

Best Practices Newsletter

Guidance and Strategies Needed to Jump-Start College and Careers

Schools have an obligation to prepare students for college and careers. Endemic to that are challenging academics and extra help programs, quality career and technical education, and counseling and advisement programs that help students make informed choices about career pathways, course offerings and career options. This newsletter lays the groundwork for helping students to succeed in school and beyond.

It describes best practices presented at the 29th Annual High Schools That Work Staff Development Conference in Atlanta, GA.



Preparing Students for College and Career Readiness: Whose Job is it Anyway?

Some students at Bernallillo High School (BHS) in New Mexico are leaving school with a diploma, industry certification and a job in hand, but it wasn't always that way. Just a few years ago, BHS was faced with administrative turnover, student apathy and a staff that was not always adept at meeting the needs of their students.

The school serves roughly 750 students in grades nine through 12. The majority of these students are English language learners from Hispanic and Native American backgrounds. When **Keith Cowan** became principal in 2011, he breathed new life into several programs and policies, which had an immediate positive impact on the school culture and preparing students for college and careers.

The career and technical education program (CTE) was one of the first to experience change. Several programs of study are in place; these comprise elective courses designed to provide students with a pathway to career and industry certification. Students have the option of taking courses in agriculture, arts and communication, automotive principles, business, culinary arts, drafting, hospitality, robotics and welding in addition to the traditional high school courses.

The problem is, few students were actually earning industry certifications until Cowan and his staff put in place a practice of sequencing courses in the programs of study and using a state-approved company for its industry certification exams, which all students take at the end of each semester. Halfway through the 2015-16 school year, 52 students were certified in various career fields.

Julia Straight, a school counselor, maintains the CTE program gives students who may enjoy cooking, baking or welding a chance to dabble in a field for which they have a passion. She noted, "It gives them an opportunity to go into that field, become certified and get dual credit" through collaboration with local colleges.

Real-World Experiences

Students also gain authentic, hands-on experience. For example, most of the students in the culinary arts or hospitality program do internships at the Hyatt Tamaya, and many are hired by the hotel when they graduate. Cowan has seen these students perform in the workplace. He said, "These experiences allow our students to shine in a professional environment. They may never have that opportunity in a school setting."

Students in this program also work at the Chez Nous, an on-campus restaurant that opens one day each week. Culinary arts students prepare a three-course meal, and hospitality students serve lunch.

Students in the business program operate the Spartan Cyber Café, which serves lunch Monday through Friday, and gain valuable experience by collecting money from customers and doing inventory.

The Spartan Auto Shop is a blocked class where students in the automotive, drafting and welding programs gain experience working on vehicles from community, district or staff.

Enhancing Guidance and Advisory

In addition to the focus on career development, BHS has also reinvented its counseling department. Teachers and counselors now work together as cohesive teams to meet the emotional and safety needs of their students. Each student is enrolled in Spartans, an advisory period that ensures every student has an adult mentor to follow them from grades nine through 12. This is an opportunity for staff to build relationships with students and keep them on track for graduation, said Straight.

During the weekly 30-minute advisory period, teachers may review grades, consult with parents, provide assistance with college applications and scholarships, and much more. As counselor Straight stresses, "It is now everyone's job to support our students and help them to be college and career ready."

A Work in Progress

The staff at BHS worked toward several goals during the 2015-16 school year:

- Promote BHS' programs of study to middle grades students during eighth-grade orientation.
- Have eighth-graders take a career inventory before registering for high school classes.
- Plan a career exploration day for high school students who don't already participate in these programs to expose them to the opportunities available to them.
- Increase the number of students who earn industry certification and the number of certifications available to students.
- Organize a job fair and increase the size of BHS' military fair.
- Provide free online certification testing to students enrolled in programs of study.

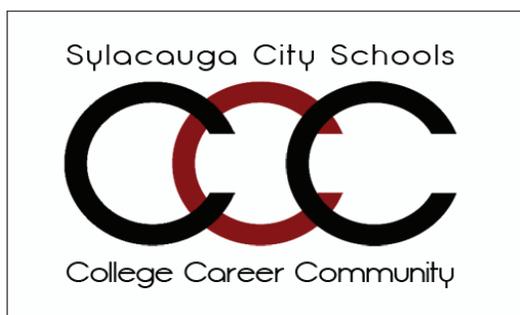
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High-Performing RTI: Real, Targeted Intervention!

In **Sylacauga City Schools** (SCS) in Alabama, the mission is clear: every student will graduate prepared for college, careers and community success. Proactive models are in place to ensure this vision is a reality. In 2011, SCS created a systemic model for providing focused, targeted interventions for students in grades K-12, and it's yielded phenomenal success.



An early identification system requires that all students are screened, assessed and receive targeted support through a multi-tier initiative called Response to Instruction (RTI), known in many schools as Response to Intervention.

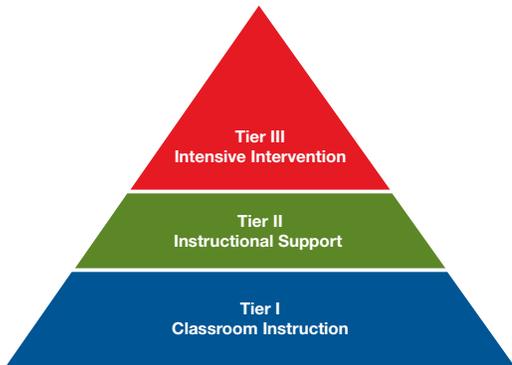
"The idea is to offer students intervention at any point at every grade level as needed," said **Carol Martin**, the school system's director of instruction and intervention. The system serves four schools: two elementary, one middle grades and one high school. While processes are consistent across schools, each building develops its own RTI model. "There is no cookie-cutter formula approach," indicated Martin. "Each of our RTI teams works differently, and they all have great results for students."

RTI Model

At the beginning of each school year, students are assessed using Renaissance Learning STAR assessments. STAR assessments provide information about students' abilities and achievements in reading and math and compares them to national norms. The assessments are repeated throughout the year as needed to monitor students' progress.

RTI teams are formed to review assessment data and other factors such as students' grades, behavior, absenteeism and other factors. The composition of the RTI teams and calendar of meetings vary at each school. After analyzing the data, the RTI team gets a clear picture of what's happening with every child and determines which students need intervention, support or enrichment. A multi-tiered approach is used to personalize targeted support for all students.

Response to Instruction
Sylacauga City Schools, Alabama
Three Tiers of Support



RTI teams meet monthly to review student progress.

Tier I is classroom instruction. SCS has a strong focus on teaching and learning to ensure high-quality instruction at every level. The district believes most students will be successful in Tier I.

Tier II involves instructional support and resources at the classroom level with parents as partners. Teachers target specific skills or work that students need. At this level, gaps can be closed quickly with additional time and different approaches in small groups or individual work. Growth is monitored carefully to see if interventions are working.

Tier III begins a process of intense intervention. After several weeks of intervention, students who show little or no progress move to this level. About 5 percent of students fall into this category, and they need intensive intervention, including those in the “menu” of interventions below.

SCS Menu of Interventions

- **Saturday School** — This strategy provides opportunities for students to make up missing work, retake exams and receive extra help. Transportation, breakfast and lunch are provided to make it an enjoyable experience.
- **Do Your Work** — This middle grades program holds students accountable for completing all assignments and assessments, teaching them that zeros are not accepted.
- **Late Night at the Middle Grades School** — This special event, highlighted by pizza and study sessions, helps keep students on track.
- **ACE Class and Success Class** — These are extra periods that allow students to complete credit recovery assignments, catch up after extended absences and get extra help or enrichment.
- **Lunch Bunch** — Lunch bunch provides opportunities for small-groups of students who need assistance in similar content areas to receive help from teachers during the lunch hour.
- **Jump-Start Summer Program** — This program provides proactive interventions at critical transition times that are designed to strengthen students academically before they enter the next grade level; program runs every morning for two weeks in the summer.

All of the programs, even Saturday School and the Jump-Start Summer Program, are successful. “I think it’s because it is not considered punitive; it’s considered true support. When students get that kind of individual attention, they do embrace it,” said Martin. “We actually have students and parents requesting Success on Saturday classes.”

Progress Through the Roof



Carol Martin

Sylacauga City Schools tracks the RTI system’s success indicators closely. Graduation rates have steadily increased over the past three years from 78 percent in 2011-12 school year to 91 percent in the 2014-15 school year. Retentions in ninth grade have dramatically decreased from 20 percent to 5 percent, and there have been zero eighth-grade retentions — a critical transition year.

The formula for success is really simple, maintained Martin. “We’re just going to find the kids who need help and we’re going to help them. We believe in REAL, personalized support.”

Students’ RTI plans will transition with them from school to school, allowing students to continue their growth and avoid starting the process over at the next grade level. RTI teams will meet in the spring to share information about RTI plans in upcoming grade levels with each school. Students begin each year with supports already in place, continuing the cycle of success.

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Helping Students Discover Their Paths to Success

Far too often, students graduate from high school with no idea what they want to be or what college major or career path is best suited for them. It doesn't have to be that way; clues to students' futures lie inside them.

YouScience, a revolutionary online data-driven career discovery process, helps high school students recognize the intersection of their aptitude (what they do well), interests (what they love to do) and opportunities (where they'll thrive in jobs that the market needs).

Panelists representing various workforce preparedness perspectives convened at the 29th Annual High Schools That Work Staff Development Conference in Atlanta to address the benefits of YouScience and find ways to help students discover the best path for their education and career success. The primary question for panelists was, "How do we help high school students make good decisions about an educational path and a career?"

Gene Bottoms, SREB senior vice president, said middle grades and high school counselors need to be keenly aware of career and technical education (CTE) opportunities. These CTE opportunities need to be clearly defined career pathway pipelines and a sequence of courses that are relevant and rigorous. Such CTE courses need to include project-based instruction, dual enrollment options and the opportunity for credentials.

A variety of panelists ranging from a state senator to a superintendent to a student touted the benefits of YouScience, which uses game-like exercises to scientifically measure aptitudes and career choice, pinpoints work activities that students like and are passionate about and ultimately recommends careers that best fit a student's abilities and interests.

"YouScience seeks to position counselors as the heroes by providing an easy-to-interpret summary that makes it simple for them to discuss with students and parents," said Philip Hardin, YouScience CEO. "By helping students understand their strengths and broadening their vision of opportunity, we inspire them to continue to pursue their education and more effectively enter the workforce."

A recent high school graduate who used the YouScience inventory said he was pleasantly surprised and helped by the YouScience results. He was headed for a communications major because of his outgoing personality, but the YouScience report indicated he should consider architecture, given his interests and his aptitudes. The student believes the customized report accurately reflects the participant.

To learn more, please visit www.youscience.com/educators or call 844-YOUCIENCE.

Breaking Up the Block



Cary Nadzak

"Create a little organized chaos in your classroom!" That's the mantra of **Cary Nadzak**, a sixth-grade social studies teacher at **Northwoods Middle School** in North Charleston, South Carolina. Her lessons are full of fun, quirky, interactive ways to deliver instruction and assess students' progress. Her ideas for breaking up a 90-minute block include read-alouds, brain breaks and hands-on activities for review and checking for understanding.

Nadzak has taught a wide variety of subjects at the high school and middle grades levels. She believes in routines and daily procedures that give structure to any classroom. Her students expect an agenda on the board when they come into the classroom and will call her out if she's missed a daily favorite! Written agendas benefit students and teachers by establishing a plan for the day. They should include standards that have been "unpacked" and rewritten in student-friendly language.

She believes in the importance of establishing classroom expectations early in the year. Teaching students what the block looks like and practicing routines pay off later with smooth transitions from activity to activity. "Having a routine cuts down on confusion and discipline issues," said Nadzak.

When planning for a 90-minute block, a variety of activities and modes of delivery are needed. Activities that involve auditory, visual and kinesthetic components appeal to many learning styles in a class and will aid in differentiating instruction. Examples may include music, photos, games or gallery walks. She uses variations of the following schedule.

Bell-to Bell for 90 Minutes: What the Block Looks Like

Activity	Information
Do This Now!	A video clip, reflection, quote, review question or activity, riddle, rap or poetry and be on the board when students enter.
Read Aloud!	The teacher reads aloud a chapter per day from an adolescent novel.
Anticipation Activity	This can be done in “Do This Now” or can be a photo, video clip or song.
Delivery of Content	This can be short, direct instruction (limit to 20 minutes), power points, reading selections, “what it is” bubble maps, vocabulary exercises, group activities or jigsaw activities.
Practice /Review	Review may include iPad games, three-second “I learned,” group races or contests, white board reviews, Kahoot!
Assessment / Checking for Understanding	Possible activities include mini-quizzes, six-word summaries, class paragraphs, student iPad presentations or iPad games.
Ticket to Leave	This may include agenda or homework information, parking lot or partner activities.

Sample Activities

Read-Alouds: Nadzak likes to introduce her daily activities with a song. For instance, when her students hear the “*Wonderful World of Disney*” theme, they know it’s time for the daily read-aloud.

Nadzak swears by read-alouds; she never skips it even if there is a shortened schedule. Reading aloud every day gives students the opportunity to hear fluid reading and expands their interests and vocabulary. She suggests reading adolescent novels that have a sequel so that students will continue reading on their own. She usually reads near the beginning of the class period, but reading at the end of class can calm down students after a boisterous activity. Since she’s implemented read-alouds into her daily routine, students have checked out more books from the library and have shown much more interest in reading. They often check out the book being read in class so they can read ahead!

Direct Instruction: Nadzak maintains direct instruction should be kept to no more than 20 minutes at a time if it is teacher-centered. It may be longer if it involves hands-on activities. Instructions for group activities like *Pass the Folder*, can be found on her website: <http://looneyteachr.com>.

Wake-ups: Nadzak has used “wake-ups” in her classes even before the new “brain break” phenomena! These fun exercises are designed to mix things up a bit and add a little spice and variety to the class. Tons of brain break activities can be found on the Internet.

Practice and Review

Nadzak is always looking for new review activities. Her students love playing Kahoot! or participating in outside treasure hunts for eggs, or miniature boxes with review questions in them. Playing Bingo or using Padlet allows students to show what they know. Gallery walks are fun ways to allow students to move while learning.

Assessments do not always have to be exams. Collages, cartoons, journal writing, portfolios, and bubble maps are also great ways to gauge where students are in their learning. Kahoot, Padlet and Quizizz are student favorites. They cannot only show what they know by participating in review games, but can take it a bit further by designing their own games. Mastery Connect is another great resource for frequent formative assessment.

Teaching styles are greatly influenced by personalities, but everyone doesn’t have to be a “looney teacher.” Choose hands-on and innovative activities that match your unique teaching style. “Putting in the time and energy up front in planning pays off in student achievement, classroom climate and teacher sanity,” says Nadzak.

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For more information about the school improvement models offered by SREB, contact Gene Bottoms, senior vice president, at gene.bottoms@sreb.org or call (404) 875-9211.