

Chapter 3 – Solving Learning Concerns

Section 3.1 Problem Solving and Standard Protocol

Considering the research on Response to Intervention, two models have been widely implemented around the nation: **Problem Solving** and **Standard Protocol**. Problem Solving is a process that uses the skills of professionals from different disciplines to study student issues (especially individual), implement scientifically based interventions, and evaluate impact on performance. This is more common at Tiers 3 and 4. Standard Protocol is a process where a school or system uses pre-determined scientifically based interventions in a specific sequence with identified students, primarily at Tiers 1 and 2. Both models offer strong structures for teams to support student achievement. **The Georgia Department of Education recommends the use of a blended approach to solving student learning or behavior issues.** Combining both approaches will allow schools the flexibility to identify research based and research proven reading, mathematics, and behavioral interventions. Schools will then be able to insert these interventions where they are most appropriate.

The exact “Scientifically Based Research” language from NCLB Section 9101 (37) reads:

(37) SCIENTIFICALLY BASED RESEARCH- The term scientifically based research —

(A) means research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs; and

(B) includes research that —

(i) employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;

(ii) involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;

(iii) relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators;

(iv) is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls;

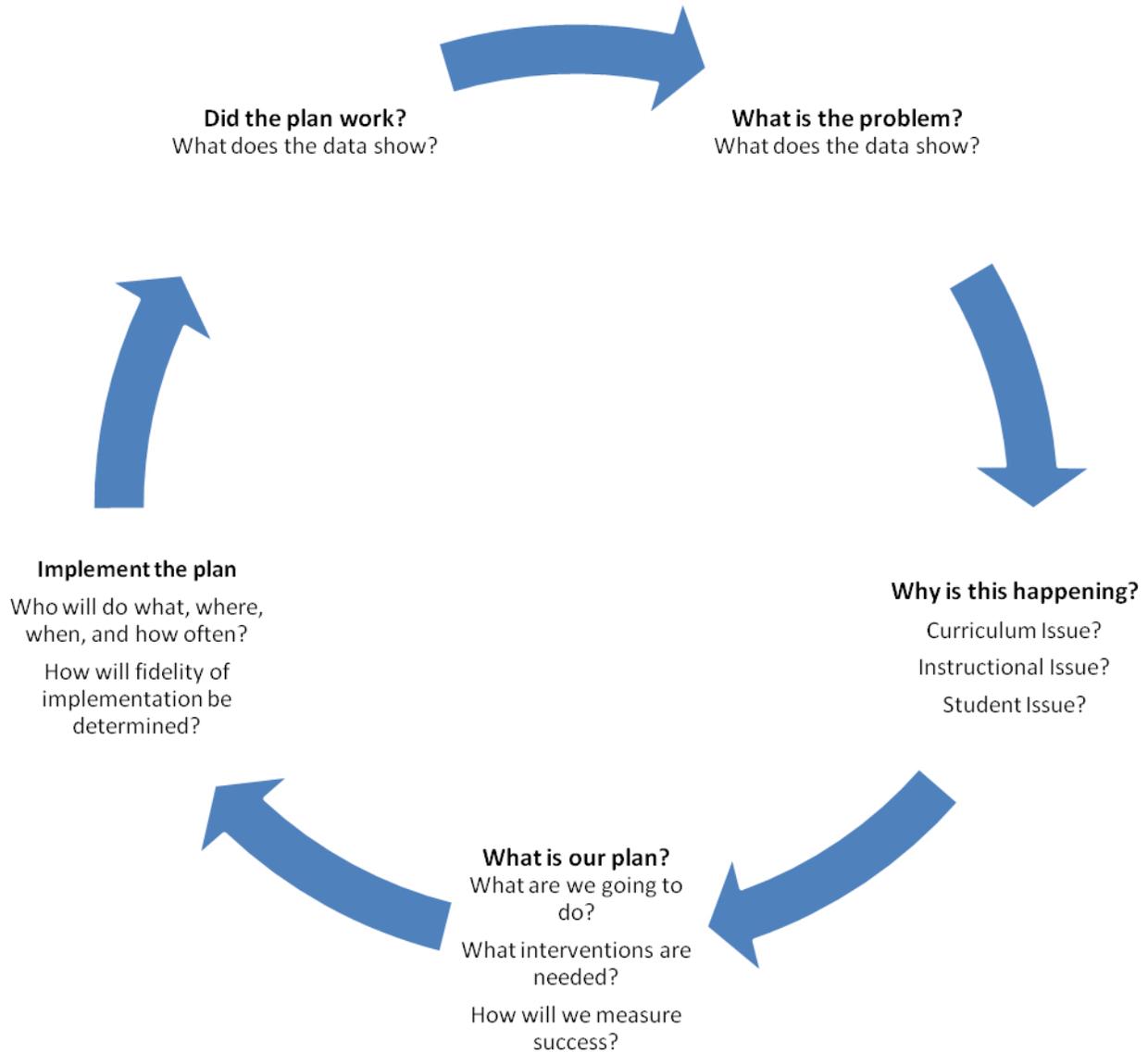
(v) ensures that experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings; and

(vi) has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review.

Data Teams

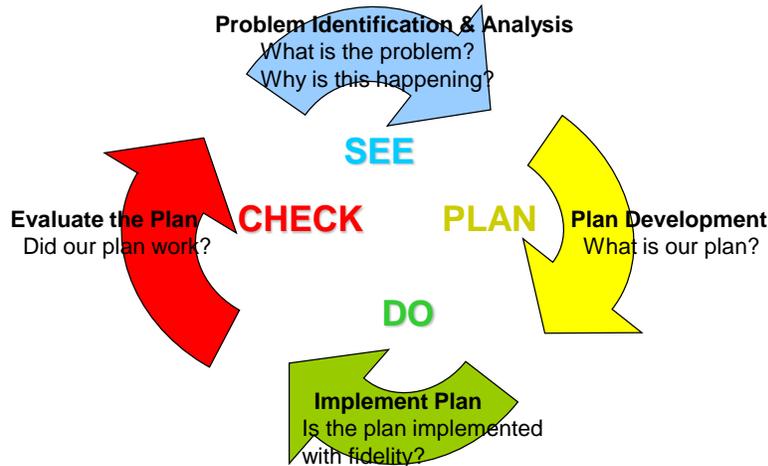
The Georgia Department of Education recommends the formation of a data team at each school. This team would be responsible for analyzing achievement and discipline data from both formative and summative measures in use. The team would lead the work of using district and school performance norms to set criteria for expected growth and the identification of scientifically based interventions needed to support the learner. School level participants should include the principal, grade level/content area representatives, counselors, and school psychologist.

This graphic illustrates Georgia's process that data teams follow for solving student learning and behavioral concerns:

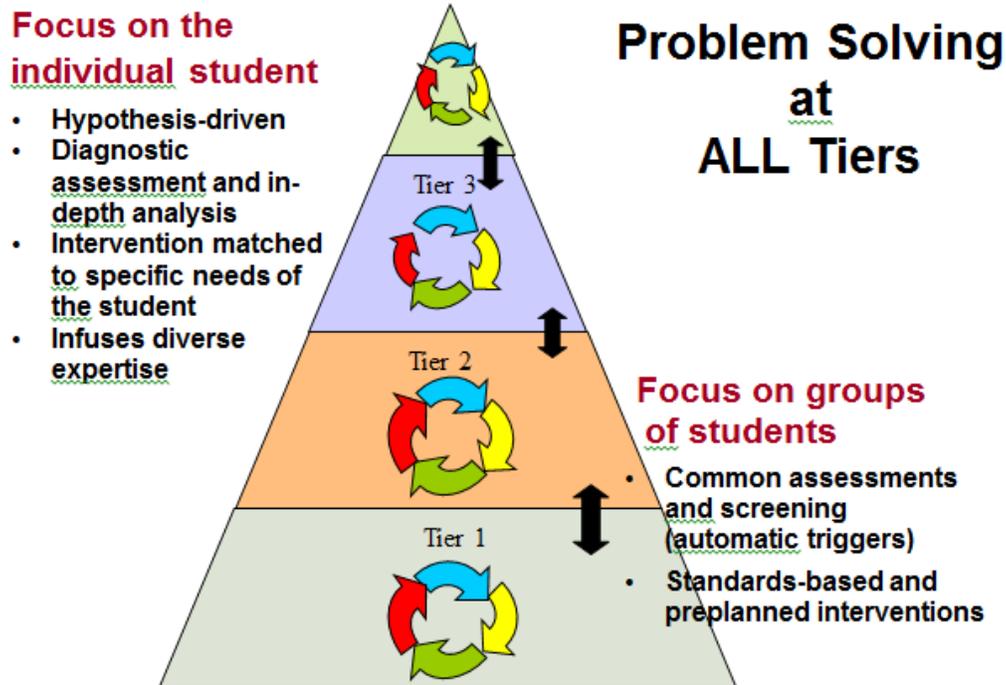


Problem Solving occurs at all Tiers. Teachers are continually using data to drive instructional decision making. These visuals from SSTAGE (Student Support Team Association for Georgia Educators) show a four-step problem solving process and its use at each tier to support students:

The Problem Solving Process... Data-Driven Decision Making



Source: Lynn L. Pennington, SSTAGE



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What is the problem?

A review of student data at the district and school level will reveal patterns in learning and behavior. These patterns are used to develop system norms for expected student progress. Schools will use these norms to identify students not meeting their individual expected potential. The use of a Universal Screener, based on the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, is critical to identifying students who may need additional assessments to determine learning gaps. If less than 80% of the school's students meet standards, the data team should use local school norms to identify targeted students and work to raise the school to district standards.

Why is this happening?

The Department suggests a deep look at the reasons why learning is occurring at the rate identified for individual students.

- Are the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards being implemented in classrooms? The universal screener and benchmark assessments should be based on the CCGPS, so it is reasonable to require schools to ensure that the curriculum is being learned to the level of rigor expected at each grade level. If the curriculum lacks clarity, has limited rigor, and/or shows inappropriate depth of learning, this is a curriculum issue. A review of the curriculum and professional learning is needed.
- Explicit and systematic instruction should be in all classrooms. Research based instructional strategies, teacher modeling, student feedback, and teacher commentary are the foundation of standards-based classrooms. The uses of formative assessment to guide instruction, along with appropriate student engagement and management skills, are requirements in all classrooms in Georgia. An instructional issue would be flagged by what the teacher is or is not doing in the classroom. Professional Learning will be required to ensure standards-based instruction is occurring in all classrooms and to support the content knowledge of teachers.
- Finally, after removing the possibility of curriculum or instructional issues, the school can begin the process of determining if the progress gaps are due to how the student learns.

What is our plan?

At this stage, the team has the responsibility of deciding which intervention(s), whether available pre-identified or individualized interventions would be most appropriate for supporting the student. A deep review of student and teacher historical data will guide this decision. The team will create a specific plan to include progress monitoring, growth expectations, and timelines to evaluate progress. Professional Learning support will be in place to ensure and monitor that the interventions are implemented with fidelity.

Implement the Plan

As the plan is implemented, the Department strongly suggests a constant flow of communication between the teacher providing the intervention and the core teachers. This will support the transfer of learning from the intervention to the core area being targeted. Additionally, checks for fidelity of implementation should occur by the data team and/or SST team to ensure accurate implementation of the intervention as designed.

What is fidelity of Implementation? (NRCLD 2006)

Fidelity of implementation is the delivery of instruction in the exact way it was designed to be delivered (Gresham, MacMillan, Boebe-Frankenberger, & Bocian, 2000). Fidelity must also address the integrity with which screening and progress-monitoring procedures are completed and that an explicit decision-making model is followed. In an RTI model, fidelity is important at both the school level (e.g., implementation of the process) and the teacher level (e.g., implementation of instruction and progress monitoring).

How can schools ensure fidelity of implementation? (NRCLD 2006)

- Link interventions to improved outcomes (credibility)
- Definitively describe operations, techniques, and components
- Clearly define responsibilities of specific persons
- Create a data system for measuring operations, techniques, and components
- Create a system for feedback and decision making (formative)
- Create accountability measures for non-compliance

Did the plan work?

At the designated points for data collection, the team will measure plan success. The team will document growth and create the next level of support for the student.

The Georgia Department of Education recommends that a problem solving process checklist be used as a guide for implementation of the problem solving process. (see example below) This document will support the accountability of school based personnel working to address identified areas of concern for individual student achievement.

Persons involved in the plan for addressing student achievement concerns should be knowledgeable about teacher development and instructional pedagogy. This document will provide a common framework of understanding for school and system level professional learning initiatives designed to ensure that instructional and behavioral interventions are implemented with fidelity.