

SAU Implementation of
Response to Intervention: A Case Example



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Section One: Background

A. Project Background

NH RESPONDS (July 2008 – December, 2012) was a Professional Development Project of the New Hampshire Department of Education emphasizing high quality practices in literacy, behavior, and secondary transition services blended together in a Response to Intervention model. This 5-year, \$3.85 million State Personnel Development Grant was awarded to the state of New Hampshire's Department of Education from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. Primary partners included the NH Department of Education, New Hampshire Center for Effective Behavioral Interventions and Supports (NH CEBIS at SERESC), Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire (IOD at UNH), and Parent Information Center, along with several institutions of higher education (<http://www.education.nh.gov/nhresponds/index.htm>, 2012). One component of this project included demonstration of a blended Response to Intervention model in NH schools.

NH RESPONDS collaborated with five SAUs to design, demonstrate, and evaluate a blended RTI model addressing academics (literacy) and behavior for children and youth in early childhood education (ECE), elementary, and high school¹. Project sites received training, technical assistance and support to their SAU-wide administrative team as well as their ECE and school teams. The assistance helped SAUs as they

- identified components of a locally-adapted RTI model,
- enhanced their infrastructure to support the model, and
- initiated implementation of a comprehensive and integrated approach to literacy and behavior support.

The NH RESPONDS framework was designed to help educators and policy makers make strategic decisions regarding the design and sustained implementation of RTI. Once implementing the RTI model, specific outcomes were expected, including (a) improved social/emotional skills, (b) improved acquisition and use of literacy knowledge and skills, (c) reductions in major problem behaviors, suspensions, expulsions, and dropping out of school, and (d) increased rates of graduation, competitive employment, and enrollment in postsecondary education.

Our ultimate goal for this document is to highlight one example of a district's process used to design, document, and initiate implementation of a system-wide approach to RTI.

¹ Middle schools were included as part of SAU leadership teams, but demonstration of the model at the Middle Schools was not targeted. This decision was based on SAU priorities.

B. Background and Profile of SAU

Considered to be an urban district, the total enrollment in the district is 1,950 students. This community settled before 1700 as an early mill town and currently has a population of approximately 12,000. This SAU is comprised of two districts: one district of one elementary school (grades 1-6); one district of an early childhood program, two elementary schools; a shared middle school and high school. In 2010-2011 one district went through some changes that resulted in a new elementary school (grades PK 1-5) being built, one elementary School (grades 1-4) being closed, and some shifts in grades and staffing at the new elementary school (from grades P K, 1-4 to K, 1-5).

Demographics

Total Enrollment	1,950
Students identified as students with disabilities	22%
Students identified as economically disadvantaged	46%
Students identified as minority	15%
Students identified as English language learners	5%

In the first year that the SAU participated in NH RESPONDS, training and technical assistance was initiated with the early childhood program and one elementary school. In the second year, a second elementary school and the high school were added. A SAU Leadership Team met regularly through the first two years to review activities at the project sites and to describe a common set of components that might apply across the entire PK-12 system. This team was comprised of three SAU office personnel (Superintendent, Asst. Superintendent, Special Education Director), at least one lead administrator from each school (Principal or Assistant Principal), and a sampling of teaching staff with expertise in either literacy or behavior (e.g., general education teacher, special education teacher, reading specialist, counselor).

During the first three years, the SAU experienced turnover in several key positions: Superintendent (twice), Assistant Superintendent (twice), Special Education Director, and two school principals.

Section Two: Emergence of Design Teams

The impetus of RTI Design Teams emerged from three interest areas and circumstances: implementing consistent RTI practices across all elementary schools; creating a SAU-wide, PK-12 model; and manualizing the model.

The leadership of the schools and the SAU shared a vision where students, a significant proportion of whom move to different schools during their elementary years, would have a consistent educational experience – even if they were transitioning among the schools. Across the three elementary schools (2 were project sites in one district, the third was not a project site and was in a different district) there were differences in the teaching philosophies and practices as well as the level of RTI implementation. The administrators agreed that before trying to change practices at the schools, a team of representative stakeholders should work toward consensus of the features of the RTI model. Thus, the Elementary Design Team was convened.

With the commitment to SAU-wide standards of RTI practice, shortly after the Elementary Design Team initiated their work, a Middle – High School (6-12) Design Team was assembled. The split in design efforts from the SAU-level to the two age-group teams reflected recognition of needs by faculty and staff to move through the consensus phase (exploration and adoption) using examples that were most relevant to their day-to-day experience. SAU administrators attended and participated in the dialogue for both Design Teams. Following the consensus among members of Design Teams, the documents would be aligned and synthesized into a SAU-wide model by the SAU Leadership Team.

Finally, wanting to increase the likelihood of sustainability of the SAU model, the Leadership Team fully documented their recommended model. The leaders recognized the importance of creating a manual that could exist beyond any one person's employment (i.e., regardless of changing administrators or faculty/staff, the implementation of RTI would be more likely to continue) and beyond the assistance provided through the NH RESPONDS project. The schools and SAU could then provide training and coaching focused on the agreed-upon model. Formal updates to the model would be based on data from agreed upon, outcome and process measures across the system.

A. Structure of the RTI Design Team

Structure of the Elementary Design Team

Stakeholder representation of the Elementary Design Team included: administration (1 required per building); general education grade level representation (minimum 1 general education teacher per grade within the entire group, not per building, K-5); special education; reading/literacy specialists; behavior/school counselors; and rotating attendance from SAU administrators (Special Ed Director then Assistant Superintendent) . There was no family representation on the Elementary Design Team.

The meetings were facilitated by NH RESPONDS staff member. The facilitator set the agendas, guided a consensus model in decision making, focused the group effort, and attended to momentum throughout the duration. NH RESPONDS provided literacy and behavior expertise in the form of presentations, resource documents, and coaching as needed.

Early meetings emphasized agreement on the process for the work, group norms, and a collaborative decision-making structure. An iterative design process was adopted. This included team members working through their agreement with various features of a model, vetting those features with the Leadership Teams of their respective schools, and returning to the Design Team to work toward consensus. (School Leadership Teams were expected to vet the features with faculty/staff and provide feedback to their Design Team representatives.)

The Elementary Design Team adopted group norms based on the work of The Adaptive Schools (Garmston & Wellman, 2006).



Seven Norms of Collaboration

1. Promoting a Spirit of Inquiry

Exploring perceptions, assumptions, beliefs, and interpretations promotes the development of understanding. Inquiring into the ideas of others before advocating for one's own ideas is important to productive dialogue and discussion.

2. Pausing

Pausing before responding or asking a question allows time for thinking and enhances dialogue, discussion, and decision-making.

3. Paraphrasing

Using a paraphrase starter that is comfortable for you (So or As you are or You're thinking) and following the starter with an efficient paraphrase assists members of the group in hearing and understanding one another as they converse and make decisions.

4. Probing

Using gentle open-ended probes or inquiries (Please say more about or I'm interested in or I'd like to hear more about or Then you are saying) increases the clarity and precision of the group's thinking.

5. Putting ideas on the Table

Ideas are the heart of meaningful dialogue and discussion. Label the intention of your comments. For example: Here is one idea or One thought I have is or Here is a possible approach or Another consideration might be.

6. Paying Attention to Self and Others

Meaningful dialogue and discussion are facilitated when each group member is conscious of self and of others, and is aware of what (s)he is saying and how it is said as well as how others are responding. This includes paying attention to learning styles when planning, facilitating, and participating in group meetings and conversations.

7. Presuming Positive Intentions

Assuming that others' intentions are positive promotes and facilitates meaningful dialogue and discussion, and prevents unintentional put-downs. Using positive intentions in speech is one manifestation of this norm.

Structure of the 6-12 RTI Design Team

While the Elementary Design Team and the SAU Leadership Team were regularly meeting, having meaningful two-way dialogue about the critical components of RTI, and implementing the framework of RTI, the stakeholders from the high school on the SAU Leadership Team realized the same two-way conversations back to the high school were not at the same level as elementary schools. At this time, the principal of the high school was the only representative at the table and the only liaison between the SAU Leadership Team and high school's own leadership team. Another contributing factor was the fact there was underrepresentation of administration at the middle school level, as they did not apply to be part of this grant initiative. However, to develop consistency among the district and considering the changes among administration throughout the district, it was decided to invite the middle school administrator to be part of the 6-12 Design Team. The SAU Leadership team charged the building

administrators to invite middle school and high school representatives to form a 6-12 Design team to have more voice at the table and create shared understand to move forward.

The structure then began with stakeholder representation across administration from both middle school and high school (1 required per building); general education teachers in specific content areas (1 Social Studies, 2 English, 1 Wellness, 1 Math); behavior representatives (the district school psychologist and special ed case manager/behavior specialist at the middle school); rotating attendance from SAU administrators (Special Ed Director /Assistant Superintendent/ Superintendent rotated attendance). There was no family representation on the 6-12 RTI Design Team.

The purpose of the team was to:

- Examine the critical features drafted by the SAU LT team
- Discuss what these critical components would look at the middle school /high school level
- Recruit internal implementation drivers and build greater awareness of RTI back at the building level
- Ensure there was shared leadership represented across content areas and specialties.

There was collaboration with outside partners involved in the project bringing specific skills sets to assist the teams in their work. The meetings were facilitated by, JoAnne Malloy and Kathy Francoeur from the Institute on Disability at UNH, with assistance from Leigh Rohde, also from Institute on Disability at UNH. The facilitators set agendas; established understanding of shared decision making; built a consensus model within the group on levels of agreement; and, the facilitators maintained group focus and momentum. Ongoing roles and a communication plan were established at the meetings. JoAnne Malloy provided expertise and education on RTI and the critical components to develop common language.

B. Relationship with the SAU

Elementary Design Team

Communication and collaboration between the Elementary School Design Team and the SAU Leadership Team was an essential ingredient in designing the overall framework of RTI across the district. SAU officials served as representatives on both teams as well as building principals. One other member from each elementary school also sat on the SAU Leadership Team (a general education teacher, and two reading specialists). Updates on the Elementary Design Teams activities and action steps were reported at each SAU Leadership Team allowing the

leadership team members to ask probing questions about process, outcomes, and implications for the system. This 2-way communication was essential as the Elementary Design Team would report back to each of their buildings leadership teams to review and give input on design considerations.

6-12 RTI Design Team

With both SAU administrators as consistent stakeholders to the 6-12 Design Team, it gave focus, clear communication and collaboration between the SAU Leadership Team and the 6-12 Design Team. These critical representatives could help vet the work between the groups as well as with the Elementary Design Team as they were involved on all three teams. The high school principal served on both the 6-12 Design and the SAU Leadership Team; therefore, could give regular updates on 6-12 activities and next steps reported at each SAU Leadership Team. Two-way communication was facilitated through clarifying questions about process and agreement. At end of process the 6-12 RTI Design Team reported back to their school leadership teams to review and give input on design considerations. A major discussion involved restructuring of the teams to build momentum around RTI and start initial plans to roll out to the staff.

C. Processes

Elementary Design Team

Identifying and defining the critical components of RTI at the elementary level was essential in the first steps of the process. The “Practice Profile Template” (Appendix) was a tool that helped assist the discussion and attention of the members on defining the critical component and their descriptions. NH RESPONDS staff provided a suggested list of the critical components to further educate and facilitate discussion among the Elementary Design Team members to help them reach consensus. The team established shared decision making via consensus, “Levels of Agreement”, for each critical component description. Shared Leadership was also established by representation from each building and clear expectations that the representatives engage buildings Leadership Team. This shared leadership helped foster each building’s ownership of the features and gave “non-members” an avenue for meaningful participation. The work at this level was linked with the SAU Leadership team, whose role was defined with the ultimate deciding body. This helped promote sustainability; whereas, if they wanted to describe something in a way that was inconsistent with NH Responds (or what NH Responds knew to be “best practice”) the discrepancy was named, teaching team members about the discrepancy, and then, ultimately, let them choose and own the decision via “Levels of Agreement”:

Fingers	Level of Consensus
1	I strongly support this decision
2	I support this decision
3	The decision is OK; I may have minor reservations but will support the wisdom of the group.
4	I have major reservations that need to be addressed before I can support the decision.
5	I do not support this decision and will work against it.

6-12 RTI Design Team

To help provide clarity of vision, it was necessary for the team to first begin by developing a clear mission statement to give focus and purpose to their work.

An example of the 6-12 RTI Design Team Mission:

To draft a sustainable, common SAU RTI system for grades 6-12 including team structures, decision rules and criteria for data based decision making, tiered instruction and progress monitoring that can be implemented with fidelity across the middle and high schools

Prior to the development of this team, there had not been any substantive communication at the building level on RTI. It was necessary to first provide team members some education on RTI and defining the critical components. Next, the team broke into small groups to complete the work by Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3. This was decided by the group members based on their experience and knowledge base with each tier. The small groups continually reported back to large group to review the work and get feedback on the essential features.

The team established shared decision making via consensus “Levels of Agreement” for each critical component description. When team needed clarity on terms, further research was provided by the NH Responds facilitators and given to teams to increase their knowledge base. Shared leadership was established by representatives from each building with the expectation of the representatives to engage building leadership teams to foster ownership of the features and give “non-members” an avenue for meaningful participation. The work at this level was linked with the SAU Leadership team, whose role was defined with the ultimate deciding body. To promote sustainability, if the team wanted to describe something in a way that was inconsistent with NH Responds (or what was considered to be “best practice”), the discrepancy was named, teaching around the discrepancy occurred by the facilitators and brought back to

the SAU Leadership Team to be vetted, and then, ultimately, let them choose and own the decision via the consensus model.

D. Time Line and Reflections

Elementary Design Team JANUARY – AUGUST 2011

In developing the design of RTI and considering the restructuring of personnel due to the new elementary school, it was imperative that each principal from each of the three elementary schools convene to discuss the consistency of the model across the system. Many shifts in the district were occurring with two principals shifting schools, an elementary was closing and a new elementary school was opening Fall 2011. At the same time, the elementary school in the neighboring town was preparing for a new principal over the summer. One principal was part of this group from the beginning and first to learn about RTI and was in a leadership position by Summer 2011.

In February 2011, an Elementary Design Team convened which included a 5th grade representative. This stakeholder position was important as by the Fall of 2011 the current 5th grade teachers were shifting from the middle school to the elementary schools. They met several times in Spring-early Summer 2011. The significant shifts and change in positions was a critical in the planning process to guarantee the work around RTI would continue with momentum.

This change in membership in Fall 2011 did set the group back to reestablish group identity, reset norms and decision making processes, and re-exploration of some features. It was discovered that the full building was not kept as “in the loop” as had been intended by the last representatives of the Elementary Design Team. Neither was there a method of cross-school conversations happening at Middle or High School until Fall 2011. The Elementary Design Team meet regularly through Fall, Winter, and into Spring 2012 to finish iterative development process.

SPRING 2012

Part of Spring 2012 work included reviews of and revisions of the “Glossary” for the SAU manual. Developing consensus and shared vision and understanding around the definitions was imperatives discussions to have between all levels in moving forward with the model.

6-12 RTI Design Team

SUMMER 2011

In August of 2011, realization by the SAU Leadership Team and NH Responds facilitators was that the buildings were at different places with the understanding of RTI and consensus around it. To help facilitate consistency across the district there needed to bring more middle school and high school representatives to the table as stakeholders in the process.

FALL 2011

On September 13, 2011, the 6-12 RTI Design Team was established. Group membership was confirmed, introductions and the purpose of team was presented and discussed. NH Responds facilitators (Michael McSheehan and JoAnne Malloy) described the SAU work from the beginning to present. Team roles and group norms were established, as well as a clear mission statement. This process was facilitated by JoAnne Malloy and Kathy Francoeur from the Institute of Disability at UNH. JoAnne Malloy educated the team on creating an RTI framework to guide their work and systemize their practices. Michael McSheehan from the Institute of Disability at UNH established current knowledge and understanding of RTI with the team.

The 6-12 RTI Design team created timeline of work establishing a commitment to process, and to keep focused on the work, as well as deadlines in mind. On October 11, 2011 the team reviewed the “Big Ideas of RTI”. Kathy Francoeur and JoAnne Malloy shared data with team on their previous knowledge and how it compares to the Big Ideas of RTI by Harkin. A decision was made to work in small groups to complete the features of RTI across the 3 tiers using the “Big Ideas” and knowledge of the team members, as well as feedback from the SAU Leadership Team. October 25, 2011 the team continued drafting critical features of RTI across the tiers and reported back to large group. In November, the team began aligning the work with the manual developed by the SAU Leadership Team. A communication plan was developed back to the schools to help create buy in and educate the leadership teams, as well as the staff. The 6-12 RTI Design Team conveyed the message that RTI is a framework, not a program and the work of the 6-12 Design Team provides an organizational framework at the school level, while establishing consistency district-wide. This communication plan enabled people to use understand common language in regards to RTI.

WINTER 2011-2012

Vocabulary discussions occurred, starting December 11, 2011 to build consensus around common language. The team, along with the NH Responds facilitators, clarified the notion of evidence based/ research based practices. Group norms, terms of collaboration and shared decision making were reviewed. Education was provided to the team by JoAnne Malloy on “Managing Complex Change”, adapted from Knoster (2000) as well to “Stages of Implementation” by Fixsen, Blasé, 2005. Bruce Tuckman's Team Development Stages Model (1965), was also reviewed with the team December so they could better understand the glossary completed by the SAU 56 Leadership Team and reached consensus on evidence based practices. The time line was reviewed to complete the work.

In January 2012 the drafts of the documents created by the 6-12 RTI teams were reviewed. The communication plan back to the schools was finalized.

On February 6, 2012 organizational structures existing at each building and how these structures will carry out the work to embed RTI as the ongoing frame was reviewed with recommend changes. Terms and language in the document was finalized and completed all revisions of the document from feedback received by the SAU Leadership Team.

SPRING 2012

6-12 RTI Design Team members presented the work to the leadership team of the high school. All reached consensus to move forward and adopt the manual the SAU Leadership Team and 6-12 Design Team developed. Agreement was also reached to reorganize the leadership team in order to support the framework of RTI. The first roll out to staff was planned for late spring.

Reflections

The 6-12 RTI Design Team demonstrated tremendous growth and understanding of the process and of RTI as a framework in a relatively short time. A real collaboration and shared decision making was created by all stakeholders. A shift in conversation away from actual implementation versus design features of RTI at the building was accomplished. The development of consistency of the model across the district was critical to move the work forward. Beginning work included increasing awareness of knowledge around RTI, the features and the terms, and bringing the buildings together to reach consensus around the work. .

Section Three: Adoption of Critical Components

A. Defining RTI

The collaborative efforts by the SAU Leadership Team, guidance and training from the NH RESPONDS facilitators, and the RTI Design Teams enable the district to reach consensus on the guiding principles and critical beliefs underlying Response to Intervention (RTI). This was imperative in order to create a consistent framework across the district. Establishing a common definition agreed and understood by all was necessary in developing a shared vision. Response to Intervention (RTI) can be defined as “the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions” (Batsche et al., 2006). For this SAU, RTI is described as:

- the practice of providing high quality, evidence based, differentiated academic and behavioral instruction using a flexible tiered system of intervention
- a collaborative approach involving data based decision making used to improve academic and behavioral outcomes for all students
- student progress is monitored frequently to ensure that instructional decisions and actions taken are having the desired effect

B. The Big Ideas of RTI

The NH RTI Task Force adopted “Seven Guiding Principles of RTI” based on the work of the Heartland Area Agency in Iowa. (<http://www.education.nh.gov/innovations/rti/documents/guide.pdf>)

Seven Guiding Principles of Rti

1. ALL students are part of ONE proactive educational system.

- ALL students can learn.
- ALL available resources are used to teach ALL students.

2. Scientific, research-based/ evidence-based instruction is used.

- Curriculum and instructional approaches must have a high probability of success for most students.
- Instructional time is used efficiently and effectively.

3. Instructionally relevant, valid and reliable assessments serve different purposes.

- Screening assessments collect data to identify low- and high-performing students at risk of not having their needs met.
- Diagnostic assessments gather information from multiple sources to determine why students are not benefiting from instruction.
- Formative assessments guide instruction through the frequent, ongoing collection of both formal and informal data.

4. A systematic, collaborative method is used to base decisions on a continuum of student needs.

- The core cycle of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is strong.
- Increasing levels of support are based on increasing levels of student needs.

5. Data guide instructional decisions.

- Data are used to align curriculum and instruction.
- Data are used to allocate resources.
- Data drive professional development decisions.

6. Staff receive professional development, follow-up modeling, and coaching to ensure effectiveness and fidelity at all levels of instruction.

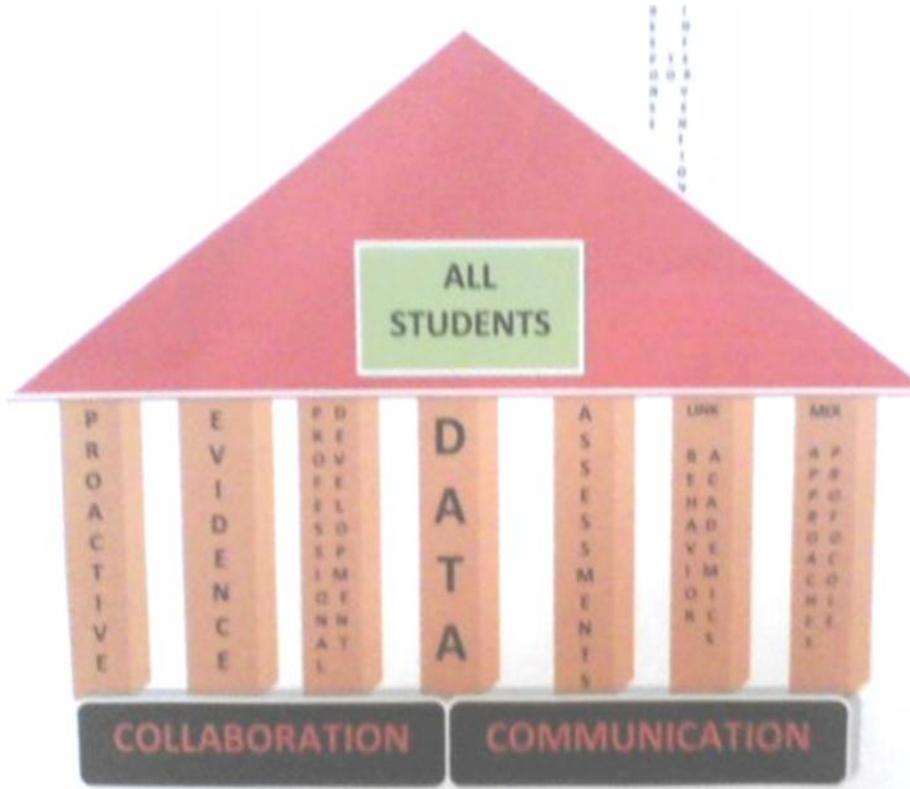
- Staff receive ongoing training and support to assimilate new knowledge and skills.
- Staff anticipate and are willing to meet newly emerging needs based on student performance.

7. Leadership is vital

- Strong administrative support ensures commitment and resources.
- Strong teacher support means sharing in the common goal of improving instruction.
- A leadership team builds internal capacity and sustainability over time.

Adapted from Heartland (Iowa) Area Education Agency

NH RESPONDS also adopted and supported use of these guiding principles. During the collaboration with this SAU, a lead SAU administrator created a graphic representation of them as they had been edited and adopted by this SAU.



SAU Definition of RTI: Big Ideas

1. All students are part of ONE proactive education system.
2. Behavior and academics success are inextricably linked.
3. Evidence based curriculum, instruction and interventions are used.
4. Instructionally relevant assessments (for behavior and academics) are used.
5. A mix of problem-solving approaches (with agreed upon criteria) and standard treatment protocols are used.
6. Data (academic and behavior) are used to guide (academic and behavior) instructional decisions.
7. Professional development and follow-up modeling and coaching (with combination of external and internal coaches) is provided and individualized as needed to meet competencies. This is provided to ensure effective instruction
8. Collaborative leadership, with strong iterative communication is vital (e.g. SAU, school, grade/class)

C. The Critical Components of RTI Across the Continuum

The final documents representing the agreed-upon critical components for the SAU model were compiled into a Manual and disseminated (“rolled out”) to all stakeholders in the system. The entire manual – including descriptions of the final components and tools for monitoring implementation can be found at the following link:

<http://www.movingyournumbers.org/images/resources/sau/RTI-Manual-PDF-for-Public-updated-June-2012.pdf>

Section Five: Sustainability Plan and Implementation

Sustainability Plan and Implementation

For this SAU, their vision for RTI is explained by “it is who we are, not what we do”. (This SAU is highlighted in the “Moving Your Numbers” project sponsored by the National Center on Educational Outcomes: <http://www.movingyournumbers.org/feature-stories/sau-56-somersworth-nh>) It is a culture that brings adults together across the district and community to work together on behalf of all children. There are clearly defined outcomes to ground and steer the implementation of the critical components at each school. These outcomes are organized by the 3-tiered model. These outcomes are defined as:

1. All students achieve grade level academic and behavior. This means that a minimum of 80% of students are proficient in response to Tier 1 instruction and curriculum.
2. An additional 15% of the students will be at benchmark for academics and behavior as a result of Tier 2 instruction and interventions.
3. An additional 5% of our students, for a total of 100%, will be at benchmark for academics and behavior as a result of Tier 3 instruction and interventions.

There is a planned strategy for RTI implementation and sustainability that is reviewed on a continuous basis. The Process/Implementation checklists and fidelity instruments are used as prescribed to assess status of implementation and create/refine action plans. To support sustainability, there is a strong initial and ongoing commitment to RTI for school improvement on the part of administration and staff. At least annually, an 80% vote and periodic check-ins with all staff is assessed for continued commitment to an RTI system by using a consensus process. In this SAU, RTI has been identified as one of the schools top three (3) priorities for school improvement. All administrator’s actions and decisions actively support RTI implementation such as allocation of resources, system scheduling, and supporting interventions. To support implementation, sustainability, and fidelity efforts, the School Leadership teams meet regularly with consistent attendance and effectively uses team and data-based decision making processes. The support and feedback loops among the schools is continually monitored via the SAU Leadership Team. The systematic approach of RTI used by this SAU helps to facilitate implementation throughout the district with clear expectations, consistent practices, student engagement, and common language. This will support the ongoing efforts and sustainability of RTI.

SAU 56 RTI ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

VERSION 3

