

# Florida RtI Update

A collaborative project between the Florida Department of Education and the University of South Florida

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# Scaling Up Problem Solving/Response to Intervention

## The Importance of Data: Part II

*Evaluating Implementation Integrity, Student and System Outcomes*

By George M. Batsche

The primary reason for the implementation of a Problem Solving/Response to Intervention (PS/RtI) model is to improve the academic and behavior outcomes of all students. The process of scaling up — moving from a limited implementation “footprint” to impacting an entire district or state — cannot be done in an efficient and effective manner unless the methods of implementation are validated. The use of “pilot” schools/districts enables districts and the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) to identify the components required for successful implementation and to modify those components as necessary to maximize positive impact on students and the district. Once core components are identified, they can be applied to additional sites in the process of “scaling up.”

### Monitoring Implementation Integrity

Unlike pilot sites (where “development” occurs), the scaling up of PS/RtI to additional sites must follow a consistent implementation blueprint. Unless this is done, the expectation for consistent impact across buildings cannot be realized. In addition, the use of a consistent blueprint improves the efficiency of implementation. The Self-Assessment of Problem-Solving Implementation (SAPSI) is an instrument designed to assess the degree to which buildings implement each of the core components of the PS/RtI model. This self-assessment instrument was developed for use in Illinois and then modified for use in Florida. The instrument is designed to assess the degree to which a building is implementing the model by evaluating the percent of implementation multiple times each year. The SAPSI is completed by the School-Based Leadership Team (SBLT) which uses the SAPSI data for two important tasks: (1) monitoring the rate of progress in implementation and (2) identifying areas in need of technical assistance and additional training support. Frequent use of the SAPSI helps buildings focus implementation support in the most important areas in a timely manner — ensuring both effectiveness and efficiency.

*Data collection is a tedious and time-consuming process. However, the collection of these data now will result in significant time and dollar savings in the future.*

Two other measures of implementation integrity are available to districts through the statewide Project: the Critical Components Checklist and the Problem-Solving Check-

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# What Works for South Woods Elementary

## St. Johns County Pilot School Success Story

By David Morrell, Guidance Counselor, South Woods Elementary, St. Johns County School District

As the Response to Intervention process continues to grow and spread, there are many great things happening at RtI schools. Here at South Woods, we are very proud of the way we have been able to implement the RtI model. While each school will inevitably have to fine tune the model to fit the needs and resources of their particular school, we feel we have established a process that is very effective in helping to meet the needs of our students. While many factors go into establishing and maintaining an effective RtI team, here at South Woods we have discovered that certain features have allowed the team to thrive.

The most important factor in the success of the South Woods RtI team has been the support provided by administration. The leadership and support of the administration provided the RtI team with the fuel it needed to get off the ground. The administration has consistently provided the team with what many of us in education consider one of the most valuable resources — time. The team has been given the necessary time to train faculty members, hold meetings, and receive additional RtI team training.

While there are many things that go into establishing and maintaining an effective RtI team, one of the defining characteristics of the South Woods RtI team is our method of training the faculty on the RtI process. Instead of training the faculty in large groups, we chose to implement a different strategy. We offered individual, small group, and large group training sessions to the teachers.

The main reason we offered the individual training was because we had a relatively large number of teachers who were either new to teaching or new to South Woods and thus the RtI process. We felt that in a large group setting, these teachers might be apprehensive about asking important questions during the training sessions. While a small number of teachers asked and received the training in a small group, the vast majority of teachers opted for the individual training. Much to our surprise, many veteran teachers also chose the individual training. It's important to note that no one lobbied for the large group training option.

In my opinion, this method of training the faculty was critical in achieving the “buy-in” necessary for the RtI program to be successful at our school. The individual and small group training sessions helped to de-mystify the RtI process to the

faculty. It also allowed the teachers to discover how the RtI process could increase the academic achievement of their students. Learning how the process works and how it could help their students went a long way towards solidifying teacher buy-in.

A second defining characteristic of the South Woods Elementary RtI team is the concept of accountability. Accountability pervades the RtI process at South Woods. Staff members are held accountable for the implementation of interventions and for progress monitoring while RtI team members are held accountable for tasks assigned at RtI meetings. When RtI plans are developed, clear goals and data-driven means for monitoring progress toward the goals are established. Once the teacher has had ample time to implement the interventions, he/she is invited to an RtI meeting to report on the progress of a student. The agreed upon progress monitoring tool and the corresponding data points the teacher provides are used to assess progress and make decisions related to the “tiers” associated with the RtI model. All decisions are made as a

team. The teacher and the RtI team work together to establish the academic goals, interventions, and progress monitoring tools. Decisions to move students along the tiers, up or down, are made with great care as a team and based on the data provided by the progress monitoring tool.

As the RtI program at South Woods continues to evolve, we are beginning to take on additional issues. For example, about midway through the

year, attendance was emphasized as an important issue for the team. As a team, we noticed that quite a few of our students were missing a lot of school. We discussed the issue as a team and came to the conclusion that students must be in attendance regularly if they are to benefit from the interventions being developed by the team.

We addressed the attendance issue by first gathering the attendance data and prioritizing the students based on number of absences. We then divided the RtI team into small, two-person teams. Each team was given a list of the students with frequent absences and asked to go on home visits. Home visits were made for all students with attendance concerns, not just those with RtI plans.

A team would discuss the attendance issue with the parents if a parent was home, or if no one was home, the team left a let-

*The individual and small group training sessions helped to de-mystify the RtI process to the faculty... Learning how the process works and how it could help their students went a long way towards solidifying buy-in by the teachers.*

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# Using Data to Examine Core Instruction in a PS/RtI Model

## Making Sure Your Water is Healthy Before Treating the Fish Individually

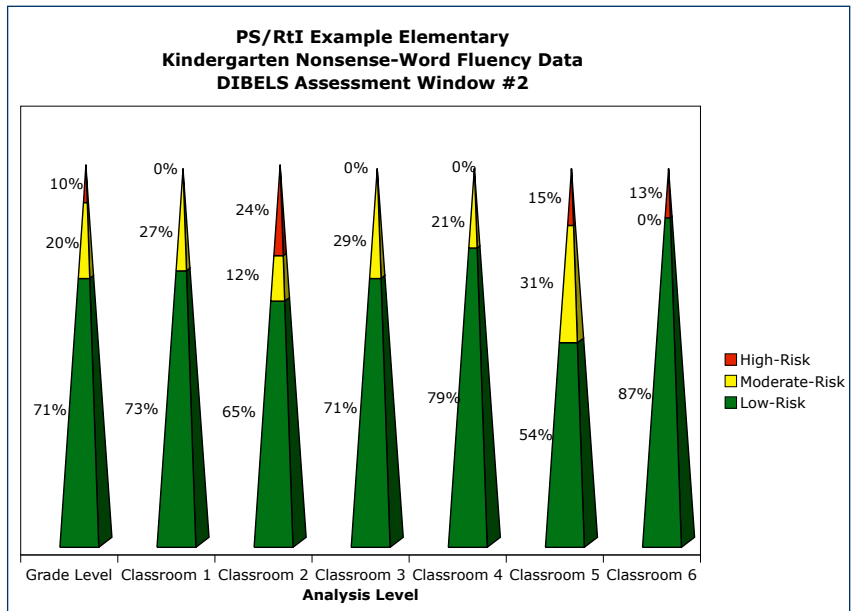
By Kelli Henson (PS/RtI Coach, Pasco County School District), Amelia Van Name-Larson (Supervisor of Student Services and PS/RtI District Liaison, Pasco County School District), Lisa Ciganek (PS/RtI Coach, Pasco County School District), and José Castillo (PS/RtI Project Evaluator and PS/RtI Coach, Pasco County School District)

Problem Solving/Response to Intervention models suggest that approximately 80-90% of students should respond to core (i.e., Tier I) instruction alone, while approximately 15-20% of students will require more intensive services (i.e., Tier II and/or III services in addition to core instruction) to attain grade-level benchmarks/standards. The rationale for these percentages is that schools have finite resources (e.g., time, personnel, materials, funding) with which to meet the needs of their student population. Schools cannot provide additional instruction to more than approximately 20% of their population given the amount of time in the school day and the number of personnel available to provide additional intervention. Therefore, administrators, teachers, and instructional support personnel must continue to examine how well students, including subgroups, respond to core instruction and engage in a systematic problem-solving process when the data suggest that changes in core instruction are needed to increase the percentage of students meeting expected benchmarks/standards.

Examining the impact of core instruction regularly is like examining the water in a fish tank. Fish tanks require regular maintenance to ensure the health of the fish inhabiting it. Frequently treating and sometimes changing the water ensures the health of the overall system in the tank. When the water in the fish tank is not maintained on a regular basis, increasing numbers of fish will likely become ill. At that point the individuals maintaining the fish tank could choose to treat each of the fish individually through diagnosis and medication. However, the amount of time and money to treat each sick fish individually would likely begin to go beyond the resources available to treat them. The other option would be to determine what factors are likely contributing to the epidemic in the fish tank and to intervene to address those factors. One likely reason for the fish getting sick is that the water had not been treated recently. Upon treating and/or changing the water, the health of

the majority of the fish would likely improve with the routine maintenance of the water. A small percentage of the fish might not improve and would need to be treated individually using the additional resources freed up by eliminating the source of the problem (i.e., the dirty water).

When using this analogy with educators, it has been our experience that many educators believe that the water is synonymous with classroom instruction. To be clear, how students are taught (e.g., instructional routine, method of delivery) is one component of core instruction that should be examined when problem-solving; however, it is only one of the four domains of potential barriers to student performance that we ask educators to examine. The other three domains include curriculum (i.e., what is taught), environment (e.g., classroom rules and management, peer influence, family/community factors), and learner (e.g., student skills) variables. The discussion of potential barriers to students attaining standards/benchmarks during problem-solving meetings should be focused on alterable variables for which educators have control. Below is an example of data from an elementary school in the first year of



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## Scaling Up Problem Solving/Response to Intervention

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list. These two instruments basically measure the degree to which the core components of PS/RtI are present in student-focused products (e.g., reports and intervention plans) and in problem-solving meetings. If effective training and technical assistance has been provided for a building, the core components of PS/RtI should be observable in the behavior of the staff and in the products that guide instruction and interventions. Project staff and members of the SBLT complete these measures with randomly selected student-focused products and during randomly selected problem-solving meetings. Of course, these instruments focus solely on the presence or absence of the core components and do not include the identity of students and staff.

The combination of staff self-assessment of implementation (SAPSI) combined with data from the two checklists enables a building to assess both perceptions of implementation and the degree to which the core components have actually filtered down to staff and student levels.

### Student and Systems Level Data

The Project staff, SBLTs, and District-Based Leadership Teams (DBLTs) are collecting student-centered data directly through building and district sources as well as through the FLDOE Data Warehouse and the Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN). Student performance data from the FCAT, as well as benchmark and progress monitoring data are used to monitor the academic performance of students in PS/RtI buildings. In addition, office discipline referrals (ODRs) and suspension/expulsion data are used to monitor the behavior performance of students. Clearly, the time required to see the impact of any school reform process on student data will take longer than simply measuring the degree to which a staff implemented procedures. Therefore, it is important to collect these student data across a number of years. The use of frequently administered, highly sensitive measures (e.g., progress monitoring) will increase a school's ability to demonstrate student impact more quickly.

The assessment of district-level (system) outcomes is an important measure of efficiency. The system-level outcomes measured by the Project include: grade retention, referrals for problem solving, ESE placements, and attendance. All of these outcomes will be assessed across student demographic characteristics (e.g., race, socio-economic status) to determine the degree to which the impact of the project is equitable for students from diverse backgrounds.

Finally, the Project is collecting data on the effort (e.g., amount of training time, technical assistance) and expense (cost in dollars) to implement PS/RtI. This information is important for districts to consider when developing the district plan for implementation. In addition, the use of these effort/expense data, combined with student and system outcome

information will allow the FLDOE and districts to develop Return on Investment (ROI) estimates.

### Summary

Problem Solving/Response to Intervention is a process that is being implemented across the United States in response to federal and state initiatives. Scaling up PS/RtI across the state of Florida will occur more efficiently and effectively if data relating to critical questions are available to the FLDOE and district. The data being collected as part of the pilot/demonstration projects will:

1. Facilitate consistent implementation of the core components of the process
2. Ensure implementation integrity
3. Identify the most efficient methods of implementation
4. Assess the impact of the process on student and district outcomes
5. Permit the development of ROI estimates

Data collection is a tedious and time-consuming process. However, the collection of these data now will result in significant time and dollar savings in the future. The Project staff is very appreciative of the efforts of building and district administrators, SBLT members, coaches and teachers for their efforts in the collection of these data. The Project is committed to providing these data to buildings on a frequent basis. In this way, buildings and districts can use these data to evaluate the effectiveness of the model for their students and to streamline the process of implementation.

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## What Works for South Woods Elementary

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ter detailing the number of absences the student had and encouraged the parent to improve the attendance of their child.

Again, without the support of the administration, the focus on attendance simply would not have been possible. The team was given the time to focus on the issue, come up with an action plan, and execute the plan. The result was a dramatic improvement in attendance. The students who received a home visit from the school decreased their absences by an average of 46%. Our efforts paid off in that the interventions put in place by the team have a much greater chance of success when students attend school regularly.

While the South Woods RtI team still has much growing and improving to do, we feel we are in a very good position. Effective systems for training, support, and accountability are in place, and we now have the luxury of being able to incorporate other, school-specific areas of need into the RtI process. While the main focus of the RtI team remains academic performance, the RtI team concept has proven to be a very adaptable tool that can be used to address a wide range of needs.

## Using Data to Examine Core Instruction

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PS/RtI implementation that lead to a problem-solving meeting focused on alterable variables that may have been inhibiting students from responding to core instruction.

The problem-solving meeting began with a discussion of all available data in the area of Language Arts and their relationship to the Sunshine State Standards for kindergarten. Data included the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) subtest, the DIBELS Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) subtest, teacher observations of student performance, literacy walk-throughs, and an informal teacher administered assessment of letter names and sounds. The data represented in the graph are from the DIBELS NWF subtest, an indicator of students' fluency with basic decoding skills. Students' DIBELS subtests scores can be compared to benchmarks that have been shown to predict with high levels of accuracy whether students will meet standards in reading. The data in the graph represent the percentage of kindergarten students who scored within the low- (at or above benchmark), moderate-, and high-risk ranges in February (i.e., the DIBELS second assessment window) and are broken down by grade- and classroom-level. Following the collection of these data, the building administrators, kindergarten teachers, instructional support personnel, and data coaches met to discuss the results and engage in problem-solving to improve the outcomes of students not meeting benchmarks.

After engaging in a dialogue about what the data demonstrated at the grade- and then classroom-level, the team identified increasing the number of students attaining decoding benchmarks as the issue they wanted to problem-solve. Approximately 70% of all kindergarten students met the decoding benchmark according to the NWF subtest; there were differences across the classrooms in terms of the number of students who scored within the different risk ranges. After identifying the problem, the team then analyzed potential reasons that were likely acting as barriers to more students attaining benchmarks in the instructional, curriculum, environmental, and learner domains. The team determined that instruction was not sufficiently differentiated, nor were explicit phonics instructional strategies utilized and connected throughout the 90-minute reading block. Next, they developed an action plan to reduce or eliminate the instructional and curricular issues they identified as barriers to improving student learning. The components of the action plan included (1) layered professional development on differentiated instruction and sharing ideas on how to incorporate phonics instruction into their 90-minute reading block, (2) time for teachers to observe instruction in other classrooms where the strategies introduced during the professional development were being utilized, and (3) technical assistance in the classroom. The response of students to the changes that were made was scheduled to be evaluated in May when additional data would be available.

## Behind the Scenes

### The Florida Project's Program Evaluation

The following School Psychology Graduate Research Assistants have organized and analyzed all data collected during the 2007-08 school year. Thank you to each of these individuals for making this project a success.

José Castillo	Amanda March
Decia Dixon	Devon Minch
Susan Forde	Josh Nadeau
Jason Hangauer	J.C. Smith
Alana Lopez	Kevin Stockslager

## Congratulations!

Dr. Lesley Messier, Director of Student Services for the Monroe County School District (and an RtI District Liaison), has been awarded a Japan Fulbright for October 2008. Dr. Messier will be the first educator from Monroe County to be offered a Fulbright!

## Statewide Training Update

The Florida PS/RtI Project has begun numerous five-day trainings across the state. In Fall 2007, 1,148 individuals, 117 School Teams, and 50 District Level Teams participated in Days 1 and 2 training sessions. Day 3 sessions are currently underway. As of this newsletter printing, 746 individuals, 71 School Teams, and 42 District Level Teams have participated in the third day of training.

## RtI Staff Presenting in Upcoming Conferences

**7th Annual Just Read, Florida! K-12 Leadership Conference**, June 29-July 2, Orlando — RtI will be featured in several breakout sessions throughout the conference. A Response to Intervention Institute is scheduled for the last morning. For more information, go to <http://www.justreadflorida.com/conference/>.

**RtI Innovations Conference**, September 11-13, Salt Lake City, Utah — For more information, go to <http://158.91.165.5/innovations/index.html>.

# Select Resources

*These electronic resources are also found on the Florida RTI website at <http://floridarti.usf.edu/resources/>*

**IDEA Partnership's Collaborative Work on Response to Intervention** (<http://www.ideapartnership.org/page.cfm?pageid=17>) is dedicated to improving outcomes for students and youth with disabilities by joining state agencies and stakeholders. This comprehensive online collection of resources is designed to assist you in learning more about Response to Intervention and best practices for its implementation on all levels — federal, state, and local. Included are introductory and advanced resources.

**Project MP3: Lehigh University** (<http://www.lehigh.edu/collegeofeducation/mp3/rti/rti.htm>) is a collaborative model/demonstration project with Lehigh University, University of Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. This website includes a list of RTI resources and a link to NRCLD's Parent Advocacy Brief: A Parent's Guide to Response to Intervention. This site includes a list of RTI resources and a link to NRCLD's Parent Advocacy Brief: A Parent's Guide to Response to Intervention.

**RTI Action Network** (<http://www.rtinetwork.org/>) is a national initiative dedicated to the responsible and effective implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI). This Web site provides the information and tools educators and families need to help each child succeed. Funded by the Cisco Foundation, led by the National Center for Learning Disabilities, and supported by some of the nation's top experts in RTI, this initiative seeks to guide frontline educators and families in the large-scale adoption of RTI.

**Using Assessment to Inform Instruction** (<http://www.fcrr.org/assessmentReadingFirstUsingAssessment.htm>), on the Florida Center for Reading Research's website, provides links to presentations and documents that focus on using data to guide instruction. Topics include developing school-based reading assessment plans and using Progress Monitoring Reporting Network reports.

**Washington State Special Education, Response to Intervention** (<http://www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/RTI.aspx>) allows users to access Washington's state-wide manual for implementing RTI. The manual is lengthy but is easy to follow and incorporates a variety of information. Included are principles and components of RTI, guidelines for decision-making within an RTI system, recommended procedures for determining LD eligibility, and resources for districts to use in developing their own RTI process. The manual includes intervention resources for reading, math, writing, and behavior, along with universal screening and progress monitoring tools.

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