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Improving Reading Interventions: A School Improvement Plan

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

This paper examines the use of reading instruction interventions in an elementary school in Northwest Iowa. Whereas the school excels at providing regular assessments, including universal screeners, educators there have struggled to adequately meet the reading needs of their students as reflected on FAST, MAP, and Panorama data. This school improvement plan provides professional development training in response to intervention (RTI) procedures along with continual support and collaboration throughout the school year to assist teachers in confidently serving all learners and helping them reach their fullest potential as readers.

Keywords: RTI, reading, interventions, collaboration, universal screening, progress monitoring

Table of Contents

Abstract.....2

Introduction.....5

Literature Review.....7

School Profile.....19

 Community Characteristics.....19

 School District Characteristics.....19

 School Building Characteristics.....21

 Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment.....22

 Student Performance.....27

 Professional Development Practices.....27

Needs Assessment.....29

Data Analysis.....30

Action Plan.....34

Implementation of School Improvement Plan.....37

 Resources Needed.....37

 Timeline & Responsibilities.....38

 Monitoring for Success.....41

Conclusion.....42

References.....45

Improving Reading Interventions: A School Improvement Plan

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) called for schools to reevaluate and upgrade their systems for identifying students who are struggling. Schools were challenged to implement data-based decision-making procedures, use evidence-based instructional practices, and incorporate accountability systems. Many schools adopted a Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) in the form of Response to Intervention (RTI). “Key elements of RTI include the use of screening tools to identify struggling students, a tiered approach to intervention, and continual progress monitoring to facilitate data-based decision making” (Thomas et al., 2020, p. 118). The problem is many teachers do not feel knowledgeable about RTI or feel that they have the time to implement it. Al Otaiba et al. (2019) explains that teachers have a broad understanding of RTI and do not feel prepared to make data-based instructional decisions. This nationwide problem greatly impacts the success of students. Early intervention is key to improving student outcomes, but if our teachers are not qualified to identify and help at-risk students, students will not make appropriate gains and meet their greatest potential.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to equip elementary teachers in RTI to better support students who are at-risk. Based on this plan, teachers will be qualified to screen and identify students who need further support through an intervention, identify and implement an appropriate intervention with fidelity, and progress monitor to make data-based instructional decisions. Teachers will feel well supported through collaboration and an RTI team walking with them through the process. General and special educators will work together in tandem to provide high quality, evidence-based instruction at all tiers. Administration will support and provide time

for valuable, regular collaboration. Accountability systems will be incorporated to ensure that at-risk students are receiving the interventions and support they need.

Research for this paper was drawn from the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) database, the WorldCat discovery tool through DeWitt Library, and Google Scholar. All articles were peer reviewed and, with the exception of one article, written within the last ten years. The author focused on research conducted in elementary school settings in North America due to the improvement plan being developed for Sioux Center (IA) School District's Kinsey Elementary School, which includes grades TK through third grade. The research for this school improvement plan focused on RTI implementation, successes, challenges, and perceptions of teachers and parents.

The belief is that as Kinsey Elementary improves its RTI process, students will be able to be served in their least restrictive environment. When teachers are knowledgeable, equipped, and supported, they are able to appropriately serve a diverse student population within the classroom through collaboration with the RTI team and special educators. Kinsey Elementary has a diverse student body that includes a high population of English Language Learners (ELL) and students with diagnosed disabilities. To ensure that students are accurately being identified, they need to first experience high-quality evidence-based instruction and responsive interventions before being evaluated and identified for needing Tier 3 (special education services outside of the classroom setting). Based on Panorama data, students should be receiving appropriate, targeted interventions with fidelity before an alternative instructional decision is made.

The literature review of this school improvement plan will outline the history and legislation of RTI, explain how RTI bridges the gap between special education and general education, describe the challenges that may arise or may be hindering schools from

implementing quality RTI, and articulate keys to successful RTI implementation. Kinsey Elementary School and its teachers will benefit from understanding the law and motivation behind MTSS and RTI. Research shows there are misconceptions about who is responsible for the implementation (Berkeley et al., 2020), thus this school improvement plan will describe the relationship between general and special education in this process. It is important to describe what research has found to be challenging and successful for schools implementing RTI as Kinsey educators consider the best way forward in their own implementation.

Review of the Literature

Historical Background of RTI

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a relatively new concept, but its roots evolve from legislation designed to help struggling students. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was passed to ensure that all students (even those with disabilities) were educated well. While this was a win for students who had been denied education based on their mental and physical disabilities and the beginning of placing students in their least restrictive environment, the law also led to an exponentially large increase in students being placed in special education with the identification of Learning Disability (LD). The identification process utilized a discrepancy model, or “wait to fail,” by analyzing the difference between a student’s cognitive and intellectual ability and their classroom performance. This model of identification began the problem of overidentification of students with learning disabilities. Rudd et al. (2015) explains, “Historically, identifying students with learning disabilities has been the single most controversial issue in the field of special education. The classification rate of students with LD has increased by 200% since 1976” (p. 79).

EHA became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990 with some revisions supporting students with disabilities. Congress made amendments to IDEA in 1997 to improve the fact that “the IDEA had been impeded by low expectations for students with disabilities, an insufficient focus on translating research into practice, and too great an emphasis on paperwork and legal requirements at the expense of teaching and learning” (Yell, 2019, p. 47). This amendment focused on improvement of the quality of education, specifically for special education students. “The foundation for change in the identification for LD was established in IDEA in 1997 and codified in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004” (p. 80). In five short years, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 was put into place to improve the quality of education for all students and demonstrate educational growth using performance indicators. Schools were held accountable to display measurable academic gains in math and reading using student data, regardless of race, ethnicity, or ability. Thus, the push continued for improved school systems that address student needs, meeting students where they are at.

The reauthorization of IDEA 2004 stated, “In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures” (IDEA, 2019). Berkeley et al. (2020) states, “it was identified as an alternative process for identification of students with learning disabilities” (p. 332). Discrepancy models were discredited, and schools were encouraged to use evidence-based instruction. The authors continue, “inherent to the process is an ongoing cycle of screening for early identification, providing interventions of graduating intensity, and monitoring for student growth” (p. 332). Only after proving that students were not making adequate progress with the intervention would they be evaluated for

special education. The amendment required more accountability, raising the standards for teachers and demanding better outcomes for students, but left it up to each state to decide how they make these improvements within their schools.

The provisions in these acts were intended to improve student achievement and decrease the need for services in special education (Rudd et al., 2015, p. 80). Willis (2019) echoes this notion explaining that the researchers behind the legislation claimed that the discrepancy model should be replaced by a multi-tiered approach (such as RTI), utilizing evidence-based interventions to assist students in bridging the gap. The goal was to create equity amongst all populations. Similarly, the legislation wanted to create equity in access to education. “Prior to this reauthorization, in many states schools had two options: general or special education. The reauthorization of IDEA pressed for schools to fill the gap between regular and special education with a less restrictive option” (Wingate et al., 2018, p. 163). Implementing multitiered system of supports (MTSS), such as RTI, promotes inclusion of learners of varying abilities within the least restrictive environment.

Wingate (2018) explains that each state can choose how they fill the gap between general and special education, but that they must consider consistent documentation, assessment, and interventions within the general education setting. In their research, they found that all states were implementing core characteristics of RTI. With the push for MTSS/RTI deriving from special education law, Berkeley et al. (2020) explains that teachers are unsure who is responsible for implementation of RTI within their schools. It is imperative that teachers understand how general and special education are connected through RTI.

Bridging the Gap Between General and Special Education

Response to Intervention was meant to provide early intervention to provide help to students who are struggling. Through the help of Tier 2 supports, they would either make sufficient gains to catch up to their peers or be identified as needing more intensive supports, such as special education. When schools wait for students to fail in Tier 1, they deny them the opportunity to learn to their highest potential. Likewise, if we place every student who is struggling in special education, they are not accessing their least restrictive environment; overidentification can lead to less effective supports for students who truly do have a disability and need special education.

Al Otaiba et al. (2014) examined the literature and found that RTI was encouraged through the amendments to IDEA to address concerns among researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and parents regarding the “wait to fail” model of identification. RTI is meant to prevent and identify disabilities. The authors explain that there is “converging evidence indicating that prevention was easier and more effective than remediation” (Al Otaiba et al., 2014, p. 129). Yet, the average age of students being identified as having a reading disability was 10 years old, making them not eligible for intensive intervention until then. Concerns were also raised about inaccurate classification and identification of reading disabilities for minority students, including those having low socioeconomic background and those with limited English proficiency. The authors also identified the need for high quality Tier 1 instruction along with identifying students who are at-risk and providing them with interventions that will help them learn the academic skills they lack.

Likewise, Partanen & Siegel (2013) found that “children who fail to acquire reading proficiency by the end of the first grade are unlikely to perform within an average range by the

end of elementary school” (p. 665). These findings show the importance of early intervention in comparison to the wait-to-fail model. In their research, they found that children who were not proficient in reading by the end of first grade were unlikely to perform within the range of average by the end of elementary school. Through their longitudinal study, they found that early identification and quality intervention did provide positive outcomes in the North Vancouver, Canada study. In 30 schools within the North Vancouver district, 22% of kindergarten students were identified to be at-risk for reading deficits. They received reading interventions three to four times each week for 20 minutes each session, as well as tier 1 instruction. When students were tested again in 7th grade, only 6% of students were identified to have reading difficulties. This significant improvement shows that high quality Tier 1 instruction along with targeted Tier 2 instruction can decrease the number of students identified as having a reading disability and requiring special education services.

In Torgessen’s (2014) study conducted in Florida over the course of three years, he found that with appropriate screeners to identify at-risk students and a consistent intervention system, students showed growth. He states that “if we implement [RTI] effectively, we should see both a gradual reduction in the percentage of students who show serious academic performance problems and a reduction in the identification of students for special education services” (Torgessen, 2014, p. 38). The schools in his study implemented Reading First, a program focused on high-quality initial instruction in the classroom with differentiated small-group instruction, meeting students’ needs in a variety of ways (i.e., time, size, focus, and structure). It utilizes reliable screening and progress monitoring and provides interventions for readers who are struggling that are powerful enough to accelerate their development to grade-level standards. Torgessen followed data from 318 schools in Florida implementing Reading First (specifically,

students identified as learning disabled, a percentage of students finishing the year with significant difficulties in reading, and a percentage of students finishing the year reading at or below the 10th percentiles). In each year of the implementation (years 1-3), students in kindergarten-3rd grade showed increasing scores, decreasing the number of students in the above listed areas.

Similarly, Wanzek et al. (2017) conducted a yearlong study on fourth graders in 16 public elementary schools. Fourth grade students were screened using Gates-MacGinire reading tests, by which 451 students were identified as performing below 30%. Using random selection, half the students received the intervention Passport to Literacy and the other half received typical services provided by the school. Students receiving interventions outperformed students receiving only typical school services in reading comprehension. In contrast to Torgesen's study, the specific intervention group did show progress to closing the gap, but neither group demonstrated on-grade level performance by the end of the year. This limited progress could be in part to the study being only a yearlong and conducted on older students, compared to them receiving the specific intervention at an earlier age.

Challenges of RTI Implementation

Implementing Response to Intervention is not without its challenges. Though lawmakers put into effect the need to meet students' needs in their least restrictive environment and utilize interventions, many schools face difficulty in implementation. "Teachers are expected to provide quality instruction in core academic areas; however, given that a large percentage of student struggle in at least one academic area, teaching strategies that engage an entire class at once are often not feasible or effective, as students often need more concentrated instruction to support their learning challenges" (Ross & Begeny, 2015, p. 12). Al Otaiba et al. (2014) found that all 50

states have been identified as utilizing RTI or another multitiered system of support, but only 13 have explicit guidelines. The lack of guidance in RTI leaves much confusion, inconsistency, and lack of accountability for schools in their implementation of the appropriate services to their students with reading deficits.

Werts & Carpenter (2013) conducted a survey to understand the perceptions of special education teachers in the RTI process. The results indicate that special education teachers have an understanding that general education teachers have the most involvement in the RTI process. “Changes in how educators work together are as yet undefined but may include an increased presence for special educators as consultants” (Werts & Carpenter, 2013, p. 253). They explain that for RTI to be implemented well, most persons in a school will have their role impacted. Time and training and defined roles are needed for teachers in regard to RTI.

Benedict et al. (2021) found similar challenges. They found that general and special educators lacked knowledge and understanding in the RTI process and in evidence-based instruction. In a one-year study that provided teachers with professional development and support in Project InSync and Lesson Study, they found that teachers went through three phases of learning before feeling confident and seeing results in their teaching. They start by attempting to comprehend content and integrate it into their daily instructional practices. Next, they begin making connections between Word Study content, pedagogical practices, and student needs, and determining how they could use the strategies in different subject areas. Finally, they discussed how they could use what they were learning to design more coordinated instruction that anticipated all students’ needs. These phases indicate that teachers need strong guidance when implementing something new and time to learn and incorporate it into daily practice. Teachers do not have time to do implement all the phases of RTI on their own and need the whole school

to be a part of the process. “Our findings suggest that if teachers are going to implement coordinated instruction successfully, then they need access to ongoing, collaborative opportunities that provide them with access to the knowledge and skill needed for implementing evidence-based practice, and to plan, observe, and debrief about instruction” (Benedict et al., 2021, p. 154). Administrators must be supportive and provide time for learning and collaboration.

Another study that highlights the need for clear expectations and understanding was conducted by Thomas et al. (2020). “Research has shown that implementation of RTI across the country and even from ‘building to building’ varies greatly” (Thomas et al., 2020, p. 118). According to the survey they presented to 115 respondents from Midwest elementary, middle, and high schools, elementary school teachers found progress monitoring and screening to be the least challenging aspect of RTI. What they found to be most challenging was decision-making with problem-solving teams and scheduling to be the most difficult parts of RTI. The authors emphasize the importance of professional development about RTI for teachers.

Another survey that echoes the lack of understanding of RTI sought to determine the level of teachers’ knowledge of the implementation of RTI. Al Otaiba et al. (2019) conducted a survey of both general and special educators in nine elementary schools across four states. Answering 52 questions using a rating scale of 1-4, teachers were to indicate their understanding of RTI. The results were that teachers have a broad understanding of RTI but do not feel equipped to make data-based instructional decisions. This result reflects the lack of procedural guidance in RTI and the variability in the implementation amongst states and districts.

There is concern that students will not be able to close the gap even with interventions, even if teachers are well-educated and supported in the RTI process. Vaughn et al. (2020)

conducted a 16-week study on fourth grade students to analyze how word reading ability predicted their response to intervention. They found that “very low word reading appears to suppress the effects of intervention even when the intervention is provided in small groups over the course of a year” (Vaughn et al., 2020, p. 423). They also found that the students struggling in upper elementary with comprehension were not the same and would likely benefit from different interventions. This point is key to note that students may not all benefit from the same intervention. If the students in this study could have received a targeted intervention earlier in their school career, they may have been able to respond to the support in place.

Similarly, Kim et al. (2013) conducted a study with first-grade students over the course of a year to examine the effects of phonological, orthographic, and morphological awareness and vocabulary instruction on word reading and spelling abilities. They found that children vary widely in these areas even at the kindergarten and first grade level, so “supplemental intervention at Tiers 2 and 3 could be differentiated as a function of the children’s skill level not only for reading, but also for language” (Kim et al., 2013, p. 339). The authors suggest assessing a student’s abilities in the different linguistic awareness skill areas to best determine the instruction they would benefit from. Not only do teachers need to identify students who are struggling, they need to identify in what areas they are struggling (specific abilities and areas of concern) to differentiate instruction at any tier.

Keys to Successful RTI

Knowing the motivation to appropriately help students who are struggling and to keep them in their least restrictive environment, the literature does provide suggestions for implementing RTI successfully. Schools need to be implementing the pillars of RTI: implementing research-based instruction in classrooms, conducting universal screening,

intervening with increased intensity for students not making adequate progress through tiered interventions and supports, and progress monitoring to make data-based instructional decisions (Werts & Carpenter, 2013). Keys to success in implementation are ensuring early intervention, providing intensive interventions with fidelity, and collaborating within the school system.

Based on a seven-year study in North Vancouver, Canada, that tracked students who struggle with reading and students who are learning English as a second language, Siegel (2020) found that 25% of children with English as a first language and 50% of children with English as an additional language showed significant difficulties in kindergarten and were labeled at risk. By 7th grade, nearly all the children had developed strong reading skills: only 1.5% of both English and EL learners were diagnosed with a reading disability. The intervention used was based on several principles that should be applied to all schools:

- interventions should be implemented as soon as a child displays difficulty
- screeners should be administered as soon as possible to identify potential problems
- classroom instruction should be evidence-based and begin as early as possible
- training should be provided for teachers in developing phonological awareness and phonics skills
- progress monitoring must be ongoing to identify development and difficulties
- the focus should be on the intervention, not on the classification of students.

The author notes the importance of early interventions. MTSS and RTI were meant to replace the “wait to fail” model, but if RTI is not implemented well from kindergarten using the above principles, teachers are essentially still utilizing the “wait to fail” model.

Another study that echoes the findings of Siegel (2020) was conducted by Grapin et al. (2018). For this three-year study, participants were 489 students enrolled in a K-5 public,

university-affiliated research school in Florida. Students received support through RTI at various stages of the implementation process in grade 2 and then assessed in grades 3-5 to analyze the effect of the RTI implementation on student reading achievement. “The results of this study suggest that RTI implementation in the early elementary grades may impact students’ long-term reading achievement” (Grapin et al., 2018, p. 252). Schools need to understand that student achievement is nonlinear, but being diligent to intentionally implement RTI from the start of school will allow students to make the most progress.

Coyne et al. (2018) found in researching literature and their own study that intensive interventions for those struggling with academics (specifically reading) produced meaningful effects on their achievement in reading. While the research does indicate this finding, they acknowledge that evaluations of the nation’s RTI implementation and results are not consistent. In their work, they took data on students from four different school districts in grades 1-3. Students who qualified for Tier 2 support based on DIBELS scores received intervention using Proactive Early Interventions in Reading. They found that Tier 2 interventions showed statistical significance impact on the students’ phonemic awareness and decoding outcomes. The authors state that this “study adds to the growing body of evidence suggesting that schools and teachers can expect positive effects of supplemental, small group reading intervention when they significantly increase instructional intensity and implemented with fidelity and consistency” (Coyne et al., 2018, p. 364).

As mentioned in previous sections, collaboration is another key to success in the implementation process. No longer should general and special education teachers operate independent from each other; in fact, school staff from many areas should come together in collaboration in regard to RTI. Benedict et al. (2013) utilized Lesson Study (which consists of

getting started, analyzing data and studying curriculum, creating aligned goals, designing aligned lessons, teaching lesson, and analyzing with peers) to monitor its effect on the RTI process in Desert Sun Elementary School. What they found after only two rounds of Lesson Study was that teachers became more confident in developing collaboratively planned aligned lessons, lessons were differentiated appropriately to students' needs and stronger in content, and the use of collaboration ensured all students received high-quality instruction. The power of being able to work together to develop high-quality lessons in all tiers that address the specific needs of students allows teachers to feel supported and students to make gains.

In summarizing the keys to success, Higgins Averill et al. (2014) proposed a blueprint to address challenges in helping schools utilize RTI, starting with the issue of time. They suggest providing an intervention block to ensure that all students are able to receive high-quality, evidence-based instruction in the classroom. When differentiated, this core instruction will address the needs of all students and be preventative, which is the base of RTI. Administration also needs to determine and provide professional development so teachers are equipped to deliver interventions. Appropriate universal screeners and resources for interventions must be provided to teachers, and time must be structured to deliver the interventions as well as to engage students not receiving interventions. Collaboration must take place between teachers and administrators to ensure these steps can take place. Administration must be supportive in the RTI implementation by encouraging collaboration and providing time for collaboration between general and special education teachers, along with the time to provide interventions. The authors also emphasize the importance of fidelity in interventions. If teachers and schools are not set up for success, the interventions will not continue, and students will continue to struggle and fail. It is up to administrators and teachers alike to ensure RTI is implemented well.

School Profile

Community Characteristics

Kinsey Elementary School is a part of the Sioux Center Community School district. It is located in a rural, northwest Iowa town with a population of 8,427 people (United States Census Bureau, 2022). The United States Census Bureau (2022) also stated that the largest racial groups in Sioux Center are white (85.9%) and Hispanic (10.7%). The median household income is \$80,955, while 5.3% of the population lives in poverty. Of the population ages 16 and older, 73.7% are in the civilian labor force.

Within the community, there is also a private preschool, a Christian TK-8th grade school, Dordt University, and multiple businesses that support the school in its mission. Businesses and community partners throughout Sioux Center collaborated with the school district to develop a Portrait of a Graduate. They helped define characteristics and skills needed in students as they graduate, begin working, and become active members of the community. These community partners had noticed skills that were lacking and concerning as students entered the workforce. They also are active in the school district by coming in as guest speakers, hosting destinations for field trips, and providing training and work opportunities prior to graduation for field experience.

School District Characteristics

There are five buildings within the district (preschool, elementary, intermediate, middle, and high school). The district's mission statement is to educate the whole student for a whole lifetime. Within the last few years, the district has developed a Portrait of a Graduate; teachers, parents, and community members can understand the values the district strives to develop in students.. These values consist of productive collaboration, skilled communication, community and cultural connections, creativity and innovation, health and wellness, and determined and

empowered learning. The middle and high schools focus more on developing the Portrait of a Graduate, while the elementary and intermediate schools incorporate it into Habits of Mind to work on life/social-emotional skills. The 16 Habits of Mind are persisting, thinking and communicating with clarity and precision, managing impulsivity, gathering data through all senses, listening with understanding and empathy, creating, imagining, innovating, thinking flexibly, responding with wonderment and awe, thinking about thinking (metacognition), taking responsible risks, striving for accuracy, finding humor, questioning and posing problems, thinking interdependently, applying past knowledge to new situations, and remaining open to continuous learning (The Institute for Habits of Mind, 2022).

Both Portrait of a Graduate and Habits of Mind align cohesively with the district's mission to educate the whole student for a whole lifetime. The vision is that the policies, programs, and practices of the Sioux Center Community School District will reflect our commitment to educating a whole student for a whole lifetime. Incorporating Portrait of a Graduate and Habits of Mind aims to develop skills in students that will help them be successful in the world around them, providing them with ways to solve problems and work with others productively. While Sioux Center Community Schools long to provide students with a quality academic education, they understand that a student is more than what facts and concepts they know and understand. They want their students to leave school having both the academic and functional skills to be productive members of the community.

School Building Characteristics

Kinsey Elementary School consists of students in grades Transitional and Junior Kindergarten, Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades. Kinsey Elementary had the following goals for the school year of 2022-2023 (Sioux Center School District, n.d.):

- To improve student achievement in language arts and math in each grade level as measured by performance on local and state assessments. By the end of the 22-23 school year a minimum of 60% of students will demonstrate growth in the areas of math and reading.
- To develop, maintain, and improve rubrics and assessments aligned to the Iowa Core Competencies through annual reviewing and updating of those documents.
- To continue to investigate and reflect annually upon current resources and practices that aid in maximizing student potential.
- By the end of the 2022-23 school year students and staff will continue to develop an understanding of the Habits of Mind and how they contribute to growing our understanding of the Portrait of a Graduate.
- Teachers will engage in continuous learning as well as seek opportunities for leadership development.

For the year 2022-2023, enrollment was marked at 505 students according to Iowa Department of Education (2018). There are three sections of Transitional Kindergarten (8-9 students per section), two sections of Junior Kindergarten (10-11 students per section), and six sections of kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades (17-19 students per section). Demographically, 50.7% are white, 43.8% are Hispanic, 2/8% multi-racial, 1.2% African American, 1% Native American, 0.4% Asian, and 0.2% Pacific Islander. Of all the students, 55% are male and 45% are female. Students on an Individualized Education Program for a documented disability are at 8.5% of students, 35.4% are English Learners, and 39.6% are of low socio-economic status. With a 96.3% attendance rate, Kinsey Elementary is above the state average (92.8%). All teachers have met Iowa Teaching Standards with 43/46 of the teachers obtaining a standard license.

The school offers programs for Title, English learners, high achieving learners, and special education. Every student has access to art, music, physical education, library, computer, and counseling with their general education class. The school has prided themselves in being able to serve a wide variety of student needs through the programs provided and adjusting as needs arise (providing a sensory room, an inclusive playground, fences to increase safety of students who may not understand boundary lines, sensory items to help increase student success in classroom settings, etc.). All of the teacher population in the building are white, and 89% are female. Within the building, 81.1% of teachers are retained, which is slightly lower than the state average of 82.3% (Iowa Department of Education, 2018).

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Kinsey Elementary School utilizes packaged curriculum program for reading (ReadyGEN), phonics (Really Great Reading), and math (GoMath). Really Great Reading is a recent addition due to data displaying deficient phonics skills from ReadyGEN. The school will be changing their math curriculum next school year due to GoMath discontinuing its current publication and branding. The building leadership team analyzed different math curricular options and chose iReady. This new curriculum has a diagnostic tool that allows teachers to accurately assign skills to help address missing or deficient skills/conceptions. Kinsey Elementary School is a standards-based school, utilizing rubrics. While report cards were formerly vague in reporting how students were performing, teachers recently adjusted report cards to explicitly identify how each student was performing on each standard they have learned based on a rubric. Report cards additionally include data from how students performed on district-wide assessments.

Most classrooms follow a schedule of whole-group instruction, followed by small-group instruction. During small-group instruction, students receiving services for English Language instruction, Title, High Achieving Learners, and/or special education leave the general education classroom for instruction out of the classroom. While each classroom has the flexibility to choose how they deliver the curriculum and ensure standards are met, many teachers incorporate Daily 5 or Daily 3 into whole-group instruction. The understanding of differentiation and how it applies to whole-group instruction differs from teacher to teacher. Some teachers are diligent about adjusting the activities and instruction to fit the needs of all students, while others assume the support teachers will adjust instruction in their small-group instruction time.

In the last few years, Sioux Center Community Schools adopted a one-to-one initiative, providing each student with their own device. At Kinsey Elementary School, students are required to leave their device at school, but they can use the device in specials and support classes. One special is computer class, during which they learn technology standards, which are also addressed within the general education classroom. There are varying amounts of technology used within each classroom. Some teachers utilize technology for every subject, every school day, while others use it intermittently.

The building also uses Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to prevent and respond to behaviors and teach expectations. Teachers track behavioral data by writing minor or major reports based on the individual behaviors, which get entered into SWIS (a PBIS application). The four PBIS expectations for all school settings are being respectful, responsible, safe, and caring. These expectations are explicitly taught twice a year (the beginning of the year and reviewed in the second semester). Expectations are also taught to individual students as needed based on behaviors. Teachers are responsible for teaching the expectations of their

classroom, but the principal takes classes to teach how these expectations look on the bus, playground, lunchroom, bathroom, and hallway.

Kinsey Elementary completes a number of assessments throughout the year. While multiple points of data are beneficial for making decisions, a case could be made that students are losing quality instruction time spending so much time taking assessments. Students who struggle with academics often take longer to complete these assessments and may suffer from testing anxiety causing them to take longer to regulate before and after, thus losing more instructional time. The assessments Kinsey Elementary School conducts are Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST), Measures for Academic Progress (MAP), STAR, diagnostic tests, Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screeners (SAEBERS), Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP), and Alternate Assessment.

FAST tests are administered three times each school year. They are used as the universal screener for literacy, evaluating skill deficits with the intention to guide instruction. Early Reading FAST is for students in TK, JK, and kindergarten to evaluate concepts of print, onset/initial sounds, letter names and sounds, rhyming, phoneme blending/segmenting, sight words, decodable word reading/nonsense words, and sentence reading. CBM Reading FAST is administered to students in 1st-3rd grade through grade-level reading passages, tracking fluency and accuracy, with an optional comprehension portion. Tier 2 teams evaluate performance data against norms and class averages to help identify students in need of more intensive support. Students who are identified as “at-risk” are progress monitored weekly.

MAP tests are used district wide. In kindergarten through third grade, MAP tests for reading and math are conducted three times per school year and in third grade for language and science two times per school year. The reading MAP test is broken down into foundational skills,

vocabulary use and functions, literature and informational, and language and writing for kindergarten through second grade. For third grade the reading MAP test breaks into informational text, literary text, and vocabulary. The math MAP test is broken down into numbers and operations, operations and algebraic thinking, geometry, and measurement and data for kindergarten through third grade. Reports generate comparisons, instructional areas for specific skill deficits, and personalized growth goals with the intention to guide instruction.

STAR is another assessment administered for reading and math three to five times per school year, depending on the grade level. The STAR report generates a grade equivalency to see where a student is performing based on what they have shown to understand. The data is used as another point of evidence to identify students needing more intensive support, but it is mostly used to find a student's "best fit" reading level. STAR offers the option to screen, progress monitor, and observe growth comparisons, but Kinsey Elementary School does not use these options.

Kinsey Elementary School has access to a variety of diagnostic assessments (including PRESS and Really Great Reading for literacy and Numeracy Project for math) that are helpful in identifying the lowest skill deficit in order to address those concerns. These assessments are used primarily by special education teachers once students are already identified for special education services. The diagnostic assessments are less formal and conducted one-on-one to identify how the student is performing. The diagnostic assessments are intended to be used by all classroom teachers to guide interventions.

SAEBERS assesses students at risk for social-emotional or behavioral struggles. Teachers fill out the questionnaire for each of their students in their class. In collaboration with teachers, school counselors utilize the information to form one-on-one or small-group meetings

to address the areas of concern. This is a norm-referenced tool to address mental health and social, emotional, and behavioral struggles students may be experiencing.

ISASP is administered once per school year starting in third grade to assess students in reading, language arts, writing, and math. The data is used to meet the requirements of Every Student Succeeds Act. Administration can also utilize the data to develop school-wide goals. Prior to administering the assessment, teachers must complete the training each year. Reports provide information on the Iowa Percentile Rank and student data file layouts.

Lastly, Alternate Assessment is administered to students on IEPs who have a significant cognitive disability. They receive instruction aligned to the Iowa Core but at a reduced breadth, depth, and complexity. Early Literacy Alternate Assessment takes the place of the FAST universal screener and progress monitoring while the Dynamic Learning Maps takes the place of the ISASP. In order for a student to be deemed eligible, the student's IEP team must meet and determine if they are diagnosed with a significant cognitive disability that significantly impacts intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Qualifying students require extensive direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains (Iowa Department of Education, 2022).

Student Performance

According to Iowa Department of Education (2018), Kinsey Elementary School has been labeled as having “acceptable overall performance” scoring 51.33/100. This number is below the state average of 54.65 but not requiring support based on the ESSA cutoff of 44.17. Based on the school's FAST literacy scores, 58% of students tested are benchmarking based on the 2022-2023 school year. Broken down between grade levels, 46% of kindergarten students, 69% of first-grade students, 52% of second-grade students, and 69% of third-grade students are

benchmarking. The schoolwide goal was for 80% of students to hit benchmark scores. Based on math scores, 81% of students are benchmarking based on the 2022-2023 school year, with the goal being 80%.

Based on MAP scores, growth scores indicate how well the school is doing at teaching all learners, and achievement helps identify students who should be receiving extra support. Kinsey Elementary School is in the 54th percentile for growth in reading, 50th percentile for achievement in the winter, and 55th percentile for achievement in the spring of the 2022-2023 school year. In math, Kinsey Elementary School was in the 75th percentile for growth, the 56th percentile in achievement in the winter, and 66th percentile for achievement in the spring.

Professional Development Practices

For the previous two school years (2021-2022, 2022-2023), Sioux Center School District implemented the use of CBE-IC MAP through Area Education Agency (AEA). The motivation for the change was to apply the concept of personalized learning to school district staff, increasing efficacy amongst staff members. At the beginning of the year, teachers took a survey as part of the resource rating themselves, the school building, and district in Mastery Learning, Deeper Learning, Authentic Assessment, Personalized Supports, and Anytime/Anywhere Learning. From there, teachers would identify an area to focus their professional development and develop a goal to which they would work towards for the school year. Throughout each month, the district provided time to work on professional development, time dedicated to the goals developed. For example, if a teacher set their goal to work on interventions and support, they would conduct self-learning with resources provided or found on their own during this time.

Beyond the work done on CBE-IC MAP goals, , the district has provided additional professional development in recent years to address concerns that have been identified, such as

interventions and behavior. The district provided training in Applied Behavior Analysis for special educators to help better educate our students with significant disabilities and consistency with strategies and techniques used between buildings. Special educators were also trained in ACHIEVE due to the state changing the IEP system. To help address concerns with interventions, the district provided training in Numeracy Project (required for all elementary teachers) and Sound Wall (optional for teachers). The intention of these professional development opportunities was to assist teachers in developing personalized learning for their students and to better understand their needs. Social-emotional/behavioral trainings were provided for all teachers from Brian Mendler and Joe Beckman to address mental health and social-emotional/behavioral concerns, providing strategies and perspective on students from hard places and how to support them.

Needs Assessment

Analyzing the school profile allows us to pinpoint the highest area of need. While Kinsey Elementary has many great attributes and strives to meet the needs of a variety of learners, they suffer from a lack of guidance and support in the realm of providing MTSS/RTI and reaching students identified as “at-risk,” as do many schools as discussed in the literature review. Professional development and on-going support in the area of interventions would be most beneficial for Kinsey Elementary. Teachers would be equipped to help and feel supported as they implement new practices to meet the needs of students without continuing a “waiting to fail” model. Students’ needs would be addressed right when the concern arose, and they would be served in their least restrictive environment. The building and district have provided and made available quality resources for teachers, including new curriculum for math and phonics and a variety of diagnostic assessments. With short trainings on these resources (less than one school

day), however, teachers often leave feeling overwhelmed and that they still need to teach themselves how to incorporate the newly learned resources into their classrooms along with the other things they need to accomplish. There also needs to be a specific delegation of tasks and accountability for completing the tasks, such as providing the interventions and conducting the progress monitoring.

Though Kinsey Elementary School does not qualify for needing support based on the ESSA requirements, scoring 51.33 (ESSA required support is 44.17), the school is still scoring below the state average (Iowa Department of Education, 2018). With the right interventions in place for students when they start being identified as “at-risk,” struggling students may be able to bridge the achievement gap and improve performance on state- and district-wide assessments. This score for ESSA is only one example of the need for an improved approach. Looking at the school’s FAST and MAP scores also indicates that the school needs more support in personalized, consistent interventions.

The focus of this school improvement plan is on reading/literacy skills. Kinsey Elementary School stated that their goal was for 80% of their students to meet benchmark. As mentioned previously, only 58% of students benchmarked the universal screener of FAST literacy (FastBridge, 2023). None of the grade levels reached the goal of 80%, but kindergarten was the most concerning (46% of students meeting benchmark). On the other hand, 81% of students were meeting benchmark in math. The building’s MAP scores were more concerning in the area of reading in comparison to math. They were in the 54th percentile for growth in reading, but 75th percentile for growth in math (MAP, 2023).

Due to the scores and the fact that Kinsey Elementary School is changing their math curriculum, addressing math at this time would not be appropriate. Due to the ESA, FAST, and

MAP scores, reading is the greater concern. This should be the focus of the improvement plan, so teachers do not get overwhelmed with trying to learn and change multiple things. Once teachers learn and understand how to appropriately provide interventions for reading, the hope would be that they could generalize the concepts to math in years to follow.

Data Analysis

Reading is an area of concern for Kinsey Elementary, especially the number of students reaching benchmark. Diving into the data broken down between grade levels will provide a better understanding of the need. According to FastBridge (2023), 60% of students met or were above benchmark on the Early Reading test in the winter, and 46% of students met or were above benchmark on the test in the spring. Meanwhile, 40% of the kindergarten students were below benchmark in the winter, but 54% of students were below in the spring. This is alarming that the number of students who met benchmark decreased significantly between winter and spring tests and that over half of the students were below benchmark in the spring. In theory, students should be receiving intervention support to help bridge the gap.

First-grade students took part in two FAST tests, the Early Reading test and CBM Reading. For Early Reading, 68% of students met or were above benchmark in the winter and increased to 70% of students in the spring (leaving 32% of students below benchmark in the winter and 30% in the spring). For CBM Reading, 65% of students met or were above benchmark in the winter and 67% of students in the spring. In the winter 35% of students were below benchmark for that test and 33% in the spring. While these scores do not meet the goal to reach 80% of students making benchmark, these numbers are less concerning due to an increasing number of students meeting benchmark by the end of their first-grade year.

Second-grade students take only CBM Reading. In the winter, 51% of students met or exceeded the benchmark, leaving 49% of students below benchmark. In the spring, scores were only slightly better with 53% of students meeting or exceeding benchmark and 47% of students below benchmark. These numbers are very concerning to have nearly half of the students not meeting benchmark in both test seasons. If one testing season had shown concerning numbers, it could possibly be an anomaly, but both sessions have very similar outcomes.

Third-grade students also took only CBM Reading. For the winter test, 74% of students met or were above benchmark, and 26% of students were below benchmark. In the spring, 69% of students were meeting or above benchmark, with 31% of students below benchmark. Aside from first grade, third graders' scores were the best of the school, but they still were not meeting the goal of 80% of students meeting benchmark, and fewer students were meeting benchmark in the spring session.

Kinsey Elementary School has a schoolwide goal of at least 60% of students demonstrating growth (Sioux Center School District, n.d.). When looking into the MAP scores, kindergarten scored in the 44th percentile for growth. For achievement, they scored in the 52nd percentile in the winter and 46th percentile in the spring. When analyzing the individual classes, they were below the 50th percentile, except one class, which was in the 62nd percentile for growth. It is concerning that achievement decreased from winter to spring and that the growth percentile is below the 50th percentile.

First grade was in the 67th percentile for growth (46th percentile for achievement in the winter and 57th percentile in the spring). Three out of the six classes in first grade exceeded the schoolwide goal by being above the 70th percentile, while the other three were below the 55th percentile. While the grade meets the goal, it is concerning that only half of the classes are

actually meeting the goal when looking at the numbers. All classes showed an increase in achievement from winter to spring, which is a strength for the grade.

Second grade was in the 42nd percentile for growth, 47th percentile for achievement in the winter, and 54th percentile for achievement in the spring. There was only one class (out of six) that made the schoolwide goal by being in the 62nd percentile for growth, while all the others were below the 50th percentile. All classes showed an increase in percentile for achievement from winter to spring, with the exception of one class that decreased ten percentiles. While the increase in achievement is encouraging, it is concerning that the majority of the grade is so far below the schoolwide goal.

Third grade had some positive scores by being in the 70th percentile for growth, 50th percentile for achievement in the winter, and 59th percentile in the spring. All classes exceeded the schoolwide growth goal except for one. Likewise, all classes showed an increase in achievement apart from one class (which was a different class than the one not meeting the growth goal). Third grade appears to have the strongest scores showing growth and increasing achievement.

Figure 1 (below) shows that Kinsey Elementary School does a great job of screening their students but struggles to get their students to benchmark according to Panorama Education (2023). Some alarming numbers are displayed in Figure 2 (below) that reflect the data previously explained. None of the grades meet the goal of progress monitoring 90% of students at-risk, and only one grade identified interventions that were implemented for students at-risk. The low percentages for progress monitoring in kindergarten and second grade reflect the scores on the assessments discussed above.

Figure 1

Percentages of Students Being Screened and of Students Reaching Benchmark

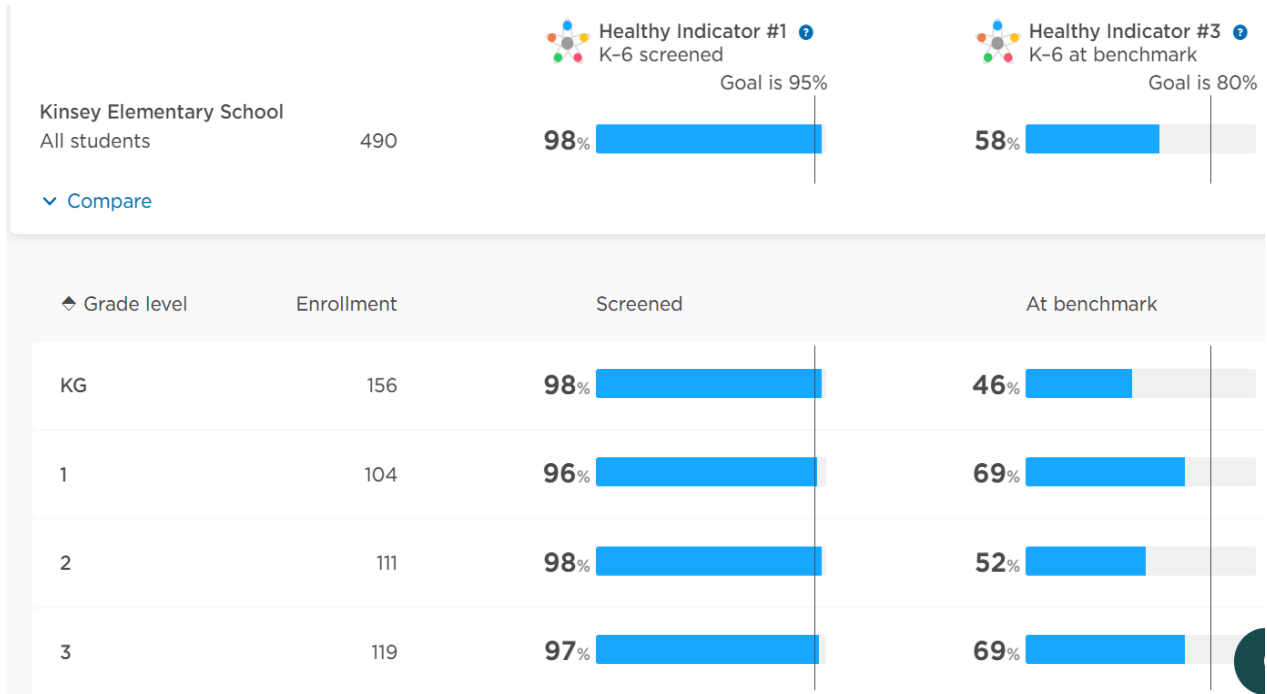
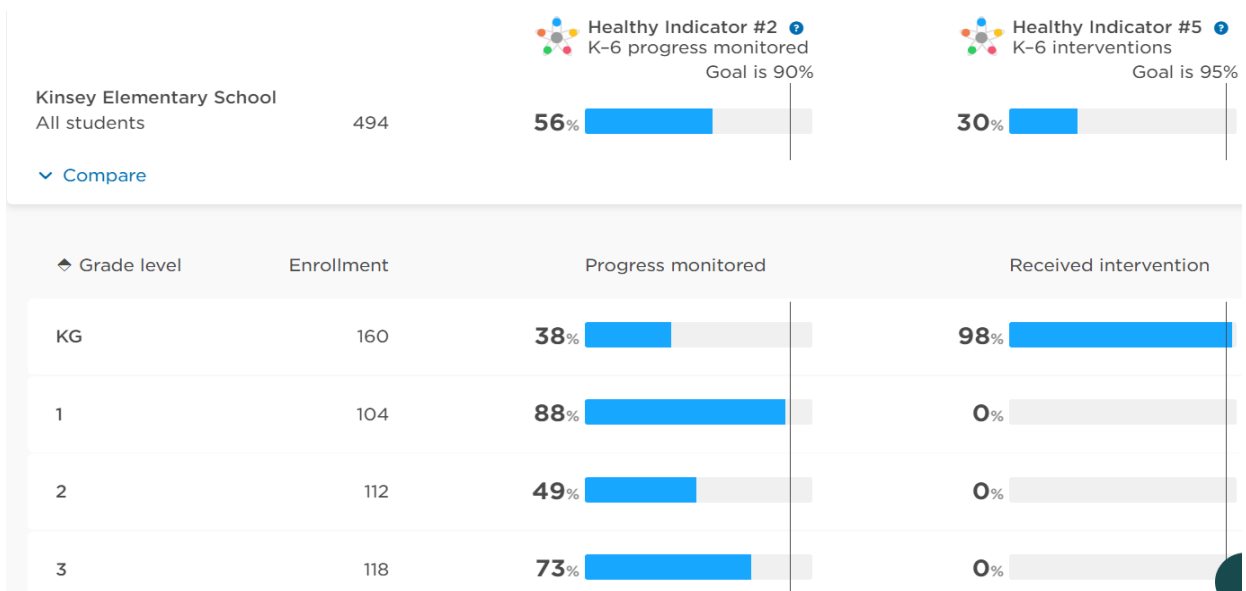


Figure 2

Percentage of Students Being Progress Monitored and Students Receiving Recorded Interventions



Analyzing the data from Kinsey Elementary School shows the need for better practices in providing interventions and accountability in progress monitoring. Most scores do not meet the goals put in place by the administration or Iowa Department of Education. Arguably, the student scores indicate that students' needs are not being met. Implementing appropriate interventions when students first show signs of being at-risk on universal screeners and consistent progress monitoring will help improve students' scores on assessments, including universal screeners. With strong training in RTI and continual support, teachers will feel confident to meet the needs of the diverse learners at Kinsey Elementary School.

Action Plan

Key components to Response to Intervention (RTI) include administering universal screeners, providing tiered interventions with increased intensity based on student needs, and progress monitoring to make data-based instructional decisions (Werts & Carpenter, 2013). Based on the data, a strength of Kinsey Elementary School is teachers conducting universal screeners in an appropriate time frame with their students. Beyond this assessment, teachers would benefit from training in RTI, collaboration, and support in implementing the process. Siegel (2020) identified key principles to successful RTI implementation based on the seven-year study conducted in North Vancouver, Canada: interventions should be implemented as soon as a child displays difficulty, screeners should be administered as soon as possible to identify potential problems, classroom instruction should be evidence-based and begin as early as possible, training should be provided for teachers in developing phonological awareness and phonics skills, progress monitoring must be ongoing to identify development and difficulties, and the focus should be on the intervention, not on the classification of students.

The first step is for teachers to be adequately trained. Before the school year begins, Area Education Agency (AEA) staff would meet with all the elementary school teachers to provide professional development in RTI. While some teachers or even grades of teachers may have a strong grasp of RTI, explaining the basic principles would help everyone have a common understanding and language. Teachers should see the data and the problem to be motivated to make the change. After looking at universal screening scores, teachers would learn how to interpret the scores and identify students who need interventional instruction. Teachers can be trained in utilizing the diagnostic assessments already provided by Kinsey Elementary School, including Press and Really Great Reading.

“Armed with information about their students’ strengths and needs, teachers should plan instruction and interventions based on expectations for the grade level—as expressed in the content and performance standards—and on students’ current performance profiles” (Fisher & Frey, 2010, p. 21). Teachers will be trained to look for patterns to create small groups for interventions that target students’ deficient skills. If a large percentage of the class is lacking skills, teachers need to analyze core instruction. According to Fisher & Frey (2010), Tier 1 instruction needs to not only be high quality, but responsive and scaffolded so all students can benefit. AEA staff and instructional coaches are available to problem-solve and support teachers in ensuring they are using evidence-based practices and reaching all types of learners in their classroom. Teachers and support staff can schedule to collaborate or even observe to help enhance the classroom teacher’s approaches. “Approximately 75-85 percent of students should make sufficient progress through core instruction alone” (Fisher & Frey, 2010, p. 24). When more than 25% of students appear to require additional help, it is time to evaluate core instruction.

As identified in several studies, collaboration is one of the key components to teachers being able to implement RTI well. Benedict et al. (2013) found that when teachers had specific time to collaborate between general and special educators, confidence rose. Students began receiving higher-quality instruction that was appropriately differentiated and stronger content. At Kinsey Elementary School, teachers of different support areas often operate separately apart from determining times for students to be pulled out of the classroom and administering assessments. Teachers must work congruently to align and differentiate their lessons.

As teachers work together to identify who would benefit from an intervention beyond the evidence-based core instruction, they will be trained in appropriate phonics instruction. David A. Kilpatrick (2015) identified three practices that should take place in every intervention for struggling readers: phonological and phonemic awareness, explicit and systematic phonics instruction that is scaffolded and builds on prior knowledge, and practice using phonics skills with connected/decodable texts. As teachers utilize the resources provided by Kinsey and any supplemental resources, they will understand how to implement an intervention and track progress monitoring. Administration will review how to use the FAST website to track interventions and progress monitor.

After training, teachers will meet monthly with the RTI team (instructional coach, AEA staff, a special education teacher, Title 1 teacher, and general education teachers). These meetings are already in place at Kinsey, but do not involve discussions about specific interventions and problem-solving. Here, teachers will specifically discuss progress monitoring data and the specific intervention used. Teachers may seek input in interventions, strategies, etc. AEA staff and the instructional coach will guide the discussions to help teachers gain confidence in seeking input and understanding of the process. These meetings will also hold teachers

accountable for implementing the intervention and conducting progress monitoring. Decisions will be made based on progress monitoring data whether a student needs further support, an alternate intervention/strategy, or a decrease in support. AEA staff, instructional coaches, and support staff will provide on-going support beyond these meetings through collaboration time to ensure everyone is aligned in their teaching and feeling equipped and comfortable in their strategies.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

Resources Needed

Kinsey Elementary School has access to many resources that aid RTI implementation, so they will not need to purchase any new resources. Rather, teachers will be trained and supported in using them accurately and with fidelity. AEA staff assigned to Kinsey Elementary School are well-educated and readily available. The instructional coach will be another vital resource in this improvement plan. The FastBridge (2023) website will be a stopping point for universal screening, marking the intervention used, and progress monitoring. For diagnostic assessments and interventions, teachers will be using Really Great Reading and Press. To keep track of interventions and plans, teachers will be using Iowa Area Education Agencies' website for General Education Instructional Plan (2023). The only other resource needed for this plan is time—time to learn and put the practices into action, and time to meet and collaborate.

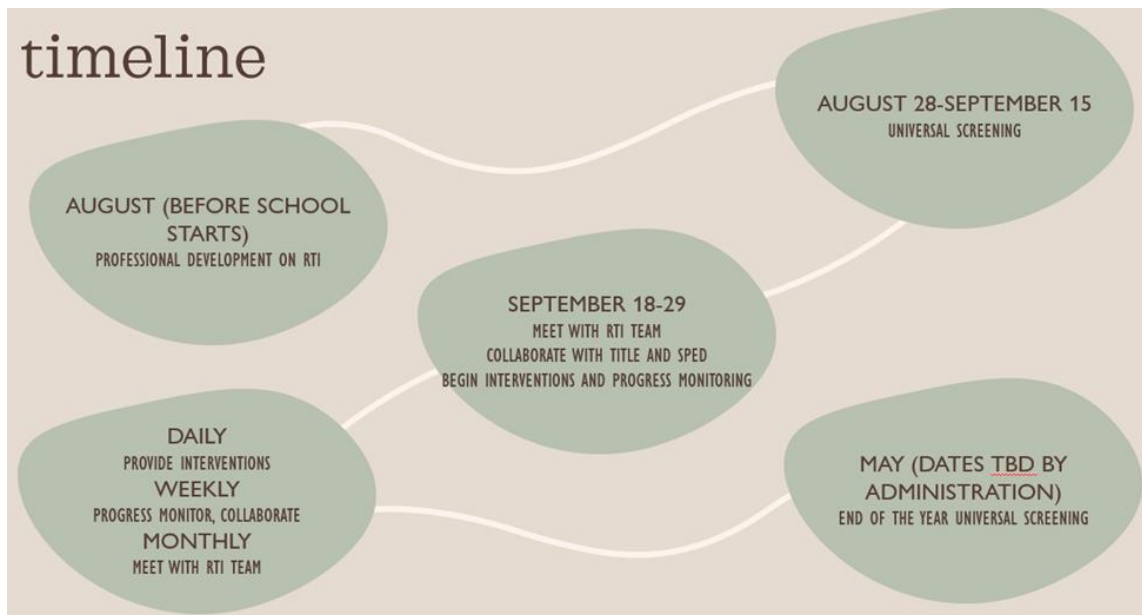
Timeline and Responsibilities

This improvement plan will begin before school starts to educate teachers about the plan for the school year and help equip them with the knowledge to make the changes for the school year (see Figure 3 below for an overview of the timeline). The professional development will be led by AEA staff and Kinsey Elementary School's instructional coach. Administration should

have teachers plan to attend the training for the day. Teachers who have been using the resources (such as Really Great Reading and Press) can contribute by providing valuable feedback and tips for implementing the system into their schedule. Since some staff members may be overwhelmed with the training, there will be a brief meeting held after universal screeners are administered to students (around the third week of school) during the professional development hour on Wednesday to go over how to access and use FastBridge for progress monitoring and determining an intervention. Administration will lead the meeting about accessing and using the FastBridge system.

Figure 3

Overview of the Timeline



Once teachers have been trained and conducted the universal screener, they will identify students who are “at risk” and in need of Tier 2 support through intervention (keeping in mind that if more than 25% of the students are below benchmark, core instruction must be addressed). To identify deficient skills, teachers will use Really Great Reading to identify the lowest skills and begin intervention instruction and progress monitoring. General education teachers must

collaborate with Title 1 teachers immediately following universal screening. AEA staff will help teachers create intervention plans and show them how to utilize Iowa Area Education Agencies' website for a General Education Instructional Plan (2023) to track the intervention. Historically, many teachers at Kinsey Elementary School have completed progress monitoring without collaborating to create an intervention or providing one. Utilizing this website in combination with FastBridge progress monitoring will help track data to evaluate interventions and their effectiveness.

According to IRIS Center (2023), Tier 2 instruction (interventions) may be provided by the general education teacher or another trained adult: "If Tier 2 intervention is provided by someone other than the general education teacher, collaboration between the teachers is particularly important so that the intervention program is aligned with Tier 1 instruction" (IRIS Center, 2023). During the meetings for collaboration, it will be of utmost importance to determine who will be implementing the intervention or if it will be a combination of the two teachers and to determine whether the instruction is based on and supports Tier 1 instruction. Based on numbers for the grade level that the Title 1 teacher serves, administering the intervention may have to be divided amongst the two teachers based on where students fall in their scores and skills. Teachers may choose to group students from other grade level classrooms to create small groups that are working on similar skills, balancing that benefit with the benefit of serving students within the general education setting. The teacher providing the intervention is responsible for progress monitoring weekly.

Monthly meetings will be scheduled (one grade level per week) to meet as an RTI team. The team will consist of AEA staff, instructional coach, grade level teachers, Title 1 teachers for the specific grade, and a special education teacher. AEA staff bring in an outside view that can

help see the big picture, such as when core instruction may need to be evaluated or alternate interventions attempted. The instructional coach can identify patterns of problems, especially with core instruction, and provide means for improvement, but also give input on intervention instruction. Grade-level teachers are necessary to relay the data and discuss what they have been implementing with their students. They can provide feedback to each other about the standards and curriculum. Title 1 teachers should be present to collaborate with general education teachers and align what they are teaching. The special education teacher can provide helpful insight and assistance in scaffolding and differentiating to help meet the needs of all students in the classroom.

During the monthly RTI meetings, the team may notice that it is difficult to fit the agenda within the time frame allotted (one hour). In this case, collaboration between general educators and Title 1/special educators may take place in an alternate collaboration time (such as after school, lunch recess, or specials classes for that grade level). Another option would be for teachers needing to evaluate and adjust core instruction to meet with the instructional coach and possibly AEA staff during a separate meeting. It is of utmost importance to prioritize collaboration for effective RTI to take place. If teachers encounter difficulty finding common scheduling time, they should discuss options with administration.

Monitoring for Success

Accountability will be held monthly during the RTI meetings to determine if students are being instructed according to their needs and if progress is being monitored with fidelity. Administration, AEA staff, and/or the instructional coach can look at the FAST website for progress monitoring and Iowa AEA's website for instructional plans to make data-based decisions. If an intervention has not been implemented and monitored with fidelity, decisions

regarding if a student requires a more intensive intervention cannot be made. For many teachers, these systems will be unfamiliar and may require extra support and check-ins to assist them in implementation with fidelity.

Proof of the improvement plan's effectiveness will be seen in increased skills of students. This evidence can be found in progress monitoring data, universal screening, and assessment scores. Universal screeners will continue to be administered three times each year to identify if students can move Tiers according to performance. If a different student appears to be struggling, they can start receiving an intervention. If a student has made effective progress, they may be able to be moved down to Tier 1 instruction without intervention supports. Teachers must keep in mind that differentiation is key in Tier 1 to promote success of all types of learners. Without differentiation, more students will struggle and be identified as "at-risk." Using the perspective of other teachers, such as special education teachers, general educators should collaborate to identify ways to differentiate their instruction for the benefit of their students. Looking at growth and data from the end of the year scores (and even tracking scores over several years) will give a broader idea of whether the plan was successfully implemented or if teachers need further support, guidance, and accountability.

Conclusion

The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA encouraged and incorporated a process of interventions to assist students identified as "at-risk" to address the rise of students being evaluated and needing special education services. Previously, schools waited for students to fail before providing additional academic support. MTSS and RTI were developed to meet a student's academic needs before they were failing in the general education classroom. Despite this initiative, research has shown that there is very little guidance provided by the Department of

Education, with implementation left to each state or each individual school (Berkeley et al., 2020). Teachers lack understanding of who is responsible for what, a confusion that leads to inaction (Werts & Carpenter, 2013).

RTI is built upon the key components of high-quality core instruction, universal screening, intensive interventions, regular progress monitoring, and utilizing data to make instructional decisions. When RTI is executed to its fullest potential, students are able to learn in their least restrictive environment as well as reach their fullest potential. To be successful, teachers must spend time intentionally collaborating to reach all learners within all environments. Trying to reach a wide variety of learners along with meeting the standards, conducting assessments, etc. can be an overwhelming task. When support and collaboration are purposefully scheduled, teachers can learn from each other and share the responsibility.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to enhance the capacity of teachers at Kinsey Elementary School to meet the needs of all learners. With this plan, teachers will be trained and equipped to screen and identify students who are at-risk, choose and implement the appropriate intervention with fidelity, progress monitor weekly, make data-based decisions, and collaborate with support teachers. This plan incorporates support from experts (the instructional coach and AEA staff) and regular, intentional collaboration to help teachers feel confident and equipped to follow the RTI process. An accountability and support system will be in place with monthly RTI team meetings to ensure students are receiving the appropriate intervention and being progress monitored, while also problem-solving any issues that arise.

Given the data, Kinsey Elementary School is inadequately meeting the needs of their students in the area of reading. More than 20% of students are not reaching benchmark, nor are they receiving intentional interventions, being progress monitored with fidelity, or making

growth in the assessments. With this improvement plan, teachers will learn the RTI process, have defined roles of responsibilities, and have support and guidance throughout the school year.

Instruction on all tiers will be intentional and high-quality. When student needs are addressed at the first time of showing signs of struggling, they are more likely to make gains and grow academically.

Response to Intervention through MTSS can meet the needs of students who are struggling instead of waiting for them to fail before identifying intensive supports for them. Due to the lack of guidance provided to states and schools in implementing RTI, schools and their teachers are often uncertain on the process of RTI and who is responsible for the tasks. By installing a strong system for RTI through training, support, and collaboration, students at all tiers are able to be served well and make gains. When educators prioritize working together to meet the needs of their diverse student population, students are able to meet their fullest potential.

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