies?

One of the most important things to look for is teachers’ use of instructional strategies. The nine strategies from McREL’s ASCD publication, Classroom Instruction that Works, for example, can serve as a framework for determining the extent to which teachers use research-based strategies. Although there’s no single right way to teach, great teachers employ a variety of teaching strategies, understand the instructional purposes of each, and use each strategy intentionally. So, when observing classrooms, principals should look at strategies teachers are using, and during a follow-up coaching conversation, teachers should be able to articulate why they used a particular strategy.

2. Do student grouping patterns support learning?

One of the nine categories of effective instruction in Classroom Instruction that Works is cooperative learning, which includes supporting student learning through large groups, small groups, pairs, cooperative groups (small groups with assigned roles for each member), or working individually. None of these grouping strategies are wrong; they may all be appropriate at different times and for different learning purposes. Again, the key is to determine whether teachers are intentional in their use of grouping patterns. During follow-up coaching sessions, can teachers state why they selected a particular grouping strategy?
3. Are teachers and students using technology to support student learning?

While educational technology is more prevalent in today’s classrooms, many teachers still do not put these tools to best use. During walkthroughs, principals should note the technology teachers are using and how they’re using it. As before, principals should specifically ask about the pedagogical or learning purpose the teacher intended by using the selected technology. It also is important to monitor if and how students are using technology. Principals should ask about students’ opportunities for “fingers on keyboard” time to use technology to deepen their learning.

4. Do students understand their goals for learning?

While conducting walkthroughs, principals should do more than go through a checklist of teacher practices; they also should observe what students are doing and learning. When asked, are students able to articulate what they are doing as it relates to their learning goals? Are students making a connection to true learning objectives, or are they completely focused on activities? Over time, student responses will provide an indication of how well teachers are communicating learning goals and whether students are engaged and intentional about their own learning.

5. Are students learning both basic and higher order levels of knowledge?

Classroom observations also should reveal whether students are engaged in learning at the lower rungs of Bloom’s taxonomy (e.g., remembering, understanding, and applying) or at the higher levels, such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. All of these forms of learning are necessary and appropriate in different contexts. However, if the vast majority of student learning is concentrated on lower level learning, principals should initiate conversations with teachers regarding the levels of student learning they observed.

Continued on page 62

When principals place their classroom observations within the context of student achievement data, they can dramatically increase the acuity of their observations and identify ways to improve teaching and learning.
6. Do student achievement data correlate with walkthrough data?

Principals should also observe classrooms through the lens of student achievement data. In *It’s Being Done*, Chenoweth provides the following anecdote of how Sheri Shirley, principal of Oakland Heights Elementary School in Russellville, Arkansas, uses classroom observations to help her high-poverty school raise student achievement:

Shirley spends a great deal of time in classrooms herself, watching for effective teaching methods that can be shared. In one instance, she knew that the children in one classroom were mastering many more “sight” words (words read automatically without having to laboriously spell them out) than in others...she noticed that in the less-successful classrooms, if the children missed a flashcard word, the teachers would simply read the words to the children. In the more-successful classroom, any time the children missed a word, the teacher would teach them a “trick” to read the word more quickly. She might point out, for example, that there was a “word within the word” that children already knew (stAND). That simple practice on the part of the teacher was helping kids read better, and by noticing, Shirley was then able to initiate conversations among teachers about effective teaching practices.

As this example illustrates, when principals place their classroom observations within the context of student achievement data, they can dramatically increase the acuity of their observations and identify ways to improve teaching and learning.

**How to Use Walkthrough Data**

A number of misconceptions persist about how to use the data generated from classroom walkthroughs. Indeed, some teachers’ resistance to walkthroughs is likely due to the fact they or their principals—or both—are unclear about how to use their observation data.

**Coaching, Not Evaluating**

For starters, the purpose of a walkthrough is not to pass judgment on teachers, but to coach them to higher levels of performance. Walkthroughs are not teacher evaluations; they are a method for identifying opportunities for improvement and supporting the sharing of best practices across the school.

Measuring the impact of staff development efforts

In its best use, the walkthrough process will provide strong data to schools and districts regarding the extent to which their professional development initiatives are actually making it into...
Looking at one tile in isolation tells you almost nothing. But when you see 400 of those tiles laid out in an orderly manner, a picture begins to emerge.

the classroom. If a district’s focus is in differentiated learning, for example, and the data indicate that an overwhelming percentage of observations show students are working only in whole group settings with each student doing exactly the same type of work, there would be an apparent disconnect between the intent of the professional development and actual classroom practice. By systematically collecting and analyzing data from classroom observations, school leaders can determine whether staff development efforts are making a difference and guide real-time adjustments to the professional development they are offering teachers.

Supporting professional learning communities with walkthrough data savvy principals also understand the power of sharing their aggregated observation data with school staff to support professional learning communities. For example, one elementary school we worked with in Montana discovered, through walkthrough data collected over a three-month period, that teachers taught students in a whole-group setting in 67 percent of all observations. Through conversation with the staff and professional development on learning context, that number decreased from 67 percent to 56 percent during the following three months.

Final Thoughts: Viewing the “Mosaic”

As the success of this school illustrates, one of the most powerful aspects of walkthroughs is aggregating data across teachers and over time. One or two, or even 10 observations of an individual teacher, do not provide a clear picture of the quality of instruction within a school. But 10 visits each to 40 teachers’ classrooms does provide a more accurate picture. Think of it as a mosaic. Looking at one tile in isolation tells you almost nothing. But when you see 400 of those tiles laid out in an orderly manner, a picture begins to emerge.

So too with classroom walkthroughs: when principals understand what to look for and the purposes of their observations, they are able to pull together their brief blink-like observations into a more complete picture of the quality—and variations in the quality—of instruction occurring in their buildings. In short, the power of walkthroughs lies not only in seeing the trees, but also the forest.

Research-based responsibilities of effective school leaders that can be fulfilled through classroom walkthroughs:

- Connecting with teachers and staff on a personal and professional level (the responsibility of relationships)
- Encourage teachers to use research on instruction (the responsibility of intellectual stimulation)
- Reviewing formative achievement data and using it to inform instructional practices (the responsibility of involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment)
- Assessing the quality, fidelity, and consistency of instructional practices to determine staff development needs (the responsibility of monitor/evaluate)
- Praising teachers with exemplary practices (the responsibility of contingent rewards)
- Communicating the belief that individual teachers can accomplish school goals (the responsibility of ideals and beliefs)
- Interpreting disappointing results or implementation challenges in ways that inspire hope and resilience (the responsibility of optimize)
- Soliciting feedback, both good and bad, and advice on improvement initiatives (the responsibility of input)
- Uncovering staff concerns and modifying leadership behaviors accordingly (the responsibility of flexibility).


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At the risk of losing most of my educational friends and colleagues, I am one of the few willing to openly support the NCLB legislation. Beyond all of the issues of organizing a fair and valid process of accountability for all students from Anchorage, Alaska, to the Hawaiian Islands; White Plains, New York, to Salt Lake City, Utah; and all destinations in between, there is success. If nothing else we have started the process of creating an accountability system that will assist education to help all students. Who would not support this idea? I know there is much work to be done. If we do not start now, then when?

I am the instructional leader, the principal of a small elementary school. We do have challenges. We are a K-5 school of roughly 380 students. Of those students, 49% are Caucasian, and 47% are Hispanic. Of the Hispanics students, 38% are identified as English Language Learners (ELL). Fifty percent of our students are economically disadvantaged based on the free and reduced lunch information. We also enjoy a fairly large population of middle class students. And YES, we are a Title I school, and our strength is in our diversity. Many Utah schools have similar characteristics. The question is where you might think my school is located? I am the principal of McPolin Elementary School that is located in the middle of Park City, Utah. And yes, I still support NCLB and the idea of using a consistent assessment system to measure student academic growth.
Change is ever present. Change happens to us all. Change in population and instructional needs have impacted our school just as much as every other school. In my opinion, these challenges are the seed of powerful and purposeful learning. Like so many before us, even though our school has changed, our expectations have not. The staff and community is committed to ensuring that all students can and will learn at high levels. And as important as the commitment is; planning, developing, and supporting a clearly defined process that will enable teachers to learn how to improve and refine instructional practices is another matter. This is exceptionally hard work. At the same time this work is non-negotiable. Even with the strong will to do it, finding the way can be extremely challenging.

An effort to integrate Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) strategies, with a building level RtI process has recently been initiated. Added to these district structures, the school has created a schedule that allows the teachers to have a 45 minute staff development meeting, on a weekly basis, with highly talented instructional coaches. These meetings are being adapted to teacher and grade level needs to support the district work and to define not only what the SIOP work looks like in the classroom for the teacher, but what it looks like for the student. More specifically, we are focusing on what it sounds like when a student is engaged in learning.

What do I mean by sounds like? In the past, I did my best to use classroom observations and debriefing meetings with teachers to judge the effectiveness of student learning. However, we were encountering mixed messages with the data they had collected. I would observe what I believed to be very strong instruction, and more often than not, teacher directed. In other words, the teacher was doing the majority of the talking. I would take notes, then meet with the teacher. The teacher would share plans, offer detailed efforts to differentiate, and clarify any questions I might have. We would both leave the meetings feeling validated. Unfortunately, the data was not showing the growth indicators we expected.

In addition to the teacher observation process, I started asking students, “What are you working on right now?” The answers would range from: “This worksheet,” or “Some work,” to my absolute favorite, “I don’t know,” or “What the teacher said.” And the most disheartening response—silence. The same silence that might occur nearly every time the student is asked to engage or interact. I realize that based on a student’s language level there may be a silent phase. However, this is not appropriate for a fourth grade ELL student that has attended the school for three years or more. Apparently limiting my conversations to teachers had left out the most important part—the student.

Inviting students to express their thinking is not new. What is new, is having the McPolin staff deliberately, purposefully, and consistently making plans for students to express their thinking, every day in every class period. Now when I enter a kindergarten classroom and a teacher is having students break words into phonemic segments I will hear:

TEACHER: “What are we doing when we “chop words?”” (Chopping is a technique Mr. Paul Barton has created to help students to anchor phonemic segmentation. They use their hands as a signal to break works into parts like a karate chop on the table.)

STUDENT: “We are practicing phonemic segmentation.”

TEACHER: “Why do we practice phonemic segmentation?”

STUDENT: “So we can learn to read words better.”

TEACHER: “Why do we practice learning how to read and say words?”

STUDENT: “So we can be good readers.”

We have just started this journey. We have already learned that on-going vocabulary instruction in all content areas for all students is beneficial and necessary. If students are expected to be able to share their thinking, they need the building blocks of vocabulary to express their thoughts. All students benefit from such instruction. We are now becoming more explicit and systematic with our vocabulary instruction in all content areas. The SIOP work is helping us to better define academic language (CALP) versus basic or “playground” language (BICS), and purposefully embed vocabulary work in all content areas, emphasizing and building background for not just ELL learners, but all students.

All faculty members at McPolin Elementary School are committed to helping all students learn. Our work continues. Through this journey I have discovered two important learning principles that are shared repeatedly with staff and parents:

1) The person doing the most work is doing the most learning.
2) Teachers need to learn to stop talking and to become more of a facilitator and let the students talk.

Principal walk throughs are a powerful tool for instructional leaders, and contribute to more students doing better work.

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14002 or by scanning this QR code.
As of this writing, 45 states have passed anti-bullying laws prohibiting bullying and mandating significant, immediate responses from schools and community (http://bullypolice.org). Its detrimental impacts on victims, bystanders, and bullies alike have been well documented, including academic/behavioral problems (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Schwartz & Gorman, 2003), school drop-out (Berthold & Hoover, 2000), employability (Carney & Merrell, 2001; NSSC, 1995), and depression/suicide (Baldry & Farrington, 1998). Over the last two decades, an absolute onslaught of interventions have been developed to address these frightening outcomes including everything from zero-tolerance policies, to school-wide social skills curricula, to “mean girls” groups, to ambassador programs, to restorative justice interventions between victims and their transgressors. But regrettably, these strategies have not proven as effective as hoped, and none have yet been determined evidence-based. In fact, in several cases bullying interventions have actually produced negative effects, increasing the amount of observed or reported incidents (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, and Isava, 2008). This is especially problematic considering that many states and districts are requiring schools to implement the programs, and in many cases the resources expended to do so are substantial.

Clearly it is not enough to simply purchase and implement the next big program on the market. Instead, educators must approach the problem systematically, building from the universal to the individual and matching the level of support to the level of problem intensity. Specifically, three intervention components can have a powerful impact on bullying if implemented with fidelity: a) universal strategies that promote a culture of competence, b) specific skill development for bystanders, and c) function-based, individualized support for students (victims as well as perpetrators) not responding to initial efforts.

Building Effective and Efficient Bully Prevention Systems within the Context of Positive Behavior Support
Universal Strategies

The creation of safe and caring communities where both students and adults feel supported is the first step in effective/efficient bully prevention. Many of the programs currently available employ school-wide strategies such as bully-proofing pledges, increased staff training, social skills training for all students, standardized adult responses to incidents, reinforcement for appropriate behavior, and support for the parent community. While each of these strategies can improve school culture and the outcomes of students, two issues in particular keep them from having an ideal impact. First, available bully prevention programs often prescribe a significant amount of intervention but rarely provide sufficient strategies for data-based decision making to inform modifications and the additional support needed for all students to be successful. Second, many pre-packaged universal programs require a significant amount of time and resources (especially in the case of programs involving large school-wide social skills curricula). Schools have had a difficult time implementing them without additional funding or personnel, and research has indicated through follow-up studies that few beneficial effects have been maintained even two years after initial implementation (Limer et al., 2004; Roland, 1993).

The one exception to these two issues is School-Wide Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (SWPBIS). While not a pre-packaged program, 20+ years of research has demonstrated SWPBIS’s ability to reduce problem behavior and improve school climate through a focus on data, systems, and practices (Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005). SWPBIS employs a) empirically-tested instructional principles to teach expected, positive behavior to all students, b) systems of reinforcement for expected behaviors and a continuum of consequences for inappropriate behavior, c) training/feedback to staff regarding their implementation of the systems (Crone & Horner, 2003), and d) the documentation/analysis of reinforcement and discipline data by SWPBIS teams, who use the data to modify support on a regular basis (Sprague & Horner, 2006). The implementation of these strategies has resulted in demonstrated effectiveness when implemented by typical state agents (Horner, et. al., 2009; Bradshaw, et. al., 2008), as well as over time (Luisseli, Putnam, & Sunderland, 2002; Putnam, Luisseli, & Sunderland, 2002; Taylor-Greene & Kartub, 2000; Colvin & Fernandez, 2000).

Skill Development for Bystanders

SWPBIS can create positive school environments where students feel safe and are more likely to act according to expectations. It can also provide the data and systems necessary to recognize when students need more. This is often the case with bullying when schools implement SWPBIS with fidelity but find that a proportion of their students still exhibit bullying-like behavior. Immediate responses to these outcomes would typically involve the implementation of secondary interventions: simple, often generic strategies that can be implemented with small groups or individuals. But herein lies a problem. Research on bullying has demonstrated that it is frequently exhibited covertly and that it is almost always reinforced by peer attention (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Craig & Pepler, 1995; Salmivalli, 2002; Soutter & McKenzie, 2000). Therefore, simply implementing a secondary intervention with the bully or the victim will not be enough. Other students in the school fuel the behavior by laughing at victims when they are teased, fighting back/harassing perpetrators in retaliation, or even watching the problem behavior and doing nothing about it. Instead, once effective universal systems are in place, the next level of intervention should involve teaching bystanders (all other students in the school) to remove the peer attention maintaining the problem behavior. Doing so effectively includes three aspects: a) teaching students specific skills that can be implemented outside the classroom, b) implementing sufficient generalization strategies, and c) ensuring ongoing implementation by staff.

Specific skills. Several available programs provide curricula for teaching students to address bullying and include a plethora of instructional objectives such as empathy, cliques, problem solving, exclusion, sexual harassment, taking a stand, and definitions of bullying. Unfortunately, these curricula usually require a substantial amount of resources to implement (e.g. ten 50-minute lessons), and while the skills they teach are valuable for many students, they may not be necessary at the school-wide level of intervention. Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support (BP-PBS; Ross, Horner, & Stiller, 2008) was developed in response to this need for more efficient approaches to teaching bystander skills. Specifically, BP-PBS teaches all students a 3-step response to use when students exhibit problem behavior (not just bullying), either towards them or others. It also teaches perpetrators an appropriate reply when the 3-step response is directed toward them. By focusing on specific critical skills that are easy to remember and implement, the delivery of BP-PBS is reduced to only 45 minutes of initial instruction along with 10-15 minute data-based follow-ups in unstructured settings. In addition, by reducing the resources used for instruction, more staff time and effort can be placed on generalization strategies and staff implementation fidelity, which are equally important but often overlooked.

Generalization. Generalization is an incredible challenge for educators, not just for bully prevention skills, but for any skills we want students to actually use outside the classroom environment. Far too often, substantial effort is made to teach students effective bully prevention strategies in the classroom followed by an expectation that those skills will generalize to unstructured settings. Defined as “...behavior change that proves durable over time, across settings, and across behaviors” (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968, p. 96), generalization rarely happens without planned programming. First, teach the skills you want students to use in the actual settings where bullying occurs. BP-PBS does this through 10-15 minute data-based follow-ups, conducted throughout the school where bullying continues to be an issue. Second, involve adults who are normally in that environment. Teachers or counselors usually deliver the initial bullying prevention instruction, but other adults (i.e. supervisors or instructional aides) are often the ones responding to reports of bullying. Cont. on page 68
Building Effective and Efficient Bully Prevention Systems within the Context of Positive Behavior Support
Therefore, it is essential that those adults be trained to a) reinforce student attempts to use new skills at a high rate, b) practice skills with students on a regular basis, and c) use a universal review and resolve routine for responding to student reports of problem behavior.

**Staff implementation fidelity.** The effectiveness of bully prevention efforts are entirely contingent on the above generalization strategies being implemented by adults. In fact, it is so important that simply expecting them to follow-through is not enough. SWPBIS teams should lead this effort by providing ongoing collaboration and coaching with staff that supervise unstructured settings. In addition, SWPBIS teams should collect ongoing implementation data, which can be done through weekly surveys or daily checklists filled out by supervising staff. Example questions on the forms can include how many times staff a) practice with students, b) deliver reinforcers for students attempting new skills, c) deal with reports of problem behavior, and d) deliver office discipline referrals for continued problem behavior. When implemented with fidelity, the combination of SWPBIS systems, simple bystander response skills, and effective generalization strategies can have an enormous impact on problem behavior in schools. In an empirical trial across three elementary schools, Ross and Horner (2009) observed a 72% reduction in physical and verbal aggression after the intervention was delivered. In addition, other students on the playground were substantially more likely to respond appropriately (less likely to reinforce) when they experienced problem behavior.

**Individualized Supports**

Finally, school-wide systems and effective bystander strategies may not be enough for all students. Successful approaches to bullying prevention should also include individualized, functionally-related interventions for students not responding to previous efforts. Many pre-packaged programs provide interventions for these students, but they are often standardized and not based on the specific reasons for their lack of response. Specifically, there are three common reasons students do not respond to initial bully prevention efforts: a) they have not acquired, mastered, or generalized the pro-social skills necessary for effective behavior change, b) they continue to be reinforced by a small group of peers, or c) their problem behavior is maintained by a function other than peer attention.

The first problem can be addressed through additional pro-social skills instruction for the given student. Assessment (e.g. teacher ratings, direct observation) should be conducted to evaluate externalizing as well as internalizing issues that still need to be addressed. Instructional objectives, lesson plans, generalization strategies, and progress monitoring can then be developed accordingly.

The response to the second problem can be similar to the first but with extra consideration of the specific peers involved. In many cases certain peers fail to effectively respond to bullying and continue to reinforce it because they fear losing their friendships or popularity. For these peers, it is essential to practice pro-social skills with the perpetrator or victim, both in the classroom as well as in applicable settings. Here it is critical to consider group size and delivery type. Instruction can be delivered one-on-one, in dyads, or in small groups, depending on the resources available and the type of peer interactions typically occurring. For example, some perpetrators or victims will benefit most from practicing pro-social skills with one preferred peer. Others may benefit more from a small group of socially appropriate peers. Just be careful to avoid grouping together deviant peers as this may lead to increased peer attention for problem behavior (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999). Also, shorter lessons conducted on a more frequent basis, with specific objectives, assignments, practice in applicable settings, and numerous opportunities for feedback will be ideal for many students.

The third problem, behavior maintained by a function other than peer attention, cannot be effectively addressed through peer-based interventions. For example, some students will engage in continued aggression after the intervention was delivered. In addition, other students on the playground were substantially more likely to respond appropriately (less likely to reinforce) when they experienced problem behavior.

**In Conclusion**

Schools that hope to sustainably prevent and reduce bullying despite constant demographic, administrative, and budgetary changes must learn to approach the problem systematically. They must move away from the common practice of purchasing/implementing what sounds good, looks good, or feels good, and instead approach bullying as they approach RtI: by providing high-quality interventions matched to student need. The strategies described in this article can help schools develop a positive climate, specific skills for bystanders, and effective interventions for individual students. But even with these in place, a few students may require even more intensive assessment and intervention. Functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plans, and additional resources may be necessary for these students, the details of which extent beyond the limitations of this article. But by addressing bullying universally through SWPBIS, then teaching bystanders how intervene, and finally providing a menu of interventions for students not responding, the number of students requiring the highest levels of support will be greatly reduced. Clearly, future research is warranted to add and expand the current knowledge base around effective bully prevention. Specifically, detailed and controlled studies are needed to both isolate essential features as well as evaluate effectiveness across diverse school populations.

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To be effective in supporting all students, schools need to implement a continuum of positive behavior support, from less intensive to more intensive, based on the severity of the problem behavior students exhibit. This continuum of support includes Tier 1 prevention strategies such as implementing school-wide positive behavior support (SW-PBS), Tier 2 prevention/intervention strategies to target the 10-15% of students at-risk, and Tier 3 prevention strategies for approximately 5% of the student population who need intensive intervention. Many schools in Utah and across the country have been successful in implementing SW-PBS, which has led to reductions in office discipline referrals and increases in academic engaged time. The next step in preventing problem behavior involves implementing efficient and effective Tier 2 interventions for students who are at-risk but not currently engaging in severe problem behavior. In this article we will provide an overview of one type of Tier 2 intervention called the Behavior Education Program or BEP.

**Behavior Education Program (BEP)**

The BEP, also referred to as Check-in, Check-out (CICO), is implemented with students who are just beginning to engage in problem behavior. The BEP process involves the following five elements: First, students “check in” daily with a paraprofessional before school (See Figure 1). The paraprofessional provides the student with a Daily Progress Report (DPR) form (see Figures 2 & 3 for sample DPRs), similar to a behavior contract, which is carried to class for feedback throughout the day. When students check in, they are asked if they have their DPR signed from their parents from the day before and if they have their materials to be ready for the school day. They receive praise and a lottery ticket for a weekly drawing for checking in. Also during check-in, students are asked to identify daily goals and are given feedback to encourage success. For some of the younger students the DPR is delivered to them in their classrooms by the paraprofessional.

Second, during natural transitions in the school day (i.e., after language arts, after math, etc.), teachers provide students with feedback on their DPR. Teachers provide feedback on student behavior at the end of each time period by rating either “0” did not meet expectations, “1” somewhat met expectations, or “2” met expectations. The expectations for all students on the BEP are the same as the school-wide expectations such as (a) keep hands, feet and objects to self, (b) use kind words and actions, (c) follow directions, and (d) work completion. Teachers also provide immediate verbal praise for students who meet behavioral expectations for that time period and corrective feedback if students do not meet the expectations.

Third, at the end of the school day, students take the DPR to the paraprofessional to “check out.” Percentage of points for
The Behavior Education Program (BEP): A Tier 2 Check-in, Check-out Intervention to Prevent Severe Problem Behavior in Schools

The percentage of points earned by each student is summarized daily or weekly by the BEP Coordinator. A targeted systems team, which is usually a subset of the school-wide behavior support team, meets bi-monthly to examine student progress on the intervention. During these meetings, the targeted systems team examines student progress data to determine whether or not to continue the student on the intervention, make modifications, or begin fading the intervention. The primary reason for the targeted systems team to convene at least bi-monthly, is to be able to make timely decisions regarding student response to the BEP intervention.

Research on the Behavior Education Program

Over the past 10 years there has been an increase in the number of studies that have evaluated the impact of the BEP. The BEP has been found to be effective in reducing problem behavior with elementary school students (e.g., Bergman, 2010; Cheney et al., 2009; Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, & Lathrop, 2007; Filter et al., 2007; Hawken, O’Neill, & MacLeod, 2011; Hawken, MacLeod, & Rawlings, 2007; McCurdy, 2007; Cheney, Lynass, Flower, Waugh, Iwaszuk, Mielenz, & Hawken, 2010; Todd, Kaufman, Meyer, & Horner, 2007),

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middle school students (Hawken, 2006; Hawken & Horner, 2003; Lane, Capizzi, Fisher & Ennis, 2012; March & Horner, 2002), and high school students (Swain-Bradway, 2009). In addition, studies have documented increases in academic engagement (e.g., Campbell & Anderson, 2011; Hawken & Horner, 2003; Swain-Bradway, 2009) and reductions in referrals for Tier 3 support and special education. (Cheney, et al., 2010; Hawken, MacLeod, & Rawlings, 2007).

A recent review of the literature found that across group (i.e., experimental and quasi-experimental) and single subject studies, the overall effectiveness rate of the BEP intervention was 75% (Hawken, O’Keeffe, Bundock, 2012). Effectiveness across studies was documented using a variety of dependent measures including direct observation, office discipline referrals (ODRs), and percentage of points on Daily Progress Reports. Overall, BEP was found to be more effective in reducing problem behavior in elementary than in middle school settings (Hawken et al, 2012).

Increasing Sustainability of the Behavior Education Program

One of the most common obstacles of sustaining the BEP is the ability for schools to dedicate personnel time to the daily process of checking students in and out of the program. Depending on school size and resources, each BEP coordinator can support up to 15-20 students in elementary school and from 20-30 students in secondary settings (Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2010). For many schools, this is a very small percentage of their student population. For example, for a middle school with 600 students, if only 30 students are able to receive the BEP intervention, this is only 5% of the student population. It’s anticipated that 10-15% of the student population will benefit from Tier 2 behavior support.

To increase the number of students who can receive the BEP intervention, many schools and districts are using a model that involves multiple people in the school building serving as BEP facilitators (e.g., http://www.pbisillinois.org/). The BEP facilitators are school staff (e.g., teachers, librarians, custodians) who agree to check-in and check-out 1-5 students every day. In addition, the school assigns one person to serve as the BEP coordinator who is responsible for organizing the intervention, graphing daily data from the DPR and sharing data with targeted systems team. Schools and districts who use the model of multiple BEP facilitators have been able to support between 10-13% of their student population with the BEP and have seen improvement in their overall positive behavior school climate (Hawken, Bundock, Eber, Breen & Phillips, 2013).

Another way to ensure the sustainability of the BEP is to solicit feedback regarding the acceptability of the BEP intervention from students, parents, and teachers. Encouraging the collaboration between schools and families, through the promotion of communication links, is essential in order to increase the likelihood of student success with the intervention.

In summary, the BEP is an efficient and effective Tier 2 intervention that can be implemented school-wide to prevent students from engaging in severe problem behavior. If your school or district is interested in implementing the BEP, see resources listed below.

References & Resources for Implementing the Behavior Education Program

E-mail: Leanne.hawken@utah.edu for an invitation to a Dropbox folder of BEP materials.


An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14004 or by scanning this QR code.
The most challenging group of students within a school setting represents 5-7% of a school’s population. These students exhibit chronic disruptive or dangerous behavior across both home and school settings. As a means for coping, adults often become optimistic in thinking the student will grow out of these behaviors only to discover they are quite stable over time. The reality is that these students will require a more systematic, intensive and precision oriented approach to assessment and intervention. The earlier these students are identified and their needs are systematically addressed, the better the outcome.

Earlier in the year, I had the opportunity to visit with a team of teachers and a third grade student named Kyle. When I first met Kyle, he was climbing onto filing cabinets and pulling down ceiling tiles. For the last two years, he has been in and out of treatment facilities due to his aggressive behavior at home and at school. At school, Kyle’s aggressive behavior was usually directed toward staff in the form of hitting, kicking, spitting, throwing objects and running from school. Needless to say, the team needed an individualized Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) that matched the intensity of the positive instructional interventions to the frequency and intensity of the problem behavior.

Prerequisites for Behavior Intervention Plans

In order to develop an effective BIP for Kyle, the school team conducted a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) on the problem behavior. Through the FBA process, the team discovered that there were specific triggers for problem behavior as well as times of the day when the problem behavior was more likely to occur. They learned that anytime that Kyle was asked to complete a task that required a high demand for writing, he would put his head down on the table. Staff would redirect him back to work and Kyle
would further resist by throwing his materials or spitting. For safety concerns, staff would remove him to another classroom. During this time, Kyle’s behavior escalated to hitting, kicking and running from school. The team hypothesized that Kyle’s aggressive behavior allowed him to escape the academic writing tasks and the school setting. Equipped with this information, the team developed an individualized behavior plan that involved the systematic and intensive instruction of replacement behaviors and a differential reinforcement schedule that matched the frequency and intensity of the problem behavior.

The team identified two replacement behaviors that they wanted Kyle to use rather than becoming frustrated and aggressive to escape and avoid writing tasks. The purpose of the replacement behavior is to serve the same purpose as the problem behavior. The two replacement behaviors they identified for Kyle were asking for help or asking for a break in Mr. O’Neil’s classroom. Since Kyle engaged in a variety of problem behaviors to escape from writing tasks, asking for help or going to Mr. O’Neil’s classroom were better alternatives.

The frequency and intensity of teaching and reinforcing replacement behaviors should match the severity of the problem behavior. The goal here is for the student to become fluent with the new skill so that it replaces the need to engage in the problem behavior. Kyle began receiving daily social skills instruction and frequent teaching interactions for recognizing when he is frustrated, asking for help, and requesting to go to Mr. O’Neil’s classroom. Staff began teaching Kyle these new skills by providing multiple practice opportunities throughout the day during a neutral time. During the second week of intervention, practice opportunities occurred during writing tasks. 100% of practice opportunities were reinforced by providing additional assistance or allowing him to go to Mr. O’Neil’s classroom. In addition, he also earned 1 minute for each occurrence of a replacement behavior instead of engaging in problem behavior. Later in the day, Kyle could trade his minutes for playing time on an IPAD.

Matching the intensity of the intervention to the frequency and intensity of the problem behavior also requires the utilization of various differential reinforcement strategies and schedules of reinforcement. There are a variety of differential reinforcement strategies. For Kyle, the team wanted to reduce the frustration of the writing tasks while at the same time gradually increasing the amount of his independent writing. The team decided to implement a differential reinforcement of high rates (DRH) strategy for increasing independent work during writing tasks. To implement the DRH, the team looked at his baseline data for the prior week and determined that one word per sentence would be a good initial criterion. Since he was not completing any work in the first place, one word per sentence would represent significant progress.

Once Kyle completed the sentence, he was able to bank 1 minute of time that could be used to play on the IPAD at a later time. Staff repeated this process for each additional sentence until the assignment was complete. The following week, staff increased the criteria to two words per sentence. Over time, staff systematically faded the amount of support and increased the criterion by leaving additional words within each sentence blank. If Kyle became frustrated, help was available or he could request a brief break in Mr. O’Neil’s classroom.

Prior to the intervention, Kyle was completing 0% of his assignments, the classroom was missing 7 ceiling tiles and he was spending an average of 90 minutes a day hitting, kicking, spitting and running from staff. I recently had a chance to visit with Kyle’s teachers about his progress. As a result of the plan put into place by his teachers, and at the time of writing this article there are 0 new missing ceiling tiles and it’s been 2 months since Kyle had an incident of physical aggression. He requests to go to Mr. O’Neil’s class for a break about 2 times a week for approximately 15 minutes in duration. He completes 78% of his writing assignments independently and asks for help when he gets frustrated.

In an attempt to address challenging behavior, students like Kyle are often exposed to high levels of punishment. As a result, many of these students become immune to the effects of punishment and prefer to engage in additional problem behavior to be sent home or they run from school. In order to adequately address challenging behavior, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on the role of teaching alternative behaviors and utilizing a variety of reinforcement strategies.

This article mentions a few of the critical components of an effective behavior intervention plan. Additional critical components should also be taken into consideration, such as extinction procedures, staff training, monitoring intervention fidelity, progress monitoring, interagency and parent collaboration, and a crisis/emergency plan.

For Additional Information See the Attached Links

FBA: http://www.updc.org/behavior/
BIP: http://www.updc.org/behavior/
Differential Reinforcement:
http://www.iseeams.com/teachall/text/behavior/LRBI.htm
Schedules of Reinforcement:
Tier 3 Behavioral Interventions:

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Closing the Behavior and Achievement Gap and Scaling up with MTSS

Experience and Recommendations from Implementing School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports in Oak Grove School District, San Jose, California

Oak Grove School District has a total student enrollment of 11,523 from grades K-8. There are 16 elementary schools and 3 intermediate schools. Four out of nineteen schools receive Title I funds: The size of the school ranges from the highest (905) student enrollment to the lowest (440) student enrollment. About 20% of the district’s students are white (not Hispanic), 47% are Hispanic, 20% are Asian or Pacific Islander, 6% are African American while 8% are in other categories including biracial. The percentage of English Learners is 27% representing 60 languages spoken in the district. Forty-seven percent of the students qualify for the free and reduced-price school lunch. Eleven percent of the students receive special education services.

This district has a total of 575 teachers and 92 paraprofessionals. Teacher certification data from the 2011-12 indicate all teachers are fully credentialed, properly placed, and highly qualified. Further, 100% of the paraprofessionals meet the NCLB requirements.

During the 2010-2011 school year, eight elementary schools in Oak Grove School District that were ready to participate in Year 1 of PBIS training and beginning implementation each elected a team of 4-7 individuals to receive training on PBIS. The teams consisted of an administrator, a primary grade teacher, an upper grade teacher, a special education representative (school psychologist, special education teacher, resource specialist, instructional assistant, etc.), and a community member (yard duty, custodian, parent volunteer, administrative assistant, etc.). Three PBIS coaches in the district were trained along with the eight school teams in the establishment and implementation of Tier 1 supports and interventions. The eight school teams received training four times throughout the school year from Dr. Rob Horner and Dr. Chris Borgmeier. The staff members would then return to their school’s staff, leadership team, Continuous Equity Improvement Team (CEIT) to present the information from the trainings and develop a plan of action for implementation of PBIS.

Each team met on a monthly basis with their PBIS coach to establish a plan of action in the development of PBIS. The first action that the schools worked on was to establish 3 to 5 simply and positively stated school-wide behavioral expectations. The PBIS teams approached this by involving the certificated and credentialed staff members, surveying the children and families, and voting on the most widely embraced school expectations. The teams then continued to develop a teaching matrix and behavior lesson plans in order to teach the behavioral expectations to the students. These lesson plans and expectations were developed by mid school year.

The teams also established a reward and acknowledgement system to increase the likelihood of the expected behavior from both students and staff members. The PBIS teams who went through the training received background knowledge on behavioral foundations, such as using 5 positives to 1 negative word or action in order to increase the expected behaviors in their students. The teams also worked on visual displays of the expectations on posters, staff shirts, stickers and pencils, banners and murals. A discipline and referral system was established and discipline data was entered weekly by each on-site administrator. Each month, the PBIS team would analyze data (discipline data) and analyze the implementation data through the Team Implementation Checklist. By the end of the school year, each of the eight schools had established a foundation for PBIS Tier one, had begun some levels of implementation, and was ready to begin full implementation for the 2011-2012 school year.

At the start of the 2011-2012 school year, each of the eight schools taught the behavioral expectation lesson plans for the first few weeks of school. Meanwhile, the PBIS Coordinator and three PBIS coaches began Year 1 development and implementation with two new Elementary Schools. The initial eight schools also received training in Bully Proofing planning and implementation as well as in Tier 2 support with the Check-In, Check-Out system. The initial eight schools are currently working on the Check-In, Check-Out system and will launch the system during the 2012-2013 school year. The PBIS coaches and school teams have also started to present PBIS foundations and structures that can be implemented into the home-setting by presenting to parents and community members from schools that are implementing PBIS.

The “% Fully Implemented” graph shows the progression of PBIS, Tier 1 being fully implemented from October 2010 to April 2012 in the initial eight Elementary Schools. The average percent of PBIS items implemented in the eight schools in October 2010 was approximately 40%. The average percent of PBIS items implemented in the initial eight schools grew to approximately 86% by April 2012.
Sarah Freeman, Katherine Harris, Nancy Roorda and Nancy Wolf, Oak Grove School District, CA.

Using Behavior Event Data for Problem Solving

While Oak Grove has looked at academic achievement through the Cycle of Inquiry Process, the district and sites have not consistently looked at behavior events. The PBIS site staff is monthly reviewing behavior events by the average number of events per day, by location, by time. The graph entitled, Major Behavior Events by Date shows the number of behavior events that occurs each day across the district. Oak Grove on average has 20 major events across 17 schools that consistently inputs major and minor events. The average of 20 events per day divided by 17 schools is a daily average of 1.18 major events per day, per site. The national average is 2.5 major events per day, per sites with 500 students. There are 10,099 students across the seventeen sites in the information provided. Oak Grove is below the national average by 1.32 major behavior events per day.

Improvement in Academic Gains

Oak Grove School District is committed to the academic progress and success for all students. PBIS has become part of the learning environment in the Oak Grove School District, along with previous practices such as Guided Reading, English Language Development, Cycle of Inquiry, and Culturally Responsive Teaching practices in order to help students achieve academic standards. At three points throughout the year, students in grades 2nd-6th in the elementary schools are assessed on the district level benchmarks in order to determine every student’s proficiency level. The graphs below demonstrate the academic growth in the areas of English Language Arts and Math that each of our PBIS schools in Year 1 have made on the District benchmark assessments. The assessments are

Figure 2: Number of Major Behavior Events by day

Figure 3: Percentage of students scoring at Proficient or Advanced on Quarter 1 (October) English-Language Arts Benchmark Tests for grades 2-6.

Continued on page 78
given in October, January and May of each year. The graphs assess the academic growth over the year and the increase in the percent of students that have achieved proficient or advanced scores on the criterion-referenced assessments. As the data shows, the percent of students at either proficient or advanced on the academic standards increased over the course of the first year of PBIS planning and implementation.

**Improvement in Equity Measures**

Historically, there has been a discrepancy between the academic and behavioral performance of African-American and Latino males when compared to their peers of the opposite gender and peers of different ethnic backgrounds. Data from 1971 to 2008 on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) website shows that African-American and Hispanic students, particularly boys, have been behind their white peers in the areas of reading and math. Furthermore, the NCES report on high school drop out rates indicates that Hispanics have the highest high school drop out rate, followed by African-American students, and then White students. In order to create an educational system of equity and success for African-American and Hispanic students, it is essential that Culturally Responsive Teaching begin at the primary school level.

Oak Grove School District, as mentioned before, has had over a decade of training, implementation, and data analysis in the area of Closing the Achievement Gap (CTAG). PBIS provides a framework under which the district can address the learning and behavioral needs of all students, particularly African-American and Hispanic students and, more specifically, male students. All administrators in the district were trained in data implementation during the 2010-2011 school year. Data analysts at each PBIS school were also trained to disaggregate the behavior referral data by several areas, including race ethnicity. The school district is continuing to work on the data entry and analysis program, Infinite Campus, and to work on consistent data entry.

The “Discipline Referrals Graph” indicates an increase in the discipline referrals for all students for the eight PBIS schools during the 2011-2012 school year as compared to the eight non-PBIS schools. However, the “Major Discipline Events” graph indicates that the 51% of these discipline referrals from the non-PBIS schools are major events. In comparison, the eight PBIS schools only had 26% of their discipline events as major events. Any major discipline event leads to removal from instructional time in the classroom, while a minor event is quickly handled in the classroom and the teacher returns to his/her instruction. Through PBIS, each of the eight schools has established consistent and predictable rewards and consequences in order to minimize loss of instructional time due to behavioral events. Culturally Responsive Teaching strategies help to engage the African-American and Hispanic males and to reward their engagement. The implementation of PBIS, Culturally Responsive Teaching, ELD instruction, and strategies for male students have decreased the amount of major events and have increased the amount of instructional time for all students, creating an equitable educational experience.

The focus on equity and closing the achievement continues to be a focus. The behavior event data by race indicates staff refers more Hispanic and Black for major behavior events. Oak Grove believes the school system must improve to close the social and achievement gap for students of color.

**Recommendations**

PBIS is a direct fit with the District Five-Year Plan, which emphasizes Student Learning, Positive Interdependence, Quality Performance, Integrity and Respect.
In the multi-tiered approach of PBIS, ALL children have equal access to being academically and socially successful. In fact, the first tier allowed us to immediately address the needs of 80% of our students in the first year of implementation. This approach is directly aligned with the district’s commitment to equity and the adopted common core standards.

By creating consistent and common school cultures, PBIS has laid the foundation for enhanced instructional time and providing safe and positive learning environments for students and staff.

PBIS, in association with the district’s equity training, has contributed to the development of culturally responsive learning environments, emphasizing active student engagement strategies. Establishing school routines and procedures has set the stage for creating strong learning environment expectations and allowed for the implementation of supportive instructional programs, such as Collaborative Teaching.

The role of the School Psychologists as PBIS Coaches has been very instrumental to the success of the program, providing on-going support to the school staff throughout the process of implementing PBIS. Their time during a week is split 70% role of School Psychologist, and 30% PBIS Coach. Some of time the PBIS Coaches are coaching at schools where they are the school psychologist, and some of the time they are coaching PBIS teams at other sites. They find that by coaching sites toward PBIS they create a greater transition from a typical role of School Psychologist who spends all day testing students on initial, annual and triennial Individual Educational Plans (IEP). The roles of serving as both a PBIS Coach and a School Psychologist are not mutually exclusive. Rather, it is a logical blend between both roles. There is a highly beneficial and relevant correlation between what support they provide as a Coach and how they further support and implement positive behavior interventions as School Psychologists. One role directly benefits the other and this model is realistically doable and more effective in addressing the behavioral needs of students at all levels of the PBIS triangle.

Coaches have met weekly with the Educational Services director who is the PBIS coordinator to schedule, plan, and monitor the implementation of PBIS at participating schools. Coaches have been directly assigned to support schools on a monthly basis, assisting in meeting timelines for PBIS implementation. The Coaches have also participated in development of PBIS in-service trainings at each site. In addition, Coaches have provided training to noon duty aides, parents, and community members to expand the PBIS philosophy of positive behavioral expectations. Coaches have also shared PBIS strategies, such as Positive Behavior Support Plans and Functional Behavioral Analysis with district School Psychologists in addressing Tier 3 behaviors. These efforts have contributed to establishing common goals using a common language.

Coaches have been actively involved in data analysis training of school teams, supporting teams in utilizing data for decision making, and problem solving.

The Coaches have provided training to school staff and parents on PBIS Bully-Proofing. As a result, they have been able to model and reinforce the introduction of these concepts to teachers, supervisory personnel, and parents.

The district’s utilization of School Psychologists as Coaches and the direct administrative support and leadership provided by the Educational Services Director has allowed for rapid expansion of PBIS and cost effective sustainability. Effectively, this group now becomes the trainer for on-going PBIS implementation and serves to integrate PBIS with district goals.

In summary, Oak Grove School District is committed to increasing the academic results for all students, and closing the achievement gap for Latino and African American students. Through academic data, special education referral and placement data, and discipline suspension and expulsion data analysis, Oak Grove determined the need for creating safe learning environments for all students. Through Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, our schools have established social cultures that are predictable, consistent, positive and safe. We believe all students need and deserve behavior support to stay engaged in learning and meeting their potential. PBIS has already grown outside of the school culture and into the community. Parents are planning family expectations, lessons, and reward systems. Parents report that their children use the language of PBIS at home. While we have only begun implementation of PBIS, we see the gains for students, families, staff, the district, and community around us.

Oak Grove School District has a five-year plan to ensure that all sixteen elementary schools and three intermediate schools are implementing the three tiers Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports to all students. We believe this approach will improve results of all students, and close the achievement gap.

This article first appeared as a PBIS Implementation Brief, www.pbis.org

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Response to Intervention in the Identification of Learning Disabilities: Empirical Support and Future Challenges

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Response to Intervention in the Identification of Learning Disabilities: Empirical Support and Future Challenges

Authors:
Frank M. Gresham, University of California-Riverside; Amanda VanDerHeyden, University of California-Santa Barbara, and Joseph C. Witt, Louisiana State University


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The Future of a Mistake: Will Discrepancy Measurement Continue to make the Learning Disabilities Field a Pseudoscience?

Keith E. Stanovich, Ph.D., Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

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Identifying Learning Disabilities in the Context of Response to Intervention: A Hybrid Model

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Rethinking Response to Intervention at Middle and High School

Lynn S. Fuchs, Douglas Fuchs, & Donald L. Compton, Vanderbilt University
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As a mother of two boys, ages 12 and 4, I know firsthand the importance of a quality education for children. Like most parents, I want my children to view school as a positive place where they can learn and feel successful. I know that school is more than just a place to go. It is an environment for learning in which we help to mold children to become successful adults and lead us toward our future. Sadly however, not everyone views school in this same way. For children who struggle academically or behaviorally, school can be a place of challenge and in some cases even a place for failure. Fortunately, with new innovations such as the implementation of the Utah Multi-Tiered System of Supports (UMTSS) we are taking another step toward ensuring that we truly don’t leave any child behind when it comes to education. Join me as I tell you my story about how MTSS has helped me feel hopeful moving forward in education with my own child and others.

My story started out over 12 years ago when my oldest son was born. Having a child is one of the most amazing things you can do, but it is also one of the scariest. As a young mother I knew right away that something was different with my child, but I did not know why. Luckily, within months, I was able to connect with early intervention services in my local area. They did an assessment and found that my child was indeed developing differently and that he needed immediate services to address some developmental delays. Although I was concerned at what was causing the delays, I was also happy that he was getting the help he needed. Over the next three years he received many services including speech, physical therapy, occupation therapy, and social skills assistance. Around this same time I also had some private testing done, which identified that he was very gifted, but likely also had Aspergers syndrome as well an anxiety disorder.

By preschool my son had made vast improvements, but still needed some help, especially in the social emotional area. Academically he was doing really well, and was actually ahead of grade level in many academic areas. Behaviorally, however, he struggled, and we wondered if he would need special education support moving into school. At this time he was re-evaluated for special education services. They looked at both his behavioral and academic progress. I remember the eligibility meeting well, as it was a very bittersweet moment. The academic data showed that he was above grade level in almost all areas. The early intervention he received had helped, and he no longer needed special education support in these areas.

With behavior, however, it was a little different. The tests did show some issues and delays with social emotional skills, but they were not bad enough at the time to qualify for services. I understood that the team was following procedures and laws, but I could not help feeling bitter and a little angry. It seemed they were telling me, “There is a problem, but it is not yet bad enough for us to help.” It felt very much, from my perspective, like we might just be waiting for him to fail. I wanted his problems to be addressed early, and, like most parents, I was uncomfortable by the thought that he might not have the help he needed. I have to say that the team was very kind and listened to my concerns. They promised to carefully monitor him, and they also told me about 504 accommodations, should they be needed. I signed the papers but still had a bad feeling that we might be setting him up to fail.

Around this same time I also started a new job as a Parent Consultant at the Utah Parent Center. In this job I started talking to other parents who had children with special needs. I was surprised to meet many parents who, just like me, had a child that did not qualify for special education, but also who were not doing great in general education. It seemed there were kids falling through the cracks—kids who were not having their needs met. I also saw and experienced a big divide in schools between general education and special education. Special education was in charge of fixing all the kids who had issues. If they did not qualify for special education, then no one really knew what to do. I saw the heartache that parents experienced when their child was the one falling through the cracks. It seemed like an impossible problem. What would or even could change to fix this fragmented system?

Well, the good news was that change was coming. In 2004 IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) was reauthorized by Congress, and this reauthorization included something different. It introduced schools to a concept that had been around for a while, but was not always utilized, called Response to Intervention or RTI. RTI is the concept that we should help children at the lowest level possible giving them various levels of support based on need. It involved three different levels or tiers of support and involved both general education and special education teachers. The concept of RTI is truly revolutionary because it helps schools understand that when a child is struggling, it is the job of both general education and special
education to help. I saw a difference personally as I approached my child’s teachers about interventions and accommodations. They seemed more understanding and willing to do this and even came up with some of the ideas!

I’ve been to multiple trainings on RTI, and I truly believe it is a wonderful concept, but it’s not without its problems. One problem is that most districts were using RTI mostly for academics. There are many children who would benefit from both academic and behavioral tiers of support. Some schools in Utah were able to successfully implement RTI, while other districts needed additional support. Utah did not, however, really have the capacity to provide that support, and so some schools were not able to successfully implement RTI. Still, I felt hopeful that we were moving in the right direction for kids.

Fast forward to the present day, and we have something even better coming down the pipeline. Utah was recently awarded a grant to use a new model called Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). With this grant comes the chance for districts throughout the state to receive coaching, training and even some funding to help implement an MTSS model. This is very exciting to me as a parent, as it addresses two of the big issues I saw as a parent with RTI. First, it includes both academic and behavioral supports! Having these rolled into one model will help streamline things, and just makes more sense. Kids like mine will really benefit from having access to behavioral supports in the general education setting. The second benefit is that schools and districts will be getting support and training to make this happen. Change is always hard, but with this support, we have a much better chance of getting MTSS to become a state-wide model.

MTSS works by providing universal screenings for all children. These screenings look for signs of struggle. Students identified as needing support in either academics or behavior will then be given targeted interventions based on individual needs, and their response to previous interventions. Data is very important in this process, as it will help schools make data-based decisions rather than just guessing what a student needs. Any student who struggles regardless of his or her label or disability will be able to get help. This means that ALL children can benefit from MTSS. General education and special education can work together to put in place research-based interventions. Schools will continually be looking at student data to identify new students that need help as well as to evaluate the effect of current interventions.

Some parents have asked questions about MTSS like, “How will this affect special education?” The good news is that special education will still be there for the kids who need it. Parents and educators will still be able to request an evaluation for special education if needed at any time during the MTSS process. Under MTSS it may even be possible for a child to be receiving IEP services and also be getting some tiered supports in the general education setting. The bottom line is that MTSS will benefit ALL children. I believe that this process will also greatly improve communication between all educators and create a belief that it is everyone’s job to help educate a child.

Looking forward, I feel hopeful as a parent. Of course I know it won’t be perfect, but I am excited to see the progress. I hope fewer parents have to feel that their children are falling through the cracks as I once did. Hopefully more and more parents will notice the changing role of general education teachers and appreciate that they are there for all of our children. My hope is that MTSS will be a great new start for education in Utah and will be a helpful model for years to come. The journey is just beginning, but I look forward to it with my own children and for the children of the families with whom I work.

For more information on MTSS please visit www.utahparentcenter.org or call the Utah Parent Center at 801-272-1051 to speak to a consultant!

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14011 or by scanning this QR code.
Utah has been ahead of the curve in providing instruction in grade-level literacy to students with intellectual disabilities. While this instruction has received attention with publication of the Utah Common Core Essential Elements and Range of Complexity Examples this fall, Utah special educators have been including this in their classrooms for three years. Many Utah districts, including Granite, Salt Lake, Jordan, Cache, and Weber have begun using evidence-based strategies to teach the grade-level literature suggested in Appendix B of the Utah Core State Standards. While only a few years ago age-appropriate literacy was out of reach for our upper elementary and secondary teachers, we now have students experiencing literature such as:


Teaching grade level literature to all students lines up well with Utah Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (UMTSS) and its emphasis on implementing “evidence-based instruction and intervention to support the Utah Core.” Indeed, it is only through the use of evidence-based instructional practices and universal design for learning that educators are able to help students with the most challenging disabilities access and make progress in grade-level literature. To accomplish this, educators have adopted a dual approach to teaching reading. It consists of systemic and sequential reading lessons at the student’s instructional level and “read-alouds” of grade-level text or adapted grade-level text. Frequently, other IEP goals, such as communication or social skills goals are embedded into the story-based instruction. Many researchers, including Diane Browder, Shawnee Wakeman, and Melissa Hudson have given us guidance in this area (Teaching Exceptional Children, Vol.45, 2013). The book, Literacy Beyond Picture Books, Teaching Secondary Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities by Dorothy Smith, Jill DeMarco and Martha Worley and Teaching Students with Moderate and Severe Disabilities by Diane Browder and Fred Spooner may also be valuable resources. Using such strategies Utah teachers have been able to bring the enjoyment and benefits of reading literature to students with intellectual disabilities, including students who are placed in special schools.

When instruction is carefully planned and adapted and student progress is monitored, students with more significant challenges show an ability to comprehend and connect with grade-level curriculum. It has been an exciting development for both students and educators.

Some of the strategies used to teach grade-level literature include:

1. Adapt the text
2. Scaffold comprehension
3. Provide different means of responding
4. Provide writing opportunities

1. Adapt the Text
Adapt original text
- Provide direct instruction on critical vocabulary (fig. 1)
- Insert a repeated line

Provide media and picture support
Physically alter the book
Highlight title, author, etc.
Use separators or magnets to make pages easier to turn
Instruct with a lower Lexile version of the text
Start-to-Finish™ books by Don Johnson
High interest, low readability classics
Tar Heel Reader summaries

(NOTE: Remember when adapting the text, be sure to follow copyright and district guidelines. If each student has an adapted version you will want to have a published copy for each student also.)

2. Scaffold Comprehension
Videos of the book
Show the video before reading the book
Show one chapter or segment of the video before reading that chapter or segment
Compare and contrast different video versions (e.g., A Christmas Carol)

(NOTE: Use videos in compliance with district guidelines)
Pictures (these can also be “still shots” of the video)
Symbols
Objects (fig.2)
Graphic organizers (e.g., Venn diagrams)
Pre-teach important vocabulary
Write in the antecedents to pronouns
Provide multiple reading of the text for different purposes
Use a consistent routine
Reenact scenes from the text
Provide extension activities such as
A treasure hunt for Peter Pan
Math activities for Gift of the Magi (figs. 3 and 4)
A visit from the fire department to show hatchet use for Hatchet
A sleigh ride for How the Grinch Stole Christmas
A ping-pong game for A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving

3. Response Options
Choral responding
Pointing to symbols
Gestures or signs
Partner-assisted scanning
Performing an “action” whenever the teacher reads a predetermined vocabulary word
Eye gaze systems
Switches
Augmentative alternative communication systems with core vocabulary (fig.5)

4. Provide Writing Opportunities
Journal activities including:
- Vocabulary activities (Fig 6)
- Sequencing activities (fig. 7)
Sentence strips that are cut apart and re-assembled (Fig 8)
Class summary of the chapter
Class summary of the extension activity
Collaborative writing with a peer by selecting images from the internet
MTSS: Supporting Grade-Level Literacy for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Cathy Longstroth, UPDC (Utah Personnel Development Center), Barbara Hegland, Granite District; & Julianna Woodbury, Weber District

The overwhelming response of teachers who have used grade-level literacy is that individuals with moderate and significant intellectual disabilities are capable of understanding much more than we may have previously thought. Data collected in one school made it clear that students can remember story elements and details. By incorporating content from the Essential Elements of the Utah Common Core and using evidence-based strategies, teachers are providing language-rich and concept-rich instruction to their students.

To assist Utah educators in expanding the use of grade-level literature, we have established a link on the UPDC Grade-Level Literacy website (link) for lesson plans, extension ideas, visual supports, and reviews of grade-level texts for their suitability for students with disabilities. Please contact cathyl@updc.org to submit resources to this site.

Tar Heel Reader
http://tarheelreader.org/category/books/

Essential Elements

UDL (Universal Design for Learning)
http://www.udlcenter.org/implementation/examples

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In almost all arenas of human interaction, our perspectives change as our knowledge base expands. As the general public becomes more educated about Asperger Syndrome (AS), what were once thought of as “challenges” related to the diagnosis are now commonly considered strengths.

One feature routinely associated with Asperger Syndrome (AS) is an intense focus on a topic of interest, sometimes to the exclusion of most or all other interests. While this can appear to tilt toward the obsessive in nature, the net effect is that a person with this level of ardent attention can spend long periods of time researching and analyzing information related to a specific endeavor. This may come in handy, say, the fields of medicine, engineering, astronomy, physics, information technology, math, history, psychology, writing, or really, any other vocation. The ability to concentrate without being diverted by other less compelling pursuits is the ability to devote oneself to pure and undiluted study. When supported with training, discipline, and routine, this is a skill to be sought after in our distraction saturated world.

Educators wield vast power to parley this ability and other strengths of students with Asperger Syndrome into tools for relationships, college, jobs, and numerous other life activities. We can begin with the intention of creating a school environment for kids with AS that is (1) less anxiety ridden, and thus less aversive, and (2) more structured for channeling interests and energies toward productive ends.

The following strategies will help to create this type of classroom environment. They are simple to implement, yet often yield quick and significant results.

Avert arguments with delayed discussion (“discuss later” option)

This strategy helps to get kids “un-stuck,” or to stop perseverating on an issue after a disagreement.

The student or the entire class is provided with a process for scheduling a discussion with the teacher when there is a disagreement, and the conversation is postponed. The teacher sets aside a brief fixed period (e.g., the last ten minutes of the school day, the ten minutes immediately following the end of the school day) so that students may schedule appointments for problem solving. This assures kids that they will be heard and as a result, often decreases anxiety. The discussion periods are limited to a few minutes and the discussion is structured with scripted questions. The process is taught ahead of time and involves the following three steps for students:

1. Write name and appointment time on appointment card and place it in a designated container; cross out the time slot on a posted discussion schedule to indicate that the slot is filled.
2. Meet with the teacher at the allocated time.
3. Calmly discuss the issue and think of alternative solutions if the problem arises again.

Teach a skill for handling changes in routine (and prepare students for changes ahead of time, whenever possible).

Rehearsing this skill for a few minutes each day when the student is calm will help to establish the steps to follow when unexpected changes occur.

Provide written or picture schedules for the school day and for specific activities

Develop an individual student schedule to be kept at the student’s desk or in a folder. Teach the student to check it at regular intervals.
and to cross off or remove completed activities. Revise the schedule ahead of time for any anticipated changes in routine.

**Rethink the requirements for written work; re-evaluate what is needed for a student to demonstrate mastery of a concept**

This study will change your mind about handwriting forever! Important neurological research related to motor function in students with ASD [http://brain.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/awp088](http://brain.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/awp088)

- Decrease requirements for written work production.
- Establish a flexible approach to the amount of homework required (are there alternative methods of practice?).
- Allow keyboarding for completing assignments whenever possible.

**Conduct a brief sensory inventory with parent and student**

Ask parents and students if there are any identified sensory issues that cause anxiety or are an impediment to school function.

Sample questions:

- Is the student sensitive to noise (hallways, lunchroom, class choral responding, overhead projector fan, etc.)?
- Is the student sensitive to bright lights or fluorescent lights?
- Is the student aversely affected by strong smells (glue, paint, cleaning supplies, etc.)?

Include other questions as discussion warrants.

**Establish time and place rules for topics of interest**

This helps kids to self-regulate discussion of preferred topics, so that they take place at appropriate times and are channeled into productive work. For example, a student may discuss the topic during lunch, after school, with designated school or community mentors, at school club meetings, while working on specific projects, etc. They may not discuss the topic during teacher instruction or independent seatwork time. This also helps to decrease the rate of classroom disruption and subsequent negative consequences.

**Teach exceptions to the rules as part of the rules**

Include common exceptions within the framework of classroom rules to minimize confusion about classroom procedures and to decrease ‘rules-policing’ behaviors.

**Class Rules (and sample exceptions)**

1. Follow teacher directions
   - *Exception(s):* Students may leave seat to get a drink or sharpen pencil without asking, during independent seatwork periods
2. Stay in your seat
3. Raise your hand to talk
   - *Exception(s):* Students may answer without raising hands when teacher gives a signal for the whole class to respond
4. Keep hands, feet, and objects to self
5. Do your work; stay focused on task or teacher

**Teach social skills with an approved curriculum**

Provide social skills training as a means to replace inappropriate behavior and to promote pro-social behaviors in the areas of classroom skills, friendship-building skills, coping skills, conversations skills, job skills, etc.

Recommended social skills curricula with author names:

- *Skillstreaming* – 3 age levels (Arnold Goldstein)
- *Superheroes Social Skills: A Multimedia Program* (Jenson, Bowen, Clark, Block, Gabrielson, Hood, Springer, Radley)
- *Navigating the Social World* (Jeanette McAffee)
- *Social Skills Training; Social Skills Picture Book* (elementary and secondary levels); *Preparing for Life* (Jed Baker)
- *Social Stories* (Carol Gray)

Melisa Genaux, staff trainer and consultant, and the author of *Asperger Strength: How to Best Help Kids with Asperger Syndrome to Thrive*—[www.aspergerstrength.com](http://www.aspergerstrength.com)

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: [http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14014](http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14014) or by scanning this QR code.
Differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students is a huge task for every teacher, but in the self-contained classrooms in Granite School District, it can seem nearly impossible. Self-contained teachers are faced with the task of delivering instruction on a variety of grade levels within the same classroom, while at the same time meeting the needs of each student at their instructional levels. In addition to the emphasis placed on academics, teachers in these classrooms must have a heightened awareness of the emotional, physical, and social needs of each student and also stay focused on the end goal of moving the student to the general education classroom with their same-aged peers.

Granite School District has made the bold move of adopting one math curriculum to be used with all elementary students with both the general and special education populations. This is a paradigm shift over the past twenty years. Typically, there has been a primary curriculum used in the general education setting with supplementary materials being used in the special education setting; often these materials did not generalize for students because they had a different format and instructional method.

The adoption of the new curriculum has been an exciting change and has helped the special education students in Granite School District to have greater access to the general education Core and to make connections between the information learned in their various settings. It also provided the opportunity to enhance the services for students in the district’s self-contained classrooms. With the goal of having these students mainstreamed in the general education classroom, the self-contained unit teachers were asked by district personnel to collaborate with the general education teachers within their buildings to provide students the opportunity to join their same-age peers in the general education classrooms during the whole-group math block. The idea was to send a small group of students with a paraeducator to a general education class to receive instruction on grade level. While the general education teacher would deliver the instruction,
the paraeducator would be there to provide necessary support for the special education students, both academically and behaviorally. Following the 30-minute whole group instruction, the students would return to their classrooms for math interventions on their instructional level provided by either the special education teacher or paraeducator through small group instruction.

Some teachers were hesitant to try this new service pattern because it was so different from what the teachers and their students had experienced. Those teachers who have tried this change have seen a drastic change in their students, and the change has been nothing but positive. Students are feeling more successful and are much more widely accepted by their non-disabled peers. They feel more successful during math class, which is evidenced by their increasing test scores, and they have more confidence in their abilities. Two teachers and their classes exemplify this positive change and we celebrate their achievements.

Crista Holt, upper grade SEL (social-emotional learning) teacher at Westbrook Elementary is a first-year self-contained teacher in Granite School District, who spent the first four years of her teaching career as a fourth grade teacher in general education. Crista has implemented the District’s vision for her students and has nearly every student mainstreamed for a portion of the day. Her students have shown such a high level of growth that some have even been fully mainstreamed for all subjects. She has had two students return to a general education classroom in their neighborhood schools already this school year. Crista feels that in order for her students to make progress on grade level and to work toward achieving their individual IEP goals, they must have access to both the general curriculum and to the instruction that she provides on their instructional level. With 4 different grade levels and 12 different instructional levels, the task of meeting the needs of each of her students can seem daunting, but with the help of her general education colleagues, she has been able to provide her students with the educational experiences that they deserve.

Dana Okerlund, lower grade SEL teacher at West Valley Elementary has seen similar successes with her students. All of her students are participating in their grade level whole-group math instruction in various general education classrooms. Each group of students is joined by a paraeducator who monitors the students’ behavior and learning while the general education teacher delivers the instruction. Continued on page 100
Dana has been thrilled with the acceptance that she as a teacher has received from her colleagues and even more excited about the way that her students have become a valued part of the classroom and school communities. The general education teachers that have opened their doors to Dana’s students have been equally delighted with the results. They have seen true compassion and camaraderie develop in their classrooms. Students in both the self-contained classroom and the general education classrooms are developing lifelong character traits that cannot be taught, but must be learned through experience.

Along with the life lessons learned, there is no argument that students in these classrooms are also making outstanding progress in mathematics this year. Looking at grade level benchmark assessment data not only shows the growth, but also proves the effectiveness of this service model. Every student’s score has had marked improvement from the pre-test to the post-test; some have doubled and tripled their scores, while others have seen an increase of 40% or more. The students take an active role in charting their own scores, which allows them to visually see their improvement. The children feel successful and they are taking ownership of their own learning and they have a more positive attitude toward math.

We applaud the effort of the teachers in self-contained classrooms in Granite School District and pay special tribute to these two stellar teachers who have taken an active role in giving their students the opportunity to work with their same-aged general education peers. The outcome has been truly amazing in more ways than anticipated!

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Recognition and Response: An Early Intervening System for Young Children At-Risk for Learning Disabilities

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Some young children show signs that they may not be learning in an expected manner, even before they begin kindergarten. These children may exhibit problems in areas such as language development, phonological awareness, perceptual-motor abilities, and attention, which have been considered precursors of learning disabilities in older children. However, under current state and federal guidelines, these children are unlikely to meet eligibility criteria for having a learning disability. This is because formal identification of a child’s learning disability generally does not occur until there is a measurable discrepancy between the child’s aptitude and academic achievement, often not until the second or third grade.

This document describes what is known about an early intervening system being developed for young children (i.e., 3 to 5 year-olds), called Recognition and Response. The Recognition and Response system is an emerging early childhood practice designed to help parents and teachers respond to learning difficulties in young children who may be at risk for learning disabilities as early as possible, beginning at age 3 or 4, before they experience school failure and before they are referred for formal evaluation and possible placement in special education. Support for the Recognition and Response system can be found in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and in the Response to Intervention (RTI) model for school-age children.

The Origins of Recognition and Response in Response to Intervention (RTI)

The Response to Intervention (RTI) model for school-age children who are at-risk for learning disabilities emphasizes pre-referral prevention and intervention. RTI can be distinguished from traditional methods of identifying learning disabilities in that it allows early and intensive interventions based on learning characteristics and does not wait for children to fail before providing necessary services and supports. The major premise of RTI is that early intervening services can both prevent academic problems for many students who experience learning difficulties and determine which students actually have learning disabilities, as distinct from those whose underachievement can be attributed to other factors such as inadequate instruction.

Although several variations of the model have been proposed, in general RTI is based upon three components: (a) the use of multiple tiers of increasingly intense interventions; (b) a problem-solving approach to identify and evaluate instructional strategies; and (c) an integrated data collection and assessment system to monitor student progress and guide decisions at every level. In recent years, a standard treatment protocol—the use of a particular research-based intervention for a small group of children with similar needs—has emerged as an additional RTI practice.

Continued on page 102
Critical Contexts in the Early Childhood Field

Several critical contexts in the early childhood field have caused national attention to be focused on early education issues and have helped to influence attitudes about the importance of services for very young children and their families: (a) the emphasis on high quality care and education, (b) the school readiness movement, (c) the national pre-kindergarten movement, and (d) the importance of prevention and early intervention. Each of these contexts reflects important factors that must be considered in developing an early intervening system for young children prior to beginning kindergarten.

Establishing an Evidence Base for the Recognition and Response System

The conceptual framework for the Recognition and Response system is being developed with grant support from the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation (http://www.tremainefoundation.org) through a collaborative effort that involves the FPG Child Development Institute, The National Center for Learning Disabilities, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Communication Consortium Media Center, and key state partners. The work is being accomplished through two primary activities: (1) a comprehensive review of the literature to produce a research synthesis on RTI and (2) a series of focused discussions with the collaborating organizations and partners to develop a conceptual framework for the Recognition and Response system adapted from the RTI model.

Research Synthesis on RTI

A total of 14 studies met the selection criteria for inclusion in the review and served as the current research base regarding the efficacy of RTI. Analyses included an appraisal of the quality of research methods as well as descriptions of the characteristics of study participants, the nature of the interventions, and methods of assessing student progress and outcomes. The findings suggest that there is an emerging body of empirical evidence to support claims that RTI is an effective method for identifying children at risk for learning difficulties and for providing specialized interventions, either to ameliorate or to prevent the occurrence of learning disabilities. Although there was general agreement across studies about the conceptualization of RTI in terms of its key components and tiered implementation, there was less agreement about the nature and focus of specialized interventions, the duration or intensity of the interventions, and the benchmarks used to determine when more intensive interventions were needed for individual children. Despite these limitations, the research synthesis findings suggest that RTI is a promising approach, particularly because of its focus on sound instructional principles such as effectively teaching all children, intervening early, using research-based interventions, monitoring student progress, and using assessments to inform instructional decision-making.

A Conceptual Framework for the Recognition and Response System

The proposed Recognition and Response system is based on the premise that parents and teachers can learn to recognize critical early warning signs that a young child may not be learning in an expected manner and to respond in ways that positively affect a child’s early school success. In the Recognition and Response system, there is limited reliance on formal diagnosis and labeling. Instead, the Recognition and Response system emphasizes a systematic approach to responding to early learning difficulties that includes assessing the overall quality of early learning experiences for all children and making program modifications, tailoring instructional strategies, and providing appropriate supports for individual children who struggle to learn.

The Recognition and Response system includes four essential components: (1) an intervention hierarchy; (2) screening, assessment, and progress monitoring; (3) research-based curriculum, instruction, and focused interventions; and (4) a collaborative problem-solving process for decision-making. Future efforts should focus on further developing and evaluating each component as part of an integrated system, particularly with respect to identifying the specific assessment and instructional strategies within each of the tiers in the intervention hierarchy. Figure A below, shows the four components of the Recognition and Response system.

![Intervention Hierarchy](image)

**Intervention Hierarchy.**

An intervention hierarchy reflects increasing levels of intensity of instruction and intervention that correspond directly to children’s needs for support. A teacher’s decision to move from one tier to the next is guided by screening and assessment information as part of a systematic and collaborative problem-solving process that includes parents and specialists.

**Screening, Assessment, and Progress Monitoring.**

An integrated assessment plan that relies on multiple methods and sources of information (e.g., observation, checklists, work sampling, curriculum-based assessments) can be used to determine which children are meeting key benchmarks, which children are in the process of developing these skills, and which children are not making adequate progress.
Research-Based Curriculum, Instruction, and Focused Interventions.

The overarching goal of the Recognition and Response System is for teachers to use assessment as part of an integrated instructional system to make improvements in the general early childhood program and to plan focused interventions for children who require additional supports. Future efforts should focus on identifying standard research-based interventions that would comprise a “toolkit” from which teachers could extract specific practices to respond to individual learning characteristics within each tier of an intervention hierarchy.


Key to the problem-solving process is the use of assessments to inform decisions, thus, creating a dynamic link between the recognition and response components. The problem-solving process is collaborative, systematic, and used by teachers, parents, and specialists to make decisions about practice and to evaluate their effectiveness for individual children.

Recommendations for the Early Childhood Field

The following recommendations address the need to support future development, evaluation, and adoption of the Recognition and Response system:

1. Further develop the Recognition and Response system by (a) specifying in more detail each of the four components (i.e., an intervention hierarchy; screening, assessment, and progress monitoring; research-based curriculum, instruction, and focused interventions; and a collaborative problem-solving process for decision-making) and (b) creating the tools and resources related to implementing each component.

2. Evaluate the efficacy and effectiveness of the Recognition and Response system through future research.

3. Use professional development as the primary vehicle for disseminating information about the Recognition and Response system to front line early childhood professionals—teachers, specialists, and administrators.

4. Develop and evaluate dissemination strategies (consisting of print, electronic, and oral presentation methods) to communicate information about the Recognition and Response system with a wide audience that includes parents of young children, researchers, policy makers, and the general public.

5. Develop (or adapt) existing public policies related to program standards and professional competencies to support the widespread adoption and implementation of the Recognition and Response system throughout various sectors of the early childhood field (e.g., child care centers and homes, public and private pre-k programs, Head Start).

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An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14016 or by scanning this QR code.
There is a quiet but growing movement in Utah with the goal of improving educational outcomes for all children, and in particular children at-risk for school failure such as children with developmental delays, English Language Learners, and children living in poverty. The importance of early identification and interventions has long been a foundational tenant practiced by the medical community, yet has not been universally applied to very young children in educational settings. Universal identification of preschool-age children who may be at-risk for learning problems is not mandated by the Utah and preschool programs vary widely from district to district, are often delivered outside of the 41 school districts by private and social organizations, and federally funded programs such as Headstart.

The Utah core mandates substantially higher learning standards in language arts, numeracy, and science for all children. Grade level core proficiency requirements have been raised for all grades, including those for grade 1. Response to these higher standards for very young children has sparked heated debate over “frontloading”--the movement to teach academics to preschool-age children. As an educator not directly involved in the design or delivery of educational services to this population, the debate appears similar to the “reading wars” of the past decade, where passionate advocates of phonics squared off against equally passionate practitioners of whole language reading instruction. After many years, this debate was settled using sound research and data.

In 2009, Voices for Utah Children released the results of a longitudinal study of Granite School District’s preschool program, with data regarding educational outcomes, and substantial financial savings of early intervention using MTSS principals. In response to the success of the Granite program, several other Utah school districts have adopted this research-evidenced model and are in different stages of implementation. One district’s journey in scaling up their high quality preschool program (Davis) is presented in this issue.

The following passages are excerpted from the 2009 “Voices of Utah Children” article, to provide a base of background knowledge regarding the program, outcomes and fiscal implications. Interested readers of this program are encouraged to access the entire article, available in the Essential Educator online journal here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14017  ■
Applying MTSS Principles and High Quality Preschool for At-Risk Children

A Sustainable Financing Model: High Quality Preschool for At-Risk Children. Results from the Granite School District in Utah

Introduction

There is growing state and national attention on addressing the achievement gap and increasing reading proficiency by 3rd grade. As state governments continue to face challenging fiscal conditions, there is a need to identify strategies that will lead to improved school readiness for at-risk children within state education budget constraints. The sustainable financing model for high quality preschool presented in this report is one strategy that could potentially increase the resources available to school districts to invest in high quality preschool programs for at-risk children.

Voices for Utah Children, in partnership with Granite School District (GSD) Preschool Services, and with support from the United Way of Salt Lake and Goldman Sachs Bank USA, conducted a longitudinal study of the outcomes associated with 3 cohorts of 4 year olds in 11 schools most impacted by poverty attending the Granite School District’s high quality Title I preschool program beginning in SY06-07. The study tracked the special education use of children from the 3 cohorts who tested as potentially eligible for special education services at 4 years old to determine how many of these children required special education services in kindergarten through the 3rd grade. Academic achievement data for all the children in the 3 cohorts was also collected to determine if the GSD preschool program has been successful in closing achievement gap through elementary school.

Research shows that at-risk children who attend high quality preschool programs use special education services at significantly reduced rates in kindergarten through the 12th grade as those at-risk children who do not attend a high quality preschool. This reduction in special education use is a cost savings to the state and federal government. The Sustainable Financing Model quantifies the cost savings achieved through reduced special education use and reinvests the savings back into the preschool program in order to serve more at-risk children. The sustainable financing model can be one component of an overall financing strategy for investments in high quality early education. This financing model will effectively shift resources from remediation to prevention and sustainably scale high quality preschool programs for at-risk children.

Early results from the Granite School District in Utah are promising. Longitudinal data from the 3 cohorts of at-risk children show that significant cost savings—approximately $1 million—in special education have been achieved over the three-year period. Had the sustainable financing model been implemented in SY06, an additional 736 children could have been served over the three years with the state cost savings, effectively doubling access to the Title I preschool program (not withstanding capacity issues) for at-risk children.

The achievement gap for the SY06-07 Preschool Cohort included in this study has been effectively closed by 3rd grade. The SY06-07 preschool cohort included in this report just completed 3rd grade. These students attended preschool in the 11 schools most impacted by poverty in Granite School District and are primarily economically disadvantaged. Approximately 74 percent of the students in these schools were eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) during SY07-08 and over 80 percent were eligible for FRL in 7 of the 11 schools during SY08-09. The 2011 3rd Grade Criterion Reference Test (CRT) scores for the SY06-07 preschool cohort showed that 76 percent were at or above proficiency in Language Arts (LA) and 80 percent were at or above proficiency in Math. The 2010 statewide percent proficient for all 3rd graders in Utah in LA was 78 percent and 71 percent in Math.

Editor’s note: the article that follows updates this earlier study referred to here.

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14017 or by scanning this QR code.
Gains in academic achievement for at-risk children persisted in 4th grade.

The achievement gap in Language Arts and Math was significantly reduced.

The achievement gap between non-economically disadvantaged and economically disadvantaged students in the Granite School District (GSD) in LA was reduced from 24 percentage points to 4 points.

The achievement gap in Math was reduced from 22 to 4 percentage points.

The achievement gap between 4th grade students in the 4 schools least impacted by poverty (28% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch) in GSD and the 11 schools most impacted by poverty (80% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch) in LA was reduced from 24 percentage points to 4 points.

The achievement gap in Math was reduced from 28 percentage points to 9 points.

Reduced Special Education Costs

Research shows that at-risk children who attend high quality preschool programs use special education services at significantly reduced rates in kindergarten through the 12th grade as those at-risk children who do not attend a high quality preschool.

This reduction in special education use is a cost savings to the state and federal government.

Data with regard to special education use was collected for three cohorts of children in the 11 most impacted Title I schools.

Of the 213 children in the SY06-07 preschool cohort included in the study, 65 (30%) of the children were potentially eligible for special education. Only 5 received special education services k-4.

Of the 245 children in the SY07-08 preschool cohort, 68 (28%) were potentially eligible for special education. Only 3 received special education services k-3.

Of the 279 SY08-09 preschool cohort, 105 (38%) were potentially eligible for special education. Only 3 received special education services k-2.
High Quality Preschool Closes the Achievement Gap and Reduces Special Education Costs for At-Risk Children:

*Evidence from the High Quality Title I Preschool Program in Granite School District, Utah*

The Granite School District achieved a total of $1.75 million in state special education cost savings through SY11 as a result of reduced special education use among the at-risk preschoolers included in the study.

![Graph showing state cost avoidance in special education for at-risk preschool cohorts](image)

Voices for Utah Children

http://www.utahchildren.org/

*Editor’s note:* In 2012, the Utah Legislature passed HB 226, which would have provided $10,000,000 to fund high-performing preschool programs such as the Granite Preschool program mentioned in this article. Early childhood education advocates recognize it could be tough to get Utah lawmakers to agree to pay for a proposed preschool program for at-risk students, given limited dollars and historical resistance to state-funded preschool. As of this writing (3/11/2013), funding for this bill appears to have stalled. Opponents appear to have been persuasive in their arguments that government shouldn’t remove young children from the home, and that the bill would serve too many children identified at-risk for school failure.

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator [HERE](http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14018) or by scanning this QR code.
In the spring of 2009, Davis School District faced several challenges within the Early Childhood Programs. Prior to this school year, DSD Head Start and DSD Early Childhood Special Education were under the same administration. Because of size and needs of each program, the programs divided and were rearranged under separate departments and directors. The programs continue to work together for the needs of all early childhood students, but now have separate administration. In the late spring and early summer of 2010, DSD ECSE underwent another change with the retirement of the supervisor over the program. At that time, I was appointed as Coordinator over the ECSE program and, as a department and under the direction of the SPED director, we decided to make some changes. As you will see, we don’t have all the answers and we are continually evaluating, reflecting on our practices, and making changes as needed; however, every day we strive to meet the needs of students and parents in our district.

First, we set a goal to provide a continuum of evidence-based, program-wide practices to support the needs of each early childhood student.

Then, we examined our classroom structure, professional development and progress monitoring systems, as well as the early childhood curriculum we were using. As a department, we decided that all of these components needed an overhaul in order to meet our goal. This article will take you through the changes we made and some of the things we have learned throughout the process.

The Changes

Co-Teaching Model: As long as I can remember, DSD community preschool classrooms have followed a consultative/itinerate model. It had served our program well to a point, but there were also problems with the model. The general education teachers did not feel supported all of the time, the special education teachers did not feel a part of the classroom with which they consulted and class size was getting too large...the list could go on and on. The biggest problem we faced was that the special education students were not making adequate progress toward the general education curriculum. The first change we made was to adopt a co-teaching model, meaning the general education teacher and the special education teacher would both be in the classroom full time. Both teachers would be responsible to teach all of the students. We gave the teachers the option to figure out exactly how that would look in each one of their classrooms. In addition, we placed one paraeducator in each classroom. I can hear you all saying...that is so expensive, how do you find all the personnel, etc. etc. Well, it is expensive and it has been difficult to find quality professionals, but we continue to feel it is best for our students. We have seen a dramatic change in student progress. We have also seen an increase in job satisfaction, ownership of student growth and increased collaboration between teachers. One of our biggest struggles was with the co-teaching model. It was difficult for teachers to learn how to share existing classrooms and responsibilities, but it is working and we continue to see teams work collaboratively for the needs of all students.

Curriculum: For many years, DSD EC programs used Creative Curriculum and it served our program well. As we examined our practice, we found that teachers were not using the curriculum to its fullest potential. We discovered that “activities” were being used in the classroom instead of teaching specific preschool skills. Granted, some students were learning, but not ALL students. We needed a change. We researched many options and chose to purchase and implement the We Can! curriculum. It gave our teachers specific skills to teach, as well as ways to incorporate modifications into the general education lesson plan. The first year, we chose to pilot the curriculum in six locations in order to determine if it was the right choice for DSD. It was piloted in three Learning Centers and three Community Preschool Classrooms. All six teachers were trained and asked to give feedback to the administrators. It was received well in the pilot schools, so we chose to move forward and implement it an all of our community preschools and learning center classrooms. We are now in our third year of implementation and we are still having growing pains; but overall, it was the right decision for our district. This year, we have held the teachers to a higher standard of implementation. All classrooms are required to:
Develop and maintain two small group instruction tables throughout each school day. In the curriculum, they are called the teach table and the work table.

Develop weekly lesson plans that incorporate the Essential Preschool Skills and are linked to the Early Childhood Standards. Lesson plans are required to document the skill, activity in which the skill will be taught and the skill with which the standard is linked. All lesson plans are posted in the classroom or sent home to parents weekly.

Implement the management system in the daily schedule. We found that our class time was shorter than the schedules in the curriculum, so we have allowed the teachers to make small adaptations.

Administer the Essential Preschool Skills Assessment System two times per year. This will be our first year with this new assessment system, so we are still learning. We have our first set of data points and will have our second set by the end of the school year.

Every classroom is required to keep daily data logs on all students with an Individualized Education Program.

As a department, we also chose to implement additional curriculum supports in our classrooms. Supports include a computer-based discrete trial program, a social skills program, a handwriting program and programming for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

We learned that it was wise to move slowly through changing curriculum and to not rush our teachers as they tried to learn a new system. Many of our teachers have been with the department for numerous years and they appreciate the gradual way we are making the changes. Over the last three years, the changes have been small, but have had a high impact on the instruction in the classrooms.

**Professional Development:** Our department meets monthly for preschool training and all members (including paraeducators) are required to attend each training. In the past, we met as a whole department every month, but the teachers expressed interest in meeting in small groups. They wanted to have time to work together, exchange ideas and visit other classrooms. In order to make this a possibility, we chose to start professional learning communities. The preschool locations were divided into small groups and meet every other month. The teachers are allowed to pick their topics of discussion and location for each meeting. They are also required to document attendance, topics of discussion and what they learned from the discussion. We still meet as a whole department every other month for large group training. So far, this has been very successful.

**Coaching and Induction:** Over the past three years we have implemented a coaching program and an induction program with our new teachers. New teachers are required to have a coach and attend induction training for the first three years they are with our program. Our veteran, level two teachers are assigned as coaches and make contact with new teachers every week. The coaches then meet monthly to train on coaching topics and discuss the needs of our new teachers. The new teachers attend induction training one time per month to train on the basics of our program and gain skills essential for a new teacher. Both programs have been very successful.

**Progress Monitoring:** Prior to this school year, we were using the Brigance Developmental Screener for progress monitoring. Teachers were required to administer the instrument two times per year and use the results for goal development and progress reports on IEP goals. The general education students were also given the screener and results were used for progress reports to parents as well. We found that it wasn’t giving us the information we wanted, nor were our teachers using it to change instruction, so we made a change this year. We contacted Granite School District and asked about their assessment system. After viewing it, we knew right away it was a much better tool. Granite had been using it for a number of years and it was aligned with the EC standards. The assessment system goes into greater depth than any other tool I have seen and provides wonderful information for teachers. We have administered the assessment one time so far and plan to administer it a second time in the spring. As I have been observing in classrooms, I can already see that teachers are using it to change instruction, they have a better way to see what skills need to be taught and we have a formalized way to make sure that all students are being taught the same skills. Our functional skills classrooms implemented The Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program this year as well. They have the same requirements to administer the tool two times per year and use it to change instruction, goal development and progress reports. So far, this tool is working well for our students with moderate to severe disabilities.
Overview

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a comprehensive early detection and prevention strategy that identifies struggling students and assists them before they fall behind. RtI systems combine universal screening and high-quality instruction for all students with interventions targeted at struggling students. RtI strategies are used in both reading and math instruction. For reading instruction in the primary grades (K–2), schools screen students at least once a year to identify students at risk for future reading failure. Students whose screening scores indicate potential difficulties with learning to read are provided with more intensive reading interventions. Student responses to the interventions are then measured to determine whether they have made adequate progress and either (1) no longer need the intervention, (2) continue to need some intervention, or (3) need even more intensive intervention.

Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention and Multi-Tier Intervention for Reading in the Primary Grades

In RtI, the levels of interventions are conventionally referred to as “ tiers.” RtI is typically thought of as having three tiers, with the first tier encompassing general classroom instruction. Some states and school districts, however, have implemented multi-tier intervention systems with more than three tiers. Within a three-tier RtI model, each tier is defined by specific characteristics:

- Tier 1 instruction is generally defined as reading instruction provided to all students in a class. Beyond this general definition, there is no clear consensus on the meaning of the term Tier 1. Instead, it is variously referred to as “evidence-based reading instruction,” “high-quality reading instruction,” or “an instructional program...with balanced, explicit, and systematic reading instruction that fosters both code-based and text-based strategies for word identification and comprehension.”
- Tier 2 interventions are provided only to students who demonstrate problems based on screening measures or weak progress from regular classroom instruction. In addition to general classroom instruction, Tier 2 students receive supplemental, small group reading instruction aimed at building foundational reading skills.
- Tier 3 interventions are provided to students who do not progress after a reasonable amount of time with the Tier 2 intervention and require more intensive assistance. Tier 3 (or, in districts with more than three tiers, tiers 3 and above) usually entails one-on-one tutoring with a mix of instructional interventions. Ongoing analysis of student performance data is critical in Tier 3. Systematically collected data are used to identify successes and failures in instruction for individual students. If students still experience difficulty after receiving intensive services, they are evaluated for possible special education services.

Though a relatively new concept, RtI and multi-tier interventions are becoming increasingly common. This is attributed in part to the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which encourages states to use RtI to help prevent reading difficulties and to identify students with learning disabilities.

RtI’s inclusion in the 2004 reauthorization can be traced to two key reports released in 2002. First, the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education Report(2002) revealed that special education put too much emphasis on paperwork and too little on instruction. It recommended that educators put more energy into monitoring student progress in academic areas and less into monitoring paperwork and compliance with regulations.

Second, a 2002 report from the National Academy of Sciences examined the over-representation of students from minority subgroups in special education. This report proposed ideas for making the referral process for learning disabilities more meaningful to classroom teachers, arguing that special education “eligibility ensues when a student exhibits large differences from typical levels of performance in...[reading] and with evidence of insufficient response to high-quality interventions...in school settings.” This encouraged schools to provide services to students struggling in reading within general education in the early grades before considering special education. Special education would be considered only for students who failed to respond to evidence-based interventions, or interventions using what the field considers best practice.

There are two potential advantages of RtI and multi-tier intervention. Struggling students are provided with help in learning how to read early in their school careers. In the past many students were not provided with additional assistance in reading until they were officially diagnosed with a specific learning disability, often not until grade 2 or 3. This was the practice even though longitudinal research consistently showed that students who were weak readers at the early elementary grades tended to stay weak readers in the higher grades.

RtI also urges schools to use evidence-based practices in all tiers and to provide intensive services only to students who fail to benefit from a well-designed, evidence-based intervention. This helps to accurately determine which students possess learning disabilities in reading since only students who do not respond to high-quality reading instruction in their general education classrooms would be considered for special education. Thus, there is the possibility—and certainly the hope—that RtI will reduce inappropriate referrals to special education, especially of ethnic minority students, low-income students, and students who received weak reading instruction.
The panel also believes that RtI holds the most potential for serious ongoing collaboration between the special education community and that of general education—largely because the collaboration is based on objective data and shared understandings of the evidence.

Summary of the Recommendations

This practice guide offers five concrete recommendations for helping elementary schools implement an RtI framework to ensure that all students in the primary grades learn to read. There are many ways to orchestrate this process, and implementing this system entails involvement of school personnel at many levels: classroom teachers, special educators, school psychologists, paraprofessionals, reading coaches, specialists, and the principal.

Recommendations and Corresponding Levels of Evidence

1. Screen all students for potential reading problems at the beginning of the year and again in the middle of the year. Regularly monitor the progress of students at risk for developing reading disabilities.

   **Tier 1 Intervention/General Education**

2. Provide time for differentiated reading instruction for all students based on assessments of students’ current reading level.

   **Tier 2 Intervention**

3. Provide intensive, systematic instruction on up to three foundational reading skills in small groups to students who score below the benchmark score on universal screening. Typically, these groups meet between three and five times a week, for 20 to 40 minutes. Monitor the progress of Tier 2 students at least once a month. Use these data to determine whether students still require intervention. For those students still making insufficient progress, school wide teams should design a Tier 3 intervention plan.

   **Tier 3 Intervention**

5. Provide intensive instruction on a daily basis that promotes the development of the various components of reading proficiency to students who show minimal progress after reasonable time in Tier 2 small group instruction (Tier 3).

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: [http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14020](http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14020) or by scanning this QR code.
A District-Wide Initiative to Improve Phonemic Awareness of Kindergarteners

Rob Richardson & Sheri Ebert, Canyons School District
As a result of reviewing screening data, the Canyons School District kindergarten team became concerned with their benchmark screening data. While kindergarteners need to learn a variety of things in preparation for becoming socially and academically prepared for first grade, proficiency in phonemic awareness has been identified by multiple research studies as a key component for later success in developing reading skills (NRP, 2000). The district kindergarten data team was concerned that district-wide approximately 34% of kindergarteners were not at benchmark levels of proficiency by the end of kindergarten (See Figure 1). Furthermore, there was insufficient growth in this skill between the winter and spring benchmarks. With rising benchmarks over time, there were slightly less students proficient in the Spring than there were in the Winter.

In response the kindergarten team decided to engage in a district-wide professional development campaign to enhance the kindergarten phonemic awareness curriculum. The goal was to get 100% of kindergarteners to proficiency on our universal screening measure of phonemic awareness (Phoneme Segmentation Fluency). Teachers were taught the scope and sequence of phonemic awareness acquisition, were given materials with which to teach phonemic awareness, trained how to measure phonemic awareness by reading and interpreting formative assessment data, and were given supportive in-class feedback from peers. Figure 2 displays the scope and sequence of phonemic segmentation given in our district (borrowed from Oregon’s Reading First).

Last year, the initial year of professional development, kindergarteners made much stronger progress than they did the prior year. By the end of the school year only 14% were not at benchmark (9% below benchmark and 5% well below (See figure 2). Note: Numbers across the top of the table indicate the month of the school year that a skill should be taught. Skills are ordered according to difficulty, starting with simplest (easiest) at the top of the list and continuing to most complex (difficult) at the bottom.

This represents 492 less students at risk for reading problems. The percentage of students reaching benchmark by the end of the school year increased from 66% to 86% from one year to the next (see Figure 3).

This year, in addition to continuing support with kindergarten teachers, we are adding a concerted district-wide professional development for first grade teachers. First grade teachers have been reporting that their students are better prepared to learn to read than they have been in the past. The emphasis will be on teaching alphabetic principal as well as more advanced alphabet-embedded phonemic awareness. What this experience suggests to us is that using data to target district (and school-wide) professional development has the potential to dramatically impact student outcomes, and that when all support each other (district and building level personnel) in the context of an aligned, goal driven, organized structure, we can do better than we have done in the past.

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14021 or by scanning this QR code.
A major tenet of the Common Core State Standards for literacy in grades 6-12 is that content teachers outside of the English/Language Arts classroom emphasize literacy in their planning and instruction. One of the architects of the six major Common Core literacy shifts (Coleman, 2011) is that students should learn through domain-specific texts in science and social studies classrooms. Rather than referring to the text, they should be expected to learn from what they read. The title of the literacy standards, *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*, makes it clear that content teachers are key to ensuring that students have college- and career-ready literacy skills at graduation.

The most recent research on effective instruction for improving the literacy skills of adolescent students supports this emphasis on content literacy instruction. In the report *Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents*, Dr. Joseph Torgesen and colleagues (2007) noted that, in order to meet adolescent literacy goals, all teachers must be involved, especially since most middle and high school students spend most of their time in content-area classes and must learn to read expository, informational, content-area texts with greater proficiency. The report states: “Although reading strategies might be taught explicitly in a designated reading support class, students are unlikely to generalize them broadly to content areas unless teachers also explicitly support and elaborate the strategies’ use with content-area texts” (p. 12).

*Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006) identifies 15 elements of successful programs designed to improve adolescent literacy achievement in middle and high schools. Six of these elements directly address content literacy instruction: direct, explicit comprehension instruction; effective instructional principles embedded in content; extended time for literacy; text-based collaborative learning; diverse texts; and intensive writing.

In 2008, the Institute of Education Sciences published the practice guide *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices* (Kamil et al.). The goal of the guide was to present specific and coherent evidence-based recommendations that educators can use to improve literacy levels among students in grades 4–12. The report made five recommendations about improving practice, three of which directly address content literacy instruction: (1) provide explicit vocabulary instruction, (2) provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction, and (3) provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation.

Regarding content writing instruction, *Writing Next* (Graham & Perrin, 2007) summarized the results of a large-scale statistical review of research into the effects of specific types of writing instruction on adolescents’ writing proficiency. The report identified 11 elements of effective writing instruction, all of which represent instruction that can be embedded in content classroom instruction for all students: (1) writing strategies, (2) summarizing, (3) collaborative writing, (4) specific product goals, (5) word processing, (6) sentence combining, (7) prewriting, (8) inquiry activities, (9) process writing approach, (10) study of models, and (11) writing for content learning.

**Content Literacy Alignment to Common Core State Standards**

It is important to note that the Common Core literacy standards complement rather than replace content standards in subject areas. Content teachers need to keep literacy achievement goals in mind along with coverage of content information. Which Common Core literacy standards are most associated with content literacy instruction? That is, which 6-12 literature and informational text standards should content teachers be most focused on? Here are my suggestions:

**Reading Standards**

• #1 & #2: Students should be able to determine what texts say explicitly and to summarize them, make logical inferences, and cite textual evidence to support conclusions.

• #4: Students should be able to interpret words and phrases as they are used in text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings.

• #5: Students should be able to analyze the structure of text, including how sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of text affect meaning.

• #8: Students should be able to synthesize and compare information from print and digital sources and critically evaluate the reasoning and relevance of text evidence.
• #10: Students should be able to read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently.

**Writing Standards**

• #1, #2, & #3: Students should be able to write effective arguments, informative text, and narratives.
• #4, #5, & #6: Students should be able to use the writing process and make their writing appropriate to varying task demands, purposes, and audiences.
• #10: Students should write routinely over extended and shorter time frames.

**Language Standards**

• #4: Students should be able to determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and reference materials.
• #5: Students should demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
• #6: Students should acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level, and demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge.

In addition to the specific standards listed above, I think it is also important for content area teachers to understand the focus of the Common Core on making sure students develop comprehension skills to understand steadily increasingly complex texts. Students must learn to read and learn from complex text because this is the demand that will be placed on them in college and career. For too many years, content teachers have avoided using text as the vehicle to learn information because student literacy skills were not sufficient. I like to use the metaphor that content teachers have been giving the students fish, but not teaching them how to fish. It is important for content teachers to understand that the Common Core asks that they not simply use more complex text but rather do the more difficult task of teaching students how to read and understand subject-area text.

Joan Sedita, is a founding partner of Keys to Literacy, a literacy professional development company devoted to equipping all teachers and administrators with knowledge and strategies to improve student literacy skills. She is also the author of *The Key Comprehension Routine* and *The Key Vocabulary Routine*.

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Joan Sedita, founding partner, Keys to Literacy
In recent years there has been a growing interest in adolescent literacy, especially as Americans become more concerned about the economic and civic health of the nation. Literacy skills are necessary more than ever to succeed in college and work, as well as to manage the everyday life demands of an increasingly more complex society and world economy. The best example of this focus is the tagline “college and career ready” from the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

More middle and high school leaders are beginning to acknowledge that they must develop a school-wide approach to teaching literacy skills that includes two tiers of instruction. The first tier is content literacy instruction for all students that is delivered in regular classes, including history, science, math, and English/language arts. The second tier is literacy instruction for struggling readers that is delivered partly in regular content classes and partly in intervention settings (including extended English/language arts blocks and individual/small-group settings).

A school-wide approach to literacy instruction must involve all teachers in the delivery of reading and writing instruction, including content-area teachers and staff who work with special populations. This is a major tenet of the literacy CCSS. A successful school-wide plan must also have strong, committed leadership that provides ongoing support for literacy instruction.
A Literacy Planning Model

I have worked with numerous schools and districts to help develop literacy plans using a planning model that addresses six components:

1. Establishment of a literacy planning team
2. Assessment planning for screening, guiding instruction, and progress monitoring
3. Literacy instruction in the content classroom
4. Interventions for struggling readers that address phonics, word study, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills
5. Flexible scheduling to allow for grouping based on instructional needs
6. Professional development planning

A key first step is to assemble a literacy planning team that is representative of the major stakeholders who will have to implement the plan. Members of the team should include teachers of all subject areas, interventionists, parents, reading specialists, and administrators. It is important to recognize that literacy planning is a process, not an event. Like most school-wide initiatives, developing and executing a literacy plan will take time and sustained effort; literacy planning teams should be prepared for the process to take 1–3 years.

Once a planning team is assembled, the first step is to take stock of what is already in place in relation to the six components. This includes gathering information that answers questions such as:

- What assessments are currently used to identify good and struggling readers?
- What assessments are used to identify specific needs of individual struggling readers? What reading instruction is already taking place in content classrooms, and what professional development do content teachers and others need in order to effectively address all reading components?
- What reading interventions and supplemental reading programs are currently offered for struggling readers?
- What information and professional development do the teachers of struggling readers need?
- Is the scheduling process flexible enough to accommodate different grouping patterns for struggling readers?

After information has been collected to answer these questions, the planning team can set and prioritize goals and action steps for each of the six components. Some action steps are like low-hanging fruit—easy to accomplish quickly and with minimal expense. Other action steps will take longer to address. A concrete plan for addressing the action steps throughout the coming year or two is essential to keep the process moving forward.

A literacy assessment plan is key to successfully implementing a school-wide literacy plan. Screening literacy assessments provide the data to determine which students are struggling, while diagnostic assessments help determine why they struggle, and progress monitoring assessments determine if instruction is working in both content classrooms (Tier I) and with supplemental instruction (Tier II).

The six planning components are interrelated. Action steps for one component need to be related to action steps for the other components. For example, decisions about both tiers of instruction should be based on assessment data, along with how to group students and schedule supplemental instruction. Plans for professional development should be made based on the needs of teachers and other members of the team.

Middle and high school administrators must make the acquisition of literacy skills a priority and provide adequate time in the school schedule for reading and writing instruction. They must also be willing to use flexible grouping patterns when scheduling students in order to implement a two-tiered model for delivering reading instruction in both content classes and intervention settings. Professional development for content teachers and specialists is also essential.

The time, effort, and expertise necessary to develop a school-wide plan for providing effective literacy instruction to all students present a challenge for most middle and high schools. The challenge is worth taking, as there is an urgent need to improve the reading, writing, and comprehension skills of these students.

Joan Sedita, is a founding partner of Keys to Literacy, a literacy professional development company devoted to equipping all teachers and administrators with knowledge and strategies to improve student literacy skills. She is also the author of The Key Comprehension Routine and The Key Vocabulary Routine.

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Adapting a School’s Reading Curriculum Materials as a Tier 2 Intervention

Kimberly A. Mendenhall, University of Utah, Nicole Suchey, Salt Lake City School District, Breda V. O’Keeffe, University of Utah & Robert E. O’Neill, University of Utah

Tiered System of Support

An increasingly popular and prevalent approach to providing assistance within the general curriculum for all students is a multi-tiered system of support, commonly referred to as Response to Intervention (RtI; Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009; D. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; D. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009; VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2010). RtI is intended to enhance the learning of all students by guiding teaching practices (based on student needs) as the intervention, and progress within the intervention (based on data) as the response (Kalberg, Lane, & Menzies, 2010; Sailor, 2009; Vanderheyden & Burns, 2010).

The goal of a multi-tiered system of support for struggling readers is to identify their needs, determine the best approach to address those needs, and use research-validated interventions within a tiered system (L. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009; VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2010; Sailor, 2009; Division for Learning Disabilities, 2007). For a tiered approach in reading, the Division for Learning Disabilities (2007) suggests that 1) Tier 1 be focused on preventing reading difficulties through “a high-quality reading program” (p. 7), 2) Tier 2 involve supplemental quality instruction, such as an additional small group instructional period, with 3) Tier 3 supplying more targeted and individualized reading instruction.

Tier 2 Interventions for Struggling Readers

For support in literacy at the Tier 2 level, supplemental interventions need to be implemented. These supports should be in addition to what each student is receiving in the classroom at the Tier 1 level (e.g., whole group instruction, reading groups). Tier 2 should involve more targeted and specific support in small group settings (e.g., additional reading instruction), with explicit and supportive instruction (Denton & Al Otaiba, 2011; Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2010) using research-based reading components (NRP, 2000). An important and often overlooked element in a tiered model of intervention is aligning the supplemental supports (e.g., Tier 2) with primary supports (e.g., Tier 1) to instructionally meet the needs of all students (D. Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012; Ham et al., 2007).

Adapting Core Curriculum to Provide a Practical Tier 2 Intervention (ACCEPT)

Researchers suggest that no one particular area of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension) is more important than another (Ming & Dukes, 2010; Mathes, et al., 2005; NRP, 2000). Denton and Al Otaiba (2011) recommended that teachers address all five of these essential reading components, preferably in the context of a well-structured and appropriately sequenced lesson plan, as a comprehensive method of reading instruction for struggling readers. Ritchey, Silverman, Montanaro, Speece, & Schatschneider (2012) refer to this approach as “a multi-component intervention” (pg. 320), suggesting that struggling readers could have difficulty in different areas of reading and may need a broader instructional approach.

Inspired by a summer reading clinic for inner-city elementary students, the ACCEPT Intervention (Mendenhall & Suchey, 2011) concepts and lesson plan were developed as a comprehensive Tier 2 literacy intervention. The lesson plan format helps teachers adapt the school wide core reading program and bridge Tier 1 and Tier 2 for ease, utility, and effectiveness in the classroom. The lesson plan was
designed for small group supplemental instruction, addressing the five research-based elements for reading achievement through sections and activities titled 1) Vocabulary, 2) Supported Reading, 3) Word Sorts, and 4) Fluency Passages (see Figure 1 p. 121). This intervention is intended to be used in its entirety as a comprehensive supplemental small group intervention in a multi-tiered model of support.

The ACCEPT Intervention lesson plan is sequenced in a checklist format that acts as a guide for teachers. The vocabulary component emphasizes the proper pronunciation and understanding of vocabulary word meanings that are embedded in the daily reading. Supported reading optimizes daily reading with teacher support through the practices of model read, echo read, choral read, and whisper read (with the teacher independently listening to each student). Previewing, inferencing, and predicting are rooted in this component along with comprehension questioning. During the word sort activity, the teacher and students work together sorting and matching words. While students play a word matching game with the sort, the teacher simultaneously conducts fluency passage timings. Each student takes turns being pulled from the game for a one-minute timing of a previously read passage. The suggested timeframe for each lesson is 20-30 minutes. Materials from the school’s core reading curriculum are used in this intervention, with the exception of supplemental word sorts which are included in the ACCEPT Intervention manual (retrieved from Tyner, 2004, and Tyner & Green, 2006).

The ACCEPT Intervention in Ms. Pennington’s Second Grade Classroom

After expressing concern about four students who fell below the expected mid-year oral reading fluency score of a second grade DIBELS benchmark assessment (Good et al., 2011), one teacher, Ms. Pennington, made the decision to intervene with additional reading support. A case study examines the use of the ACCEPT Intervention lesson plan and materials from the school’s core reading curriculum for this small group of struggling readers in Ms. Pennington’s second grade classroom.

Ms. Pennington is a seasoned teacher of 21 years and has taught second grade at the same school for her entire career. Teaching in a school with ample parental and staff support to address the needs of struggling readers, Ms. Pennington has minimal experience with providing supplemental reading interventions in the classroom. The ACCEPT Intervention provided her a step-by-step reading intervention that made use of familiar reading materials she was using for whole class instruction at a Tier 1 level.

The reading curriculum used by Ms. Pennington and the entire school provided leveled reading books within each grade level that align with weekly lessons: 1) red coded readers for students below grade level, 2) green coded readers for students on grade level, 3) blue coded readers for students above grade level, and 4) multi-color coded readers for students needing second-language support. The weekly readers embed the vocabulary words that support the weekly lesson/theme. Other supports include online and printed activities using the vocabulary words and single pages of passages from readers for timed readings. This case study demonstrates each component of the ACCEPT Intervention lesson plan with the school’s core reading curriculum for a small group in Ms. Pennington’s second grade classroom.

Vocabulary

With the week’s vocabulary words printed and cut into word strips, Ms. Pennington reviewed the words by verbally reading them to the students (model read) and then having the students read the words with her (echo read). Once reviewed, Ms. Pennington used a cloze activity that allowed the students as a group to verbally fill in the blanks connecting the correct word with its meaning. Ms. Pennington stayed within the suggested lesson plan timeframe of 5–8 minutes for this component of the lesson plan.

Continued on page 120
The premise of ACCEPT is to ease the burden of classroom teachers by providing a simple instructional manual and lesson plan with research-validated components that can be used with the materials they already have available.

Upon completion of the summer reading clinic aforementioned, a 10-page teacher manual with an appendix for the ACCEPT Intervention was developed to instruct educators in its use (Mendenhall & Suchey, 2011). The manual provides 1) recommendations on determining the need for a supplemental intervention, 2) information on assessment during the intervention (e.g. progress monitoring), 3) simple suggestions on implementing a small group intervention in the classroom, 4) instructions on the lesson plan components and activities (e.g., word sorts, fluency reads), and 5) instructional supports in addition to core curriculum materials (e.g., reproducible word sort cards). The contents of the manual are identified in Table 1.

To evaluate the acceptability of the intervention by teachers, a survey was conducted. Forty-nine professionals (including general educators, special educators, and administrators) from four elementary schools voluntarily reviewed the ACCEPT Intervention manual and lesson plan using a Likert-type scale survey. Surveys were available after school in each library with six copies of the manual also available for teacher review. Questions addressed 1) the organization and contents of the manual, 2) the components and layout of the lesson plan, and 3) the opinion from educators on the use of the manual and lesson plan as a supplemental intervention in the classroom. Results showed that 1) 65% of the participants found the manual organized and easy to follow, 2) 72% found the lesson plan check off system to be useful for implementation, 3) 67% felt that this intervention would constitute a supplemental support tool, and 4) 67% would use this intervention in their classroom. In addition to the Likert-type rating, comments were made such as:

- I really like this and would use it in my classroom.
- Simple – love it!
- Good reminders for what can and should be used in an intervention.
- This would be a good Tier 2 intervention for classroom teachers.
- I love that [the manual and lesson plan] can go with any program.

Final Thoughts

Research in the past 10-15 years has alerted us to the need for reading support that is efficient and useful for teachers while meeting the diverse needs of all students. As discussed and exemplified in the case study, one way of doing this is to use a research-validated lesson plan and adapt the school’s core reading curriculum as a supplemental support for struggling readers. With its flexible format, the ACCEPT Intervention supports teachers in the classroom while providing a fluid supplemental support for struggling readers. In a school with a core reading curriculum, materials are already available to be used with this research-validated lesson plan, providing an easy and useful supplemental intervention. With the heavy workload of classroom teachers, making use of an accessible and easy intervention such as this makes sense.

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HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14024 or by scanning this QR code.
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Figure 1. The ACCEPT Intervention Lesson Plan

**Vocabulary** (*5 min*)
- Vocabulary: *Teacher reads vocabulary words 1st time with students*
- Teacher model reads vocabulary words 2nd time
- If vocabulary words are in pre-story, students circle words, then read them aloud
- If spelling/writing piece with vocabulary words, students fill in the blanks legibly or verbally with correct word

**Supported Reading** (*5-10 min*)
- Preview story: *Key vocabulary word(s)*
- *Predictions: During story: Model read, Choral read, Whisper read, *Ask comprehension questions (daring & after)

**Fluency Passage** (*5 min*)
- Read/Chart passage read
- **All students engaged — see *Score Chart**
The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative (2012) targets students’ readiness for college and careers and suggests more rigorous academic preparation is needed in U.S. middle and high schools. English Language Arts (ELA) Standards, in addition to Mathematics Standards, is a major area of emphasis to provide robust and relevant standards that reflect the knowledge and skills that secondary students need to compete successfully in the global economy. The four key skill areas included in the ELA Standards are reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. This paper focuses on identifying text structures to improve students’ reading comprehension within the ELA Standards.

Previous reviews of research document that academic literacy instruction for adolescents (see Kamil et al., 2008; Torgesen et al., 2007) identify decoding as a possible area for intervention but add comprehension and text structure as possible areas for intervention for struggling readers. Teaching students how to identify text structures commonly found in narrative and expository text has shown to improve students’ understanding of text and result in increased reading comprehension (Dickson, Simmons, & Kamenui, 1995; Meyer & Ray, 2011; Pyle et al., in review). Teaching students text structures helps students organize the information through the use of graphic organizers and providing direct instruction on text structures and organizational patterns is helpful (Torgesen et al., 2007).

The most relevant CCSS that address text structure in the secondary grades include (a) Reading Standard for Literature (RL) 6.5: Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot; and RL 8.5: Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style; and (b) theReading Standard for Informational Text (RI) 6.5: Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas; and RI 7.5: Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.

Identifying Text Structures

There are two main categories of texts: narrative text and expository text. The purpose of narrative text is to entertain the reader or present a story whereas the purpose of expository text is to inform the reader of an event or provide general information. Within these two types of text there may be different types of text structures. Each time a reader encounters a new text the readers should first determine what type of text it is (narrative or expository) then identify what type of text structure is used in the text.

Text structure is defined as the organization of text. Proficient readers use text structure to help them understand what they read.

Narrative text structures are often easier to remember because the structure follows a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Plus, students in the younger grades are exposed to stories earlier and more often than informational text. Expository text can use different text structures within one text, which may present an additional challenge when reading informational text. As students enter the older grades, they may experience more reading difficulties with expository text for a variety of reasons. Therefore, it is essential that students learn to identify narrative and expository text structures to improve their reading comprehension.

Narrative Text Structure. There is one common text structure type that is often found in narrative text. The story structure generally includes the following elements:

- Setting
- Characters
- Conflict
- Plot (Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action)
- Resolution

Expository Text Structure. There are six common text structure types that are often found in expository text. Examples of each type are included below.

- Cause-Effect, examples include directions, science texts, explanations
- Chronology/Sequence, examples include recipe steps, history books, biographies
- Compare/Contrast, an example is a political speech; note that this text structure is sometimes referred to as Pro-Con, such as ideas for and against a topic
- Description/Categorization, an example is a newspaper article
- Problem-Solution, an example is medical information
- Position-Reason, examples include debates, persuading or informing an audience; note that this text structure is sometimes referred to as Pro-Con or Compare/Contrast

Teaching students to identify text structures is an essential skill to improving reading comprehension. Figure 1 provides a guide for students while learning text structures. Students may reference the two main types of text, narrative and expository, and the common text structure types, definitions, signal words, and graphic organizers used to visually represent the information in the text.

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14025 or by scanning this QR code.
## Identifying Narrative and Expository Text Structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Structure</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Signal Words</th>
<th>Graphic Organizer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative Text</strong></td>
<td>Purpose: To entertain the reader or present a story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story elements:</td>
<td>• Setting • Characters • Conflict • Plot (Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action) • Resolution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organized around a set of story elements or story grammar</td>
<td>First So Finally</td>
<td>Story map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expository Text</strong></td>
<td>Purpose: To inform the reader of an event or provide general information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause-Effect</td>
<td>How or why an event happened: what resulted from an event</td>
<td>Because Due to</td>
<td>Cause-effect semantic map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Since therefore</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>So that As a result</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Consequently</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Afterward</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Before During</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Immediately</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Last Previously</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chronology/Sequence</td>
<td>The order of events/steps in a process</td>
<td></td>
<td>Timeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. 2. 3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare/Contrast</td>
<td>How two or more things are alike/different</td>
<td>As opposed to</td>
<td>Vern diagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both In common:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In comparison</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Opposite</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Similarity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Description/Categorization</td>
<td>How something looks, moves, works, etc.; a definition or characterizatio n</td>
<td>Appears to be</td>
<td>Web</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>For example Identify</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Refers to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Such as</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To illustrate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem-Solution</td>
<td>What’s wrong and how to fix it</td>
<td>Problem Resolution</td>
<td>Problem-solution relationship</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Response</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Solution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To fix the problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position-Reason</td>
<td>Why a point or idea should be supported; what’s wrong with an idea</td>
<td>As illustrated by</td>
<td>Position-reason flowchart</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Because</td>
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<td>Consequently</td>
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<td>For instance</td>
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<td>For this reason</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In conclusion</td>
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</table>
“...the use of many technologies with potentially great educational value have followed a similar pattern: first, they are introduced with great fanfare and anticipation of the powerful impact they will have on student learning; then they are eagerly and hurriedly introduced into classrooms with little emphasis ever having been placed on examining their content or defining their role, and even less emphasis on training teachers to properly use them; and finally, their weaknesses are soon revealed to students, teachers and parents, and they are shelved permanently, their potential power forever wasted.”

– Hofmeister, Carnine & Clark, June 1994 American Association for the Advancement of Science, Project 2061: “A Blueprint for Action.”

Introduction

The need for improved outcomes in beginning reading instruction is well documented. While modest improvements have been made, the most current National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) results document 67% of fourth grade students have “...partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work...” (National Center for Educational Statistics, NCES, 2011). Despite this rather disheartening statistic, there is cause for optimism. Foorman, Francis, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, and Fletcher (1997) found that 82% of children could be successful if high-quality intervention was provided in the early grades. Other researchers document similar findings (Adams, 1990; Juel, 1988; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Torgeson, 1998).

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, included the following in a list of essential Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) ingredients needed to drive positive changes in student achievement (Florida's multi-tiered system):

1. Highly effective personnel deliver scientific, research-based instruction and evidence-based practices.
2. Evidence-based curriculum and instructional approaches have a high probability of success for most students.
3. Instruction is differentiated to meet individual learning needs.
4. Reliable, valid, and instructionally relevant assessments include the following:
   • Screening Measures: Assessment tools designed to collect data for the purpose of measuring the effectiveness of core instruction and identifying students needing more intensive interventions and support.
   • Diagnostic Measures: Formal or informal assessment tools that measure skill strengths and weaknesses, identify skills in need of improvement, and assist in determining why a problem is occurring.
   • Progress Monitoring Measures: Ongoing assessment conducted for the purposes of guiding instruction, monitoring student progress, and evaluating instruction/intervention effectiveness.
   • Formative Measures: Ongoing assessment embedded within effective teaching to guide instructional decisions.
   • Summative (Outcome) Measures: Typically administered near the end of the school year to give an overall perspective of the effectiveness of the instructional program.
5. Ongoing, systematic planning/problem solving is consistently used by teams including parents and educators, from enrollment to graduation for all students, to make decisions across a continuum of student needs.
6. Student response to instruction/intervention (RtI) data are used to guide meaningful decision-making.
7. Job embedded, ongoing, professional development and follow-up coaching with modeling are provided to ensure effective instruction at all levels.
8. Actively engaged administrative leadership for data-based decision making is inherent to the school culture.
9. All students and their parent(s) are engaged in one proactive and seamless educational system.

Background

In 2012, the National Science Foundation provided research and development funding to explore opportunities for enhancing the efficacy of a beginning reading curriculum by employing the use of mobile devices. The funds were awarded to Academic Success For All Learners, based in Logan, Utah. The curriculum selected for the research was the Reading For All Learners K-3 beginning reading program. The research team weighed the value of possible enhancements in relation to the likelihood of making substantive changes to key MTSS principles, such as those listed above. The team selected the following as areas for examination: the collection, analysis, and sharing of data, including the use of that data to drive day-to-day decision making. Also examined was the use of embedded program supports to increase the use of evidence-based practices in delivering instruction.

In examining the research related to the use of data, the following two items were noted. First, the quantity of data being collected by schools is increasing dramatically; however, much of the data is being collected to meet new state and national reporting requirements rather than being used to drive daily instructional decisions (Means, Padilla, Debarge, & Bakia, 2009). Second, despite the plethora of new reading instruction applications available for devices such as Apple Computer’s iPad, researchers noted a dearth of applications employing the big ideas of reading instruction (Coyne, Kame & Carnine, 2011) and virtually no applications intended to drive daily instructional decisions (Means, Padilla, Debarge, & Bakia, 2009). Second, despite the plethora of new reading instruction applications available for devices such as Apple Computer’s iPad, researchers noted a dearth of applications employing the big ideas of reading instruction (Coyne, Kame & Carnine, 2011) and virtually no applications intended to be used in teacher-led reading instruction. Guided by these findings, the Academic Success For All Learners team developed two mobile device applications. The first, a web-based application entitled SAM (Student Assessment and Monitoring). SAM may be used on any modern internet-connected device and is optimized for use on tablets. SAM is intended to support the use of data to drive informed, needs-based decision making by classroom staff. The second is an adaptation of the Reading For All Learners student materials into a native iOS application for Apple’s iPad. The Reading For All Learners application is intended to provide teachers and students with enhanced supports and models of key instructional protocols.

The development team found a useful body of research outside traditional education research to assist in the development of SAM. Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS) are based primarily in the arena of business software training and support. After examining designs of EPSS, Barker and Banerji (1995) stated, “The basic rationale underlying EPSS is the desire to design and create software, hardware and cognitive aids (or support tools) that will facilitate improvements in human performance.
Technology Implementations that Work within an MTSS Framework

Andrew Hofmeister

within given task domains.” An additional field, outside of education, examined by researchers was the use of high-quality data visualizations. Adaptions of visualization techniques developed by Edward Tufte of Yale University appeared to offer significant promise. In meeting with Tufte and discussing the program objectives, Tufte suggested further examination of a specific quantitative data visualization technique permitting the distillation of student data into a summarized form.

Finally, the research team noted the substantial body of evidence describing the importance of in-service staff development efforts. For example, findings such as those published by the National Council on Teacher Quality points to the need for in-service training in systematic and explicit reading instruction (Walsh, Glaser & Wilcox, 2006). In 2011, The Council of Chief State School Officers noted the following, reinforcing the above mentioned 2009 findings of Means, Padilla, Debarger, and Bakia: “The current education system treats assessment as a function largely separated from teaching. Yet, teachers are expected to use data to improve instruction and support learner success.” (InTASC model, 2011)

Selected Research and Development Outcomes

Using Mobile Technology to Collect and Examine Student Data

In the existing print-based Reading For All Learners program, a variety of assessment measures are used to provide teachers with screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, formative and summative data. However, the collection of data requires a number of manual calculations. Progress monitoring required the use of Excel or another teacher-provided tool to chart progress over time. The comparison of level of progress with desired goals required further efforts by classroom staff. Although SAM works on any internet-connected computer, tablets offer an advantage for the collection of the raw assessment data as they can be hand-held and are relatively unobtrusive when used in a testing setting. The collection of these data does not require student use of a tablet device, thus permitting teachers using the existing print edition of Reading For All Learners the Continued on page 126
ability to use SAM with only one tablet or other computer in the classroom. For example, in an accuracy and fluency assessment teachers start and stop a timer on the tablet and tap or click words to indicate student errors. The outcome of assessments are computed automatically, and compared to assessment mastery criteria and teacher designated student goals. The resulting data is plotted on a progress monitoring graph and other visualizations.

A series of assessments are embedded throughout the program to measure student mastery of recently presented skills. Each embedded assessment includes an associated mastery criterion. These assessments are used to guide the need for reteaching. While valid measures of student performance, these assessments are conducted approximately every 5-10 lessons. In a setting where students receive instruction only 2-3 times per week, this means meaningful response to intervention data could take weeks to collect. Between the embedded assessments teachers make an informal assessment of student mastery of each lesson in order to determine if the lesson should be repeated. The SAM development team devised a unique method to both guide the teacher in these informal decisions and capture quantitative data on specific reading skills. The capture and display of this data then permits teachers to compare their informal assessment of skill mastery to the formal imbedded assessments. Accomplishing this outcome requires teachers to collect data for each student at each lesson. By using a tablet computer, the data for each student is collected in a few seconds. By increasing the frequency of data collection, progress monitoring data can now be plotted and compared to goals in days rather than weeks. The intent behind increasing the resolution of data is to permit teachers to make adjustments in program placement, instructional emphasis, and lesson frequency, based upon data collected over a shorter time period.

Unique Data Visualization

The informal skill assessment data are displayed using a series of sparklines. Developed by Edward Tufte, sparklines are described as "small, high resolution graphics embedded in a context of words, numbers, images" (Tufte, 2006). Tufte suggested the use of sparklines as an appropriate way to summarize large amounts of student data and quickly convey a general trend in the data. The sparklines used in SAM revolve around four student measures. Decoding, accuracy, oral reading fluency and comprehension are the skill areas measured. A separate sparkline tracks the number and frequency of lessons and the learner’s attendance/participation in lessons. The three skill sparklines provide a visual summary of skill deficit areas and are intended to help classroom staff quickly identify where additional instructional emphasis should be placed. The comparison of sparkline data for multiple students may be useful in devising instructional groupings.

While the response from field test users has been initially positive, and this visualization has face validity in initial trials, the use of sparklines to summarize skill data has not been previously studied in an instructional setting and further research is needed to evaluate the usefulness of this tool.

Instruction and Mobile Devices

A number of fairly obvious advantages of delivering instructional materials on a tablet are apparent. The Reading For All Learners print-based curriculum consists of 141 books; simply keeping track of the program materials in a classroom requires space and effort. While printing materials in full color has become less expensive in recent years, there is no added cost to delivering full color materials on a tablet.

The practices used by effective teachers working with the print-based Reading For All Learners and other research-validated instruction techniques were used to guide the implementation of interactive features. Additionally, a number of embedded prompts for teachers and learners were introduced into the application. A control panel permitting instructors to adjust the use of the prompts and other features was designed. A selection of the embedded prompts and supports provided in the Reading For All Learners application are discussed below.

The use of recorded audio has a long history in reading instruction (i.e., Carbo, 1978; Skouge, Rao & Boisvert, 2007; Banister, 2010). Teachers have used tape recorders and digital recording devices for some time permitting learners to record themselves reading and then listen to the recordings. In the Reading For All Learners application a simple sequence was devised to record the reading of each page and then play back the recording for the reader. This recording may be listened to in comparison to another embedded support—the “Read to Me” function. Thus the learner may hear their own reading in comparison to the embedded narrator.

An important addition to the “Read to Me” support is the precise synchronization of text highlighting and narration. As the text is read by the narrator, the words on the page highlight individually as they are read. Additionally, the sounds and words practiced before each connected text story may be tapped by learners and highlight in sync with a narrated audio model. Related to the “Read to Me” feature is the “Touch Words”
support. Learners may touch any word in the story or in the word list practice sections and the word is read to the learner two ways. First, the word is read slowly, using a precise pronunciation based upon the most common sounds each letter makes, then the word is read normally. This support ties directly to the second of the five big ideas in reading instruction, the alphabetic principle (Liberman & Liberman, 1990).

The control panel permits instructors to turn off or on each of the interactive features. This permits the instructor to tailor the desired level of support based on learner needs and to fade prompts and supports over time. These controls permit the materials to be used in a variety of settings including teacher-led instruction, guided practice and independent practice. Also available in the control panel are the instructions for using the application including sections on explicit, systematic instruction. An audio pronunciation guide is included to provide precise models of each sound (phoneme) used in the program. Additionally, a submenu of the control panel, the learner management panel permits instructors to track the completion of books for up to 20 learners per device. Also from this panel, instructors can access and share via email audio recordings of the embedded assessments.

Conclusions

In a multi-tiered system of support, the iPad and other tablets offer numerous opportunities to differentiate instruction in response to learner needs. In the Reading For All Learners application the control panel provides the ability to tailor the embedded supports and to fade supports as appropriate. The SAM application provides tools to monitor each learner’s individual needs, identify skill deficits and to develop instructional groupings based on needed skills.

In the case of the Reading For All Learners iPad application and the associated student data management application, SAM, the research and development team have used the above noted research findings to guide software design and development. The research team believes these applications can be used to support in service staff development efforts. The primary focus of the current SAM system is on providing useful, easy to interpret, and current information on learner progress and skill deficits. Additionally, the primary functions of SAM represent the essential assessment functions of an MTSS, thus providing a model of effective assessment practices for teachers. Additionally, the Reading For All Learners application provides models of essential instructional skills. Included are precise examples of phoneme pronunciation, the blending of phonemes into regular and irregular words, and other critical reading instruction skills (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). In addition to the new supports made possible by technology, the Reading For All Learners program models effective instructional practices such as the practice of sounds and words prior to attempting to read those words in connected text.

The possibilities afforded by new touch-based interactions with tablets are exciting. If you have spent time with young learners and observed their interaction with such a device, you have noticed how quickly children intuit their operation. Many children seek engagement with these new devices. It is an exciting time to be involved in the development of learning applications because of their growing prevalence in education, relative ease of use, and impressive features. However, we must not assume student engagement ensures improved learning outcomes.

The selection of the authors, timing and content of the opening quotation was quite deliberate. We must be cautious in the excitement and promise of new ways to engage learners. You needn’t be connected to education for very long to hear tales of a technological evolution promising, and promptly failing to deliver, an educational revolution. It is crucial that we examine any new technology implementation with questions such as: How will this be used by teachers? With what research is this aligned? What direct evidence of efficacy exists? How will progress be measured? The principles governing effective instruction will not be rewritten overnight, even by Apple Computer.

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." – George Santayana, September 1952.

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Introduction

Guillermo has struggled since he enrolled in Lincoln School. He receives English as a second language (ESL) services, but general education teachers at Lincoln have had little or no professional development to help them understand second language acquisition and learn effective practices for working with English learners. Guillermo’s teachers over the past 2 years thought he just needed more time to learn English, but Guillermo speaks English fairly well; it is in academic situations where he falters. His current teacher recognizes that English learners like Guillermo require instruction that takes into consideration the linguistic demands of academic tasks. She has been teaching in ways that make lessons more understandable to English learners, but she and the ESL teacher both agree that Guillermo hasn’t been making adequate academic progress. In the past, she might have been tempted to consider a referral for special education services, but because her school has a well-developed Response to Intervention (RTI) process, she will tap into that source to get Guillermo the help he needs.

RTI is an instructional service delivery model founded on two key premises:

- All children can learn when provided with appropriate, effective instruction.
- Most academic difficulties can be prevented with early identification of need followed by immediate intervention.

RTI uses a multi-tiered structure of increasingly intensive and focused instruction and intervention for serving the needs of students with academic or behavioral concerns. It is being seen as a more effective process than more traditional approaches, which involve either waiting for a student to fail before intervening or identifying a potential need for special education services, then testing, determining eligibility, and placing the student. But for English learners—the fastest growing segment of the school population—the RTI process raises some special issues. Because English learners face the challenge of learning new material, skills, and information in a new language, teachers need to use practices that have been shown to be effective in making instruction understandable for them (August & Shanahan, 2006; Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008).

Like Guillermo, many English learners have floundered without appropriate assistance for a number of reasons, including low expectations for their academic performance (Artiles & Trent, 1994; McKown & Weinstein, 2007). In addition, because culturally diverse students have historically been both over- and under-represented in special education, some schools restrict referral for special education services or assessment until English learners have been in school for some period of time. They hope this will reduce the misidentification of English learners as having learning disabilities. Often, teachers assume that English learners’ academic difficulties are related to language acquisition and give them additional time, ostensibly to learn English, before offering appropriate academic support.
In the past, when English learners didn’t make adequate academic progress, one of the only options available to teachers was to refer the students for an assessment to identify possible learning disabilities. Now the RTI process is available as an alternative to the IQ–achievement discrepancy formula, which measures the gap between a student’s potential and achievement (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008; National Center for Learning Disabilities, n.d.). This brief is designed for educators who are learning about or have begun the process of implementing RTI to help them tailor its use to meet the needs of English learners.

RTI Services

The first step in following the RTI model is ensuring that general education instruction reflects best practice and meets the students’ academic and linguistic needs. For English learners who struggle, we need to consider what instructional accommodations are necessary for them to succeed academically. RTI services are typically provided in one of two ways: a problem-solving procedure or a standard treatment protocol (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008; Haager, Klingner, & Vaughn, 2007). In the problem-solving procedure, decisions about the instructional adjustments or services to be provided for an individual student are based on results of assessments and observations and are tailored to the needs of the student. With the standard treatment protocol, the school has a specific set of programs or interventions available for use at various tiers of service (described below), and students with a specific profile of needs are placed in the most appropriate program. Schools often use a combination of the two approaches (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). Whichever approach schools take, educators with knowledge of second language acquisition and effective practices for English learners must be involved in the decision-making process.

Tier 1: Standards-Based Instruction

Tier 1 services involve providing effective, differentiated instruction in the general education classroom using whole-class and small-group formats. For English learners, this instruction is made comprehensible by having clear learning objectives and using a variety of techniques, such as presenting material visually, providing sufficient repetition, and offering opportunities to practice new learning.

The key to an effective RTI model is providing instruction in the general education classroom that is in accordance with students’ needs. Teachers should be provided with sufficient support (e.g., release time, shared planning periods) to allow collaboration within and across grade levels. This enables them to make decisions-based on standards, data from benchmark and diagnostic assessments, classroom observations, and language proficiency assessments—about what to teach in order to meet the specific needs of their students. Teachers then design and deliver lessons that utilize research-based components of systematic, explicit, intensive instruction with many opportunities for active student engagement. More specific instructional practices for English learners are described later in this brief.

Tier 2: Supplemental Instruction

If students are not responding as expected to Tier 1 instruction, as determined through progress monitoring assessments, work samples, and daily observations, they can be considered for Tier 2 services. Services provided at this level are intended to be supplemental—provided in addition to the continuing Tier 1 instruction—and closely aligned with the content and focus of the classroom instruction.

Tier 2 services are intended to be short-term. With this extra instruction, the desired outcome is that students will learn the skills they have been struggling with and can then benefit from Tier 1 instruction alone. Tier 2 services can be provided by classroom teachers themselves in small-group instruction, by specialists who work in the classroom or pull students out during the school day, in before- or after-school programs, or in Saturday school or summer school. Instruction for English learners might include intensive English language development, instruction with ample contextual clues to make it understandable, and/or specific literacy interventions (Haager, Klingner, & Vaughn, 2007; Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, & Cirino, 2006; Richards & Leafstedt, 2010). If students are not making sufficient progress with Tier 2 services, educators may consider Tier 3 services.

Tier 3: Intensive Intervention

In some RTI frameworks, Tier 3 includes special education services for students who have been formally identified as having a learning disability and have had an Individualized Education Plan developed for them. In other cases, schools design Tier 3 to be an intensive, focused intervention that may include students without disabilities. In some cases, Tier 3 is supplemental—provided in addition to Tier 1 and Tier 2 services. In other cases, particularly when the student’s performance level is far below grade-level expectations, Tier 3 may be provided as a replacement to core classroom instruction. Tier 3 instruction is more intensive than Tier 2 because it is provided in smaller groups and with a more specific skills focus. (Vaughn, Wanzek, Murray, Scammacca, Linan-Thompson, & Woodruff, 2009). Whatever the format, all interventions provided in Tier 3 must be research based (Klingner, Sorrells, & Barrera, in press).

Assessments Used in RTI

RTI models involve administering assessments and using the results to make key academic decisions. Benchmark or screening assessments are used to identify students who are not meeting established performance benchmarks and may therefore need additional assistance. Diagnostic assessments can help pinpoint specific skills for which the student may need additional or specialized instruction. Progress monitoring assessments are often used with students receiving supplementary assistance or intensive intervention to help teachers determine whether the student is making adequate improvement in response to instruction. A fourth category of assessments, sometimes referred to as outcomes assessments, includes tests used to measure progress toward standards or broader objectives, such as annual state tests or standardized achievement tests.
English Learners

understandable lessons for students learning English. The following practices are essential for providing meaningful, high-quality, appropriate teaching that includes academic English when selecting assessment methods and interpreting the results. In all cases, the unique linguistic needs of English learners must be considered when selecting assessment methods and interpreting the results.

Instructional Considerations for English Learners

When an RTI model is in place and assessments indicate that a student is not making sufficient progress in the general education classroom, the first consideration is to examine the quality of instruction that the student is receiving. Are research-based practices used consistently? How well does classroom instruction meet the student’s specific needs? Effective instruction for English learners provides access to the core curriculum and, at the same time, intentionally develops their English language proficiency. Specific features of high-quality instruction include explicitly teaching the academic language required to complete the lesson’s activities and assignments, activating and strengthening students’ background knowledge, promoting oral interaction and extended academic talk, and reviewing vocabulary and content concepts to provide repetition of key ideas and their associated language (Echevarria & Short, 2009).

Many teachers are familiar with some strategies or techniques for making instruction understandable for English learners, such as using visuals, repeating key vocabulary, or slowing their speech. But teachers need a way to consistently and systematically implement best practices to provide optimal learning conditions for English learners. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model provides a framework that is composed of research-based features of instruction, including the techniques previously mentioned (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). The SIOP Model consists of 30 research-based features of instruction that, when implemented to a high degree, improve the achievement of English learners (Echevarria, Richards, Canges, & Francis, 2009; Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006; Short, Fidelman, & Louguit, 2009).

Effective Practices for Teachers of English Learners

Before English learners are recommended for Tier 2 or Tier 3 services, teachers need to ensure that these students have had sufficient exposure to high-quality, appropriate teaching that includes academic English instruction in an environment that is supportive of their language development. The following practices are essential for providing meaningful, understandable lessons for students learning English.

Pay Systematic Attention to Language Development

When teachers have both a content objective and a language objective for their instruction, they remain cognizant of daily English language development. Standards for English language arts or English language development can be used to guide the selection of language objectives to increase students’ proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Systematic attention to language development includes vocabulary knowledge, which has been found to relate strongly to students’ reading comprehension and to their overall academic success (August & Shanahan, 2006; Baker, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995; Lehr, Osborn, & Hiebert, 2004). For English learners, vocabulary development should be an intentional goal of every lesson. Teachers can present new terms in context, talk about them, encourage students to use them in conversation and peer dialogue, and post them for students to see and use.

Build on Students’ Background Experiences

Although students come to school with a wealth of experiences, these experiences may not align with those reflected in texts and lessons. Teachers can tap into students’ experiences and link them to the lesson by asking questions about the topic. For example, the teacher may ask, “Have you ever had to take care of a younger brother, sister, or cousin? Tell me about it,” then “Well, today we’re going to read about a boy who had to bring his little sister with him to his baseball game. How would you feel if that happened to you?” This type of discussion makes a link between students and the text. The same approach can be used with historical events, science concepts, and math word problems.

Use Techniques That Make the Lesson More Understandable

Provide visual clues for students by using gestures, modeling, pictures, demonstrations, and graphic organizers. Writing words on the board or overhead projector to accompany speech creates a context for understanding. Words and key lesson information should be posted in the classroom as a reference for later use.

Use scaffolding to provide students with the level of support they need to complete the task or assignment successfully. As students become more proficient, the amount of support provided decreases, until they can work independently. The gradual release of responsibility model explicitly moves instruction from the teacher (“I do it”), to guided instruction with the whole class (“We do it”), to students working together with teacher supervision (“You do it together”), and, finally, to students being responsible for their own work (“You do it alone”) (Fisher & Frey, 2008).

Create Opportunities for Practice and Application

The gradual release of responsibility model provides students with ways to practice using new information and concepts. However, some students may need additional opportunities to practice new learning with continued support as they move through the process. Support may include hands-on activities that are meaningful and engaging, more teacher modeling or guided practice, scaffolding of tasks (e.g., providing partially completed graphic organizers or outlines for students to fill in), and explanations in the student’s primary language.
English learners need structured opportunities in all subject areas for practice of academic English. These can be provided by creating balanced turn taking between teachers and students in class discussions and by having students work in small groups or with partners to discuss and grapple with ideas and information in the text. Opportunities for practice using academic English can advance learners’ proficiency and improve their knowledge and use of English. There is a strong relationship between oral language proficiency and literacy (August & Shanahan, 2006), which makes development of oral language a priority.

**Use Repetition and Redundant Information**

Following the simple rule "Say it, show it, repeat it" ensures that students have multiple exposures to the information in a lesson and that they receive the information in a variety of ways. Teachers can provide extra support for English learners by using technology such as PowerPoint slides, overhead transparencies, smart boards, audiotaped texts, and Web sites as supplements to oral presentations.

**Assess Frequently and Reteach as Necessary**

The saying "practice makes perfect" is true only if the practice is accurate. Because there is much that may be misinterpreted by students who are learning in a new language, teachers of English learners need to check frequently for understanding and reteach when needed. Periodic review and practice are called for because English learners require repetition and redundancy. English learners improve their conceptual understanding and English proficiency with repeated exposure to learning.

**Summary**

Research has shown that educators today have at their disposal the tools and strategies necessary to provide effective instruction to all students (August & Shanahan, 2006; Ellis & Worthington, 1994; Genesee et al., 2006; Marzano, Gaddy, & Dean, 2000). By using an RTI framework to guide their professional decisions, teachers can provide specialized supplementary instruction and intensive intervention to those students who need such additional assistance. With English learners, it is imperative to consider whether current classroom instruction reflects best practices for their specialized needs. When making these decisions, it is important to consider each child’s particular set of life experiences and to work closely with families to identify relevant cultural influences and considerations (Brown & Doolittle, 2008).

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An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14027 or by scanning this QR code.
I have evaluated reading programs in elementary schools throughout the country for the past decade of No Child Left Behind, Reading First, and successive reading initiatives. But no matter where I travel, I am reminded that one of the strongest and best functioning SYSTEMS of supports for early reading success is in my own back yard. Hands down, Cache School District has one of the best multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) for student and teacher success that I have observed. In fact, Cache School District was well ahead of its time when it first implemented an MTSS well over a decade ago. Their results and the sustainability of their MTSS are commendable, particularly given the shoestring budget under which Utah school districts operate.

The strengths of Cache School District’s MTSS lie in several key features well-aligned with what we have learned from our efforts to help every child read. First, a common vision with high expectations for EVERYONE is needed to establish and sustain a highly functioning system. Cache provides tremendous support to teachers, paraprofessionals, and building-level literacy facilitators but maintains strong expectations that all staff put children first. Second, stability in administration is crucial to district and building success. Cache administrators have been involved in creating, tweaking, and maintaining a district-wide MTSS for elementary reading for some time. Next, decisions are data-driven with student needs first and all staff held to high levels of performance and accountability. Yet, the strong supports provided to teachers and paraprofessionals help everyone who has a commitment to the system succeed. Next, Cache has used ongoing progress data to drive reading instruction and intervention since the inception of their MTSS. This frequent and focused use of data helps make every child visible and allows Cache educators to monitor and evaluate the success of programs and interventions. Finally, resources are used wisely. Cache’s student to teacher ratio was the largest in the state in 2012, but the configuration of district- and building-level literacy facilitators combined with highly skilled and well-trained teachers and paraprofessionals maximizes the use of resources. This MTSS allows evidence-based large- and small-group instruction designed to efficiently help all children succeed in reading while providing adequate supports to adults in the system. Cache accomplishes all this on one of the lowest per-pupil budgets in the nation.

**Cache County School District’s MTSS**

In Cache County School District, student reading achievement is highly valued and therefore monitored regularly to ensure student progress is evident and aligned with educators’ high expectations. Each elementary student’s progress is reviewed three times per year using data from state assessments, DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills), CORE Phonics, and Tier 1 and 2 curriculum-based measures. Educators use this information to identify students who may be in need of enrichment or supplemental support. Reviews of achievement data for students who are below benchmark are conducted three times per year and include the principal, classroom teacher, literacy facilitator, and possibly additional support staff, as needed. Outcomes from those meetings then guide future instruction.

Six key elements crucial to Cache District’s literacy program have been built around those promoted by Reid Lyon, former chief of National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). They are as follows:

1. Commitment to meeting individual student needs at all levels,  
2. Adoption and implementation of research-based reading curricula,  
3. Objective assessment to evaluate student progress and the effectiveness of reading programs,  
4. Design and implementation of an effective instructional delivery system,  
5. Maximization of available instructional time, and  
6. Administrative monitoring of student progress and program implementation.

Using these guiding principles, reading instruction is provided to all students by the classroom teacher during Tier 1. Additionally, ALL K-3 students participate in Tier 2 literacy instruction at another time during the day for 30 to 45 minutes. During Tier 2, all students received targeted instruction in small groups at a level that is both challenging and achievable:

- **Enrichment** for students with advanced skills  
- **Additional instruction** for students who are performing on grade level  
- **Explicit intervention** for students who are performing below grade level

**Figure 1: Explanation of Small Group Instruction**
MTSS in Cache School District = Student Success!

And the Results Are…

This multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) for reading has resulted in strong and sustained outcomes for children’s success in reading in Cache County School District over the past decade. The following table shows the percentages of children reading proficiently over time in Cache School District in comparison to state averages. Figure 3 shows Cache’s results for subgroups of students compared to Utah’s averages from 2011, the most recent year for which subgroup comparisons are available. Clearly, Cache’s MTSS has resulted in reading success!

Table 1: CRT State Comparison 2004-12

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>1st Grade</th>
<th>2nd Grade</th>
<th>3rd Grade</th>
<th>4th Grade</th>
<th>5th Grade</th>
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<td>92</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
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<td>93</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>92</td>
<td>90</td>
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</tbody>
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* Socio-Economic Status: In 2012, 30% of Cache District students met federal low income eligibility criteria.

State of Utah

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>3rd Grade</th>
<th>4th Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>2012*</td>
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<td>79</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>80</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Socio-Economic Status: In 2012, 30% of students in the state of Utah met federal low income eligibility criteria.

Continued on page 134
Because we wanted to know how Cache School District’s students’ reading abilities compared to national norms (and standardized tests from previous years), we administered the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) Survey Form E to all third grade students in the fall of 2013. When these children entered school, approximately 27% lived in low-income households, 13% qualified for special services, and 9% had limited English proficiency and/or came from homes where English was not the primary language.

Results show the MTSS is working for most students as they move from learning to read to grades where they are expected to read to learn, as shown in Figure 4. On average, students in Cache School District placed at the 74th percentile on the ITBS reading subtest. Reading abilities were strongly related to writing skills, and Cache students, on average, placed at the 70th percentile in writing. However, the results for subgroups of students were even more remarkable as shown in the following graphs. The boxplots in Figure 3 show the range of ITBS national percentile rankings, as well as the average and quartile ranges, for students from low-income households, those receiving special education services, and those receiving instruction for English as a Second Language (ESL). Students living in low-income households and students receiving special education services performed, on average, nearly as well as the district average in reading for all students.

While the results for ESL students may seem low, an average National Percentile Ranking of 43 places a child above a 3.0 grade equivalent in reading, almost exactly where we expect them to be near the beginning of 3rd grade. Results from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP, 2011) also help put these findings in perspective. Most of Cache School District’s ESL students live in Spanish-speaking homes. Fourth grade reading scores for Hispanic students on the 2011 NAEP show Utah is tied with Oregon as the lowest performing state in the nation. While NAEP and ITBS assessments are not directly comparable, evidence indicates their percentile rankings in reading are related. If, on average, Cache School District’s ESL students performed above the 43rd percentile on the ITBS, they were far from the bottom. In fact, the 43rd percentile on the NAEP reading assessment is equivalent to a scaled score of 223-224, which is above Utah’s average scaled score of 221 for ALL students on the NAEP in 2011! However, there is clearly more work to do to close the achievement gap.

Finally, struggling students’ progress over time is one of the most telling indicators of a MTSS’s success. Figure 5 shows grade equivalent reading outcomes on the ITBS for students in 3rd grade disaggregated by 1st grade beginning of year (BOY) DIBELS Next status. Bar width indicates the proportion of students in each group. Students who began 1st grade reading at or above benchmark and even below benchmark are, on average, reading well above grade level at the beginning of 3rd grade. However, those who started 1st grade reading well below grade level are, on average, reading on grade level at the beginning of 3rd grade, with some of those struggling first graders reading well above grade level by 3rd grade. At a time when reading skills are crucial for later academic success, Cache School District’s students’ are SUCCESSFUL in reading.

Overall, Cache County School District’s MTSS has created a well-functioning system of supports that helps children SUCCEED in reading. As an external evaluator who has evaluated reading programs all over the US, I am continually impressed with the way Cache District leadership and building-level administrators monitor and maintain their MTSS to improve reading outcomes for children. While our bad air this winter in Happy Valley might make one wonder why we live here, it’s hard to find a better place in Utah to raise a child and feel confident that the school system is ensuring reading success, and therefore, later academic success. I, for one, am glad my family and I live in Cache County School District!

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14028 or by scanning this QR code.
In 2012-2013, Granite School District combined the models of RtI and PBIS currently being implemented at the district and school levels by adopting a national model of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). This change fits well with the goals set forth by the GSD Board of Education to: 1) increase student achievement and 2) enhance community engagement. MTSS also reflects Granite District’s Superintendent Martin Bates’ vision that schools “individualize, customize and personalize” our students’ educational experiences to meet their needs to ensure that all “students will leave Granite School District, prepared for college, career and life in the 21st century world.”

To build the awareness of MTSS throughout the district and to accomplish these goals, the district has prioritized extensive professional development for school administrators and their staffs. District directors and specialists from nearly every district department participate in the cross-departmental design of monthly professional development modules. District directors then facilitate delivery of the learning modules to building administrators in the MTSS meetings. The intent is to train school administrators as instructional leaders who then facilitate professional development modules with their faculties. The topics below describe the professional learning the district has provided to date:

- Introduction to MTSS
- Common Vocabulary
- Using Data to Inform Instruction
- Implementation of MTSS
- MTSS and SSAP (SIP)
- Formative Assessments
- Social Emotional Learning
- Differentiation

Continued on page 136
Building a Solid MTSS Foundation

As the district directors work with the administrators to increase the awareness of MTSS, Integrated Supports Coaches (systems coaches) support school teams in building the teaming infrastructure needed to implement MTSS within their schools. The Cog diagram (see fig. 1) illustrates the purpose and task associated with each team and how teams can work together to improve learning for all students.

District departments and school teams have studied the PLC model through the book, *Learning by Doing* (2010, Dufour, Dufour, Eaker) to develop foundational knowledge and common understanding of Professional Learning Community (PLC) practices and foundations. The use of norms, agendas, roles/responsibilities, consensus, and data-driven problem solving are promoted and implemented system-wide to enhance team collaboration and productivity.

MTSS Leadership—The learning of all students is supported by:
- Working in conjunction with the SST
- Analyzing school academic and behavior data to identify trends and patterns
- Using a systematic problem-solving process
- Setting goals with action plans
- Communicating with the faculty to build consensus and crafting
- Assessing the effectiveness of collaboration
- Implementing research-based practices
- Supporting a comprehensive instructional framework

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) provide an integrated systemic approach to meet the needs of all learners and use resources in the most effective and efficient way—enabling every child to be successful.

Multi-Disciplinary Team—When interventions have been tried and there is little evidence of improvement:
- Consideration is given to treat a student for special education supports
- Parents may request an assessment

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports Leadership Team

Common PLC Practices:
- Use agendas
- Follow norms
- Research clear roles and responsibilities
- Build consensus
- Use problem-solving model

Teacher Collaboration

Grade level or Department Collaboration—Teacher collaboration supports student learning by:
- Identifying essential concepts and skills
- Using data to determine if learning has taken place
- Responding systematically to meet the needs of students who do not learn or retain content

When further interventions are needed students are assessed by the Student Support Team.

Although team membership may overlap for MTSS teams, Leadership teams and Student Support Teams (SST), the purpose and tasks of the teams change as the focus of the teams’ work changes across Tiers 1-3 from school-wide needs to more individualized student needs. It is strongly urged that administrators, grade level representatives, and specialists in reading, mathematics, and behavior be a part of this team to increase collaboration and communication. Broad school representation on the team increases the knowledge base for problem solving and targeted intervention strategies.

GSD recognizes the need for grade level or department collaboration. Time is allocated for teachers to work collaboratively in PLCs and make student learning decisions based on data. To facilitate consistent intervention support, the district provides a clear Student Support process with accompanying data collection forms to guide school teams through the MTSS process. As needed, coaches support grade level and department teams through this process in preparation for meeting with the Student Support Team. A flow chart and accompanying documents assist SSTs in tracking interventions and monitoring the progress students achieve from year-to-year. These data are also shared with parents at regular intervals at SST meetings.

Granite School District is moving the MTSS process forward by digitizing a workflow system to ensure that all intervention information and support is efficiently documented and cumulatively added to a student’s electronic file. Our goal is to ensure student support through graduation so that our students can demonstrate that they are “prepared for college, career, and life in the 21st century world.”

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14029 or by scanning this QR code.
As Utah joins other states in the implementation of Muti-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), providing training experiences to LEAs throughout the state is a critical priority in moving the work forward. Training experiences include workshops, conferences, and on-site professional development with LEAs, but there is one additional experience that addresses some of the “real-life” limitations of time, money, location, and expertise. This experience is an online Canvas course developed by the Utah Personnel Development Center (UPDC) and available to all through the Utah Education Network (UEN). It is available 24/7/365 and is provided at no cost to participants.

The course, titled, “UMTSS 1000,” which stands for Utah Multi-Tiered System of Supports, is the first in a series of courses being developed by the UPDC with the support of State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) funds. The course is intended for training of personnel in school districts, charter schools, private schools, universities, and other agencies that are responsible for implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports.

In addition to being available 24/7/365 and free, the course includes other benefits of online learning experiences such as access to expertise on the given content, links to more in-depth resources throughout the nation, and immediate results and feedback available through built in quizzes. The UMTSS 1000 Course can be completed in less than an hour (or longer if a person wants to “dig deeper” and explore the numerous links throughout the course), and provides a basic understanding of some of the critical features of MTSS.

At the completion of this course, participants will be able to demonstrate a basic understanding of the following essential questions:

1. What is a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)?
2. What are the critical components of MTSS?
3. What is “tiered instruction” and what differentiates the various tiers?

In addition to the three outcomes listed above, there is an additional section focused on requirements for participation in the UMTSS project—this applies to only those LEAs who are involved with the UPDC, but the information can be viewed by anyone.

Take some time to explore the UMTSS 1000 Course on UEN. The need information to access the course is: http://www.updc.org/umtssmodule
Enjoy the flexibility and content available through this online 24/7/365 experience!

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14030 or by scanning this QR code.
Recently the UPDC (Utah Personnel Development Center) announced the release of www.PMfocus.org, a free online tool for screening, intervention, and progress-monitoring. It allows the user to track student progress on any academic or behavior skill as defined by the user. A student’s response to instruction and/or intervention can be measured over time to aid the teacher and others on the educational team in making data-based decisions. The app is easy to use and lends itself to quick and easy interpretation of data. Some of you may be familiar with the Excel-based files “CBM Focus” and “PM Focus.” Those tools have been used in Utah as educators have more consistently monitored their students’ progress. While those can be helpful tools, the new PMFocus.org application does everything that the Excel files do but with greater efficiency, power, and usability.

An overview of the program is available for viewing on YouTube: “PMfocus Overview.” This video walks the viewer through how to set up and use the tool. Additionally, this article is intended to be a resource for a user. What follows are step-by-step instructions on how to begin accessing the functions of the tool. Users are also encouraged to access the Support menu option on the site for additional information and resources to help in progress-monitoring efforts.

To use pmfocus.org, select Create Account/Login at the top right corner of the screen. Select “Signup” and follow the steps for setting up your account. Once you have set up an account and logged in, refer to these instructions for using the site.

1. **Enter students.** From the menu select Management, and then Students. Here you can add any students you want to screen, provide intervention for, or progress-monitor on any academic or behavior skill or area.

2. **Screening.**
   1. Select/add benchmarks.
      1. Select Management, Default Benchmarks to select from the list of benchmarks/standards that have been pre-loaded into the application (DIBELS, AIMSweb, etc.). The selected benchmarks will show up in other areas of the application where you need to select the standard for comparison. Be sure to click the Save button at the top to save your selections.
      2. Select Management, My Active Benchmarks. Here you can add any custom benchmarks (local norms, screener specific cut-scores, etc.) as well as see a list of all active benchmarks including custom benchmarks and those selected from default list.

   2. Screening report. Select Screening, New Report. Type in a name of the report (e.g., 4th Grade Math Screener), the Area (e.g., Math), and select the Benchmark you would like to use as a standard of comparison (e.g., Math_AIMSweb_Mathematics_M-CAP_8th_End). Then enter the scores for the students to be included on this screener, including errors if relevant. Students are automatically selected for the report when you enter a score for the student, but you can select/deselect all students or individual students. Click Save & Next to view the
Screening Report. Any saved screenings can be accessed in the future by selecting Screening, Reports and selecting the desired report. Based on the benchmark and scores entered, the Reports page displays helpful information including a group-wide breakdown of scores and individual risk information.

3. Identify students needing intervention. Based on the information displayed in the screening report, as well as other information you have available to you and your own expertise, you can identify the students you want to flag for intervention. Click/tap on the flag on the row of the student you would like to flag. This student will now show up on the Screening Flags portion of the Dashboard. The Dashboard is the page you see when you first log-in to the application. You can also access it by clicking/hitting on the PMfocus icon in the top left corner of the screen. It gives an overview of upcoming data collection, how students are responding to interventions, and students who have been flagged for intervention.

3. Add Interventions. You can create an intervention for a student who has been flagged straight from the dashboard. You can also create an intervention by selecting Interventions, Add Intervention.

1. Select the student you want to provide an intervention to, then write (or select from previously entered) an objective for the student. This is a brief summary of the goal (IEP or other) you would like to accomplish (e.g., Increase Reading Fluency, Reduce Talk Outs). You can type a longer explanation (e.g., the entire IEP goal) in the Notes box under Intervention Plan. Type or select the Area of the Objective (e.g., Reading, Behavior, Writing, etc.).

2. Next enter any diagnostic data you would like to enter. Two diagnostic measures that provide helpful diagnostic information are included: a Can’t Do/Won’t Do assessment and the Instructional Level and associated score. Any additional diagnostic data collected can be recorded in the Notes box.

3. Set up the Intervention. Enter the planned frequency of your data collection, the weekly growth rate (e.g., ‘1.5’ for 1.5 correct words/minute per week growth), and the desired goal (e.g., 80 cwpmin). Next enter the start date of your data collection (you may actually collect baseline data before implementing an intervention), the goal date (the date you wish to reach your goal) and the Measurement type (e.g., Correct Words/Minute, % on task, etc.). Add any notes you would like in the notes box.

4. Enter a label of each intervention, or phase of an intervention. If the first intervention for a student is a behavior contract, type ‘behavior contract’ next to Phase 1. Subsequent phases of an intervention or new interventions tried can be entered at any time as needed. Make sure you save your intervention.

4. Progress Monitor. You can measure student progress and response to interventions in the Progress Monitor section.

1. Select Collect Data to enter any data collected for a student’s objective or intervention.

   1. Select the student and objective you would like to add data for. Details of the Objective Plan will be displayed.
   2. Enter data under Objective Data. Select the date of the data point, select the corresponding phase, enter the score for that day, and any notes about that day or data point. The fidelity measure is a measurement of whether the intervention was implemented as intended for the time period that the data represents. Select the fidelity measure that is most appropriate (Yes, No, N/A). The data point will indicate if you selected ‘No’ by having an empty center to the data point, compared with a filled data point for those labeled as ‘Yes’ or ‘N/A’. Be sure to save your data.

2. Select New Student Report to view the progress-monitoring chart for a given student’s objective. Select the student and objective to display the chart. Student performance can be analyzed with regards to a goal (Goal line), the desired rate of progress (Aim line), and by phases.

3. The New Horizon Report is a snapshot of how students are responding on selected Objectives. Select the students’ objectives you would like displayed. You can select multiple students or multiple objectives for one student. On the displayed chart, an Objective’s column at 100% means that based on the last 3 data points the student is growing at the rate set up in the plan (e.g., 1.5 correct words/minute per week growth). A green column means the student is responding at a rate above the desired rate and a red column means they are responding at a rate below the desired rate.

It should be noted that many users may not have a need to use the screening function of the site. This is a process intended to help you identify struggling students. If you already have identified the students you will work with (e.g., a special education teacher who already has their caseload identified and is not involved with identifying students for intervention), then you may skip over the step associated with screening. In this case, you may want to enter your students, set up interventions for those students, and progress-monitor those students on their interventions (i.e., steps 1, 3, and 4).

The response to this tool has been very positive as educators have used the tool to improve their progress-monitoring practices. In addition, users have provided great feedback on issues or ideas for improving the site that have either already been adopted into the current system or noted for future versions of the site. A great tool is getting better thanks to that feedback. We encourage all users to contact us with such feedback by emailing pmfocus@updc.org. We are planning on continuing to make improvements and add functions to the site to make it as useful for educators as possible. Tools are intended to make our jobs easier. A hammer can make all the difference in hanging a piece of art on the wall. We are excited to share the tool of PMfocus.org with you and hope you can use it to make your jobs of implementing and measuring the impact of academic and behavior interventions easier, and wish you Happy Progress Monitoring!

An electronic version of this article can be accessed at the online Essential Educator HERE: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14031 or by scanning this QR code.
Much of what we do in education is about solving problems. Whether at an individual student, small group, classroom, or system (school or district) level, we work to identify the problem, generate solutions to solve the problem, and measure the impact of our efforts. Many teams at various levels have enjoyed the use of the four step problem-solving model as they have worked through this process. Using this model teams consider the following four steps, centered around the use of data at each step:

1) What is the problem?
2) Why is it happening?
3) What should be done?
4) Did it work?

By considering these questions, based on relevant data, teams are able to more effectively and efficiently identify a problem, develop a solution, and measure its impact. Within the ABC-UBI project, a problem-solving flipbook was developed to better guide teams through the problem-solving process. This flipbook has been an invaluable tool for teams who consistently use it in their meetings.

While this problem-solving process has been helpful in addressing various types and levels of problems, it perhaps lends itself best to problems at an individual student or small group level. Recently, Dr. George Batsche trained participants of the Utah Special Education Leadership Academy (USELA). Dr. Batsche is a faculty member at the University of South Florida and has been a leader in the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model in the state of Florida. He is widely considered one of the leading minds nationally on MTSS. Batsche shared with USELA participants a tool that is ideally suited for problem-solving at a systems level called the 8-Step Planning and Problem-Solving Worksheet. Beyond the obvious difference of having four additional steps, there are some distinct characteristics of this process that make it an invaluable tool in systems-level problem-solving. The steps guide a team through the identification of potential obstacles and help them identify ways to eliminate or reduce those obstacles. In order to take advantage of this process, a team must first identify a priority of focus. This priority should be based on data (e.g., student outcome scores, teacher observation data) in order to assure that the efforts are based on a real and not simply a perceived need. Once the priority is selected the team is ready to begin the 8-Step Process. Following the outline of the process below, an example is given to illustrate its use:

1) Desired outcome and how it will be measured.
2) Brainstorm all available resources/positive factors that might facilitate achievement of desired outcome and all obstacles that might prevent achieving the desired outcome.
3) Select one (1) obstacle from #2 to address first and identify it in behaviorally descriptive terms – ensure everyone understands it.
4) Brainstorm strategies to reduce or eliminate only the obstacle identified in #3 and record them below. These are only ideas. Do not consider feasibility or implementation at this stage.
5) Using the list generated in #4 as a stimulus, but not as a limit to ideas, develop multiple action plans to reduce or eliminate only the obstacle identified in #3. Specify who will do what (descriptively) and by when. DETAIL IS A MUST!!
6) Specify a plan for follow-up for each action plan. (How will completion be verified and outcome evaluated?)
7) Plan for evaluation of reduction or elimination of obstacle identified in #3
8) Plan for evaluating progress toward achievement of desired outcome specified in #1.

This process guides the team through systematically selecting an obstacle to the desired outcome and identifying ways through, around, or over those obstacles. It calls for specific action plan items identifying “who will do what by when” with a plan for follow up on those items. This helps eliminate the practice of admiring the problem with no plan for solutions or no follow-up on the implementation of that plan. It is also centered on the use of data not only in identifying the problem, but in measuring the impact of the efforts. One of the major differences between this process and the four-step process, then, is the focus on systems-level resources and obstacles. This is a critical step in identifying how a team can implement practices to achieve the desired outcome.

Consideration of a hypothetical example from a district team using this process may be helpful. The district team identifies the priority of improving math scores in their high schools based on their end-of-level scores.

1) Upon further analysis of available data and information, the desired outcome is identified; specifically the need to improve the instruction, or the delivery of the math curriculum. This will be measured through external observations with the specific goal of having all teachers reaching established benchmarks of student and teacher behaviors (e.g., opportunities to respond, % of engagement among students).

2) The team then identifies the resources they have to achieve the desired outcome. The district has an infrastructure of trained instructional coaches in every building. They have buy-in from all of the department directors. They have recently identified some good books that outline good instruction (Explicit Instruction, Archer & Hughes, 2011) and how to coach on classroom management and instruction (Coaching Classroom Management, Sprick, 2006).
The team also identifies obstacles to their desired outcome. The School Board is hesitant about a focus on instruction due to recent teacher negotiations that resulted in bad press. There are many teachers who have expressed concern about receiving training during class time as they don’t want to be away from their students. There aren’t enough funds to train all teachers directly on explicit instruction. The coaches feel spread thin as they have been trying to do observations in every teacher’s room on a quarterly basis.

3) The team next selects one obstacle to tackle first. They decide to address the issue of the coaches not having enough time to observe every teacher quarterly. The obstacle is defined in behavioral terms: “Instructional coaches with a FTE of .5 have a caseload of 50 teachers to support. They are currently only observing about 20 teachers in a quarter. They need to be able to provide support to all teachers as needed.”

4) The team brainstorms how to resolve this issue and generates several ideas. One idea is to create more instructional coaching positions. Another idea is to train teachers to provide peer-to-peer support on their prep periods. Another idea is to purchase cameras so teachers can record themselves and take the videos to their Professional Learning Committee meetings to discuss. Another idea is to reduce the amount of teachers coaches observe on a regular basis.

5) The team next works to develop multiple action plan ideas. After much discussion the team identifies the fact that not every teacher needs ongoing coaching support, rather there are probably only 40% of the teachers who need periodic support and only 10% (4-5 teachers in each caseload) that need regular support (weekly visits). They decide to change the expectation for coaches regarding the number of teachers to observe. They are asked to do one quick observation of every teacher and an interview of the administrative team in the first month of the year. Based on this information coaches create a schedule in which they will observe 5% of their teachers on a weekly basis until they get the teachers up to the benchmark standards on the key behaviors of the observation protocol. When one teacher has demonstrated adequate performance, the coach will discontinue observations with that teacher and bring on another teacher from the original list of teachers needing support.

6) Action items are created of “who will do what by when.” The director of the Curriculum and Instruction Department, who oversees the instructional coaches will make a change in the department expectation and communicate this to the coaches by the next district team meeting one month away. The assistant superintendent over secondary schools will also share with the administrators the change in expectation with high school principals in their next principals’ meeting in two weeks. Both of these items will be addressed in next month’s district team meeting to provide follow-up.

7) In order to measure the impact of the action plans, coordinators over the coaches will review coaching logs and compile data to share back with the team each month for the remainder of the school year and beginning again at the start of the next year. At this point, the team returns to identify another obstacle from step 3. They decide to address the obstacle of providing professional development to teachers during their instruction time. The team works through steps 3-7 and identifies action items that include providing greater training to the instructional coaches who in turn can provide individualized support and training to teachers in need of improving their instructional practices. The team continues to cycle through each obstacle over the next few team meetings to reduce or eliminate each one.

8) Going forward, the team decides it will have coordinators compile classroom observation data and share this with the team on a quarterly basis to evaluate progress toward the desired outcome. The team will also look at CRT scores for the year for the high school math teachers and compare them with past scores to measure impact of the actions taken.

The 8-Step Problem-Solving Process is not a panacea for all ills of education. It is a tool that can systematically guide a leadership team in identifying and eliminating or reducing obstacles to achieving desired outcomes. The use of this process can be an invaluable tool in guiding a team in problem-solving around systems-level change. I invite you to use it in your next team meeting. Considering the resources at your disposal and obstacles you face within your school or district, discuss how you can overcome those obstacles to improve outcomes for your students.

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Dispelling Myths about Professional Development in a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

Suraj Syal, Coordinator, UPDC (Utah Personnel Development Center)
Introduction

Professional development or professional growth opportunities occur on a regular basis in education. This article will examine three myths about professional development in a multi-tiered system of supports. MTSS is an instructionally focused and data informed system of professional development with one desired outcome—increased student achievement.

Let us be clear. It is not whether or not professional development opportunities should occur that matters. What really matters is do these opportunities provide educators with the skill sets and mindsets to increase student achievement? “Schools can be no better than the educators who work within them, and professional development remains key to educators' progress and professional growth. In addition, scouring the education literature for examples of school improvements occurring without professional development fails to yield a single case. No improvement effort in the history of education has ever succeeded without thoughtfully planned and well-implemented professional development activities designed to enhance educators' knowledge and skills” (Guskey, 2009, p. 226).

Myth 1: A MTSS framework stifles opportunities for individualized professional development that addresses the unique needs of educators.

Facts:
- MTSS enhances and aligns professional development to provide skill sets that match the unique needs of educators and it allocates resources accordingly so that the system is smarter and better equipped to improve outcomes for all students.
- It is unthinkable to suggest that every teacher will have all the competencies necessary to meet the achievement needs of all their students. “All staff within a school or district must work closely together in providing professional growth activities that are meaningful and relevant to competencies that teachers need and desire” (Cy Freston, 1983, The Utah Special Educator).
- The ultimate goal of professional development is to increase student achievement (Hunzicker, 2010). A MTSS framework demands that professional development supports teachers toward this goal.

Myth 2: A MTSS framework makes professional development for educators overly complex.

Facts:
- Consider the complexity that can exist in any given year for a school or district applying standards-based curricula, differentiating instruction, developing formative assessments, adapting Continued on page 144
A MTSS framework makes professional development produce higher rates of success more quickly. We need to build, Active methods for implementing evidence-based practices product of effective intervention times effective implementation.

- A MTSS framework defines improved student outcomes as a product of high quality. How do we as a system go from being good to being very good? “If you want to go from good to very good, you need to become obsessed with implementation” (Fullan, 2013, p.71).

**Myth 3:** A MTSS framework makes professional development cumbersome to implement.

**Facts:**

- Most educational improvement efforts are multifaceted and haphazard by nature where schools implement multiple innovations simultaneously (Guskey, 2009). This strategy of multiple innovations being implemented simultaneously is cumbersome on resources, time, and educators’ trust level in the system to support capacity building that leads to increased student achievement.

- Most professional development is driven by leaders who are short on time and pressured for results. Their hope is to gain immediate improvements. Little attention is given to gathering reliable evidence on effectiveness. Evaluating the experience tends to be an afterthought. Typically, after the investment in time and resources, someone wants to know if anything made a difference (Guskey, 2009).

- A MTSS framework makes capacity building central. “Capacity building is not just workshops and courses. It is always what happens in between workshops that count” (Fullan, 2013, p.74). MTSS allocates time, resources, and supports in implementing with fidelity what is learned at workshops so that students are the ultimate beneficiaries of teacher improvement.“When leaders don’t know what they are doing, they often muddy the waters in order to make them seem deep. Leaders who are capacity builders understand current reality so that they can find the levers to new, better realities” (Fullan, 2013, p.72).

- A MTSS framework defines improved student outcomes as a product of effective intervention times effective implementation. Active methods for implementing evidence-based practices produce higher rates of success more quickly. We need to build, utilize, and evaluate implementation infrastructures and strategies to achieve significant outcomes for students (Fixsen et al., 2013).

**Final Thoughts**

A multi-tiered system of supports is an instructionally focused and data informed system of professional development with one desired outcome—increased student achievement. Does MTSS stifle individualized professional development opportunities for educators? No. Does MTSS make professional development overly complex? No. Does MTSS make professional development cumbersome to implement. No. Instead, an MTSS framework is hyperfocused on aligning professional growth opportunities to educator skill set and student performance, is committed to making the complex understandable, and is focused on developing effective and efficient implementation of solutions that improve outcomes for all students.

The motive behind educators participating in professional development is to make them better. Attending and learning content is not enough. The courageous question that must be asked is how do we as a system go from being good to being very good? “If you want to go from good to very good, you need to become obsessed with implementation” (Fullan, 2013, p.71).

Lastly, are all educational professional development opportunities equal in quality? No. Is there a way we can determine the level of quality? Yes. The Observation Checklist for High Quality Professional Development is one example of a tool that represents a compilation of research-identified indicators that should be present in high quality professional development. It can help professional development providers improve the quality of professional development.

The Observation Checklist for High Quality Professional Development was designed to be completed by an observer to determine the level of quality for professional development, as well as to provide ongoing feedback and coaching to professional development providers. The tool represents a compilation of research-identified indicators that should be present in high quality professional development. Professional development that includes 80% or more of these indicators can be considered to be of high quality.

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Observation Checklist for High-Quality Professional Development in Education

The Observation Checklist for High Quality Professional Development was designed to be completed by an observer to determine the level of quality for professional development, as well as to provide ongoing feedback and coaching to professional development providers. The tool represents a compilation of research-identified indicators that should be present in high quality professional development. Professional development that includes 80% or more of these indicators can be considered to be of high quality.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The professional development provider</th>
<th>Observed?</th>
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### Preparation
1. Provides a description of the training with learning objectives prior to training
2. Provides readings, activities, and/or questions to think about prior to the training

### Introduction
3. Provides an agenda before or at the beginning of the training
4. Connects content to participants’ context (e.g., community, school, district)
5. Includes the empirical research foundation of the content (e.g., citations, verbal references to research literature, key researchers)
6. Engages the participant in a preview of the content (e.g., material, knowledge or practice)
7. Builds on or relates to participants’ previous professional development
8. Aligns with school/district/state standards or goals
9. Emphasizes improving student learning outcomes

### Demonstration
10. Builds shared vocabulary required to implement and sustain the practice
11. Provides examples, demonstrates, or otherwise illustrates the content/practice
12. Illustrates the use or applicability of the material, knowledge or practice for the participant

### Engagement
13. Includes opportunities for participants to practice and/or rehearse new skills
14. Includes opportunities for participants to express personal perspectives (e.g., experience, thoughts on concept)
15. Includes opportunities for participants to interact with each other related to training content
16. Adheres to agenda and time constraints

### Evaluation
17. Includes opportunities for participants to reflect on learning
18. Includes discussion of specific indicators—related to the knowledge, material, or skills provided by the training—that would indicate a successful transfer to practice
19. Engages participants in assessment of his/her acquisition of knowledge and skills

### Mastery
20. Includes follow-up activities that require participants to apply their learning in a new setting or context
21. Provides continued feedback through technical assistance and resources
22. Includes coaching to improve fidelity of implementation
Interviews with Experts: UMTSS Resources
The UPDC YouTube site contains outstanding video resources for educators.
Check out these interviews with national experts.
http://www.youtube.com/user/TheUpdc

4:46 Randy Sprick
Dr. Sprick discusses the role and benefits of coaching to help with behavior management.

7:06 Judith Miller
Dr. Miller responds to questions concerning behavior management for students with autism.

10:48 Scott Ross
Dr. Ross discusses teaming structures to help facilitate successful implementation of school-wide interventions and supports.

4:01 Terry Scott
Dr. Scott explains the probability equation, which is used to determine which educational practices are most likely to result in the desired behavioral changes of students.

9:05 Bill Jenson
Dr. Jenson discusses practical classroom management strategies for tough kids.

1:54 Anita Aracher
Dr. Archer discusses ways to help narrow the achievement gap.

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First Annual Utah Multi-Tiered System Of Supports & Effective Practices Conference

June 12-13, 2013,
8:30am-3:30pm
Davis Conference Center, Layton, Utah

Topics include:
Evidence-Based Instructional Practices in Literacy and Numeracy for At-Risk Learners, Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, PLCs that Support Students Progressing in the Utah Core, & Principals as Instructional Leaders.

Who Should Attend:
District and School Administrators, School Board Members, General Educators, Special Educators, Related Servers, University/College Personnel, Parents

Welcome Message, Day 1:
Martell Menlove, Ph.D.
Superintendent, Utah State Office of Education

Keynote Speaker, Day 1:
Robert Horner, Ph.D.
Professor of Special Education at the University of Oregon. Dr. Horner’s 25-year history of research, grants management, and systems change efforts related to school reform include helping schools and school administrators develop systems for embedding school-wide systems of positive behavior support.

Keynote Speaker, Day 2:
Kevin Feldman, Ph.D.
Independent Consultant and Director of Reading and Intervention, Sonoma County Office of Education. Dr. Feldman develops, organizes, and monitors programs related to PreK-12 literacy and the prevention/remediation of reading difficulties. Dr. Feldman’s primary focus is on improving academic literacy.

Featured Presenter, Day 2:
Bradley Witzel, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Winthrop University. Dr. Witzel has extensive experience in math education and intervention in the secondary, special and general education settings.

Registration deadline: May 1, 2013:
http://umtss-spring-2013.eventbrite.com/

This conference is supported by IDEA/SPDG funds