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Improving the School's MTSS Reading Intervention Framework

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Improving the Middle School's MTSS Reading Intervention Framework

Mariah Snyder

Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

The purpose of this school improvement plan was designed based on first-hand experience in seeing the high need for an improved MTSS reading intervention framework. Research findings show that reading interventions provided through an MTSS framework provide students with many beneficial supports that increase reading test scores. With these research findings in mind, a school improvement plan was created to create a sustainable reading intervention framework within the school setting.

Keywords: multitiered system of support, reading intervention, universal screening, fidelity, progress monitoring

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Improving the Middle School's MTSS Reading Intervention Framework

Multitiered systems of supports, also known as MTSS, is being adopted and implemented by many schools across the United States in order to support students that are experiencing learning difficulties (Coyne et al., 2018). In their 2015 report, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), found 44% of fourth grade students in Iowa scored at or above the proficient level in the area of reading. Seven years later, the 2022 NAEP report showed that only 40% of fourth grade students in Iowa scored at or above the proficient level in the area of reading. The problem is the school's struggle to implement reading interventions with fidelity. According to the Iowa State Department of Education (2022), at South Tama County Middle School, 45.46% of students in grades 5th-8th are proficient in the area of English Language Arts. Students are not provided with Tier 1 and Tier 2 reading interventions through MTSS that will support reading growth. Interventions need to be taught with fidelity by teachers who are trained in MTSS and in specific research-based reading interventions.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to improve the reading intervention MTSS framework at South Tama County Middle School. This plan will educate teachers on proper interventions to use with students, as well as provide training for all teachers on the importance of MTSS instruction. Using a schoolwide framework for reading interventions that is consistent through all grade levels in the building will create clear data that can be analyzed to gauge student growth. Using FastBridge CBM and aReading universal screening data throughout all grade levels will align and make data comparable. It is the author's goal that this school improvement plan will improve the data collection and fidelity of reading interventions at South Tama County Middle School to improve student's proficiency in the area of reading.

Research for this project was done using both DeWitt Library at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa and Google Scholar. Each article used was peer-reviewed. All articles were published within the last ten years. The author focused on articles about reading interventions used in grades 4th-8th. Due to limited research in these specific grade levels on the topic of MTSS reading interventions, studies of other grade levels were included. The scope of this research allowed the author to understand the importance of using research-based reading interventions, as well as training staff on interventions and fidelity in teaching them.

When reading interventions provided to students at South Tama County Middle School are improved through the MTSS framework, student growth and proficiency in the area of reading will occur. This growth will occur due to reading interventions being taught using a research-based reading curriculum, progress monitoring and analyzing student data, and by educating staff on how to teach these interventions with fidelity following the MTSS framework. Each of these improvements will lead to student growth in the area of reading.

This school improvement plan will make reading interventions at South Tama County Middle School more productive and worthwhile for students. Multitiered system of supports consists of Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 interventions based on student need and performance. Using a research-based reading intervention curriculum is needed in order to teach with fidelity. A common and consistent progress monitoring tool is needed schoolwide in order to analyze student data and track student growth. Teachers need to be educated on the importance of MTSS, on the specific curriculum being used, the progress monitoring tool being used, how to analyze progress monitoring data, and how to teach interventions with fidelity.

Review of the Literature

The research provided in this literature review has been collected from peer-reviewed journal articles. This research summarizes previous research on the importance of using multitiered system of supports to enhance reading interventions. This literature review discusses the benefits provided by MTSS, use of universal screening measures, implementation of interventions, progress monitoring and data analysis, and teacher training. The research summarized in this review has helped develop a school improvement plan on the importance of improving the school's MTSS reading intervention framework.

Benefits of MTSS Reading Interventions

The implementation of Multitiered System of Support (MTSS) has provided many school districts in the United States with positive outcomes (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). Positive findings in research of MTSS includes a reduced gap between actual reading performance and grade-level standards for identified at-risk students (Choi et al., 2020). MTSS reduced the identification rate of students that had reading disabilities, increased their passing rates on assessments, and increased the time on tasks and academic outcomes through an integrated MTSS framework (Choi et al., 2020). Students with reading difficulties can potentially face negative and long-term consequences (Thomas & January, 2021).

When implemented with fidelity, MTSS can serve as a driver for inclusion in schools (Choi et al., 2020). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) sets the expectation that all students should be educated in and be included in the general education classroom in order to have access to the general education curriculum. Inclusion of students with disabilities is a law that all schools must follow (Francisco et al, 2020). MTSS helps to desegregate special populations, as well as integrate all school resources, in order to benefit all students based on

their individual needs, allowing for equity-based inclusion to occur (Choi et al., 2020). Teaching students inclusively allows for academic growth to occur. Academic growth in students with reading disabilities allows for schools to see increased test scores. Being a research-based intervention program, MTSS helps meet the needs of diverse learners both socially and academically by providing students with the level of classroom support needed for each individual student (Swanson et al., 2017).

When a school adopts a whole school approach for instructional delivery, the school climate also improves. This is due to inclusion of all students in the school population through a multitiered system of support. In the MTSS model, all adults in the building have shared responsibility for both academic and social outcomes of all students and must respond to student needs collaboratively (Choi et al., 2020). School climate improves when teachers are properly trained. True implementation of MTSS requires high-quality professional development for teachers (Swanson et al., 2017). When the school climate improves, test scores and student academic growth follows. Having support from administrators made each team member feel valued and heard, regardless of their role in the MTSS process (Frank Webb & Michalopoulou, 2021). Results from Goodman-Scott et al. (2018) study demonstrate that MTSS intervention practices included positive school outcomes including importance of administrative leadership, proactive PBIS practices, creating consistency, building community, and school counselor integration.

Universal Screening Measures

Universal screening occurs in order to identify students who may be at risk academically. This occurs for students in all three tiers of MTSS. Since the goal of MTSS frameworks is to provide increasingly more intensive and aligned supports to meet student needs, you first need to

use universal screening procedures to identify the students in the school who are at risk or needing intervention (Coyne, 2018). In most schools, universal screening measures occur more than once an academic year, therefore these measures should be efficient, relatively inexpensive for school districts, and repeatable (Missall et al., 2021).

In the study by Thomas and January (2021), educators used universal screening to identify students who would be at risk of not being proficient on state assessments. The researchers looked at the predictive quality of the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. MAP is an assessment that can be used as a universal screener for reading interventions. Findings in this specific study supports using MAP as predictors of reading proficiency and to identify at risk students for poor performance on the reading state assessment. Researchers stated the importance of adopting a universal screener that is valid, as well as informs of appropriate and effective delivery of intervention for struggling readers.

Another universal screening measure for reading interventions is CBM-R through FastBridge Learning. In the research by Van Norman et al. (2019), they explored student growth in reading interventions where this specific universal screener was used to both identify students for interventions and to identify students who show positive response to the reading intervention and are able to exit their Tier 2 intervention. This screener is given three times a year, in the fall, winter, and spring. When students exceeded the benchmark scores on the next screening period, they were exited from the intervention program. Results showed that students who earned lower scores on universal screening benchmark assessments, they take longer to meet the exit criteria. In contrast, students who score closer to the benchmark scores require fewer weeks of intervention to meet the exit criteria. Most students who showed a positive response to the intervention provided in reference to a set goal-line based on expected rate of weekly

improvement on their CBM-R progress monitoring also exceeded the benchmark scores for the next screening period. These students were then exited from their Tier 2 reading intervention (Van Norman et al., 2019).

There are negative and potentially long-term consequences for students with early reading difficulties (Thomas & January, 2021). Universal screening helps this issue by identifying students early. Success of a sound MTSS implementation is evidenced by a decrease in special education referrals (Frank Webb & Michalopoulou, 2021). This is due to the universal screeners that show students need additional support in the area of reading right away. Typically, these gaps are able to be closed in interventions provided in the general education setting.

Carta et al. (2014) researched the effects of identifying preschoolers for higher tiers of language and early literacy instruction through universal screening in a MTSS framework. Results showed the importance of increased focus on early literacy and language instruction in programs serving high proportions of at-risk students. This is critical to prevent reading failure for students in future years. In contrast, Carta et al. (2014) stated that many educational systems wait until early elementary grades to identify children in need of reading intervention. Research by Thomas and January (2021) confirm this finding. Their research states that in many states, third grade is the first time that students take high-stakes standardized tests and screeners. Successful MTSS implementation efforts will require more refinement in screening and progress monitoring tools in early literacy practices (Carta et al., 2014).

Implementation of MTSS

Developing and implementing MTSS in reading is a complex process (Leonard et al., 2019). In Leonard et. al.'s (2019) research, the author provided an overview of systems and tools for schools to overcome barriers to implementation of MTSS reading interventions while

assisting teachers and administrators in the work that it takes to establish, coordinate, and sustain these reading practices. One common issue in MTSS implementation is not having a set school literacy plan to guide day-to-day literacy instruction. The research by Leonard et al. (2019) suggests using an activity timeline. This is a log for teachers and administrators to document every activity in the school setting related to reading and how it aligns to specific goals from the school's literacy plan. A school literacy plan typically consists of reading goals and objectives for the school year. Research by Leonard et al. (2019) stated that teachers reported that they did not use these plans for proactively planning and documenting activities, or for making informed MTSS reading decisions. When a school's literacy plan is not actively used and referred to throughout the school year, teachers and administrators may lose sight of literacy goals set for the school year (Leonard et al., 2019).

Another common issue is that instruction is not consistent across grade levels. In an MTSS framework, classroom reading instruction should be coordinated across all teachers and grade levels to ensure that all students have access to a consistent and systematic approach to learning (Coyne et al., 2016). Typically, well-designed curriculums that promote high-quality instruction can be difficult and overwhelming to implement in the general education classroom. Leonard et al. (2019) suggests developing whole-group and small-group instruction templates to help teachers identify critical components of the curriculum to ensure that Tier 1 instruction was implemented with consistency across all classrooms. These are working documents that can be changed as needed after meetings with all involved in reading curriculum and services. These templates also help document fidelity in instruction across all classrooms. These serve as observation templates as well, allowing for observations to develop goals towards improving instruction (Coyne et al., 2016).

Implementation of MTSS in reading is challenging, and may take more time and effort than schools initially realize in order to make a whole school change and successfully meet the needs of all learners (Leonard et.al, 2019). There is evidence in research that suggests partial implementation of MTSS models may not improve student learning outcomes (Balu et al., 2015). Therefore, the implementation of MTSS should occur fully with support from school administrators to ensure success in the implementation (Frank Webb & Michalopoulou, 2021). Administrators must prioritize meetings for teachers and other staff members to analyze data. Research by Leonard et al. (2019) discusses the importance of different types of data meetings: pre-data meetings, grade-level data meetings, implementation meetings, progress monitoring meetings, and interventionist meetings. Pre-data meetings occur after benchmark universal screening occurs to make intervention grouping decisions. Grade-level data meetings occur to make instructional based decisions for all students. These grade-level teams met monthly to make adjustments as needed. Progress monitoring meetings took place every 6-8 weeks to monitor student growth and make instructional modifications if needed for the students receiving intervention. Interventionist meetings are important to monitor implementation of all interventions schoolwide. At each of these meetings, the data grouping workbook allowed teachers to use data to make informed decisions about instruction and intervention (Leonard et al., 2019).

Progress Monitoring and Data Analysis

Progress monitoring for student growth is a crucial component in the MTSS framework. Effective progress monitoring practices require educators to adapt the type and intensity of the intervention provided in response to student improvement and growth in the area of reading (Van Norman et al., 2019). Brief, standardized formative assessments have become a widely used

progress monitoring tool within tiered frameworks and data from these assessments are used for both determining the effectiveness of the intervention and as part of a comprehensive evaluation for learning disability eligibility determination (Chaparro et al., 2018). In the research by Benson et al. (2018), the accuracy associated with decision making in progress monitoring was examined. Results from this study indicated that errors made in decision making based on progress monitoring data are strongly related to the reliability of measurement and the applied decision-making rules used to determine intervention responsiveness.

While the research by Benson et al. (2018) showed that the commonly used 4-point decision making rule was applied, many cases were classified as non-responsive to the intervention given. In contrast, as reliability of the decision-making rule increased, errors in data analysis decreased. Educators use trend lines or slopes generated from frequent progress monitoring administrations over time to evaluate student growth, and without valid estimates, the trustworthiness of the data-based decision-making process is jeopardized (Chaparro et al., 2018). The same progress monitoring technique must be used each time it is administered in order to collect consistent and precise data.

Schools often have vast amounts of data to analyze such as standardized tests, reading program assessments, universal screening measures, and required district and statewide assessments (Leonard et al., 2019). A common issue in making data-based decisions is having so much data that it is difficult to make meaningful decisions. In the research by Leonard et al. (2019), researchers state that schools need to develop a process to organize and interpret data in a way that allows teachers to ask and answer the important questions about student reading achievement. Researchers shared the data grouping workbook tool. This tool facilitates efficient instructional decision making by organizing all student data in a document, as well as their

intervention and grouping options. This workbook shows all reading instruction a student receives, such as Tier 1 classroom instruction and small group instruction and Tier 2/3 interventions. Materials and curriculums used for each intervention would also be noted. This form of data analysis allows for alignment in all areas, allowing all school teams to make instructional and intervention decisions for each individual student. Misalignment between instruction and intervention supports for students with disabilities across general education and special education can occur, causing lack of intensity and consistency in instruction (Fuchs et al., 2018). Therefore, data grouping workbooks and documentation on data analysis for each student supports students and educators in the area of progress monitoring.

The research by Benson et al. (2018) discusses the issue of making instructional changes prematurely. A student may be responding positively to an intervention and it would be prematurely terminated or altered when in fact it should have continued unchanged. This confirms the importance of a set decision-making tool with a specific number of data points to analyze before making a change in instructional decisions. When educators make inferences about student growth, it should be informed by true student learning over a specific time period, not influenced by varying levels of difficulty in progress monitoring (Chaparro et al., 2018).

Teaching Reading Interventions with Fidelity

The success for MTSS implementation is largely dependent on teacher's knowledge about MTSS implementation because teachers are the first line of defense against reading difficulties (Baker et al, 2019). Teachers are responsible to make educational decisions based on student data, therefore they need to have knowledge and understanding of MTSS and data-based decision making. The research by Baker et al. (2019) surveyed both general education and special education teachers on their knowledge about the MTSS framework. Findings show that

educators have plenty of knowledge of what MTSS is and consists of. On the other hand, findings from these surveys add to findings from other studies that teachers feel less prepared to make data-based instructional decisions than they report having knowledge about MTSS. Findings in this study also show that teachers also need knowledge about how to deliver early, targeted, and systematic instruction in the foundational reading areas of vocabulary, phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, and reading comprehension which have been shown to improve the literacy skills of struggling readers. Professional development opportunities are needed for educators to learn how to make data-based decisions in order to better provide instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

In MTSS, in order to effectively impact student outcomes, interventions taught throughout all tiers must be taught with fidelity and integrity from trained educators (Sanetti & Collier-Meek, 2015). In reading intervention research, implementation fidelity is assumed to be positively related to student outcomes in interventions taught (van Dijk et al., 2022). According to Sanetti and Collier-Meek (2015), most school personnel struggle to deliver interventions with integrity, which negatively impacts the potential effectiveness of the interventions. Their data supports the idea that each teacher may need different training based on their knowledge and experience in teaching interventions. This research also acknowledges the other responsibilities that teachers have, suggesting that professional development days are best for this learning to occur for teachers and staff members. The success of a multitiered framework begins with establishing schoolwide, high-quality general classroom instruction via professional development in evidence-based instructional procedures and classroom support from instructional leaders (Swanson et al., 2017).

Research by Mason et al. (2019) states that teachers have identified barriers to implementing MTSS in five areas: lack of adequate training, lack of time to plan, insufficient staff and resources, the MTSS process being too long, and the high levels of documentation needed to implement MTSS properly. This research describes effective professional development as needing a content focus, incorporate active learning, support collaboration, use models of effective practice, provide coaching and additional support, and offering feedback and time for reflection. Mason et al. (2019) shared the common barriers to implementation. Time was the most significant barrier that they found in their research. MTSS initiatives competed for time with other schoolwide initiatives. It was also difficult for teams to find time to collaborate, as well as time to actually implement interventions with fidelity.

Another barrier found by Mason et al. (2019) was knowledge of content. Leadership at schools felt teachers needed more understanding of standards and teaching, which could be provided by professional development and follow-up coaching. Resources were a final barrier identified by Mason et al. (2019). Some schools have the funding to invest in assessment and intervention programs, whereas other schools did not have any funding to use towards MTSS initiatives.

Professional development is needed. While instructional strategies are important, teachers want something that they can take back to their classrooms and execute immediately (Mason et al., 2019). Coaching is also a large factor in MTSS implementation. Contrasting research from Mason et al. (2019) states that professional development is not enough to fix the barriers to support long-term and sustainable change. Professional development followed by coaching to reinforce the skills learned during professional development provides teachers with immediate feedback as they practice implementing new learning in the MTSS process.

This research shows that MTSS is beneficial to student learning. The MTSS framework can seem like an overwhelming process to implement, but it is worthwhile for student success. Universal screening and progress monitoring allow for teachers and other educators to have data to analyze to ensure that students are getting the support necessary to make growth in the area of reading. Educators need training in order to understand the MTSS framework, as well as how to organize and interpret data. This data supports the need for an improved MTSS reading intervention framework at South Tama County Middle School.

School Profile

Student and Community Characteristics

South Tama County (STC) Middle School is a rural, public school located in Toledo, Iowa. STC Middle School serves the communities of Toledo, Tama, Chelsea, the Meskwaki Settlement, and Montour. The school serves 429 students in grades 5th-8th (Iowa State Department of Education, 2022). The student population is diverse. The minority enrollment of students is 54%. The majority of this percentage are Hispanic students, while Native American students are also part of the percentage. This demographic is more than the Iowa public school average of 24% minority students (Iowa State Department of Education, 2022). The student population consists of 54.8% female students and 45.2% male students (Iowa State Department of Education, 2022). South Tama County Middle School has 51.3% of students that are considered economically disadvantaged (Iowa State Department of Education, 2022). The school district as a whole and the communities the school serves are very diverse.

School Characteristics

Staff demographics are not nearly as diverse as the student population. In the middle school specifically, 90% of school employees are white. Of these school employees, 80% of staff

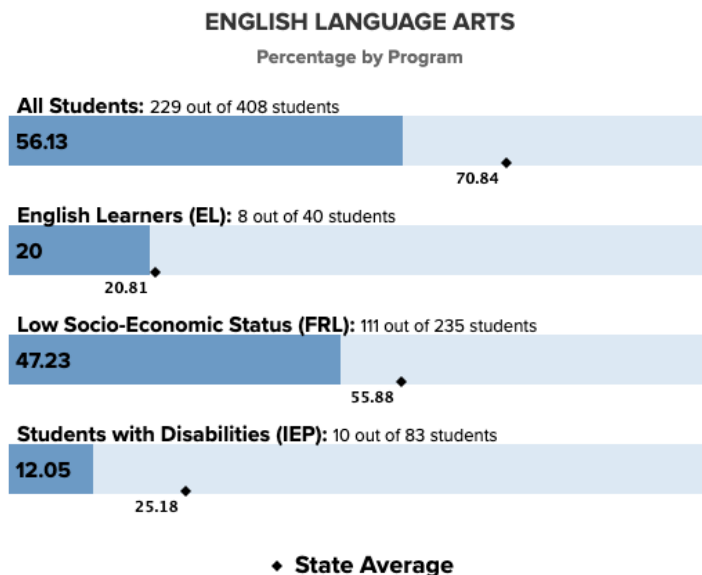
are female and only 20% are male. The student-teacher ratio is about 14 students to one certified staff member. There are 31 full-time certified teachers in the school and 2 full-time guidance counselors. South Tama County Middle School consists of grades 5th-8th (Iowa State Department of Education, 2022).

Student Performance

Of the 429 students that attend South Tama County Middle School, 98.51% participated in the English Language Arts Exam. 56.13% of students are proficient in English Language Arts (See Figure 1). Of the 40 English Language Learner (ELL) students, 8 students, or 20.81%, were proficient. The state average of ELL students that are proficient is 20%. Of the 235 students classified with a low socio-economic status, 111 or 47.23% were proficient. The state average is 55.88% of low socio-economic students were proficient. South Tama Middle School has 83 students on IEPs with learning disabilities. Of these 83 students, 10 or 12%, were proficient. The state average of proficient students on IEPs was 25.18% (State of Iowa, 2022).

Figure 1

English Language Arts Proficiency Percentage by Program



Parent Involvement

Parents are invited to be involved within STC Middle School. Teachers and other staff members keep parents informed using JMC, a record management system. This provides all information on the student, such as discipline, interventions, bussing, health plans, academic progress, and missing assignment scores. Parents are able to keep up to date on their students' missing assignments and also have access to their district usernames and passwords. Parents are also able to have access to different forms and applications, such as field trip permission slips, health plans, and applications for free and reduced lunch. Conferences are also scheduled with teachers using JMC management system.

Another way that parents are involved in their child's education is through the use of Google Classroom. South Tama County Middle School uses this program schoolwide for posting and sharing classwork. Parents are invited to these virtual classrooms and are able to see all that is taking place and being assigned to students. Parent-teacher conferences take place twice a school year. Parents are allowed to choose a time to connect with teachers in person or via Google Meet at a time that is most convenient for them. This allows for a high percentage of parent attendance. The school has two full-time staff members that are titled community liaisons. Their main focus is to make strong connections between families, the community, and the school.

South Tama County School District understands that parents are a vital part of a child's educational journey and keeps families informed via Facebook, Twitter, and the school website. The school website has a Parents and Families tab that has all information that may be needed by parents and guardians (Bearden, 2022). One resource on this tab are student handbooks for the elementary school, middle school, and high school students that state all protocols and

expectations for students. Another resource is the bus list and routes map. Breakfast and lunch menus are updated for families each month. There is also a district calendar that shows all days off, early outs, and sporting events in the district to keep families up to date and involved in these activities.

School Mission and Vision

South Tama County School District takes great pride in their mission and vision. The mission statement begins with “Where Every Student Has a Plan” (Bearden, 2022). All district initiatives revolve around this mission. The South Tama Country School District faculty, staff, and administration in partnership with parents, students, and the community will strive to provide a rich academic and student-centered education, support our multicultural environment, and encourage success for all students. The school’s superintendent, Cain (2022) stated that we outline our strategic plan around five strategic anchors:

Strategic Anchor 1: Attract and Retain Great Staff

Strategic Anchor 2: Guarantee Exceptional Learning Opportunities

Strategic Anchor 3: Emphasize Data and Measure Progress

Strategic Anchor 4: Inspire Success and Share OUR Story

Strategic Anchor 5: Cultivate a Culture of Excellence

These strategic anchors are put in place in order to create a culture of excellence to enhance student learning and enhance community engagement (Cain, 2022).

Current Student Learning Goals

Each academic school year, the students at South Tama County Middle School are assessed through many universal screening assessments, statewide assessments, and progress monitoring techniques. Grades 5th and 6th take FastBridge screeners in reading and math three

times per school year, in the fall, winter, and spring. Grades 7th and 8th take Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) screeners in reading and math two times per school year. Grades 5th-8th all take the FastBridge social emotional screener three times per school year. The data collected from these testing measures is used by teachers to create intervention groups for students. To determine Tier 2 interventions, teachers look at student data that is close to the benchmark score. Tier 3 interventions are determined by looking at data of students performing well below benchmark that are also not yet receiving special education services.

All students take the Iowa Assessments (ISASP) each year in the spring. This data is analyzed by the district, but not used to make many academic decisions at this time. Students in grades 5th and 6th are progress monitored for their reading interventions using FastBridge each week. A program, Lexia Core5, is also used to track literacy progress for these grades. While this program is used to track growth, it is not used as their specific intervention curriculum. Lexia Core5 uses student data to meet students where they are at, working on skills that they are lacking based on a screener assessment. Students in grades 7th and 8th are currently progress monitored using Common Lit assessments. They are not currently using a specific intervention curriculum to teach students at this time.

Teacher Instructional Strategies and Professional Development

Teachers are able to choose instructional strategies based on their individualized approach to teaching. Currently, there have been no district-wide teaching strategies established or implemented; however, there are professional development opportunities offered to learn and review instructional strategies. These professional development meetings often review strategies for teaching special education and ELL students. The special education teachers from each building and ELL teachers from each building lead these meetings. The school district has

professional development time scheduled in the district calendar. There are a few full days for staff learning each school year, along with an hour each Wednesday. Professional development topics vary from instructional strategies, mental health, differentiating instruction, and data analysis.

South Tama County Middle School also has two instructional coaches dedicated to our building. Their primary role is to support teachers. Coaches collaborate with teachers to identify learning goals, problem solve together, and support the teacher until the specific learning goal is met. They are available for teacher to complete coaching cycles, learning walks, and observational walk-throughs in order to improve our instructional strategies or classroom management techniques. Each of the topics that are part of the walkthrough form (See Figure 2) are taught during both professional development days and through the teacher mentoring program. By helping teachers improve their instruction, they help enhance student success.

Figure 2

Walkthrough Form Topics

Walkthrough Form	Topics: 1. What is the teacher doing? 2. Two engagement checks 3. Building Background 4. Comprehensible Input 5. Strategies 6. Practice and Application 7. Assessment 8. Behavior Specific Praise
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Teacher Mentoring Program

South Tama County School District is the teacher mentoring program. The instructional coaches in the district lead the mentoring program for first- and second-year teachers, as well as first year in the district teachers. This program consists of many components and supports offered to teachers. First year teachers are assigned a mentor teacher within the district, typically in the building in which you teach or in the subject area that is taught. This program goes along with the Area Education Agency Mentoring program, required by the state. The new teachers and their mentor teacher attend a monthly meeting that focuses on one of the eight teaching standards. In addition to these monthly meetings, mentors and mentees are required to meet ten additional hours outside of school contract hours. The mentors are paid additionally for their time. The teacher mentoring program sets new teachers, both to the profession and to the district, up for success and for teaching in alignment with building goals.

Needs Assessment

At STC Middle School, the curriculum and assessment of reading interventions is not best designed to fit student and instructional needs. In grades 5th-8th, there is not a consistent framework for reading interventions. Of the four grade levels, 5th grade is the only grade level using a specific reading curriculum for their Tier 3 intervention. The 5th grade Tier 2 intervention is not using a specific, research-based curriculum. Grades 6th-8th are also not using any specific, research-based curriculums to guide their Tier 2 or Tier 3 reading interventions. Teachers are using what they think may help students based on universal screening scores in fluency and comprehension skills. While this may help students and improve scores, it is inconsistent and gives unreliable data to analyze.

Students at STC Middle School need a consistent and organized reading intervention framework. Currently, the school's reading proficiency scores are concerning. This needs to be improved in order to close the learning gaps in the area of reading. With an improved reading intervention framework using MTSS, the school will be able to include more students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Currently, of the 188 (43.87%) out of 249 students that are not proficient in English Language Arts, only a small number of students get a consistent reading intervention (Iowa State Department of Education, 2022). In 5th grade, there are 25 students who receive Tier 2 or Tier 3 reading interventions four days per week. In 6th grade, there are 16 students who receive Tier 2 or Tier 3 reading interventions three to four days per week. In 7th grade, there are 18 students who receive Tier 2 or Tier 3 reading interventions three to four days per week. In 8th grade, 16 students receive Tier 2 or Tier 3 reading interventions three to four days per week. This is only 113 of 188 students that are not proficient in English Language Arts that are placed in a reading intervention.

It is fairly common at STC Middle School for students who need academic interventions to need both literacy and math instruction. It can be hard to find time for both interventions to occur in the school day. If the reading intervention framework was set up differently at STC Middle School, we could find a way to ensure all 188 students that are not proficient are receiving reading intervention supports. Students with reading difficulties can potentially face negative and long-term consequences (Thomas & January, 2021). We need to do what we can to prevent these consequences from occurring with our middle school students by serving more students in our MTSS reading interventions.

Based on the school profile, school improvement is needed in the area of reading intervention in MTSS due to the percentage of students not proficient on the Iowa Statewide

Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) (Iowa State Department of Education, 2022). The data collected from FastBridge and MAP universal screening assessments used schoolwide show a need for more intensified interventions based on the number of students not proficient in reading.

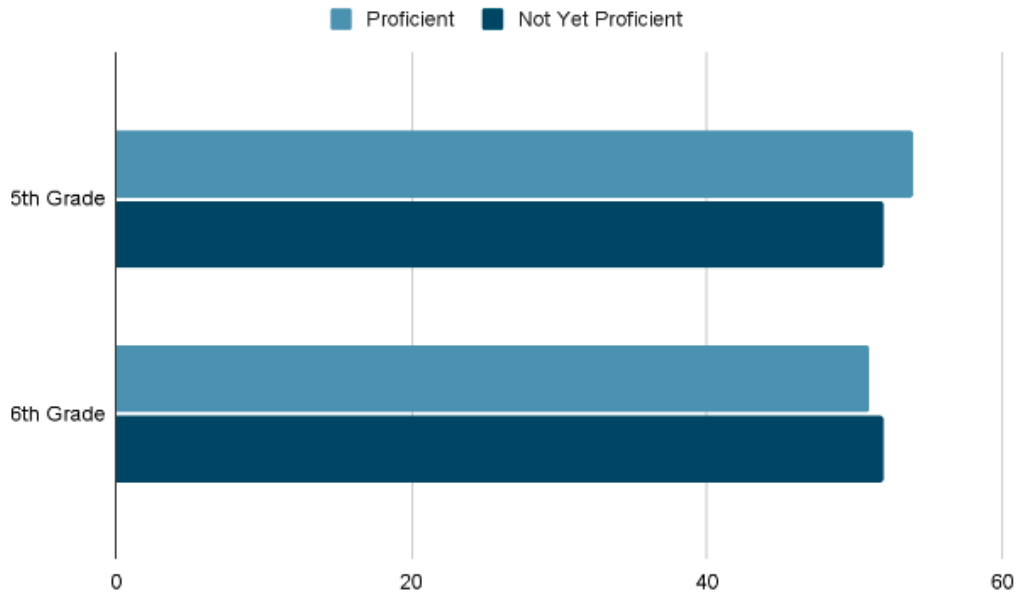
Data Analysis

The ISASP assessment is taken in grades 5th-8th. This data is consistent with each grade level at STC Middle School. According to the Iowa State Department of Education (2022), 56.13% of students at South Tama County Middle School are proficient in the area of English Language Arts. The average for the state of Iowa is 70.84% proficient in English Language Arts. Of the 40 English Language Learner (ELL) students, 8 students, or 20.81%, were proficient. The state average of ELL students that are proficient is 20%. Of the 235 students classified with a low socio-economic status, 111 or 47.23% were proficient. The state average is 55.88% of low socio-economic students were proficient. South Tama Middle School has 83 students on IEPs with learning disabilities. Of these 83 students, 10 or 12%, were proficient. The state average of proficient students on IEPs was 25.18% (State of Iowa, 2022).

FastBridge aReading is currently used as a universal screening method for grades 5th and 6th. The purpose of the aReading assessment is to assess student's reading comprehension skills. Of the 106 5th grade students who took the aReading screener in the fall, 54 (51%) of students were proficient. 52 students (48%) were not yet proficient. Of the 103 6th graders that took the aReading assessment, 51 students (50%) were proficient. 52 students (50%) were not yet proficient on this assessment (See Figure 3).

Figure 3

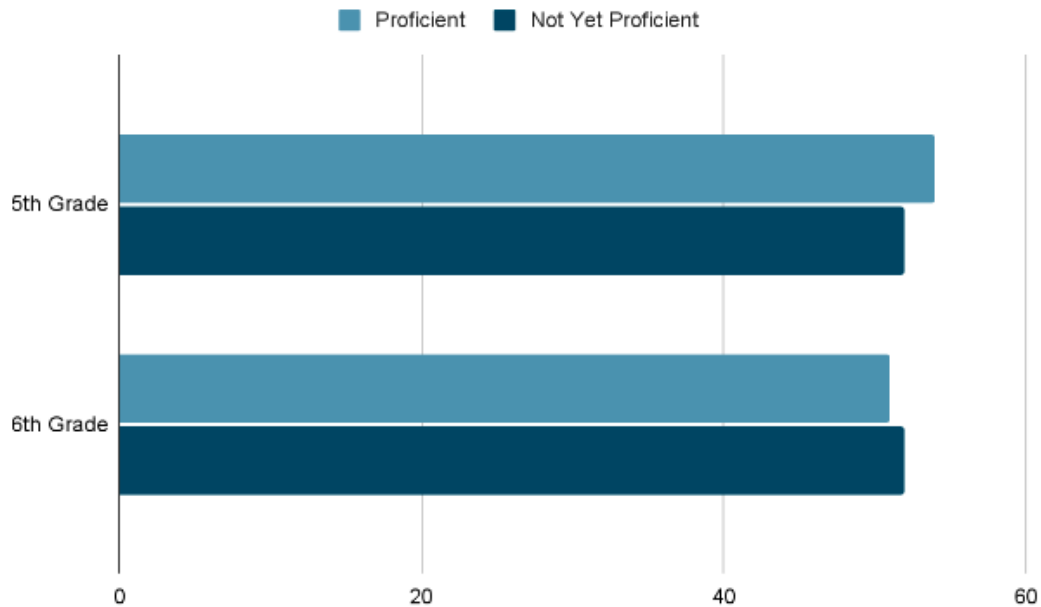
5th and 6th Grade Students Proficient on FastBridge aReading Screener Fall 2022



In addition to FastBridge aReading, FastBridge CBM is another universal screening method that is used in grades 5th and 6th. The purpose of this assessment is to gauge student's reading fluency. This is assessed by giving students a grade level passage and having them read out loud for one minute. In that minute, you assess how many correct words are read. In 5th grade, 45 students (42%) are proficient in the area of reading fluency. In 6th grade, only 38 students (37%) are proficient in reading fluency (See Figure 4). When students cannot read fluently, there is more risk of them not comprehending what they read, therefore causing low comprehension proficiency scores.

Figure 4

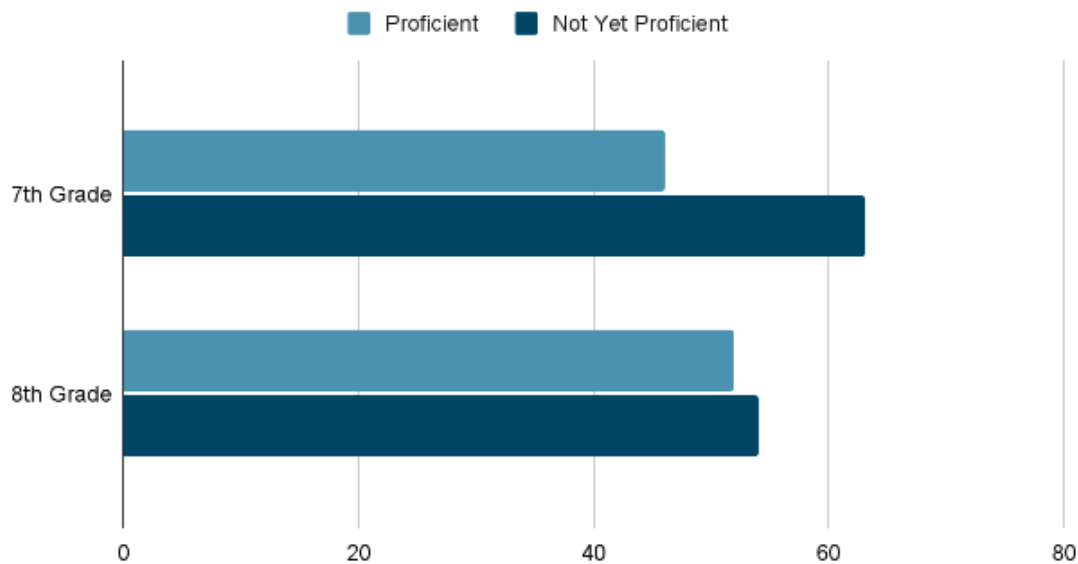
5th and 6th Grade Students Proficient on FastBridge CBM Screener Fall 2022



Rather than using FastBridge universal screeners in grades 7th and 8th, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing is used. Students take this ELA assessment three times per academic school year. In 7th grade, there are 109 students. Of the 109 students, 63 students (58%) were not yet proficient in English Language Arts. In 8th grade, there are 106 students. On the MAP ELA assessment, 54 students (51%) were not yet proficient (See Figure 5). This lack of proficiency shows a need for more intensified reading interventions with a research-based curriculum and set progress monitoring technique.

Figure 5

7th and 8th Grade Students Proficient on MAP ELA Screener 2022



The data shown above in Figures 1-3 shows the need for an improved MTSS reading intervention framework. In grades 5th and 6th, the number of students not yet proficient in reading fluency (126 students of 209) is concerning. This demonstrates a need for a fluency screener for grades 7th and 8th as well. About half of the students in each grade level are proficient in reading comprehension. In 5th and 6th grade, based on the FastBridge universal screener, 51% of students are proficient in reading comprehension. In 7th and 8th grade, based on the MAP ELA universal screener, 46% of students are proficient in reading comprehension. This data demonstrates that about half of the students (52%) in the school are not yet proficient in the area of reading comprehension.

The improved reading intervention plan needs to meet students where they are at academically with a research-based curriculum. Using the same universal screener and progress monitoring techniques at each grade level would allow for more organized and intensified data analysis to occur. We need to increase the number of students proficient in the area of reading

fluency and comprehension at STC Middle School based on the data shown above in order to close educational gaps that exist in grades 5th-8th. When students are not reading fluently, they are less likely to comprehend the texts that they are reading. Reading affects academic growth in all subject areas. With only 48% of students in grades 5th-8th proficient in reading comprehension, students will struggle in all academic areas. An improved reading intervention framework will allow for growth not only in the area of reading, but in all subject areas.

Action Plan

Introduction

With the low proficiency scores on both fluency and comprehension assessments, a change needs to be made to the MTSS reading intervention framework at STC Middle School. Students with reading difficulties can potentially face negative and long-term consequences (Thomas & January, 2021). This is why it is crucial to make a change in our current system to improve student's proficiency rates on reading assessments. Improving reading instruction will help students be successful in all subject areas.

Proposed Improvement Plan

In order to improve student's proficiency rates on reading assessments, the MTSS design and framework at STC Middle School needs to be reworked. Trojan Time and RE (intervention times) for grades 5th-8th should be aligned and taught at the same times (See Figure 6). With these interventions being at the same time building wide, more adults would be available to teach interventions. These educators consist of specials teachers, librarians, TAG teachers, guidance counselors, and interventionists. They currently are teaching classes for other grade levels during certain Trojan Times. In addition, students at similar reading levels with similar needs to close learning gaps could be grouped together. This would be scheduled using a data-grouping

document, a strategy that is described more in depth in the following section. This would allow for students potentially struggling with fluency in grades 7th and 8th to have interventions with teachers trained in this area.

Figure 6

Sample Schedule with Aligned Trojan Times

South Tama MS 3:10 Release Schedule (3 Min Passing)							
5th Grade		6th Grade		7th Grade		8th Grade	
Expo	8:10-9:01	1	8:10-9:01	1	8:10-9:01	1	8:10-9:01
Math	9:01-10:00	Expo	9:04-9:55	2	9:04-9:55	2	9:04-9:55
Literacy1	10:00-11:15	3	9:58-10:49	3	9:58-10:49	3	9:58-10:49
Number Corner	11:15 - 11:35	4	10:49-11:43	Lunch	10:52-11:21	Recess	10:52-11:21
SS/Science	11:35-12:03	5	11:43-12:37	Recess	11:21-11:40	Lunch	11:24-11:54
Lunch	12:03-12:33	Lunch	12:37-1:07	4	11:43-12:30	4	11:57-12:41
Recess	12:33-12:48	Recess	1:07-1:30	Expo	12:33-1:30	5	12:43-1:32
SS/Science	12:51-1:25	6	1:30-2:22	6	1:33-2:22	Expo	1:35-2:22
Literacy 2	1:25-2:25	Trojan Time	2:25-3:10	Trojan Time	2:25-3:10	Trojan Time	2:25-3:10
Trojan Time	2:25-3:10						

Research-Based Curriculums

Interventions need to be taught using research-based reading curriculums, such as S.P.I.R.E., to teach interventions. S.P.I.R.E. is a research-proven curriculum that builds reading success through an intensive, structured, and spiraling curriculum that incorporates phonological awareness, phonics, spelling, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension in systematic 10-step teacher-led lessons, reinforced by practice to lock in measurable gains (School Specialty, 2023). Research-based curriculums include research-based strategies to lead to an improvement in learning outcomes for students. While teachers have a lot of knowledge in the area of teaching, research-based curriculums use teaching strategies that have been proven effective in student growth. Research-based curriculums help teach students to develop a deep understanding of the content, while also applying what they have learned to their daily lives. In an MTSS framework,

classroom reading instruction should be coordinated across all teachers and grade levels to ensure that all students have access to a consistent and systematic approach to learning (Coyne et al., 2016). Implementing a curriculum for reading fluency and reading comprehension, while aligning them schoolwide, would ensure that all students have access to a consistent and systematic approach to learning.

Universal Screeners & Progress Monitoring

FastBridge universal screeners and progress monitoring techniques should be used schoolwide in order to make data-informed decisions about interventions. Iowa schools are required to select a state approved literacy assessment for each K-6th grade level (Condict, n.d.). Our school district adopted using the FastBridge literacy assessments for these grade levels. Since we are required to use these assessments in 5th and 6th grade at STC Middle School, using the same universal screener and progress monitoring procedures in grades 7th and 8th would be helpful in analyzing data and creating intervention groups. The aReading screener should be used in grades 5th-8th to assess reading comprehension skills. The CBM screener should be used in grades 5th-8th to assess reading fluency skills.

Schoolwide Strategies

Schoolwide strategies should be put into place to support teachers in the MTSS framework implementation process. One strategy that should be implemented is an activity timeline, as suggested in research by Leonard et al. (2019). This is a log for teachers and administrators to document every activity in the school setting related to reading and how it aligns to specific goals from the school's literacy plan. When a school's literacy plan is not actively used and referred to throughout the school year, teachers and administrators may lose

sight of literacy goals set for the school year (Leonard et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important for the school to have clear literacy goals established and written into a literacy plan.

Another strategy that Leonard et al. (2019) suggests is developing whole-group and small-group instruction templates. These would help teachers identify critical components of the curriculum to ensure that Tier 1 instruction was implemented with consistency across all classrooms. These are working documents that can be changed as needed after meetings with all involved in reading curriculum and services. These templates also help to document fidelity in instruction across all classrooms. These serve as observation templates as well, allowing for observations to develop goals towards improving instruction (Coyne et al., 2016).

A third strategy that should be implemented into the MTSS reading intervention framework is holding data meetings. Leonard et al. (2019) discusses the importance of different types of data meetings: pre-data meetings, grade-level data meetings, implementation meetings, progress monitoring meetings, and interventionist meetings. At these meetings, the data grouping workbook allowed teachers to use data to make informed decisions about instruction and intervention (Leonard et al., 2019). The data grouping workbook has all data for each student in one place. It supports students with reading disabilities by providing a standardized process for documenting the alignment of supports between Tiers 1, 2, and 3 (Leonard et al., 2019). This helps make intervention planning into a systematic and data-based approach.

Professional Development

In addition to these recommendations, teachers need to be provided with professional development opportunities to learn new strategies. Without proper education and time for trainings, this proposed plan would be highly stressful for staff. Educators should be provided with time to process and ask questions. Without proper implementation and teaching with

fidelity, the interventions will not be successful. The success for MTSS implementation is largely dependent on teacher’s knowledge about MTSS implementation because teachers are the first line of defense against reading difficulties (Baker et al, 2019). A clear professional development plan should exist for the school year (See Table 1). This will allow learning to take place for staff throughout the upcoming school year. Staff will be able to apply new learning throughout the year, preparing to implement the new MTSS reading intervention framework the following school year.

Table 1

Sample Professional Development Plan

Professional Development Date and Leader	Estimated Time Needed	Learning to Take Place
August 22nd, 2023 Administration	3 hours	This time would consist of an introduction of learning. You should also go over schedule alignment of Trojan Times (including the staff that would now be available to help during intervention times), discuss FastBridge universal screeners and their purpose in this new framework. Allow the rest of the time for training on administering these assessments.
September 25th, 2023 Instructional Coaches	2 hours	Staff will learn about the activity timeline and the school’s specific literacy plan. This is a time for the staff to learn about the literacy goals in place for the school year. Staff will learn how to use the document to make and align reading plans.

Professional Development Date and Leader	Estimated Time Needed	Learning to Take Place
October 30th, 2023 Instructional Coaches	1 hour	This time will be used to show staff how to use whole-group and small-group instruction templates. These would help teachers identify critical components of the curriculum to ensure that Tier 1 instruction was implemented with consistency across all classrooms. The templates help with teaching interventions and reading curriculums with fidelity.
November 27th, 2023 Instructional Coaches	2 hours	Staff will learn about the importance of different types of data meetings: pre-data meetings, grade-level data meetings, implementation meetings, progress monitoring meetings, and interventionist meetings. Staff will also learn about the data grouping workbook and how to use it appropriately.
January 3rd, 2024 Instructional Coaches	3 hours	Curriculum learning will take place during this time. Staff will be properly trained with all new curriculums used for reading interventions.
February 19th, 2024 Instructional Coaches	1 hour	Coaching cycles and observations will be discussed during this time. Staff will be given clear direction on this and told exactly what will be looked for. Staff will be given time to ask specific questions during this time.
March-May Instructional Coaches	-	This would be time for coaching cycles and formal observations to take place from administration and instructional coaches to look for new learning in the classrooms. Observations should include specific feedback.
May 28th, 2024 Administration	1 hour	Time would be used to review learning from the year, provide expectations for the next school year for reading interventions, to share findings from observations, and allow time for questions.

In the MTSS model, all adults in the building have shared responsibility for both academic and social outcomes of all students and must respond to student needs collaboratively

(Choi et al., 2020). School climate improves when teachers are properly trained. True implementation of MTSS requires high-quality professional development for teachers (Swanson et al., 2017). When the school climate improves, test scores and student academic growth follows.

Coaching is a great tool that should follow professional development opportunities on new tools and strategies presented to teachers. Research from Mason et al. (2019) states that professional development is not enough to fix the barriers to support long-term and sustainable change. Professional development followed by coaching to reinforce the skills learned during professional development provides teachers with immediate feedback as they practice implementing new learning in the MTSS process. Coaches can also look for the specific strategies and tools when completing observations to ensure they are being used correctly, while also offering feedback and advice.

Summary

These positive changes to the MTSS intervention framework would help increase student's proficiency in the areas of reading fluency and comprehension. With education for teachers on new processes, strategies, and curriculums, teachers will feel more confident in teaching reading interventions. The new framework will help connect and align the general education curriculum and standards to the intervention being taught. Data will be organized and used to make informed decisions in the intervention placement process. Progress monitoring will be used to ensure that students are making academic growth. This proposed plan consists of a lot of dedication and collaboration between staff and administration, but it is in the best interest of the students of STC Middle School.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

Introduction

Implementing a new MTSS reading intervention framework is a large process. It will take time to work through this improvement plan. If professional development and training is able to start at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year, the plan could be fully implemented for the 2024-2025 school year. Taking the time to learn the new process, curriculums, and tools allows for the interventions to be taught with fidelity. This plan would need to be approved by administration, as well as the school board, in order to move forward. Administration and instructional coaches would play a major role in the implementation of this plan. Instructional coaches would be teaching professional development and monitoring the processes of the plan to ensure it is being followed with fidelity.

Timeline for Implementation

The proposed timeline below calls for full implementation to occur during the 2024-2025 school year. The delay in full implementation allows for dedication to professional development to occur before jumping in without proper training. This timeline also allows for administration and instructional coaches to learn about the plan in depth, while preparing professional development tools. The proposed timeline is shown below:

May-June 2023: Receive approval from administration and the school board.

June-July 2023: Begin training for administration and instructional coaches.

June-July 2023: Adopt a curriculum that is aligned with desired reading outcomes for students.

July 2023: Create resources needed and develop staff training.

July-August 2023: Prepare all teachers and staff members.

August 2023: Begin professional development training for the 2023-2024 school year.

September 2023: Begin implementing learning from professional development trainings.

March-May 2023: Instructional coaches will observe and have coaching cycles with staff giving specific feedback.

May-August 2023: Train teachers on the new curriculum that is adopted so that it can be taught with fidelity.

August 2023: Launch full implementation for the 2024-2025 school year.

August 2023-May 2024: Monitor student growth and learning with FastBridge universal screeners (fall, winter, and spring) and progress monitoring tools throughout the school year.

August 2023-May 2024: Make adjustments based on the data being collected.

This timeline will keep all staff accountable in the learning process. Consistent professional development for staff will keep this learning a continuous process. Taking the time for training and learning will ensure that the school improvement plan will be implemented with fidelity to ensure student growth.

Staff Roles

This plan requires intensive support from both administration and instructional coaches. In this plan, administration will be in charge of changing the schedules, getting school board approval, and communicating all information throughout the process with staff. Administration will need to be responsible for scheduling professional development time for staff. This time needs to be devoted to this instruction. With any new initiative that is introduced, there are many questions and concerns coming from staff. Administration will listen to these questions and concerns, while clearly explaining to staff why these changes need to occur to better serve the students at STC Middle School.

Instructional coaches will be leading professional development, teaching staff about each new strategy and concept in the new MTSS reading intervention framework. Instructional coaches play a vital role in this school improvement plan. They will be teaching staff exactly what this new MTSS reading intervention framework will look like. They will be creating tools and professional development presentations and spending a lot of time encouraging staff throughout this process. As well as leading all professional development, they will ensure that data organizational tools are being used in data meetings. They will also observe staff and give immediate feedback directly related to the work being done to improve the MTSS system.

All teachers will take responsibility for all students learning. In the MTSS model, all adults in the building have shared responsibility for both academic and social outcomes of all students and must respond to student needs collaboratively (Choi et al., 2020). Teachers will be expected to respond positively to these changes. It will be a great team effort, with a lot of collaboration with other staff members to make it a success. Once new learning is introduced, teachers will have opportunities to ask questions, as well as practice new strategies. It is important for teachers to keep the mindset that it will greatly improve the learning for all students at STC Middle School.

Plan for Monitoring & Schoolwide Goals

This plan will be monitored in two ways. The first will be conducted after all professional development takes place. Teachers will be sent a survey after learning to ensure that they understand all parts of the new framework. This survey will cover each new strategy learned, asking for specific feedback on each part. The success of a multitiered framework begins with establishing schoolwide, high-quality general classroom instruction via professional development in evidence-based instructional procedures and classroom support from

instructional leaders (Swanson et al., 2017). Data from the observations done from instructional coaches will also be used to assess staff learning from professional development.

The second way that this plan will be monitored is by using FastBridge universal screening data. This would occur after the plan is fully implemented during the 2024-2025 school year. Data from aReading (comprehension) and CBM (fluency) assessments will be analyzed. Using the data grouping workbook strategy, student growth will be analyzed by looking at growth from fall to winter scores and winter to spring scores. If the plan is working, we should see great growth in the number of students proficient in reading comprehension and reading fluency. Student growth will show that the new MTSS reading intervention framework implementation was successful.

In the 2024-2025 school year, STC Middle School will expect the following goals to be met:

1. All staff will be properly trained in all aspects of the new MTSS reading intervention framework and feel confident in teaching interventions, as well as analyzing data.
2. When FastBridge universal screeners are given, the percentage of the number of students proficient will grow in each testing window (fall, winter, spring).
3. 80% or above of all students in grades 5th-8th will be proficient in the area of reading.

Potential Challenges

One potential challenge that may exist in this plan is the professional development time being set aside for this learning to occur. Oftentimes, other district goals and initiatives take over professional development days. There never seems to be enough time in the school year for all meetings that need to take place. This plan requires time to be spent for educators to learn about

the MTSS process. Without proper education for staff, implementation will likely fail. This plan needs to be implemented with fidelity.

Another potential challenge is school staff not being on board with this plan. For some, the amount of work and new learning that this plan will take will turn them away from wanting to execute the plan. While the plan is intensive and time consuming, it would be beneficial for student growth and progress in all subject areas. This school improvement plan may also not be approved by the school board due to the time and resources that it consists of. With the support of administration and instructional coaches, the learning and implementation of this plan should be a collaborative, group effort. Administration and instructional coaches should encourage staff and keep learning positive.

Conclusion

At South Tama County Middle School, only 45.46% of students in grades 5th-8th are proficient in the area of English Language Arts on the ISASP assessment (Iowa State Department of Education, 2022). The problem is the school's struggle to implement reading interventions with fidelity. The current MTSS reading intervention framework is not well organized. Decisions are not made using consistent data, which they need to be in order to implement and teach interventions with fidelity. Findings from research show that implementation of Multitiered System of Support (MTSS) has provided many school districts in the United States with positive outcomes (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). These outcomes would positively affect student growth and learning at STC Middle School.

By implementing this school improvement plan, STC Middle School will restructure the MTSS reading intervention framework to align instruction building-wide, use data-based decision making, and implement research-based interventions and strategies to support student

growth in the areas of reading fluency and comprehension. This redesigned intervention framework will allow more students to receive reading interventions, increasing the proficiency rate. Using a building aligned universal screener and progress monitoring measures, data analysis will be an easier process. A data grouping tool will ensure that all student data is in one place. This will also help with placing students in an intervention with students at their current level.

Professional development is crucial to successful implementation. With a well-designed professional development schedule, teachers will be engaged in learning one academic year before full implementation. This will allow teachers to process information, ask questions, and try out new strategies in their classrooms. Instructional coaches will encourage learning by supporting teachers throughout the implementation process. Observations will occur that will provide teachers with timely and constructive feedback.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to increase the number of students that are proficient in reading fluency and comprehension at South Tama County Middle School. Providing students with research-based reading interventions will allow for them to make consistent growth. Teaching with fidelity will ensure that students are getting the instruction that they need. This increase in reading skills will allow them to make growth in other academic areas as well. It is time to help the students at STC Middle School with a building wide MTSS reading intervention framework.

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