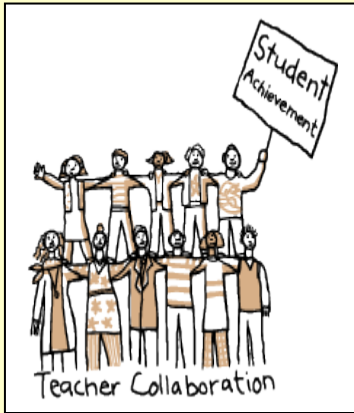


SAU 50 Professional Learning Update

Winter 2012



*George Cushing,
Superintendent SAU 50*

*Mary Lyons, Assistant
Superintendent SAU 50*

*Heidi Powers Amsden, teacher,
New Castle*

*Peggy Balboni, School Board
Member, Rye*

*Beth Brown, teacher,
Newington*

Kaleen Edwards, teacher, RES

*Heather Jenkins, teacher,
Greenland*

Chris Pollet, Principal, RJH

Kerry Ridolfi, teacher, RJH

*Julie Samonas,
Paraprofessional, Greenland*

*Tracy Sherrill, teacher,
Greenland*

The Professional Learning Advisory Committee

Organization and Purpose:

The Professional Learning Advisory Committee (PLAC) is comprised of diverse representatives from the SAU 50 communities: Greenland, New Castle, Newington, and Rye. Its primary purpose is to promote the training and professional growth of teachers and support staff in our schools. The Committee determines the focus of staff learning priorities, arranges professional learning opportunities, and evaluates and revises the Professional Learning Master Plan, a state-mandated plan to ensure that all professional learning initiatives in SAU 50 are aligned with federal, state and local goals, and satisfy the NH state teacher recertification requirements.

What is a Professional Learning Community?

Professional Learning Community (PLC) is defined as “an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.” PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved student learning is continuous job-embedded learning for educators. High-performing schools use the professional learning community process to support powerful professional development through teacher collaboration.

Since our all-staff training in October 2009, the schools in SAU 50 have been shifting from a traditional school model with teachers working in isolation to a collaborative culture of high-performing teams. Our smaller schools collaborate as a staff. The larger schools have grade level teams, grade span teams and/or content area teams that meet regularly to collaborate on student outcomes.

In addition to our school-based teams, all SAU 50 teachers meet for a full day (twice per year) in grade level or content area teams facilitated by the assistant superintendent.

All of our collaborative teams (SAU-wide or building level) collectively focus around the four critical questions of Professional Learning Communities:

- What is it we want all students to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned?
- How will we respond when some students experience difficulty in their learning?
- How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are already proficient?

“We assess our effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions. Individuals, teams, schools, and districts seek relevant data and information and use that information to promote continuous improvement”

*-DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work
(2008)*

*“Every student can learn, just not on the same day, or the same way.”
~George Evans*

The Learning Compact

In the fall of 2010, after a two-year pilot period, all SAU schools introduced “The Learning Compact” to students and parents. The Learning Compact is designed to formulate a partnership with parents, teachers and students working together to help individual students succeed.

At the start of this school year, parents completed a *Parent Survey* to give the school input about their child. The teachers then utilized this information and student input to formulate at least one student goal for the school year. The teachers will communicate progress made toward achievement of the goal with parents throughout the year. At the end of the school year, teachers will

complete a student information form for each student including information about preferred strategies for learning and his/her interest areas. Teachers will then collaborate, grade level to grade level, one year’s teacher to the next year’s teacher, discussing the student information form and highlighting teaching approaches and strategies that worked well with the student. This information will be passed on to the next year’s teacher or teaching team so that staff will be well-prepared to best help the student achieve success.

This annual mutual exchange of student learning needs will enable our teachers to ease students’ transition to the next grade level.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

This year our professional staff has been utilizing a method called Response to Intervention (or Instruction) to help tailor instruction towards the specific learning needs of the students. All children learn in different ways and at different rates. Our mission is to assure high levels of learning for *all* students. Response to Intervention (RTI) is a systematic process that ensures every child receives the additional time and support needed to learn at high levels. “Systematic” means it doesn’t matter what class or school; a child will get the support he/she needs.

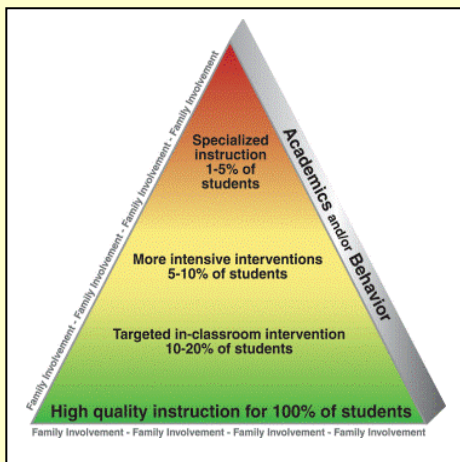
RTI starts with highly effective research-based core instruction. Teachers then identify students who are not succeeding in the core program and provide them with additional time and support until they have learned the essential skills. The emphasis of RTI is to focus on providing more effective instruction by encouraging earlier intervention for students experiencing difficulties.

In order for students to be present for

core instruction, intervention blocks allowing for additional time and support need to be carefully scheduled. If interventions are not needed for students, this time can be used for extended learning enrichment opportunities. Groups are flexible and fluid, depending on student need.

Professional Learning Communities are the foundation for Response to Intervention. Individual teachers cannot do this alone. Teams work collaboratively targeting instruction and coordinating the additional time and support needed for all students to learn at high levels.

RTI looks different at each of our SAU 50 schools as each individual school has identified specific ways to best use RTI for its student population. At any given time you can walk into any SAU 50 school and find teachers collaborating on student data to inform instructional decisions on how to best intervene to meet the individual needs of each student.



The RTI Pyramid

Professional Development Workdays

In order to support our efforts to work as professional learning communities and create a systematic approach to response to intervention, a number of staff members have participated in trainings in various locations, including Concord NH and Boston, over the past three years. In addition, we have had two all-staff trainings right here in our SAU during our October professional development days. The first workshop was in October 2009 and this past October we hosted another.

The focus of the October 2011 Professional Development Day was specifically on RTI. Teams discussed ways to identify students needing additional support, determine appropriate interventions, monitor progress, and revise programming as needed. Staff also looked at ways to use flexible time to extend student learning and support students who have already mastered grade-level curriculum.

What's Ahead?

Teachers in SAU 50 are in their second round of grade-level and content-area team meetings. They continue to work together to learn the process of collaborating on student outcomes and creating benchmarks to monitor student progress.

Staff is also in the process of cross referencing our SAU 50 core curriculum with the new federal **Common Core Standards** for math and language arts. These standards are the blueprint for curriculum instruction. The common core standards are rigorous, but more consistent than the current NH state standards. They offer a specific focus of instruction each year. Students are expected to meet each year's grade-specific standards and retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered at preceding grades. The SAU 50 curriculum standards can be found on the SAU website www.sau50.org under

The presenter, Geri Pascale, shared some universal screening tools to identify students before they fail and explored how PLCs with a focus on learning, building a collaborative culture, and being results-orientated, are a natural partner with RTI.

Teacher surveys indicate an overall positive reaction to the workshop. Seventy surveys were returned with an 86.4% overall rating as good or excellent.

Teachers and support staff have continued to expand upon what they have learned by attending additional workshops throughout the school year in RTI strategies, improving professional learning communities, differentiating instruction, improving instructional strategies, applying positive behavioral interventions strategies and utilizing technology in the classrooms.

the heading: Curriculum & Instruction.

Teachers work in teams to determine the best instructional methods and materials to ensure that all students are mastering the skills and concepts outlined in the standards. Curriculum review is an ongoing process that occurs on a regular basis with teachers. The assistant superintendent oversees this process. The SAU 50 Curriculum Advisory Board meets monthly to discuss various curriculum areas and identify areas of improvement.

State testing on the common core standards will begin in 2014-2015. We are confident our students will be well prepared as we move forward in our examination of what we teach in math and language arts at each grade level in comparison to the grade level expectations of the common core.

Teacher comments from the October workday:

"I enjoyed learning about and comparing traditional interventions and today's RTI intervention."

"I feel like my team is headed in the right direction."

"The data left a huge impact on the importance of what we are doing."

"It was valuable to work with colleagues who are in the trenches with you to discuss students and RTI."

"Geri gave me many things to think about-example: change schedule to include more staff-common core grade cards."

"The amount of discussion within our group was helpful and pertinent. I was given many great ideas and tools to use."