

Creating the Conditions for Success: A Case Study of Three Thompson Schools' RtI and PBIS Frameworks



“The power of collective capacity is that it enables ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things—for two reasons. One is that knowledge about effective practice becomes more widely available and accessible on a daily basis. The second reason is more powerful still—working together generates commitment.

The collective motivational well seems bottomless. The speed of effective change increases exponentially. Collective capacity, quite simply, gets more and deeper things done in shorter periods of time. (Fullan, 2010 p. 72)

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Additional Information

Please feel free to contact CDE with any questions and/or comments regarding this report. If your organization is interested in serving as a test site for future studies of multi-tiered systems of support, please notify us. Thank you.

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The study of success is central to the continuous improvement process (Fullan, 2010). In learning about success, we come to understand how we can expand individual pockets of excellence across multiple sites. Bringing good practices to scale is critical to the deep and lasting change required for ensuring student success within today’s challenging educational environment (Coburn, 2003; Coleman & Shah-Coltrane, 2011). In this report we explore one school district’s journey of RtI and PBIS implementation, examining the conditions and root causes of success for students with disabilities.

Colorado Department of Education’s Focus on RtI and PBIS

RtI and PBIS are central to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) mission to: *Provide all Colorado children equal access to quality, thorough, uniform, well-rounded educational opportunities in a safe, civil environment* (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 2008). Colorado’s RtI framework, a multi-tiered system of supports for academic and behavioral success, defines six critical areas for school improvement: leadership; curriculum & instruction; problem solving; assessment; positive school culture and climate; and family and community partnerships (CDE, 2008). Through these six components, RtI provides the organizational structure to support *all* students – including students with disabilities. The purpose of this study is to look at how the needs of students with disabilities are being addressed within the RtI and PBIS framework and specifically to examine the root causes that support the conditions for success. Thompson School District staff was invited to participate in this study because of their leadership in implementing RtI and PBIS and their willingness to work to understand how the conditions for success originated and persist across time.

Looking for the Root Causes of Success

In his book *Root Cause Analysis*, Paul Preuss (2003) describes root cause analysis as the process by which we examine the underlying causes for the outcomes we see. He defines root cause as:

“The deepest underlying cause, or causes, of positive or negative symptoms within any process that, if dissolved, would result in elimination, or substantial reduction, of the symptom.” (Preuss, 2003, p. 6)

The process of root cause analysis is essential to building an understanding of *why* things either work or do not work. Using an understanding of the root causes of a context, we are able to eliminate the causes that lead to or perpetuate negative, unwanted outcomes while we strengthen and reinforce the causes for positive, beneficial, or desired outcomes. Root cause analysis is most frequently used to find underlying causes for problems. This study, however, examined the causes that led to success. In light of the use of a positive root cause analysis, the definition may be reframed as:

“Root Cause - The deepest underlying cause, or causes, of positive or negative outcomes within any process that, if dissolved, would result in elimination, or substantial reduction, of negative outcomes, while if enhanced would strengthen positive outcomes.”
(Adapted from Preuss, 2003, p. 6)

By using a root cause analysis for success we can:

- Validate successes,
- Determine where we need to enhance causes to strengthen positive outcomes,
- Understand how these causes can be replicated,
- Build pro-active thinking about how to support change,
- Ensure that key aspects of success are not eliminated in the name of change,
- See that even within difficult circumstances *some things* may be working well,
and
- Support pro-active planning.

Our exploration of the root causes of success within Thompson’s RtI and PBIS implementation began with a look at the Thompson School District.

Thompson R2-J School District

Mission: “Empower to learn, challenge to achieve, and inspire to excel.”

(thompson.k12.co.us)

At the time of the study, Thompson School District, with approximately 15,310 students, was the 16th largest in Colorado. Encompassing nearly 362 square miles of Larimer and parts of Weld and Boulder counties, the towns of Berthoud, Loveland, and the southern portion of Fort Collins all fall within its borders. The district had six early childhood centers, twenty elementary schools, five middle schools, five high schools, and one charter school. The student body reflected the diversity within the community with the following demographic representation: White (80.5%), Hispanic (15.5%), Asian/Pacific Islanders (1.8%), Black (1.3 %), and American Indian (.9%). Approximately 32% of Thompson’s students received free and/or reduced lunch and students with disabilities made up approximately 11.8% of the population at the time of the study. Three schools making up one feeder system—Namaqua Elementary, Walt Clark Middle School, and Thompson Valley High School—were included in this case study of success.

Namaqua Elementary

Namaqua, which means “near water,” is named for the daughter of one of Loveland’s first settlers. At the time of the study, student enrollment was 396, of whom 33 were identified as having disabilities. There were 64 members of the Namaqua staff, and the average number of years of teaching experience for the faculty was 13. A point of pride for the Namaqua Wildcats is their state of the art technology used for classroom instruction, parent involvement, and staff unity. One of Namaqua’s goals is to increase Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports in order to improve academic outcomes for their students.

Walt Clark Middle School

Walt Clark is named for a teacher and coach at Loveland High School (1944-1966). Student enrollment was 574 at the time of the study, 94 of whom were identified as having disabilities. Walt Clark had a total staff of 77 with an average of 10 years teaching experience. Points of pride for Walt Clark Cougars include being considered a high performing school, having a strong athletic program, providing tutorial support to improve student achievement, and holding extracurricular activities that focus on academic

excellence. Two goals for improvement at Walt Clark are: (1) increase the use of differentiated instruction based on student data and (2) improve reading and writing through integration of skills across the curriculum.

Thompson Valley High School

Thompson Valley's mission is "building for a new generation" and their 135 staff members take this seriously for their 1,330 students, including the 137 identified as having disabilities. The faculty at Thompson Valley had an average of 9 years teaching experience. Points of pride for Thompson Valley include being selected as one of 100 outstanding high schools by *Newsweek*, having a strong academic curriculum with rigorous coursework, and being a partner school with Colorado State University. Thompson Valley's goals include: (1) expanding their AP offerings and increasing enrollment in these for students from economically disadvantaged families, (2) providing "second chance" classes for students who need additional support, (3) improving the 9th grade transition process, and (4) focusing on 21st Century skills.

RtI and PBIS in Thompson Schools

"Response to intervention is a school-wide, multi-tiered, data-driven framework that allows teachers to assist any child identified as needing academic and/or behavioral support – whether they are working below grade level or are gifted and not meeting their full potential." (p. 2 RtI Guide for Families in Thompson, 2010)

In Thompson, RtI is combined with PBIS to form a system of supports for academic and behavioral needs. Students receive the supports they need in one or more of three tiers and movement across the tiers is fluid. Problem solving teams meet regularly to review student data and monitor students' progress. The problem solving approach is central to ensuring that no student falls through the cracks. Members of the problem solving team may vary depending on the specific student needs. Parents and/or guardians are key members of the team helping to create an effective plan for their child.

RtI provides a seamless framework of support that addresses the range of student needs, including special education services for students with disabilities and services for students who are gifted and talented. The framework that RtI offers, with data-driven

decision-making through a problem solving process, is used to review the student's full and individual evaluation data to look at patterns of strengths and needs. It is also used to determine eligibility for a specific learning disability.

Each school in Thompson established teams to address the implementation of RtI and PBIS and these teams were responsible for identifying implementation goals, monitoring implementation success, and making recommendations for continuous improvement. The district works to support these teams and to build district capacity for successful implementation. The overall purpose of RtI and PBIS, in Thompson, is to improve educational outcomes for ALL students. The following description of RtI in Thompson Schools was adapted from *Response to Instruction and Intervention: One District's Approach* by Michelle Malvey (2010).

RtI's Six Components:

One District's Approach

Each of the six components plays a role in helping us address the needs of our students. How we implement the six components is described below.

Colorado required districts to plan for RtI implementation beginning in the 2007–2008 school year. To meet that requirement, the Thompson School District created a district RtI leadership team headed by the Director of Special Education. The team comprised approximately 15 people, including district-level administrators, building administrators from elementary and secondary schools, and school psychologists. There were no general education teachers on the initial team. At the end of the 2007–2008 school year, it was determined that to move forward with RtI implementation at a systems level, the district needed to hire an RtI Coordinator and to house this position in the Curriculum and Instruction Department.

During the two and a half years that the coordinator position has been in place, we have created a rubric to guide our work and began to implement a procedure to reflect on our growth as a district and at the building level. This rubric has guided our decision making in terms of the allocation of resources for people, materials, time, and so on. Our rubric includes the six components that define RtI in Colorado, and each component is addressed in our work.

Curriculum and Instruction

With our state's adoption of the Colorado Academic Standards and our need to determine how to use them at a district level, we are currently working with all building level leadership teams and curriculum coordinators to implement a Rigorous Curriculum Design (Ainsworth, 2010), which we modified to include Understanding by Design and other instructional design approaches. The 2010-2011 school year was our first year beginning to use this process and it required a high degree of leadership and professional development resources. Our intended outcome is to have aligned standards, essential questions, unit designs, and assessments that lead to increased student achievement at a robust level.

Assessment and Use of Data

We implemented a comprehensive assessment cycle in our district that includes screening three times per year in early math and literacy for grades K-2 and predictive assessments three times per year toward our state summative assessment (CSAP) in math and reading in grades 3-10. This system also includes Explore, Plan, and ACT (American College Testing) assessment in 8th, 10th, and 11th grades, respectively, and The Colorado English Language Acquisition Proficiency Assessment (CELApro) testing for all students who are English Language Learners.

In addition, we have implemented a district-wide, data-driven dialogue approach using the Collaborative Inquiry Process (Lipton & Wellman, 2004). We trained each of our instructional coaches, principals, and leadership teams within the buildings in this approach, and we model it regularly at a district level. While we have not yet achieved our goal of reducing the gap in our targeted population areas by 15%, we are beginning to see a trend in that direction after one and a half years of the comprehensive assessment process.

Problem-Solving Process

The Thompson School District began using a problem-solving approach approximately 5 years ago. During the past few years, we refined this process in grades pre-K-12. This has included streamlining forms used to document interventions and progress across the district and housing those in a central location within the district student information system. We have provided beginner- and advanced-level training in

the areas of problem identification and analysis, gap analysis, and plan development and evaluation. Our biggest challenge in this area has been in getting consistency in decision making at a building level and in assisting building-level staff on how to collect data and how to use it for intervention design and effectiveness determination.

Family and Community Partnerships

This has been our most difficult area to take on in a systemic manner. To do this well, you need a lot of family involvement, yet it is hard to get consistent family involvement when you don't have an established process for doing so. We have begun building this process by creating a Family/Community Engagement Coordinator position and beginning a Family Academy that presents monthly symposia for all families on a variety of topics.

Positive School Climate and Culture

Our district began moving toward the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) universal social/emotional/behavioral approach approximately 7 years ago. The 2010-2011 school year was our first year of 100% building involvement in PBIS. Our biggest hurdles were mostly at the secondary level with establishing buy-in from staff on the need for consistent expectations across the school environment. We added the CHAMPS (conversation, help, activity, movement, participation, success) approach to universal classroom management and have 9 of 20 sites implementing the curriculum during the 2010-2011 school year, with another 7 sites on board for the fall of 2011.

Leadership

This component is mainly focused on the principal's involvement in RtI implementation at their school site and how they facilitate the growing capacity of their building staff to support each of the other component areas. While this can often be person specific, in general, our administrators indicate that they feel highly involved in this process.

Matching Appropriate Supports and Services with Student Need

At the heart of the RtI and PBIS process is matching student needs with supports and services. Thompson schools follow the CDE's model for screening students to determine if they are on track, and identifying those students whom may need additional supports if they are not. If a student does not make the progress expected after general education teachers have provided differentiated instructional strategies and universal interventions, a referral is made to the Problem-Solving Team (PST) and a problem-solving meeting is scheduled.

At the high school, an early warning system is utilized to identify students who are not making adequate progress. This early warning system triangulates data from multiple sources to identify those students most at risk for academic difficulties, and potentially dropping out. Additionally, the early warning system can assist in matching interventions to student needs, monitoring the success of interventions, and more importantly to get students on a path toward successful high school completion and post-secondary workforce readiness. Once a student has been identified through the system, a referral is made to the SIT and problem-solving meeting is scheduled.

Assistant Principal Lanny Hass' Description of the High School Process

High school students are referred to the "Achievement Team" through three primary methods: 1) Classroom teachers who notice challenges that students are experiencing in accessing success in class may be referred; 2) Use of an "early warning" system known as the GPI, which is a four digit number that is generated by the student's existing grades in each course. (E.g., A number 7001 is assigned to a student with seven Cs or higher, no Ds, no F+s, and one F. A number 4301 student would have four Cs or higher, three Ds, no F+s, and one F.); and, 3) Monitoring the change in GPI over two to three week periods to see if students are improving, maintaining, or declining. The adults that form the Achievement Team are versed in referring students who they feel need additional resources to meet the academic and behavior challenges associated with the classroom and school settings. The Team includes our dean of students, interventionist, two assistant principals, one classified staff member, one counselor, and some department chairs. On occasion, it also includes instructional coaches, resource teachers, and other adults.

Interventions provided for high school students range from department-level interventions and student-level interventions to performance interventions. It truly depends on the situation associated with the performance (or lack thereof). The 12-person achievement team discusses students that triggered the early warning system and designs appropriate interventions for each student. We are developing “cohort” interventions based on patterns we have noticed that address trends and we are seeing student success. Monitoring is a multifaceted process that includes data, interventionists, resource teachers, volunteers, student guides, and classroom teachers. The Thompson Valley Achievement Center plays a large role in this process, as well as the personnel of Thompson Valley High School.

To prepare for the problem-solving meeting, the teacher with concerns documents the research-based interventions and accommodations that have been provided for the student as well as any progress or growth made by the student. Documentation also includes data and information from the parents about strategies used at home and in collaboration with the classroom teacher. Additionally, the teacher contacts the student’s parents to explain the problem-solving process and invites them to attend the meeting. A Request for Parent/Guardian for Student Information is also given to the parents to solicit more information about the student. Finally, a trained case manager is assigned to support the teacher and parent through the process.

The problem-solving process proceeds through the identification of the problem, data analysis to verify the problem, and the development of a plan of action. It may be necessary to gather additional information, or provide additional assessments to clearly identify the academic and/or behavioral problem exhibited. It is only through the use of data, that an intervention carefully matched to the student’s need can be proposed. The parent’s perspective is integrated throughout the discussions, and parents may be expected to take part in supporting the intervention.

Once a research-based intervention has been identified to best support a student, the implementation begins. Progress monitoring data are collected to ensure efficacy of the intervention, and to make decisions whether to continue the intervention, modify it, or propose an alternative intervention. The case manager checks in with the general education teacher weekly to support the implementation of the intervention and gathering

of data. Parents are kept informed of the student's response to the intervention. If students do not make adequate progress with interventions, alternative interventions may be provided, and/or special education eligibility processes may be considered.

Thompson's Journey Implementing RtI and PBIS

School reform is a journey that often involves stops and starts, twists and turns, and pushes and pulls as stakeholders wrestle to develop a shared vision for the work (Fullan, 2010). The implementation of RtI and PBIS within Thompson schools reflects this change process, yet it also shows what is possible with commitment and collective capacity-building. Through their generosity, Thompson has allowed us to learn from their journey what it takes to create the conditions for success within RtI and PBIS for students with disabilities. The following questions and answers share what we have learned.

Where are Thompson Schools on this Journey?

The state of Colorado required the initiation of district planning for RtI implementation during the 2007-2008 school year. In the subsequent years, districts implemented Response to Intervention frameworks using a variety of approaches. As we begin the 2011-2012 school year, expectations are high that we'll begin to see academic outcomes that may be attributed to program fidelity resulting from four years of RtI implementation. These changes should be reflected in policies, programming, teacher behaviors, school climate, family involvement, and other systems aspects of schooling. The 2011 testing and accountability measures should also begin to show academic and behavioral gains for students.

Fidelity models often use three years of implementation in predicting outcomes. This accounts for early program planning in year one, initial school implementation during year two, and refinement of implementation during year three (Century, Rudnick, & Freeman, 2010). Our focus group and interview data, combined with the self-reflective fidelity of implementation data provided by the district, indicated that for Namaqua Elementary, Walt Clark Middle School, and Thompson Valley High School, a reasonable level of fidelity of implementation was achieved during the course of the prior academic year. The questions we can now explore include: what changes have taken place as a result

of this implementation, what will the assessment and accountability data tells us about the effects of implementation, and what might we expect as we move into the future.

What changed as a result of Thompson's Implementation of RtI and PBIS?

One of the most important indications of change has been the development of a shared vision of RtI and PBIS. Teachers and administrators across all schools focused on the importance of this shared vision for clarifying expectations, strengthening ownership for outcomes, and facilitating communication through a common language. The importance of a common language was mentioned often as teachers discussed alignment of practices and they expressed appreciation that expectations across the district were more consistent. Students and teachers both expressed a feeling of ownership for outcomes that they had not felt prior to implementation. This ownership allowed for students to advocate for themselves more often and meant that teachers felt connected to every student in the school rather than just those in their classrooms.

Teachers also mentioned that the climate improved since implementation. The improved climate was reflected in fewer referrals to special education, more supports in place for all students, and less stigmatization for students in special education. They felt that the climate was more oriented toward the students rather than the rules, and that PBIS increased the focus on supporting desired behaviors instead of on disciplining infractions. The climate also set high expectations for the academic and behavioral outcomes for all students.

Teachers and administrators agreed that the new system encourages collaboration in ways that were not in place prior to RtI and PBIS. There was a sense of shared decision-making and responsibility so that everyone felt both a responsibility for leadership and also a sense of support. Teachers and administrators recognized a willingness to work as a team sharing responsibilities so that these no longer fell to just one person. Many teachers described feeling more competent to address the needs of their students through a range of strategies, but also indicated that they had confidence in their teams if they needed additional help.

Teachers also remarked on an increase in parent willingness to work within the RtI and PBIS systems. As parents became more familiar with the interventions they were able

to carry through with them at home and as their familiarity with RtI and PBIS increased, they were able to communicate more easily with teachers. This was, however, an area where teachers indicated they wanted to see even more improvement, especially at the middle and high school levels.

Interdisciplinary team meetings about students were taking place with more frequency and those meetings focused on providing interventions rather than simply referring students to special education. Administrators and teachers found a clear connection between their collaboration in those meetings and use of data-driven decision making. They described more intentionality in their use of data, using a wide variety of evidence to choose their interventions and matching students with appropriate supports and services. Data reviews for all students also helped to assure that no child slipped through the cracks.

Administrators noticed that the RtI system, with the emphasis on collaboration and shared vision, initially challenged the culture of Thompson school faculty that used to pride themselves on their autonomy. They indicated, however, that given the benefits mentioned above, the system has clearly been strengthened. The one frustration that teachers expressed was with the process and forms used to refer students for special education. Some teachers felt that longer periods of time passed before students were placed in special education. Interestingly, however, they also noted the availability of more support and tailored interventions for all students prior to formal identification for special education.

All-in-all, teachers and administrators viewed the changes made with RtI and PBIS implementation in a positive light. They felt that implementation has led to a shared vision, increased ownership for student outcomes, deeper collaboration, and a focus on data driven decision making. These changes were reflected in the increased clarity of communication, family involvement in planning for students' needs, and in the overall improvement of the school culture and climate.

What supports were needed to bring about these changes?

The kinds of changes that Thompson schools are seeing as a result of their implementation of RtI and PBIS did not happen without considerable investment and

support. Thompson School District made a substantial commitment to supporting full district-wide implementation of RtI and PBIS. This commitment included an investment in professional development for all faculty members, the provision of resources for data management and specific interventions, the allocation of time for collaborative planning, and the building of a leadership cadre with expertise to support implementation. Table 1 describes each of these elements of support.

Table 1. Elements of Support Needed for Implementation

Element of Support	Examples of Support
<i>Professional Development</i> provides ongoing support on RtI and PBIS, collaborative planning, intervention strategies, and data driven decision making.	State CDE workshops, district and school staff development, coaching, communities of practice, leadership cadre, shared expertise across the faculty, and professional growth plans
<i>Provision of Resources</i> needed for implementation.	District data management systems, specific interventions in reading and math
<i>Allocation of Time</i> for collaborative planning and problem solving.	Meeting in the summer, after school, and schedules that allocate time during school hours, use of faculty meeting
<i>Leadership Cadre</i> that can provide just-in-time support for implementation needs.	Teacher and principals' expertise, district personnel who provide help

The supports needed to bring about these changes included resources, time, and permission to experiment. Administrators and teachers all acknowledged the difficulty of working to create a shared vision and develop a plan to reach this vision. Their strong consensus was that this difficult and daunting journey began with and was sustained by Superintendent Cabrera's commitment to continuous improvement. Thompson's sustained commitment and focus on continuous improvement has built the capacity for systemic and deep implementation of RtI and PBIS with high levels of fidelity.

What has happened for student with disabilities?

Often the first indications that change has taken place show up in the climate and culture of the school because of changes in the attitudes and behaviors of the adults.

Teacher and administrators who participated in the focus groups identified the following changes specifically related to students with disabilities in their schools.

Reduced the Stigma of Special Education. Teachers noted that within a culture where learning differences are accepted and supported, there is greater acceptance of students with special education needs. Real and meaningful inclusion was taking place as teacher teams gained strategies for addressing students' needs. General education students appeared to be more welcoming; especially at the middle and high schools where teachers indicated that some difficulties previously existed.

Support for Social and Emotional Growth. Specific strategies were put in place to nurture social and emotional development pre-K through high school. Those included the recognition of success (e.g. student of the month, positive reinforcement with blue slips), teaching of conflict resolution strategies, and explicit discussions about feelings. The focus has moved from "accountability" to "responsibility," with students accepting responsibility for their actions. Additionally, PBIS implementation in the schools provided teachers and students clear expectations for behaviors, direct instruction of expectations, systems of reinforcement to increase the likelihood that positive behaviors occur, and respectful consequences when rules were broken. Administrators indicated that disciplinary and expulsion rates have decreased, and teachers indicated that their students with disabilities appeared happier in school.

Increased Student Confidence. Teachers and administrators noted that expectations for the academic performance of students with disabilities increased and that the students appeared to be rising to meet them. This was described as an increase in morale in the elementary grades, a willingness of students to talk about their test scores and grades from a growth rather than a failure perspective in the middle grades, and a pride in accomplishments at the high school level. Clearly, teachers and administrators perceived positive differences in the inclusion of students with disabilities within the community of the school. Given all this, we can now look at what the assessment and accountability data tell us about the outcomes for students with disabilities within an RtI and PBIS framework.

Adequate Yearly Progress and CSAP Achievement Outcomes

The overall NCLB accountability measure, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), was met at Namaqua Elementary School for Reading and Math in 2010 but not in 2008 or 2009; for Walt Clark Middle School, AYP was achieved in 2009 but not in 2008 or 2010; and for Thompson Valley High School, AYP has not been reached during any of those three years. In regards to the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), moderate growth in overall math performance for two of the focus schools (see Table 2) has occurred across the four years. For Namaqua Elementary School and Thompson Valley High School, CSAP math proficiency rates exceeded those for the district during 2011. For reading, the results were mixed. The district overall experienced an increase of 2.1% of the percentage of students that were proficient or advanced across a four year period. Namaqua Elementary, Walt Clark Middle, and Thompson Valley High School all experienced appreciable improvement. This includes Thompson Valley High School experiencing a substantial increase (i.e. 11.9%) in the percentage of students scoring at the proficient and advanced levels.

Table 2. CSAP Performance by Target Schools (2008-2010): Reading and Math

School	Reading (% Prof.+)				4-Yr Ch.	Math (% Prof+)				4-Yr Ch.
	2008	2009	2010	2011		2008	2009	2010	2011	
District	72.2	73.6	73.2	74.3	+2.1	56.4	56.2	59.3	59.1	+2.7
Namaqua ES	76.0	75.6	73.9	82.1	+6.1	67.2	69.3	71.2	75.4	+8.2
Walt Clark MS	69.7	70.4	69.4	72.1	+2.4	55.2	55.7	57.6	53.5	-1.7
Thompson Valley HS	62.3	74.9	74.2	72.5	+10.2	34.9	38.1	44.2	46.3	+11.4

An examination of the performance of students identified as having an IEP presents a different story in regards to performance (see Table 3). Overall rates of proficiency by school were lower for all three target schools during each of the past three years as compared to the district. However, Thompson Valley High School experienced an increase in reading proficiency across the four years that exceed the growth observed for the district.

Table 3. CSAP Performance by Target Schools for Students with IEP (2008-2010): Reading and Math

School	Reading (% Prof.+)				4-Yr Ch.	Math (% Prof+)				4-Yr Ch.
	2008	2009	2010	2011		2008	2009	2010	2011	
District	23.8	24.5	21.2	21.9	-1.9	20.1	19.3	21.6	23.7	+3.6
Namaqua ES	22.9	14.8	10.5	--	--	17.1	14.8	15.8	--	--
Walt Clark MS	20.7	16.3	17.3	20.6	-0.1	12.9	11.6	9.3	11.1	-1.8
Thompson Valley HS	11.3	10.0	18.3	15.1	+3.8	2.8	0.0	3.3	5.6	+2.8

CSAP Growth Percentiles: Overall, by School, and by Students with Disabilities

The CSAP student growth percentile serves as a way to understand how much growth a student makes from one year to the next relative to a student’s “academic peers” (Colorado Growth Model: FAQ, July 2009). The state of Colorado has defined a “typical” growth score as being between the range of 36 and 64. For all four years, the Reading median growth percentiles fell within the “typical” range for all three schools (see Table 4). Similarly, for math, median growth percentiles all fell within this range for all four years except for 2010, in which Walt Clark Middle Schools had math growth percentiles that can be classified as “high”. An examination of growth percentiles for students on an IEP provides a different picture of effectiveness (see Table 5). For two of three years at Walt Clark, reading growth percentiles fell within the “low” range; for one of three years (2009), its math growth could be considered low. In all other cases, Walt Clark and Thompson Valley growth percentiles were in the “typical” category for students on an IEP. The data set was too small to calculate growth percentiles for IEP students at Namaqua during all four years that were examined.

Table 4. CSAP Median Growth Percentiles (Overall)

School	Reading (MGP)				Math (MGP)			
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2008	2009	2010	2011
District	46	51	49	54	51	47	55	50
Namaqua ES	40	61	45	45	43	49	42	47
Walt Clark MS	45	52	43	57	58	50	67	50
Thompson Valley HS	36	56	57	53	42	54	60	58

Table 5. CSAP Median Growth Percentiles (IEP/non)

School	Reading (MGP)				Math (MGP)			
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2008	2009	2010	2011
District	38/47	50/51	35/50	47/54	42/51	40/48	43/57	42/51
Namaqua ES	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Walt Clark MS	26/48	44/53	22/45	49/59	40/60	35/52	48/69	43/51
Thompson Valley HS	39/35	49/56	45/58	64/51	57/41	50/54	55/60	47/58

Graduation & Dropout Rates

The graduation rate for Thompson Valley High School was consistent from 2008 to 2010, with overall rates approximating 81% (see Table 6). In contrast, students with disabilities in 2010 graduated at a rate of only 59%, which is a 10.8% decline from the reported 2008 graduation rate. For dropout rates, students with disabilities experienced a 1.0% decline across the three years in which data were available at Thompson Valley High School. For students with disabilities, the dropout rate declined by 1.5% during this same period of time. It should be noted, graduation rates did show more substantial declines when examined from 2009 to 2010. This can be at least partially explained by the utilization of a new graduation rate calculation formula by the Colorado Department of Education. In effect, the adopted change altered which students are to be included within the graduation rate denominator thus creating a reduced graduation rate artifact.

Table 6. Graduation and Dropout Rates: Percentage by Year

School	Graduation			3-Yr Ch.	Dropout			3-Yr Ch.
	2008	2009	2010		2008	2009	2010	
District	77.9	82.5	80.1	+2.2	2.9	2.6	1.9	-1.0
w/Disabilities	70.5	78.5	59.3	-11.2	3.2	2.7	2.7	-0.5
Thompson Valley	81.5	88.0	81.6	+0.1	2.9	2.5	1.9	-1.0
w/Disabilities	70.1	78.5	59.3	-10.8	3.5	2.6	2.0	-1.5

Student Enrollment, Office Discipline Referrals, & Out of School Suspensions

The obtained behavior data for our target schools indicated large declines in out-of-school suspension rates across a three year period at both the district and school level (see table seven). The data indicated that Walt Clark middle school and Thompson Valley high

school accounted for 70% of the decline observed for the district across the three years. In addition, the rates for Walt Clark and Thompson Valley declined by 4.6% and 3.8% respectively. For Thompson Valley High School it should be noted that the overall membership did decline by 107 students from 2008 to 2010. In terms of out-of-school suspensions 62 fewer were reported in 2010 than during 2008. It is possible that the membership decline may partially account for the reduction in out of school suspensions; however, it is unlikely to be the sole cause of the observed change.

Table 7. Enrollment & Behavior

School	Membership (Overall/IEP)			3-Yr Ch.	Behavior (OSS): Overall & % of Membership			3-Yr Ch. n/% of Mem.
	2008	2009	2010		2008	2009	2010	
District	15,332	15,225	15,310	-22	1114 (7.3%)	1175 (7.7%)	963 (6.3%)	-151 (-0.98%)
Namaqua ES	471/55	473/45	396/33	-75/- 22	1 (0.2%)	3 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	-1 (-0.20%)
Walt Clark MS	643/100	576/88	574/94	-69/-6	164 (25.5%)	143 (24.8%)	120 (20.9%)	-44 (-4.6%)
Thompson Valley	1,437/13 6	1,366/1 38	1,330/1 37	- 107/+ 1	159 (11.1%)	149 (10.9%)	97 (7.3%)	-62 (-3.8%)

Note. Reported membership obtained from official CDE October count membership reports. Behavior data reflects a duplicated student count and includes all reported out of school suspensions.

The changes in school climate and behavior are also reflected in the rate of office discipline referrals. As you can see from Tables 8, 9, and 10, the numbers of referrals from the office have declined dramatically over the past three years for Walt Clark Middle School (Table 8) and declined modestly for Thompson Valley High School (Table 9). Namaqua Elementary School’s referrals (Table 10) initially increased in year two and seemed to hold at this rate for year three.

Table 8. Walt Clark Middle School Office Referrals

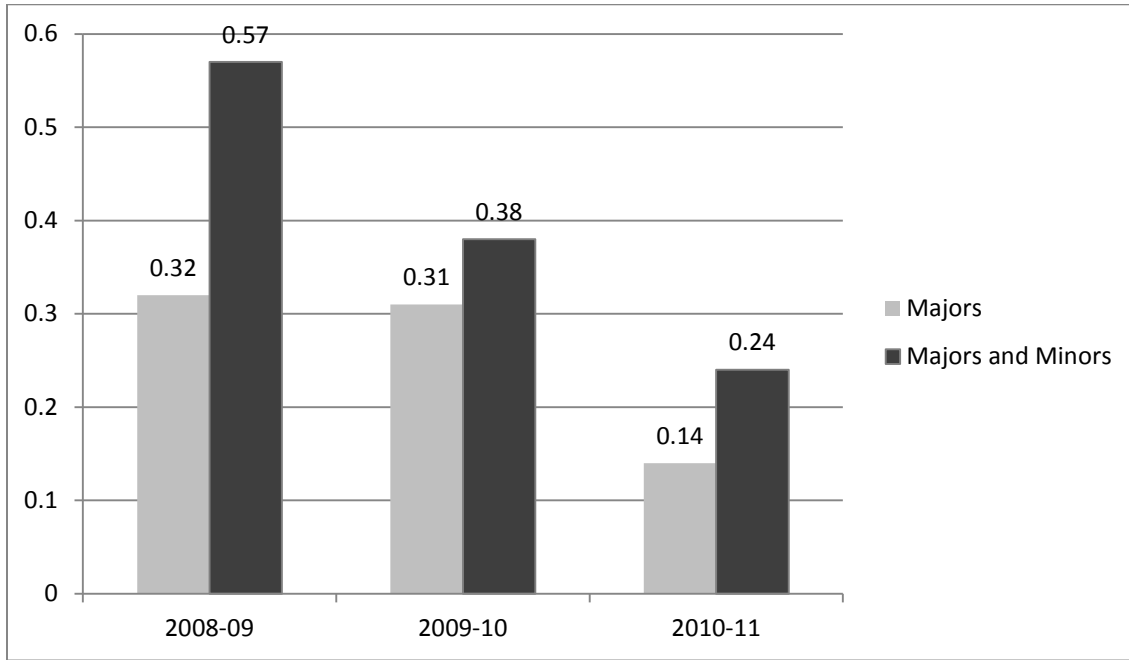


Table 9. Thompson Valley High School Office Referrals

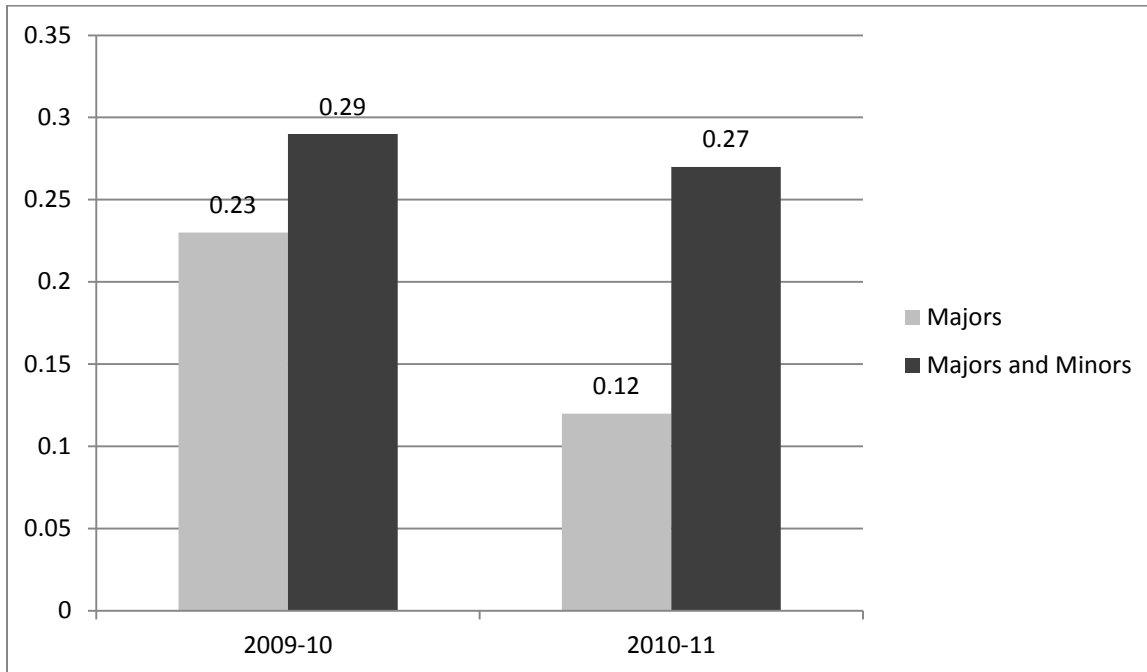
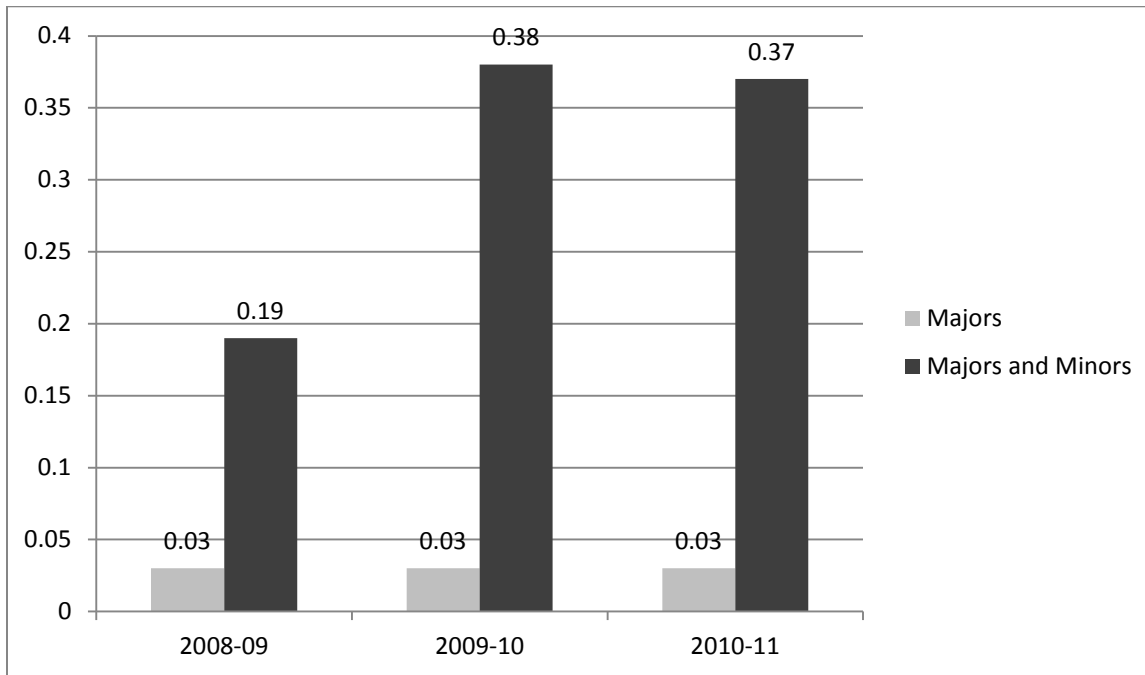


Table 10. Namaqua Elementary School Office Referrals



Converging Measures of Implementation Success

The presented quantitative data indicates an overall reduction of out of school suspensions, a decline in office disciplinary referrals at middle and high school, stable graduation/dropout rates across three years at Thompson Valley High School, “typical” CSAP growth percentiles at all three target schools, and rising overall CSAP reading and math proficiency percentages for Namaqua elementary and Thompson Valley High School students. The collected qualitative focus group data triangulates with the detailed quantitative findings, discussed above. Table 11 shows both qualitative and quantitative findings along with the outcome that may be established from the data by level.

Table 11. Teacher Focus Group Results: Triangulation with Convergent Methods

Level	Observation (Qualitative)	Assessment/Behavior (Quantitative)
Elementary	Scheduling for greater inclusion	
	Building a culture of competence	Typical CSAP Growth with increased proficiency in reading and math
	Strong reading supports	
Middle	Re-assigning space to integrate special education within building	Typical CSAP Growth
	Discussion focused on growth not failure	4.6% decline in Out-of-School Suspensions from 2008 to 2010
	Recognitions of students success	Decline in office discipline referrals
High	Greater acceptance of students with disabilities	Typical CSAP Growth with increased proficiency in reading and math
	Fewer behavior problems	3.8% decline in Out-of-School Suspensions from 2008 to 2010
	Student pride in earned grades	Decline in office discipline referrals

What are the families’ perceptions of these changes?

As a part of this study, focus groups were conducted with parents/guardians of students with disabilities at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Unfortunately, a very small number of parents attended these focus groups, and as such, the team did not feel that a representative group of parents voiced their opinions.

That being said, some themes that surfaced from the focus groups did appear to echo those from the other focus groups. Parents, for the most part, were satisfied with the level of communication they received from special educators. Depending on whether general education teachers were early adopters of RtI and PBIS or not, parents expressed varying levels of satisfaction regarding how their students were progressing in the general

education curriculum, the level of support their student received in general education (including accommodations and modifications), and level of communication with general education teachers.

Again, because of the small number of parents attending the focus groups, it is difficult to determine whether the opinions expressed were pervasive. It is interesting to note that Thompson has identified family and community partnering as a goal for improvement and will be focusing on strengthening this component in the coming year.

What challenges has Thompson staff faced on this journey?

Although these Thompson schools are clearly well along the way on their journey of implementation, there remain some challenges. Focus group participants indicated that even with the reasonable degree of fidelity with which RtI and PBIS has been implemented, improvement is needed to bring more consistency and quality to the system. The specific areas for special education that were highlighted include: the use of progress monitoring data to continually review instructional needs of students, the provision of a true continuum of services that is not dependent on scheduling conflicts, a greater emphasis on co-teaching to support inclusion, continued effort to reduce stigmatization sometimes associated with labeling, and increased attention to families as partners in addressing the academic and social needs of the students. A further challenge is how to maintain and improve services in light of severe budgetary cutbacks and reduced resources.

How Can We Create the Conditions for Success?

Although there are remaining challenges, there have also been many successes. Trends that are moving the district in the right direction were identified for each of the six components of RtI. These trends indicate areas where growth has taken place and we see emerging successes. Based on these trends a district stakeholder group completed a root cause analysis to identify the underlying foundations for these successes. Table 12 shows the trends and root causes for the districts emerging successes across all six components.

Table 12. Root Cause Analysis of Success Trends and Root Causes for RtI and PBIS Success in Three Thompson Schools

Six Components of RtI	Trend # 1	Trend # 2	Trend #3	Root Causes: Thompson School District is successful because:
Leadership	Culture of using data to make continuous improvement	Direct, transparent communication	Relationships are considered important and trust is intentionally nurtured	<p>Shared leadership fosters the vision that all students can achieve at higher levels with the right supports</p> <p>Risk-taking is nurtured and supported by leadership</p> <p>Relational trust is foundational to leadership</p>
Problem-Solving	Using data-driven process to plan for student needs and interventions	Culture of open communication and intentional collaboration	Continuous progress monitoring to examine systematic practices	<p>Data is used objectively and accurately inform decisions and plan for needs</p> <p>We understand that we are better together than alone and we share the responsibility and ownership</p> <p>We use</p>

				continuous progress monitoring to examine our implement of best practices
Curriculum & Instruction	Tier I instruction includes differentiation support and enrichment within a full continuum of support	Lines between special education and general education interventions are blurred	Students are taking ownership of their own academic growth	<p>We have common goals and priorities surrounding use of data to promote student achievement</p> <p>All stakeholders share the belief that all students can learn with the appropriate support</p>
Assessment	Variety of assessments are available	Culture of access to and use of data on all levels at all times	Assessment data leads to richer discussions that inform instructional decisions	<p>The belief that all students can achieve with proper supports</p> <p>We have a shared Vision</p>
Positive Climate	Respect for and valuing of input from colleagues (seeking each other's expertise)	Parents feel welcome in the school	Staff believe that all students are capable of success	<p>All stakeholders share ownership which is essential to genuine, trusting, & open relationships that respect and value collegial expertise</p> <p>Partnerships have formed that share expertise between families and schools and a</p>

				<p>culture of customer service</p> <p>Staff believe that all students are capable of success and that it is our responsibility to help them accomplish this</p>
Family & Community	Parental involvement is sought and valued during the IEP development	Resources are provided for families to increase awareness and understanding	Development of a culture of shared responsibility among family, school, and community	<p>Collaborative problem-solving teams value input from families</p> <p>We understand that strong family partnerships lead to stronger students outcomes</p>

A further analysis of the root causes of success gives us five themes that are evident across the six components. These are the five major root causes of success for Thompson Schools' RtI and PBIS implementation:

- A shared vision that leadership is everyone's responsibility and that we are better together than we are alone;
- A belief that all students can be successful if given appropriate support;
- A strong culture of collaboration, partnerships, and relationships built on trust, open communication, and respect;
- An honoring of diversity and inclusion; and
- A problem-solving, continuous improvement focus that uses data to inform decision at all levels, from individual students to systemic planning.

These five roots deeply anchor the district and the schools forming the philosophical foundation for how decisions are made, policies established, and work gets done. Nurturing these roots should lead to an even stronger system.

What advice would you have for others on this journey?

The advice offered by focus group participants captures the wisdom that comes from their deep experience with implementation. This advice includes the following:

- Make a strong district-wide commitment to the work and stick to it
- Make sure that leadership is solution focused, allows risk-taking, and is willing to break down the silos that prevent new ways of thinking and working
- Build understanding of RtI and PBIS that spans philosophical to strategies-intervention levels to increase ownership
- Collaborate and work in teams to strengthen supports and services
- Use data to help personalize supports but also get to know your students individually (keep the student's needs at the forefront)
- Select your processes carefully and then stick to them to give them time to work
- Engage in a continual reflection process using data to examine and improve practices.

And a final piece of advice that was a consensus point for all the focus group participants: Find a really good RtI coordinator who understands the system and can help teachers and administrators grow into the RtI process!

Recommendations for Scaling Success

In light of the advice given, we asked the participants to share their thoughts on how good practices can be brought to scale across multiple settings. The ideas have been clustered into three areas: shared vision, capacity building, and continuous improvement.

Create a Shared Vision

- Take the time needed to define your belief system (vision) with meaningful input from all stakeholder groups and use this to guide all future actions

- Remember that accurate data is critical to the decision-making process
- Share and discuss the district's vision repeatedly in multiple venues
- Create uniform expectations by district leadership
- Develop a three year written plan for the district aligning policies, procedures, and practices with the vision; clearly outline activities and next steps
- Be completely transparent about everything so people can have trust in how decision are made (build this practice at all levels)
- Use transparent communication, collaborative leadership, and intentionally work to build and maintain trust
- Establish criteria for transparency with clear expectations and guidelines for shared decision making
- Make sure that communication is positive, frequent, and two-way
- Make sure that invitations are intentional, personal, and meaningful by seeking, valuing and responding to input of all stakeholders
- Practice flexible responsiveness to stakeholder needs (especially families)
- View diversity as an added value and honor multiple points of views

Build Capacity for Success

- Understand that capacity building is essential to success
- Link district and building supports to synergize resources and effort
- Seek out exciting models, practices, materials, and strategies that have been successful – don't reinvent the wheel
- Start small, pick one area of focus (start with what is working)
- Use your data to help you develop a plan to build the infrastructure that supports the work (e.g. schedules that facilitate collaboration, work assignments that match teacher strengths and needs, resources to accomplish the work)
- Establish clear roles and expectations for responsibilities and trust that people will do their jobs

- Intentionally hire new employees and leadership who have the core belief that all students can be successful
- Build a systemic infrastructure to support data access and use
- Define the continuum of assessments at all levels (e.g. screening, district probes, diagnostic) and make sure that all stakeholders understand these
- Create physical environments that are respectful, clean, inviting, and multi-cultural where student work is shared and honored
- Provide multiple opportunities for professional development for all stakeholders (e.g. team learning, coaching, workshops, colleagues sharing, model demonstrations, conferences, professional growth plans)
- Intentionally develop and support teams who can support each other in the work
- Work to create partnerships with families, community members, and others who are stakeholders in the shared vision

Use Continuous Improvement

- Identify gaps between your belief system and actual practices
- Recognize that change is a process and take baby steps with reasonable and measureable goals (honor the developmental process that must occur)
- Start with the belief that ongoing evaluation and reflection will help you to see what is working and what is not working
- Think about standards, curriculum, research-based practices, and perceptions about all students as learners
- Decide how you will monitor progress, know if you are successful, and respond to data that shows a need for improvement
- Monitor progress in regular intervals so that you can adjust your practices
- Start with your own data to demonstrate growth
- Clearly define student achievement expectation
- Use data to show the strengths and needs of the child and to support decisions about interventions

- Explore research-based interventions and options as you work to find solutions
- Share data and results with all stakeholders
- Celebrate success

This list of ideas about how to bring good work to scale can help us reflect on our own practices, guiding us as we work to implement RtI and PBIS.

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