

Durham Elementary School

7980 SW Durham Road

Tigard, OR 97224

Principal: Joyce Woods

Durham Elementary School in Tigard-Tualatin School District provides a continuum of schoolwide instructional and positive behavior support. Primary prevention systems are school- and classroomwide for all students, staff, and settings. All students receive quality behavior and academic instruction and support; and all are screened for instructional needs in the fall, winter, and spring.

- ◆ Elementary (K-5)
- ◆ 58% White
- ◆ 29% Hispanic
- ◆ 13% Other
- ◆ 45% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ 15% English Language Learners

Evolution of Statewide Response to Intervention¹

Tigard-Tualatin School District played a key role in the evolution of RtI in Oregon and has maintained a central role in training and supporting other districts with RtI implementation.

“In the early 1990s, a team of school psychology and special education staff members...did some pioneering work. Collaborating with researchers from the University of Oregon, they piloted the use of curriculum-based measurement as a central component in the evaluation, identification, and monitoring process for special education....

“In spring 2000, based on the [Tigard-Tualatin] district’s experience, Tigard-Tualatin School District was awarded U.S. Department of Education funding to develop and implement a unique approach to reading and behavior instruction, called Effective Behavioral and Instructional Support [EBIS]. This award from the Office of Special Education Programs was one of only six similar projects funded nationally that year. There was little talk of RTI at the time, but essentially, this program represents the district’s rendering of RTI.

“Initial work starting in 2001 focused on expanding the school’s existing RTI team membership to include all K–3 teachers and specialists from Title I, special education, and English language learner programs. Special education and RTI project staff and school representatives met to formalize policies and procedures, including selecting both core and supplemental instructional programs (called ‘interventions’) and screening tests, team methods, and rules for placing students into three instructional levels, or tiers...a district literacy coordinator, special education teacher, and counselor, worked closely to provide technical assistance to the school teams....

The state department didn’t have the capacity to do this work, but...began to realize Tigard-Tualatin could...Upon mutual agreement in 2005, [the state] developed a

¹ Raphael, J. (2008). Tigard-Tualatin Sets the Standard for Oregon RTI Program. *Northwest Education*, 14(1), 14-19.

collaborative agreement with the [Tigard-Tualatin School] District to provide RTI training. This became OrRTI [Oregon Response to Intervention Project]...”

OrRTI Districtwide Training: Introducing and Sustaining RtI

“Tigard-Tualatin was well-suited to its leadership role in the Oregon Response to Intervention Project (OrRTI), as the state’s program is called, having implemented RTI since 2001, three years before the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act included the approach as an option for identifying students with learning disabilities” (Raphael, 2008).*

In Oregon, RtI is viewed as a systematic approach to instruction requiring collaboration between general and special education. To maintain an effective RtI system with a high level of fidelity, the entire district needs to be on board. OrRTI provides intensive training and support to 32 district teams from around the state. District training is focused on multi-tiered instruction, systems requirements, teaming, data analysis, and using the RtI approach to identify learning disabilities.

OrRTI staff works with district leadership teams to help them understand the stages of implementation and systems change across the district and achieve large-scale instructional change. Leadership teams include a variety of district office administrators, principals, and teaching and special education staff. Erin Lolich, OrRTI director, explains some of the critical components needed to sustain high-quality instruction:

“When I am thinking about sustaining high quality RTI instruction, the components that I want to keep in mind are how is training provided, how do teachers receive the training that they need in order to deliver the very best instruction, and then coaching: how much support do they get from folks like myself, from administrators that work within their building or school districts, how do they get ...on-going coaching [with] their instruction

“The final component of that are fidelity checks. Who is monitoring how instruction is being delivered and giving teachers feedback if they are on track, or are there pieces they could refine and enhance? Training, coaching, and fidelity checks are some of those big ideas for me that sustain high quality instruction. There is always that balance you need to strike between setting really high expectations for teachers and for children and making sure that what you are communicating is also feasible given the nature of teachers’ jobs and how many different things are being juggled in any given moment.”

OrRTI provides district teams with up-front training on how best to work together and emphasizes the principal’s importance as the team’s instructional leader. Continuing professional development focuses on the three RtI tiers and assessment, including explaining the purpose of different assessments (e.g., screening and progress monitoring) and providing assistance with aggregating statewide assessment and behavior data. In addition, districts receive training focused on shifting perceptions about learning disabilities, why it’s important to identify students early, and how to use intervention data.

The School Leadership Team: A Foundation for RtI

Durham Elementary School has established a strong building-level leadership team to facilitate RTI implementation and provide ongoing staff support. The team, which consists of the principal, counselor, literacy and ELL specialists, special education teacher, and classroom teachers from each grade level, meets weekly to plan and implement schoolwide supports, monitors students receiving small-group and individual interventions, oversees RtI fidelity, and makes referrals to special education. Key responsibilities include collecting and interpreting data for presentation at review and planning meetings and supporting staff in using assessment data, including screening, progress monitoring, and aggregating state- and school-level data.

Classroom teachers participate in student reviews during monthly grade-level meetings. At each meeting, team members use data to evaluate the core program, plan initial interventions for targeted student groups, and monitor student progress. Content-area teams meet every month to recommend curriculum and instructional improvements across all content areas. In addition, Individual Student Case Management implements intensive interventions and monitors student progress within the RtI process.

A Principal's Story (Raphael, 2008)*

“Joyce Woods, principal of Durham Elementary in Tigard-Tualatin School District...served as lead trainer during the OrRTI program’s first year...Woods remembers that when the district received the federal grant to implement its version of RTI, it decided not to make the program voluntary in the schools.

“‘The district studied the research and decided this was the right way to approach special and general education,’ says Woods. All teachers received training on tiered instructional interventions and RTI. The district emphasized how RTI changed student identification for special education, but in retrospect, Woods thinks that focus may have made people think the program was only for special education students. ‘This program means all students get a much more equivalent educational experience. No matter which second-grade class a student is in, he or she now gets the same well-delivered instruction,’ says Woods. ‘Most of all, as a teacher, if my student doesn’t succeed in my regular class, I no longer assume something’s wrong with the student. My team at the school asks what else we need to do beyond core instruction to help this student.’

“Woods remembers advising schools to start small and implement only what they could do well. To succeed, she says a school needs at least one team member who is adept with handling data. ‘If one of our teachers came to a team meeting without organizing and displaying the large amount of data we needed to review, it would be a disaster.’ Additionally, to implement RTI, school staff should be flexible: Reading will become a true priority, which means that for students in interventions, some instructional time in another subject will be forfeited. At Durham, students in interventions might miss some social studies, science, or health. Teachers must be flexible about their own instruction, too: A school must implement a research-based core-reading program, which in some cases means giving up previous instructional approaches.

“Woods says RTI helped to explain what she had already experienced as a special education teacher. ‘I used to work on phonics with some of my students, and they

would make this miraculous recovery. RTI taught me that I'm not a miracle worker—the kids just needed some additional instruction.”

Lessons Learned (Raphael, 2008)*

“Trainers and other staff involved in OrRTI have learned to go slowly while laying the groundwork for the large-scale changes involved in RTI. Especially in the first year, Lolic and her trainers spend more time talking about general education than special education, which comes as a surprise for some participants.

“RTI's emphasis on accurate implementation of interventions also means a district cannot rush putting the whole framework into place. When Woods worked with schools that weren't able to implement instructional interventions at all grade levels, she told them to start with the grade levels they could handle, even if that meant just one grade level. To reinforce high levels of implementation of instructional interventions, OrRTI trains both school principals and literacy specialists to regularly observe in classrooms.”