Tier 1 Problem Solving: Case Study

All grade-level teams at Sunshine Elementary School participate in weekly Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, with a shared mission: for all students to achieve or exceed grade-level expectations. Each PLC includes general education teachers, ESE teachers, instructional coaches and intervention providers. Staff members share the belief that every educator is a valued and contributing team member, and that all tiered instruction and supports provided to students should be integrated and aligned.

Following the first universal screening of the school year, the 5th grade team met to review and discuss data related to Reading/ELA. The team understood that universal screening data would provide information regarding their students' progress toward end-of-year standards, as well as identify students who may benefit from intervention.

Step 1: Problem/Goal Identification

The first step in problem solving at the Tier 1 level is establishing the expected and current levels of performance for all students. This helps the team identify how many of their 5th grade students are at-risk versus on-track for meeting end-of-year grade-level expectations in reading. They reviewed the School Overview Report from the Beginning of the Year Acadience™ universal screening assessment, which indicated that only 41% of 5th grade students earned a reading composite score that placed them At or Above Benchmark. The reading composite score is a combination of multiple scores (i.e., ORF Words Correct, ORF Accuracy, Retell and Maze Adjusted) and provides an estimate of reading proficiency.

The team confirmed that because less than approximately 80% of students were meeting or exceeding the expectation, they knew that moving forward with Tier 1 problem solving was appropriate.

They documented their discussion in Step 1 of the Tier 1 Problem Solving Worksheet (PSW) below:

Step 1 – Problem Identification: What is the Problem?

Expected Level of Performance:

Students will score At or Above Benchmark, as measured by Acadience (Reading Composite Score).

Current Level of Performance:

41% of students met or exceeded expected level of performance

59% of students did not meet or exceed expected level of performance

Appropriate Tier of Problem Solving:

☒ Less than approximately 80% of students are meeting or exceeding expected levels of performance, continue problem solving to develop Tier 1 instructional/intervention plan.

☐ Approximately 80% or more of students are meeting or exceeding expected levels of performance, consider Tier 2 problem solving for students not meeting expectations.

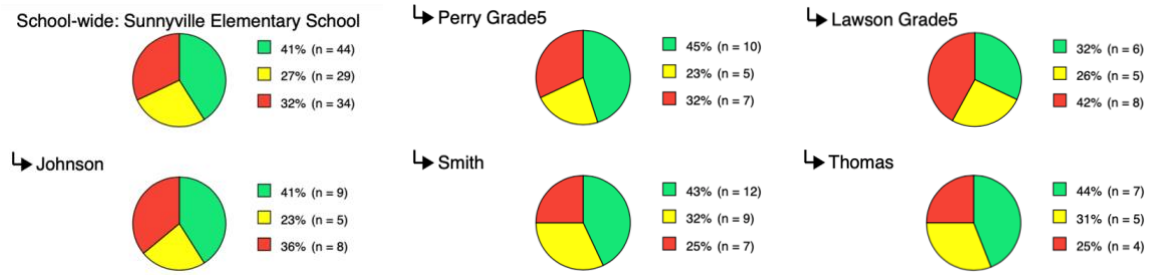
Florida's Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project is a collaborative project between the Florida Department of Education and the University of South Florida. Learn more at https://floridarti.usf.edu

To set an end-of-year goal, the team considered several options. After much discussion, they decided on a target: 70% of students will score At or Above Benchmark by the end of the school year. Given the current distribution of scores, the team felt that improving performance for an additional 31 students to reach the benchmark would be ambitious yet realistic.

They documented their goal in Step 1 of the Tier 1 PSW below:

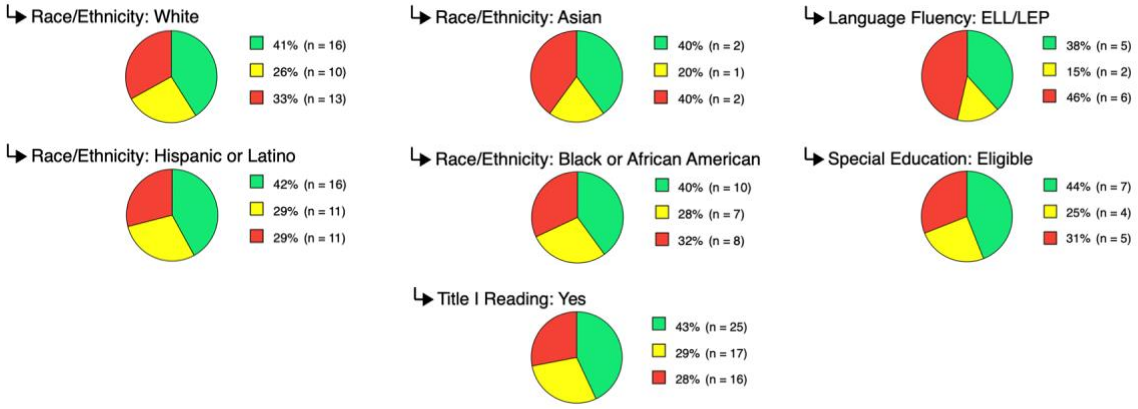
> **Goal (SMART):** By the end of the school year, 70% of students will score At or Above Benchmark, as measured by Acadience (Reading Composite Score).

The team wondered if there was significant variability in student performance across each of the five classrooms, so they reviewed data by teacher.



They found that each classroom had similar performance to the aggregate grade-level data.

A review of subgroup data is a standard part of each PLC's Tier 1 problem-solving process and allows the team to examine the degree to which core instruction is sufficient for subgroups of students. The teachers reviewed the data disaggregated by race/ethnicity, English proficiency, disability status under IDEA, and socioeconomic status (low SES is designated as "Title I Reading" in the report).



The data indicated student performance did not vary significantly based on subgroup membership.

The team also spent time reviewing available subtest data: ORF Accuracy, Retell and Maze. They noted that only 46% of the 5th grade students scored At or Above Benchmark on the ORF Accuracy. This was especially concerning as they knew that the students' lack of reading accuracy would adversely impact their ability to comprehend what they are reading.

They decided that the focus of the Tier 1 plan would be to specifically improve reading accuracy for all 5th grade students.

The team documented their discussion in the Notes section of the Tier 1 PSW below:

Notes: Retell and Maze data confirmed that our students demonstrated lower performance on these two measures in addition to, and likely as a result of, the lower level of performance on ORF Accuracy. In light of these data and the fact that reading accuracy is a prerequisite for comprehension, we agreed to focus on improving reading accuracy for our students.

Step 2: Problem Analysis

With support from the instructional coach, the 5th grade team examined the universal screening data and discussed possible reasons why only 46% of students were meeting ORF Accuracy expectations. They considered multiple educational domains (i.e., instruction, curriculum, environment, and learner) and generated hypotheses as to why the problem was occurring, being intentional to focus on hypotheses for which they had control. After generating the hypotheses, they identified what specific information they would need to gather to validate or confirm each hypothesis, and the assessment method they would use (review, interview, observe, test). Once the team reconvened with the gathered data, they determined the validity of each hypothesis.

The details for each hypothesis are below:

Step 2 – Problem Analysis: Why is the problem occurring?

Hypothesis #1:

Domain: ☒ Instruction ☐ Curriculum ☐ Environment ☐ Learner

Hypothesis: Too few students are scoring at or above benchmark on the ORF Accuracy measure because explicit instruction on word analysis skills is not consistently occurring.

Prediction Statement: If explicit instruction on word analysis skills were consistently provided, then the students' reading accuracy will improve.

Assessment Method(s): ☒ Review ☒ Interview ☐ Observe ☐ Test

Specific Data to be Collected: How frequently word analysis skills are explicitly taught.

Validated: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Through review of lesson plans and interviews with teachers, it was determined that explicit instruction on word analysis skills occurs an average of only once per week. Teachers expressed concerns with reducing the time currently spent on teaching the Reading and Vocabulary standards in order to focus on Foundational Skills.

Hypothesis #2:

Domain: ☐ Instruction ☐ Curriculum ☐ Environment ☒ Learner

Hypothesis: Too few students are scoring at or above benchmark on the ORF Accuracy measure because they do not identify and correct their errors when reading.

Prediction Statement: If students had self-monitoring skills to identify and correct their errors when reading, then students' reading accuracy will improve.

Assessment Method(s): ☒ Review ☐ Interview ☐ Observe ☐ Test

Specific Data to be Collected: Do students use self-monitoring skills when reading.

Validated: ☒ Yes ☐ No

A review of the ORF probes revealed that students are not self-correcting errors as they read, even when those errors violate meaning.

Hypothesis #3:

Domain: ☐ Instruction ☐ Curriculum ☒ Environment ☐ Learner

Hypothesis: Too few students are scoring at or above benchmark on the ORF Accuracy measure because they don't have access to accessible instructional materials.

Prediction Statement: If students had access to accessible instructional materials, then students' accuracy will improve.

Assessment Method(s): ☐ Review ☒ Interview ☐ Observe ☐ Test

Specific Data to be Collected: Do students have access to accessible instructional materials.

Validated: ☐ Yes ☒ No

Teachers report that students have access to and regularly use accessible instructional materials.

Step 3: Intervention/Instructional Design

As the team began developing the Tier 1 intervention plan, they reviewed the three hypotheses generated in Step 2. The hypothesis considering access to accessible instructional materials (Hypothesis #3) was found to be invalid, so it was discarded. The hypotheses considering consistency of explicit instruction on word analysis skills (Hypothesis #1) and students not identifying and correcting their errors while reading (Hypothesis #2), were both found to be valid and will be addressed in the Tier 1 Intervention Plan. To address Hypothesis #1, the team decided to add 10 minutes to the reading block to consistently provide explicit instruction on word analysis skills. The instructional coach suggested using FCRR Student Center Activities - Advanced Phonics, and agreed to print and prepare the necessary materials. To address Hypothesis #2, the team consulted What Works Clearinghouse for ideas and found that Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) is an evidence-based program that can be used at the Tier 1 level. They decided to use specifically the Partner Reading activity, as it is designed to support students' in identifying and correcting their errors while reading.

As a result of their conversations, the 5th grade team developed the comprehensive intervention plan detailed below. The plan represents adjustments to core instruction that will be delivered to and received by all 5th grade students, and is aligned to the following reading standards:

ELA.5.F.1.3 Use knowledge of grade-appropriate phonics and word-analysis skills to decode words.

a. Apply knowledge of all letter-sound correspondences, syllabication patterns, and morphology to read and write unfamiliar single-syllable and multisyllabic words in and out of context.

ELA.5.F.1.4 Read grade-level texts with accuracy, automaticity, and appropriate prosody or expression.

Step 3 – Intervention Design: What are we going to do about it?

Intervention plan developed for: All 5th grade students **Content area/focus of improvement:** ELA/Reading - ORF Accuracy

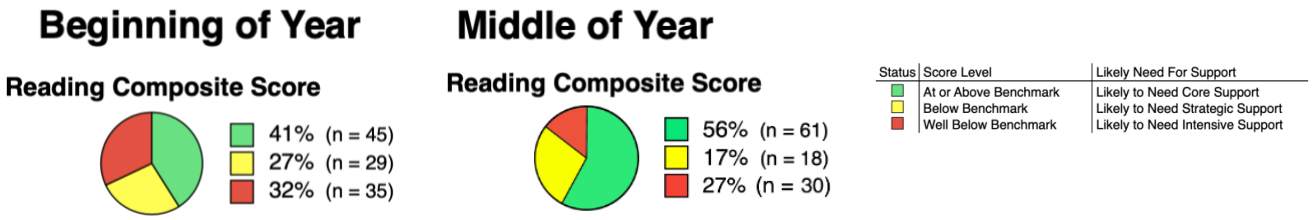
Validated hypothesis:

Intervention Plan	Support Plan	Fidelity Documentation	Progress Monitoring Plan
Who is responsible? 5th grade teachers **What will be done?** Teach word analysis using FCRR Student Center Activities - Advanced Phonics **When will it occur?** 10 minutes, Daily, at 9:45 AM, beginning on 9/24/24 **Where will it occur?** All classrooms	**Who is responsible?** Instructional Coach **What will be done?** Print and prep weekly materials for each classroom **When will it occur?** Weekly, beginning on 9/23/24 **Where will it occur?** Smith's office	**Who is responsible?** 5th grade teachers **What will be done?** Use Documentation Worksheet to note completion of FCRR activities **When will it occur?** Daily **How will data be shared?** Worksheets will be uploaded into OneDrive and issues with implementation will be discussed during grade-level PLC meetings	**Who is responsible?** 5th grade teachers **What data will be collected and when?** Mid-year Acadience data in December **When will team reconvene to evaluate progress?** 1/10/25

Who is responsible? 5th grade teachers **What will be done?** Engage students in 5th grade Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) focusing on the Partner Reading activity using novel study materials **When will it occur?** M, W, F during independent reading time within the reading block **Where will it occur?** All classrooms	**Who is responsible?** Instructional Coach **What will be done?** Prepare PALS materials and co-facilitate training of students; then observe students and teachers during PALS and help troubleshoot barriers to implementation (e.g., student pairings, text selection) **When will it occur?** PALS student training begins 9/25/24 **Where will it occur?** All classrooms	**Who is responsible?** 5th grade teachers **What will be done?** Teachers: review student materials for implementation; Instructional Coach: observe instruction, provide feedback, and help troubleshoot barriers to implementation **When will it occur?** Teachers: weekly; Instructional Coach: observations every two weeks beginning 10/9/24, then monthly starting 11/20/24 **How will data be shared?** Teachers and Instructional Coach: review student materials and observation notes every two weeks	**How will we decide if the plan is effective?** Percent of students scoring at or above benchmark (Reading Composite Score) **Decision rules:** Positive RtI = ≥ 56% Questionable RtI = 42%-55% Poor RtI = ≤ 41%

Step 4: Response to Intervention/Instruction

Mid-year Review: As planned, the team met on January 10th to review the Mid-Year Acadience data and plan next steps. First, they needed to determine the students' response to intervention. Referring to the decision rules they developed in Step 3, they were able to easily determine that with 56% of students scoring At or Above Benchmark, the student response was positive. Because the goal of 70% had not yet been met, with a positive RtI, they discussed two possible options for next steps. They could (a) continue the plan as designed, (b) increase the intensity of the current plan.



The team decided to continue the plan as designed and keep their end-of-year goal of at least 70% of students scoring At or Above Benchmark, as measured by Acadience (Reading Composite Score). They felt confident that the students' progress, resulting from their adjustments to Tier 1 instruction for all students, would continue at the current rate, enabling them to meet their end-of-year goal. Noting the number of students scoring Well Below Benchmark did not decrease significantly, the team scheduled a problem-solving meeting for later in the week to address more intensive supports for their most at-risk students.

A summary of Step 4 for the mid-year review is below:

Progress Monitoring Data:

56% of students met or exceeded expected level of performance

44% of students did not meet or exceed expected level of performance

Data-based decision making based on pre-determined decision rules:

☒ POSITIVE

Goal is *not* met: ☒ Continue plan as designed *or* ☐ Increase intensity of current plan (document all changes or adjustments)

Goal *is* met: ☐ Fade intervention and monitor *or* ☐ Identify new goal, modify plan (document all changes or adjustments, complete new PSW if appropriate)

Changes or adjustments to the plan: How will we decide if the plan is effective? Percent of students scoring at or above benchmark (Reading Composite Score)

New Decision rules:

Positive RtI = ≥ 70%

Questionable RtI = 57%-69%

Poor RtI = ≤ 56%

Next Meeting Date: 5/19/25

End-of-Year Review: The Tier 1 intervention plan was implemented throughout the spring semester, and the team met as planned on May 19th. During this meeting, they reviewed the End-of-Year Acadience data to determine the students' response to intervention. Using the decision rules they established in January, they determined that with 68% of students scoring At or Above Benchmark, the response was questionable. They know that when students' response to intervention/instruction is determined to be questionable or poor, fidelity of implementation should always be examined before considering a change in intervention. They reviewed Documentation Worksheets and observation data and found fidelity to be good.

To learn the plan's impact on students' reading subskills, they reviewed all Acadience assessment data (ORF Accuracy, Maze, and Retell). It revealed a significant improvement in ORF accuracy, with the percentage of students scoring At or Above Benchmark increasing from 46% to 82%. This indicated that the interventions focused on multi-syllabic word decoding and self-correction of reading errors was effective. However, the percentage of students scoring At or Above Benchmark on the Retell measure increased from 37% to just 56%, and on the Maze measure from 44% to just 59%, suggesting that students continue to struggle with low-level comprehension. The team discussed that this data, along with other classroom assessments, indicated a need to focus on vocabulary instruction moving forward. With the school year ending in less than two weeks, activities targeting academic vocabulary will be added to teachers' single sign-on pages for students to access during the summer.

A summary of Step 4 for the end-of-year review is below:

Progress Monitoring Data:

68% of students met or exceeded expected level of performance

32% of students did not meet or exceed expected level of performance

Data-based decision making based on pre-determined decision rules:

☐ POSITIVE

Goal is *not* met: ☐ Continue plan as designed *or* ☐ Increase intensity of current plan (document all changes or adjustments)

Goal *is* met: ☐ Fade intervention and monitor *or* ☐ Identify new goal, modify plan (document all changes or adjustments, complete new PSW if appropriate)

☒ QUESTIONABLE

Fidelity concerns: ☐ Address fidelity, continue plan as designed and monitor (document adjustments to address fidelity)

No fidelity concerns: ☐ Increase intensity of current plan and monitor *or* ☒ return to earlier steps of problem solving (document all changes or adjustments)

Changes or adjustments to the plan: By 5/31/25, we will identify and add vocabulary building activities to our single sign-on pages for students to access during the summer. Activities will target 6th grade academic vocabulary.

Next Meeting Date: This was the last Tier 1 problem solving meeting for this school year. We will meet again next year on 8/6/25 to review data and plan Tier 1 for our incoming 5th graders.

Notes: We reviewed ORF Accuracy, Maze, and Retell data. Significant improvement in ORF accuracy (46% to 82%). Retell had less improvement (37% to 56%) as did Maze (44% to 59%). This suggests that students continue to struggle with low-level comprehension. Vocabulary instruction will be a focus moving forward.