



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Powerful RtI Training Experiences

Cornell Elementary School, Iowa • January 2010

Topic: Response to Intervention in Primary Grade Reading  
Practice: RtI Implementation

### Highlights

- Technical assistance provider Wendy Robinson describes the types of support that schools need from an external agent to implement RtI.
- She discusses the use and value of a constituent chart, which RtI leadership teams create to bring others in their school on board.
- Ms. Robinson provides an extended example of a story she uses to help schools understand the implications of taking on a data-focused instructional philosophy of allocation of resources.
- She describes how to move from data sorting to instructional decision making using a “four box” categorization of students’ reading needs.
- Robinson talks about the value of a school’s Data Days, including the role of the schoolwide RtI leadership team.

### About the Site

Cornell Elementary School  
Des Moines, IA

## Demographics

87% White

9% Hispanic

2% Black

2% Other

50% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

4% English Language Learners

8% Special Education

Response to Intervention (known in Iowa as Instructional Decision Making, or IDM) has been evolving at Cornell Elementary School over the past 15 years under the leadership of Principal Deb Chiodo. The school has developed RtI practices over that time period with the assistance of the Heartland Area Education Agency and a regional technical assistance provider. Features of IDM (RtI) at Cornell include:

- A grade-level teaming structure led by the principal and responsible for regular reviews of data, progress assessment, and planning interventions;
- Universal screening in reading and math, followed by schoolwide data days;
- A variety of intervention structures, including differentiated instruction in the core classroom and small-group interventions;
- Implementation of RtI in reading and math with positive behavior supports.

## Full Transcript

My name is Wendy Robinson, and I am the assistant director of professional development in Heartland Area Education Agency, here in Iowa, and one of my primary functions is to help coordinate our instructional decision-making project.

In Iowa, we use the term Instructional Decision Making, where in many other parts of the country, that terminology is RTI or Response to Instruction. We think about having three phases. We think about a commitment and infrastructure phase. So what we recommend is that for a full year that each building would send a building leadership team to professional learning to learn about the infrastructure planning that they need to do, to think about all of the questions that they would need to and the planning that they would need to do to be able to start implementing this in a year. We found without the planning phase, we had very low implementation and we had very little integrity among many of the things we were trying to implement.

## *Constituent Chart*

One of the steps we had them do is that they had to create a constituent chart and they had, each person

on the building leadership team, had to identify who were the people that they were to go back and communicate with and whose views they would also bring back when they were making decisions. We found if we didn't do that, what happened was after a year you had a small group of people who had amazing conversations, who made amazing decisions about kids, but they never brought their colleagues along.

### ***Confirming the Basic Premises***

When we are engaging in this work, what we are going to say is that it's going to really truly be based on the kids' data, so that you could be possibly a second-grade teacher and you may get no additional support if the data in your classroom would suggest that your kids don't need that level of support. That is a very different thought process, and it's easy to agree to until you actually see that practical ramifications. That was something that we really needed to bring Heartland staff in to do, and we as Heartland staff figured out, by telling other people's stories was how we would go about doing it.

For example, a school district always had summer school and all grade levels had access to it. Well, they started looking at, well, was it worth the money, what were they getting out of the summer school, and the budget had been cut. So the decision got made through the building leadership team that only one grade level would get their summer school. It turned out to be the second-grade class, and there were 22 students who really needed the help and they had the highest need. But what was interesting was the implications that had because that meant that only certain teachers could teach summer school; they had to be trained in the instructional techniques that the student had. With the support, though, from an outside and more neutral party, they were able to weather that storm. And the "So what?" of all that is you talk about these 22 kids who came for eight weeks, three hours a day, very targeted toward their needs. By the end of third grade, 15 out of the 22 were on track. Think about the power of that, even if it wasn't your students.

### ***Making the Instructional Match***

Districts get very good at collecting the screening data, and they get good at sorting kids based on the data. Where they struggle is the instructional match. We have developed very practical, reasonable, doable ways. One that we just tend to call is our Four-Box method in the area of reading. The first thing we would ask is, "Are they accurate at their grade level?" If the student is not accurate, the inaccurate kids would all land in an instructional box. Now, within that box, we realize that it could be basic decoding, it could be sight words, or it could even be multisyllabic. There is another group of kids who are very accurate readers, but they are not automatic or effortless readers. Sorting even between an accurate and inaccurate are two very different instructional responses. Now you could ask yourself, "Do they read and understand?" or checking into their comprehension skills, and you could dig deeper there. Once we got teachers to understand that, they would even start to look for those patterns and kids on a daily basis and not just wait

for the benchmarking data three times a year. And now you've started to get teachers to start to be more diagnostic.

### ***Data Days***

One concept that we found was very powerful was the concept of something called the Data Day. And what we encouraged our administrators to do was to set these within a week after that the building had screened all the kids and collected the benchmark data. The primary focus is to get each of the classroom teachers to look at their class, to look at the instructional needs of their students, and to be able to shift resources, to change instructional strategies for kids, or to identify if there were kids who were on track but now seem to be starting to need more support in terms of looking at that.

As schools get very good at this, and this is once again one of my practical indicators that we're there, is that we only spend a certain percentage of time on our struggling kids. And they are starting to ask what would be appropriate for their on-track kids and their highly proficient kids or their highly able kids. Then we know that this has become institutionalized; this is about all kids.

What we have assembled is a group of people who have a high knowledge of the students themselves, a group of people who have a high content knowledge of the data that we're about to look at for those students so we can make some really good decisions about students. Part of the building leadership team's job on a Data Day is, in addition to working with your classroom teachers, is you want to look across your grade levels and you want to look across your whole building. Those are the kind of things we have found that districts really, or buildings, have to do if you are going to sustain this and it's going to be the way that you do business with kids.