



The EHS Model: Implementing Response to Intervention at the Secondary Level

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Every school administrator who regularly peruses professional literature will read articles that suggest good leaders must implement the author's research or ideas. Each new moral imperative is presented as the heart of a new way of operating a school. Usually, however, there is no time to integrate these ideas carefully into an existing system. School leaders tend to have only the time and resources to add new ideas rather than integrate them in a viable and effective manner. In this way, leaders can safely say, "Yes, we do that," despite knowing the innovation is isolated and unproven in its effects on student success. School leaders can get caught in the trap of constantly looking for the latest new things to add, without ever fully capturing the benefit of the educational innovations they have just added.

Empowered High Schools (EHS) reconsiders the whole system. Our question is: How can we design a school as an understandable system so we know how each process supports every other process toward a unified purpose? We recognize the school needs to be designed around data-collection systems that can measure the effects of each new process. Our model questions what is well designed and working, what needs to improve and where to place innovations so a school's capacity to achieve its purpose becomes increasingly efficient. When leaders can identify areas in which their school is deficient, they can concentrate on investigating and implementing specifically proven processes or strategies that can help improve well-defined problems and produce measureable results.

Design model

Our systemic model meets all the requirements of response to intervention (RTI) theory and practice but does so within the unique needs of an American secondary school. For years, school leaders have struggled to make RTI fit at the high school level. The components of the model include systems, processes, strategies and protocols. The purpose is to unite all the school's functions to the purpose of higher student achievement by using efficient, interactive, results-based practices. It is similar to a modern hospital, which organizes its professionals into supervisory boards and specialized teams that follow protocols using data-driven problem-solving and uniform analysis practices to improve treatments and determine the next level of intervention.

The EHS model has the following components:

1. Professional learning teams (PLTs).
2. Teacher leadership development.
3. Data-driven and standards-aligned core curriculum.
4. RTI system.
5. Social emotional learning (SEL) system.
6. Continual quality improvement processes.

1. PLTs: The model requires teachers be placed in PLTs. Individual administrators and teachers working in isolation do not have the capacity to ensure student achievement. Teams are energizing places in which individual teachers find the encouragement, support and procedural know-how to handle the tough problems that interfere student achievement goals. An isolated teacher can only affect the quality and improvement of his or her individual classes. These teams are generally established along the lines of a course, grade-level content area or, for small programs, a department. For example, the freshman English teachers form one team. Alternatively, all teachers in a technology department come together as a team despite the fact they teach a variety of different classes.

The EHS notion of teams is quite different from those found in other professional literature. Teams must have a specific performance expectation as measured by student achievement and the team's own development level. Setting aside student achievement for now, the EHS model has established the nine levels of PLT capacity. This is an administrative and team management tool that defines and measures a team's level of functioning within the model. The nine levels explain:

- What the PLT is able to do presently.
- What resources or staff development the team will need to grow.
- What is expected of the PLT in the future.

Because each team has different strengths and capacities, school leaders must understand that teams will develop at different rates along this development ladder.

Embedded within nine levels of PLT capacity is a process called SCAIL— standards, curriculum alignment, assessment summative, instruction formative and interventions, and



learner and environment. SCAIL is a design and improvement tool that describes what work must be done and in what order the work must be completed. Using this mnemonic ensures efficient school improvement efforts. For example, it is difficult and inefficient to design summative assessments when there is little curricular alignment within a building's curricular program. After a standards-based formative and summative program is completed, the PLT's main performance function is to ensure at least 80% of students exhibit mastery of a skill or concept in the same course.

2. Teacher leadership development: To ensure all students achieve, more leadership is required than traditional administration can provide. Each team leader is highly trained to facilitate the teams' work and the problem-solving model. All team leaders meet monthly for support and additional coaching.

3. Data-driven and standards-aligned core curriculum with developmental benchmarks: The EHS model requires the school adopt sets of standards that define a core program for what all students must be able to know and do to graduate high school. The most crucial is a set of skill standards, such as the ACT College Readiness Standards or the Common Core standards. In either case, these standards must be related to the external testing system used by the district or state. Local and content standards also should be aligned within a school curriculum.

Each of the standards is assigned to particular courses, and the level of responsibility is described. It is crucial that skills be taught and practiced across departments. Each standard must have a set of developmental benchmarks or a performance rubric that defines a student's progress toward mastery. Mastery benchmarks are used to set expectations for summative assessments and developmental benchmarks define formative assessments and instructional targets.

4. An RTI process for teams: EHS has a true high school RTI model:

- **Tier one:** The model stresses the tier one development using the design mentioned earlier. If a school does not create a viable core curricular program, the lack of student achievement will overwhelm the other tiers. We define viable as having 80% of students in a given course performing at mastery on each standard.

- **Tier two:** To have credibility with teachers, schoolwide interventions must be designed to support the teachers as they develop more viable programs. These include academic support centers, which assist students with specific needs. Schools need to amend their bell schedules or delay students' selection of elective courses to enable more participation in scientifically proven support programs.
- **Tier three:** EHS recommends an intervention matrix that explains the protocols for meeting difficult students who are unsuccessful at tier two. This small percentage of students will require intensive support and progress monitoring.

5. SEL system: SEL and motivational problems are treated similar to academic problems. Standards are adopted, activities and programs are designed, assessment measures are adopted, results are analyzed and improvement plans are designed. Schools design schoolwide approaches to SEL that all students experience, and then a system of intervention for students who fall short of expectations.

6. Continual quality improvement processes: After the PLT can benchmark its summative assessments, the team gets a performance report that shows how students in their courses or programs are succeeding. To focus on key areas for improvement, the PLT will use a uniform problem-solving method to analyze potential problems according to the ordered protocols of SCAIL.

The EHS model requires that teams perform analysis and problem solving on the data results. Teachers are rarely trained to do this type of work; therefore, EHS trains leaders on using a uniform five-step process that borrows heavily from Six Sigma's define, measure, analyze, improve and control approach. Each team in the building—from the building leadership team to the core (multidisciplinary) teams, and from early intervention teams to screening teams—must use this method. Only by using the exact same model ubiquitously can we make the entire system as efficient as possible. Using common steps on all of the teams at each tier helps ensure a common language, common vision and a systematic approach to problems.

Each component of the EHS model is necessary for a school to experience real and lasting improvement. RTI cannot be implemented with integrity if there is not sufficient confidence in the school's tier one academic and behavioral programs. Otherwise, the school systems for intervention will be fraught with waste, and schools will just estimate where the



needs exist. The teamwork ensures the faculty's proficiency levels increase and are sustained for years without being influenced by retirements and staff changes. Working through teams enables a gradual role outside of the model and ensures time for integration within a school's broader system. The model works with all types of schools and has been implemented in schools of all sizes and demographics in the upper Midwest, with nearly immediate success.

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For more information on EHS, visit www.empoweredhighschools.com, read Johns' and McMackin's blog at www.empoweredhighschools.com/blog or follow EHS on Twitter at @EmpowerdSchools.