



Student Support Team for Georgia Educators

Effective Solutions Matched to Student Needs

Disproportionality in School Discipline: The Role of Implicit Bias and How to Neutralize It Dr. Kent McIntosh

Decades of statistics at both the state and national levels document severe racial/ethnic disparities in school discipline, with Black or African American students receiving disproportionately more office discipline referrals and suspensions than their White peers. This disproportionality is concerning because of the widely-documented negative effects of exclusionary school discipline on educational and life outcomes. Unfortunately, some efforts (e.g., cultural sensitivity training) have not closed the discipline gap, and many educators are left wondering how to improve outcomes for students of color when even bringing up the subject race can lead to arguments and blaming students or families.

(*Disproportionality* continued, p.2)

An Interview with Dr. Joseph Barrow: Georgia School Superintendent of the Year Courtney Sunseri Rogers

SSTAGE recently had the honor of meeting with Dr. Jody Barrow of Fayette County School System, the 2017 GSSA Superintendent of the Year. Dr. Barrow began his career in education in 1980 and has served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal and superintendent across the K-12 education spectrum in several Georgia school systems. During our visit with Dr. Barrow, we were able to gain valuable insights from his thirty plus years of experience in education in regards to how leaders can make a positive impact on their organization and truly be “Champions for Children.”

Vision for Supporting Continuous System and School Improvement

As a district leader, Dr. Barrow emphasizes relationship building and communication as the most critical components for supporting continuous system and school improvement. As educational leaders “you have to take the time to listen and know your audience in order to determine your message. We are in the business of providing quality customer service. Therefore, in taking the time to build relationships with all stakeholders, we can effectively identify areas of need and align our services that...

(*Barrow* continued, p.3)

2017 SSTAGE STAR Award Winning Schools Wallace Blackstock

Each year SSTAGE hosts the Promising Practices Conference at The Classic Center in Athens, GA. Schools and school systems across the state apply to make a presentation at the conference regarding their effective practices to support students through the RTI framework and their successful implementation of the Student Support Team to meet students’ needs and thereby promote student improvement and school/district improvement. Following the conference in January, a team from SSTAGE visits the applicants with the highest audience scores from the conference. These visits are designed to evaluate the school’s/district’s practices as well as ensure that the presentations match the practices.

(*Awards*, continued p. 3)

Fall Conference - September 10-11, 2018
Two Days for School Teams - School Culture,
School Climate, School-wide Discipline Equity
with Dr. Kent McIntosh

2019 Promising Practices Conference
January 16, 2019

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Fortunately, new research is pointing to promising avenues for both understanding root causes of the discipline gap and identifying strategies that are most likely to reduce it. This research shows a powerful predictor of discipline disparities is *implicit bias*. When many people hear the word bias, they often think of overt or explicit bias, which is conscious (i.e., deliberate). In contrast, implicit bias is unconscious (i.e., automatic) and influences our decisions without us even knowing about it. That doesn't excuse biased decision-making—instead it helps us determine the best ways to counter it. Research in business and law shows that explicit bias is best countered by calling it out and building strong policies with accountability for unbiased decision-making. But these same interventions might actually magnify the effects of implicit bias because the decision maker is unaware of it. Instead, research shows that the most promising way to counter implicit bias is to do the following two steps: (1) identify specific situations where biased responses are more likely (we call these situations vulnerable decision points, because the decision-maker is more vulnerable to the influence of implicit bias on their decisions), and (2) learn and use a “neutralizing routine,” an alternative response that can be used in place of the knee-jerk response (e.g., sending a student to the office). Our initial research is showing that such an approach is feasible in schools and can reduce discipline disparities (McIntosh, Ellwood, McCall, & Girvan, in press).

However, because discipline disproportionality is multi-faceted, no single approach will solve the problem. Implicit bias is the source of much—but not all—disproportionality. Instead, what is needed is a multi-component intervention approach. The OSEP National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS; www.pbis.org) has released freely-available resources for achieving equity in school discipline (www.pbis.org/school/equity-pbis) that align with the following 5 recommendations:

1. **Collect, use, and report disaggregated discipline data.** It is important not only to assess whether overall student outcomes are improving, but also to assess whether outcomes are improving for students in each racial/ethnic group.
2. **Implement a behavior framework that is preventive, multi-tiered, and culturally responsive.** Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) can be effective for implementing proactive behavior support. PBIS, an example of an MTSS for behavior support, is flexible enough that it can be adapted to the needs of students, their families, and their communities. PBIS has been shown in multiple studies to decrease the discipline gap.
3. **Use engaging academic instruction to reduce the opportunity (achievement) gap.** Instruction can improve equity when it: (a) is explicit, (b) primes background knowledge, (c) has high rates of opportunities to respond, and (d) includes performance feedback.
4. **Develop policies with accountability for disciplinary equity.** Policies are most effective when they have a clear focus on equitable outcomes, enable instructional approaches to discipline, restrict the use of exclusionary practices, and mandate processes for implementing equity action plans.
5. **Teach strategies to neutralize implicit bias.** Once educators understand implicit bias and become aware of their vulnerable decision points, they can learn and use alternative responses that allow them to respond in line with their values.



Dr. Kent McIntosh

“Research in business and law shows that explicit bias is best countered by calling it out and building strong policies with accountability for unbiased decision-making.”

Achieving equity in school discipline may not be easy, but there are effective strategies for doing so, and many make use of skills that educators already have, such as good teaching and data-based decision making.

Dr. Kent McIntosh, Ph.D., teaches and conducts research in the areas of positive behavior support, school systems change, and sustainability of evidence-based interventions in schools. He is Director of Educational and Community Supports, a research unit in the College of Education at the University of Oregon.



Dr. Barrow began his career in education in 1980. He is in his fifth year as the Superintendent of Fayette County Schools, having served previously as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and superintendent across the K-12 spectrum in several Georgia school systems.

(BARROW, CONTINUED, P.1)
... **directly** focus on supporting teachers and students (Barrow, October 10, 2017)."

Dr. Barrow's vision for district leaders and support personnel is a boots on the ground service approach that promotes active collaboration and supports to schools in order to have a direct impact on student achievement. In regards to school improvement, Dr. Barrow believes that student achievement is "where the rubber meets the road." As a result of this philosophy, Dr. Barrow believes in intentionally aligning departments at the district office level to support administrators and teachers. "Our largest department in regards to support is Student Achievement. We believe that if we invest in our people in this department and have them directly working with teachers in supporting standards-based instructional practices and students, we are going to get results (Barrow, October 10, 2017).

Multi-Tiered System of Supports: More than a Conversation

As an instructional leader at the system and school level, Dr. Barrow strongly believes that having a systematic framework of Multi-Tiered System Supports (MTSS) is critical for continuous system and school improvement. Dr. Barrow stated that MTSS is more than just a conversation but rather best practice. As educators, we have wanted to personalize instruction for a long time, which can be a challenge when teachers have 25-30 students in their classroom. However, Dr. Barrow believes that with the technology, resources available, and a stronger understanding of how the brain functions, educators are closer than ever before to actualizing personalized learning for our students. When speaking to educational stakeholders about the importance of MTSS, Dr. Barrow shared the following talking points for engaging in meaningful discussions about supporting student success:

- Our primary goal as educators is to remove barriers in order for students to be successful and achieve at the highest level possible, which requires personalized instructional practices.
- MTSS encompasses effective Tier 1 and Tier 2 instructional practices in the classroom that are consistent and pervasive across the system and schools.
- MTSS is a problem-solving process to support student success that runs congruent with special education, rather than a pathway (to SpED).
- In addition to removing barriers for our students, we need to remove barriers for our teachers and ensure that they have the resources, technology and professional learning necessary to get students across the finish line.
- MTSS must align with continuous system and school improvement that is data-driven.

Shifting Practices to Increase Rigor of Success

As educators it's important to nudge one another and challenge professional growth in order to expand our pedagogy and flourish student success. An intentional focus on literacy, along with the majority of schools across the state of Georgia, is an area that Dr. Barrow believes has the strongest correlate for maximizing student success. According to Dr. Barrow, "all of our boats are going to rise if we can be intentional with a focus on strengthening literacy instruction at all school levels. In addition, when speaking from an MTSS perspective and continuous school improvement, we need to make sure there is a strong plan in place for literacy instruction, allocation of resources and support with embedded professional learning that is monitored for effectiveness. If we can accomplish this, we are going to see progress across all content areas."

The Power of Partnerships

Intentionality for allocating resources and establishing partnerships with educational organizations is a strategy that Dr. Barrow has invested in over the years as a district leader. His partnership with SSTAGE dates back to his leadership in Ware County School System, one of the first school systems in the state to receive the SSTAGE Promising Practices award at the district level. Establishing a partnerships with organizations such as SSTAGE is what Dr. Barrow attributes to administrators and teachers embracing the response to intervention framework as a means for personalized instruction and standards based practices in a manner to support all students. As educators, it is important to recognize that there isn't a single, solitary bullet in education. We need to value the power of collaboration and see the potential in every student. Therefore, we have to create momentum by helping teachers and colleagues connect the dots, realign and make instructional adjustments as needed, and make the implementation of best practices a priority that is consistent and pervasive across all classrooms in order to maximize student success.

Awards, continued from p.1

In making its decision for which schools would receive the award, the SSTAGE Board of Directors' visiting Team considered the following characteristics of effective Pyramid of Interventions and RTI practices:

- Effective systematic problem solving process at each tier
- Coordinated system of instructional and behavioral supports and resources
- Coordinated system of assessment and progress monitoring
- Job-embedded professional learning and ongoing teacher supports
- A systematic plan for parent/family communication and involvement

Each winning school's implementation of these components has brought their school to the forefront of RTI in Georgia, warranting awarding them the coveted *SSTAGE STAR Award for Promising Practices*. SSTAGE is happy to announce the 2017 STAR Award winners are:

Elementary School Winner:

Bowdon Elementary School, Carroll County Schools

Principal: Lorie Teal

Assistant Principal: Colleen Jones (Currently Assistant Principal at Central High School, Carroll County); Ginny Edwards (Current Assistant Principal, Bowdon Elementary/2017-2018)

Middle School Winner:

Henry County Middle School, Henry County Schools

Principal: James Mercer (2016-2017) (LaRita Wiggins-Current Principal at HCMS/2017-2018)

Assistant Principal: Julissa Forbes (Current Principal, Stockbridge Middle School)

Student Support Facilitator: Diana Zoellner

High School Winner:

Madison County High School, Madison County Schools

Principal: George Bullock

Assistant Principal of Instruction ad RTI: Dr. Melissa Conway

Assistant Principal of Special Education: Ms. Julie Shadburn

Lead Counselor: Daniel Bennett

Reading Specialist: Ms. Angela Dean

The SSTAGE Rubric For SST, RTI/MTSS

<p>Characteristics of Effective Practice for SST, RTI/MTSS and the Pyramid of Interventions</p>	<p>Circle the number that represents the degree to which the school or system demonstrate each characteristic: 1 – Not Addressed 2 – Emergent 3 – Operational 4 – Fully Operational</p>
<p>1. Effective, systematic problem solving process at each tier with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined responsibilities and roles of members • Alignment, communication & connectedness (with/to other teams) • Data driving the team's decision making to inform instruction 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>2. A coordinated system of assessment and progress monitoring (to include universal screening, decision-making rules, data collection and analysis, measures of fidelity, and intervention effectiveness).</p>	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>3. A coordinated system of instructional/behavioral supports and programs with resources allocated (to include scheduling, research-based materials and practices, and staffing).</p>	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>4. Job-embedded professional learning and ongoing teacher support that addresses relevant areas essential to effective implementation including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching support • Follow-up to ensure implementation of new skills • Case study examples 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>5. A systematic plan with specified practices for parent/family communication and involvement. Sample practices such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence in developing parent/family pyramids • Parent/Family brochures • Parent/Family training modules 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>

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**McGraw Hill Education
and
SSTAGE**



**Invite You To
The 2nd Annual Georgia
RTI/MTSS Summit**

Featuring Dr. Mark Shinn

Thursday, March 22 at the Anderson Conference Center, Macon, GA

Click [HERE](#) to register for the conference!

Breakout Sessions with:

Colquitt County School
Jackson County Schools

Madison County High School
Fayette County High School
Henry County Middle School

Oak Grove Elementary
Bowdon Elementary

**When: Thursday, March 22, 2018
8:00 AM–3:30 PM**

**Where: The Anderson Conference Center
5272 Eisenhower Pkwy.
Macon, GA 31206**

Registration (You may register on-site.)

- \$150 for 2017-18 paid SSTAGE members
- \$200 for non-members

Event Schedule

7:00-7:50 Registration/Breakfast
8:30-10:15 Keynote Presentation with Dr. Shinn
10:15-10:30 Break
10:30-11:45 Breakout Sessions
11:45-12:45 Lunch (Lunch Provided)
12:50-2:05 Breakout Sessions
2:05-2:15 Break (Afternoon Snack Provided)
2:15-3:30 Closing Session with Dr. Mark Shinn