

REPORT ON THE 2011 FLORIDA MTSSS LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE: DEVELOPING A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF STUDENT SUPPORT

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The 2011 Inaugural Florida Multi-Tiered System of Student Support (MTSSS) Leadership Institute was held on June 22-24, 2011 at the Innisbrook Resort. The institute provided district and school-based leaders with workshops, implementer forums and district exemplars to enhance the implementation of Response to Intervention/Positive Behavior Supports (RtI/PBS), now also referred to as a Multi-Tiered System of Student Support (MTSSS). The theme of the inaugural Institute was: "Maximizing Student Outcomes through the Integration of Academic and Behavior Instruction/Intervention in a Multi-Tier System of Student Supports (RtI/PBS)" and emphasized efficient and effective methods of improving student performance in an era of diminishing resources.

Topical Strands, Implementer Forums and Leadership Networking allowed participants to become familiar with highly effective practices and skills with actual exemplars from implementation leaders from districts throughout Florida.

Topical Strands of the Institute included:

- *Leadership Skills to Support an Integrated Model-District/School*
- *K-12 Alignment/RtI/PBS at the Secondary Level*
- *Coaching Models and Practices to Enhance Implementation Fidelity*
- *District-level RtI/PBS Accountability and Evaluation Practices*
- *Using School Academic and Behavior Data to develop effective instruction/intervention practices to accelerate student performance*
- *Sustaining Implementation in a Rapidly Changing Landscape.*

Source of Information: Florida RtI Leadership Institute flyer.

Bambi Lockman, Bureau Chief, Exceptional Education and Student Services, Florida Department of Education gave the keynote address. Of particular importance was her statement that school psychologists need to "re-tool to stay", using their skills and knowledge in flexible ways. As school leaders embrace the new Florida's Leadership Standards for School Leaders, they are called to recruit, nurture and retain highly effective personnel which work collaboratively to build a culture of continuous improvement that leads to measurable student success. School psychologists become indispensable participants and school leaders when they willingly engage in:

- *collaborative professional team building*
- *consultative support to principals, staff and parents*
- *formative assessment of academic and social emotional student needs*
- *problem solving skills using data-based decision making for continuous improvement*

George Batsche, Ed.D. and Don Kincaid, Ed.D. led the institute indicating that there had been a marriage between PBS and Rtl. Going forward, the new union's name will be Multi Tiered System of Student Supports (MTSSS). The roll out of the new union is expected later in the year. This union is supported by research findings which indicate that an integrated implementation of school-wide positive behavioral supports and high quality instructional practices are critical for school success and result in increased student engagement and academic gains. Their mission and vision is to model a collaborative Multi-Tiered System of Student Supports that share a common language and "informs the development, implementation, and on-going evaluation of an integrated, aligned, and sustainable system of service delivery that prepares all students for post-secondary education and/or successful employment within our global society".

Participants were encouraged to consider three essential guiding questions as they attended the Topical Strands sessions and the Implementer Forums:

- *How does the information strengthen my district's MTSSS Implementation Plan?*
- *Which resources do I have and which ones do I need to implement the plan?*
- *What additional supports will be necessary?*

Of the six Topical Strands available, participants were able to attend four, in addition to attending each of the four Implementer Forums.

Highlights of the Topical Strands:

"Leadership: Contributions to Student Outcomes"

Presenters: Clark Dorman and Michelle White

Five critical elements were identified as indicators of effective district leadership, as evidenced by teams or individuals who:

- *" Establish a vision with a sense of urgency for change, maintain focus and deliver a consistent message over time*
- *Focus on schools (districts are successful when schools are successful)*
- *Create relationships with stakeholders based upon mutual respect and shared responsibility*
- *Engage in expert problem solving*
- *Invest in professional development"*

(Leithwood, 2010; Barnhardt 2009; Crawford & Torgeson, 2007)

There were several questions posed by the presenters in the workshop regarding leadership:

- *"What leadership functions are linked to the student outcomes?"*

- *“How is information being shared?”*
- *“Is leadership a component of your plan or are the Florida Leaders standards used to guide Leadership?”*
- *“How do lower levels influence the upper levels of leadership?”*

“Accountability & Evaluation”

Presenters: Jose Castillo, Ph.D. and Karen Childs

Accountability allows us to establish and maintain standards for performance, reinforce the use of data to monitor student growth and resource allocations, and focus on student outcomes. Evaluation then becomes an essential tool for data-based decision making, with the data collected being determined by the questions that need to be answered:

- *Are students meeting expectations academically, behaviorally and/or socially-emotionally?*
- *Are we implementing MTSS with fidelity?*
- *Do we have the capacity to implement successfully?*
- *Does staff buy into implementing MTSS?*

A variety of tools are available to the teams as they use the problem solving process to answer each of these questions. For example, principal walkthroughs, lesson plan reviews, intervention documentation worksheets, the Self-Assessment of Problem Solving Implementation, the Benchmark of Quality checklist, and staff development evaluations.

What are you currently doing to examine these areas? What data sources do you have to answer these questions? What critical questions do you need to start asking?

“Maximizing Student Outcomes through K-12”

Presenters: Rebecca Sarlo, Ph.D. and Stephanie Martinez, Ed. S.

The purpose of our K-12 educational system is to provide all students with a seamless and efficient way to learn the knowledge and skills they need to achieve graduation and/or become a skilled workforce (FDOE Mission Statement).

Keep in mind:

- *“Successful high school completion begins with kindergarten”*
- *“Each grade/school level inherits an aggregate of student gaps, weaknesses, and strengths produced in the previous grade/school level”*

- *“The most successful intervention is to ensure that students enter each grade/school with as much strength as possible”*
- *“The best screening tool is the compilation of the student’s historical data”*
- *“The best predictor of future failure is current failure and disengagement”*
- *“To improve student outcomes ... build systems which allow schools to more effectively... prevent disengagement and academic gaps from occurring ... respond more readily to student engagement and academic deficits when they occur”*
- *“It’s not enough to simply identify at risk students ... follow identification with effective and appropriate intervention”*

Critical elements for success include School-Based Teams with strong levels of consensus, multiple tiers of support that address students’ behavioral and engagement needs, a data system which allows for prevention and timely response to gaps, schedules that support multi-tiered interventions, evaluation methods that improve fidelity, and family/community involvement.

To build a District-wide Early Warning System collect a combination of engagement and academic data that allows you to identify students in need of support before they have failed courses or missed instruction. Academic and engagement indicators include attendance/absenteeism rate, previous retentions, high mobility, academic course failures/low GPA, and discipline referrals.

Effective multi-tiered systems pre-teach skills critical to success at the next level, teach grade level standards and behavioral expectations, as well as re-teach missing skills through instructionally matched supports. Implementation is facilitated when there are clear expectations for vertical alignment, with established protocols for collaboration across grades/schools, and with resources allocated to support the vertical articulation.

“Coaching for MTSSS”

Presenters: Brian Gaunt, Ph.D. and Amanda March, SSP, NCSP

School psychologists are the ideal candidates to coach the MTSSS process based on their advanced professional training in educational research practices, data based analysis and decision making, and consultation for collaborative implementation of best practices.

Although the empirical evidence on coaching remains limited (Cornett & Knight, 2009; Killion & Harrison, 2006; Poglinco et al., 2003) the literature suggests its positive impact on teacher attitudes, the enhancement of fidelity and sustainability of best practices, and the promotion of educator collaboration. In a model of coaching for system change, such as the MTSSS Coaching Model, “coaching or facilitation capacity refers to a system’s ability to organize personnel and resources for prompting and encouraging local school training and implementation efforts (Sugai & Horner, 2006)”.

Within this model, coaching is redefined as “a set of activities that provide dynamic support and facilitation to develop capacity of school/district leadership teams to implement MTSSS aligned with the school/district improvement plan in order to enhance student outcomes”. Since the coaching process is influenced by the school context, the role of the coach (and the activities used) changes over time as the system builds capacity. Therefore, school psychologists must remain actively engaged at each step of the process, improving their interpersonal, problem solving, and content expertise in order to provide relevant consultation and implementation activities that support system changes (Curtis, Castillo, & Cohen, 2008; Gutkin & Curtis, 2008).

The proposed MTSSS Coaching model incorporates four major research-based components that guide all coaching activities:

- *Problem-Solving Facilitation Skills*
- *Content Knowledge*
- *Leadership Support*
- *Professional Development*

School psychologists must intentionally refine consultation skills (i.e.: knowledge of research-validated consultation models, effective communication and interpersonal collaborative skills, and problem-solving facilitation). Content Knowledge in areas of Instruction and Pedagogy (i.e.: evidence-based educational and behavioral practices, classroom management strategies, curriculum and instruction routines) and System Issues (i.e.: system change stages, multi-tier support systems, state and district policies and procedures, effective teaming, stakeholders buy-in) needs to be up to date. In order to support collaborative responsibility and leadership among teachers and principals, school psychologists must understand how to promote “a vision with a sense of urgency for change, maintain focus and deliver a consistent message over time” (Leithwood, 2010; Barnhardt, 2009; Crawford & Torgeson, 2007).

The future professional development of school psychologists must be tightly aligned to the needs of the system if we intend to be relevant stakeholders for years to come. As educators and leaders refine their skills in developing, gathering and interpreting data, ensuring instructional matching for intervention planning, and systematically and formatively evaluating student outcomes, school psychologists must team up with them in order to “re-tool” themselves.

The guiding questions remain:

- *Considering the expectations for best practices of the MTSSS Model, do you have the rigorous and relevant knowledge and skills required to remain a long-term valued participant within this system?*

- *If you and/or your team need coaching support, what coaching activities need to happen and how will you use the information and skills gained through them to scale up the MTSS process with fidelity?*

“Data-Based Problem Solving and Data Systems”

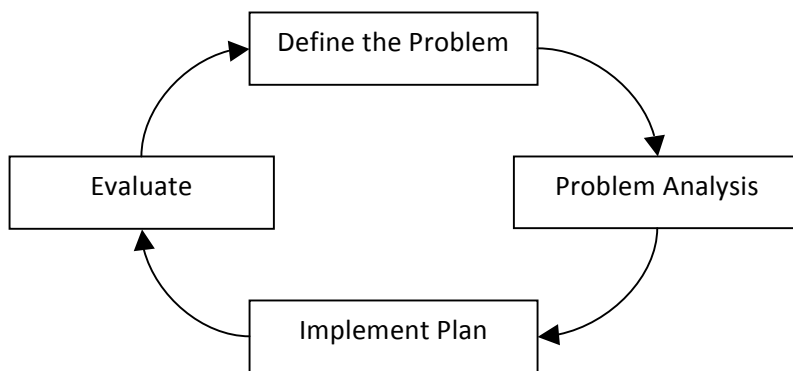
Presenters: Shelby Robertson, Ph.D., Therese Sandomierski, M.A. and Pamela Sudduth, M.A.

The overall goal of this session was to “solidify a vision for problem solving at Tier 1.” In defining Data-Based Problem Solving, decisions are based on student performance data; at the screening level data is used to make decisions about which students are at-risk of their needs not being met; and at the progress monitoring stage the effectiveness of interventions is made based on data. Student performance data guides the decisions to increase or decrease the intensity of interventions in a Multi-Tiered System of Support.

In a Data-Based Problem Solving model, it is important to know why and for what purpose the data is being collected. This information can lead to varied and better decisions. Three types of data are gathered within the MTSS process:

- **Data from universal screening – identifies students not making expected academic and/or behavioral progress**
- **Data from diagnostic assessment- used to determine what students can and cannot do in important academic and behavioral domains**
- **Data from progress monitoring – used to determine if academic interventions are being effective**

The Problem Solving Process is ongoing as evidenced by the diagram below:



Tier 1 Integrated Guided Questions indicated to be answered at each stage of the process:

Define the Problem – What do we want or expect our students to know and be able to do?

- *How sufficient is the core? To answer Behavior Questions address: Attendance, Tardies, Suspensions, Discipline Referrals*
- *Problem Analysis - What can't they do? What are the barriers that prevent them from meeting expectations?*
- *Implement Plan - What are we going to do about it? What strategies or interventions will be used?*
- *Evaluate - Did it work (student response to intervention)? What to do if the response is positive, questionable, or poor?*

"Sustaining the Implementation of MTSSS"

Presenters: Don Kincaid, Ed.D and George M. Batsche, Ed.D

In order to sustain long term change, systems have to intentionally monitor critical elements of sustainability such as policies and planning of practices, leadership training, infrastructure building and effective use of technology for on-going program evaluation. We are encouraged to entertain the following guiding questions:

- *What is the status of your district's MTSSS plan?*
- *Are the right people at the table for its development and implementation?*
- *Are the plan and the data being collected used to guide and evaluate implementation?*

The Florida MTSSS Project has developed a blueprint for comprehensive professional development that will assist Local Educational Agencies (districts and schools) with coaching, technical assistance, and commitment to fidelity of implementation. Their target audience will be the district level leadership and their coaching teams, as they develop a common language and understanding across vertical and horizontal stakeholder levels in order sustain the system reform. The key guiding questions will be:

- *Are changes necessary to increase the impact of the district leadership of MTSSS implementation?*
- *Does the district leadership promote the blueprint and support the building principals in the implementation of MTSSS?*
- *Which critical infrastructure elements are well supported by the district and which elements require additional support?*
- *Who is accountable for facilitating the critical infrastructure elements?*
- *Does the district have an evaluation plan for the implementation of MTSSS?*

Highlights of District Exemplars

Martin County -

- *Located along the coast in Southeast, Florida, Martin County's school population is approximately 18,000 students. The district is in full implementation status for the RtI process.*
- *Organizationally, the RtI Coordinator and PS/RtI Coaches report to the Director of Elementary Programs and School Improvement who reports to the Executive Director of Instructional Services. RtI is located under Instructional Services as a paradigm shift was needed moving away from the previous special education eligibility model of "testing and placing" students.*
- *District Expectations are that ALL schools will use the problem solving process in developing school improvement plans.*
- *The initial PS/RtI Leadership Team was developed using the "Response to Intervention Blueprints: District Level Edition", NASDSE. The current District Based Leadership/Problem Solving Team consists of the: PS/RtI Coordinator, Math Coordinator, Reading Coordinator, School Psychologist and Behavior Specialist.*
- *PS/RtI Supports are provided by:*
 - *District Team – provides Professional Development for School Based Leadership/Problem Solving Teams*
 - *RtI Coaches – support School Based Leadership/Problem Solving Teams, classroom teachers, and students on a daily basis. Coaches also facilitate most meetings ensuring the fidelity process; serve as liaisons between School Based Leadership Team and District providing insight to the district coordinator about the actual implementation of each school site; provide consistent coaching and modeling for teachers and analyze academic and behavioral data. School psychologists serve as external PBS coaches and attend meetings. Experienced coaches mentor new coaches for one year.*
 - *RtI Coordinator – arranges Professional Development*
- *School Based Leadership Team Structure:*
 - *Team Members: Facilitator, parent, classroom teacher, recorder, time keeper data coach, instructional support and administrator*
 - *Each school has a set day, time and place (usually when the School Psychologist is available). Works best when administration does not allow for other events to be scheduled during this time.*

- *Grade level bi-weekly meetings are held*
- *Forms are available on Outlook Forms for district employees*
- *Facilitators of Success:*
 - *Unwavering Support from District Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent & Directors*
 - *ARRA funds used to purchase intervention materials, pay salaries for personnel to facilitate implementation and professional development.*
 - *Internal coaches to support schools on a consistent basis*
 - *Ongoing Professional Development*
 - *DOE Monitoring Visits*
 - *Continuous support from USF/RtI Project*
 - *Administrators who actively participate in the Problem Solving Process set the same expectations for teachers*
- *Barriers to Success*
 - *Lack of understanding by key stakeholders*
 - *Old procedures that inhibit the paradigm shift*
 - *Poorly designed interventions*
 - *Lack of collaboration among some district level teams*

Flagler County –

- Located along the Northeast Coast of Florida, Flagler County's school population is approximately 12,931 with 12% of the students identified as disabled in 2011.
- Flagler County's RtI Implementation was initiated five years ago. The initial plan called for the Curriculum /Reading Coaches to define the assessments and interventions available at the district. The school administrators then identified teams, which included the administrators, reading coaches, guidance counselors, teachers, and district personnel, including school psychologists. These target teams then defined the roles and responsibilities of the members, consistent with the vision of the Superintendent of Schools.
- PS/RtI Professional Development was developed by the Curriculum Department, including training specific to the programs used as well as how to use data to guide instruction. They

also looked at monitoring the fidelity of the process by using reading walkthroughs to collect the data.

- **The PS/RtI Leadership Team developed tools and resources for use by the Building Based RtI Team, including:**
 - a District RtI Road Map to Increased Student Achievement, in which they defined the expectations at each tier of support
 - an RtI Flowchart that describes the data-based decisions that the team must consider at each tier
 - an RtI Documentation Checklist, which defines the specific data and documentation used at each tier. The data collected is then placed in an RtI Folder divided by tiers.
 - a PS/RtI Handbook has been published to guide the consistent implementation of the process
- **Facilitators of Success:**
 - Key to the success of their implementation is the support that they have received from their superintendent. PS/RtI is under the Instructional Services Department, with school psychologists and guidance counselors acting as case managers within the RtI team.
 - Assistant Principals and Deans have been responsible for the behavioral component, relying on the Code of Conduct and Positive Behavioral Support strategies
- **Barriers to Success**
 - Barriers faced during implementation include funding allocation, school schedules at the secondary level, and the need for additional staff training in differentiated instruction practices.
 - Some staff still view RtI as a road to eligibility rather than multi-tiered systems of instructional supports, although the district team has noticed a gradual shift in staff beliefs and practices.

Pasco County –

- *Located on Florida’s West Coast, Pasco County School System has 67,000 students and 84 schools. Thirty four of the forty-six elementary schools and four secondary schools currently have implemented RtI.*
- *Pasco County has aligned their District PS/RtI Plan to promote leadership skills and ensure a unified system in which there is a proactive and responsive multi-tiered system of supports for teachers and students. All District Action Plans are built around the shared vision. The system*

is based on Marzano' Leadership framework which is intended to deal with inequities, support a collaborative culture, and meaningfully engage all stakeholders.

- **Organizationally, RtI is not in a department but under the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum. The PS/RtI District Taskforce:**
 - *Guides the PS/RtI process at all levels of implementation with shared responsibilities assigned to leaders at each level*
 - *Works directly with the technology and data management team to ensure the creation of efficient and relevant data systems that provide the users at each level with the data they need to make solid data-based decisions.*

- **Components of the Process:**
 - **Multi-tiered Systems of Support**

Tiered Supports with features of (1) Common Language of Instruction, (2) Framework for Data and (3) Allocation of Resources

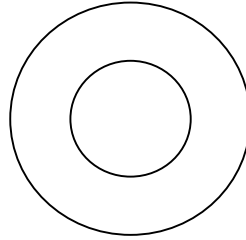
Tier 1: Core, Universal

 - *Goal is 100% of students achieve at high levels*
 - *Considered effective if 80% of students meeting benchmarks*
 - **Questions asked:**
 - “What exactly do we expect children to learn?”*
 - How will we know if and when they’ve learned it?*
 - How are we going to ensure they learn what we want them to learn?*
 - How will we respond when some students have already learned?*
 - *Psychologists transitioned to coaching positions.*
 - *Evaluated using PS/RtI Evaluation provided by state.*
 - *Comprehensive Data System – Common data system agreed upon*

- **Problem-Solving Framework:**

Problem Identification: What's the problem?

Response to Intervention: Is it working?



Problem Analysis: Why is it occurring?

Intervention Design/Implementation: What are we going to do about it?

- **Evaluation:**
 - **Early Warning Systems used to monitor progress**
 - **Built infrastructure for Early Warning System for elementary schools**
 - **High School/Middle School Early Warning System (Betterhighschools.org)**
 - **Middle School Early Warning: Attendance, Behavior, Failure Rate**
 - **High School Early Warning: Attendance, Behavior, Failure Rate, Credits and FCAT**
- **Self-Assessment Problem Solving Implementation (SAPSI) –**
 - **Evaluates how we've done**
 - **Monitors the growth of teams**
 - **Systematically used in a formative manner to guide all coaching activities**
- **Lessons Learned:**
 - **“Engage in Purposeful Redundancy – Definition**
 - **Always plan and communicate with the END in mind**
 - **Make meaningful and constant connections**
 - **Respect the development stage for teams – TAKES TIME**
 - **Live and model PS/RtI (MTSS for schools, leaders, teachers...)**
 - **Make the teams work and share – Gradual Release**

- *Communicate during-not just before (pps. Podcasts, 1-pg overviews)*
- *Remember what is at stake*
- *Watch for old boxes!!!!*

Pinellas County –

- *Located on the West Coast of Florida, the Pinellas County Schools district has a school population of 102, 672 in 118 schools.*
- *Within the organizational chart:*
 - *PS/RTI is within the Curriculum and Instruction Department. The District Leadership Team consists of over 50 members which meet 2-3 times a year*
 - *PS/RtI Steering Committee – 12 Member Workgroup, District Personnel meet minimum of 2 times per month. Team integrates academics and behavior*
 - *Behavior Sub-Committee - 38 members, School-Based and District Personnel meet 2-3 times per year*
 - *Behavior Task Force – 10 members, District and Florida PBS Personnel meet 5-6 times per year.*
- *Implementation Structure:*
 - *School Based Leadership Team at each school scheduled weekly meetings. Team reviews Meeting Maps, Research Maps, Problem Solving at Tiers, what data is showing and where we need to go*
 - *100 of 118 schools have been trained*
 - *Training for School-Based Leadership Teams – Grouped by DA status and range from five to eight days. Sometimes training was taken to principals. Trainings are conducted by 25 groups of school psychologists, social workers, counselors and assistant principals, through their Virtual School and Moodle.*
- *Evaluation/Accountability*
 - *100% of schools completed Scheduled Evaluation*
 - *Teacher Focus Groups were utilized*
 - *Implementation Integrity*
 - *Partnership with Research and Accountability*

- *Observations of School Based Leadership Team*
- *STOIC Walk-through – Self reported structure,*
- *Teacher Expectations*
- *Observations*
- *Interactions*
- *Correction*
- *Data System and County Resources:*
 - *Portal – Student Information System*
 - *Early Warning System - Built within Portal – Better HighSchool.org*

Please note that all information was paraphrased and/or taken directly from documents provided at the MTSSS Leadership Institute