By Kristen Pester

Reading Discussion:

  I see the school psychologist as a vital member of the problem-solving team (PST)- often times acting as the leader/director of the process. If a new member of the school staff asked what role the school psychologist plays in the PST process, I would have several responses. First, a school psychologist is trained in the process and purposes of the MTSS/RtI system of interventions. This is important information for the team so they can be guided as to what constitutes a Tier 1,2 or 3 intervention and when to move a child up to the next tier. In addition, a school psychologist would have knowledge of the various specialized staff in the building and what they could offer to that child's intervention process. Second, a school psychologist is extensively trained to gather, read, understand and utilize data collected from students and they would be able to help the entire team understand what the trends in the data mean for that student. Third, because of their unique knowledge about assessments and interventions, the school psychologist would play a major role in brainstorming appropriate assessments to pinpoint problem areas and then interventions to improve the academics of the child. Finally, the school psychologist thoroughly understands the requirements for qualification in special education and would be able to speak in to whether or not a child should be referred on for special education evaluation or continue with Tier 3 interventions. This is important information because a child should not be kept for an extended amount of time in Tier 3 interventions if they are not making adequate progress and should instead be referred for evaluation in a timely manner in order to avoid precious academic time being lost for the student.
  I am quite familiar with the process of Tier 1 and 2 interventions, due to my work as a 5th grade teacher. However, in my experience in my district, when a student does not respond to Tier 2 interventions, then the child is quickly referred to special education evaluation. This has been the default Tier 3 "intervention" in my experience. Therefore, I was interested to see what the actual recommended role of the PST was when the Tier 3 level was reached. Each step makes sense and follows a logical sequence from problem identification and analysis, plan development and implementation and then evaluation after sufficient time has passed. It makes sense, but one of my concerns is that by the time a child struggles at the Tier 1 level and is identified and referred to Tier 2 interventions, so much time has passed. Then the student must work on the Tier 2 interventions that are put into place for them and the team must determine if those are working, at which point they are referred on to Tier 3, if they are still struggling. Then the team must meet to brainstorm (which often takes months), collect data, implement and monitor intervention progress and finally make decisions about whether adequate progress is being made. Finally, if the child does not make progress, then they are referred for special education evaluation, which also takes months. By the time the whole process has taken place, a student can lose a year or more before they are matched with the help they need. If the child is young, they can often catch up and have an excellent academic experience. However, if the child is older and struggling, then they can often become frustrated learners whose attitudes sour on school. There are benefits to a slow process because those that are helped at a lower tier do not have to be referred to special education, which is a good thing. However, it is frustrating at times to see the process take so long and for the students to continue to struggle daily until they get the right help. This is how I hope to help as a school psychologist- to be part of the team who gets help for struggling students in the most efficient manner possible with the best interventions to fit their needs that improve their educational journey.

<u>**Activity Discussion:**</u>

<u>Scenario-</u> Henry is a 5th grade student at Walnut Elementary School (WES) who is currently struggling in reading. He is an otherwise hard-working student who gets along well with peers in the classroom. His classroom teacher is concerned and has asked for the PST to meet with parents to discuss how to help Henry learn best. This process involves the following steps: problem identification, problem analysis, developing a plan/hypothesis, plan implementation and plan evaluation.

<u>Problem identification-</u> WES uses the Fastbridge platform for all their academic benchmark assessments and data collection for Tier 1 interventions. On the Fall benchmark test for the aReading assessment Henry scores 492, which is at the third-grade level. The 5th grade benchmark is 513. The aReading score measures Henry's reading comprehension. His CBM reading score, which measures reading fluency, is 92, which is also at a third-grade level. The 5th grade CBM benchmark for Fall is 132. These two scores qualify for the dual discrepancy model and the team determines that Henry struggles with both reading comprehension and fluency. Due to these initial scores Henry had already been moved to participate in a Tier 2 intervention called Read Live, which is a reading comprehension and fluency computer program administered by the reading staff. Unfortunately, after consulting the weekly progress monitoring data for 6 weeks, it is discovered that the Tier 2 interventions are not having the desired results for improving Henry's reading scores.

<u>Problem Analysis</u>

When the PST meets with parents, they discuss Henry's reading struggles and decide to collect a variety of data to pinpoint the potential root cause of his reading struggles. The team knows that in order to read fluently, first a student must have solid phonemic awareness, then strong decoding skills, which leads to reading fluently, which, in turn, allows the student to demonstrate reading comprehension (Burns and Gibbons, 2012). The team has already identified that Henry struggles in the areas of reading comprehension and fluency, so they decide to keep working backwards and test his decoding skills and phonemic awareness. The reading specialist gives several assessments that measure his competence in these areas. Other avenues are considered for intervention such as vision issues (which would make reading words hard), hearing issues (which would impact the way Henry understood the words) and attention challenges. Henry's parents and his classroom teacher are given questionnaires to complete inquiring into past history and his personality. School records are also consulted to examine any patterns that would relate to a struggle with academics. When all the data come back, the only significant concern is in the area of decoding skills. The reading specialist administered a DIBELS assessment in nonsense word fluency and in addition, observed Henry while reading several passages and took extensive notes. The team decides to focus on Henry's word decoding skills in the hopes that this will improve his general reading skills.

<u>Plan Development and Implementation</u>

It is decided that in addition to continuing to participate in the Tier 2 intervention group with Read Live, Henry will also get 20 minutes of focused decoding skills interventions with a reading paraprofessional, at least 4 times a week. The reading para will work with Henry on an intervention called "Graphosyllabic Analysis: Five Steps to Decoding Complex Words". This intervention has been shown to improve decoding skills in especially the poorest readers and ultimately improves overall reading. The para will teach Henry a five-step syllable segmentation strategy through modeling the concepts and positive praise and feedback. The para will select a third-grade word list containing words with multiple syllables. The five steps include reading the word first, then defining it, then orally dividing the word into syllables, then the para would cover part of the word and say it to match it to the spelling and finally, the para would demonstrate how to blend all the syllables together to say the whole word (Burn, et al., 2017). The para will progress monitor Henry weekly using CBM reading passages and will graph his progress. It is decided that the PST will reconvene in 8 weeks to assess Henry's progress and discuss next steps.

<u>Plan Evaluation</u>

The team reconvenes and ascertains that the plan has been implemented with integrity, as evidenced by the documentation presented by the reading specialist showing eight weeks of graphed points on Henry's CBM data. Henry's data does indicate that he is making steady progress with his CBM scores and the team decides to continue the plan implementation until the data improves to reflect current grade level or it shows that Henry has leveled off and is no longer progressing, at which time the team will meet again to discuss the possibility of further interventions or referral for special education testing.

References

Burns, M. K., & Gibbons, K. (2012). *Implementing response-to-intervention in elementary and secondary schools: Procedures to assure scientific-based practices*. Routledge.

Burns, M. K., Riley-Tillman, T. C., & Rathvon, N. (2017). *Effective school interventions: Evidence-based strategies for improving student outcomes*. Guilford Publications.