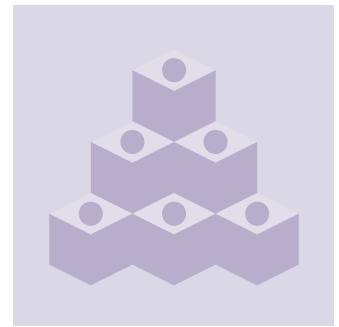


The ABCs of RTI in Elementary School: A Guide for Families



November 2012



National Center on Response to Intervention
<http://www.rti4success.org>

IDEAs
that Work
U.S. Office of Special
Education Programs

About the National Center on Response to Intervention

Through funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, the American Institutes for Research and researchers from Vanderbilt University and the University of Kansas have established the National Center on Response to Intervention. The Center provides technical assistance to states and districts and builds the capacity of states to assist districts in implementing proven response to intervention frameworks.



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This document was produced under U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs Grant No. H326E070004 to the American Institutes for Research. Grace Zamora Durán and Tina Diamond served as the OSEP project officers. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service or enterprise mentioned in this publication is intended or should be inferred. This product is public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted. While permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, the citation should be: National Center on Response to Intervention (November 2012). *The ABCs of RTI in Elementary School: A Guide for Families*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, National Center on Response to Intervention.

Publication Number 2309_11/12

Introduction

The National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI) has developed this document to help parents and other family members understand the essential components of Response to Intervention (RTI), ask questions about RTI, and understand how the RTI framework is being used to help your child succeed in school. Additionally, this document provides a definition of RTI and a brief description of each of the essential components.

Throughout the document, you will find sections about the fictitious Freemont Elementary School. These sections will give you examples of what RTI components might look like in the classroom and school. Each section also includes questions you might ask teachers or other school staff members. Answers to these questions will provide you with more information about RTI and will help you understand how RTI is benefiting your child.



For more information about the National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI) and the essential components of RTI, please see the informational brief developed by NCRTI, *Essential Components of RTI – A Closer Look at Response to Intervention*, which can be found at <http://www.rti4success.org/resourcetype/essential-components-rti-closer-look-response-intervention>.



Universal Components of RTI: A Quick Reference Guide

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RTI (Response to Intervention)

What is RTI?

- RTI is a multi-level, instructional framework aimed at improving outcomes for ALL students.
- RTI is a preventative framework and provides immediate support to students who are at risk for poor learning outcomes.
- RTI may be a component of a comprehensive evaluation for students with learning disabilities, depending on your state and school district policies.

RTI is a framework that school districts or states may choose to implement. It is not a specific class, test, or instructional program. Some states require that schools use RTI, while others do not. Many elementary schools now use this framework to support students in reading, mathematics, and behavior and they find it helps students succeed. An increasing number of middle schools and high schools are also implementing RTI. When a school implements RTI, everyone in the school participates in the process. The purpose of RTI is to make sure that every child in the school receives instruction that leads to success. School staff ensures that resources are available to provide students with immediate instructional support when needed.

Within an RTI framework, valid, reliable assessment is closely linked to instruction. Teachers and staff use results from assessments to help them choose the best materials and instruction for each child. Teachers also use assessments to find out how students are doing and to check on student progress throughout the year. They want to know if a child is not doing well. If a child is not making progress, teachers and staff will figure out the best instruction for that child and will provide the level of support that is best for helping that child achieve.



The child's progress is checked frequently to make sure the support being given is leading to success. Most schools refer to this frequent checking as progress monitoring. If the child is not succeeding, teachers and staff will change the instruction or intervention and perhaps change the level of support. A change to a higher, or more intense, level would mean that a child might receive, for example, longer periods of instruction in smaller groups or more frequent instruction in a particular subject area. Using RTI can also help a school identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities.

In this document, we use the term "levels" to talk about the varying intensities of instruction. However, many schools, districts, and states use the term "tiers" instead of "levels" of instruction when they describe the stages of increasingly intense instruction.

You will get a better idea about how RTI works as you learn about each of the four essential components. These components are listed in the Quick Reference Guide on page 2 in this document, along with the page numbers where additional information is located.

Most schools that use an RTI framework focus on students who need help in reading, but schools are branching out, and many now focus also on mathematics and writing. Because reading is the most common subject area addressed with RTI, most RTI examples in this booklet involve reading. Although an RTI framework can be used for any subject, it is rare to find it being used for secondary subjects such as science and history.

You should feel free to ask your child's teacher or the school staff about your child's progress. Let the staff at your child's school know that you will work with them by helping your child at home and by sharing your concerns with them. If your child requires additional support, you should ask school staff how they will update you about your child's progress.



Important Note for Parents

States and local school districts must find and evaluate all children with disabilities who live in the state and who are or may be in need of special education and related services. This is called “Child Find.” As stated in a memorandum from the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, “It is critical that this identification occur in a timely manner and that no procedure or practices result in delaying or denying this identification.”¹

IDEA regulations² allow parents to request an initial evaluation to see if their child is eligible for special education and related services at any time. This request is usually made to the local school district. The district has two choices of response. It may agree that the child needs to be evaluated and seek the parent’s written permission to do so. Or, if the district does not suspect that the child has a disability, it may deny the request for the initial evaluation. When a district denies this request, it must do so in a written notice to the parents explaining why the district is refusing the request and the reason it used as the basis for the decision. The written notice should explain how the parent can challenge the district’s decision not to evaluate the child. Participation or lack of participation in RTI may not be the reason for denying or delaying an initial evaluation.³

¹ OSEP Memorandum, “A Response to Intervention (RTI) Process Cannot Be Used to Delay-Deny an Evaluation for Eligibility under the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),” January 2011

² 34 CFR 300.301(b)

³ OSEP Memorandum (above)



Screening— Finding Out How Students Are Doing

Screening answers the following questions:

- Is the general classroom instruction working?
- Is instruction effective?
- Which students need additional assessment and instruction to make progress toward grade level goals?

To find out whether a child is at risk for poor learning outcomes, schools use universal or school-wide screening. Typically, a screening assessment is short and brief and is given to all students three times throughout the school year. Schools often screen students at the beginning, middle, and toward the end of the school year. The reason students are screened multiple times during the year is because some students who seem to be doing well in the beginning of the year might struggle later. Additional screenings help school staff remain aware of student needs and determine if all students are making satisfactory progress during the school year.

It is not unusual for schools to find that one out of every five children could benefit from some sort of extra help. If a school is not completely sure a child really needs extra help, that school might do a few more assessments just to make sure. Schools find it useful to determine early in the year which students need help so that teachers can begin supporting them right away.

Children who need extra help can be identified in a number of ways. Screening assessments to find out which children need help are brief and are intended for all students. For example, one type of reading screening test for students in kindergarten and first grade quickly measures how well a student understands the sounds that letters make within a word. Teachers have found that students who have a good understanding of sounds and letters will be more successful in learning to read than





In 1997, Congress established a National Reading Panel. This group of 14 people studied the research about how children learn to read. Research identified the following points:

- **Parents play a very important role in helping their child learn to read.**
- **It is very important for schools to find out whether a young child may have trouble learning to read.**
- **It is critical to provide help as early as possible to children who may have trouble learning to read.**

Findings from the National Reading Panel also can apply to other school subjects such as mathematics and writing. If a child who needs help does not get that help right away, the child will get further and further behind. When you have concerns, it is important that you ask questions so that you and your child's school can work together to help your child.

students who do not have that same understanding. Researchers, too, have found a link between understanding sounds and letters and learning to read. Knowing which students have a poor understanding of sounds and letters helps schools provide extra support to the students who need it.

Another type of screening test for older students asks students to read a paragraph or story out loud. The teacher checks to see how many correct words the student reads in one minute. Scores on these types of assessments give teachers a good idea of whether a child is having difficulties in reading.

Teachers may also check to see how well students understand what they read. If students have a good understanding of what they read, we say that they have good reading comprehension.

Schools that screen for mathematics difficulty might use tests that include basic addition and subtraction facts and computation concepts for early elementary students or more advanced mathematics skills for older elementary students.

Screening at Freemont Elementary School

Morgan is in third grade. In mid-September, Morgan and her classmates were given individual screening tests for reading. The teacher listened to Morgan read part of a story for one minute and then counted how many words Morgan read correctly during that time. The number of correct words read in one minute is known as the oral reading fluency rate. Thus, fluency is a combination of rate, or speed, and accuracy.



Morgan’s teacher uses the screening test manual to find out the fluency rates that Morgan and the other third graders should have. The manual also gives the teacher information about fluency rates that would indicate that a child is at risk for reading difficulties.

Morgan had an oral reading fluency rate of 87 correct words per minute. This is a typical oral reading fluency rate for a child at the beginning of third grade, which means that Morgan probably is not having trouble with reading. Teachers were not concerned about Morgan’s reading at the beginning of the year but continued to check throughout the year. The results from the winter screening test indicated that Morgan was struggling. She had not made as much progress during the fall as she should have. School staff members were glad to be able to step in midyear with extra support for Morgan.

Maren, also in third grade, had an oral reading fluency rate of 48 correct words per minute. This score of 48 lets the teacher know that Maren is possibly at risk and may need some extra help with reading.

Questions to Ask About Screening

- How does the school find out if students need extra help in reading or mathematics?
- What are my child’s scores from the screening assessments?
- Based on these scores, is my child at risk for poor learning outcomes?
- How do my child’s scores compare with the scores of other children who are at the same age and grade level?

TIP—You may want to keep a record of your child’s scores so that you can compare them with his or her performance on future assessments.



Progress Monitoring— Checking on Student Progress

Progress monitoring answers the following questions:

- Are students meeting short- and long-term performance goals?
- Are students making progress at an acceptable rate?
- Does instruction need to be adjusted or changed?

If a student's scores on the screening measure are low, school staff may watch that student's progress closely for a short time to see if he or she is truly at risk for poor learning outcomes. Perhaps a child was not feeling well on the day of the screening assessment and under other circumstances would have done well on the assessment. After checking this child's progress for several weeks and seeing that this student is making good progress, teachers might conclude that this child is not truly at risk. Monitoring students' progress ensures that students who need additional support receive it.

On the other hand, consider a child who does poorly on the screening assessment and continues to do poorly when progress is checked. This child is likely at risk. In this case, the student will receive greater support and additional instruction. Before additional instruction begins, teachers will set a goal for this student. They want this student to progress at a rate that will put the student back on track and in line with his or her peers at the end of the school year. To accomplish this, the student's rate of progress generally needs to be about one and a half times his or her current rate. The needed rate, of course, depends on the student's current rate and the student's goal. A student must receive exactly the right kind of support to be able to increase his or her rate of progress by approximately one and a half times.

School staff members closely monitor the progress of students receiving instruction at the secondary and tertiary levels to find out if the extra support and instruction are making a difference. School staff also want to make sure the child's rate of progress will make it possible for the student to reach his or her goal. A student's goal is typically related to end-of-year grade level standards.



To get an idea of a child’s rate of progress, a teacher may give the student a brief assessment (e.g., 1–8 minutes long) perhaps as frequently as once a week. The teacher records the score for that week as a mark on a chart. After several weeks, the teacher and student will be able to tell whether the line on the chart that represents the test scores is going up (indicating that progress is being made) or going straight or down (indicating that little or no progress is being made). A third possibility might be a pattern that is inconsistent, with test scores going up AND down. Keeping close track of progress is called progress monitoring. The teacher uses the information gained through progress monitoring to determine whether the program is or is not working, to consider other issues that might be involved, and to make decisions about future instruction. Schools have found that students benefit from being closely involved in their own progress monitoring, tracking, and charting.

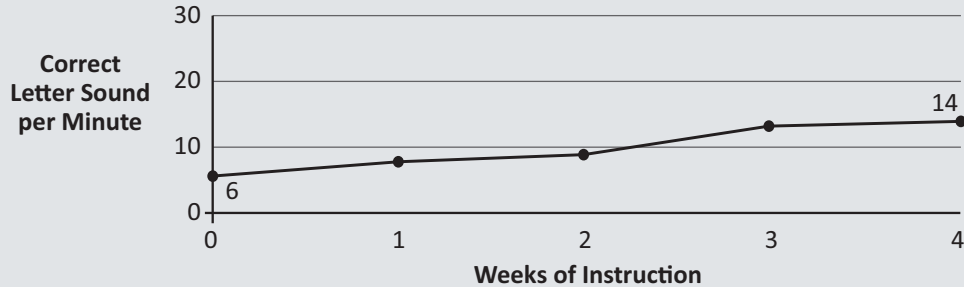
Progress Monitoring at Freemont Elementary School

Oliver and Rose are in kindergarten. The results of the fall screening tests for reading show that they are both having difficulty with letter sounds. Three times each week, their teacher provides additional instruction (secondary level instruction) to this small group, using methods and materials that have been shown by research to do a good job helping students learn the sounds of letters. The teacher wants to be sure that this extra instruction is helping these students, so he spends several minutes at least once each week testing each of them to see if their understanding of letter sounds is improving.

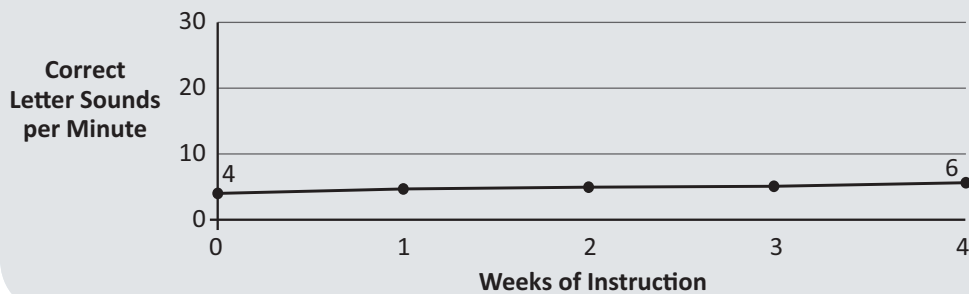
The teacher marks each child’s progress on a chart. After each brief test, the teacher puts a mark on the chart to show how many letter sounds the child can say in one minute. At the beginning of the year, Oliver could say only six letter sounds in one minute, but after four weeks of extra instruction, he could name 14—he gained an average of two letter sounds per minute each week. This is considered good progress, and the teacher believes that he is using the right kind of instruction for Oliver. Oliver’s chart shows an increase each week in the number of letter sounds he knows. Rose’s chart, however, shows that she has made very little progress during the four weeks. She gained only two letter sounds per minute over four weeks. Her teacher and other school staff members decide that another kind of instruction should be used. Both Oliver and Rose like being able to look at the charts to see how they are doing. You can see their charts on page 12.



OLIVER'S CHART - LETTER SOUNDS



ROSE'S CHART - LETTER SOUNDS



Questions to Ask About Progress Monitoring

- How does the school track progress monitoring data?
Does the teacher do the graphing?
- What skills are being measured?
- How often does my child's teacher monitor my child's progress?
- Does the school have a graph that shows the results of the progress monitoring for my child?
- At what point will the teacher make a change if my child is not progressing?

TIP—You may want to ask for a copy of the progress monitoring results on a regular basis so that you can follow your child's progress, particularly if he or she receives extra help at school.



Preventing Failure— Using a School-Wide Multi-Level System of Instruction

If a child's screening scores indicate lower than expected achievement, he or she may need extra time with a teacher or skilled staff member in addition to instruction in the general education classroom. To make sure that each child gets the right level of instruction, RTI includes a multi-level system for instruction. The primary level is the core instructional program (e.g., general classroom instruction). Eighty percent of students would typically be expected to be successful at this level. At the more intense secondary level, school staff serve about 15 percent of the students in the school. The tertiary level, which uses the most intense level of instruction, serves about 5 percent of the school's students. Students who require special education services may be served at all levels of the system, depending on their needs.

Changing intensity and nature of instruction means changes to the following:

- Instructional time: minutes per session
- Duration: number of weeks for intervention
- Frequency: number of sessions per day or week
- Interventionist: skill and experience of instructor
- Group size: number of students
- Instructional strategies used: match of instruction to observed skill deficits

Intensity is typically increased in one or more ways: increasing the instructional time, duration, and/or frequency of the instructional sessions; changing the instructor or interventionist; decreasing the size of the group. The choice of intervention also can make a difference. Some interventions are naturally more intense than others.



Parents may frequently hear school staff members talk about research-based curricula and evidence-based interventions. Both are important parts of the RTI multi-level system. Research-based curricula may incorporate design features that have been researched generally; however, the curriculum or program as a whole has not been studied using a rigorous research design, as defined by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. An evidence-based intervention is an instructional tool that has been researched extensively using strict methods and has been shown to work well at helping students succeed. To the extent possible students should receive evidence-based interventions when they receive secondary level and tertiary level instruction.

All children receive primary level instruction in the general education classroom with their regular classroom teacher. For example, reading instruction at this level might last 90 minutes each day. When a screening assessment shows that a child is at risk for academic problems, the child may receive extra help in the general education classroom with the general education teacher in addition to the 90 minutes that all students in the classroom receive. If, after a brief period of time, the child has made very little progress, the teacher will consult with other staff members at the school. Together, they might decide that the best way to help a child who has not improved would be to give the child secondary level instruction in addition to primary level instruction.

Questions to Ask About the Primary Level of Prevention

- For how many minutes each day is my child participating in primary level instruction?
- What are my child's specific strengths and weaknesses in reading?
In mathematics?
- How will I be involved in the decision-making process if school staff is considering moving my child from primary level instruction to secondary level instruction?
- On what basis would you refer my child for a special education evaluation?
- How does special education fit into this process at my child's school?



Secondary Level of Prevention

Instruction at the secondary level of prevention is in addition to that provided at the primary level. Secondary level instruction and interventions are provided with an increased level of intensity. For example, instruction might be provided to a small group of children for 30–40 minutes three days a week in addition to the 90 minutes of primary level reading instruction. In this way, the length of reading instruction each week is increased. If school staff members decide that an increase in frequency is needed to strengthen intensity, they might increase frequency to four or five days a week, up from three days a week. Small-group instruction also increases intensity. Small-group instruction for an additional period of time each day has many benefits for a child needing extra help. With fewer children in a group, an individual child has more opportunities to respond, and the teacher has more opportunities to give immediate and appropriate feedback to that child.

In some schools, the classroom teacher gives secondary instruction to the the small group—perhaps in a quiet corner of the general education classroom. In other schools, a school staff member, such as a reading specialist, provides secondary level instruction within the classroom. Small-group instruction might also take place in another room in the school, such as the school library or in an available office.

Secondary level instruction includes careful monitoring and charting of student progress. When a student succeeds at the secondary level, this more intense instruction may no longer be necessary. If secondary level instruction is discontinued, the classroom teacher will need to continue paying close attention to the student’s progress to make sure that the gains are maintained and progress remains steady.

When a student is not successful at the secondary level of prevention, the teacher meets with the parents and other school staff to decide what is best for the student and to plan the next steps. Sometimes it is best for the student to continue with the secondary level of intervention and support but with a change in the session length, frequency, group size, or type of curriculum. At other times, it may be better to have the child receive increasingly intense tertiary level instruction with a literacy or math specialist or special educator working in a very small group with the student. Depending on the school or district, tertiary level instruction may or may not be special education.



Questions to Ask About the Secondary Level of Prevention

- How is the secondary level instruction different from the primary level instruction?
- How will I be involved in the decision-making process if school staff is considering moving my child from secondary level instruction to tertiary level instruction?
- What interventions are being used for my child at the secondary level? How often?
- How many students are in my child's group?
- What methods are used to monitor my child's progress? How often?
- On what basis would you refer my child for a special education evaluation?

Tertiary Level of Prevention

The intensity of services is again increased at the tertiary level. The teacher typically works with only a small group of three to five students. The length of each instructional session may be increased at this level. In addition, instruction will occur more frequently—likely every day of the week.

At this level, progress is again monitored frequently and marked on the progress monitoring chart to make sure the student is making meaningful progress and to help the teacher decide if changes in instruction are needed. Progress monitoring tells us if the student is meeting his or her established goal. Just as at the secondary level, school staff, the parents, and the student all benefit from having a chart of progress up-to-date and close-at-hand. When the student is successful at the tertiary level, school staff and the parents decide the best way to maintain success: to continue the intense instruction or to have the child receive less intense instruction at either the secondary or primary levels. At the tertiary level, there is also greater emphasis on making the instructional program very specific to the individual student and to his or her needs.

Information about a student's response to instruction and progress during each instructional level also can be very helpful in determining whether the student has a learning disability and thus would be more successful receiving special education services. (See Important Information for Parents About Their Legal Rights on page 22.)



Questions to Ask About the Tertiary Level of Prevention

- How is the tertiary level instruction different from the secondary level instruction?
- How is it decided that students might benefit from tertiary level instruction?
- Who is involved in that decision?
- What interventions is my child receiving at the tertiary level? How often?
- What methods are used to monitor progress? How often?
- How are parents involved in decisions about the possibility of their child receiving tertiary level instruction?
- On what basis would you refer my child for a special education evaluation?

The Multi-Level System at Freemont Elementary School

Addison is in first grade at Freemont Elementary School. Ms. Wells is his teacher. At the beginning of the school year, Ms. Wells gave all the students in Addison's class an assessment to see how well they could add and subtract numbers. Addison's scores on this assessment showed that he might need extra help in mathematics. Addison continued to receive mathematics instruction at the primary level, and Ms. Wells monitored his progress for six more weeks. Because Addison's progress monitoring chart and his scores reflected little improvement, school staff and his parents decided that he should participate in the school's secondary level instruction program.

For the secondary level of instruction, Ms. Wells chose a mathematics program that had research proving its effectiveness in helping first graders with mathematics difficulties. Addison was one of five children in a group who received this secondary mathematics instruction for 40 minutes a day, three days a week. Ms. Wells worked with this group at a small table in an alcove inside her classroom. This instruction was in addition to the mathematics instruction he received at the primary level.

After eight weeks of secondary level instruction, Ms. Wells could see that Addison continued to make very little progress. His scores on each progress monitoring assessment were either the same as on the previous assessment or only slightly better. Ms. Wells decided that Addison would benefit from a change in instruction. Ms. Wells began to work with Addison using a different math program in a group



with three other students. Addison continued to make little progress. At this point, Ms. Wells, along with other school staff members and Addison’s parents, decided that Addison might benefit from instruction at the tertiary level.

At the tertiary level, a math specialist worked with Addison every day in a small room off the library. Each daily session was between 30 and 40 minutes. Another mathematics intervention was begun and progress was monitored. After two weeks, Addison’s scores on the progress monitoring assessments began to increase by one or two points each week. This was good progress. Ms. Wells, the math specialist, and other staff were confident that Addison would likely reach his mathematics goal at the end of the year.

Ideally, secondary and tertiary supports are provided for students in addition to instruction at the primary level. Secondary instruction supplements the core instruction, as does tertiary instruction to the greatest extent possible. Some schools arrange their school schedules so that extra instructional sessions are scheduled during the week, and students receiving extra support at the tertiary level do not have to miss art, music, or physical education.

● Data-Based Decision Making— Deciding What Works

As you have seen, information from the screening and progress monitoring measures is looked at carefully and is used to make decisions about instruction for the students in the school. Using the test scores from screening, teachers and school staff members can decide which students might benefit from secondary level instruction and which students might need tertiary level instruction. This also helps staff understand how well they are meeting the needs of all students in the school.

Progress monitoring results tell teachers and staff a lot about how well a certain type of instruction is working. If the student is not making progress, the school staff is likely to decide that either another type of instruction or more intense instruction is needed. Schools usually use set guidelines, or decision rules, to help them make these decisions about changing instruction or moving a child to another level.



Data-Based Decision Making at Freemont Elementary School

Back at Freemont Elementary School, the progress monitoring team is meeting to make decisions about the best instruction for several students whose progress is in question. To make sound decisions about each student, every member of the progress monitoring team has a copy of information, or data, about that student—including progress monitoring graphs.

Brenda, a third grader, is one of the students the team is concerned about. She receives instruction in a small group at the secondary level. Her teacher works with this group three days a week, 20 minutes a day. Brenda's teacher has given a copy of Brenda's progress monitoring graph to each member of the team.

School staff members want Brenda to reach her goal. With her present instruction, she is making slow progress. It is not enough. After a thoughtful discussion about Brenda's progress and instruction, the team decides to have Brenda continue with the same instruction at the secondary level but at a greater intensity. Brenda will be moved to a small group that meets four days a week for 35 minutes each day. This will more than double the time Brenda receives extra support and instruction.

As it turned out, this was a good decision. After several weeks with this more intense schedule, Brenda's rate of progress increased, and her graph showed that it was likely she would meet her goal.

Questions to Ask About Data-Based Decision Making

- How will you let me know when the school has decided to make changes to my child's instruction?
- Who will let me know?
- How are decisions made?
- Are parents a part of the decision making process?



Other Important Aspects of RTI

Instruction That Works

An important part of RTI is the use of appropriate interventions for students who need extra help. The term “intervention” means a specific type of instruction that is used to help with a specific type of problem. Schools need to ensure that the interventions they use are of high quality and have been shown by research to be effective (research based). For example, a person who has a knee injury may have to do a set of specific exercises prescribed by a physical therapist. The injured person wants to be sure that the exercises have been used many times before and were proven to work well! In the same way, teachers must use teaching methods and materials that have been successful. Schools using an RTI framework use high-quality interventions that rigorous scientific research has shown work well with students who need extra help.

Questions to Ask About Instruction That Works

- What materials and methods of instruction are used in my child’s general education class?
- How does the school know that the programs are research based?
- Who is helping my child?
- Do the teachers and staff helping my child have special training in reading? In mathematics?
- Do the teachers and staff helping my child have special training in using the materials and methods?
- What evidence-based interventions are being used?

School Staff Working Together

One of the many positive results of RTI practices is that school staff members experience an increased level of collaboration, or working together, to support students. The principal, the general education teachers, the special education teachers, the reading specialists, the school psychologists, and other staff members all feel a shared responsibility for helping each child succeed.



Questions to Ask About School Staff Working Together

- Other than the general education teacher, who is helping my child?
- Do the teachers and other school staff members share information with each other about how my child is doing?
- Who is involved in those discussions?
- How often do those discussions occur?
- What information will I, as a parent, receive following those meetings?

Fidelity—Using Instruction and Materials the Right Way

Fidelity of implementation is using instruction or materials in the way they were designed to be used. When interventions are created and researched, the “best way” to use the resource is established. This could involve a specific sequence of activities, timing, and frequency. It is important that educators use teaching methods and materials in the manner suggested by the researchers or designers.

For example, think of recipes for cakes and cookies. The recipes include not only the ingredients needed but also instructions about how to use the ingredients in the right way. “Tried and true” recipes for cakes have been developed and tested by baking experts who know the recipes work well when the directions are followed. When making a cake, it is important to follow the instructions when adding dry and liquid ingredients. Following these instructions results in a cake that is light in texture. Not following the instructions is likely to result in a cake that is dense and bread-like. Just like materials and methods in the classroom, recipes work best if used in exactly the way developers designed them to be used.

Questions to Ask About Fidelity

- What process does the school have in place to ensure that instructional materials and methods are being used as they are supposed to be used?
- Who oversees the instruction to be sure it is being provided as intended?



Important Information for Parents About Their Legal Rights

All parents have a legal right to ask that the school evaluate their child to determine if he or she is eligible for special education services. If you suspect that your child has a disability, you can write a letter of referral to the school or school district. All that you need to do is to write a very simple letter. Give one copy to the school or district, and keep one copy for your records. The following is an example a letter of referral:

(Date)

Dear _____ (Name of Principal or Superintendent),

Please evaluate my child (Your Child's Name) to see if he/she qualifies for special education and related services. Thank you.

(Your Name)

When you give this letter to the school or district, school officials are legally required to respond in writing to your request. As part of their response, school or district staff may want to meet with you and explain the procedures, goals, and timelines for the individual evaluations. They will also want to listen to your reasons for requesting the evaluation.

You can request that the school or district conduct a special assessment at any time, regardless of where your child is in the RTI process. Teachers also can refer a child for special education comprehensive evaluation. (See Important Note for Parents in this booklet.)

It is important to remember that, although RTI is not a substitute for special education services, information gained from the RTI screening and progress monitoring practices can be used as part of a special education evaluation.

Questions to Ask About Special Education

- On what basis would you refer my child for a special education evaluation?



Resources

Cortiella, C. (2011). *A parent's guide to response-to-intervention*. New York: National Center for Learning Disabilities. Retrieved February 8, 2012, from <http://www.nclld.org/publications-a-more/parent-advocacy-guides/a-parent-guide-to-rti>

Hozella, P. (2007). *Module 6: Early intervening services and response to intervention*. In National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (Producer), *A training curriculum on IDEA 2004*. Retrieved February 8, 2012, from <http://nichcy.org/laws/idea/legacy/module6/>

Klotz, M. B., & Canter, A. (2006). *Response to intervention (RTI): A primer for parents*. Retrieved February 8, 2012, from <http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/rtiprimer.aspx>

Learning Disabilities Association of America. (2006). *Responsiveness to intervention: Questions parents must ask*. Retrieved February 8, 2012, from <http://www.ldanatl.org/news/responsiveness.asp>

National Center on Response to Intervention. (2010). *Essential components of RTI—A closer look at response to intervention*. Retrieved February 8, 2012, from <http://www.rti4success.org/resourcetype/essential-components-rti-closer-look-response-intervention>

National Research Center on Learning Disabilities. (2007). *Learning disabilities resource kit: Specific learning disabilities determination procedures and responsiveness to intervention: Parent pages*. Retrieved February 8, 2012, from http://www.nrclld.org/resource_kit/

Additional Resources

To talk with a parent in your state, go to www.taalliance.org

If you want more detailed information about RTI, you can find it in the RTI manual titled *Responsiveness to Intervention (RTI): How to Do It*. Available online at http://www.nrclld.org/rti_manual/



Disclaimer: The ABCs of RTI contains information from other public and private organizations that may be useful to the reader. These materials are merely examples of resources that may be available. This publication also contains links to websites created and maintained by outside organizations, provided for the reader's convenience. The U.S. Department of Education is not responsible for the accuracy of this information.

This document was produced under U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs Grant No. H326E07000.4 Grace Zamora Durán and Tina Diamond served as the OSEP project officers. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service or enterprise mentioned in this publication is intended or should be inferred. This product is public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted. While permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, the citation should be: www.rti4success.org.

Funding for the second (October, 2008), third (October, 2009), and fourth (June, 2012) printings has been provided by the U.S Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Award No. H326E070004, to the American Institutes for Research—National Center on Response to Intervention.

Funding for the development and first printing (December, 2007) of The ABCs of RTI was provided by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Award No. H324U010004, to the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities.



Acknowledgments—2012 Printing

NCRTI gratefully acknowledges the following for their contributions to the revision of *The ABCs of RTI*:

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Executive Director and Co-founder, PACER Center, MN

Jody Manning,
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Carolyn Anderson
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Debra Jennings
Executive Co-Director, Region 1 Parent Technical Assistance Center @ SPAN

Ruth Ryder
Deputy Director, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education

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American Institutes for Research, Education, Human Development, and the Workforce Publication Services



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