

SSTAGE Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 1



Universal Behavior Screeners: One District's Story

By *Debbie Williamson, Ed.S.*

Region 1 Representative

As educators, we are all so comfortable with the idea of screening our students for academic difficulties. When asked "What universal screener do you use?" we can roll off acronyms such as DIBELS, AIMSweb, and GRASP with ease. At this point, many of us cannot imagine how we would "do RTI" without our academic universal screeners. So why has it been so difficult for schools and school districts to grab on to the idea of universally screening students for emotional and behavioral difficulties? Why do we continue to rely on teacher referral as our primary means of identifying students for behavioral supports? The truth is, in the past there have been many legitimate barriers, which included the lack of understanding of the importance of behavioral screening, lack of available or affordable behavior screeners, perceived lack of time to implement a screener, and lack of available behavioral interventions to implement once we receive the behavior screening data.

Despite these barriers, several school districts in Georgia have successfully implemented universal behavior screeners and have further ventured into creating fully developed behavioral pyramids. These pyramids begin with Tier 1 universal screening and behavioral curriculums and end with highly specific behavioral interventions tailored to the individual needs of students. One such district is Jefferson City Schools, which began universally screening behavior in elementary and middle school students during the 2012-2013 school year. Specifically, they used the Behavior Screening Checklist III, which was developed by School Psychology Professor Dr. Amy Reschly of the University of Georgia. This free, 12-item screener examines Classroom Behaviors (work completion, attending behaviors, etc.), Externalizing Behaviors, (verbal and physical aggression, etc.), and Socialization Behaviors (withdrawal, appropriate peer interactions, etc.).

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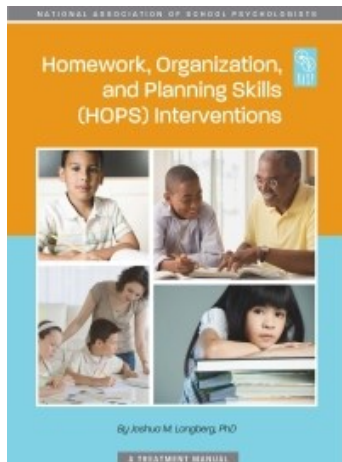


From the Editor...

SSTAGE was formed in 2007 by a diverse group of educators who were passionate about fulfilling their vision of finding "effective solutions matched to student needs." While SSTAGE is well known for the professional development opportunities offered

through various conferences and workshops each year, we are always trying to come up with new ways to promote more frequent communication with our members. This inaugural issue of the SSTAGE Newsletter, which is intended to be the first of many, has been a collaborative effort of the SSTAGE Region Representatives. It is our hope that readers will glean information on a variety of educationally relevant topics, as well as come away with some new ideas to implement in their own schools and classrooms. On behalf of the entire Newsletter Committee, we hope you enjoy the issue!

Questions, Comments, or Ideas for Future Newsletters?
Email us at newsletter@sstage.org!



Research-Based Intervention Spotlight: HOPS

By Morgan Potts, Ed.S.
Region 5 Representative

Intervention: Homework, Organization, and Planning Skills (HOPS)

Creator: Joshua M. Langberg, PhD

A publication from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

Description: Materials include a 94-page manual and a CD with reproducible forms. The program consists of 16 (20 minute) sessions that can be used in an individual or small group format, as well as 16 (30 minute) sessions for larger groups. At each session, students earn points for things such as materials organization, teacher initials on homework assignments, and time management. Once a student reaches 100 points, which could occur approximately every two or three sessions, the points can be redeemed for a reward. Parent and teacher meetings and communication are integrated into the program.

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - \$52.00 for NASP members, \$62.00 for non-members • Flexible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For individual students, small groups, or whole class - Effective for kids with ADHD / attention difficulties - Designed for middle school, but some aspects can be used from third grade through high school - Can be implemented by counselors, psychologists, or teachers (includes parents and teachers in the process) • User Friendly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Includes 16 sessions described in detail - After printing tracking sheets for each student (included on CD), minimal preparation is needed beyond reading over the session ahead of time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scheduling parent meetings can be challenging. • Teacher/Parent Participation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For maximum effectiveness, teachers and parents have to follow through with some aspects of the program. • Staffing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With larger groups of students, two teachers are needed. • Student Limitation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not recommended for students with significant academic deficits.

Preliminary Review: This intervention is being implemented in an Atlanta middle school with a group of eight students in grades 6-8. Students were selected by teacher nomination and a review of basic skills. Parents provided consent for participation and parents, teachers, and students completed questionnaires assessing study skills, organization, homework completion, cooperative learning skills, independent seat work, and academic motivation. The group has approximately five sessions remaining. At the onset of the group, both students and parents were reluctant to participate. However, enthusiasm grew quickly and the students seem to enjoy the group. Communicating regularly with parents/teachers about the intervention and providing rewards has been challenging at times. Given these factors, I would recommend having an assortment of rewards prepared and available prior to beginning the intervention. Some of the rewards that have been effective with this group of students include a week-long free water fountain pass (with some limitations), shadowing another teacher for a class period (with the teacher providing background on the planning and preparation needed for the class), and the old standby – snacks. At the beginning of the intervention, students are provided with some supplies, but I would recommend giving these out more slowly, as many of the students have lost them (pens and pencils). While the students seem to enjoy the intervention, the effectiveness is still not clear. At the conclusion of the intervention, parents, teachers, and students will again complete questionnaires and these, along with the earlier responses, will be analyzed. Stay tuned for the results!

NEWSLETTER TRIVIA QUESTION

Spring 2014 Trivia Question:

What SSTAGE Region are you in, and who is your Region Representative?

(Helpful Hint: Answers can be found on the [SSTAGE website](http://www.sstage.org).)

****Please submit answers via e-mail to newsletter@sstage.org by Friday, May 9.****

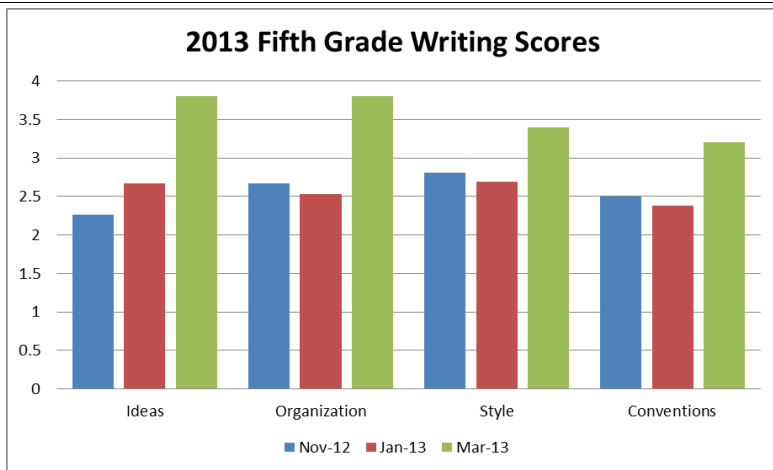
Correct responses will be entered in a drawing to receive a **free book!**



Oh Writer, Where Art Thou?

By Deborah Moore-Sanders, Ph.D.
Region 3 Representative

See: The Fifth Grade Writing Test is one of those dire tasks that some students do not look forward to completing. If you are a student that is struggling academically, writing in an unknown genre can certainly make you and/or your teacher quite anxious! This is exactly what happened to the teachers at Pearl Stephens Elementary School. In the winter of 2012, a group of teachers met to ponder a lingering question: *How can we unlock the mystery to writing in each genre?* The fifth grade students practiced daily for several months, yet reports from mock assessments yielded daunting, and even scary, results. Not only were the students stressed, but the teachers were stressed as well. Rather than cave under the insurmountable pressure, these colleagues pulled resources from their professional libraries and began strategizing.



Plan/Do: After thorough research of effective writing interventions, an analysis of student responses, and hours of professional dialogue, the school's writing team devised a plan to increase the number of students meeting and exceeding grade level standards on the statewide assessment in March 2013. They began by increasing the amount of guided practice students received before, during, and after school. Students were grouped based on data in order to enable teachers to appropriately plan and pace the lessons. During this time, teachers became excited about writing, unpacking each genre and re-teaching the nuts and bolts to ensure students had a firm grasp of what they were expected to know and do. With a working plan in place, the school's Instructional Coach assumed the responsibility of writing the lessons. Teachers were provided scripted lessons, complete with demonstration pieces, overheads, and support documents for student folders. The teachers met frequently to discuss student progress and determine next steps. Through their efforts, they set a goal and believed students would master the following:

- Understanding of persuasive/argumentative, informational, and narrative writing
- Deciphering a prompt
- Generating strong ideas
- Creating plans that work
- Drafting
- Incorporating craft moves, such as building suspense in narrative writing or using parallel ideas in persuasive and informational writing
- Using lively transitions
- Revising for meaning
- Editing for correctness

Check: Students were assessed three times per year with Write Score to establish a baseline of performance and determine each student's strengths and weaknesses in the following areas: generating ideas, organization, style, and using conventions. The above table highlights student scores at three intervals: November 2012, January 2013, and March 2013. Overall results indicated a significant improvement in students' writing performance from 85% in 2011 to 91% of students meeting or exceeding state standards in 2013. With the teachers' belief system and determination, their students developed an excitement for writing and were indeed writing as if their pens were on fire!

UNIVERSAL BEHAVIOR SCREENERS (Continued from Page 1)

Schools using the screener found it to be both efficient and valid for the purpose of screening students for significant emotional or behavioral problems. Teachers completed the screener on the district's student data system (Infinite Campus) in May 2013, and information used from this screener allowed the RTI team at each school to evaluate student behaviors in many different ways. First, this information was used to assist in assigning students to classrooms for the following year so that no one classroom was overloaded with behaviorally challenged students. Additionally, students whose ratings fell within the top 5-10% of behavioral difficulties for the school were assigned to either Tier 2 or Tier 3 behavioral supports at the beginning of the next school year, allowing progress monitoring of their behavior to begin at the beginning of the school year.

This universal screener was the essential starting point for a comprehensive behavioral pyramid for Jefferson City Schools. To pursue best practices in RTI, schools must carefully consider the various universal behavior screening options available and begin implementation. Perhaps the next time you are asked the question, "What universal screener do you use?" you will be able to roll off the name of your school's universal behavior screener and you can confidently say, "I don't know how we would do RTI without it!"

TKES Applications within the Framework of RTI

By Wallace Blackstock, Ed.S.
Region 2 Representative



During the January 2014 SSTAGE Best Practices Conference, presenters Michael Miller and Wina Low from the Georgia Department of Education emphasized key points to consider when facing the task of meeting the requirements of the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System.

Component I of TKES, the Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS), details the five domains for teacher performance, while Component II involves Surveys of Instructional Practices. Component III, however, is the area where Mr. Miller stressed that teachers will really need to focus. This area, which analyzes Student Growth and Academic Achievement, accounts for fifty percent of a teacher's overall annual rating. Teachers will be evaluated on the level of growth students demonstrate on the state test (CRCT) using data analysis through the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS).

Additionally, local school system leaders will develop Student Learning Objectives (SLO's) for students in classes of non-state tested subjects. A locally developed, state approved SLO assessment will be administered at the beginning and end of the year to identify growth during that school year. Using the five domains and specific standards under those domains, actions to ensure growth will be identified.

Key Points for Various Standards

- *Domain 1 – Planning, Standard 2 – Instructional Planning:* In this standard, there is a focus on analyzing student progress and planning for meeting individual student needs.
- *Domain 2 – Instructional Delivery, Standard 3 – Instructional Strategies:* Based on the content in this standard, the use of research-based interventions in the classroom is essential.
- *Domain 2 – Instructional Delivery: Standard 4 – Differentiated Instruction:* This standard emphasizes that teachers must be skilled in differentiating instruction by content, process, product, and environment, and in utilizing diagnostic, formative, and summative data.
- *Domain 3 – Assessment of and for Learning: Standard 5 – Assessment Strategies:* In this standard, additional emphasis is placed on the need for the teacher to use diagnostic data, formal, and informal assessments to identify individual needs and assessment formats.
- *Domain 3 – Assessment of and For Learning: Standard 6 - Assessment Uses:* According to this standard, teachers must analyze and use data to measure and design interventions, plan, and differentiate instruction.

Mr. Miller and Ms. Low reinforced that the above standards are reflective of what should happen in the regular classroom. The teacher should ask himself or herself if instruction is planned to meet the needs of all students and what data is used to identify student needs and thereby plan instruction. The teacher must also use research proven interventions and analyze the data gained from these interventions to identify the academic strengths and weaknesses of each learner. Assessment should be more than simply the administration of tests. The teacher should actively reflect on the informal and formal formative assessments given by asking questions such as: How do I know the student is ready for the next level? What level of feedback is being gathered from students so that I am informed and the instruction is targeted to student needs? Is the assessment a means for a grade or is the assessment a means to analyze student preparedness and readiness for mastery?

In the end, TKES is designed for the teacher to demonstrate his or her impact on student learning. With regards to interventions, the classroom teacher must recognize that the regular classroom is the first stage of responding to student needs. It is the classroom teacher who must first assess and diagnose student performance levels and plan instruction that meets those. It is the classroom teacher who must choose Tier 1 interventions with research proven strategies and/or programs to help students demonstrate progress. It is with data analysis demonstrating continued difficulties that a teacher can confidently make a referral for assistance from the school level Response to Intervention team. Conversely, the teacher who uses the opportunity to analyze and diagnose student needs and deficits, and who consequently plans differentiated instruction to meet those needs, is likely to see that child respond and develop the needed skills. Finally, the teacher should remember that the development of a home-school partnership through communication with both the child and parent regarding the work to be done can yield powerful results.

Georgia Teacher Keys Effectiveness System. comps. and eds. Office of School Improvement: Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Division. Atlanta, 2013.

Georgia RTI Experts Answer Your Toughest Questions

By Theresa Martin, Ed.D.

Region 4 Representative

During the January 2014 SSTAGE Conference (Promising Practices for RTI, Pyramid of Interventions, and SST), a panel of four experts in the area of Response to Intervention responded to various questions posed by attendees. Panelists included Dr. Theresa Martin, Director of Student and Community Services, Ware County Schools; Cathy McKenzie, Lead Psychologist, Cherokee County Schools; Cammie Neal, RTI Coach, Forsyth County Schools; and Amanda Sailors, RTI and Assessment Coordinator, Madison County Schools.

Many of the questions concerned progress monitoring. Specifically, attendees wanted more information on the following: 1) how to know when to change an intervention; 2) how many data points should be collected before a child is referred to Special Education; and 3) how to respond to progress or a lack thereof.

Tips from the Panelists on Above Issues

- Intervention fidelity should always guide the duration of an intervention. For example, if a math intervention calls for the intervention to be conducted in 30 minute sessions 3 times per week, but the student only participates in 15 minute sessions 2 times per week, expected growth will not occur.
- It is important to remember that because no two students are alike, no two referrals are the same. Exclusionary factors, social history, and other variables must be considered. This makes it almost impossible to provide a standard answer on how many data points are required for testing. However, your School Psychologist can provide guidance in this area and valuable insight into what is needed before a child can be tested.
- Research shows that applying decision rules to charted data provides the best method of enhancing growth. Jim Wright's 3-data point decision rule is very helpful in determining student progress. Click on the following link to read more about how to make decision rules: <http://www.cbmnow.com/documents/cbaManualhand.pdf>.



RTI at the High School Level – It Can Be Done!

By Morgan Potts, Ed.S.

Region 5 Representative

Not long ago, it was a challenge to find any high schools that were implementing Response to Intervention (RTI). Today, however, we are seeing more and more promising practices at the secondary level. High school representatives, Melvina Crawl, Gladys Coverson, Shenisa Allen, and Tabatha Ford from Greenville High School in Meriwether County, and Caroline Whitt and Jessica Ainsworth from Lithia Springs High School in Douglas County presented at the recent SSTAGE conference in a session titled, "Georgia High Schools: Getting Started and Moving Forward."

These dynamic educators left no doubt that motivation and passion for student success and school improvement is present in Georgia high schools. These schools are implementing practices such as universal screening, using data to guide interventions, and creating dedicated blocks in the master schedule to intervene with students. These high schools also provide a myriad of extended supports for struggling students such as credit recovery and Saturday school.

Despite success stories such as these, a lot of work still lies ahead for high schools. Even the two high schools mentioned acknowledge their needs for continuing improvement. RTI is a complex system that impacts every aspect of school functioning. Over the years, as interventions have been developed, more options have become available for high schools. When compared to what is available for elementary schools, however, high schools still may feel overlooked. Scheduling challenges are magnified with large school populations found at many high schools, and effective communication becomes difficult when multiple educators are working with each student. Given these reasons and others, some high school teachers may be reluctant to implement RTI, even when administrators are supportive of the RTI process.

High schools must continue to work through unique challenges on their path of RTI implementation. However, Lithia Springs and Greenville High Schools, along with many others, provide inspiration that progress can be made.