



*A Community of Learners*

## **Special Education Overview**

### ***How are Response to Intervention (RtI) and Special Education Related?***

TO: School Board  
Trisha Kocanda, *Superintendent*

FROM: Beth Martin  
*Director of Student Services*

November 18, 2014

### **Essential Questions**

- How is instruction differentiated to address the needs of all of our students in an effective and appropriate manner?
- What opportunities exist for provision of alternative programs and services to our students with special needs?
- How can we effectively evaluate current programs, services and staffing patterns to determine if all programs offered are high quality in nature?

### **Board Request for Resources**

- Specific requests for resources are not warranted at this time.

### **Special Education Program**

Special Education is a mandated program that is governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). School districts are obligated to offer special education services that meet state and federal requirements to those students who are eligible for these services. It is imperative that we offer programming that addresses the needs of all of our students, be it through

general education programming or special education programming. This memo is designed to provide:

- a general overview of Special Education
- a basic understanding of how Special Education and Response to Intervention (RtI) are related, yet differ
- a basic understanding of when school districts are required to utilize information from RtI when considering eligibility for special education services
- an overview of our current successes and challenges

The goals of the student services department include the following:

1. Provide quality services to every child based on eligibility and needs.
2. Ascertain how and where we can provide services effectively while also building student independence.
3. Involve parents as key members of the educational team.
4. Collaborate with Curriculum and Technology departments to support educational initiatives district-wide.
5. Improve and maintain compliance with federal regulations.
6. Enhance the Winnetka Experience for all students.

### *Continuum of Service*

Any special education program is required to offer specialized instruction to students who are eligible for these services in the least restrictive environment (LRE). LRE implies that all students are educated with appropriate access to their non-disabled peers. Each student who qualifies for special education is provided educational supports and services through an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This plan outlines how and where the services will be provided.

Examples of the continuum of service include:

- General education with supplementary aids/services.
- General education with inclusion support from a special education teacher.
- Special education classes within a general education building.
- Specialized programs within a general education building
- Alternative programs in buildings that are solely for special education students.

With each increase in this continuum of service, students have less access to their

non-disabled peers. All members of an IEP team, which includes parents, contribute to the decision regarding what level of service is warranted for any student.

### *Identifying Trends and Needs*

Within The Winnetka Public Schools, we offer programs that are more intensive in nature. This includes an Extended Resource Program (ERP) for our K-4 students (currently located at Crow Island), and more specialized programs at both Skokie and Washburne for students with greater need for specific support. All three of these programs are cross-categorical in nature, as more than one type of disability can be addressed within these programs. However, these programs are not currently designed to support students with more emotional challenges.

A recent trend in the district is an increase in the number of students who may have the capacity to do well academically, but are struggling emotionally such that academic performance is impaired. This includes students who may suffer from childhood anxiety, or may have challenges with managing their behavior internally or externally. As a District, we are in need of enhancing our service delivery for these students. The Township as a whole does not offer a variety of programs for our emotionally diverse students within general education buildings. As a result, we have been looking at alternative placements when unable to serve these students in-district (most through NSSSED). At the time of this memo, 60% of our out-placed students are in these placements as a result of emotional needs.

### *Program Enhancements and Additions*

When identifying gaps in our abilities to program for our students within District, it is our obligation to ascertain where programs are available, or what enhancements or additions to current in-district programs may be feasible. It is a goal of the Student Services Department to provide opportunities to our students that are in-district prior to considering placing students into alternative programs at other locations. Enhancements or additions to programs will enable us to provide better educational opportunities to most of our students with special needs, including those with health impairments, autism spectrum disorders, learning disabilities and emotional disabilities.

## *Program Compliance*

Key to the success of any program is the need to comply with federal and state regulations. Currently, the student services department is making appropriate modifications to programming and documentation practices to enhance our level of compliance with state and federal regulations.

## **Response to Intervention - Where does RtI fit in?**

### *Why RtI?*

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a general education initiative that was established as a means to bring needed supports to students as quickly as possible. Prior to implementation of RtI, many students were without educational support until going through the full eligibility process for special education. This can be a timely process, and students' ability to access curriculum and meet curricular expectations was suffering as a result.

### *State Mandates*

Below is Information from the ISBE website that may help to increase overall understanding of how RtI and Special Education are interconnected.

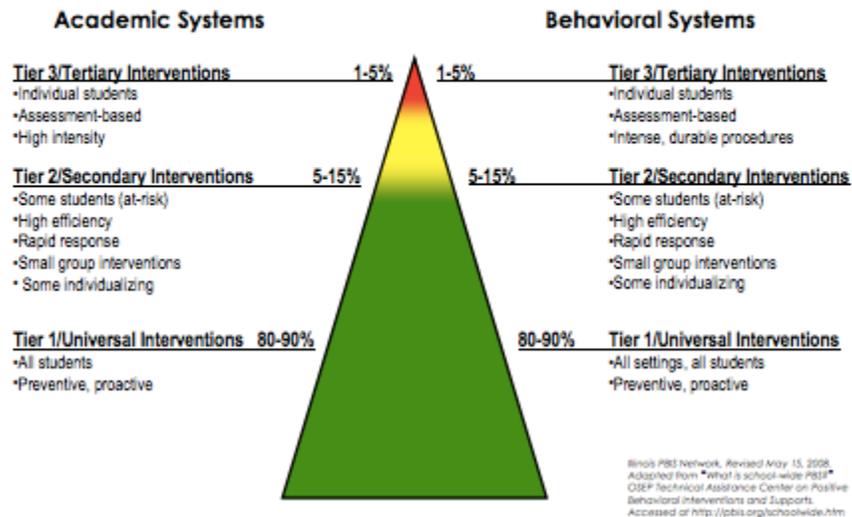
In accordance with 23 Illinois Administrative Code 226.130, districts must use a process that determines how a child responds to scientific, research-based interventions as part of the evaluation procedures to determine special education eligibility under the category of specific learning disability (SLD). While this requirement is specific to SLD, districts also have the option of using such a process as part of the evaluation procedures for other disability categories.

As stated earlier, RtI is designed to get academic or behavioral supports to students more quickly. RtI can be used to guide instructional practices in reading, math, writing and behavior. However, moving through the tiers of RtI is mandated when considering eligibility for special education under the category of specific learning disability. Any student can participate in RtI when delays in acquisition of skills are indicated. At times, there can be confusion as to how RtI is designed, and what results can be anticipated when students participate in the process. The following link may offer guidance to parents who are seeking more information about RtI

[http://www.isbe.net/RtI\\_plan/pdf/parent-guide09.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/RtI_plan/pdf/parent-guide09.pdf)

**Figure 1**

**School-Wide Systems for Student Success:  
A Response to Intervention (RtI) Model**



***Tiers of RtI***

Three Tiers encompass the RtI process. In most instances, Tier 1 interventions are implemented by a classroom teacher within the classroom. This includes means to differentiate instruction for those students who are performing outside of the norm. Tier 2 intervention includes small group targeted instruction that occurs within the general education program, but not necessarily within the student's classroom. Tier 3 intervention includes more intensive intervention (more often; longer duration; smaller group or any combination of the three). As students respond appropriately to interventions, and meet targeted goals through progress monitoring, they will exit RtI. RtI is not designed to be a placement for students. Students who are not responding to targeted interventions will be referred to special education to ascertain if longer term, small group instruction may be warranted.

***Interventions***

The District has a variety of research-based interventions that can be utilized for reading and math support. The District is researching and plans to acquire research-based interventions and supporting materials for writing and behavioral support.

### *Successes*

- Winnetka Public Schools has high quality faculty and staff who consistently put the needs of their students at the forefront of their teaching practices.
- We have laid the groundwork for RtI to be effective while also working to differentiate instruction for all students, not simply those who may be struggling.
- We are collaborating with curriculum and technology departments as a means to support our mutual efforts and to effectively utilize tools at hand.
- We are developing a handbook for parents that will help them to understand what services Winnetka Public Schools offer, and who they can contact for more information. This will include links to documents that are available on the ISBE website.

### *Challenges*

- We need to find the balance between what is mandated and what is simply best practice. Research regarding best practice in education should drive our decisions about what programs and services we provide to our students. We cannot lose sight of all the data that should be considered when developing programs for our children. RtI is an opportunity for us to do this well. However, resources are required to support RtI appropriately.
- As a District, we need to be more proactive to effectively implement consistent RtI practices District-wide. Here, a systematic approach will help to provide guidelines that all buildings can implement. Quantitative and qualitative data will be collected and will be utilized to determine where we are successful and where, or when, alternatives need to be explored.
- We need to determine who is going to deliver which service to whom. We employ coaches from NSSSED. These individuals can help to build similar capacity in our staff. Currently we have some faculty who are filling more than one role (Special Education and RtI). When looking at special education service delivery and RtI, what is the most appropriate way to provide supports and services to our students? How can we evaluate staffing patterns and coordinate efforts effectively to meet the needs of our students?

## **Resources Needed to Support Special Education and RtI in the Future**

- Staffing - We need to obtain the proper resources in staffing such we can support all educational programs. This goes beyond simply aligning staffing numbers to our student enrollment. We need to determine how we want to get services to students in the most effective means possible, while also promoting opportunities for students to become more independent.
- Materials - Expand our library of research-based intervention materials for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions in reading and writing.
- Professional development - provision of PD to our staff is paramount to the success of any initiative. This goes beyond attending workshops or having well known speakers come to our District. We also need to capitalize on opportunity for trained staff (NSSED coaches and Winnetka facilitators) to support other staff members in each building.
- Time - provision of time for ongoing discussion regarding effective implementation of RtI, special education services, and systematic practices that are child-centered. Candid conversations among all stakeholders can help establish and maintain relationships that will support what is best for the children who attend our schools.

## **Next Steps**

This presentation is an overview of Special Education and RtI - Future presentations and/or informational memos will include the following:

*December 2014* - Cost analysis for:

- existing special education program improvements
- proposed program additions (SEL based programs)

*January 2015* - RtI update including:

- student growth/progress in Tier 2 and Tier 3;
- data regarding movement of students among Tiers;
- data regarding number of students who have transitioned from RtI into Special Education.

*February 2015* - Staffing plan for 2015-2016

*April 2015* - Special Education 3-Year Plan

- overview with more specificity regarding District-wide special education programs, direct services and related services.

Click here to view the presentation.



# **Special Education and Response to Intervention – An Overview**

November 18, 2014

# Essential Questions

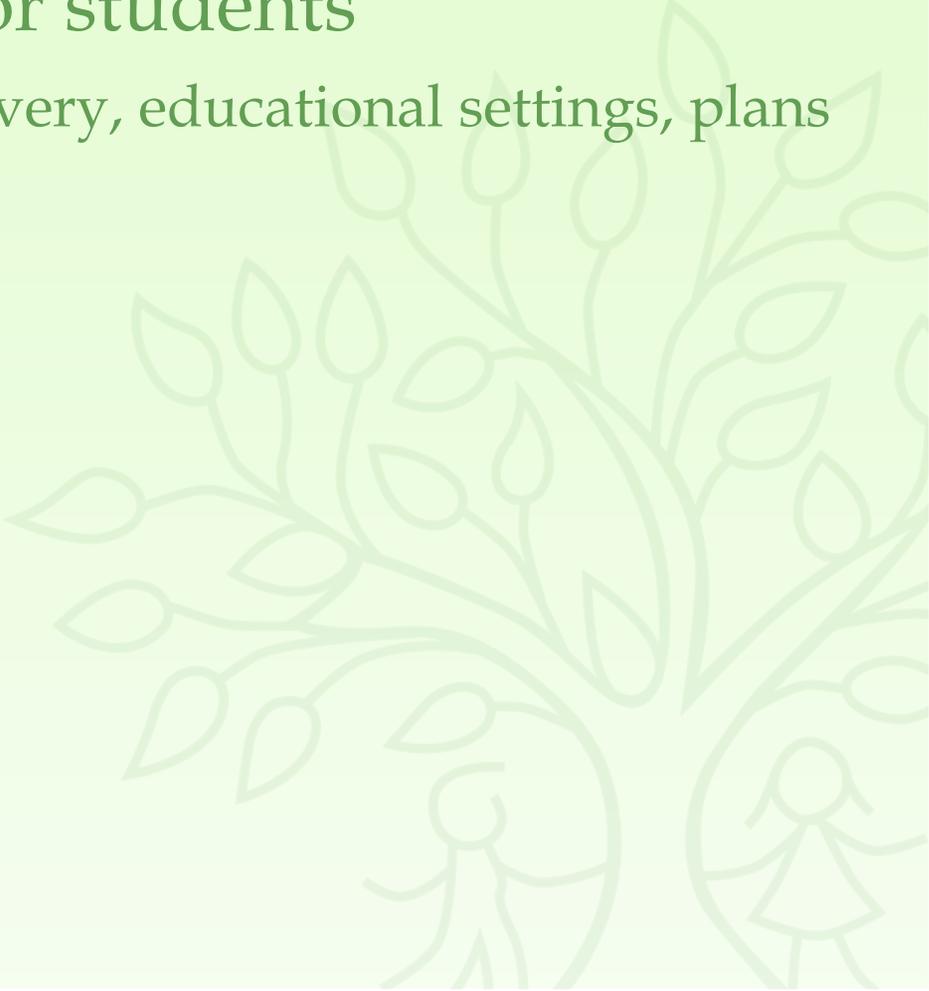
- ▶ How is instruction differentiated to address the needs of all of our students in an effective and appropriate manner?
- ▶ What opportunities exist for provision of alternative programs and services to our students with special needs?
- ▶ How can we effectively evaluate current programs, services and staffing patterns to determine if we are offering high value programs for students?

# Special Education

- ▶ Mandated program guided by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
  - ▶ Continuum of Service
  - ▶ Least Restrictive Environment
  - ▶ Access to non-disabled peers

General Education Classroom  
Special Education Classes  
Self-Contained Classrooms  
Alternative Placements

# Special Education Umbrella

- ▶ Programs and Services for students
    - ▶ Eligibility criteria, service delivery, educational settings, plans
    - ▶ NSSED
  - ▶ Faculty and Staff
  - ▶ Parents
  - ▶ RtI
  - ▶ Compliance
  - ▶ Federal Grants
  - ▶ State Reporting
- 

# Trends, Needs and Program Enhancements

- ▶ Current Programs
  - ▶ ERP (K-4), Life Skills/Specialized Programs (5-8)
- ▶ Social and Emotional Learning
  - ▶ More students are experiencing challenges in this area
  - ▶ More structured supports are warranted
  - ▶ Currently 60% outplaced for SEL challenges
- ▶ Maximize program opportunities
  - ▶ Complete feasibility study and cost analysis for potential new programs within the District.
- ▶ Program Compliance
  - ▶ Enhance documentation practices

# Response to Intervention (RtI)

- ▶ General Education Initiative –
  - ▶ Provides supports to students quickly.
  - ▶ Three-tiered approach that utilizes research-based interventions.
  - ▶ Mandated when considering special education eligibility for specific learning disability.
  - ▶ RtI ≠ Special Education
- ▶ Action for RtI –
  - ▶ Review staffing allocations
  - ▶ Determine entrance and exit criteria for interventions
  - ▶ Identify interventions and progress monitoring tools that are most effective

# Successes

- ▶ Employing high quality faculty and staff who consistently put student need at the forefront of their teaching practices.
- ▶ Establishing the groundwork for RtI while also addressing the need to differentiate instruction for all students.
- ▶ Collaborating with Curriculum and Technology departments to support mutual efforts and to effectively utilize tools at hand.
- ▶ Developing a handbook for parents that will improve overall understanding of all services we offer.

# Challenges

- ▶ Finding the balance between what is mandated and what is simply best practice in teaching.
- ▶ Utilizing all available data to make child-centered decisions.
- ▶ Implementing a coordinated effort to provide services to our children .
- ▶ Determining how to best utilize the specialists who work for the District.
- ▶ Continuing to evaluate staffing levels to ensure student success in general and special education.

# Resources from the Board

- ▶ Staffing
  - ▶ Obtain proper resources in staffing to support all educational programs.
- ▶ Materials
  - ▶ Expand library of research-based interventions for reading and math.
- ▶ Professional Development
  - ▶ Utilize District facilitators and NSSED coaches effectively to build capacity in District staff.
- ▶ Time
  - ▶ Plan for implementation of systematic practices.

# Next Steps

- ▶ December 2014 : Cost analyses of existing and proposed new Special Education programs.
- ▶ January 2015 : RtI Update regarding student growth data, progress within tiers, movement from RtI to Special Education.
- ▶ February 2015: Staffing Plan
- ▶ April 2015: Special Education 3-Year Plan



Q & A