REGIONAL *EDUCATIONAL* LABORATORY
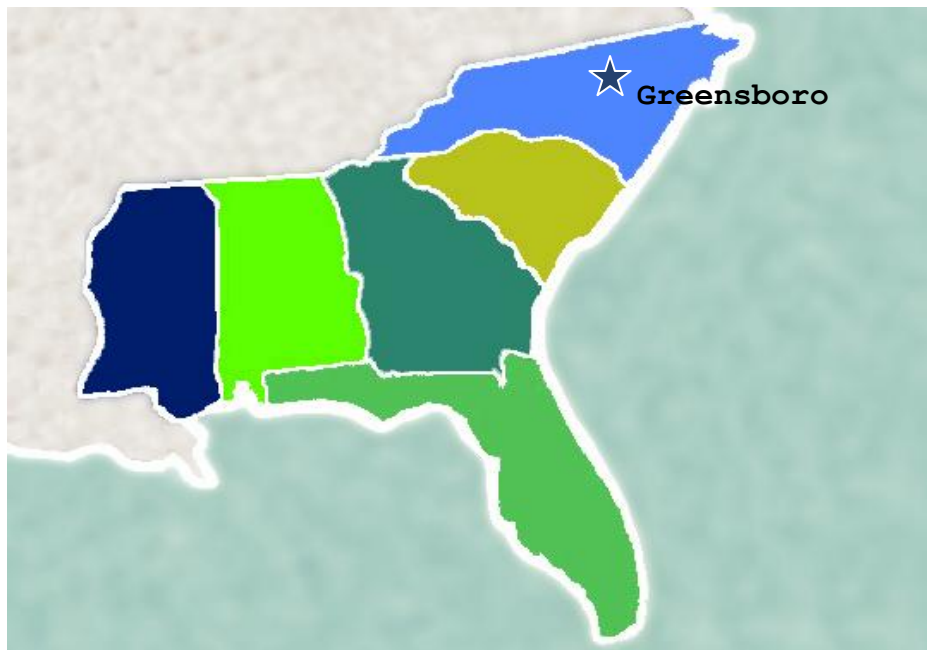## SOUTHEAST ~ SERVECenter

EVIDENCE BASED EDUCATION REQUEST DESK

OUR GOAL
To assist educators and policymakers in their efforts to apply the evidence base to decisions about policies, programs, and practices they encounter.

Greensboro

REQUEST:

Please provide RtI background information and a scan of what states are doing in this area.

RESPONSE

REL-SE sent the recent EBE request it completed on RtI Resources (#155). Also:

1. The publications, "Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation" and "Response to Intervention as it relates to Early Intervening Services: Recommendations," produced and published by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), are good materials that provide overviews of RtI, and have many helpful tips and suggestions about issues that state-level
personnel may want to consider. They can be obtained directly from NASDSE's website, at http://www.nasdse.org.

2. The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities has a resource kit which outlines in some detail issues such as school-wide screening, progress monitoring, tiered service delivery, implementation, and school examples. The document also includes planning tools. The document is accessible at http://www.nrcld.org/rti_manual.

3. There is a publication titled "Response to Intervention: A Practical Guide for Every Teacher" published by Corwin Press, Sage Publications of Thousand Oaks, CA, which might be helpful to use with school-level staff.

4. Appendix B: Summary Reports of State Policy Scans

The following summaries provide basic information about the status of state RtI initiatives in each of the southeastern states. The information was collected from SEA websites and the websites of entities working with the SEA. Information was collected in July-August 2007, and therefore represents what was publicly available about RtI and the SEAs at that time.

1. Alabama

Implementation Status
Alabama is currently in the process of developing an RtI initiative. Related to RtI, the Lee vs. Macon Special Education Consent Decree was signed in 2000 concerning the overrepresentation of African-American students in the categories of Mental Retardation (MR) and Emotional Disturbance (ED), and the underrepresentation of African-American students in programs for students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and for gifted education.[1] As a result of the decree, awareness training that covers possible reasons for overrepresentation, characteristics of MR, ED and SLD students and the purpose of disability placements must be provided to all K-8 general and special education teachers, administrators and evaluators every two years. The use of Building Based Student Support Teams (BBSST) is also required in the prereferral process. The BBSST is a general education team that provides interventions in the general education setting for students experiencing difficulty with academics and/or behavior. When students are referred for possible special education services, the Alabama SEA monitors the implementation of prereferral interventions. The state is required to provide annual monitoring reports on special education referrals, discipline referrals and dropout rates to the US Department of Justice and plaintiff parties to ensure compliance with the Consent Decree.

Policy & Procedures
Alabama is in the process of developing policy regarding the RtI initiative.

Purpose of Initiative
To be determined.

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1 Civil Action. 70-T-854. See:
http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/edo/documents/leeor.htm

Model Characteristics
To be determined.

State Department Roles & Responsibilities
The impetus for initiating RtI began with the Department of Special Education Services. However, the SEA plans to have the Classroom Improvement Section, which is general education, lead the initiative. Roles of other departments are to be determined.

Assistance from Consultants/Organizations
Alabama is in the process of considering working with consultants and/or organizations.

Related Initiatives
No information was obtained online.

Technical Assistance/Professional Development
To be determined. Currently, the SEA website posts two 2007 RtI powerpoint presentations.[2] One, Problem Solving and Response to Intervention, focuses on the principles of RtI and research on outcomes. The second powerpoint, Response to Intervention, was presented at a January 2007 conference of the Southeastern Area Council of Administrators of Special Education. This presentation describes the need for adopting RtI and outlines the components of a three-tier system.

Outcomes
Initiative has yet to be implemented.

2. Florida

Implementation Status
The Florida SEA partnered with the University of South Florida to create Florida's Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project (PS/RtI). The project was announced on February 7, 2007.[3] In the fall of 2007, Florida began a pilot site initiative with training for school-based teams in 8 districts and including 38 schools across Florida. Each district has identified comparison schools for a randomized-control trial research investigation that is part of the initiative. The PS/RtI project schools were awarded mini-grants to serve as pilot sites for the Problem Solving/Response to Intervention.

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[2] See Alabama Department of Education website at:
http://www.alsde.edu/html/search_results.asp?menu=search&footer=general
[3] Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention website:
http://floridarti.usf.edu/floridaproject/projectinformation.html

Policy & Procedures

During the 2006 legislative session, changes were made to Florida House Bill 7087 to require progress monitoring as part of assessment and remediation for reading and math. A letter to district superintendents stated that, "A student who is not meeting the school district or state requirements for proficiency in reading and math shall be covered by one of the following plans to target instruction and identify ways to improve his or her academic achievement: 1) A federally required student plan such as an individual education plan (IEP); 2) A schoolwide system of progress monitoring for all students; or 3) An individualized progress monitoring plan."[4] The state is currently revising the State Board of Education Rule to include criteria for using RtI. LEAs have been instructed to continue to use the discrepancy model (according to current legislation) to determine eligibility for special education services.[5]

Purpose of Initiative

The main purpose of the PS/RtI project is achievement for all students through high-quality, effective instruction. In addition, RtI is expected to assist schools in identifying the students who may require more intensive instructional services and/or be eligible for an exceptional student education program.

Model Characteristics

PS/RtI operates within a systematic problem-solving model in which instructional decisions are made by a multidisciplinary team regarding student progress. The following four sequential steps of the problem-solving process are completed in all situations, whether addressing large groups (district or school-wide), smaller groups (grade level or classroom), or individual children:[6]

- Problem Identification: identifying the problem and the desired behavior for the student(s) experiencing academic or behavioral difficulty.
- Problem Analysis: analyzing why the problem is occurring by collecting data to determine possible causes of the identified problem.
- Intervention Design & Implementation: selecting, developing and implementing evidence-based interventions based upon data previously collected
- Response-to-Intervention: Evaluating the effectiveness of interventions.

The PS/RtI process is applied through a multi-tiered approach to service provision and employs interventions at increasingly intense levels based on student response to each intervention. The multi-tiered system involves three tiers of interventions for struggling students based upon

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[4] *Progress Monitoring Plans as Part of Assessment and Remediation*, FLDOE memo available at: http://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-3804/k12_06_84memo.pdf

[5] PS/RtI website: http://floridarti.usf.edu/index.html

[6] PS/RtI website: http://floridarti.usf.edu/resources/tools/about_ps_rti/index.html

level of need. The first tier (universal) consists of the core curriculum and general education program which is based on evidence-based practices. Available after demonstrating that the core curriculum results in success for most students, the second tier (supplemental) consists of supplemental instruction in addition to the core curriculum to support those students who continue to struggle. Tier two interventions are delivered in a small group format using strategies known to be effective for these learners. Tier three (intensive) interventions are designed to be individualized, long-term interventions for students who have not responded to Tier One and Tier Two interventions that have been delivered with a high degree of fidelity.

State Department Roles & Responsibilities
The PS/RtI project is led by the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services and run in conjunction with Curriculum Instruction, and Student Services.

Assistance from Consultants/Organizations
University of South Florida (USF) partnered with the Florida SEA for the PS/RtI project. George Batsche and Michael Curtis are the project co-directors. Also at USF are three regional coordinators, a project leader, a project evaluator, technical support and other assigned staff.

Related Initiatives
All Florida students who are targeted for reading intervention, whether in a self-contained classroom, or in a reading or content area course, must have their progress monitored three to four times per year using the assessment identified in the approved K-12 Comprehensive Reading Plan and the progress must be reported.[7] The Florida Continuous Improvement Model (FCIM) is a research-based approach that tracks student performances to help close the achievement gap between all racial and socioeconomic groups.[8] Students are assessed at regular intervals and data analysis determines classroom instruction. The main focus of the FCIM is high student achievement with the Sunshine State Standards.

Technical Assistance/Professional Development
The PS/RtI project initiated statewide training for school-based teams in July 2007. During the 2007-2008 school year, five days of training were planned for each of the three state regions (North, Central, and South). The training was expected to be conducted by the three Regional Coordinators and support staff. Each of the 38 pilot schools are supported through the services of a dedicated, full-time PS/RtI Coach—one Coach for every 3 schools. All coaches completed five days of training in July 2007 and receive additional training, mentoring and support by a

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[7] *Intensive Reading Instruction – Student Data Base Reporting Requirements – 2006-07*, available at:
http://www.justreadflorida.org/endorsement/files/MIS_TA.pdf
[8] Florida Continuous Improvement Model website, available at:
http://www.bsi.fsu.edu/schoolimprove/cim.htm

Regional Coordinator throughout the year. Technical Assistance (TA) will be provided to the school-based teams participating in the statewide training on a quarterly basis. Regional coordinators will conduct a TA needs assessment to determine the content of the TA sessions. In addition to face-to-face meetings, web-based TA will also be provided. Monthly TA sessions are scheduled with Pilot Site Coaches. Regularly scheduled TA meetings will be used to assist and support Pilot Site Administrators. On the SEA website, the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services posts a technical assistance paper, "Response to Intervention."[9]

Outcomes
No outcomes are reported in online materials.

3. Georgia

Implementation Status
To assist all students in meeting high standards, the Georgia SEA developed a conceptual framework, The Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions. The Pyramid includes four tiers of student interventions and provides a framework for instruction: Tier 1: Standards-Based Classroom Learning; Tier 2: Needs Based Learning; Tier 3: Student Support Team Learning; and Tier 4: Specially Designed Learning.[10] The Pyramid is designed to be used at the elementary and secondary school levels. The Pyramid includes Student Support Teams (SSTs) in Tier 3 interventions. SSTs are mandated at all Georgia public schools as a result of the 1982 Marshall vs. Georgia court case, concerning the disproportionate placement of African-American students in special education.

Policy & Procedures
The Student Achievement Pyramid of Intervention is a conceptual framework and graphic organizer for Georgia's tiered intervention. The Rules of the State Board of Education related to special education are being revised in order to align them with the federal IDEA 2004 regulations.[11] An Implementation Guide is currently under development and will provide specific guidance to school districts on the new State Board of Education rules. The guide will serve as a framework for technical assistance and training within school districts during FY 2008.

Purpose of Initiative

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[9] *Technical Assistance Paper: Response to Intervention.* See
http://www.fsc.edu/meetchallenge/documents/floridatechnicalassitanceRTI.pdf
[10] "Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions." Available as a selection on the webpage: http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school.aspx
[11] Georgia's State Performance Plan, available as a selection at: http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ci_exceptional.aspx?PageReq=CIEXCStatePlan

One purpose of the Pyramid is to reduce disproportionality.[12] Related challenges that Georgia faces regarding students with disabilities are that: 1) in many schools the disability subgroup is not making AYP, and 2) ethnic disproportionality exists in certain categories for disability and for placement—e.g. African American students have a risk 2.5 times greater of being identified as having an intellectual disability (mental retardation) as other ethnic groups. African American students are also much more likely to be educated outside of the general education classroom than students in all other ethnic groups. Additional expected outcomes are to reduce the number of students identified as having a disability and to enable all students in Georgia to make great gains in school. A related catalyst for adopting the Pyramid was the need for Georgia's educators to have a common focus and common language regarding instructional practices and interventions. The Pyramid is expected to support improved documentation of students' strengths and provide additional challenges to students.[13]

Model Characteristics

The Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions supports the continual implementation of progress monitoring and provision of increasing levels of intensive interventions so that all students can be successful. The Pyramid is a conceptual framework and graphic organizer that illustrates four tiers of instructional efforts to address students' individual needs:

- Tier 1, Standards-Based Classroom Learning, is effective instruction for all students in all classrooms and is based on the Georgia Performance Standards;
- Tier 2, Needs Based Instruction/Learning: Standard Intervention Protocols, adds to Tier 1 instruction pre-planned interventions for students identified through progress monitoring evaluation data. Examples of Tier 2 interventions include the Early Intervention Program, Reading First Supplemental Intervention, After School Tutorials, and Peer Tutoring.
- Tier 3, Student Support Team Driven Instruction/Learning is an additional layer of analysis and interventions where the SST (teachers, other school personnel and parents) meet to discuss systematic strategies individualized to students who are still not provided the instructional experiences to meet their needs. Examples of activities in this tier include individualized tutoring, assigning a mentor to a student, and developing a behavior or learning contract.

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[12] Powerpoint presentation: Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Intervention
http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/Presentation%20for%20Model%20Schools%20Conference%20web.pdf?p=39EF345AE192D900F620BFDE9C014CE65F48E7E4CC653240D303AB51F38ED5FF1B37D892B8220630&Type=D

[13] "Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions." Available on the webpage:
http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school.aspx

- Tier 4, Specially Designed Instruction/Learning, is an intervention developed specifically for students who meet respective eligibility criteria for special program placement. This tier may include adapted content, methodology, or instructional delivery, such as the Gifted Education Program or ELL programs.

State Department Roles & Responsibilities
The Pyramid initiative is led by three SEA departments: The Office of Standards, Instruction & Assessment; the Division of Special Education Services and Support; and the Office of Education Support and Improvement. Several divisions within the SEA were involved in developing the Pyramid: Innovative Academic Programs; School Improvement; Division of Special Education Services and Support; Remedial Education Programs (REP); Early Intervention Programs; English to Speakers of Other Languages; Reading First; Curriculum & Instruction; Teacher Quality; Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education; and Title I.

The State Advisory Panel, a 35-member panel mandated by IDEA to advise the SEA on the needs of students with disabilities, reviewed the Pyramid and supports it as a conceptual framework that will improve the education of all students, including students with disabilities.

Assistance from Consultants/Organizations
No information was available through online searches.

Related Initiatives
Special Education Services and Support staff has planned a Disproportionality Forum to provide technical assistance to Georgia districts with significantly disproportionality. SEA staff will collaborate with district-level teams and help them to examine the policies, practices, and procedures that contribute to weighted risk ratios.

The Georgia Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process (GCIMP) monitors compliance with the IDEA, applicable federal regulations, and Rules of the State Board of Education. Georgia moved from a model of procedural monitoring to one of continuous improvement with a focus on student results.

Technical Assistance/Professional Development
The Implementation Guide for special education that is under development will define plans for technical assistance and training for Georgia school districts for FY 2008.[14] Professional learning related to implementation of the revised rules regarding determination of eligibility for special education services will be aligned with SEA efforts to promote the Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions. Evaluation and eligibility determination will, under the new rules,

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[14] See http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ci_exceptional.aspx?PageReq=CIEXCStatePlan

include analysis of interventions at the Tier 2 (flexible grouping for pre-established standard interventions) and Tier 3 (Student Support Team for individualized needs assessment and individually determined interventions). Training on the Pyramid of Interventions is also offered and organized through Regional Educational Service Agencies.

Outcomes
No results have been reported concerning the Pyramid.

4. Mississippi

Implementation Status
In January 2005 (revised May 18, 2007), the Mississippi State Board of Education adopted SBE Policy 4300 authorizing the Mississippi SEA to require an instructional model consisting of three tiers that is designed to meet the needs of every student.[15] A key feature of Mississippi's Three-Tier Model, the Teacher Support Team (TST), was created by the state legislature in 1988 as part of Chapter 20 Remedial Education to determine instructional services for a child and has been incorporated into the Three-Tier Model.[16] The Three-Tier Model is currently being implemented statewide in Mississippi.

Policy & Procedures
Mississippi's Three-Tier Model is required of schools in the state. The policy specifies the three tiers, the use of progress monitoring, the role of the TST, characteristics of the intervention process, and guidance about the length and intensity of interventions.   The policy also provides additional criteria by which a student could be automatically referred to Tier III: if a student fails one grade (when in grades 1-3); if a student fails two grades (for grades 4-12); or if a student failed either of the preceding two grades and has been suspended or expelled for more than 20 days in the current school year. The Three Tier Model is also incorporated into Mississippi's draft special education policy (March 2006).

The Mississippi SEA issued a *Teacher Support Team Manual* in 2005 for the purpose of providing the training guidelines necessary to enable approximately 600 school staff to develop and implement TST teams in a manner that is consistent across the state. The manual includes information about the law, the Three-Tier Model, the TST process, scientific inquiry, teamwork, referral processes, designing interventions, collecting data, charting student interventions, plotting data, and data driven decision-making.[17]

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[15] For the full policy see http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad1/programs/tst/sb_policy.html
[16] *Three Tier Model MSIS Screen Presentation (Three Tier Screen)*, at: http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad1/programs/tst/presentations/index.html.
[17] A link to the *Teacher Support Team Manual* (*TST Manual*) is available at: http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad1/programs/tst/sb_policy.html

Purpose of Initiative

Mississippi's Three-Tier Model initiative is related to the state's efforts to reduce overall overidentification of students for special education services based on the specific learning disability (SLD) category, including racial disproportionality for African-American students. It is also motivated by interest in instituting a new model of educational service delivery, one requiring use of baseline data and progress monitoring to ensure that all children are successful.[18] As of 2006, 108 of Mississippi's 152 LEAs had disproportionality in the number of students identified for special education services based on the SLD category.[19] The disproportionality issue in Mississippi is influenced by mandates laid out in the new *Mattie T* consent decree that the state entered into in the fall of 2003. *Mattie T* lays out specific benchmarks that must be achieved by the end of the 2009-10 school year, including improvement in the access of students with disabilities to the general education setting and reduction in disproportionate identification of African-American students as SLD.[20] The Three-Tier Model is one of three strategies advocated by the Office of Academic Education for reducing disproportionality.[21]

Additional motivations to adopt the Three-Tier Model in Mississippi include: inconsistencies across the state in efforts to assist academically struggling students, the existence of different support models used within the same district, the high school dropout rate (40%), the inappropriateness of the "wait to fail" approach, and the value of using a strategy allowing student progress to be tracked over time and that links assessment and instruction to interventions.[22]

Model Characteristics

Mississippi's SBE Policy 4300 describes the state's model as consisting of three tiers:
Tier 1: quality classroom instruction based on the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks;
Tier 2: focused supplemental instruction
Tier 3: intensive interventions designed to meet the individual needs of students
Teachers are required to use progress monitoring, which the policy defines as an ongoing process that may be measured through informal classroom assessment, benchmark assessment instruments and/or large scale assessments. The policy also requires every school to have a TST, which is defined as the problem-solving unit responsible for interventions developed at Tier 3. TST membership requires the chairperson to be the principal or principal's designee;

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[18] Ibid.

[19] See *Three Tier Model Presentation* (*Three Tier Model Presentation*) available at
http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad1/programs/tst/presentations/index.html.

[20] See http://www.mscenterforjustice.org/policy/juvenile3.html.

[21] *Mattie T. Consent Decree Update on Progress Toward Goals*, Office of Academic Education, MDE, 4-07

[22] *Three Tier Model Presentation*

however, the policy stipulates that the designee may not be an individual whose primary responsibility is special education. Additional characteristics of the state's model are:[23]

Delivery personnel: for Tier 1, teachers; for Tier 2 and Tier 3, personnel are determined by the school and can be a classroom teacher, reading specialist, or external interventionist.

Setting: for Tier 1 the general classroom; for Tier 2 and 3 determined by school and can be within or outside class.

Forms: Are available from the state website but their use is not mandated.

Movement across tiers: Is a dynamic process with students entering and exiting as needed (ibid). Tier 3 is prescribed as 18 weeks; the TST must conduct a documented review within 6 and 12 weeks of implementation of the intervention and a final review at week 16. Data are entered into the Mississippi Student Information System. Despite the18-week rule, if an intervention is not working, it should be discontinued and another tried. If progress is indicated then the decision to continue or to modify the intervention can be made within the 18 week period.

Parent notification: The Mississippi SEA recommends that parents be informed of a district's three tier process, stressing the intent to assist students' success in the regular education classroom. It additionally recommends notifying parents when a student is referred to the TST, apprising parents of the intervention plan that is developed, and inviting parents to subsequent progress monitoring meetings.

State Department Roles & Responsibilities

In the Mississippi SEA, the Three-Tier initiative is led by the Office of Academic Education, which contains the Office of Curriculum and Instruction; Office of Reading/Early Childhood; Office of Student Assessment; and Office of Special Education.[24] With the exception of the Office of Student Assessment, each of these offices was represented on the team that developed the *TST Manual*, in addition to the Office of Educational Technology and Office of Compulsory School Attendance. The Division of Data Services and Office of Special Education have been involved in the development of Tier 3 screening procedures.[25]

Assistance from Consultants/Organizations

Representatives of the Mississippi Council for Exceptional Children were involved in the development of the TST Manual and state technical assistance presentations. And a state Special Education Advisory Panel has provided input and recommendations related to the TST and Three-Tier Model.[26] In addition, the Mississippi Office of Special Education has been

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[23] *TST Manual, Three Tier Screen*, FAQs, MDE Feb 2006 available as a selection at:
http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad1/programs/tst/index.html
[24] http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad1/aboutus.html
[25] *Three Tier Screen*
[26] *Special Education Advisory Panel 2006 Annual Report*

working with the Southeast Comprehensive Center and Regional Educational Laboratory-Southeast to develop and provide training on the Three-Tier Model.

Related Initiatives

The Office of Student Assessment is working with an outside firm to introduce a Student Progress Monitoring System (SPMS), which is a web-based and will indicate which students are mastering key objectives and which are not.[27] Participation in SPMS is a district and school decision and districts registered for SPMS do not have to involve every school in the district. For 2005-6, the state funded the entire per pupil costs and planned to do the same in 2006-7. Some districts use SPMS for benchmark testing and others for formative assessment. SPMS includes an item bank for math, reading, science, social studies, and writing that are linked to the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks.

Technical Assistance/Professional Development

There have been SEA-sponsored regional workshops on the TST and Three-Tier Model for administrators and teachers.[28] The Program of Research and Evaluation for Public Schools (PREPS) in Mississippi offered a Three-Tier Model training during the 2006-7 school year. This 2-day in-depth training was offered to all teachers, counselors, and administrators, and was available for credit.[29] The Office of Curriculum and Instruction provides online information about the TST process and in 2005 it organized two free professional development trainings on the Three-Tier Model: "Integrating Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction," and "Teacher Support Teams: The Three-Tier Intervention Process."[30]

Outcomes

The *TST Manual* references the experiences of one anonymous district. Data for one school in the district are presented and show an overall increase in the percent of students proficient and above in grades 2 and 3. Overall the district has had 82% successful interventions, gauged in terms of students making instructional progress, and only 13% of students referred to the TST (Tier 3) ultimately found to be eligible for special education.

5. North Carolina

Implementation Status

Beginning in 2001, a state task force in North Carolina began to study ways to improve the identification and evaluation of services for children with disabilities. The task force ultimately recommended RtI based on its use in other states and allowance under IDEA 2004. In late 2005

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[27] See http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/ ACAD/osa/ spms.html
[28] *Teacher Talk*, Office of Academic Education 2005
[29] PREPS is a private non-profit consortium of 84 member school districts supported by the College of Education at Mississippi State University; see www.msstate.edu/dept/preps
[30] See http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/id/curriculum/teams.html

the SEA Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and School Reform Services and Director of the Exceptional Children Division successfully petitioned for a waiver from the State Board of Education (SBE) relating to special education identification procedures in order to conduct a pilot RtI project using a Problem-Solving Model (PSM) in 10 schools within 5 LEAs. Based on the evaluation of the pilot, the Exceptional Children Division will recommend changes in the "Procedures Governing Programs and Services of Children with Disabilities" and advise school systems as to the most effective ways to evaluate and identify children with disabilities.[31] North Carolina is also considering RtI as a strategy of reducing the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. The *Status Report: Implementation Plan for Recommendations from the North Carolina Advisory Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps* (May 2005) reviews strategies underway to reduce disproportionality in the state. These include collaboration with the National Center for Responsive Education Systems (NCCRESt) to develop a state disproportionality plan as well as implementation of the problem-solving model. Relatedly, the SEA has formed a task force that meets regularly to work on the state's efforts toward reducing the disproportionate representation of minorities and enhancing culturally responsive educational practices.

The SEA has identified the following as areas of potential RtI activity in the state:[32]

- Work with planning team to develop new procedures for the identification of students with mild disabilities
- Work with Policy, Monitoring, and Audit of the SEA section to develop plan of accountability aligned with RtI/Problem-Solving Model
- Work with Comprehensive Exceptional Children Accountability System staff to incorporate new forms and procedural changes
- Develop long range plan for continued training and support
- Collect and compile data to assess effectiveness of the model, satisfaction with the process, and fidelity of implementation

Policy & Procedures

The North Carolina *State Board Policies on Services for Children with Disabilities* have been recently revised to conform with IDEA 2004, including incorporation of the North Carolina RtI model. Policies relating to evaluations and procedures for emotional disability, specific learning disabilities, for students who are and are not involved in the RtI pilot in the state.[33]

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[31] NC SBE Meeting Executive Summary, 11-2005.

[32] See *Response to Intervention in NC: Implementation of a Problem Solving Model* (*RtI in NC*)Powerpoint as a link at: http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/development/learning/responsiveness/rtimaterials.

[33] *Revision of NC State Board Policies on Services for Children with Disabilities* (4-2007). Available at: http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/ec/2007disabilities.pdf

North Carolina's *Procedures Governing Programs and Services of Children with Disabilities* (10-2004) are now under review and will include instructional interventions for all disability categories.[34] In addition, the North Carolina SEA appears to be shifting its special education terminology from "eligibility" to "entitlement," which has three criteria: educational progress, discrepancy (with typical peers' performance), and instructional needs.[35]

Purpose of Initiative

The SEA anticipates three outcomes from RtI: 1) early identification of those children who are at risk for school failure; 2) provision of appropriate interventions within general education without having to refer children for special education consideration; and, 3) a decrease in the probability that nondisabled children with academic difficulties will be placed in special education services.[36] The RtI/Problem-solving model is also expected to contribute to the state's efforts to reduce disproportionality and enhance culturally responsive practices.[37]

Model Characteristics

North Carolina's tiered intervention is called the NC Problem-Solving Model (PSM). The core of the model is that a student's difficulties are analyzed, to provide a foundation for planned, systematic interventions that are then monitored and evaluated to determine effectiveness. The end result could be special education placement, but only after systematic data-based decision-making has clearly demonstrated eligibility and need. The model has four levels: Level 1 involves consultation between teachers and parents; Level II involves consultation with other school-based resources; Level III involves consultation with extended problem-solving team; Level IV involves IEP consideration. There is no set period of time for each level and it is not necessary for all student concerns to go through each possible level of problem solving—effectiveness is the litmus for deciding to continue with an intervention or formulate a new plan.[38] Forms are available to support associated activities at each tier.[39]

A school assistance team—variously called the Student Success Team, Teacher Assistance Teams, etc. (no single term is used)—is a key component of NC PSM and links to previously implemented state initiatives providing guidance to teachers in working with students with an exceptionality or suspected of having one.[40] At Level II, teams of teachers and other school personnel become involved. The assistance teams consist of the student's parent(s), primary

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[34] *North Carolina State Performance Plan for 2005-10*, revised 2-2007*(NC SPP)*.

[35] *RtI in NC* Powerpoint.

[36] NC SBE Meeting Executive Summary, 11-2005.

[37] *NC SPP*.

[38] *Working Together for Children: A Guide for Parents and Teachers (Working Together)*, available at: http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/development/learning/responsiveness/.

[39] See: http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/development/learning/responsiveness/rtimaterials.

[40] *RTI/PSM Model versus Current SIT, BAT, SAT Models* graphic. Available at: http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/development/learning/responsiveness/psmgraphics.

teacher, other teachers in the school, and local support staff such as the guidance counselor. Central administrative staff or the student may participate but this is only informal and used as necessary.

The model's specification is increasingly detailed for each ensuing Level. For example, the NC PSM specifies indicators for when educators should consider moving a student from Level II to III, including a listing of *red flags*. Level IV—the level in which special education entitlement is considered—includes due process and IDEA protections. Parents may, however, under the NC PSM request a full and individual evaluation to determine special education entitlement for their child at any time during the problem-solving process. NC's PSM has a specific case coordinator for each level: Level I, most typically the classroom teacher; Level 2, a school staff member designated by the principal or designee; Level 3, typically a school psychologist or curriculum specialist; Level IV, typically the same staff member coordinating Level III services.[41] Functional assessments" are a part of the NC PSM, including curriculum-based measurement and progress monitoring and North Carolina has developed state and LEA level proficiency norms for reading, writing, and math.[42]

State Department Roles & Responsibilities
Within the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) the Exceptional Children Division (ECD) is taking the lead on RtI. Within the ECD, RtI is under the Specific Learning Disabilities program.[43]

Assistance from Consultants/Organizations
A North Carolina-based educational consulting firm with expertise in RtI was contracted by the SEA to provide technical assistance in the curriculum-based measure norming process to five schools in the RtI pilot, which in turn was used to create state norms. In addition, a professor of Psychology at a North Carolina university is evaluating the NC PSM pilot.

Related Initiatives
In January 2007 the North Carolina General Assembly enacted legislation that will go into effect with the 2008-9 school year to initiate and fund a pilot program authorizing up to three LEAs to create alternative programs to serve students who have been suspended or expelled for more than 10 days, including those with disabilities who have been placed on homebound instruction. To be eligible for a grant, an LEA must have in place: 1) a positive behavior support

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[41] *Problem-Solving Model Pilot: The Problem-Solving Process* Powerpoint, available at: http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/development/learning/responsiveness/.
[42] See Functional Assessments at: http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/development/learning/responsiveness/rtimaterials.
[43] See: http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/development/learning.

program, 2) RtI/Problem solving, Instructional Consultation or both, at the system level, and 3) school staff trained in the legislation.[44]

The State Improvement Grant for students with disabilities, *The North Carolina State Improvement Project II* (NC SIP II), focuses on scientifically based instruction.[45] The NC SIP II Network consists of 6 reading and writing regional demonstration centers, roughly 45 research-based sites that focus on reading and writing instruction and a growing network of sites focusing on Early Literacy; 4 regional mathematics instruction demonstration centers; 16 research-based mathematics instruction sites; and approximately 40 schools serving as a Positive Behavior Supports network.

Technical Assistance/Professional Development

Professional development was provided to schools and districts participating in the initial year of the PMS pilot from March 2004 to Aug 2005 on topics ranging from the PSM model, team building, and intervention selection, to curriculum-based measures, norming, and data collection.[46] From January to July 2006, the SEA held statewide PSM training focusing on data-based decision making and the value of the approach for pairing research based interventions with continuous progress monitoring.[47] The 2007 NC DPI Summer Institute included the session, *Response to Intervention: The Problem-Solving Process and CBM/Progress Monitoring*, which consisted of detailed information about the steps of the PSM as well as information about the use of data for making important educational decisions about students. NCDPI guidance materials provide typical problem-solving activities and forms for each level, including for data collection, parent notification, intervention planning, performance summary/assessment planning, observation, etc. Additional resources are also available on the SEA website.[48] This includes a parents' guide, *Working Together for Children: A Guide for Parents and Teachers,* and PSM graphics.

Outcomes

Evaluation results of North Carolina's pilot RtI/PMS initiative are not available. The SEA has identified the following challenges associated with implementing an RtI model as:[49]

- Fidelity of Implementation
- Resource Variances among counties
- Funding Concerns/Issues
- Issues surrounding transition from discrepancy model to RTI model
- Ownership for implementation to effect system change

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[44] See: General Assembly of NC, Session 2007, HB 13.
[45] See: www.ncsip.org
[46] *RtI in NC*
[47] *NC SPP*
[48] See: www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/ development/ learning/intervention /rtimaterials
[49] "Response to Intervention in NC: Implementation of a Problem Solving Model" Powerpoint.

- Staff concerns regarding job security

6. South Carolina

Implementation Status

In April of 2002, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) entered into a partnership agreement with the Office of Civil Rights to reduce disproportionality of minorities in special education. South Carolina's State Performance Plan (SPP) for 2005 describes that a tiered intervention approach is being initiated and required of districts determined to have disproportionate representation of minority students in special education due to inappropriate identification. These districts are required to reserve and utilize the maximum amount of funds (15%) as stipulated in IDEA 2004 to provide comprehensive, coordinated early intervening services. They are also required to develop an action plan to address disproportionality, which must include a three-tiered school-wide approach that matches instruction to student need, frequent progress monitoring, use of evidence-based interventions, application of data to instructional decision-making, and development of district-wide and school-wide leadership teams. Action plans were due to the state Office of Exceptional Children on March 13, 2006.[50] Elements of an RtI approach are also incorporated into the state's plans for addressing the performance of students with disabilities on statewide assessments. After a pilot year, South Carolina plans to phase in over the next six years a statewide program to use curriculum-based measurement for progress monitoring of responsiveness to intervention in both general and special education.[51]

In addition to the state initiative, one South Carolina local education agency (LEA)—Horry County—has been implementing a problem solving model and is often cited in national discussions. Beginning in 1999, the LEA responded to inadequacies in the existing special education placement system by initiating an alternative service delivery model. After securing approval from the SEA Superintendent, the district piloted the program in three K-5 schools in 2003-4 and then expanded it to all K-5 schools in the district. In September 2006, Horry County Schools successfully petitioned the State Board of Education (SBE) for a waiver to the criteria required for entry into programs of special education for students with learning disabilities. Plans were for the district to replace the state's evaluation requirements with the problem-solving/entitlement process for a one-year period for K-5 and to incorporate grades 6-8 over the ensuing two years.[52]

Policy & Procedures

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[50] *Guidance on Early Intervening Services*, available at: ed.sc.gov/agency/offices/ec/documents/FAQreEIS.doc
[51] *State Performance Plan* 2005
[52] South Carolina SBE Minutes Sept 13, 2006

The South Carolina SBE is now in the process of adopting a new policy to align state and IDEA (2004) requirements. The new Special Education policy and Criteria for Entry into Programs of Special Education for Students with Disabilities policy are available for public comment until a public hearing scheduled for August 2007.[53]

Purpose of Initiative

In South Carolina, RtI has been linked to efforts to reduce disproportionality and to improve the performance of students with disabilities on statewide tests.[54]

Model Characteristics

The South Carolina three-tiered problem solving model is described in the State Performance Plan (2005). Tier 1 is the core curriculum with universal screening to assist the leadership team in identifying gaps in the core curriculum. Tier 2 is supplemental instruction for students that do not respond, following functional diagnostic assessments to determine specific skills deficits. Tier 3 is intensive instruction to accelerate the learning of students who did not adequately respond to Tier 2 intervention. Additional components include the use of evidence-based interventions and practices, and the involvement of an array of personnel including district and school leadership teams. Membership on the leadership team is not specified.

State Department Roles & Responsibilities

The Office of Exceptional Children is leading South Carolina's state RtI initiative.[55] It is overseeing the actions required of districts that are show to have significant disproportionality. The SPP (2005) describes the OEC as responsible for RtI-related implementation assistance through training, capacity building and support for all involved.

Assistance from Consultants/Organizations

The South Carolina SPP (2005) references to a number of outside collaborators who will be involved in the state's development and piloting of curriculum-based measurement for progress monitoring as well as related training, including the National Center on Educational Outcomes, the National Technical Assistance Center on Student Progress Monitoring, representatives of institutions of higher education, the South Carolina Association of School Administrators, National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, and parent group Pro-Parents. Technical assistance and training to implement the response to intervention as means to address disproportionality is expected to be provided by the National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring (NCSEAM), Mid-South Regional Resource Center, and SEA offices.

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[53] See http://ed.sc.gov/agency/stateboard
[54] South Carolina *State Performance Plan*, 2005
[55] See: http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/Exceptional-Children/

Related Initiatives

South Carolina has an SBE-authorized program underway to endorse selected formative assessments organized through the Division of Curriculum Services and Assessment.[56] The state has a State Improvement Grant (SIG) that has coordinated professional development in 19 districts to promote positive behavior supports using a school-wide model that was designed in part to remedy the overrepresentation of African American children as mildly mentally disabled. The SIG stresses behavioral interventions, effective reading interventions, data-driven decision-making, uniform assessments and use of a district and school leadership team.[57]

Technical Assistance/Professional Development

The state provides guidance to frequently asked questions in *Guidance Concerning Early Intervening Services*.[58] This document provides definitions of early intervening services, response to intervention, scientifically-based interventions, schoolwide model, the three-tiered model, positive behavior support, and four main purposes of assessment. The FAQs relate to student identification, funding, and the format of the disproportionality action plan.

Outcomes

Horry County South Carolina reports positive outcomes for its pilot year (2003-4), including a 31% reduction in initial K-5 special education placements, a 45% reduction in initial placement of minority males, and indication of effective early identification (67% of placements came from K-3).[59]

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[56] See http://ed.sc.gov/agency/offices/assessment/FormativeAssessment.html

[57] http://ed.sc.gov/agency/offices/ec/sig/documents/overviewjanuary_000.ppt

[58] See: http://ed.sc.gov/agency/offices /ec/documents/ FAQreEIS.doc.

[59] Barbour, C. Ben. (2005) Pupil Personnel Management: A Problem-Solving Model for Special Education's 'Storms,' *The School Administrator*. Available at: http://www.aasa.org/publicati ons/saarticledetail.cfm?ItemNumber=1024.

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