

Response to Intervention (RTI) Series

Introduction

Training for Principals and Teacher Leaders: Context and Initial Planning

An existing need within the region is providing systems within schools that provide students with the extra time and support to learn essential skills necessary for future success in school and life. Such systems need to be created using the existing resources allocated by the state and LEAs. Without substantial additional funding on the horizon, school leaders must begin to rethink how they use existing resources and start to change structures and, more importantly, school cultures to better meet the needs of all students. One of those substantial cultural shifts is that of moving from teachers working in isolation as independent contractors worried only about “their” kids to whole schools operating collectively, responsible for the success of “our” kids. In other words, when a child struggles and the individual teacher has done his or her best to intervene, what other systems are in place to help the child? Schools should have a means for responding with intervention. They should have a Response to Intervention (RTI) system in place. In the spring of 2016, the Governance Board for the NNRPDP recognized the need for training administrators and teacher leaders together to help empower each school to use the unique resources and personnel at their sites to develop systems that would support their unique challenges. The board committed to a two year RTI training series. The board used the legislated funds committed to each regional professional development program for the purpose of administrator training totaling \$33,000/year. In the first year, the funds paid for books, travel, and teacher substitutes so that influential teacher leaders could attend the training with their principals and be part of the decision-making process. In the second year, it paid for additional materials, travel, and substitutes.

Learning Design

Using the book, *Simplifying Response to Intervention* (2012) by Buffum, Mattos and Weber, the NNRPDP Leadership Consultant conducted a three-day workshop series throughout the 2016-17 school year. The NNRPDP Leadership Consultant is an authorized associate for the authors and has authored a chapter in *It's About Time* (2014), one of their anthologies, and presented with the authors on numerous occasions at a national level. Each participant was provided with the above mentioned text through the use of administrator training funds. Before participation, each principal was asked to select a “Guiding Coalition” comprised of influential teacher leaders to be part of their team. The team would learn RTI foundations together and ultimately begin designing a customized system of interventions specific to the needs and resources available at their site. The training consisted of multiple mini-presentations along with ample time for each school team to have discussions and apply what they were learning to assess their school’s situation and develop their own system and a plan for implementation. A two day follow-up

series was conducted for the same schools in the 2017-18 school year to continue to support teams as they assessed their new systems, make changes, and develop further plans for implementation.

Learning Focus

The learning focused on the following outcomes:

- Collective Responsibility
 - Cultural transformation from “I” to “We”
 - Structures for collaboration
 - Consensus building around a co-created vision
- Concentrated Instruction
 - Identifying essential skills by grade level or department
 - Developing common assessments
 - A means for tracking student progress
- Convergent Assessment
 - Universal screening
 - Common assessments and how to use them
- Certain Access
 - Where do Special Education services fit in?
 - Planning for multi-tiered support
 - Making time for interventions within the school day
- Tier I obligations, who is responsible
- Tier II obligations, who is responsible
- Tier III obligations, who is responsible
- Student Support Teams

Implementation

Teams not only spent time learning about these foundational understandings, they were given time to process their learning and apply what they were learning to their own system design. Depending upon the systems each school already had in place, the duration of leaders in their positions, district support, resources, and numerous other factors, the plans varied greatly. Each team designed their own ideal vision for their system of interventions within the context of their school, envisioning how collaborative teams, assessment, and interventions would work in the ideal, five years from the present. From there, teams were asked to identify one or two leverage points to tackle within the next year that would move them closer to their ideal than any other actions. Support was provided to teams throughout the year by the NNRPDP Leadership Consultant on site and via phone for guidance as needed.

The intention was for schools to develop systems of intervention. However, the greater desire was to empower each team to take ownership of their school’s practices. Schools are often stuck repeating practices that have been used for decades, not because they are best practices, but

because they are what have always been done. Although the text used and foundational understandings taught to each guiding coalition are considered best practices, the greater desire was not to have them replicate what others have done. Instead the desire was to empower a group of like-minded influential members of the school community to believe that they collectively have the ability to take ownership of their system and change it and the culture into what they envisioned it to be. As the results bare out, this increased level of collective efficacy was achieved to high degree.

Results

The learning outcomes listed above were met to a high degree. However, most encouraging is the degree to which each formal leadership team or guiding coalition became empowered and started sharing the responsibility for the school through the guiding coalition. Question 6 (Q6) and Question 7 (Q7) specifically illustrate that shift. Fifty-three participants responded to the survey. Question 1 asked for the participant’s name; remaining results of the survey follow.

Q2 What is your job title?

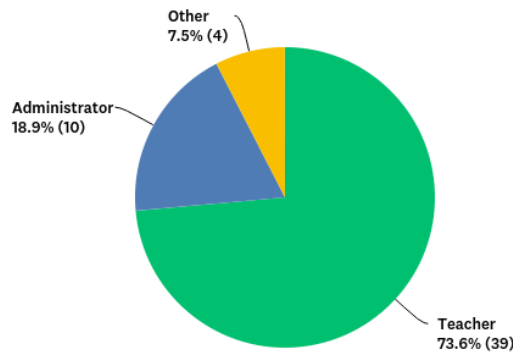


Figure 2: Job Title

Q3 To what degree was your knowledge enhanced about the fundamental principles of RTI (4c's- collective responsibility, convergent assessment, concentrated instruction, certain access)?

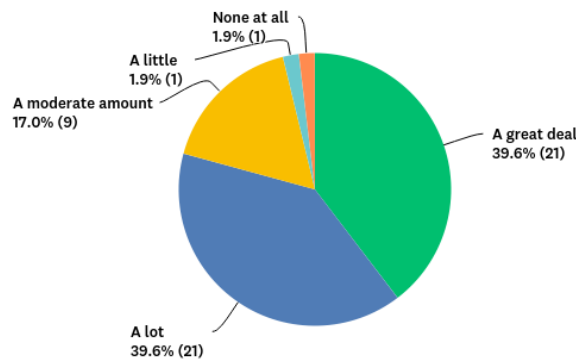


Figure 3: Knowledge Enhanced

Q4 To what degree do you feel like your classroom formative assessment and intervention practices have improved as a result of your learning from the training?

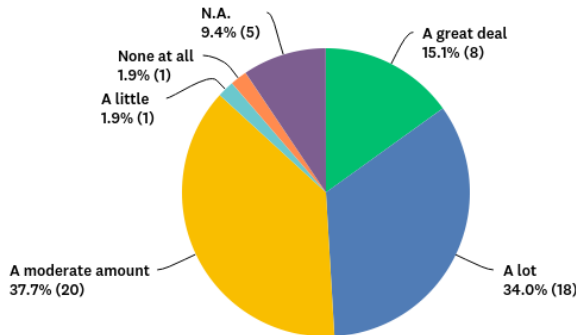


Figure 4: Classroom Improvement

Q5 To what degree has your whole school improved as a system? For example, providing time for teams to meet, more clearly defined expectations for teacher teams, intervention time built into the schedule.

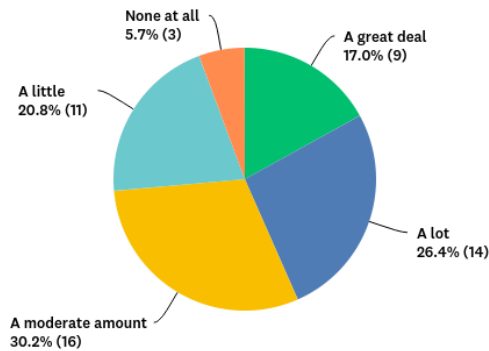


Figure 5: School Improvements

Q6 Prior to the training, to what degree did your school share leadership decisions through a formal leadership group like a "guiding coalition" or a "leadership team"?

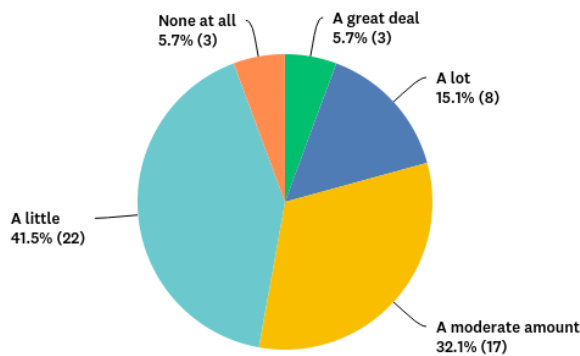


Figure 6: Leadership Decisions

Q7 To what degree does your school now share leadership decisions through a formal leadership group like a "guiding coalition" or a "leadership team"?

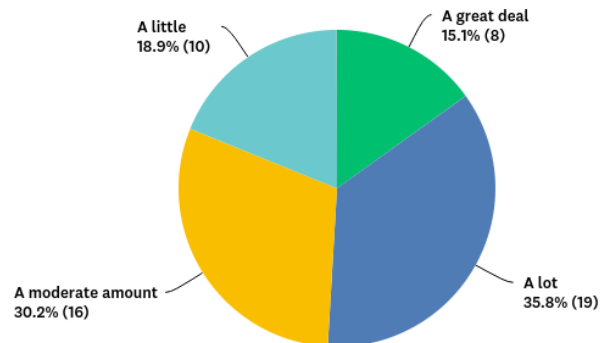


Figure 7: Sharing Leadership Decisions

Discussion

In today's educational environment of high accountability for schools, many educators are falling into the trap of feeling like their first obligation is to comply with state or district initiatives out of fear of consequences. Although schools should obey laws and district policies, each school must take ownership of their students' learning as their first and most pressing obligation. They must be empowered to design systems that they believe in, that they see working with the resources, challenges, and personalities at their individual schools. While there are strong-minded individuals in every school, leadership rarely mobilizes these individuals into a team that can change the whole school. It was our intention to do just that and to show them they have more power than they think. While it is not surprising that those schools that saw the most progress in building systems of intervention had strong positional leaders (principals), these same schools had leaders willing to share their power.

Conclusion

It takes an adept group of leaders to clarify the desired changes necessary to develop a viable system of intervention and to manage the sociology of group dynamics and cultural change. Much support is necessary for leadership teams as they continue to develop their skills. Equal to the need for high capacity is the need to stay focused. In today's educational climate, it is easy for school leaders to get distracted from the concentrated effort it takes to do the hard work described herein. In the face of so many initiatives, new laws, and demands placed upon schools, leaders' attention is easily diverted from instruction and curriculum, the core of what makes an instructional leader an actual leader of instruction capable of improving learning. Perhaps the greatest challenge schools face in actually doing this hard work is staying the course. They have to not only have the discipline to say "no" to the next good thing, but they must have support at the district level and state level to do so.

References

Buffum, A., Mattos, M., (2014). *It's about time: Planning Interventions and Extensions in Secondary Schools*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Buffum, A., Mattos, M., & Weber, C. (2012). *Simplifying response to intervention: Four essential guiding principles*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.