Effective Teaming and Collaboration within RTI

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About this Talk

Join **Principal Jonathan Ross** and members of the **Drexel Hill team** as they share lessons learned and important outcomes after two years of RTI implementation.

Transcript

Q **RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations**

Who is included on your RTI team? How was this team created and when do you meet? Is there fluidity in the composition of your team or is it set in stone?

A **Drexel Hill Middle School Team**

The team is flexible as we encourage and seek to build capacity. However, the initially-large planning team did shrink once the program began. Drexel Hill Middle School felt that the smaller team of reading specialists, the district psychologist, and grade-level administrators would collaborate, educate and build a school-wide team, which we can say we have steadily increased.

Q **RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations**

What are your collaborative instructional strategies that have proved successful and what changes have you seen in this area?

A **Drexel Hill Middle School Team**

The collaborative instructional strategies that are successful consist of the following: we teach with fidelity to scientifically research-based programs, we openly discuss how and why a program may/may not be successful by looking at the data, we use teacher and student feedback, and we believe in teachers teaching other teachers.

Drexel Hill Middle School's schedule has a daily 45-minute period of time to conduct team meetings. During this 45-minute period of time, we met weekly in our intervention teams in order to discuss student progress and use of the intervention (time also designated as daily team time, but we used it for both the team and intervention); and as time went on, we were able to have these meetings monthly. Again, this is ongoing professional development built into the school day.

We also utilized this time to train for interventions and look at data. We collect progress-monitoring data weekly, bi-weekly, and quarterly depending on the student's tier level. The data is analyzed to

A see if the student is in the appropriate program. It became evident during our Winter Benchmark that students placed in the Soar to Success program did not demonstrate increased rate of oral reading fluency as anticipated. We contacted PaTTAN to make sure the validity of the program would not be comprised if we added Read Naturally as a second intervention. After adding the second intervention, student's oral reading fluency rates did improve.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*
How are your related service providers (pupil services) such as OT, PT, SLP, School Psychologist, School Social Worker, etc. linked into the RTI process?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*
Our district coordinator of psychologists and school psychologist play very important roles in our school for the RtI process. We look at each student on a case-by-case basis. Although we do not utilize the RtI framework as the sole determining factor for special education, we do use the data from the RtI process to track and meet IEP and regular educational goals. Our school social worker is a member of our SAP (Student Assistance Program) team and helps work on student behaviors.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*
Do you include an ELL specialist on your team to address second language acquisition issues and to provide input on culturally responsive assessments and interventions?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*
We do include the ELL specialist on our team and this has been a great aspect of the RtI process. One of our sixth-grade ELLs had been showing little to no progress in her ELL classes after the first semester this school year, and she was struggling in her content-area courses as well. Our ELL specialist asked our RtI team if they felt that she was showing adequate progress in the RtI intervention that she was receiving. After collaborating, we were better able to pinpoint the student's reading deficiencies and adjust her intervention accordingly. That student is now showing progress in her ELL classes and her content-area classes and she has become a much more confident reader and student.

As we prepare for next year, we have decided to adjust the schedules for our seventh and eighth-grade ELLs, so that they can receive RtI training as well as one or two periods of ELL instruction. The number of periods of ELL instruction is determined by each ELL student's performance on Pennsylvania's required annual assessment for ELLs, the WIDA ACCESS Test for ELLs or the initial screening tool for ELLs, the W-APT. Pennsylvania's requirements for screening, placement and instruction of ELLs is outlined in the Revised Basic Education Circular for ELLs from

A the Pennsylvania Department of Education. We will arrange a meeting with the parents of ELL students to explain why their schedules need to be adjusted to allow for RtI instruction and ELL instruction.

- For more information about the origins of the WIDA Consortium visit:
  http://www.wida.us/assessment/ACCESS/origins.aspx
- For more information about the WIDA ACCESS Test for ELLs visit:
  http://www.wida.us/assessment/ACCESS/index.aspx
- For more information about the W-APT visit: http://www.wida.us/assessment/w-apt/index.aspx
- To see the Revised Basic Education Circular for ELLs from the Pennsylvania Department of Education:
  http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pa_codes/7501/educating_students_with_limited_english_proficiency_%28lep%29_and_english_language_learners_%28ell%29/507356

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*
How did you re-define roles within your school after implementing RTI? What training did you need to support changes in roles?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*
We have had to redefine and educate our teachers on the concept of reading and practicing reading in every classroom. We have provided multiple training opportunities during the summer, school day, and after school in the following programs: Corrective Reading, Read Naturally, Rewards, Literacy Navigator, Soar to Success and Great Books. Drexel Hill Middle School began to plan for RtI in January of the prior school year by meeting with members from the Department of Education.

We also had a school-wide informational, historical presentation from PaTTAN on RtI. Essentially, the entire school needed and received training on sub-skill reading development, the relationship between oral reading fluency and comprehension, and having confidence and trust in one another. The best and most important moment of re-defining roles happened when teachers began to teach one another, for example, reading specialists were able to train regular and special education teachers and administrators about intervention programs.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*
How did you decide on a system for tracking student data and who were the key players involved in that decision?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

A Currently, we have two different systems for collecting data. At the district level, we have access to a database called CDA- a database that consists of the entire standardized test results for every student. At the building level, we utilize an Excel spreadsheet that consists of state testing results (PSSA), timely benchmark assessments from 4Sight testing (Success For All), DIBELS benchmark testing and progress monitoring through AIMSweb, TOWRE, Gates, and MAZE information.

We are currently discussing another data collection tool, but we feel the Excel spreadsheet allowed us to look at individual student information collected over time. We made the Excel spreadsheet decision at the building level while the CDA database was a central office decision.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*
How did you define what success looks like within your RTI framework? How do you measure this and who is involved?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*
We measure and define success in several different ways. Without question, Drexel Hill Middle School uses a data-driven decision making system, but we still rely on teacher and student input. We measure success by looking at all of the testing data we gather on students, but we also talk to them about how they feel about their reading skills and their current program.

When students demonstrate growth on various assessments and earn the opportunity to move into another tier, we feel very successful. Students also feel motivated by the additional reading interventions and looked forward to seeing their individual growth. We also feel very strongly that the RtI framework allows us to meet the needs of every student.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*
How do you provide information regarding RTI to everyone involved - including parents? What does that information look like (brochures, meetings, etc.?)

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*
We provide information to parents through meetings. Drexel Hill Middle School is just that- a middle school. We have student-led conferences and team time built into the schedule, so we can communicate with parents and students about their growth or lack thereof. We discuss our framework and the future of our framework with parents at home. In the beginning of the school year at "Back to School Night" parents of students that were to be directly involved in RTI are presented with the programs that we have put together at the Middle School Level, and are informed of the natural progression of RTI from our Elementary Schools to the Middle School.

A Our cable network has been accessed and utilized to present an overall explanation of the goals and the data of RTI to the entire community. The school psychologist wrote and developed an explanation of individual student progress monitoring results using the AIMSweb system. The psychologists explained to parents how to read graphs and how to address the needs of their children. An hour and half program was produced and shown to parents over the cable network repeatedly as part of an educational program for parents.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*

Was it difficult for parents to understand that the RTI process (vs. whatever was used before) was the most beneficial way to help for children? If so, how did you handle that? If not, what factors do you believe contributed to their acceptance of this new framework?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

This process and framework was not difficult to sell to the parents of our students because we have had it in place at the elementary level. Ironically, our students and the parents of our students are as familiar with the process as we are. We feel as though the collaborative efforts with our elementary school teachers and principals were vital to the success of our framework.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*

How do you engage and reach out to families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

The Upper Darby School District has a very large multicultural population with over 1, 000 students (in a district serving over 12,000 students) who qualify for services as English Language Learners (ELL). Seventy-three languages are spoken at our schools, representing over 63 countries throughout the world. We reach out to parents through meetings with interpreters. At the district level we communicate with parents using our cable network, school district website, and local newspaper.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*

Did you find that initiating RTI required additional resources or were you able to reallocate existing resources?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

A RtI did require additional resources as well as reallocating existing resources. Our building and program is of the highest priority for central administration, so we have been afforded tremendous in-house support. We also utilize Educational Assistance Program in Pennsylvania (EAP) funding for additional interventionists and materials. EAP funding has existed in our district because we had not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) until this past year.

The reallocation of resources has really shown up in the form of people- how we use all of our teachers and space to make this framework successful. We are fortunate that our framework and school has been selected by Pennsylvania?s Department of Education as a "Secondary RtI Learning Site," which came with a stipend as well as free support.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*
Was RTI initiated at the district level or building level and who leads it?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*
Our Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction and our district coordinator of school psychologists initiated RtI. These two individuals initiated RtI, but the building now leads the entire framework with reading specialists, the literacy coach, building-level administrators, special education teacher, and lead teachers carrying it through. We report regularly to our Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction along the way.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*
In what areas is your school implementing RTI (reading, behavior, math, etc.?) Where did you begin in each of these areas and how was the framework rolled out?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*
We began RtI for the entire 6th grade addressing reading. We spread the concept of RtI into 7th grade and 8th grade for reading with students who see a reading specialist or special education teacher. We started with reading because our tests results demonstrated a need for reading help, especially with incoming 6th graders.

We have since begun math RtI in the 6th grade by identifying students who need additional help, and they receive an additional 42-minute period of math instruction throughout the school day.

Drexel Hill Middle School has plans to incorporate school-wide positive behavior supports through Character Counts as well as Restorative Practices (a framework that offers help before and after students are disciplined?it is a very collaborative framework for students once they reenter the

A school environment). We have planned and trained to implement each new phase of RtI well in advance, so teachers are familiar with the process. We survey teachers about dates, times, and locations in order to accommodate them for training purposes.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*
How are you acquiring the knowledge, skills, and resources, in the form of professional development, to implement RTI?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*
This is not a process you should or can do overnight. Your local intermediate unit, support from the state, and district level support are vital for the success of this framework. There is a language to RtI and you need to make sure that the staff grasps the language and the framework before you implement it. The idea is to build capacity in your building so everyone has at least a basic level of understanding about the reason and process of the Tiered RtI framework.

Many of the research-based interventions are scripted, so reading specialists and special education teachers - once properly trained - can turn around and encourage, support, and train other teachers. We also did a tremendous amount of research on RtI from an administrative standpoint. Very little information at the time we initiated this process existed about secondary RtI, but the elementary principles were very applicable. We knew that we had to meet the individual specific reading needs of our students, and a one-size fits all program was not the answer.

We continue to work with Lehigh University, the Pennsylvania Training & Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN), and district level personnel to garner more knowledge and better methods for successful implementation of RtI.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*
Is your professional development conducted in a cross-disciplinary, collaborative manner?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*
Our professional development is cross-disciplinary because all content area teachers are now teaching reading. We also utilize research-based reading strategies in every discipline in the building. The Upper Darby School District has implemented (across the district) Reading Apprenticeship. The Middle School Philosophy we adhere to really fosters cross-disciplinary support and development for our staff and students as we rely on the teaming framework to increase student achievement [Please refer to *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*, National Middle School Association: Westerville, Ohio, 2003].

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*

Does your school have professional learning communities and how have they been involved in the RTI process? If so, what resources have your PLC's used to deepen their understanding of the RTI process?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

As a result of the Middle Philosophy, our daily schedule allows teams time to meet. We ask that once a month teachers who teach the same intervention meet and share best practices and/or concerns. Administrators attend meetings as well as reading specialists and the literacy coach to answer questions and problem solve for students.

Our RtI framework is a hybrid- a combination of standard protocol and problem solving. The hybrid approach applies a standard research-based intervention to meet the specific needs of each student. We problem solve for students once a student makes or does not make progress. Consequently, students have the ability to move through our three-tiered system for academic and behavioral interventions.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*

Did you have any resistance to this process from staff members or parents? How did you identify this resistance and how did you address it?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

We were very fortunate in our development of this framework. In past years we did not have a strong research-based reading curriculum, so the changes we made were well received. Administratively, we listened to the concerns of our reading specialists about a need for a comprehensive research-based reading program. Initially, the staff members felt apprehensive about what the new RtI framework would entail. Staff was concerned with their roles in the model, the change in schedule, and now becoming a "Reading Teacher."

The only concern from parents was our ability to train and sustain the framework. The district has made it a priority to sustain the RtI framework because of its success in helping the district meet it?s AYP goals and also witnessing individual student success in reading and math achievement results.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional*

Q *and parent organizations*

What challenges have you faced during the implementation of RTI? How have you addressed these challenges?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

One of the most difficult challenges was creating a schedule in order to implement RtI. Drexel Hill Middle School had not changed its schedule in 23 years. The new schedule had to be embraced by all administrators and staff members. It was introduced at the end of the 2007-2008 school year in order to prepare all staff for the upcoming changes during the 2008-2009 school year.

The interventions also presented a few challenges. In order to keep the fidelity of the interventions, small class sizes were required. The district had to commit to hire additional support staff in order to deliver interventions.

We have addressed these challenges by being flexible and open to required changes in schedule and teaching responsibility. Often teachers had to accept students mid-year moving through inventions based on progress. We listen and collaborate with our staff and RtI team.

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*

How are you allocating time for teams to meet and discuss RTI?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

Teams meet at a specific time during the day once a month to discuss specific interventions and students. Each grade level has a designated time where teachers and administrators meet and discuss student progress. [Please see the DHMS Regular Schedule](#).

Q *RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations*

In regards to implementing RTI, what scheduling issues have been the most difficult to deal with? How have you handled them?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

Our 6th grade, 7th grade, and 8th grade schedules are all different. Teams have common meeting time during the day. Intervention meetings occur once a month. RtI is a 40-minute period where every student receives a reading intervention. In addition to RtI, students that are reading at or above proficiency receive 45 minutes of the Reading/Language Arts curriculum. For students reading below proficiency, 90 minutes are allotted for an intensive Reading/Language Arts program (Ramp-UP to Literacy from Americas Choice).

Q **RTI Roles 2.0 Group, a multidisciplinary work group representing over 20 professional and parent organizations**

Who was involved in your discussion about choosing a core curriculum? What were some issues that came up?

A **Drexel Hill Middle School Team**

The core curriculum for each subject came about through a very collaborative effort involving many stakeholders from central office to classroom teachers. It is very difficult to offer all of our students the core curriculum because roughly 25% of our regular education and special education students (100/400 students) are reading two or more years below grade level.

We know that the term "core" refers to the curriculum, in every subject, that all students can access. We are a school with 25 subgroups. This means we have 40 or more students within one or more of the following state descriptors as economically disadvantaged, special education, ethnicity, and ELL. We do have a core curriculum for all subjects.

Drexel Hill Middle School has what we like to call a "quasi core." These 100 6th grade students do not have access to the core language arts program; rather, these students attend a reading/language arts program (Ramp-Up to Literacy) for a block period at the end of the day in conjunction with a specific reading program (RtI) provided early in the morning. These 100 students who read two or more years below grade level receive a 90-minute reading/language arts program called Ramp-Up to Literacy from Americas Choice.

This program is research-based and serves to help students get back to grade level for reading. Once this occurs, the students will then have access to the core language arts program (Prentice Hall).

Q **Ishmael J Robinson**

What do your Learning and Behavior intervention pyramids look like?

A **Drexel Hill Middle School Team**

At Drexel Hill Middle School, we have a lot of data for each area of our three-tier model: math, behavior, and reading. We are currently working on our data collection and movement through the tiers for behavior. We utilize the Student Assistance Program (SAP) Tier Two, Character Counts at Tier One, and Restorative Practices in the Third Tier.

Q **Kerry Broyles**

Q What curricular areas did you focus on first from the standpoint of reading, writing math etc... Do you give students a preassessment at the beginning of the year to identify basic skills?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

We focused on reading at Drexel Hill Middle School in the 6th grade because we noticed a drop in reading performance when students transitioned from 5th to 6th grade. At Drexel Hill Middle School we utilize 5th grade PSSA (state assessment information) and the fall DIBELS benchmark data to place students into a specific intervention. We also rely on the placement tests attached to each intervention. We have now moved into math and behavior for RtI.

Q *Susan Petroff*

Please provide details on how general education and special education are collaborating to the benefit of ELL, LD and other at-risk populations. What does your special education program look like?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

The collaborative efforts at Drexel Hill Middle School bring ELL, regular education, and special education students and teachers together. RtI allows Drexel Hill Middle School the ability to program for each student in a very fluid manner. Special education and ELL students have the ability to access each intervention and move through each tier of our three-tier model. Our special education program and ELL program mirrors the core curriculum with adaptations and accommodations offered to students in need of help to "benefit" from each learning opportunity. Many of our special education students participate in our core curriculum with assistance from a special education teacher.

Q *Anita*

What were or are some of the professional development hurdles in approaching RTI?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

The biggest hurdle is to find the time to provide the training to teachers. We have had to ask teachers to be flexible and attend trainings in several of the interventions after school and over the summer. After the teachers received the trainings, the programs needed to be taught to fidelity.

There is a language to RtI and you need to make sure that the staff grasps the language and the framework before you implement it. The idea is to build capacity in your building so everyone has at least a basic level of understanding about the reason and process of the Tiered RtI framework.

Many of the research-based interventions are scripted, so reading specialists and special education teachers?once properly trained?can turn around and encourage, support, and train other teachers.

Q *Cara Kraft*

Please share the school psychologist's role on the RTI team (if you haven't already) and a specific example of a time she collaborated with other team members.

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

The school psychologist plays a critical role on the RtI team. They help organize, analyze, and synthesize universal data and individual student data. They help determine which children are not making adequate progress using progress monitoring tools and looking at both targeted and actual rates of improvement over time. Ultimately, the school psychologist determines which students will be evaluated and determined to have a learning disability. All of the data collected using the RtI process helps determine eligibility for special education.

Q *Jane Wagmeister*

Can you discuss the building of the culture at your school that led to full implementation of serving ALL students?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

We are glad someone asked about this! Our first efforts began as a result of our frustration with not making AYP. The entire staff recognized a need to improve our status. We first implemented professional development on Differentiated Instruction. We were attempting to build a culture in which the learning styles of all students could be understood and appreciated. The staff had to break out of the old model in which students were forced to meet the teaching style of the teacher. Teachers had to begin to instruct toward the learning styles of the students in their class.

We then added to this culture by using regular assessments to gauge the progress of students and use Team Data Meetings to focus on strands of identified weakness. This gave teachers an opportunity to actually see specific areas where the students needs were not being met. We then used the success of our Elementary RtI program to build upon with our sixth grade students, expanding the program into seventh and eighth grade as the year went on.

Q *Ed P*

RE: allocating resources when not meeting AYP. Do you recomend targeting students who are on the cusp towards passing and the school does better on AYP - or those who are at the bottom and most in need - but definitely will not meet target in one year?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*

Great question!!! Initially, our district focused on moving what we also called the "bubble"

A students?students who could make AYP with extra support. Now, the state of Pennsylvania measures the growth of every student through PVAAS (Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System). RtI also helps us move all of our students and aids us in our attempt to demonstrate growth for everyone. Every child is served and helps our school demonstrate growth. We noticed that focusing on the "bubble" students was a short term goal, and now we have long term goals.

Q *Ed P*
Do you have suggestions for when 80% of school is not at AIMSweb target? We overloaded services last year, but at the expense of lower fidelity and not enough results.

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*
If 80% of the school is below benchmark, then you need to look at your core curriculum. There needs to be a rapid assessment and modification of the core curriculum. At the same time, identify intervention programs that will meet the needs of the students. Adding interventions as a part of the core curriculum becomes an option.

Investigation of our core curriculum at the Elementary level is what led to development of a new core curriculum. That is how serious it was. A poorly written or executed curriculum can, in fact, be the root cause of such low proficiency rates. Its unlikely that 80% of your students are learning disabled, you have to look at instruction.

Q *Michele Litzie*
What can one management staff member do to initiate step one in setting up RTI in a junior or senior high school, and what exactly is step one?

A *Drexel Hill Middle School Team*
The first step is getting your staff and administration to accept that there is, in fact, a problem or concern in your building/district. Once identified, create a core team to meet and discuss these concerns and talk about how to collaborate to address the problem. Identify root causes, whether it be professional development needs, lack of data-driven instruction, interventions, programs, core curriculum, and/or the lack of the positions in place to carry out the plan of action once you identify the root causes.

We recommend that you begin the RTI process by creating a collaborative team of basic subject teachers, psychologists, administrators, reading and special education teachers, and specialists. PaTTAN (see Additional Resources) was a very valuable resource for us as well as NCLD's RTI Action Network.

That concludes our RTI Talk for today. Thanks to everyone for the thoughtful questions and thanks to our experts, the Drexel Hill Middle School Team, for their time today.**Related Reading from RTINetwork.org:**

- *Building Support*, by George Batsche, Ed.D.
- *Create Your Implementation Blueprint, Stage 2: Installation*, by Susan L. Hall, Ed.D.
- *The Need for Professional Learning Communities*, by Stevan J. Kukic, Ph.D.
- *There are All Kinds of Ways to Measure Progress*, by Bob Heimbaugh

Additional Resources:

- National Implementation Research Network (NIRN)
- Pennsylvania Training & Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN)