



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Principal's Role in Instructional Decision Making

Cornell Elementary School, Iowa • January 2010

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

### Highlights

- Cornell Elementary School Principal Deb Chiodo describes her evolution as instructional leader through RtI.
- She discusses the importance of her participation in grade-level meetings, including bringing the historical perspective on each child.
- Chiodo describes a typical grade-level meeting, including participants, process, and the role of parents.
- She highlights two levels of problem documentation: Form 1 for what the classroom teacher will try in order to address a student's problem; Form 2 to seek advice from colleagues if his or her own interventions have not worked.
- Chiodo describes how she examines student results, including ensuring that students who have not done well have had the opportunity for interventions.

### 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

I am Deb Chiodo, and I have been principal here at Cornell Elementary, in Saydel, for approximately 15 years, and I have evolved, as principal here, through the RtI process—Response to Intervention. I have evolved as an instructional leader through that process and I have a strong belief, a strong passion for the process. I think it helps us all be better educators every single day for our students. We have moved away from, at my school anyways, we have moved away from “I think this is what the student needs” to “I know this is what the student needs,” because it’s all data-driven.

## *Grade-Level Meetings*

Grade-level meetings are a core foundational piece that happens at Cornell Elementary throughout the school year. It’s a commitment I have made as an instructional leader that are weekly team meetings; I rotate them by week. I have the historical perspective when I sit down with those teachers; they have only the yearly. So I can say, “Yes, you know what, I think this is time that we change the course on this,” because I have watched teachers do multiple interventions or we have met with these parents multiple times.

I would like to paint a picture of what a grade-level meeting would look like. My counselor sits in on those meetings, my Title I teachers sit in on these meetings, and also I have the TAG teacher, or we call that ELP (Extended Learning Program), sits in on those meetings. So that, that allows us to do the full gamut for the child. It's not just talking about reading or talking about math or talking about behavior; sometimes it's all three of those things that we are discussing about one child. We sit down and I go teacher by teacher and I keep notes. I have notes on every student by every teacher regarding every issue that comes up. And we actually use grade-level forms that are called Level One or Level Two.

Level One, those I have watched over the years and what we have used that Level One form is that it allows a teacher to fill it out and say, "You know what, I think this is a problem." So Level One allows us to begin to capture that, and at that point they would have a conversation with the parent; we never do anything without a conversation with the parent. Then they work with that Level One for multiple weeks. They share that data at a grade-level meeting. They will say, "I have written a Level One, this is the reason why, this is what I am trying to do within the classroom environment."

If they see that the Level One is not making headway, then they move it to a Level Two. Now, the Level Two is much more specific on the grade-level form. That's when at that point then we change it and we write a specific goal. We provide the intervention. We become more attuned to "This is what we are looking for and this is how we want to make the change," and we want to know whether we have made the change and whether it's working or not based on the data that we are collecting through progress monitoring.

I pretty much won't have a conversation about a student unless they have filled out the form. You can't just admire a problem; you have to back it with something. I am a strong believer that it is my role, my responsibility, and my commitment to leadership and to help teachers be the best that they can be for their students. And so that allows me to have excellent dialogue with teachers—what's truly happening in the classroom, what truly looks like for the instructional piece, how much time is being spent on that instructional component that's being provided for students, if that's routes that we choose for kids. It allows me to have deeper conversations with my teachers. I am very confident talking with parents when I sit down and I am supporting a teacher, or we have to bring to light why we are concerned and that maybe we have to go for an evaluation and say, "We have been tracking your student for two years, three years, whatever the case, six months . . . ." You know, there is no magic to it of the time; it's about the intensity of the need and that allows me to support the teacher, to support the child, and to help the parent feel confident that this is not just a quick answer.

## **Results**

I look at results by grade level, I look at results by individual students, I look at results by individual teachers, I look at results on ITBS when we get the results back from our ITBS. The first thing I look for is kids that maybe didn't hit the mark. Were they on an intervention? Did I do what was right for them, or did

I miss somebody? That is the number-one thing I look for. If I can look in the mirror and know that I have provided good support, good counsel, making sure that each child was at least working to their potential, then I feel like I can look at the parent, look at the school board, look at my superintendent and say, “No, this student didn’t make the 40th percentile, but this is what we have been doing.”

I feel confident that I can tell you what we have done and I can tell you how we have adjusted things. I have watched and have been able to glean from the Rtl process sitting at the table every week with groups of teachers that I can see gaps or needs, and so that allows me, every year I will be able to see, “Gosh, this is where we need to improve.”