

SSTAGE Newsletter

Volume 4, Issue 1

It Takes a Village: Problem-Solving Teams and Student Success

By Rachel Brown, Ph.D., NCSP

Senior Academic Officer for FastBridge Learning

Instructional supports are often organized into multiple levels, or tiers, of instruction (Brown-Chidsey & Bickford, 2016), called a multi-tier system of support (MTSS). A MTSS does not just happen, but requires educators to work collaboratively and utilize student data to plan effective instruction for each tier. In this regard, a MTSS “takes a village” to educate each child.

Prevention Mindset

In order to build an effective MTSS, educators need a prevention mindset, a knowledge of the components of tiered supports, student data, and problem-solving teams, as a means to plan for student support and success.

Tiered School Supports

- **Tier 1:** Tier 1 includes instructional activities that are used with all students and is often called core instruction. Strong core instruction decreases who will need additional support. Based on research, about 80% of students can meet learning goals in Tier 1 instruction.
- **Tier 2:** Research suggests about 20% of students will need some additional assistance, requiring time in the day and additional instructional materials. Tier 2 is ALWAYS in addition to Tier 1. Many schools build an instructional block into the daily schedule, usually about 30 minutes in length, when Tier 2 students can get regular support through evidence based instruction and high achieving students receive enrichment and acceleration.
- **Tier 3:** According to research, 5% of all students in a school may need the intensive instruction of Tier 3 which is characterized by very direct and systematic evidence-based lessons. Time for such instruction is required, needing a longer block of time. Some schools provide such instruction at the same time as Tier 1 core and Tier 2 intervention as a replacement core program because no other time is available.
- **Tier 4:** In cases where a student still does not meet learning goals with Tier 3 support, a team can consider whether the student should be referred for a special education evaluation.

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Newsletter Committee

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Writers: Craig Albers, Rachel Brown, Donna McClain, John O'Connor, & Joan Whitehead

Contributor: Wallace Blackstock

SSTAGE Welcomes Wallace Blackstock as the New Executive Director

Wallace Blackstock, recently retired principal of Marlow Elementary School in Effingham County, was appointed as the new Executive Director of SSTAGE following the retirement of Lynn Pennington. Over the last three years, he has served on the SSTAGE Board of Directors as a region representative. His many years of educational experience from elementary and middle classroom instruction, elementary and middle school administration/RTI coordinator, and high school instructional support will be an asset to the association. In taking the new position, Wallace said, “Education is a calling for me. I have been involved in some form of teaching for my entire adult life, whether it be in public school, at church, adult city recreation, or contracted for teaching adult educators. Retirement will not stop that focus of mine. I am committed to serving all students through support and professional learning for the educators who are now face to face with Georgia’s students.” We are delighted to have him at the helm. He may be reached at WBlackstock@sstage.org.

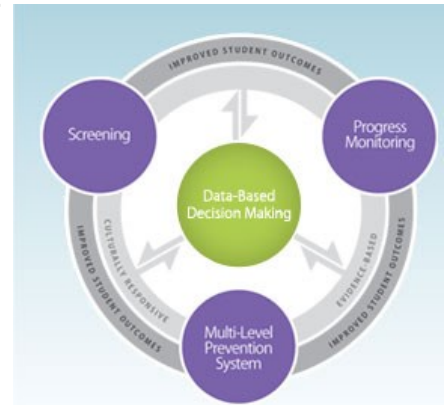
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Data-Based Instruction

An organized system of data collection and analysis is needed. A complete MTSS includes not only specific instructional tools matched to each tier, but also structured assessments; universal screening and progress monitoring are used to learn which students might need additional instruction. Universal screening occurs at Tier 1, involves testing every student with a brief standardized measure, and is usually done three times a year in grades K through 5, two to three times a year in middle school, and one to two times a year in high school. Screening scores must be compared with other sources of information to verify data accuracy. This collective data can be used to determine what type of instruction the student needs. When screening scores are different from other sources of data, brief additional screening is recommended in order to learn the student's true learning needs. For students in Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention, regular progress monitoring to evaluate if the intervention is working is needed. The most commonly used type of progress assessment is curriculum-based measurement (CBM). Sometimes, the progress measure will be the same type as used for screening and other times it will be a different one. Although it is recommended that Tier 2 and 3 monitoring be done weekly, in some cases, Tier 2 monitoring might be less frequent than Tier 3.



Problem-Solving Teams

With progress data in hand, it's possible to know if the intervention is working. Teachers often benefit from working together to interpret data and plan interventions. Grade level teams are most common in the elementary grades and include all the teachers who teach the same grade(s) and typically review the universal screening data and use it to group students for interventions. Content area teams are more common at middle and high school and include those teachers of the same specific content such as math or English and review screening data and organize interventions. Both grade-level and content-area teams also review students' progress data at regular intervals, often monthly, to see whether the interventions are working or if changes are needed.

Building level teams can provide an additional type of support for teachers through review and guidance regarding students who have not responded to intervention. School teams offer a way for educators to discuss individual student needs and identify which teacher and intervention are right. In this regard, such teams function as a village "council" for instructional leadership. Through sharing the responsibility for all students, educators engage in collaborative practices that result in the right instruction for each student.

Summary

Strong and effective schools result from careful planning for student needs and incorporate prevention thinking. Individual student success requires teacher attention to specific learning needs and is best supported with multiple types and levels of instruction. The best way to manage tiered supports is through an MTSS that involves one or more building-level problem-solving teams. No one teacher can meet all students' needs but school teams can support all students by sharing the activities necessary to promote student success.

Reference

Brown-Chidsey, R. & Bickford, R. (2016). Practical handbook of multi-tiered systems of support: Building academic and behavioral success in schools. New York: Guilford Press.

NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (Continued from Page 1)

Lynn LeLoup Pennington, first president and first executive director of SSTAGE, will remain involved this school year with SSTAGE as a consultant to assist in the transition. In describing the transition, Lynn explained, "It seems once you've been a board member of SSTAGE, you become a member of a tightly knit family and those bonds of collaboration and shared passion for all things related to SST, RTI and MTSS, are not easily broken." She has not fully retired from other professional endeavors. She continues to consult for SSTAGE Connections (www.SSTAGEConnections.org), which provides support to schools and districts, and she is teaching several cohorts of the new SST Coordinator Endorsement program offered by Griffin RESA. Lynn happily remains at lynnpennington@sstage.org.



Wallace and Amy Blackstock



Highlights from Dr. Rachel Brown's 2016 RTI/MTSS Fall Conference Presentation on *Creating the Village: Developing a Culture of Collaboration*

By Joan F. Whitehead, Ed.S.

SSTAGE Director at Large

2016 SSTAGE RTI/MTSS Fall Conference attendees were fully engaged when Dr. Rachel Brown shared her perspectives on effective education and public health, stages of change, data-driven problem solving, and case examples of collaborative support. Dr. Brown used the analogy of the village it takes to raise a child to explain the relationship between effective public education and public health. A clear connection between child rearing and teaching as collaborative endeavors was drawn, especially when the focus is on meeting individual needs of children. It

makes perfect sense for the adult educators within schools to share the responsibility of teaching ALL students when no one teacher, regardless how effective, can possibly meet the needs of every student.

The tie to public health comes into play when three stages of prevention are considered.

- 1) The Primary stage represents the proactive efforts to keep a problem from occurring.
- 2) Secondary efforts are begun immediately to eliminate the problem or at least to prevent the spread of it.
- 3) Tertiary measures are employed to reduce, as much as possible, the negative effects of the identified problem that has advanced beyond the point that neither primary nor secondary efforts are no longer effective.

Dr. Brown compared a medical primary prevention (vaccinations) to mandatory school attendance, secondary intervention (antibiotics) to remedial programs that are provided as needed, and tertiary support (assistive devices) to special education. Dr. Brown proposes that education is one of the most effective prevention tools since a good and effective education is linked to "better health, higher income, and community stability" (Brown, 2016).

Public schooling in the United States since World War II has been a "one size fits all" proposition with limited access due to race, ability or disability, and income. In recent years, there has been some recognition that students are individuals and often present with high frequency needs that could be anticipated based on these needs. The key to addressing the anticipated needs is the identification of them as early as possible. When prevention systems are in place, individual needs of students can be met immediately. School prevention systems were defined: Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS); and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

RTI/MTSS assumes that all students can learn and when there is a framework for supports that incorporates both academics and behavior within a collaborative setting, all students do learn. The challenge for the adults is to differentiate the instruction so that what is provided is, according to what Dr. Brown refers to as the Goldilocks Principle, just right for each student. It is a challenge because in many instances, adults have to change their current familiar practice. Dr. Brown cited change research with teamwork purported to be the most important step necessary for effective change. Having the right people on the team making slow and steady progress toward change is more likely to last.

Data-driven decision-making has to be the force to support ALL students according to Dr. Brown. Data allows the educator to define and to determine the exact roadmap necessary to get to the desired destination. Dr. Brown stressed that a major challenge in RTI/MTSS is the balancing act between consistency and flexibility amongst Tier 1 (scientifically-based core curricula and universal screening); Tier 2 (targeted interventions with weekly progress monitoring); and Tier 3 (specific intensive interventions are provided with weekly progress monitoring). Teacher preparation to implement RTI/MTSS with fidelity must include high quality training and problem solving skills. Attention must be paid to the selection of curricula, the availability of specific and consistent interventions for tiers 2 and 3, and the method for the determination that the interventions actually work.

The district RTI/MTSS team must define expectations and elements that are non-negotiable; provide effective and ongoing training and support for instructional options; and communicate openly and explicitly with stakeholders. Ultimately, schools must become that village, that effective system of support in which teams are fully committed to employ effective academic and/or behavioral practices over time that focus on each child's needs and educators share the responsibility of teaching ALL students.

Facilitating EL Achievement through Prevention, Early Intervention, and Problem Solving Models: Best Practices for RTI/MTSS

By Craig Albers, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Educational Psychology, University of Wisconsin - Madison

It was a tremendous pleasure to have the opportunity to meet so many Georgia educators during the 2016 SSTAGE Fall Conference built around my book "Promoting Academic Success with English Learners: Best Practices for RTI", co-authored with Rebecca Martinez from Indiana University. The book presents a framework for implementing RTI/MTSS as a way to optimally serve the academic, behavioral, and psychosocial needs of linguistically diverse students through the core principles underlying RTI and MTSS. Educators can thereby evaluate if they are implementing best practices and not need to buy a particular program/curriculum to accomplish their goals. My brief visit with Georgia educators reinforced that educators continue to grow in their use of these prevention and intervention frameworks within their classrooms and are primed to begin and/or continue adapting these approaches to best meet the needs of our growing English learner (EL) population. What is also clear is that there is much that still needs to be learned. So, what do we know at this point in time?



Until a better service delivery framework comes along, the use of RTI/MTSS with EL students can be considered best practice. There are various critical components to implementing RTI/MTSS with EL students; these are generally the same as RTI models implemented with native English speakers, with the critical difference being the need to incorporate explicit consideration of English language proficiency (ELP) and second language variables within the RTI/MTSS frameworks.

1. It is essential that high-quality, scientifically-based core content instruction be used to allow ELs to access the general curriculum.
2. An emphasis on language acquisition is necessary irrespective of the language instructional model in use.
3. Data-based procedures must take into consideration specific ELP levels when making decisions regarding curriculum, intervention provision, intervention effectiveness, and overall student performance.
4. Universal screening and progress monitoring need to account for specific ELP levels.
5. When determining movement between intervention tiers, specific ELP levels should be one of the important factors in justifying movement.
6. A variety of high-quality, scientifically based supplemental interventions that include appropriate intervention options for EL students at varying ELP levels must be available and utilized.
7. Procedures for evaluating the integrity of implementation of classroom instruction, supplemental interventions, and language instruction should be in place.

An incomplete knowledge base regarding EL education, inconsistent guidance for how to provide educational services, a possible lack of resources to meet EL needs, and the perception among many as to not having the necessary instructional and language skills to meet EL needs allow many to feel overwhelmed. Two factors give us reason for hope. First, there is increasing recognition of the need to more completely examine educational approaches to meeting EL needs. Thankfully, more research is being done in this area. Second, we have an appropriate framework for providing EL services; as summarized here and examined in "Promoting Academic Success with English Language Learners: Best Practices for RTI", the RTI/MTSS framework provides the necessary constructional components to effectively serve ELs.



SAVE THE DATE

SSTAGE Fall Conference

September 14, 2017

DuBose Porter Conference Center

Dublin, GA

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Kent McIntosh

Enhancing Equity in School Discipline: Practical Strategies & Tools

Highlights from Dr. Paul Riccomini's 2015 Fall Conference Presentation on *Closing the Arithmetic to Algebra Achievement Gap*

By Donna McClain, Ed.D.
SSTAGE Region 4 Representative

In September 2015, SSTAGE was honored to have Dr. Paul Riccomini present at our fall conference. Dr. Riccomini is a math professor at Pennsylvania State University, but he previously served Clemson University and contracted with the department of education in Georgia to provide consulting services regarding advancing achievement in math. Dr. Riccomini's background includes instruction of students with special needs, and he has a unique understanding of students who come from all backgrounds. Dr. Riccomini and Dr. Bradley Witzel co-authored the book *Response to Intervention in Math*, published by Corwin in 2010. The focus for the training in September was aimed at middle and high school levels.



Dr. Riccomini covered far too much information in the one-day workshop to present in this brief summary, but here are some highlights that I hope readers will find useful. Most teachers are trained to present a "bell ringer" or some type of opening activity at the beginning of class. This helps students shift their focus and also provides some behavior management; however, Dr. Riccomini pointed out that a common mistake is that the bell ringer is not differentiated. Some students need a tougher problem to complete and others need something easier. The most important thing to improve student motivation is success. If a student enters the room and the first item on the agenda is too difficult for the individual to complete successfully without help, then the student is automatically set up for failure and low motivation. Especially for math, it is very important for students to experience success.

The use of the number line in math instruction has fallen by the wayside, and this lack of use has resulted in limited understanding of many mathematical concepts. Dr. Riccomini recommends using the number line to teach virtually every concept in math. Using the number line is especially important for aiding the understanding of fractions. Teachers often use pie charts, and while those are useful at times, pie charts and other types of figure hold no value. Only the number line helps students associate the value of the fraction with the portion represented. The link between fractions and the number line needs to begin early in grade school, and the link needs to be established often so that students have a fluid grasp of this concept. Both vertical and horizontal number lines should be used, and fractions and decimals should be shown together.

Instruction in fluency is especially important as fluent repetition of math facts allows more use of working memory. If a student is attempting to calculate the quantity of a given math fact, then working memory is being used. Using working memory for such tasks limits the amount available to complete more complex math tasks, which is required for multi-step problems.

Interventions used in the Response-to-Intervention process are the most important feature. Without good interventions, monitoring the results does not provide useful information. Dr. Riccomini did not recommend specific interventions but noted that the Institute's for Education Science Practice Guide is available at http://www.rti4success.org/sites/default/files/rti_math_pg_042109.pdf

Finally, Dr. Riccomini has provided consultation to schools in Georgia and in Ohio. Four webinars are available on GaDOE's website at <https://www.georgiastandards.org/resources/Pages/Videos/Effective-Mathematics-Instruction-for-Students-with-Diverse-Needs.aspx>. The focus of these webinars is improving instruction for students with special needs. Dr. Riccomini also has several modules available through Ohio at <http://www.sst6.org/index.php/online-learning/math-learning-modules>. A sample of topics covered are as follows: *Linking Data to Instruction*, *The Role of the Administrator*, *Math Vocabulary*, *Systematic and Explicit Instruction*, and *Identifying and Using Error Patterns*. Finally all individuals who provide instruction in math or who supervise math teachers should become familiar with the research completed by the National Math Panel in 2008. A link to that report may be accessed here: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/mathpanel/report/final-report.pdf>

Math Instruction for Students with Disabilities

By John O'Connor, Ph.D.
SSTAGE Director At Large

This is the third article in John O'Connor's series on how special education leaders can effectively become champions of GREAT instruction to radically improve the achievement and performance of students with disabilities. Many students with disabilities struggle with mathematics. Fortunately, the National Mathematics Advisory Panel has provided specific insight into instructional practices that can be beneficial for all students and specifically students with disabilities. The Panel was charged with using "the best available scientific research to advise on improvements in the mathematics education of the nation's children." In 2008, they released their report that made wide ranging recommendations to increase the achievement of all students. In a small, but powerful section, they made recommendations for math instruction for "low achieving students and students with learning disabilities." A few of the highlights are provided below.

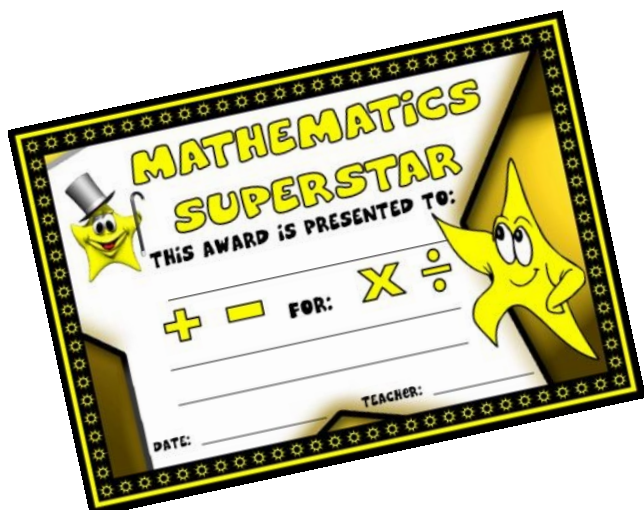
Recommendations for All Students

Through the decades, various approaches to mathematics instruction have been popular. The pendulum has swung from an intense focus on math computation skills ("back to basics") on one end to approaching instruction primarily through problem solving activities on the other. The Panel states neither end of the pendulum is appropriate. Mathematics instruction "must simultaneously develop conceptual understanding, computational fluency, and problem solving skills. Debates regarding the relative importance of these aspects of mathematical knowledge are misguided." In order to be competent in math, students need to acquire proficiency in all three legs of the mathematics school. They need to understand the concepts of mathematics, fluently compute numbers, and apply both of those skills in problem solving scenarios. Likewise, much has been argued about teacher directed versus student centered instruction. Is one approach primarily superior to the other? The Panel says no. "High-quality research does not support the exclusive use of either approach." Therefore, mathematics instruction should place mutual importance on conceptual understanding, computational fluency, and problem solving skills and that instruction should include a variety of practices including teacher-directed work and student centered activities.

Recommendations for Low Achieving Students and Students with Learning Disabilities

Based on a review of rigorous research, the Panel made recommendations regarding mathematics instruction for struggling students. It is interesting that students with identified disabilities were grouped with low achieving students. For those of us who work in schools, that is not surprising. We know that in many classes a student with an identified disability sits next to a student who does not qualify for services, yet they both have learning needs that are very similar. Because of the complex way in which we determine who has a disability, some students are able to access special education while other students have very similar profiles and needs and yet don't qualify.

The Panel recommends the use of explicit, systematic instruction. That instruction should include intentionally sequenced instruction and materials that highlight critical components. Teachers should provide clear demonstrations and guided practice. Students should be given the opportunity to ask questions and demonstrate their thought processes through "thinking aloud" as they complete mathematical tasks. Decades ago, Anita Archer and her colleagues coined the phrase "I do it, We do it, You do it" to succinctly describe this sequence of explicit instruction. Students with disabilities need this highly structured and organized approach to learning mathematics. The Panel states, however, that students also need some less explicit instruction. "This kind of instruction should not comprise all the mathematics these students receive. However, it does seem essential for building proficiency in both computation and the translation of word problems into appropriate mathematical equations and solutions."



John O'Connor is the Director of Interventions and Assessment in Henry County Schools. He is the author of several books, including the recently published "Great Instruction Great Achievement for Students with Disabilities" (CASE 2016).

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