In this issue

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Pilot School District and RtI

Walton County's Experience

By Susan Hudson, Problem Solving/RtI Coach, Walton County

The Walton County School District is located in Northwest Florida on the Emerald Coast. Its topographical diversity ranges from fertile farmland to the sugar white sands of the Walton County beaches, and its student population is as diverse as its topographical description. The school district has three pilot schools participating in the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project. We are working diligently to build consensus and infrastructure, and expect full implementation within three to five years.

Since Fall 2005, Walton County School District professionals have been working on development of a Response to Intervention educational service delivery model. The Early Intervention initiative in Walton County has been supported by concepts basic to the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project.

The district felt a systems approach was vital to the development and implementation of the problem solving model. District leaders created a district leadership team (DLT), which is comprised of individuals in curriculum, special education, psychological services, and student services. The team meets three times each year to celebrate successes/ improvements, discuss needs, and create action plans to continuously improve the model. To date, it has completed a needs assessment to identify curriculum, data sources, and intervention needs currently available at Tiers I, II, and III. During the initial meeting of the DLT, discussion suggested that buy-in from stakeholders was crucial. To initiate the consensus building process, the district leadership team provided a professional development activity for district level staff. As this activity took place, one of the administrators commented, "This is what we should have been doing all along, and it took special education to start the ball rolling."

Staff members are sensitive to where school-wide support is needed and allocate resources for those activities, with emphasis on the most important and urgent needs.

The DLT assisted the schools in forming School-Based Intervention Teams, which meet once each week for two hours. Roles and responsibilities have been discussed and team members present a noble effort toward filling these roles. Is the process perfect? No, but what a sense of professionalism and dedication these team members display!

After the award of the Project grant, pilot school teams completed their own needs assessments. Curriculum, data sources, and interventions have been identified at each school site in both the academic and behavioral arenas. Some of the needs identified at the three schools were a school-wide behavior program, a curriculum-based measurement for mathematics, and activities to build consensus. Action plans have been written

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to assist in these activities, and many of the plans are being carried out presently.

One school created learning communities, and each of the communities takes the lead in faculty meetings to review articles on the Problem-Solving/Response to Intervention model and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2005) Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation. In addition to these reviews, each school was presented a PS/RtI overview, providing a general description to foster healthy discussions. One school identified the need for a professional development activity to explain the process in more detail and describe the teacher's role in the decision-making process. This professional development activity was delivered in October.

The school-based intervention teams (S-BITs) have recognized the need to organize their data. At present, each team has completed action plans to coordinate this effort. As a Tier I focus, current reading, math, writing, attendance, tardies, and office discipline referrals data are being collected and compiled for review in January. At that time, the teams will focus on using the assessment/data information to identify weaknesses of academic and behavioral core programs. S-BIT members realize the importance of continually reviewing the data in order to modify interventions for these core needs. Staff members are sensitive to where school-wide support is needed and allocate resources for those activities, with emphasis on the most important and urgent needs. Teams have recognized the importance of taking baby steps so as not to overwhelm or discourage staff.

One Tier I goal is the reduction of lunchroom office discipline referrals. Upon looking at School-Wide Information System (SWIS) data, the team identified seven referrals per month. Since modifying the behavioral core program, the team has seen a reduction in referrals by 72%.

The same school had significant problems with attendance and tardies. The assistant principal stated that sometimes fifty students and parents were in line to check students in to school, thus significantly diminishing instructional time. Again, they developed a plan for students who were present and on time. Students earn tickets and participate in a drawing for prizes at the school. While data was unavailable at this writing, the assistant principal and office staff attest to a significant reduction in tardies and increased attendance.

As a group and as individuals, Walton County teams and school staff are working very hard to develop and maintain the know-how to assist in the areas of need in each of the pilot schools. It is a daunting task with all there is to know and understand about problem-solving/response to intervention, and our teams know the journey may be characterized as two steps forward, one step back; however, progress in this journey prevails. What a wonderful opportunity to do what is right for children!

Prior to becoming a PS/RtI Coach for the Florida Project, Susan Hudson was a School Psychologist in Walton County. Recently, she was named Florida's School Psychologist of the Year (2007) at the annual conference of the Florida Association of School Psychologists.

Exciting New Publication

As interest in Response to Intervention (RtI) continues to grow, researchers and practitioners have asked for research that validates this approach to teaching all students. Now, for the first time, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) has gathered in one book an annotated bibliography of research about RtI. This book serves as a compliment to NASDSE's best selling earlier book on RtI, Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation. As this 224-page book clearly shows, RtI is a research-based strategy that has proven positive outcomes for many students, including those with disabilities.

Print copies of this 224-page book are available for just $20 plus shipping. To order your copy now, go to http://www.nasdse.org/documents/071009_NASDSE_RTI2_FLYER.pdf. Or, if you prefer to download this book in PDF, go to http://www.nasdse.org/documents/RtI_Bibliography2.pdf.

Scaling Up
Problem Solving/Response to Intervention
The Importance of Data

By George M. Batsche and Michael J. Curtis, Project Co-Directors

Scaling up the implementation of any school reform initiative is a challenging process, and that is the case with Problem Solving/Response to Intervention (PS/RtI). "Scaling up" is the term that refers to broadening the impact of an initiative and could refer to the expansion from a single pilot school to a group of schools, from a group of schools to an entire district or from multiple districts to an entire state. The implementation of PS/RtI should begin at a building level, because the smaller number of people involved at that level allows for greater flexibility and can tolerate a wider range of "adjustments" in the implementation process. However, when an initiative is expanded beyond the single building level, knowing the critical factors that must be addressed in that effort is very important. Critical factors or components are those that predict and perhaps determine successful implementation. It is generally true that initial pilot projects typically attend to more components than is necessary for successful implementation — primarily because we are uncertain about exactly which factors really are "critical" for success.

Without these data, districts will be challenged to efficiently and effectively implement PS/RtI.

It is with this critical question in mind that the program evaluation model of the Florida Problem-Solving/Response to Intervention Project was developed. Although the literature suggests attention to certain factors, data are being collected in the 40 pilot and 33 comparison schools across the Project's eight demonstration districts to identify those specific processes and components that are and are not related to positive outcomes, especially outcomes related to students. These data will inform the program evaluation process and *are critical to the development of recommendations and guidelines for districts that wish to "scale-up" the implementation of the PS/RtI model in their schools. Without these data, districts will be challenged to efficiently and effectively implement PS/RtI.*

It is essential that the implementation of PS/RtI follows a specific sequence of phases: first, the achievement of *consensus*, followed by development of essential *infrastructure*, and, only then, *implementation* of the procedures that comprise the model. Critical components exist for each phase. The data collected through the program evaluation model will enable us to evaluate the relationship between critical components within each phase, integrity in implementing PS/RtI and student and system outcomes.

In examining critical components of the *consensus* phase, data are collected on *staff beliefs* about PS/RtI, their perceptions of their *skills* to implement PS/RtI and their perceptions of the *practices* that their building engages in that relate to Problem Solving/Response to Intervention. These data are essential because the relationship between staff beliefs, perception of skills, the actual implementation of the model and student outcomes will determine the level of importance that should be given to ensuring the attainment of each phase in the implementation sequence — for example attaining consensus before focusing on infrastructure and then implementation. Research has supported the idea that educators will embrace specific change if they understand the *need* for the change (beliefs) *and* believe that they have the *skills* needed to implement that change. If a strong relationship exists between beliefs/perception of skills and implementation integrity/student outcomes, then buildings must take the time to develop these two areas before moving to another level of implementation.

The Project staff is grateful to the district and building leadership teams in the demonstration and pilot and comparison schools in the demonstration districts for their willingness to collect these important data. The cooperation and effort of these districts and schools are providing critical information that will inform policy and practice throughout the State of Florida.

Next Issue: Data collection for implementation integrity, student and system outcomes.

Resources

This edition of the newsletter features selected Problem Solving/Response to Intervention resources.
These electronic resources are also found on the Florida RtI website at http://floridarti.usf.edu/resources/

The Florida Center for Reading Research (http://www.fcrr.org) was established to conduct research on literacy development and reading instruction and assessment. Resources provided on the website are research based and range in target age from PreK through 12th Grade. While the site does not specifically address RtI as a conceptual model, it does provide an array of evidence-based interventions that can be used in a data based, decision-making model such as RtI. Information regarding core and supplemental reading instruction strategies and progress monitoring tools is also included.

International Reading Association's Focus on Response to Intervention Resource Library (http://www.reading.org/resources/issues/focus_rti_library.html) offers a plethora of articles. Most of the resources listed on this site are published in professional, refereed journals and are available at no charge. While the focus of the site is primarily on research in the field of reading and emergent literacy, there are some references included that address RtI and problem solving in more general terms.

The OSEP Technical Assistance Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (http://www.pbis.org/main.htm) was established by the Office of Special Education Programs, US Department of Education, to give schools capacity-building information and technical assistance for identifying, adapting, and sustaining effective school-wide disciplinary practices. The site provides examples of positive behavior supports (PBS) across a tiered model with authentic data from schools and districts that have implemented PBS. Information for families is also provided.

RtI Wire (http://www.jimwrightonline.com/php/rti/rti_wire.php) offers a range of resources including commercially and non-commercially published articles. There are five sections listed, each containing a variety of links and sites for the reader to review, including:
1. RtI: Understanding the Model
2. RtI and Problem-Solving Teams
3. Selecting the Right Intervention
4. Monitoring Student Progress
5. Graphing Data for Visual Analysis

Problem Solving &
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