

# Florida RtI Update

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## In this issue

**Districts Embrace District RtI Plan Development**.....1

**Summer Training of Trainers Institutes**.....2

**Polk County School District: An All Education Approach to Implementing RtI**.....3

**Principals Receive Leadership Training in the Implementation of RtI**.....4

**Select Resources**.....6

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To access an electronic version of this newsletter, go to <http://FloridaRtI.usf.edu>.

## Districts Embrace District RtI Plan Development

By George M. Batsche

The implementation of RtI is “organized by a district plan, driven by professional development, supported by coaching and technical assistance, and informed by data.” With this in mind, a technical assistance and support plan to facilitate the development of district RtI implementation plans was launched in December 2008 and completed in May 2009. A series of three meetings scheduled over a six-month period of time were held in each of eight regional locations across the state. Sixty-six of the 67 school districts and other groups attended the three-day technical assistance meetings. Florida was fortunate to receive permission from the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) to modify an electronic version of their district level *Response to Intervention Blueprints for Implementation*. Each participating district was provided with an electronic copy of this blueprint so they would not have to “reinvent the wheel.” Day One focused on the development of the Consensus section of the district plan, Day Two on the development of the Infrastructure section, and Day Three on the Implementation section. The technical assistance sessions were facilitated by representatives from the projects and offices responsible for supporting statewide RtI implementation — Just Read, Florida!, Florida Center for Reading Research, Statewide Positive Behavior Support, RtI: Teaching/Learning Connections, and the Statewide Problem Solving/RtI Project.



Hardee District Implementation Team



DeSoto District Implementation Team

In June, thirty-one districts submitted their RtI plans for a voluntary review process designed to provide reinforcement and feedback based on the content of the plans. Each plan was reviewed by two individuals, and a “consolidated” review was provided to the superintendent and RtI coordinator for the district. The review process involved representatives from the Statewide PS/RtI Project and the Regional RtI Specialists assigned to the Differentiated Accountability Regions. In addition, representatives from the Posi-

*continued on page 2*

<http://FloridaRtI.usf.edu>

# Summer Training of Trainers Institutes

## RtI Professional Development Training Launched for 2009 School Year

By George M. Batsche

Scaling-Up RtI at the district and state levels is a multi-year school reform process. Because the implementation of RtI is "...driven by professional development," the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) wanted to ensure that districts had the training, materials, and support structure to conduct RtI professional development using district personnel. Such "capacity-building" is critical to the successful scaling-up of RtI. To that end, the FLDOE authorized the Problem Solving/RtI Project to conduct RtI Training of Trainers Institutes throughout the state during the month of August. The three-day Institutes were presented in five locations. Sixty-one of the 67 districts sent representatives to be trained to deliver RtI professional development for their district staff. The turnout and participation were outstanding, and the feedback received about the training from the participants was excellent.

Each district was provided with a Training Manual (both print and electronic versions) that included PowerPoint presentations, data collection tools, case studies to be used for training, and a multi-year training plan. The Institutes focused on effective strategies for facilitating the training of school staff to acquire skills necessary to implement RtI. The curriculum

and materials used in the training were taken from those developed over the past three years to conduct training in the pilot schools/districts and the statewide training conducted by the staff of the Statewide PS/RtI Implementation Project. These materials and strategies had been well tested and vetted with schools and districts throughout Florida.

Technical assistance and support will be provided to district trainers by the PS/RtI Regional Coordinators and Differentiated Accountability Regional RtI Specialists during the 2009-2010 school year. Five technical assistance meetings will be conducted during the year and "on-request" assistance will be provided based upon need.

A *special thanks* to our Project Leader, Clark Dorman and the PS/RtI Regional Coordinators, Beth Hardcastle, Kelly Justice, and Brian Gaunt for their hard work in the development

of the materials for the Training Manual. In addition, *special thanks* are also extended to Judi Hyde and Stevi Schermond for ensuring all arrangements and logistics for the meetings and for coordinating the printing and organization of the materials used and distributed during the sessions.

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### Districts Embrace District RtI Plan Development

*continued from page 1*

tive Behavior Support project were provided copies of the plans that included a district-wide behavior framework.

In the opinion of those conducting the reviews, the quality of the plans submitted was, quite simply, excellent. It is clear that the district representatives who attended the regional plan development meetings combined the information and resources provided at those meetings with their own district knowledge and expertise to develop comprehensive blueprints to guide RtI implementation in their districts. Districts included professional development plans, district flow charts, brochures for parents and teachers as well as others, policy statements, instruction/intervention resource maps, multi-year implementation blueprints, and data collection systems. Each district used the NASDSE *Blueprint* provided during the training to develop a district plan that reflected the mission and culture of the district. However, across the districts the content of the plans was very similar, comprehensive, and reflected a "doable" plan to bring the benefits of RtI to the students and families in the district.

To view a sample of district plans, go to [www.floridarti.usf.edu](http://www.floridarti.usf.edu).



Walton District Implementation Team

# Polk County School District

## An All Education Approach to Implementing RtI

By Brian T. Gaunt, Central Florida Regional Coordinator, Florida PS/RtI Project  
with

Pam Stein, Senior Manager, Psychological Services, Polk County Public School District

Linda Troupe, Director of Student Services, Polk County Public School District

Jim Maxwell, School Psychologist, Polk County Public School District

Susan Jones, PS/RtI Coach, Polk County Public School District

In March of 2009, the Spectrum K12 School Solutions and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) conducted a survey of school districts across the United States to evaluate the level of implementation of Response to Intervention ([http://www.spectrumk12.com/rti\\_survey\\_results](http://www.spectrumk12.com/rti_survey_results)). A total of 728 district administrators participated, representing the four primary regions of the U.S. In short summary, the report found that 74% of sampled districts described RtI implementation as a general education, or unified school improvement effort despite the initial awareness of RtI originating from their ESE department. According to the report, the number of districts at least piloting the implementation of PS/RtI has increased from 44% in 2007, to 60% in 2008, and 71% in 2009. Polk County School District, located in central Florida, and one of the districts participating in the Florida Problem Solving (PS)/RtI Project, is just such a district working to scale-up implementation of PS/RtI as a framework for improving the educational outcomes of all their students.

As school districts develop their PS/RtI implementation plans, it may be helpful to showcase a school district in an effort to share what works and what is needed to meet the challenges of large scale implementation. In an effort to further my understanding of Polk County's achievements towards implementing RtI and the evolution of their district level RtI team, I was offered an opportunity to speak with Pam Stein, Senior Manager of the Psychological Services Department, Jim Maxwell, School Psychologist, Linda Troupe, Director of Student Services, and Susan Jones, District PS/RtI Coach.

Polk County's efforts to implement RtI can be traced back to their Student Services Department participation in Project ACHIEVE as far back as the late 1990s. A component of this project was the introduction and use of a problem-solving model to help improve the quality of services provided to

students. This model, however, was primarily used by their Student Services Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) as reflected in its IAT policies and procedures of the time, and not as a general practice among all educators in Polk County Schools.

Over the last couple of years, members of the Student Services department, in particular school psychologists, attended conferences and workshops to learn about RtI and began to update their IAT policies and procedures. The district PS/RtI team membership grew to reflect other disciplines such as guidance, social work, and ESOL services to further develop

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a unified vision for implementing RtI. In those early stages it was clear to the team that RtI was not just an alternative to Exceptional Student Education (ESE) eligibility; it was a substantial education reform of general education. Consequently, they decided that they needed to include other departments such as curriculum and instruction, reading, math, science, and elementary and secondary education.

Over the course of the 2007-2008 school-year, members of Student Services along with the District PS/RtI Coach, and with support from and involvement by the Assistant Superintendent of Learning Support, Nancy Woolcock, began providing presentations to various audiences in the district in an effort to build consensus about what RtI is and the level of involvement needed to implement it effectively and efficiently. As those efforts continued throughout the year, the membership on the District Level RtI team (formerly the Intervention Assistance Team) had grown to about 40 members with some serving in roles as supervisors at the district level.

A steering committee was created to develop Polk County Schools' RtI policies and implementation plan. The membership of this committee is comprised of directors and super-

*continued on page 5*

# Principals Receive Leadership Training in the Implementation of RtI

The Institute for Small and Rural Districts (ISRD) sponsored RtI Leadership Training Institutes for principals in August. The Institutes, “What Successful Principals Do: How to Make Data-Based Decisions” were held at three locations across Florida and were attended by more than 275 building principals and district administrators. The training was conducted by Ann Selland, Michael McCauley, and Rebecca Sarlo, three of the five RtI Specialists assigned to the five Differentiated Accountability Regional Teams.

Renée Speisman, Executive Director of ISRD, organized the training and stated, “The principals were impressed with the depth and breadth of the presenters’ knowledge. It is my hope that we will be able to continue to collaborate in the delivery of high quality professional development in the small and rural districts. There is definitely a need for a continued effort as evidenced by principals’ suggestions for future trainings:

- Follow-up workshop with specific overviews of different research-based interventions
- Middle/High schools need hands-on practical applications
- Need for discussion on actual interventions being used to address areas of need and provide opportunities for participants to share interventions that have worked for them
- Need more information on how to break down data/create graphs to be used to make decisions.”

## Participating Principals’ Comments

*“I have a much clearer picture of RtI and my vision is becoming stronger.”*

*“This training served as a huge support to a district that is just starting to ‘take off’ with RtI. ‘It’s All About the Climb’ is our welcome back theme for my school. That’s what I feel about RtI.”*



Rebecca Sarlo discusses Data-Based Decision Making with 62 participants.



Ann Selland speaks to a record crowd at the ISRD training for principals in Chipley.



Mike McCauley gives principals the *Why of RtI*.

## Polk County School District: An All Education Approach to Implementing RtI

*continued from page 3*

visors of the various departments of services that make up Polk County's School District. As encouraged by the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE), Polk County Schools is currently developing and refining their district-wide implementation plan to guide their efforts to integrate RtI as a framework for supporting student education. For this purpose, the Polk County RtI Steering Committee intends to use the published NASDSE building and district level *Response to Intervention Blueprints for Implementation* as well as lessons and information learned through their participation in the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Pilot Project.

When asked about specific factors that helped to ensure Polk County's rate of progress and achievement with respect to implementing RtI, several things were noted. First, the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) program served as a convenient and important first step in that the framework of a structured problem-solving approach is already reflected in the PBS model. Participation in the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Pilot Project was cited as another critical factor which provided for a full-time PS/RtI Coach to lead implementation efforts at three elementary pilot schools. Supporting existing initiatives while introducing the concepts of problem-solving and RtI has also been found to be helpful. For example, Polk County's Research and Accountability Department hosts an annual Data Day in which school leaders review, analyze, and develop plans based on student performance data in the county. In working with the Research and Accountability Department, the RtI Steering Committee has been using these data days as an opportunity for school administrators and teachers to learn how to apply the specific data analysis protocols reflected in PS/RtI (e.g., evaluation of core Tier 1 as 80% of students passing benchmark assessments). Due to the success of this effort, further follow-up sessions are expected. In addition, a Training Committee has been created to align professional development supports towards scaling-up RtI implementation in coordination with the district-wide RtI implementation plan being developed by the RtI Steering Committee.

Finally, resource mapping within the context of a three-tiered model of delivering services to students has been found to be

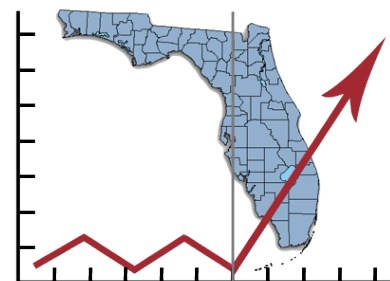
of high value to schools. What resonated for many schools through RtI has been a focus on efficient selection of services/interventions for students by mapping out the available resources or programs at each school for use as a standard protocol approach to intervention design. Schools that have engaged in this process are now in a position to streamline their staff's collective knowledge of intervention ideas and expertise and to further increase the efficiency of decision-making and provision of services to students.

It is clear that a kind of synergy has taken place in Polk County in which efforts from both a top-down and a bottom-up direction have been converging to help fuel the amount of recognition and awareness needed to begin implementation of RtI. An example of top-down support cited by Polk County personnel as helpful in bringing about support for RtI was Dr.

Eric Smith's, the Commissioner of Education, support for RtI as stated in the publication of the FLDOE Statewide Response to Instruction/Intervention (RtI) Implementation Plan. Further, it was found that Dr. Smith's teleconferences with district superintendents also created greater awareness for the importance of RtI.

In closing, to date, Polk County's efforts represent an "All Education" initiative. It was exciting to hear how the efforts of the Student Services Department have evolved to become, today, Polk County's effort to build a unified vision and plan for bringing about the necessary reforms to support and implement PS/RtI. And although Polk County representatives understand that they still have many challenges ahead of them, at present, they are focused on next steps to scale up implementation efforts from pilot schools to district-wide implementation and to begin integrating all policies and procedures within a PS/RtI framework.

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# Select Resources

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

**Building Capacity for Response to Intervention in Texas Schools Project** (<http://buildingrti.utexas.org>) is part of the Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk (MCPER) within the College of Education at the University of Texas at Austin. Funded by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the project team collaborates with members of another MCPER team, the Special Education Research Project-Mathematics (SERP Math), to inform its technical assistance efforts in promoting the implementation of RTI in early reading and math instruction. The site's sections include: RTI Presentations, Tools & Resources, For Parents, and Implementation Examples.

**The IRIS Center: Vanderbilt University** (<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resources.html>) provides free, online, interactive training enhancements to be used in both college and university courses and in professional development activities for practicing educators. A four-part training module on RTI is available under the Differentiated Instruction section of the online module listings. The training is a STAR Legacy module, which incorporates a combination of a challenge, interactive activities, and multiple opportunities for sharing, assessment, and revision.

**The National Center on Response to Intervention** (<http://www.rti4success.org>) provides state-level technical assistance support throughout the country. Their website has a library containing a various assortment of briefs, fact sheets, presentations, media and training modules relevant to RTI. The center also provides webinars through this site.

**NRCLD Responsiveness to Intervention Symposium** (<http://www.nrclد.org/symposium2003/index.html>) is posted on the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD) website. On December 4-5, 2003 the NRCLD sponsored a two-day symposium focusing on RtI issues. The page provides links to papers presented during the symposium, presentations, and video of the symposium sessions, when available.

**Reading Interventions Demonstration Videos** (<http://www.future-school-psychology.org/Videopage.html>) are on the Future of School Psychology Conference Task Force on Academic Outcomes website. These videos (produced by Matt Burns and his students at the University of Minnesota) demonstrate a number of different reading interventions.

<http://FloridaRtl.usf.edu>

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