

TOPICAL BRIEF 1

Scientific Research-Based Interventions

Connecticut's Framework for Response to Intervention

THE USE OF DATA TEAMS IN CONNECTICUT'S SRBI PROCESS



Connecticut
State
Department
of Education

August 2010

This topical brief is one of a series designed to clarify and assist the work that Connecticut educators are presently engaged in while implementing Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI). The term SRBI was adopted by the Connecticut State Department of Education in August 2008 (*Connecticut's Framework For Response to Intervention*) and is synonymous with the term Response to Intervention (RTI). Response to Intervention (RTI) is a term used nationally to describe the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student needs, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying data to inform educational decisions (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2008). The purpose of RTI or SRBI is, of course, to ensure that all students learn and acquire the behavioral and academic competencies that they will need to be successful in our schools and in society.

Throughout the SRBI trainings, numerous questions have been raised regarding the team process required to implement SRBI effectively. Therefore, the focus of this particular brief is on the role and function of instructional data teams in the SRBI process at the Tier 1 level. Tier 1 refers to the general education core curriculum and instruction (including differentiation), the overall school climate, and the system of schoolwide social-emotional learning and behavioral supports for *all* students, including special education and English language learners in the general education classroom.

First, a little history: the term “data team” is a term that has been used in CALI (Connecticut Accountability for Learning) trainings in urban districts across the state since 2004 to describe school improvement teams that meet regularly to analyze data and make educational decisions to improve student achievement. There are essentially three levels of data teams (district, school, and grade or content level), all of whose members meet regularly and follow specific steps in a collaborative, continuous improvement process cycle.

The first level, the **District Data Team**, is composed of the superintendent, senior leadership, district specialists and school-level representatives. The purpose of the District Data Team is to develop, monitor, evaluate and modify the district improvement plan, based on data. Specifically, the District Level Data Team focuses its efforts on developing high leverage strategies that the district is in the best position to implement. Examples are strategies related to curriculum development, hiring and retention, school performance standards, school design, and professional development. With regard to the SRBI process, many district teams assume the responsibility of selecting universal screening and district-level formative assessment instruments, develop a schedule of implementation, and review disaggregated group results to make district wide curricular, programming, resource allocation and professional development decisions. Certainly they do so for results of statewide testing. Please see *Standards for District Data Teams* on the Connecticut State Department of Education Accountability and School Improvement Web site for additional information (http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/cali/standards_for_district_data_team_3-22-2010.pdf).

The second level, the **School Data Team**, is composed of the principal, other building level administrators, representatives from each grade level or department, and a representative from non-classroom staff. In some instances, the school may choose to include a parent of a student. The purpose of the School Data Team is to develop, monitor, evaluate and modify the school improvement plan. Specifically, the School Data team focuses its efforts on developing strategies that will change adult actions that are of the highest priority for the school. Examples are strategies related to organization and implementation of math and literacy programs, development and implementation of schoolwide positive behavioral support systems, scheduling, assignment and utilization of human resources, and improvement of attendance. With regard to SRBI, it is the School Data Team's responsibility to review disaggregated schoolwide results of universal screenings and formative assessments to make educational programming, resource allocation and professional development decisions. Please see *Standards for School Data Teams* on the Connecticut State Department of Education Accountability and School Improvement Web site for additional information (http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/cali/standards_for_school_data_teams_3-18-2010.pdf).

The third level and primary focus of this brief is the **Instructional Data Teams**. At the elementary and middle school level, the Instructional Data Team is composed of all grade level teachers and appropriate support staff (e.g., reading specialist, psychologist, social worker, special education teacher, ELL specialist, etc.). At the secondary level, the team is composed of those teaching a common course or subject and appropriate support staff. The purpose of the Instructional Data Team is to collect and analyze individual student data relative to instructional and behavioral learning goals, to identify and implement strategies that have a high likelihood of achieving student mastery, and to monitor, evaluate and modify the strategies depending on the results. In addition to grade level and content level data teams, schools frequently need to create horizontal instructional data teams in which representative teachers from consecutive grade levels meet. The purpose of these teams is also to collect and analyze student data for instructional decision-making. Such teams can ensure that teachers agree on what skills and strategies are most important, that students have the necessary prerequisite skills to be successful at the next level, and that teachers can make instructional changes as necessary for continuity of learning. While these teams are extremely important, they are not a substitute for the grade level or content level instructional data teams that must meet on a regularly scheduled basis.

Many schools and districts already have functioning teams in place (e.g., Early Intervention Teams, Professional Learning Communities, Child Study Teams, grade level teams, subject level teams, etc.), and questions have arisen as to whether or not schools must form yet another team, specifically an "SRBI team" or "data team" to implement the SRBI process. *The name of the team is not what is important. Rather, it is the work the team engages in, the process the team uses to do the work, and whether or not the members of the team are the right people to be engaged in the work.* To answer this question, then, it will be important for each school to evaluate carefully the existing teams' purpose and function, composition, and process.

Purpose and function: SRBI requires that schools have an instructional team that that uses data to monitor the learning (and behavior, when needed) of every student to ensure that students are acquiring in a timely fashion the skills and strategies being taught. “Timely” is a critical concept. Teachers need to know right away whether a student is learning so changes in instructional or behavioral strategies, interventions, materials, etc., can be made immediately to ensure that the necessary learning takes place. If, for example, the school’s child study team is looking at only one child at each meeting, or if the professional learning community team is using the meeting time to discuss a professional book they have read, neither team will suffice for SRBI. That is not to say the time spent in such meetings are not purposeful or valuable, but they will not be sufficient for Tier I of the SRBI process. They have a different purpose. (Please note that a child study team may well be part of the SRBI process in Tier II or III.)

Composition: Every teacher in the school must be a regular participant on an instructional data team. There can be no exceptions. Every teacher needs to know what we want students to know and be able to do, how to determine whether the student understands and can do what we have taught, and what to do if the learning has not taken place. Teachers need to identify and agree on priority areas (which may also be determined by the district or school level data teams), to design and implement the instructional and behavioral strategies collaboratively, and to monitor the progress. Most schools do not have the human resources to have a specialist (e.g., ELL teacher, special education teacher, psychologist, social worker) at every grade level or content instructional data team meeting. However, these specialists have expertise that can be exceptionally helpful to the data teams, and they should be included whenever possible and well before Tier 2 interventions are being considered. Similarly, art, music and physical education specialists should be on the teams, as they can frequently teach and reinforce the concepts being taught through their own disciplines. While it may not be feasible for these specialists to be at all meetings all of the time since they deal with multiple grade levels, they should be part of all teams on a regularly scheduled basis.

While administrators are key members of the district level and school level data teams, as the name implies, it is the instructional personnel who are the most critical members of the Instructional Data Teams. Nevertheless, the principal and other administrators have important responsibilities. The administrative leadership must ensure that there is sufficient time on a regularly scheduled basis for teachers to meet and that appropriate professional development is provided. They must attend the trainings themselves and work to create a risk-free environment in the school that encourages collaboration and makes room for mistakes. While it is not realistic to expect principals and administrators to be able to attend all meetings, they should review the minutes of all team meetings. In addition, it will be important for them to attend enough meetings to support the importance of the process, to monitor the quality of implementation, and to assess the need for further professional development.

So, with regard to composition, if a school’s child study team includes only one grade-level teacher at a meeting with specialists, or if the professional learning team does not include all

the grade-level or content-specific teachers at the same time, they will not suffice for SRBI. In large schools where there may be six or more grade-level or subject-specific teachers, it may be appropriate to have two smaller instructional data teams rather than one large team. In such cases, however, there should be a formalized means of communication between the two teams to ensure agreement on priority goals, assessments, and on strategies if one team is consistently getting better results than the other.

Process: For a school team to be effective in the SRBI process, a facilitator or data team leader needs to be identified, member roles and responsibilities need to be clear, and there must be a specific protocol that all team members strictly adhere to during the meetings. The SDE-sponsored trainings for SRBI refer to the Instructional Data Team model developed by Douglas Reeves and the Leadership and Learning Center. This model has been a core part of the CALL training. If schools or districts are interested in receiving this specific training, they should contact the State Education Resource Center (SERC) or their local regional educational service center (RESC). There are other models or protocols that could be used or adapted for SRBI purposes, such as those developed by Mike Schmoker, Richard and Rebecca DuFour, and the National Center for School Improvement. Whatever the model or protocol, however, *the following are essential components of the process that must be included to suffice for SRBI:*

1. Universal Screening and Ongoing Collection and Charting of Data

At the very first meeting, instructional data teams should review statewide assessments (CMTs or CAPT) and districtwide universal screenings in relations to grade-level or content-level standards to determine overall effectiveness of instruction and areas of focus. However, while state and district data can be used to provide some direction and general focus, it does not allow for the very specific analysis of skills and concepts that teachers need to guide daily instruction. Once the team process progresses beyond the very initial stage, teachers have to rely on teacher-generated assessments and the analysis of student work to monitor student learning and the effectiveness of instructional strategies. Work samples might, for example, include writing, quizzes, and chapter or unit tests. If the team is looking at behavior, then attendance, office referrals, and suspensions may be appropriate for initial review. Later, other more specific data may need to be collected, such as number of class disruptions or time-on-task behavior during a particular activity.

2. Analysis of Data to Determine Strengths, Challenges and Determine Root Causes

It is the responsibility of the Instructional Data Team to examine assessment data and student work to identify the strengths of the students who were proficient or higher and the reasons other students did not achieve proficiency. The team might, for example, look to see whether there are common errors, trends, learning gaps or misconceptions about concepts or skills. If the team is looking at behavior, a similar analysis must be

conducted around specific behavioral issues. If 80-85 percent of students in a particular grade level in a school or across the district are not making adequate progress after instruction, the school- or district-level teams may need to analyze the data to review program, curricular and professional staff development needs.

3. Establish, Review, and Revise SMART (Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely) Goals

Based on the analysis of the data, the team must develop learning or behavioral goals for groups and/or individual students. Differentiation of instructional planning is important to consider at this stage, as the goals may be different for students who are already proficient than for those students close to proficiency or those students who are significantly below proficiency. It is also at this point that the team members determine what they will use to assess student mastery of and/or monitor student progress toward meeting these goals.

4. Select Scientific Research-Based Interventions/Instructional Strategies

At Tier I, the first level of intervention is selection of evidence and research-based instructional strategies. Team members need to brainstorm and examine effective teaching strategies and techniques and determine which techniques when implemented appropriately will have the highest likelihood of affecting student learning or behavioral change. In general, two instructional strategies/interventions are selected and must then be used by all team members. The focus on this stage of the process is completely on adult behaviors. What is it that the adults will do differently to ensure student mastery of the skill or concept being taught? In addition, the team should identify what observable adult and student behaviors will be evident as a result of the appropriate implementation of the strategy or strategies selected (in CALI these behaviors are referred to as result indicators). Since the team members have already selected how the skill or concept will be assessed, they will have evidence quickly as to whether the instructional strategy is effective or will need to be modified or changed.

All team members are expected to implement the selected strategies. Instruction should change the next day as a result of the Data Team Meeting.

5. Monitor Student Learning

To know whether the instructional strategies selected and implemented are effective, it is essential to monitor student learning on a frequent basis. In Tier I, these frequent checks are done through the assessment developed by the data team. The team should collaboratively analyze the assessment results at the next meeting to monitor individual student progress and to adjust their instruction/intervention and goals, as needed. At this point the process begins anew.

6. Cyclical

The Instructional Data Team process, like the school- and district-level teams, is cyclical and continues throughout the academic year.

Again, as schools determine whether or not their present teams are sufficient for SRBI, it is important to emphasize that the name of the team is not what is important. If a school has a team it calls a professional learning community or a child study team, or something else, and that team's purpose, composition and process is consistent with the descriptions above, the team will indeed suffice for SRBI.

A couple of additional procedural questions have been raised regarding the time and frequency of Instructional Data Team meetings. Once the team understands the process, roles and responsibilities and becomes very efficient, it may be possible to conduct a meeting within 45 minutes. However, most teams require at least an hour to function effectively. In the beginning, a team will not be able to complete a full cycle of the process in one meeting. The first meeting, for example, will likely need to focus on such things as expectations, agreed upon norms, and clarification of roles and responsibilities. The initial analysis of the State and district universal screenings may take another full meeting session. Once the cycle is established, however, and the team becomes familiar with the process, all the steps can generally be included in one meeting. Ideally, teams should meet once per week. Some schools have managed to schedule enough time for teachers to meet more frequently. At the very least, Instructional Data Teams should meet twice a month. If the teams meet any less frequently, they run a high risk of having data that is no longer current or meaningful for instructional decision-making. In addition, they have lost valuable intervention time for students who are not learning at the expected rate.

The idea of an Instructional Data Team is often intimidating for teachers. It is time consuming, requires collaboration and raises the level of visible accountability for all instructional personnel. There are obvious benefits for students. Teachers know precisely what a student can and cannot do with regard to academic and behavioral standards and can provide customized instruction in a timely manner to ensure learning. Most teachers who become involved with the process, however, also quickly see the benefits for them as professionals. First, when a student continues to struggle, they have concrete data to share to access Tier II interventions for assistance. Perhaps even more important, they get concrete evidence of their success as teachers. They do not have to rely on the high-stakes annual tests to see evidence of their effective instruction. Instead, they get feedback on a continuous basis and have an opportunity to make immediate changes in instruction that accelerate learning. They see their successes throughout the school year. Additional resources and information on Instructional Data Teams and the SRBI process can be accessed on the Connecticut State Department of Accountability and School Improvement Web site (<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2700&Q=322192>).