

RtI Update

Consulting with Private/Parochial Schools... A Win-Win!

By Chris Birr, MTSS/RtI Coordinator

In the district I serve, the number of public and private schools is almost even. Typically, the relationships with our private school neighbors are comfortable, positive, and collaborative even though there is an underlying, subtle competition for students. In my position, I am fortunate to have a narrow focus on district level development, deployment, and consultation around Multi-Tier Systems of Support.

Recently, one of the private schools in our district boundaries, reached out to our Director of Student Services and requested a meeting to meet and collaborate regarding how they could most effectively arrange their resources into more of a Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS). The request from the school and the prevalence of private schools in our backyard prompted some questions about how many students are in Wisconsin and many students attend public and private schools? The table below includes the numbers of students enrolled in Wisconsin K-12 schools from 2015-2016 (WI-DPI, 2016). Private refers to all non-public schools in the state.

Total K-12 Enrollment	867,800	
Public Enrollment	867,800	87.6% of total
Private Enrollment	123,137	12.4% of total

For a national perspective, I referenced *The Condition of Education: Private School Enrollment* from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and found the following, “In school year 2013–14, some 5.4 million students (or 10 percent of all elementary and secondary students) were enrolled in private elementary and secondary schools. The percentage of all elementary and secondary students enrolled in private schools decreased from 12 percent in 1995–96 to 10 percent in 2013–14, and is projected to continue to decrease to 9 percent in 2025–26 (the last year for which projected data are available).” Wisconsin’s private school enrollment appears to be slightly higher than the national average but it may be reasonable to expect approximately 10 percent of K-12 students will attend a private school.

Prior to the meeting with the private school, I searched “RtI, MTSS, and private school”. The results were paltry at best and I wondered whether I queried the wrong terms. However, I landed on a presentation from Dr. Michael Boyle, Director of the Andrew M. Greeley Center for Catholic Education at Loyola University Chicago (and school psychologist by training). Based on this presentation and a follow up conversation with Dr. Boyle, he confirmed that the amount of high quality research involving private schools and RTI or MTSS is lacking in quantity, but present in the literature. However, Dr. Boyle mentioned that although there is a need for more private school research involving MTSS, the use of evidence based practices is critically important in all schools, public or private. As we continued to discuss RTI, regardless of setting, it became clear that the need for high quality, tier 1, core instruction is critical for any school to improve outcomes for students.

As I continued to prepare for the meeting with the private school, I was curious if schools without the public school resources, could maintain an MTSS framework. A recent paper from Shields, Walsh, and Lee-St. John (2016) examined whether Catholic Schools using an intervention framework obtained more positive results for students compared to schools that were not using an intervention framework. Findings suggested that systemic service provision may have the potential to improve outcomes for students regardless of the location of the school or the student’s financial status. School teams that were implementing systemic intervention were not typically highly resourced but able to maintain a framework of supports through dedication to quality instruction and data based decision making. Elaborate structures and numerous interventions were not the critical element for success. Good instruction, the use of evidence based interventions, use of high quality data to make decisions, and family engagement appeared to be the key components needed for schools to positively impact all students. Sound familiar? It should, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), RTI Blueprints from 2008 spell out very similar key components of RTI.

As the meeting with the private school began, I was impressed that the team had selected a reliable and valid screening assessment, they were looking for ways to best to utilize their limited staff and resources, and they were devoted to improving outcomes for all students in their school. However, some obvious challenges also became apparent. Although a screening assessment was being administered, they had not developed a framework to examine how many students were on-track or off-track for proficiency or potentially needed more instruction or intervention. Referrals or requests for intervention were primarily based on teacher report rather than reliable and valid data, and interventions were more likely to be accommodation rather than evidence based practice to increase skill levels.

I realize that school psychologists will never have enough time to complete all that is asked of them in their school assignments. However, for those with private school neighbors, consider that you will be called on to consult about individual students and have to complete private school evaluations. By collaborating early, you can help increase the odds that the referrals received are accurate. Efficiency and more accurate referrals is important but high quality MTSS benefits all students.

If the possibility to collaborate with private schools arises, the following could be considered for discussion:

Overall MTSS:

- Using the NASDSE School Level or District Level Blueprints (2008), convey the guiding principles of MTSS such as: Provide high quality instruction, decisions are based on level of attainment and learning rate, and all decisions are made using reliable and valid assessments
- Emphasize the need to focus on tier 1 first within an MTSS framework. If possible, invite private school representatives to professional development and trainings to address the needs of struggling learners.

Data Based Decision Making:

- If the school has a universal screening assessment, introduce the concept of a target score to assess whether grade levels or classes are on track or off track for proficiency
- Provide examples or guidance to interpret screening results and help develop data based decision making guidelines to prioritize students to provide intervention or additional instruction.
- Assist private schools in the development of problem solving teams. This way, schools can monitor interventions and determine if interventions are having desired effects.

Intervention Selection:

- If your district has used a systematic process to identify and select evidence based interventions, consider sharing the process, references, and criteria used
- Share the skill area categories targeted by each intervention (i.e. phonemic awareness, reading fluency, math computation).

When discussing MTSS, good practice is good practice regardless of location. However, private schools may be receptive and appreciative of high quality information shared with them. School psychologists are in a unique position where involvement with private schools can be limited or more frequent depending on the need for evaluation of individual students. By taking a proactive approach, it could lead to increased accuracy of referrals for evaluation and even better, improved outcomes for more students in your community.

References:

- Boyle, M. P. (n.d.) *Myths and Realities of RTI for Catholic Schools*. Retrieved from: http://www.luc.edu/media/lucedu/ccse/pdfs/NCEA_RtI_.pdf
- Elliott, J., & Morrison, D. (2008). *Response to Intervention Blueprints: School Building Level Edition*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc. Retrieved from: <https://www.nasdse.org/Portals/0/SCHOOL.pdf>
- National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.). *The Condition of Education: Private School Enrollment*. Retrieved from: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgc.asp
- Shields, K. A., Walsh, M. E., & Lee-St. John, T. J. (2016). The relationship of a systemic student support interventions to academic achievement in urban Catholic schools. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 19 (3).
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Private (Non-Public) School Enrollment Data: Retrieved from: <http://dpi.wi.gov/cst/data-collections/private-enrollment/excel-1993-present>
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: Public School Enrollment Data: Retrieved from: <http://dpi.wi.gov/cst/data-collections/student/ises/published-data/excel>

Specific Private School Resources:

- Andrew M. Greeley Center for Catholic Education. Based out of Loyola University-Chicago. Private schools may benefit from the Resources tab.
- Boyle, M (2010) *Response to intervention: A blueprint for Catholic schools*. Washington, DC: National Catholic Education Association.
- Journal of Catholic Education*- open access journal focused on best practices for Catholic Schools. Although focused on Catholic Schools, articles can be generalized.

Thanks to Dr. Boyle for his contributions to, and review of, this article.

Promoting Evidence-based Practices

By Christine Peterson

Spotlight on: Practicing Mindfulness in School Settings

Website address: Mindful Schools

<http://www.mindfulschools.org>

The Mindfulness Schools project started as an initiative directed toward one school in Oakland, CA. Building on the premise of simple to use training resources for staff and students, and experiencing high levels of success, the program has evolved to support schools and students nationwide.

From the Mindful Schools website: “Our courses and curricula are designed for under-resourced public schools facing high turnover rates and toxic stress. We offer educators practical skills for self-care, facilitation, and connecting with youth, providing simple, effective mindfulness practices that can be integrated into the school day and adapted for diverse environments.”

The website includes links for:

- Training and teaching curriculums
- Resources including research on evidence based practices in Mindfulness
- Opportunities to connect with other schools and professionals working to implement mindfulness practices around the nation.