

Building Consensus for RTI Priorities

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About this Talk

Join **Dawn Miller, Ph.D.**, Innovative Projects Facilitator for the Shawnee Mission Public Schools in Kansas, during our next RTI Talk as she answers your questions about getting team buy-in when refining or prioritizing RTI actions for the year. Dr. Miller will also offer tips based on lessons she learned working with new and continuing RTI implementers on establishing priorities and facilitating collaboration.

Transcript



Susan

How do you get staff buy-in when some team members are hesitant about implementing RTI?



Dawn Miller

Hesitation about implementation of Rtl is a very healthy sign. For me, hesitation is an indication that colleagues are thinking through what it takes to fully implement Rtl. My general approach is to determine (1) what practices are colleagues hesitant about and (2) what is the reason for hesitation. Determining the answer to these questions leads to subsequent decisions that will likely strengthen the process. For example, the hesitation about the frequency of monitoring expressed in one of our buildings led to further guidance from the district that allowed teachers to get a routine established for progress monitoring that was more practical and realistic, but didn't lose the intent and message in our assessment protocol.



Eve Newsome

By the time LD middle/high school students reach that level of schooling, most classes are period based, and depend on content area texts, where good reading and writing skills are imperative. What do you suggest are the best ways to approach remediating very poor reading and writing skills at this level, while still maintaining a full class schedule?



Dawn Miller

Eve, I appreciate the question about implementing Rtl at the secondary level. Structuring for Rtl at the secondary level should not be underestimated. While the basic concepts of Rtl hold regardless of level (e.g., identifying early in the year any student who may need additional support; using data to match intervention/instruction to need; ensuring adequate time for intervention, progress monitoring, and adjusting), the structure of schedules at the secondary level and the common departmentalization of faculty makes consensus imperative. I recommend the following resources as helpful to get the conversation started: [Reading Next](#) and [Improving Literacy Instruction in Middle and High Schools](#).

Q **Eve Newsome**

What is the best way to encourage classroom teachers to be an integral part of the RTI process?

A **Dawn Miller**

I highly encourage buildings to utilize a Building Leadership Team (BLT) in the development, implementation, and ongoing evaluation of Rtl efforts. We encourage schools not to duplicate efforts with teams. Most schools have utilized a BLT that oversees the School Improvement Plan, as well as Rtl efforts around academic and social competencies. Each grade level should have a representative on the team. A critical role that this team will serve will be to address consensus building and implementation issues. The team will need to problem-solve when participation or follow-through is not present.

Outside of the BLT, I would like to add that Rtl efforts are contingent upon the classroom teacher's participation. Grade-level teams need to engage in data reviews to discuss strengths and areas of improvement related to Tier I instruction, assist with the intervention grouping process, be part of progress monitoring, and engage as a problem-solvers and decision makers when progress is reviewed. This collaborative process includes all who are involved in the academic and social competency development of the child.

Q **LuAnn McLaughlin**

How difficult is it to get everyone on the same page?

A **Dawn Miller**

I'd say with some schools the difficulty is a matter of "when" and with others it is a matter of "if."

For buildings with the difficulty of "when," the problems relate to having adequate time for consensus building. These buildings have an established culture and clarity in the decision-making process. In these buildings, the staff may not agree with the decision or some of the details, but they respect the process they have in the building and will not allow their apprehension to sabotage the process.

In buildings where it is a matter of "if," this difficulty may be the demise of the process. Colleagues in these buildings have a high degree of mistrust and lack a collective accountability plan. Strategies in these buildings to assist with resolving the problems involve (1) having a Building Leadership Team that has full grade-level representation meet regularly to address implementation and problem-solving, (2) start small with willing participants and demonstrate the pros and cons of implementation along the way, and (3) utilize the identification of problems as opportunities to demonstrate the value in the problem-solving process.

Q Carol Oberg

How important is parent participation in the RtI process and what type of participation would be most helpful to the student?

A Dawn Miller

Parent participation is of high importance in the RtI process. I encourage teams to ensure that they think through how RtI practices are communicated to parents, how parents communicate back to the school, and how parents can and should be involved in their child's education.

At a general level, parents need to understand how the district defines RtI, what parents can expect at any school in the district, and who can be contacted with questions. Further, parents need to understand how their child's school is implementing RtI and how parents can, and should be, involved. Several districts have utilized the attached parent primer to serve this purpose in early years of implementation. (Send as word document)

For more ideas on how to involve parents, see: Miller, D.D., & Kraft, N.P. (2008). Best practices in communicating with and involving parents. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best Practices in School Psychology V* (pp. 937-951). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

At a district level, parents have provided incredible assistance in the design of professional development presentations. A small group of parents should review key materials that will be sent home to families. They can provide feedback on the readability and clarity of the message. As an example, our training on progress monitoring was changed and enhanced based on the input of our parent group. They provided feedback that sent a clear message of what our patrons expect in terms of school response and parent involvement.

Q Ben Carter

How can the principal change attitudes and overcome resistance to RTI when classroom teachers aren't on board?

A Dawn Miller

This question addresses a broad issue and one that has several angles for a response. My experience has been that resistance is often not necessarily that the concepts and practices don't make sense to colleagues, rather it has to do with the history of "initiatives" we've had in our field and lack of support for making something work given the context of a particular building. Issues that come immediately to mind that may help frame some thinking here include:

1. Have a clear understanding from the district as to what is "tight" and what is "loose" when it comes to RtI implementation. For example, in our district what is "tight" refers to the responsibility of each building to ensure they are providing a targeted intervention for any

- A** student who demonstrates the need for strategic or intensive support. What is "loose" is the model of support selected by the building. Clarity on these issues allows the building to know what areas they can be creative or select preferences that will serve the building well.
2. Determine an individual and collective "why RtI" and discuss this with the faculty ? on more than one occasion. This basically answers the question "what's in this for us? For our students and families?" Our parent group said that the last thing they wanted to hear from the principal or teachers was that we were doing this because "the district/state/feds said so..."
 3. Think about how faculty, families, and students will have voice, access, and ownership of the process. For voice, they need to have input into the decision making process on the front end and during implementation. My colleague always asks "What did we get ?right?? In what ways did we miss the mark?" I think these demonstrate that we make the best decisions given the information and thinking at the time and that we adjust our course as we go. Access can be thought of in terms of how transparent and inviting the decision-making process is to those involved. If teachers are "told" intervention groups, they may not feel that information they know about the student is valued or considered. I also think about access when I think about making sure that adequate staff development, time for collaboration, and ongoing support is provided ? even in a time of difficult fiscal times. Ownership is the last area and is created by making the first two realized in a building ? we celebrate those parts of our system and process that are providing us the outcomes we desire and pushing up our sleeves and embracing those areas that didn't work as intended.

Q **Cheryl Douglas**
With budget cuts our school is already short staffed, what needs to be our highest priority as we begin implementing RTI this year?

A **Dawn Miller**
Unfortunately, this is becoming a more wide-spread experience. If this is your first year for implementation, I would have the building-leadership team review all the decisions that had been made in the context of the changes that have occurred. For example, if a model of support was selected that relied on a certain number of staff in order to carry out interventions, the building should determine if a different model of support is necessary. If they don't, a tendency exists to "cut the number of students who will be served, given the staff allocation."

Outside of needing to carefully review the decisions that were made to determine if the cuts will impact successful implementation, the highest priority should be effective core instruction and classroom management. This will always be an area that needs to stay in the forefront and be properly supported.

Q **Sue Ortiz**
What sorts of professional development activities do you recommend to promote team building?

A Dawn Miller

I'm not a trainer who can pull off some of the fun team-building exercises that others can make engaging and meaningful. While certainly not the only way of approaching this, I find the activities that provide natural opportunities to have colleagues realize each other's strengths really go a long way in building the trust necessary for schools to realize the potential of many RtI practices.

My preference for training is using a facilitated training format. In these training sessions, teams are provided background/information on a critical component, see building-based examples, and hear considerations that will assist with action planning. After this information is provided, teams are provided time to make their decisions about what the process will look like at their school. In this manner, context is acknowledged and ownership is fostered.

Q Sandra

In these times of dwindling budgets, what are some innovative ways to provide support for the classroom teacher while he/she works with level 2 RTI students.

A Dawn Miller

Let me first say that I really appreciate the way you framed this question ? not the dwindling budget part, but that the classroom teacher should be considered an interventionist for students demonstrating the need for additional support. My response to this comes back to having the building revisit their model of support for serving students in need of assistance.

In some cases, reading specialists and other support personnel have arranged intervention groups and assigned themselves and paraprofessionals to groups. While this model may work for some buildings, my preference is to have an entire grade level team, along with any other supports allocated to the building, go through the formulation of intervention groups together. This allows the screening data and any other diagnostic or classroom data to be presented and considered as groups are being formed.

Once groups are formed, then a list of all available personnel are matched based on strengths of the interventionists and known needs of the students. We follow the guidance of using our most qualified staff with students showing the most intensive needs. For some, this has been a shift to using a paraprofessional to oversee literacy centers or a librarian to run a literature circle while the classroom teacher takes a Tier 2, or even Tier 3 group. Two examples may be helpful in getting some ideas flowing:

In one building, the reduction of title paraprofessionals and a .5 reading specialist meant a reduction in staff for groups. The reading specialists (1.5 FTE [full-time equivalent]), special education teacher, title paraprofessionals (2), and ELL support (.5) met with the grade level team to form the groups. When the grade-level teachers saw that one had 2 students needing support with phonics and the other had 1 student needing similar support, they decided to group their

A student across the grade level with the "divide and conquer" approach.

In another district, the same process was used, but they had less support. One of the four grade-level teachers took a group, leaving students who were on track as a very large group. The remaining 3 grade-level teachers decided to organize themselves by big idea (one took fluency, one vocabulary, and one comprehension). During the intervention time, they organized a week's worth of enrichment activities and rotated the students on track between them. This made it so each of them only had to plan lessons for this time every three weeks.

Q **Chris Adams**

Who should be on the Building Leadership Team (BLT)? How much membership overlap is there usually between the BLT and the Child Study Team?

A **Dawn Miller**

I am attaching a "Creating Our Multi-Tiered System of Support" PowerPoint entitled "[Determining Building Team: Who, What, and Why](#)" that you may find useful. I created this for our principals to modify or use as they wish in their buildings. It is a "no frills" ppt. Basically, the guidance is to think about having a representative team that will assist with development, implementation, problem solving and evaluation. I do not advocate setting up a new team if an existing team can serve the necessary purposes listed above. Some buildings use an existing team that oversees school improvement efforts, some use their Child Study Team with specific time carved out for system issues. Depending on the size of the building, teams are typically 5-8 members in size. These are the considerations I provide:

1. Think about the function of the team members over their job title. Consider the following:

- Who is a good and respectful "positive nag?"
- Whose strength is to facilitate meetings?
- Who stays on top of current research?
- Whose strength is to translate and guide with data?
- How will our student, family, and community voices be represented at the table?
- How will different grade levels have voice at the table?
- Who is creative and open minded when it comes to systems change?

2. The principal is a non-negotiable team member.

3. Round out membership by considering:

- Staff input and possible vote for membership.
- Ensure representation so that communication back to grade-level teams during collaboration or extended committees for different issues can be done without setting up more meetings.

- A** • Ensure that student support providers such as special education, ELL, reading specialists, etc. will be represented.

Q **Fran Willias**
What strategies do you use to ensure fidelity of implementation?

A **Dawn Miller**
I have seen buildings and districts approach fidelity in different manners. I think the most helpful way for me to address this issue is to share some thinking on fidelity related to a systems view of RtI. As it relates to consensus building, the way I have found helpful in approaching fidelity is for it to be as a supportive feature of the system. Fidelity often has a negative connotation and I've heard people say "so someone is checking to see if I'm doing my job?" I view fidelity as a way to give feedback and determine areas in need of support around key areas we have agreed upon as a faculty. With RtI, all the practices are very intentional it becomes like creating a house of cards where our efforts are interdependent on each other, rather than independent occurrences.

From a system standpoint, here are ways fidelity issues are addressed:

1. Needs assessment around critical components of your reading (or other academic domain) approach or behavioral expectations and teaching plan.
2. Walk throughs that include critical areas. I like it when teachers can add to the walk through process an individual area they would like feedback on.
3. Reflection sheets to use as a review when conducting individual student problem-solving meetings. You can also bring the teacher's guide for core materials and interventions to the meeting so when we talk about possible modifications and adaptations we have tied it directly to the core and intervention.

Q **anonymous**
We have one teacher who resists every change, how can we get her on board? For the most part, everyone else participates in the discussions and follows through with what has been decided. Her resistance is noticeable and destructive.

A **Dawn Miller**
These situations can really drain energy from a group and momentum. I'm sharing some things that have been done in different situations that have worked - sometimes.

- Ask a person who has a relationship with this person to have a private discussion about what the issues are. Sometimes, this person has not had an opportunity to voice their concern(s) and find areas for problem solving or to negotiate agreements.
- Utilize this person's strengths in the process in some manner. We had a person who had incredible talent in art and we asked her to lead the poster contest at the elementary school

- A** around the behavioral expectations.
- Ask this person to be part of the building-level team. Sometimes this venue allows their concerns to be acknowledged with a clear process for determining consensus.
 - Negotiate a timeframe for review. In some buildings, they use a ["fist-to-five" technique](#) for decision making - if the staff indicates they can live with the decision, but has apprehension, set a timeframe to review how it has gone. Sometimes, those who appear resistant may be more likely to try something out if they know they don't have to live with the decision the entire year without reconsidering.
 - Sometimes the behavior becomes something that needs to be addressed as an administrative issue.

Q **Ann Price**
We have a wonderful staff, but as the special education teacher, I'm not confident we are on the same page in terms of expectations. Any suggestions?

A **Dawn Miller**
Getting on the same page is difficult to do when we don't have adequate time to develop the collegial and professional relationships that seem to get us far in the long run. As such, since time is a precious commodity, we usually find ourselves rushing to pack in all the announcements, staff development, and dialogue or decision making that accumulates on our plates.

One of the first areas I recommend attending to for a building is to have some type of conversation about our beliefs, or reaction to the core principles of RtI. I have used the core principles outlined in Chapter IV of *Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation* when I've worked with districts outside our state and I use the core beliefs developed in Kansas and my own district when working in our own buildings.

While this may appear to some as an unnecessary discussion, I have found it to be one that is necessary to have, and to have often. During implementation, buildings will find that they were well served to have the dialogue. I'm attaching [an activity we disseminated to our principals](#) for them to use, or adapt, as needed. One of our principals changed the activity to be more of a carousel process and reported that the discussion was richer than he would have imagined.

Q **anonymous**
What are your recommendations when the district selected assessments aren't ones my colleagues think are valid?

A **Dawn Miller**
My hope would be that the district can share the process they utilized for selecting the district-wide assessments. It is important that we understand how issues such as technical adequacy, time, data

A reporting format, staff development, etc. were considered. I think we need to be transparent about the selection process, clear about what questions are being answered with the data, and always validate results before proceeding with decisions.

Q *Jim Kelly*

First, our school has participated in PBS training and we've used an 80% buy-in from faculty where we voted to continue with efforts. Have people used this criterion for RtI? And second, should a district proceed with RtI if a building hasn't reached consensus?

A *Dawn Miller*

Yes, when districts have made RtI optional for buildings, this 80% buy-in cut off has been used to indicate consensus before proceeding.

When the district has arrived at consensus about their own involvement, I think it is best to proceed even if the building hasn't reached consensus yet. Not having consensus at the building level means we have to find the areas of agreement and non-agreement. Once the areas have been identified that are the sticking points, the staff may need to work through the issues. I believe I addressed this in a different question, but I have found it very helpful for a district leadership team to determine "what is tight and what is loose" about the RtI protocol. If colleagues have issues with those areas that are "tight," they need to know how those concerns can be communicated back to the district team.

Q *Stephanie Murphy*

Our building has a large turnover - it seems we have to go back through the process every year - suggestions?

A *Dawn Miller*

Going back through the process on an annual basis is a good thing. It provides an opportunity to reconfirm our agreements and reconsider issues for discussion or decision making. I think new staff appreciate hearing from colleagues how the process has evolved and it is a wonderful opportunity for new staff to see an illustration of how decisions are made in the building.

Q *Kim Riley*

How do you facilitate parental engagement in RTI implementation?

A *Dawn Miller*

Thank you for this question because it is one I have a very vested interest in. You'll see in the

A additional resources a chapter we wrote related to best practices in parent communication and involvement. Let me share some ideas for how we encourage building teams to make this part meaningful related to RtI:

At the building-level

Have parent representation on the building-level team. While some buildings don't have a large number of parents on this team, they need to have the parent voice in the process. Parents can be used to create or review materials that will be sent home related to RtI, as well as understanding and providing input as to the building protocol. When developing the protocol for addressing social competencies, it is important that parents have input and are able to reinforce building expectations. This year, one of our buildings extended the acknowledgement system for behavioral expectations to families and a lottery system is used to provide family games, gift cards, etc. for families demonstrating involvement.

At the grade level

At the classroom level, parents need to understand how they can support their child's academic and social competency development at home. Tools that we have created share (1) a definition of reading skills (e.g. phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, comprehension), (2) how the areas of reading are taught at this school, (3) how a child's skills are assessed, and (4) ways for parents to support these skills at home. At the individual student level Parents need to be involved early in the problem-solving process.

Parents who participated in our focus group gave excellent suggestions for how they prefer teachers share information and involve them in the process. It is my belief that parents need to be active participants in the process and we need to help them understand the problem-solving process so they can be prepared to share what they know about their child in the process. For more reading on this topic, refer to the chapter in *Best Practices in School Psychology* or my blog post entitled "[Involving Families in RTI](#)", published through the **RTI Action Network**.

Q **Robin Raphael**

What role do your school psychologists play in your RTI system?

A **Dawn Miller**

School psychologists offer skills and expertise in different ways, not only based on their personal skills, but also according to building need. Within the topic of consensus building, it is very important that buildings include and involve personnel who serve several buildings in the consensus process. All of our psychologists serve more than one building, making it important to understand how a building has operationalized their protocol to reduce confusion and conflict.

Q **Ken Hawthorne**

When do you fit in the meetings required for consensus building?

A **Dawn Miller**

Since consensus is an ongoing process, it usually happens at these times:

1. During training ? we build in team time for discussion and decision making during training sessions. Our trainings are typically facilitated trainings.
2. During Building-Leadership Team meetings ? the recommendation is for teams to convene monthly for 45 min. to an hour. This provides time for planning, reviewing, and problem solving.
3. Grade-Level Collaboration Time ? Sometimes the Building Leadership Team will float issues out for discussion or decision making to the grade-level teams.
4. Faculty meetings ? since these occur after school, it is best to determine in advance if the issue at hand is introduced for reflection/consideration or if you are in decision-making mode. Rarely can an entire issue be introduced and resolved in one 40-min. meeting.
5. School Improvement/Inservice Days ? these are a luxury and great time for consensus building.

Q **Robin Raphael**

Do you have a framework to guide the grade level team meetings?

A **Dawn Miller**

We have a tool that has been very helpful in guiding the grade-level data review process. We created slides in PowerPoint and assembled them in a presentation easel so the team all looks at the process and questions while the facilitator has facilitator notes on the back. The basic process framework includes:

- Illustration of the problem-solving process visual with a highlight of what part of the process the meeting is focusing on
- Expectations of the process (team norms)
- Steps to accomplish during the meeting, including specific references to the data reports that will be used
- Specific questions we are using our data to answer
- Overall debriefing of the process by the team

This process is used 3 times a year following our benchmark assessments, and at least once in between for our progress monitoring reviews. We have also created this for our individual student problem-solving process when more concentrated problem-solving is necessary. The table tents are very valuable ([see attached PDF](#)).

That concludes our RTI Talk for today. Thanks to everyone for the thoughtful questions and thanks to our expert, Dr. Dawn Miller, for her time today. [Please also take a few moments at the completion of this event to give us your feedback by taking our survey!](#)

Related Reading from RTINetwork.org:

- [Building Support](#), by George Batsche, Ed.D.
- [Creating Shared Language for Collaboration in RTI](#), by Barbara J. Ehren, Ed.D.; Barbara Laster, Ed.D.; and Susan Watts-Taffe, Ph.D.
- [RtI Leadership That Works](#), by Stevan J. Kukic, Ph.D.

Additional Resources:

- [National Center on Response to Intervention](#)
- [National Implementation Research Network](#)
- [NASDSE's Response to Intervention Blueprint Series](#)
- [Parent Primer](#)
- [Determining Building Team PPT](#)
- [Core Beliefs Staff Activity](#)
- Miller, D.D., & Kraft, N.P. (2008). Best practices in communicating with and involving parents. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best Practices in School Psychology V* (pp. 937-951). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.