

## RtI in GHAEA

### Lighting the way, now and into the future

*Eric Neessen, GHAEA regional administrator*

**O**ver the past year, Green Hills AEA has been engaged in measures to shine the light on a school improvement effort commonly referred to as Response to Intervention (RtI). This is not a new process or framework in the world of education, but it has invoked many different interpretations and understandings – some more correct than others. This brief article will attempt to clarify where things are at with RtI in GHAEA, in Iowa, and nationally.

#### **Q: What RtI efforts are occurring within GHAEA?**

**A:** There are two simultaneous efforts occurring within GHAEA now. First, there are 11 school buildings engaged in elementary literacy screening and data collection through the Collaboration for Kids (C4K) effort organized by the Iowa Dept. of Education -- with more specific literacy intervention training to occur in February. These 11 schools are currently receiving training at the state level on universal instruction and are being supported by external GHAEA coaches assigned to their buildings.

Second, GHAEA is also engaged in efforts to help others, interested non-C4K elementary buildings understand the RtI process to increase student achievement in literacy. Earlier this fall, a questionnaire was used to engage school personnel in a discussion about the RtI elements and determine what their needs are. These results have been reviewed by the AEA and common themes have been identified as well as unique needs at each building. These common themes are being incorporated in planning of professional development opportunities to come.

#### **Q: What is going to happen next for schools interested in engaging in RtI/school improvement efforts?**

**A:** GHAEA has drafted a plan to help move interested elementary schools forward with their efforts to improve student achievement using the RtI framework. Here is a brief summary of what GHAEA literacy instructional services consultants will be doing (with help from special education reps when possible) to support elementary schools at the local level over the remainder of this school year:

- Consensus building among administration and staff
- Establishing infrastructure components
  - Building Leadership Team members and structure
  - Universal screener assessments
  - Assessment data analysis and decision making
  - Reviewing the health of universal instruction (aligned with Iowa Core)
  - Reviewing the supports for all levels of learners

#### **Q: What is the plan for next year?**

**A:** More professional development in practical literacy tools and strategies will occur next year. These PD opportunities will occur at the regional level, with onsite implementation support, and will focus on K-5 universal instruction in literacy. This advance notice is intended to allow schools to build these PD dates into their 2014-15 school PD calendar.

'RtI in GHAEA' continues

**Q:** MTSS is a term that is starting to be used by the DE. Is this the same thing as RtI or something different?

**A:** Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is being used more frequently at the national level in place of RtI for a couple different reasons: 1) RtI is often associated with academic difficulties in children, and 2) it is sometimes associated with special education as it was used in the IDEA 2004. MTSS, on the other hand, is a “break” from the academic deficit connotation as it incorporates both the behavioral focus as well as accelerated learner focus. We will follow the lead of the DE as to what term we use. For now, consider both RtI and MTSS to be synonymous.



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## AEAs ON AIR



**Home**    **November 7, 2013**    **December 13, 2013**    **February 5, 2014**    **April 3, 2014**

Iowa's AEA technology integration consultants are teaming up to provide a series of mini-webinars. These sessions will run at various times throughout the day and will cover topics around the themes listed below. These Hangouts on Air will only be 10-20 minutes in length. Visit the website for schedule and more information. The hangouts will be recorded and posted on the page with resources, so those who can't attend live can view at their convenience.

**Follow the hashtag #aeatech**

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**November 7, 2013**  
**[English Language Arts](#)**



**December 13, 2013**  
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**February 5, 2014**  
**[Digital Learning Day: Resources for MTSS/RTI](#)**



**April 3, 2014**  
**[Happy Birthday iPad](#)**



## 21st Century Learners' Conference

*'Educators were ready for learning and presenters were ready to facilitate that learning!'*

~ Dr. David VanHorn, GHAEA associate administrator

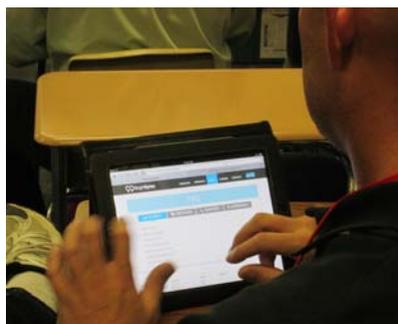
Another successful 21st Century Learners' Conference is in the books. And, it was a success! More than 1,600 educators attended one or both days of the conference, Oct. 4 and 11.

On Oct. 4, the conference was held at Creston High School. While the weather outside was a bit wet and gloomy, the atmosphere inside was upbeat and energetic. Educators were ready for learning and the presenters were ready to facilitate that learning.

The day began with a keynote presentation by David Warlick. According to his biography, Warlick has been an educator for more than 35 years -- as a classroom teacher, an administrator and a consultant. In recent years, he developed the Citation Machine, which serves nearly a million page views a day. Additionally, Warlick is the author of "Developing Your Personal Learning Network," released in 2012. He shared his wealth of knowledge and experience during both the keynote and breakout sessions.

On Oct. 11 at Abraham Lincoln High School in Council Bluffs, attendees were delighted by the keynote address provided by Jaime Casap, a self-described Google evangelist. Casap's message is about the power of technology and the use of Google tools to help students build the skills needed to succeed, close the digital divide, and help level the playing field. In a recent TedTalk, he described education as the silver bullet that has the power to disrupt poverty.

Each day after the keynote address, attendees selected from several breakout



sessions. Topics ranged from augmented reality, to Minecraft in the classroom, to apps for the elementary and 3-D printing. There were sessions for everyone.

This year we had the good fortune of having students serve as co-presenters in one or more sessions. We are hoping to enlist more students as presenters for next year's conference.

When asked what they enjoyed most about this year's conference, attendees responded with learning more about Google Docs, 3-D printer/printing, 60 apps in 60 minutes, and more. If you were not able to attend, you can check out what you missed at <http://goo.gl/uuyGBd>. The site offers many resources provided by this year's presenters.

Next year's conference is scheduled for Oct. 3 and 10. We may need to adjust one or both dates by a week or so, but hope to finalize soon. Tentatively, the keynote presenter will be Will Richardson, who is both informative and entertaining. Learn more about him by checking out his TedTalk at <http://goo.gl/23hjEg>.

**You can help us plan for next year's conference. Watch your e-mail for a brief survey regarding topics you would like to see at next year's conference. We hope to see you next year!**



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# Special education is a service, not a place

**Andy Ruff, GHAEA supervisor of physical therapy services, was invited to speak at the New York City Dept. of Ed. School Based Physical Therapy Conference, *Successful Physical Therapy Interventions in the Classroom*, held in New York City the week of Oct. 14. He shares some thoughts from the conference, including how the state of Iowa is far ahead of New York City in terms of physical therapy interventions and technology.**

If, on a federal survey addressing the provision of special education services in the least restrictive environment, your state ranks 50<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states and the District of Columbia and you are by far the largest school district within that state, what do you do?

When only the District of Columbia ranks lower than you, as the director of physical therapy services for New York City Public Schools, you know change is needed. In a city that averages 17,100 people per square mile (Iowa averages 54.4 people per square mile) and in a school district that employs more than 700 school based physical therapists – many of whom define themselves by their therapy rooms and who still provide more clinically designed pull out services typically 2-3 times per week for 30 minutes per session – physical therapists who are just being introduced to the concept of “response to interventions” and who typically see their students in their therapy rooms rather than see the students at recess, or during PE class, or in the classroom, or moving through the halls with their classmates, or during lunch, or using the restroom – then you mandate your therapists participate in a school based physical therapy conference sponsored by the New York City Dept. of Education: *Successful Physical Therapy Interventions in the Classroom*.

You invite three presenters (all PTs) whom you believe are embedding physical therapy interventions into the educational environment for the students they serve – Karen Tartick, North Carolina, Brett Erin King, California, and Andy Ruff, Green Hills AEA.

By employing technologies demonstrated and utilized regularly at the GHAEA 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners Conferences, but not yet utilized by the New York City School District – technologies like Poll Everywhere, providing a conference Twitter site, or setting up a Google+ account with Google hangout and Screen Share so that the presenter from California, who could not attend due to health issues but still wanted to share her Power Point presentation, address the audience and answer questions from her office in California – the New York City PT director shared daily that Iowa was bringing New York City into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Beyond the difference in sheer numbers, the educational culture within the New York City School District is far different from that of Iowa, and this starts at its roots. Whereas in Iowa, Early ACCESS services and school based services are provided by GHAEA, in New York these same services are provided by separate entities. In Iowa, the primary focus of Early ACCESS services is to empower families while working within the child’s natural environment and looking at the routines within that natural environment to embed interventions that can easily be carried out throughout a child’s day regardless of the presence of the Early ACCESS teachers or other service providers. In New York, early intervention is still a very hands-on, expert driven service. *(Even the semantics of these services differ: Iowa’s Early ACCESS sounds as if you are opening doors to possibilities for the families we serve, while New York’s Early Intervention sounds as if you need to intervene to fix something that is broken.)*

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In Iowa, there appears to be a natural transition from a culture of empowering families in Early ACCESS to school based services which look to empower the student’s educational team – a team that includes the family as well as the school personnel who serve and work with the students daily. The educational services again are provided within the student’s natural environment which is now their educational day and they look to embed the student’s needs into the routines of that educational day.

In New York City, where the expert model is still prevalent, there is a feeling, albeit not supported by research, that more has to be better. It is natural for

*Story continues*

*'Special education is a service, not a place' continues* families to assume that school based services would also need to be provided in a more direct expert service model approach with frequent therapist contacts. Despite the continuously growing amount of research that supports the effectiveness of integrated services when compared to providing direct services regardless of the frequency of these direct services, systems change is difficult. When 73 percent of your school based PTs have been working in this direct service model for six or more years, and 47 percent of the therapists have been in the system for 10 or more years, systems change can be even more difficult.



Andy Ruff, speaking at *Successful PT Interventions in the Classroom*.

When the school based physical therapists were polled as to who is 100 percent behind changing to a practice of integrating interventions into naturally occurring times throughout a student's educational day, less than one percent indicated they were 100 percent in favor of this change. However, if you added this number to those who indicated they were 75 percent in favor of change, but felt that others would have to be brought on board to make it work, and those that were 50 percent in favor and indicated they would give it a try, but they still weren't convinced it was the best path to pursue, then 75 percent of the school based PTs indicated they were willing to at least try a change in their practice model.

A quote from Machiavelli was shared with the audience: "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things, because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and only lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new." This quote can be found in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, written in 1532, but is still true today.

It was then discussed in order for this change to work, it is not just the physical therapist who needs to embrace the change. "The lead in the introduction of a new order of things" has to start with administrative support both from the district and building levels, supervisors have to be on board, as do the therapists, teachers, paraeducators, other support service providers, and anyone else involved in the daily school activities of these students. It is a shared project and collectively they all have to believe that it is the students they serve who will be better off because of this change, and that these students will be provided the supports through this system change to be more independent, interactive, productive, self-advocating adults upon graduation – graduates who will have not just the capabilities, but the abilities to deal with an ever changing world.

As presenters over the four days, we shared experiences, strategies and interventions. We shared successes and failures, all of which seemed to be well received by the majority of the audience. As I left New York City I was glad to be returning to Iowa and what we have going here. Even though I did get to see "Phantom of the Opera" on Broadway, and did get to eat in Chinatown and Korea-town, neither of which could match the ambience of Pisgah, Iowa's famous "Old Home Filler Up and Keep on Trucking Cafe", it was nice to have it reconfirmed that we are doing some really good things both in Early ACCESS and for the school aged students we serve in Iowa. We aren't perfect, but we're headed in the right direction and we are far ahead of New York City, and as the other presenters pointed out, ahead of California and North Carolina also. Everyone in Green Hills AEA should take pride in the job they are doing and the difference they are making in the lives of those we serve.

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Watch your e-mail each week for *Green Hills at a Glance*, a brief look at upcoming events and trainings, resources, technology tips and education news. If you aren't receiving it, send your e-mail address to [dfricke@ghaea.org](mailto:dfricke@ghaea.org).

# In the Spotlight



Would you like your school *In the Spotlight*?  
Contact Denise Fricke, [dfricke@ghaea.org](mailto:dfricke@ghaea.org), 712-322-7354,  
800-432-5804 or [click here for a form](#).

## And the blue ribbon goes to . . .

Harlan High School is a 2013 National Blue Ribbon School, an honor bestowed by the U.S. Dept. of Education for overall academic excellence.

“National Blue Ribbon schools represent examples of educational excellence, and their work reflects the belief that every child in America deserves a world-class education,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

The school was recognized for strong math, reading and science scores on assessment. Superintendent Justin Wagner said the district places a strong emphasis on excellence, starting with the elementary school.

“When you expect greatness and the person next to you is doing great things, you start doing great things,” he said. “It’s contagious, like a fire. It gets started, and then it takes off.” Wagner added that the award is a reflection of the entire staff and high school principal John Connell.

Representatives from the school will attend an awards ceremony this week in Washington, D.C.



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*Justin Wagner, Harlan CSD superintendent*



Iowa School for the Deaf students Jaymee Keen (Ames), D.J. Meyer (Iowa City), and Stephanie Perez (Perry) collaborated on the video for the Katy Perry ROAR contest.

## Hear me roar!

**Iowa School for the Deaf students may not have won a nationwide contest, but their ‘voices’ came through loud and clear**

When pop singer Katy Perry, along with ABC’s *Good Morning America*, announced a contest for high school students, almost 1,000 videos from 44 states were submitted, all vying for a chance to win a performance by Perry at their school.

Kevin Boyce, Iowa School for the Deaf (ISD) residential counselor, heard about the contest and volunteered to help students create a two-minute video in which ISD students signed the lyrics to Perry’s popular song, *Roar*, while featuring the school’s academic, athletic and social opportunities.

Perry’s *Roar* is a song about speaking up for oneself. “Strangely enough, as much as I’m so loud and proud about my music, sometimes in other aspects of my life I became very introverted and didn’t feel like I could say what I meant . . . So ‘Roar’ was a song I wrote about really standing up for myself and hopefully people are going to adopt that same message,” said Perry.

The ISD video follows sophomore Stephanie Perez as she portrays a lonely, shy student at a mainstream school. After seeing a flier for Iowa School for the Deaf, she

enrolls at the school and realizes this is where she belongs -- where people are like her and welcome her into a circle of friends. “Then she developed a voice and felt like, ‘I can roar,’” said sophomore Jaymee Keen.

Keen, who had an unpleasant experience at a mainstream school, can relate to the video. “She (the student in the video) realized she can have success in life; she doesn’t have to just follow people like she did in her other school. Here, it gives her the oars so she can row her own path and have success in life.”

In the end, Perry selected Lakeview High School in Colorado as the winning video. But to students at ISD, working on the video not only reinforced pride in their school, but pride in themselves. “It reminded us why we don’t bully and why it’s not okay (to bully),” said senior D.J. Meyer. **[Click here to view ISD’s video entry.](#)**



## On the calendar

As educators, we are constantly striving to learn new skills and strategies that will improve student achievement. Green Hills AEA programs are coordinated to enhance the professional, personal, and organizational staff development needs of LEA and AEA staff. These include license renewal and graduate credit courses and informational workshops.

- Nov. 18: Early Childhood Institute, Atlantic (broadcast to Creston and Halverson)
- Nov. 21: CPI training, Creston
- Nov. 21: Tiered Math, K-3, Red Oak
- Nov. 26: GHAEA Board Meeting, Red Oak
- Nov. 28-29: Thanksgiving Break
- Dec. 4: Superintendents' Meeting, 9:30 a.m., Red Oak
- Dec. 5: Special Education Coordinators, 9 a.m. to noon, Creston Regional Office
- Dec. 5: Special Education Coordinators, 1 to 4 p.m., Halverson Center
- Dec. 16: Early Childhood Institute, Creston SWCC (broadcast to Atlantic, Halverson)

For more information,  
visit the GHAEA calendar link  
at <http://www.ghaea.org>



<https://www.facebook.com/ghaea.org>



**I**f you have a dream, you can do it.  
*Walt Disney*



### Stay In Touch

The mission of Green Hills AEA is to collaboratively advocate for families, communities and schools to help them achieve their goals by providing dedicated professional consultation and quality system-wide supports.

**Equity statement:** Green Hills AEA does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, disability, religion, creed, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity in its employment practices or on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, disability, religion, creed, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or economic status in its educational programs and activities, or as otherwise prohibited by statute or regulation. For more information concerning application of this statement or the grievance procedure contact Lori Kinyon, Equity Coordinator, Green Hills AEA, 257 Swan St., Creston, IA 50801, lkinyon@ghaea.org, 800-432-5804.

*In Touch* is a monthly e-newsletter for school administrators and teachers served by Green Hills AEA. Throughout the year, we'll introduce you to GHAEA staff who will be working in your districts, keep you abreast of upcoming trainings that may be of interest to you and your staff and feature AEA services and programs. If there's something you'd like to see in *In Touch*, e-mail [dfricke@ghaea.org](mailto:dfricke@ghaea.org) or click here to submit a story idea. Thanks and have a great year!