

## Tips for Collaboration

### **Value students' home languages and cultures:**

When team members view what students bring with them (their experiences, languages, and cultural backgrounds) as assets and strengths to build upon, the process of gathering information and crafting interventions becomes more productive.

**Remain open to other perspectives:** Team members who are learners, reflective practitioners (Schön, 1987), and who *listen to other perspectives*, will work productively with one another to create solutions to even the most difficult situations. These teams use their time together effectively.

**Foster mutual respect among colleagues:** If the leader creates an environment in which members respect one another, team members will be more likely to speak up and share their perspectives.

**Depersonalize difficult exchanges:** When team members respect one another, then the focus of the solution-seeking teams remains on the students and their needs. Members of this sort of team can more easily put aside their professional egos and get down to the difficult work of asking questions, gathering information, and developing cohesive and comprehensive services to support students.

**Seek to develop common language:** When bringing together professionals from different fields and backgrounds, it is essential that team members recognize that miscommunication can arise. One of the main causes of miscommunications might be that professionals from different disciplines use similar language when referring to different phenomena. Unless team members take the time to discuss these terms from their different professional perspectives, confusion and frustration may arise on the part of the team members, and in the end, the students' needs may not be fully addressed.

**Ask for clarification or examples:** Even when team members make an effort to develop understanding of common terms and acronyms, everyone should feel comfortable asking for clarification at any point during the conversation. Taking the time to ask, "Can you give me an example of what you mean?" or "What does it

look like when the student does such and such?" can help redirect the conversation during the solution-seeking process.

**Triangulate data from multiple sources:** Teams can develop a more accurate profile of students' performance when they consider qualitative as well as quantitative information from multiple sources. Collecting examples of students' work throughout an RtI<sup>2</sup> process helps the team validate strengths and areas that need improvement in order to intervene appropriately. WIDA's standardized language proficiency assessments (ACCESS for ELLs, MODEL, W-APT), like all standardized assessments, do not provide the complete picture of students' progress. It is recommended that school systems monitor students' language progress through the use of formative instructional language assessments (Gottlieb, 2012; Gottlieb & Nguyen, 2007).

**Use ethnographic approaches:** Focusing on asking open-ended questions (Westby, 1990; Westby, Burda, & Mehta, 2003) allows teams to gather descriptive information about a student's performance and background. Shifting away from questions that lead to Yes/No responses makes the information gathering process more productive. For example, asking a teacher on the solution-seeking team, "Do you use graphic organizers when you teach ELLs?" will elicit a very narrow (and perhaps defensive) answer of "yes!" or "no!" The answer might be quite different if someone asks the question in a more open-ended manner such as, "Can you describe how the student responds when you use graphic organizers during content area instruction?" In this approach to solution-seeking, team members take the context for the students' performance into account when discussing how to best support them.

**Reflect on the process:** When teams take the time to reflect after a solution-seeking session, they are better able to adjust their practice and remain innovative and effective. Just taking the time to ask, "What worked?," "What didn't work?," and "What are we going to do differently in our next meeting?" can allow a team to remain progressive and relevant (Schön, 1987).

*Adapted from: Hamayan et al. (2013); Sanchez-Lopez & Young (2003)*