

offered to fourth grade students during lunch recess 1 day a week. A thriving student council provides opportunities for students to practice social and leadership skills and engage in such activities as taking visitors for tours of the school, running the school store, and organizing charitable fund-raisers.

At the Tier 3 enrichment level, students can participate in any appropriate Tier 2 enrichment activities and may also be invited to join Gateway, a program for gifted and talented students. To diversify opportunities for Tier 3 enrichment, new programs are field tested as the need arises.

Of particular interest is the way in which the diamond model has encouraged innovation of new activities that combine increased behavioral and environmental support with the high content level of enrichment at Tiers II and III, providing an ever wider array of opportunities for inclusive practices. Examples include (a) students in PASS, the school's behavioral program, (b) receiving one-on-one time with the gateway teacher for students identified as gifted and talented, (c) students with highly focused or specialized areas of personal interest finding a forum for their interests within the enrichment Tier 2 Library Press program, (d) the High Flyers Club, a small-group, low-stress Tier 2 or 3 enrichment opportunity that was designed by the school psychologist for a student with Asperger syndrome but that became open to any student, (e) the use of books on tape to include a student with learning disabilities in Literature Circles, an enrichment book-club-style activity centering on discussions of shared readings, and (f) a student with a hearing impairment, medical challenges, and a severe learning disability in math who participated in Battle of the Books both for the reading activities, which were a good match for her academic strengths, and for the inclusive social opportunities that the group provided.

Implications for Special Education

Response to intervention has been the subject of widespread discussion (Hoover, 2010; Kavale et al., 2008). Although it holds potential to decrease in special education the overrepresentation of students who are experiencing school failure that is not caused by disability, there is also concern that it may prevent the identification of students who would benefit from special education services. Regardless of the cause, the number of students referred for special education services decreased appreciably, with 18% fewer students identified for services than in previous years and with Tier 2 providing more immediate support for students who might previously have been required to complete a lengthier referral process before receiving individualized instruction. The fact that the number of students designated as with special needs within the school dropped to approximately 4% lower than the number in other elementary schools within the same district further suggests that these

changes may be the result of school-specific initiatives, such as the diamond model, rather than any districtwide reforms that have occurred in the same period.

The Diamond Model and Other School Initiatives

Few educational initiatives exist in isolation, and RTI is no exception. The diamond model integrated easily with, and even strengthened, other initiatives within the school—most specifically, schoolwide behavior supports, child study teams, and standards-based curriculum.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), a data-driven system of tiered interventions and supports structured to positively affect both schoolwide and individual student behavior, has become increasingly utilized in schools in New England and across the United States (Muscott et al., 2004). When a school is an active participant in PBIS, it is vital that any other schoolwide initiatives integrate well with the already-existing PBIS structure.

In many ways, PBIS is a natural companion for RTI. Similarities in vocabulary, tiered structures, and data collection mechanisms helped our staff to quickly grasp the concept of the newer diamond model and begin coordinating programming across behavioral and academic realms. This has been especially helpful in instances when a student's underlying academic challenges are leading to behavioral difficulties or in the case of students, such as those with autism spectrum disorders, who benefit from highly predictable behavioral expectations paired with high-quality academic opportunities.

The Child Study Process

Child study teams, a prereferral strategy that was popularized in U.S. schools in the early 1990s (e.g., Fuchs et al., 1990; Ingalls & Hammond, 1996), typically consist of a group of general educators, special educators, and administrators from a specific school who meet to discuss individual student cases. Although child study teams offer many advantages (Rock & Zigmond, 2001), if they are not part of wider systems of change within a school, they can become simply another stage of special education referral.

With the implementation of the diamond model, it soon became clear that a more comprehensive approach was needed. So the child study procedures were updated to provide support that was more consistent with the new RTI process. Today, clusters of newly named *BLING* meetings (i.e., Benchmark Assessments–Learning Strategies–Interventions & Extensions–New Learning–Giving Support) are conducted three times per year and include the

classroom teacher, special educator, speech pathologist, language arts coordinator, special education coordinator, school counselor, Title I tutor, school psychologist, and administrators. Classwide intervention and instructional decisions are made and then adapted to each child based on assessment data gathered as part of RTI and PBIS.

During the course of the year, if teachers feel that an intervention is not working or is no longer appropriate, a meeting is set up to make needed changes. This revised child study process allows examination of all students in each classroom rather than only the few who have been referred, yet is flexible enough to support inclusive education structures and ensure that adequate attention is given to students who are of particular concern to their classroom teacher.

Standards-Based Curriculum

One of the original catalysts that prompted the school to consider RTI was the adoption of a unified standards-based literacy curriculum across all schools in the district. The diamond model permitted this new literacy curriculum to assume a central role as the core reading instruction for all children in Tier 1, integrating it into the school's structure in a more holistic fashion. As district teams unpacked each standard and developed formative assessments for them, the school restructured its schedule to provide every staff member with a 70-minute grade-level meeting/planning block every other week. During this time RTI data, student achievement, and instructional practices related to the literacy curriculum could be discussed. Although it is not easy to coordinate this much planning time, we have found this level of staff support and participation to be critical to the creation and maintenance of a vibrant RTI structure that is responsive to student needs.

In further keeping with standard-based curriculum, our extension (Tier 2 Enrichment) and intervention (Tier 2 Intervention) lessons are linked to district literacy assessment and instructional requirements. First, students are grouped according to their performance on the relevant district-developed formative assessment and the kind of instruction each will benefit from most. Teachers then collaborate across classrooms to create extension or intervention lessons that are tailored to the needs of a given group, a step that provides an important avenue for personal teaching involvement and recognition of individual student needs within an otherwise highly structured literacy program.

Conclusions

Research has indicated that three-tier models that integrate more than one area of achievement produce greater student gains than those that focus on reading alone (Stewart, Benner, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2007). Our school has taken this finding to heart, creating an RTI system that

is closely tied to other school initiatives, such as inclusive education, PBIS, and standards-based instruction.

Several results have been noticed. Referrals for special needs services outside the inclusive structure have declined, even as accommodations and services for students with identified needs have become integrated in increasingly effective ways into general education classrooms. Disciplinary office referrals decreased from more than 600 in 2003–2004 to 101 in the 2009–2010 school year. More than half of the students who qualified for Title I in previous years have graduated from this supplementary program, with reading scores at grade-level performance.

Every staff member participates in tracking data, designing rigorous curricula, and planning appropriate interventions and extensions. A summer reading program has been put in place, and an increasing number of after-school activities keep students engaged in learning beyond the school day.

We have come to realize that when one attends to academics, as well as the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of all children, positive results occur. Moving the process forward one step at a time, we have become a much closer and more caring community of learners. We all understand that teaching children is hard work, but it is our collective responsibility to give students the skills they need to be successful.

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