

Parent Page

What is Responsiveness to Intervention?

Winter 2007

NRCLD developed this brief to help you understand responsiveness to intervention, an education model that promotes early identification of students who may be at risk for learning difficulties.

In many schools today, when a student can't keep up in class, that student's only option for help is to qualify for special education services. However, if a student struggles at a school that uses the responsiveness to intervention (RTI) model, the school staff's first thought is: Maybe this child isn't getting the instruction that he or she needs to succeed. In other words, the student isn't being "responsive" to the instruction. This doesn't mean that the student isn't trying, but most generally he or she isn't understanding what is being taught by the teacher.

These schools don't wait for students to fail for an extended period. They want to act immediately to get the student the help needed. They regularly screen all students to make sure classroom instruction is on target for the students. Each child is compared to others of the same age and in the same grade and same class.

School-wide screenings and progress monitoring focus on all students' achievements in class. For those students who score lowest on in-class subjects and don't seem to be mastering classroom lessons, the school uses a step-by-step teaching process using scientifically proven teaching techniques and fre-

quent brief assessments to monitor progress—that is, to determine whether the teaching techniques are helping. Results from progress monitoring, usually given at least once a week, show what planning and methods to use for academic success. This process, when done according to effective teaching practices helps to determine whether a student's low achievement is due to instructional or behavioral factors or whether the child has a possible learning disability.

Responsiveness to intervention (RTI) is addressed through federal law and refers to a tiered approach to instruction. Students who do not make adequate academic progress and who are at risk for reading and other learning disabilities receive increasingly intensive instructional services. See the graphic on page 2.

Think of responsiveness to intervention as a series of steps. The first step is instruction in the general classroom. Screening tests given in the classroom reveal students at risk for reading and other learning difficulties. For example, testing may show that a student who has difficulty reading needs additional instruction in phonics. In the second step, the classroom teacher might handle the instruction. In other cases, someone who has expertise in reading and phonics might instruct the student and other students who have the same difficulty.

Progress monitoring is a scientifically based practice of assessing students' performance on a regular basis. Progress monitoring helps school teams make decisions about instruction. An NRCLD brief related to this topic is "What is Progress Monitoring?"

Students who fail to respond to this instruction may then be considered for more specialized instruction in step three, where instruction

1

Instruction in the General Classroom
Screening tests given to reveal at-risk students

2

Classroom teacher provides instruction or expert works with students in small groups

3

Instruction with greater frequency or duration
If difficulty persists, specialists may be brought in for a comprehensive evaluation

may occur with greater frequency or duration. If the achievement difficulties persist, a team of educators from different fields (for example, reading or counseling) completes a comprehensive evaluation to determine eligibility for special education and related services. That's because responsiveness to intervention alone is not sufficient to identify a learning disability. All in all, the goal is to provide the type of instruction and educational assistance the student needs to be successful in the general education classroom.

In the responsiveness to intervention model, one of the benefits for parents is that they get to see how their child is doing, compared to peers, and how the child's class measures up to other classes of the same grade. They can get these results on a regular basis from their school. If class scores are down, for instance, questions will be raised about the quality of teaching in that class; thus, classroom teachers are more accountable for their instruction.

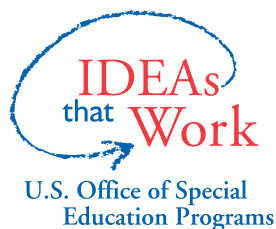
Responsiveness to intervention, with its increased instructional precision, is now used more

to prevent academic failure than to specifically determine which students have learning disabilities. Also, it has been used mostly for reading in elementary schools. Almost no research results yet exist on how it works in middle schools or high schools; practical application of it in math instruction, too, needs to be further documented.

Although unanswered questions need further research, RTI thus far has compelling benefits. When RTI is implemented with rigor and fidelity, all students receive high-quality instruction in their general education setting. All students are screened for academics and behavior and have their progress monitored to pinpoint specific difficulties.

A continuing advantage for all students is the opportunity to be identified as "at risk" for learning difficulties early in their education instead of having to fail—sometimes for years—before getting additional services. And, all students have the opportunity to get assistance at the level needed, reducing the number of students referred for special education services.

For a long time, special education has been the instructional solution for struggling learners even when they didn't have learning disabilities. Because an abundance of research has shown that well-designed instructional programs and strategies significantly improve learning when carefully monitored, the responsiveness to intervention approach may be a method to improve learning in general education and reduce referrals to special education.



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