

Informing and supporting parents, educators, service providers, and policymakers on topics related to special education

EDgE

RtI, RtI², MTSS:

Establishing Clarity

When the name of something keeps changing, people get confused. And currently there is some confusion about that thing variously called “response to intervention” (RtI), “response to instruction and intervention” (RtI²), and “multitiered systems of support” (MTSS). They are all essentially synonymous; they conceptualize an approach to designing school systems that (1) efficiently and collaboratively focus resources to provide all students with high-quality core instruction and (2) respond to any student’s need for differentiated instruction and/or targeted academic or behavioral interventions and supports.

While “response” and “intervention” are clearly integral to the concept, the entire approach is grounded in effective, research-proven, core instruction—in this model called a “first tier”—which every student receives and which, when implemented with fidelity, ensures that no child struggles because of an instructional or curricular deficiency.

Teachers have always known that some students need extra guidance and support in certain areas, others need only to be pointed in the right direction, and almost everyone requires a little additional help or encouragement at some stage in his or her learning. What MTSS does is systematize, as the name implies, a tiered structure for providing instruction and support that adapts to

these varying needs of each student, as a need emerges.

MTSS has important implications for special education. MTSS increases the likelihood that only those students who have an actual disability will be identified. As well, effective MTSS intervenes for those students whose academic performance or behavior may be threatened because they come to school hungry, didn’t go to preschool, don’t speak English well, are homeless, or experience any number of conditions that may not be related to a disability. Because professional development and learning communities for teachers are an integral part of MTSS, teachers will know how to provide differentiated instruction to help struggling students catch up before they have fallen two years behind in their reading skills. And students will not be referred to special education simply because a teacher just didn’t know what else to do with them.

MTSS is not a strategy. It’s not a program or package. Those who want a prescribed, off-the-shelf “thing” or “how to” will be disappointed. In fact, every school and district that implements MTSS will look different. MTSS, by any name, is a continuum of evidence-based, systemwide practices that support optimum academic and behavioral instruction in order to address the unique needs of the children within a specific student body. The articles in this issue provide a glimpse of how that can happen and what it might look like. ◀

Inside

p3 Multitiered Systems of Support

p6 Using Data Effectively

p8 Academics and Behavior

p14 Students and Categorical Programs

p16 Santa Ana USD and MTSS

Insert California Advisory Commission on Special Education: Annual Report

Fred Balcom: Director, Special Education
Division, CDE

Janet Digmon: CDE Contract
Monitor and Project Liaison

Stacey Wedin: CDE Editorial Consultant

Anne Davin: CalSTAT Project Manager

Mary Cichy Grady: Editor

Giselle Blong: Editorial Assistant

Janet Mandelstam: Staff Writer

George Batsche: Contributing Writer

Judy Elliott: Contributing Writer

The Special EDge is published triannually by Napa County Office of Education's CalSTAT Project (California Services for Technical Assistance and Training).



Funding is provided by the California Department of Education, Special Education Division, through contract number CN077046 with Napa County Office of Education (NCOE). Contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of NCOE or the California Department of Education (CDE), nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement

Circulation: 51,000.

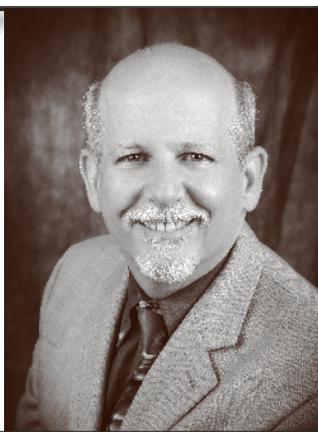
The information in this issue is in the public domain unless otherwise indicated. Readers are encouraged to copy and share but to credit CalSTAT and CDE. This issue is available on disk, audiotape, and in large print upon request. By going to CalSTAT's Web site—www.calstat.org/infoPublications.html—you can download PDF and text versions of this and previous newsletters.

Contact *The Special EDge* by telephone at 707-849-2275; by e-mail at giselle.blong@calstat.org or by postal mail at *The Special EDge*, c/o NCOE/CalSTAT, 5789 State Farm Drive, Suite 230, Rohnert Park, California 94928.



Letter from the State Director

"Successful educational initiatives have a consistent foundation: a persistent focus on quality instruction, pursuit of research-based interventions, genuine collaboration across organizational divides, and steadfast leadership."



Whether you are a parent, teacher, district administrator, or simply someone interested in education, you'll want to know about multitiered systems of support (MTSS). With the Common Core State Standards and the new local control funding formula, our educational system is ripe for reform that will benefit all students and their

ability to excel in the classroom. MTSS complements this notion seamlessly.

MTSS involves all teachers and all students, not just students with disabilities. In fact, the foundation of successful MTSS begins in general education by arming all classrooms and teachers with dynamic instructional strategies to encourage the academic and behavioral success of all students. MTSS starts with the basics; and, in Tier 1, students are served in learning environments that are evolving and flexible in response to their needs. Interventions employed under MTSS should produce positive outcomes for all students, and should focus on maintaining student success in the general education classroom.

The focus on rigorous monitoring and assessment of students' learning progress is an essential component of MTSS. This allows for targeted interventions, beyond those available to all students in all settings, to be employed only when necessary—and "when necessary" is determined by quality data that demonstrate a clear need. Districts implementing MTSS should strive for an 80 percent success rate at each tier. If fewer than 80 percent of students are successful in the general education classroom, it should indicate a need for a foundational shift in the way instruction is delivered. Similarly, if fewer than 80 percent of students receiving Tier 2 interventions are successful and/or transitioned back to receiving only Tier 1 services, then the types of interventions being employed and their appropriateness for each student should be reexamined.

MTSS is all about creating a fluid continuum where the system of instruction is adequately responsive to students' needs in a timely manner. Often, by the time an achievement gap or severe performance discrepancy materializes, it proves very difficult to address. The progress-monitoring aspect of MTSS allows for earlier intervention at both student and systemic levels. Early intervention is often more effective and less resource intensive. A systemwide framework for building varying levels of support for all students perfectly aligns with our efforts to continually improve performance. With the roll-out of Common Core State Standards, districts have an opportunity to pursue sweeping changes in their instructional frameworks that produce positive results.

This issue of *The Special EDge* provides various perspectives on MTSS, from the importance of deemphasizing categorization of our students and prescribing interventions based solely on labels to the experience of successful MTSS implementation in a school district. However, as we learn about emerging concepts in an era of reform, we should remember that successful educational initiatives have a consistent foundation: a persistent focus on quality instruction, pursuit of research-based interventions, genuine collaboration across organizational divides, and steadfast leadership. — Fred Balcom

Multitiered Systems of Support: A Single System for ALL Students

By George Batsche, Professor and Project Director, College of Education, University of South Florida

A multitiered system of supports (MTSS) is a return-on-investment model of schooling designed to ensure that student needs are matched with evidence-based services delivered by qualified personnel in the most effective and efficient manner. MTSS uses student-centered data to develop, implement, and evaluate instruction and interventions to address both the academic and behavioral needs of *all* students; and it is the method through which all of the services are delivered and resourced (figure 1) by varying the intensity of instruction to meet student needs.

The two critical elements in an MTSS are (1) the use of a databased problem-solving process and (2) the delivery of instruction/intervention in varying levels of intensity across multiple tiers. That first critical element—the consistent use of a district-adopted, evidence-based, problem-solving process—uses data across schools to develop, implement, and evaluate instruction and intervention. This process contributes to consistency in practices and procedures for all staff and parents. The problem-solving process (see arrows in figure 1) involves four steps and provides a structure through which student goals can be identified (problem identification), databased reasons why those goals are not being met can be generated (problem analysis), instruction/interventions are developed (intervention), and the impact of that instruction/intervention on student outcomes is evaluated (response to instruction/intervention).

The problem-solving process is understood through four simple questions:

1. **What do we want students to know and be able to do?** (Common Core State

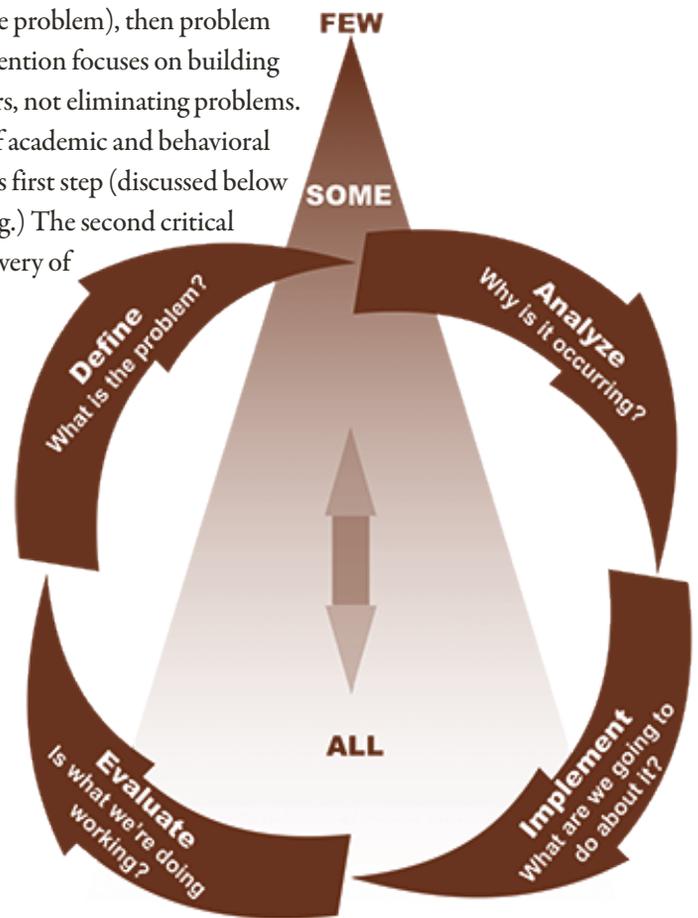
- Standards, behavior standards)
2. **Why are they not doing it?** (Hypotheses about why they are not doing the desired behavior and assessments to verify the hypotheses)
 3. **What are we going to do about it?** (The comprehensive, integrated intervention plan)
 4. **Did it work?** (Databased response to instruction/intervention)

The most important step in this problem-solving process is the first one—goal identification. When the goal focuses on what we want students to know and be able to do (rather than on the problem), then problem solving and intervention focuses on building skills and behaviors, not eliminating problems. The integration of academic and behavioral goals occurs in this first step (discussed below in Lesson Planning.) The second critical element is the delivery of instruction and supports across multiple tiers to ensure that all students receive the intensity of instruction (in both focus and time) they need to achieve success. It is critical that the district (and preferably the State Education Agency) develop a definition of the tiers of instruction. This provides a common language

(MTSS continued on page 4)

Resources

- ▶ A new research brief on MTSS from the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative is at <http://www.urbancollaborative.org/publicatoins/multi-tier-systems-support>.
- ▶ The state of Kansas features numerous materials on MTSS at <http://www.kansasmtss.org>.



Academics and/or Behavior

Figure 1. MTSS model depicting both the multiple tiers of service delivery and the four-step problem-solving process used to develop and evaluate instruction, interventions, and instructional supports.

(MTSS continued from page 3)

and common understanding for all educators and parents across schools in a district. The tiers typically are defined as follows:

Tier 1: What all students receive in core instruction—both academic and behavioral. This might include all five component skills of reading, for example. In behavior it might include a prosocial behavior curriculum (e.g., Safe and Civil Schools). Tier 1 is characterized by the broadest curriculum, the least amount of time (compared to other tiers), the fewest assessments (e.g., formative

Danger looms in the use of a multitiered system if the instruction and supports are not integrated across the tiers—and into Tier 1 in particular.

assessments three times/year plus end-of-year assessments), and the least amount of individualized attention.

Tier 2: What some students receive, also known as supplemental instruction/intervention. Typically, this instruction/intervention is provided to all students in groups and focuses on improving skill deficits (academic and behavioral) common to the students in that group. Examples would include increasing fluency in reading and improving student engagement behaviors with the use of direct instruction. The focus of instruction is more intense and narrower (only on those skills that need strengthening), and the time of

this instruction is *in addition to* the time allocated in Tier 1. Assessment data are collected more frequently (e.g., monthly). The problem-solving process typically is focused on identifying, delivering, and evaluating evidence-based instruction for the skills that are being strengthened. Tier 2 instruction/intervention can be delivered in the general education classroom or in other settings.

Tier 3: What few students receive, also known as intensive instruction/intervention. This level of instruction—the most intensive in time and focus—is provided to students individually or in very small groups. Problem solving at this tier involves student-focused, diagnostic assessment. In reading, for example, this level of instruction may include the use of technology to increase phonemic awareness; for behavioral issues, it could include anger control training. Typically, intensive instruction is *in addition to* the time allocated for Tiers 1 and 2.

Students receiving Tier 3 services clearly have an intense need; it is also clear that no effective solution to resolve the need has been identified. Often intervention solutions must be tried and data frequently collected to determine if those solutions are working. If data are not collected frequently and the solution is not working, then valuable academic engagement time is being lost and student success is compromised.

Integration Across Tiers

It is important to define the tiers consistently in terms of the focus of instruction, allocation of time, assessment data collected, and student progress. Most often, practitioners focus on differentiating the instruction provided for each tier. However, a danger looms in the use of a multitiered system if the instruction and supports are not integrated across the tiers and into Tier 1

in particular. The impact of supplemental and intensive instruction/interventions must result in improved performance of students in core instruction. It is the responsibility of the adults to integrate instruction across the tiers—not the responsibility of the student to figure out how to use what is taught in remedial services, special education, or Title 1 to improve Tier 1 performance.

Making MTSS Effective

The presence of the two critical elements of an MTSS (problem solving and multiple tiers) is necessary but insufficient to ensure that an MTSS is effective. A number of additional factors must be in place:

1. The integration of academic and behavior elements into student goals.
2. A planning or lesson study process that ensures that the instructional plan is integrated across the tiers and that the instruction/intervention is seamless for the student.
3. Instruction/intervention that is delivered with fidelity and is sufficiently appropriate to ensure positive student outcomes.

Academics and Behavior

Student behavior in school can be broken down into three categories: academic skills, academic behaviors, and inter- and intra-personal behaviors. Academic skills include the use of reasoning, critical thinking, and problem solving. Academic behaviors are those that students must possess to engage in instruction and demonstrate academic skills. Examples include following directions, asking questions, setting goals, self-monitoring, and studying. Inter- and intra-personal behaviors are those skills necessary to interact with others and remain in control of oneself.

It is critical to include both the academic skills and the student

engagement behaviors—those critical factors that influence student performance—when developing, implementing, and modifying instruction and when finding solutions for student problems. If student behavior is the focus of intervention efforts, then the goal should include the behavior to be increased *and* the outcome of the academic skill that should improve with the behavior. For example, increasing student on-task attention should result in an increase in productivity (number of assignments completed, amount of each assignment completed, and accuracy of the completed work). In short, focusing instruction on any behavior in a school setting should have academic skill performance as an outcome, not just improvement in the behavior.

Lesson Planning

Good teaching is the result of good planning. In an MTSS, this becomes more complicated when multiple providers (core, supplemental, student support) are involved in the delivery of instruction. The goal is to ensure that all instruction is integrated and aligned for the student and that the impact of Tier 2/3 instruction is seen in Tier 1. The following guidelines help to integrate instruction in an MTSS.

1. All providers of instruction and supports are present at the lesson-planning meeting.
2. The Tier 1 teachers (e.g., fifth-grade core teachers) identify the learning goal for the instruction. They then identify and select evidence-based instructional strategies, along with the student engagement behaviors (e.g., working in a group, listening, sharing) for both the instructional time and the student performance expectations. All teachers then discuss the relationship between the instruction and the expectations of student engagement.

If students lack the necessary engagement behaviors, the team can plan strategies to teach those behaviors or select other instructional strategies that are consistent with the behaviors the students possess.

3. The Tier 2 and Tier 3 providers plan their instruction in the context of the Tier 1 meeting. They align their efforts with the pacing charts of Tier 1 and ensure that Tier 2/3 instruction focuses on content to be taught before it is presented in Tier 1. This alignment facilitates the transfer of skills from Tiers 2/3 to Tier 1. Tier 2/3 providers use Tier 1 materials (at least to some degree) when working with students to help students understand that what they are learning in Tier 2/3 directly relates to improving their Tier 1 success.
4. Tier 2/3 providers observe the performance of their students in the Tier 1 setting to determine how skills are transferring from Tier 2/3 to Tier 1.
5. Tier 2/3 providers supply Tier 1 teachers with instructional strategies they have found effective. The use of those strategies by Tier 1 teachers helps students see the connections to their work across tiers.

Sufficiency and Fidelity

Instruction/intervention is effective when it is delivered in sufficient amounts and as it was intended to be delivered (fidelity). In an MTSS, sufficiency is measured in the number of minutes a week that a student receives instruction. If an evidence-based strategy for Tier 2 suggests that the student receive that instruction 30 minutes a day, each day of the week, then fewer minutes of instruction likely will result in slower progress. When students are not responding as expected, a review of the sufficiency of instruction is the first step.

One of the more effective ways to support fidelity of instruction and intervention is through the use of a coaching model that provides teachers with both interpersonal support and effective problem-solving strategies. Typically, a coach or mentor teacher meets with the staff charged with delivering the instruction at least once a week for the initial portion of the instruction/intervention and then as necessary to ensure fidelity. Three things occur during these instructional support meetings. First, the coach and instructor review student data to evaluate the student response to an instruction/intervention. Second, they discuss and address barriers to sufficiency or to the delivery of the evidence-based instruction. Third, they review critical elements of the instruction.

Summary

A multitiered system of supports is designed to maximize the performance of all students in a school district. Implementing the structural elements of problem solving and multiple tiers is only the start. To be effective, MTSS must include both the academic and behavioral components of instruction and student performance, the involvement of all providers in the lesson-planning process, and instructional support to ensure fidelity and sufficiency.

The goal of an MTSS is that students receive instruction that is integrated across tiers at the intensity appropriate to each student's needs and that the instruction improves the performance of all students in Tier 1. One litmus test of how well an MTSS is working is to ask students receiving multitiered services to explain the services to you and give you their perception of how those services help them do better in Tier 1. If they can integrate the pieces, then your MTSS is working. ◀

The New Normal: Leading with Data

The prospect of using data to make educational decisions is often fraught with intimidating images of complicated spreadsheets and impenetrable formulas. It turns out that using data is actually easier—and more familiar—than we think.

By Judy Elliott, PhD, Educational Consultant and former Chief Academic Officer, Los Angeles USD, and Assistant Superintendent, Long Beach USD

- ▶ **Doing What Matters: Creating the Conditions and Know-How for Effective Data-Driven Dialogue around Student Performance and Behavior**, from the Institute for Research and Reform in Education, is available from http://www.irre.org/sites/default/files/publication_pdfs/dwm_overview.pdf.
- ▶ **Data-Driven High School Reform: The Breaking Ranks Model**, from the Education Alliance, is available at http://www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/hisclrfm/datdrv_hsrfm.pdf.
- ▶ **Data Use for Improving Learning**, part of the Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center, offers numerous resources to help educators effectively use data. Go to <http://datause.cse.ucla.edu>.

Source

1. Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Strauss, T. (2010). *Leading school turnaround: How successful leaders transform low-performing schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ever tried to lose a few pounds? Often we try and try and the scale just does not move. So we adjust our cardio exercise and weigh ourselves again two weeks later—no change. Decision point: Do we keep on doing more cardio with the same outcome? Or do we adjust our approach? The second option is the only one that makes sense: we decide to reduce food portion sizes, thus reducing calorie intake (while still keeping the increase in cardio). Weigh-in two weeks later and—viola!—poundage loss.

Using the data from our scale leads to our problem solving, which ultimately improves our desired outcome.

So many situations in our daily lives rely on information or data to help us make decisions—when to fill our gas tank, set our alarm clock, salt our popcorn, or make a purchase. All of these decisions are based on what we know and what our desired outcome is—two factors that shape our actions to getting there.

Using data to improve student outcomes follows suit. We gather information by asking three things: What do students know? What do they need to know? And what do we need to do to get them there? Simple, really. Making academic and behavioral decisions (e.g., for an individual student, a grade level of students, students enrolled in algebra, the number of students suspended in spring semester) requires problem solving and data analysis.

Problem Solving

Problem solving is the process by which school-based leadership teams or other school staff identify and define a problem, analyze the possible causes, develop and

implement a plan to address the problem, and then evaluate whether the plan worked. Whether you are a classroom teacher, building principal, support personnel, or central office administrator, knowing how to use and implement the problem-solving process is the most critical skill you can possess.¹

Too often in education we admire our data instead of analyze it.

However, too often in education we admire our data instead of analyze it. We make observations like “short-term suspensions are up,” “more students got F’s in algebra this year than last,” or “Carlos is only reading 20 words per minute as a third grader.” The big question is “So what?” So what are we going to do about it? We all may have an opinion or feeling as to what we could do, but unless and until a problem-solving process is used (see page-3 article) we simply are admiring data.

Determining the Problem

We often place blame on the students—for not making growth, not graduating, or not meeting benchmark on a district or state assessment. But frequently it is the instructional environment that is the problem.

One effective first step in finding the true source of a problem is to examine how many of the students receiving only core instruction (Tier 1) are proficient. Is that number at or above 80 percent? Of the students receiving

strategic instruction (Tier 2), how many are proficient or moving toward proficiency? Of the students receiving Tier 3 instruction, how many are making gains? In those schools that have a lopsided or inverted pyramid, where more students are in support classes at Tier 3 or Tier 2 and the fewest proficient students are in Tier 1, data show that you can count on the instructional environment as being the problem. As a general rule of thumb, if more than 20 percent of your students are failing or not doing well in a particular area (e.g., third-grade state assessments, Algebra I, behavior in the cafeteria), then you will find that the problem rests with the instructional environment, not the students.

Examining All Data

It is also critical to integrate and analyze both behavioral and academic data. For example, if students are not meeting proficiency in their core instruction, what do their attendance data look like? What about suspension or office referral data? It is logical to assume that, if students are not in class, they are missing instruction and their proficiency levels will suffer. So while a first glance may show that students are failing algebra, problem analysis shows that there are usually multiple reasons for the failure (e.g., absence, suspension, poor instruction etc.).

It is also important to know the relationship between academic data and student behavior. For instance, what is the impact of poor attendance on math proficiency at different grade levels? The graph to the right indicates that the impact of poor attendance on math proficiency is almost twice the effect at the high school level (where students with poor attendance are only 37% proficient) than it is at the elementary level (where students with poor attendance are 67% proficient).

If we continue to use data in silos (math only, reading only, behavior only, etc.), then we will never understand the interactions between and among them. In everyday

school settings, the reality is that student performance is always the result of the interaction of academic skills and behavioral factors.

Examining Program Effectiveness

Another critical question to ask around your data is “What is the return on investment from the intervention and support services being provided?” In other words, what do data look like for students receiving additional instruction/supports in Tiers 2 and 3? It’s just as important to ask how often data are examined, since the frequency provides evidence of student growth and any movement between tiers.

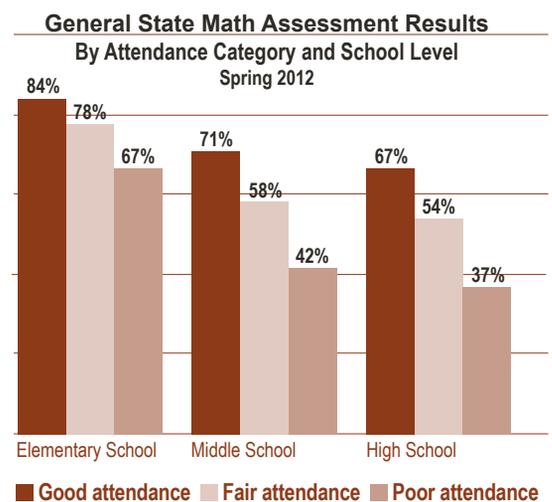
The answers to these questions will provide you with vital information. For example, if you are spending lots of time and money on an intervention program, yet students are not showing accelerated rates of growth in proficiency, the situation begs the question “why?” Why spend that money for so little return? Data will also highlight those programs that *are* making a difference. But, one way or another, if you’re not measuring program effectiveness, you don’t really know what’s worth keeping and what isn’t.

Ensuring and Identifying Quality Instruction

The quality and fidelity of instruction also matters, which makes professional development especially important. Keeping students academically engaged, checking their understanding, and successfully encouraging their active participation in the learning process are critical aspects of quality instruction. All three directly impact student outcomes. But sometimes this isn’t enough, which makes the problem-solving process key
(Data continued on page 15)

Resources

- ▶ *Implementing Data-Informed Decision Making in Schools—Teacher Access, Supports and Use*, from the U. S. Department of Education, is available at <http://www.espsolutionsgroup.com/news/data-informed-decision.pdf>.
- ▶ *Achieving with Data: How High-Performing School Systems Use Data to Inform Instruction for Elementary Students*, from the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California, is available at <http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/cegov/focus/education-reform/publications/books-chapters/Achieving%20with%20Data-How%20High%20Performing%20Schools%20Use%20Data%5B1%5D.pdf>.



The Fusion of Academics and Behavior

There are systems of academic support for students and other systems of behavioral support. Why not one have one system that supports success in both areas?

Learning and behavior are “inextricably linked,” says Cathleen Geraghty, lecturer in school psychology at the University of California, Riverside. “It really is hard to keep academics and behavior apart.”

Alberto Restori agrees. “Children whose primary issue is learning eventually become frustrated, which often leads to behavior problems. And children whose primary issue is behavior often miss out on important parts of their learning because the behaviors themselves may impede the learning process, or because they miss instruction as a consequence of their behavior,” says Restori, associate professor of school psychology at California State University, Northridge.

Given this interconnectedness—and agreement among experts—it’s not surprising that educators in California are increasingly looking to combine academics and behavior in a multitiered system of support (MTSS) for all students.

Three-tiered systems of support already exist for academics, often referred to as response to intervention or RtI. For behavior, the three-tiered system is called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports or PBIS (although many educators refer to “the RtI model” when speaking of either academic or behavioral supports). Both identify and target areas where students are at-risk or struggling, and both use increasingly intensive, research-based interventions to address those areas. But when the two are not presented and implemented together, Geraghty says, “teachers see them as two separate things instead of as a problem-solving model for everything we’re going to be dealing with in school. We might implement what we would consider a

traditional PBIS model and behavior starts to get under control, but we don’t see a bump in academics. Or we might get academics on a positive trajectory, but teachers are still complaining about behavior issues.”

When the two are implemented together, the symbiotic relationship between academics and behavior is apparent, “and our outcomes are usually better,” says Geraghty. Addressing behavioral problems will increase the amount of classroom time engaged in academics because the teacher will be spending less classroom time on discipline, “and we know that academic-engaged time is strongly correlated with [positive] student outcomes,” she says. Similarly, when academic problems are addressed, students “are more

Marrying academic and behavioral interventions makes the academic interventions more successful.

likely to participate in class and less likely to demonstrate behavior problems.” For students receiving academic intervention, according to Geraghty, “wide research shows that marrying it with low-level behavioral intervention makes that academic intervention more successful.”

Universal Screening

The way to combine academic and behavioral systems of support “and treat the whole child,” says Randy Busse, associate professor in the College of Educational Studies at Chapman University, is to implement a system of “universal screening starting in kindergarten on up for early

- Resources**
- ▶ *Making the Case for Educating the Whole Child* from ASCD is available at <http://www.wholechildeducation.org/take-action/making-the-case>.
 - ▶ *The Building Blocks of Positive Behavior* by Matthew Cregor, in *Teaching Tolerance*, is at <http://www.pbis.org/common/cms/documents/Staff/staff%20training%20materials/The%20Building%20Blocks%20of%20Positive%20Behavior%20TT.pdf>.

identification of at-risk students and early intervention.” Busse calls this an “ecological assessment of a child and the learning environment” that provides support for all students “before they fall through the cracks.” The MTSS model, Busse says, is “simple and elegant,” whether one is dealing with learning or behavior:

- “Do a good assessment.
- “Identify the problem.
- “Look to research to engage in an intervention.
- “Engage in it with fidelity.
- “And evaluate it with integrity.”

“Think of it as academic and behavioral RtI as they do in the Midwest, where they are far ahead of us [in California].”

Time, Support, and Data

The shift to MTSS doesn’t happen overnight. In Florida, educators say district-wide implementation takes three to five years. And because it requires whole-school involvement to be truly effective, it needs strong staff buy-in. For MTSS to work, “you have to get stakeholder support,” says Geraghty.

“We approach staff development through a problem-solving model. We show the staff data that there might be a problem with behavior on campus or that there are some academic concerns that should be addressed. We involve key staff in analyzing why they think the problem exists, and we keep them involved in databased decisionmaking.

“Research tells us that you want to get at least 75–80 percent of the teachers to say they are going to try it,” says Geraghty. “Over time,” Restori suggests, “the best way to get

buy-in is to show how well [MTSS] works” by providing early intervention for at-risk students and then maintaining accurate data on the results.

Busse, who calls himself “a data guy,” says data are essential for identifying a problem, engaging in systemic assessment, and ensuring the integrity of evaluations. With the early universal screening that he advocates, “we’re creating local norms so that we can compare our kids to themselves” while monitoring progress over time. And Restori agrees that “using data gathered from RtI-type progress monitoring gives us assessment information that is directly tied to actual problems student are having, rather than to some test.”

Early Intervention

Any intervention, whether it deals with issues related to academics or behavior, “is going to produce better outcomes when delivered early,” says Restori. “Most children



experiencing reading problems can be taught to read at grade level if reading interventions are delivered prior to the end of second grade. Similarly, with regard to behavior, research has shown that behavior problems become very stable from about age 8.”

Adds Geraghty:

“The longer we wait to intervene academically, the greater the holes the students have in their learning and the longer it will take to remediate.” And she agrees that students who demonstrate at-risk behavior “unless treated by age 8 or 9 will be really hard to remediate. Through a tiered system of support that targets behavior, we can address those issues and prevent a long-term societal problem.”

(Fusion continued on page 10)

Resources

- ▶ “Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support for Behavior” is available at http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/pdfs/RTIB%20Guide%20101811_final.pdf.
- ▶ “Schoolwide Behavioral Supports within the Kansas MTSS Framework,” a description of how one state is including both academics and behavior within a multitiered system of support, is available at http://www.kansasmtss.org/briefs/School-wide_Behavioral_Support_within_MTSS.pdf.
- ▶ A presentation on “A Comprehensive MTSS Model: Integrating Behavioral and Academic Interventions” is available at <http://www.kansasmtss.org/2009%20Symposium/Cara%20Shores%20General%20Session.pdf>.

(Fusion continued from page 9)

Benefits for Students with Disabilities

While MTSS is designed to benefit all students, there likely will be an added bonus for special education. “We find that when academic RtI is implemented with a reasonable level of fidelity, the special education referral rates go down,” says Geraghty. “Approximately the same number of students qualify for special education,” she says, but with MTSS “we’re better able to identify who’s likely to qualify and, therefore, reduce the rate of inappropriate referrals.”

Behavioral interventions, says Busse, can recognize and support students “who have behavioral or emotional issues but don’t really have a disability.” And with whole-school MTSS in place, students who receive special education services “know what the behavioral expectations are, no matter what environment they are in,” says Geraghty. “The general ed teacher, special ed teacher, behavioral specialist—everybody should be using the same vocabulary, strategies, and expectations to address the behavioral needs of that student.”

Over time, Restori posits, “early interventions provided at Tiers 1 and 2 would address the problems of many children so that they don’t end up needing special education.” That, he says, “would result in greater and higher-quality resources” available for those who do qualify.

The major challenge, as Restori sees it, “is that moving from our current system to an MTSS approach really does entail a complete revamping of how we address the needs of children who are at-risk or have special needs.” But the benefit to all children is significant. When fully implemented, MTSS would address academic, social-emotional, and behavioral development; and schools would support and educate the whole child. ◀

(Santa Ana continued from page 16)

meetings clearly show which students have “taken off” as readers and which are still finding their way. The conversation honors the successes of both students and teachers, but it focuses on the students who are struggling and on what is being done in response.



These two scenarios represent the central components of Santa Ana’s MTSS: quality core instruction and the effective use of data. The Open Court curriculum and PALS establish the former; Dibels⁴ assessment the latter—all research-proven. This was where Santa Ana started, but it was far from the whole of its efforts to create an MTSS. District leaders at Santa Ana knew that the best tools imaginable are worthless if the staff doesn’t know how to use them correctly and if the administration isn’t knowledgeable about and committed to them. “It all started with training,” says Lohnes, “lots of training and team building.”

Developing Capacity

Despite her energy and enthusiasm, Lohnes knew not to attempt too much at once. One of her first steps on the road to a fully implemented MTSS was to hand-select an RtI (response to intervention) leadership team from among the district’s staff. Along with Bender, there is Krista Barton; both have PhDs in school psychology and RtI. Other team members include Juan Sevilla, another school psychologist who is (in Lohnes’ opinion) a “tech wizard” and instrumental in the design of the district’s RtI forms; Karla Ledon, a curriculum specialist, who applies her classroom experience to coaching other teachers; and Jennifer Kim, another PhD in school psychology with a focus on RtI and who led the redesign of the SST⁴ processes. Bender, Barton, and Kim all received their doctorates from the University of California-Riverside, adding a “locally grown” flavor to Santa Ana’s efforts.

- ▶ The **Stop Bullying** website of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers materials for parents, teachers, school administrators, and students to help end bullying in schools and communities. The site specifically addresses cyberbullying. Go to <http://www.stopbullying.gov>.
- ▶ **Use Positive Strategies to Protect Your Child with Disabilities from Bullying**, from PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center, is available at <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/students-with-disabilities/>.
- ▶ **Bullying & Disability Harassment of Students with Disabilities**, Disability Rights California, is available at <http://www.disabilityrightscalifornia.org/pubs/551201.pdf>.
- ▶ The **California Department of Education** offers resources designed to help prevent bullying behavior; go to <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/bullyingprev.asp>.

In the district's early planning phases, each of these team members was sent out to learn about—and become the resident expert in—a specific aspect of MTSS. The team then formed focus groups throughout the district to generate enthusiasm and to address concerns. From there, the momentum grew: elementary schools volunteered to pilot the MTSS to work out any snags, and then the system went districtwide—although still with modest goals. The new structure started in first grade and is growing into the next grade level with each new school year. The district is currently implementing MTSS in grades one through five and is in the process of adding positive behavioral supports.

Establishing the Foundation

In addition to a talented and committed staff and a manageable game plan, Santa Ana had other things in place before it began developing its MTSS. Because of its Program Improvement status, it had been involved in the Reading First initiative, which gave the district experience working with, and language for talking about, students who were struggling and the interventions they needed. In the process, the district developed a cadre of instructional/intervention coaches. So while every teacher receives training in curriculum and instruction, these intervention coaches give classroom teachers ongoing support by observing, advising, and coaching them in their efforts to provide effective instruction that is appropriately differentiated to the needs of the students.

Delegating Power; Finding Money

Lohnes is the first to credit the leadership and commitment of her current and recent superintendents, Thelma Meléndez and Jane Russo, for the success the district is realizing. They gave the RtI team the power to make decisions about personnel, schedules, and use of resources. They also made—and Meléndez continues to make—suggestions to school principals about master schedules, with the

guiding principle of making every instructional second count.

Issues of money are a lightning rod in education these days, but Lohnes and her colleagues do not believe that RtI requires more of it. “Most places that do RtI figure out a way to move resources around. We look at activities that are not doing what they should, take [the money] they’ve got allocated [for those less-than-effective resources], and put it into RtI.” No one in the district is pretending that all of the decisions have been easy. “We prioritize schedules,” says Lohnes, “constantly asking ourselves ‘what can be changed and what gotten rid of?’ Sustained Silent Reading is a sacred cow in many schools. But if it’s not helping the kids read . . . the bottom-line question is ‘where is the value for the effort?’ We are constantly asking that. We also constantly struggle with the balance between the time needed for assessments and the time it takes to provide the interventions. We need more intervention time. So we are trying to streamline the assessment part. The right data are invaluable. It’s all about finding a balance. We’re constantly listening to concerns and trying new things.”

Finding the Right Help

Lohnes and her team also credit Vonnice DiCecco, former educator and trainer from the California Diagnostic Center, as being key in helping lay the groundwork for an MTSS and make changes “step by step.” Recently retired, DiCecco says the trainings she provided were “for districts wanting to move forward with changes to their strategic plans. One of the qualifiers for me was that if the district didn’t have folks in a position to make decisions, the Diagnostic Center wouldn’t play. I needed commitment. If you set out a plan but important people don’t do their part, things fall apart. These people [at Santa Ana] had a strong commitment at every level.”

Aligning at All Levels

Another critical “find” in terms of training
(Santa Ana continued on page 12)

Sources/Notes

1. *Hechinger Report*. Retrieved from http://hechingerreport.org/content/california-has-one-of-nations-highest-gaps-in-hispanic-white-reading-proficiency_6592/.
2. Schools and districts receiving federal Title I funding enter **Program Improvement (PI)** if they do not make their annual performance index (API) for two consecutive years in the same content area (English language arts or mathematics) or on the same indicators (API or graduation).
3. **PALS: Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies** is a structured, peer-mediated reading activity developed out of Vanderbilt University for students in preschool through grade six and high school. Go to <http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals/reading.html>.
4. **Dibels** is a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten through sixth grade. Go to <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/training/measures/dibelsinfo.php>.

- ▶ **The National Reading Panel's** research on the importance of reading and reading instruction is available at http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/publications/interim_report/section1.htm.
- ▶ California's three **Diagnostic Centers** are operated by the State Special Schools and Services Division of the California Department of Education and provide assessment, training, and technical assistance to all Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) in California, as well as high-quality, individualized services to special education students, their families, and school districts.
 - ⇒ **Southern California:** <http://www.dcs-cde.ca.gov>
 - ⇒ **Northern California:** <http://www.dcn-cde.ca.gov>
 - ⇒ **Central California:** <http://www.dcc-cde.ca.gov>

Note

5. **Student Study Teams** ideally consist of parents or family members and school personnel who meet to explore and problem-solve ways to help and support students facing challenges in regular classes.

(**Santa Ana** continued from page 11)

personnel was Diane Haager, from California State University Los Angeles, who helped key district personnel view MTSS within the context of special education. “At Santa Ana, I worked first with special education teachers, then with general education teachers. I also worked with school psychologists, giving them RtI basics—the importance of assessments and universal screening—and lots of practical examples of how to use data.

“I also spoke about how having early intervention in place [through RtI] in reading can prevent reading problems for kids with and without disabilities. And about how working with kids with disabilities early would lessen their achievement gap. Too often with the discrepancy model the achievement gap becomes too wide to close once a child is identified as having a disability.”

In addition, Haager helped the staff align curriculum, instruction, and assessment: “As I made site visits, the central district team would join us walking through classrooms. The principals could see how the intervention was not always well aligned with the core curriculum, and they saw the confusion that was creating for the students. They saw the importance of making sure that the intervention and core instruction did align.” The district has also redesigned its SST⁵ process to align with the rest of the system. The current forms reflect the problem-solving, intervention-based focus that is inherent to an MTSS—all conducted within the context of general education.

Keeping It Simple

Lohnes also called upon Michael Vanderwood, director of the School of Psychology at the University of California-Riverside, to help the Santa Ana staff gear up for and maintain its MTSS. Vanderwood's interests—academic and behavioral interventions, alternative assessment, and special education reform among them—made him a perfect fit for the district. In addition,

for the past 12 years he has been researching ways to make RtI appropriate for English language learners. His work confirms the appropriateness and effectiveness of RtI—its focus on interventions and assessments—for students who are learning English. “We were able to show that even for those most at-risk and challenged students, the concepts of MTSS work; prevention and early intervention work for all students.”

Bender credits Vanderwood with helping the RtI leadership team simplify MTSS. He has broken the effort down into what he calls the five “-INGS”: (1) Teaching, (2) Screening, (3) Intervening, (4) Progress monitoring, and (5) Problem solving. Vanderwood in turn credits Santa Ana's success to the following:

A clear and persistent focus on ensuring the highest quality possible in its core instruction. He has especially positive things to say about PALS, as his research shows that, even in districts “with lots of challenging students, PALS positively impacts the whole classroom.”

A reliance on research. “They make decisions based on research and data, not on past practices or what others are doing.”

Collaboration. “They are a collaborative bunch and in that capacity have embraced the heart of MTSS as a problem-solving approach.”

An understanding of the importance of leadership. “They go to great lengths to get their principals on board and involved in the MTSS.”

During the district's MTSS start-up phase, Haager provided reading intervention trainings that were designed specifically for site principals. Vanderwood continues this commitment to keeping school leaders engaged and helping them understand what they're doing—to remain clear on the “big ideas” of RtI/MTSS. He acknowledges that there are sometimes challenges and misunderstandings in these conversations. “In schools we're used to adopting programs,



Hermine Bender and Richard Valle discuss data with first-grade teachers.

to implementing a certain ‘thing’; RtI is not a thing or a program; it is a problem-solving approach” that requires the use of assessment and data. “Instead of putting a focus on things, teachers and administrators need to focus on how to improve outcomes.”

Advice

Lohnes and her team have practical advice for any school or school district that is planning to implement an MTSS:

There’s no one perfect formula. “You really need to focus in on the characteristics and culture of your own place and customize accordingly. Look at these characteristics and align your training accordingly.” Haager gives Santa Ana’s RtI leadership team credit for making this alignment. According to her, this team “coordinated how MTSS got rolled out to each site. The members of the team knew the nuances of each school [and] adapted [MTSS] to fit into the school context.”

You may not get it right the first time. And you are never done. “We do not work with any idea of being finished. You need to plan to adapt, adjust, and tweak continuously.”

One of the characteristics of the RtI team is its understanding of adult learning theory. They are committed over the long haul, with the understanding that people at every level will need to be trained, retrained, coached,

and coached again.

Define success in small increments. “We are happy with small increments of growth. We saw a 10-percent growth in spring data last year in the grades where MTSS was in place. Ten percent is good. This is what we need to do for the next three years.”

Expect struggles. “You have to problem solve as you go. You find

a problem, generate and implement a solution, monitor the effect, make adjustments, and continue the process.” The goal is to develop the ability to continuously navigate the inevitable struggles and generate solutions.

Concerns

As new as its MTSS efforts are, the leadership team is already studying alternatives to the district’s current core curriculum and assessment systems, looking for a way to give teachers more time to teach, to differentiate instruction, and to provide interventions—“to make sure that reading time and instruction are being implemented with vibrancy, fidelity, and engagement,” says Bender.

According to Lohnes, “If you’re going to invest time, blood, and sweat in interventions, you’ve got to make sure they are efficacious for your population. We’ve left behind interventions that we liked, that were colorful, that we enjoyed. They just didn’t work as well as others. We rely on the What Works Clearinghouse, which identifies tools that are validated. We keep it simple. We choose a few interventions and provide comprehensive professional development on them. At first we incorporated other stuff. But now we put only the proven interventions in place.”

The bottom line is that “MTSS is not about creating a new program,” says Lohnes. “It’s about doing everything well.” ◀

Resources

- ▶ The What Works Clearinghouse answers the question of “What works in education?” to give educators the information they need to make evidence-based decisions. Go to <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>.
- ▶ The Promising Practices Network reviews PALS at <http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=143>.
- ▶ For the results of the California Reading First initiative, read *The California Reading First Evaluation Report* at http://www.eddata.com/resources/publications/RF_Evaluation_2007-2008.pdf.

Invitation

- ▶ Santa Ana USD welcomes visitors and any opportunity to talk about its multitiered system of support. Contact Doreen Lohnes at Doreen.Lohnes@sausd.us or Hermine Bender at Hermine.Bender@sausd; or phone them at 714-558-5551.

The Picture Behind Categorical Programs

Recent studies suggest that the perceived separation of general education and special education represents a false dichotomy, especially when considering the needs of California’s students and the groups they represent.

The original intent of disabilities legislation was to provide laws and incentives that would ensure access to public schools and education for students with disabilities. More progressive legislation focused on including these students within general education, not as a separate system. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the general education legislation known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), made states and school districts more mindful of certain subgroups within the general education system, groups that had been

ignored or treated as “less than.” In particular, these groups include students who receive categorical funding, such as children with disabilities or English language learners. With NCLB, all groups of students had to be accounted for in school testing

and had to be figured into each school’s academic record and standing. As a result, many schools and districts have begun to take more seriously than ever before the need to effectively educate and serve all students and to develop and act on plans to do just that.

Overall, California has much room to improve. However, there are schools and school districts in the state that were inspired in part by NCLB but mostly by a commitment to serve all students. These places—despite high numbers of students

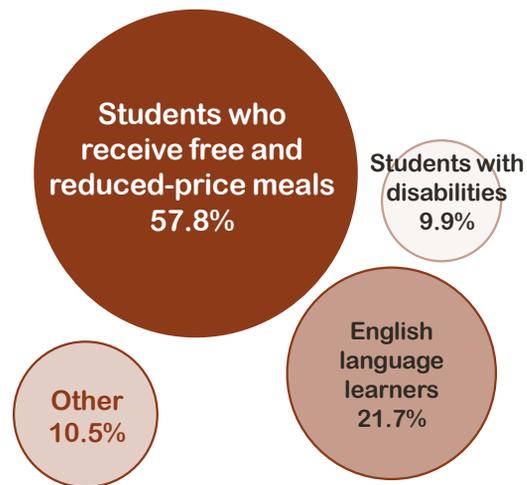
who qualify for free and reduced-priced lunch, a factor that commonly correlates with poor school performance, have produced exceptionally strong academic outcomes for all students, including those who receive special education services—and at a relatively low cost. These high-performing schools share a number of common practices: for them, gathering, maintaining, and understanding accurate data is a significant priority; they base important decisions on that data; and they have developed multitiered systems of support.

A number of studies are examining the

nature of student subgroups and educational funding in the state. One of the most compelling features of these studies is the profile that emerges of who exactly belongs to those subgroups of students in California who receive services funded through categorical programs. The

resulting picture, as presented in the charts on this and the next page, creates a compelling argument for all of education to work together to support all students. In fact, with close to 90 percent of California students in these categorical programs, and with members of categorical groups overlapping, the word “subgroup” suddenly becomes a misnomer. These are simply the students the state is charged with educating. Adhering to broad labels or operating out of separate categories is suddenly not very useful. ◀

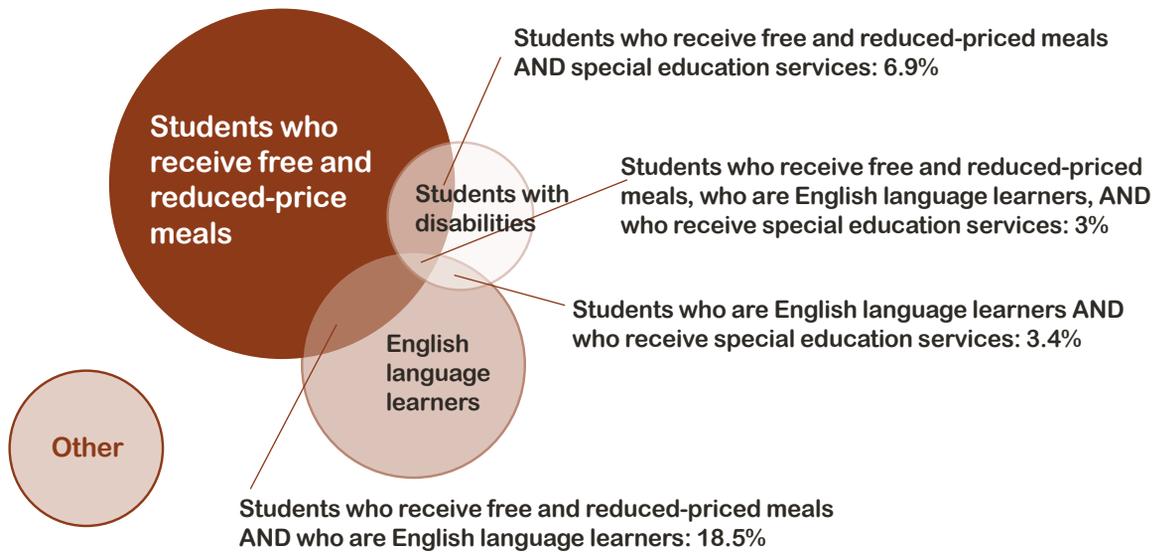
Total K–12 Enrollment in California by Percentage



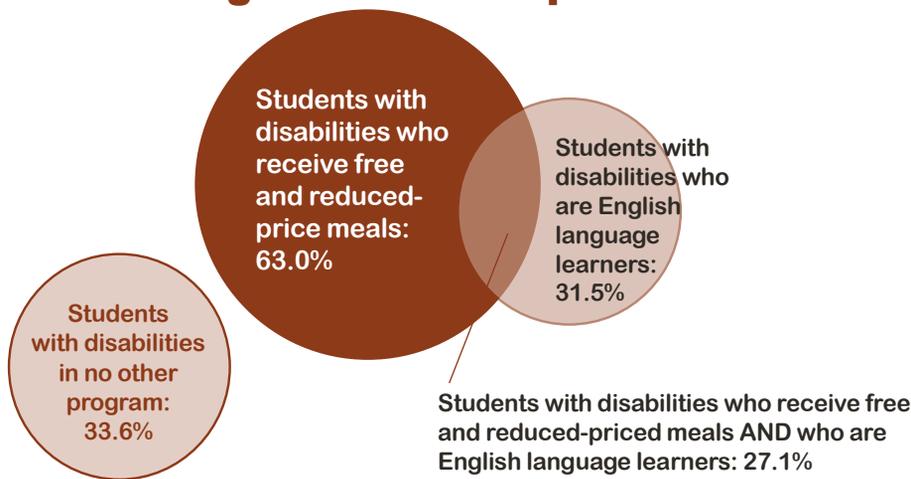
- ▶ **WestEd** works to improve special education services throughout the state. Learn more at <http://www.wested.org>.
- ▶ **The American Institutes for Research** is at <http://www.air.org>.

Resources

How All Students and Their Groups Overlap



Percentages of Students with Disabilities Who Belong to Other Groups



(Data continued from page 7)

in finding out what to do when learning outcomes are poor.

Using data to drive instructional decisions and to solve problems for both academics and behavior is becoming the new normal. Yet school administrators and leaders must never assume that everyone (teachers, principals, school counselors, etc.) knows and is comfortable with analyzing and using data. Thus it's critical to provide opportunities for personnel to develop

the skills they need to “kick the tires of the data.” Without direct instruction around how to use, analyze, and do something with data, one can assume that the “admiration” of data will only continue.

So, while we must demand data at every level of the organization, we also must provide training so the data can be effectively used to make the kinds of decisions that will produce the outcomes we want—lower rates of suspension and expulsion, higher

reading and math scores, and graduation success for more students every year.

Got Data?

We use data to problem solve and intervene daily in our lives—to lose weight, quit an annoying or unhealthy habit, or arrive to work on time. Schools must continue to learn how to use it to move all students to proficiency in reading by third grade; to pass the high school exit exam on the first try; and, in general, to realize school and postsecondary success. ◀

Defying the Odds: Every Student a Reader in Santa Ana

While it's safe (and accurate) to say that reading is the first and most important skill that a student needs for academic success, it's also reasonable to say that, given its demographics, Santa Ana was not the most auspicious place to start making "everyone a reader." According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 12 percent of Hispanic fourth graders in California are proficient in reading.¹ Current data show 95 percent of students in Santa Ana are Hispanic. And within the Santa Ana Unified School District, 82 percent of students are also English language learners. In addition, 87 percent of the district's students qualify for free and reduced-priced meals, the district's population is the largest in Orange County (and the sixth largest in the state), and its 56,000 students bus to 61 schools from a 24-square-mile radius. Finally, 2004 student scores in Santa Ana placed the district under federal "Program Improvement" status.²

These facts did not dissuade Doreen Lohnes, Santa Ana USD's current assistant superintendent of educational support services. A committed educator, she is optimistic and indefatigable in her commitment to reading and academic success for all students. But the idea of overhauling an existing system is one thing; the reality is something else entirely. So when Lohnes and her colleagues considered adopting a district-wide multitiered system of support (MTSS) as the way to create a "reading turn-around," where did they begin?



When you walk into Randee Scott's first-grade classroom at Franklin Elementary School, students alternate between working with PALS³ in pairs and observing and responding to whole-class lessons and discussions. The pace of Scott's instruction keeps her students moving. They first each work with a partner, then focus on a large-group activity, and then shift back to partner work. They've been coached to respond physically with a variety of movements to

verbal prompts, so their bodies are as engaged as their minds. This "whole-child" approach was designed to address the developmental needs of first graders—including the girl who has autism and who is as attentive to Scott's lesson as anyone. And assessments show that the students are learning to read.

Across several freeways at Hoover Elementary School, first-grade teachers gather in principal Richard Valle's office, along with school psychologist Hermine Bender, to discuss student data. Everyone quickly gets down to business. Valle's congeniality belies his thorough knowledge of the data sheets his teachers have in front of them. His presence and informed interest confirm the importance he places on that data; and Bender is there, she says, to help teachers "move beyond decoding to understanding." The data discussed at these regular

(Santa Ana continued on page 10)

Napa County Office of Education
CalSTAT Project
5789 State Farm Drive, Suite 230
Rohnert Park, CA 94928-3609

PRSR STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 105
Petaluma, CA

To subscribe

- ▶ *The Special EDge* newsletter is available free of charge to California residents.
- ▶ To subscribe, send your name, postal address, position, and contact e-mail and/or phone number to CalSTAT, 5789 State Farm Drive, Suite 230, Rohnert Park, CA 94928. Or phone 707-849-2275; or e-mail giselle.blong@calstat.org. Or subscribe online at www.calstat.org/publications/subscribe_form.php.
- ▶ Request e-subscriptions from Giselle at giselle.blong@calstat.org.