



National Center  
on Response to  
Intervention

# Planning for the Implementation of RTI

## Questions and Answers by Dr. Edward Shapiro

**Question:** As a speech pathologist with a full caseload of identified students, how do we reallocate the resources, (specifically SLPs ) to be able to provide the prevention-intervention involved in Tiers 1 and 2?

**Answer:** Reallocation of resources is a school wide discussion, not a discussion by any one discipline. This requires an attitude and conceptual shift by all members of the instructional team including speech pathologists, reading and math specialists, special educators, school psychologists, general education teachers, etc. I recently heard of one school that did an analysis of their entire teaching staff against student needs and reallocated all instructional resources across schools in a district. This meant that the schools with the greatest needs got the greatest number of human resources to implement an RTI model. The district saw RTI as a "resource neutral" model.

Having said this, I do agree that as a speech pathologist you have an obligation as first priority to provide speech services to those students whose IEPs require such services. For speech pathologists to provide services within an RTI model it may require some grouping (perhaps in a standard protocol model) of students with common needs.

**Question:** I am wondering if you can address the issue of identification of students with disabilities in an RTI model. It is difficult to understand the indicators to move from Tier 3 to identifying a child with a disability.

**Answer:** Indicators that a student should move from Tier 3 to special education are evident when responses within Tier 3 instruction show a level of responsiveness that are not sufficient to effectively close the gap between the student's performance and grade level expectations. The question of "how low is low enough" and "how slow is slow enough" is something that will be determined more at a district or state level. We have been examining our data here in Pennsylvania in our RTI models and pilot sites to try and understand the level of discrepancy evident between students found eligible and those not found eligible, even when you do not use an RTI process for the decision.

Our early data are showing that the rate of improvement (or lack of rate of improvement) may be a greater indicator of students in need of special education than just level or discrepancy of performance against grade level peers. Students who are not responsive to Tier 3 instruction seem to need a broader set of accommodations that cut across many aspects of general education instruction, many types of accommodations (may include testing accommodations), and that need careful monitoring at instructional level that is more common among special education students.

**Question:** RTI is a general education program, without taking over how can special education assist?

**Answer:** Assisting is the key. Partnering is the key. Special educators need to speak the language of general education, need to understand the concerns of the general education system, and to find ways to bring the incredible expertise that special education has to support what the general education teacher and system is expected to do.



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**Question:** Lack of response to intervention is necessary but not sufficient for identifying LD. What do you recommend evaluators do in order to identify core deficits in students with a Learning Disability (LD)? I am concerned we will lose the LD in LD.

**Answer:** Those who are afraid of losing the LD in LD seem to want to hold on to a view that learning disabilities always reside within the child and that we need to uncover these learning deficiencies. RTI really takes a different view of what a learning disability is. I personally believe that what RTI will do is BETTER uncover and discriminate those children whose learning difficulties are really not responsive to what we can do (if we do it better) in the general education system. To me, THAT is what a learning disability is about. It is not about finding a particular neurologically based deficit (which certainly may exist), it is about finding solutions to improving student performance.

At the end of the day, I believe that RTI will result in a more well defined and potentially more homogenous group of LD students, compared to the widely heterogeneous and ill defined population we currently have. I always try to remind colleagues that LD is currently one of the most poorly defined and poorly diagnosed disabilities in education. Why would we want to continue doing what we have been doing?

**Question:** What research is the basis for the training models you are using?

**Answer:** We have used much of the work of the efforts from Iowa, Minneapolis School District, the work of the Fuchs at Vanderbilt, and Sharon Vaughn at University of Texas-Austin.

**Question:** Is there ever a time that you would no longer suggest a need for a child to continue to be part of the universal screening? For instance, if starting in kindergarten through third grade a child consistently performs with proficiency on AIMSweb probes, is it prudent to suggest the child no longer needs to participate in universal screening?

**Answer:** This has been coming up recently. I think its an interesting idea that probably over time would make sense. One could save resources and time, being more efficient by deciding not to asses students who have remained at benchmark for X number of grades. I think one needs to build in a safety valve to pick up kids who suddenly slide off the benchmarks, but its an idea worth exploring. We have not yet done this, but I have heard this discussed periodically.

**Question:** How have schools addressed instructional resource allocations and schedules in developing a K-3 RTI implementation plan?

**Answer:** RTI is a resource neutral activity. It is all about reallocation of resources. What we in Pennsylvania have found is that using a Standard Protocol Model rather than a Problem Solving Model has allowed us to use our resources more efficiently. Standard Protocol models group students in larger groups (6-10 at Tier 2, 3-5 at Tier 3) so that more students can be instructed at the same time by the existing resources. We also use a block time scheduling process so that within a single grade all students are engaged in "tier time" interventions. This allows for grouping across classes within grades.

**Question:** I see that the webinar is directed towards RTI in Pennsylvania. Does this model basically apply the same in all states?

**Answer:** Yes, I see the Pennsylvania model as transportable to any state. One of the advantages we have had in Pennsylvania is that we went to a model called the Instructional Support Model in the early 1990s which served as one precursor to our current RTI initiative. As such, we have learned a lot of what worked and did not work well through IST. Other states may have to go through some of the pains we did, but the model we are using is not specific to our situation.

**Question:** Do the markers of readiness include school staff capacity to examine different tiers of instruction and learning outcome data?

**Answer:** I believe that getting staff to be willing to examine different tiers of instruction and the need for learning outcomes is a central part of RTI. I believe this also develops over time and through professional development with an RTI model, but if teachers have a philosophical problem with this, it is really a problem.

**Question:** Do the markers of readiness include teacher capacity in working with struggling learners at various grade levels?

**Answer:** Again, if I understand your question, if a district cannot get their teachers to be willing to work with struggling learners at various grade levels, there is a larger problem that goes beyond RTI. Clearly, RTI requires that all teachers have a willingness to address the tough learners and if teachers in a district or school are not willing to go there, than RTI would not be successful.

**Question:** Do the markers of readiness include determination of propensity of racial/ethnic disproportionality in special education?

**Answer:** I think that RTI can be viewed as a mechanism that uses the data to drive decisions and the degree to which the data have been used to create disproportionality is the answer to the question. Personally, I think a district that has a disproportionality problem needs to be addressing that problem at a level much larger than RTI. RTI alone will not solve that problem, but it can be a way to potentially mitigate the problem in the long run.

**Question:** How do we get the principals on board to buy into RTI?

**Answer:** This is no different than any other initiative for school change. Principals need to see this as a mechanism to impact improvement in child performance in schools and that must be reinforced by the central administration. Principals will respond when the initiative is driven from the district administration perspective.

**Question:** What are the most efficient methods for data collection and documentation when considering next tier placement for RTI models?

**Answer:** We use a spreadsheet to monitor the outcomes at each of the grade level meetings, and this has worked well to monitor the process through the RTI model.

**Question:** What are your recommendations for getting separate initiatives (i.e. behavior, literacy, Title I, bilingual, gifted & talented) to join forces in moving toward the RTI model?

**Answer:** You need nothing more than a common desire to see all kids do better in school, and a recognition that we are all in this together. Building collaborative interaction and processes will indeed go far to make the RTI model work. No one owns RTI, it must be a shared process.

**Question:** How are you monitoring fidelity and integrity of not only the interventions, but the RTI process in general? Do you have recommendations?

**Answer:** The fidelity of intervention processes is being done through the use of developed checklists that indicate the steps that define implementation of the intervention. These checklists are first given to teachers to use as self-monitoring devices. Teachers are then asked to request peers conduct some monitoring of their implementation and, when they feel they are indeed implementing with integrity, an external (i.e., supervisor, principal, curriculum specialist, etc.) provides an observation. The checklist results are shared with teachers and not used for purposes of teaching evaluations, but for formative feedback regarding implementation. We have had great success with this methodology and minimal pushback from teachers.

Fidelity of the core instruction is made a part of principal evaluation of teaching through learning walk-throughs or other methods that exist in the school. As for fidelity of the implementation of RTI, we have evaluated this twice each year (usually mid-fall and mid-spring) using a checklist similar to the one made available during the webinar. The checklist is conducted through an interview process with the key members of the core team.

**Question:** What existing research are you using that evaluates the effectiveness of RTI development, implementation, and monitoring for school districts?

**Answer:** The existing research base for evaluation of RTI comes from many places, primarily the work that has been done for 20 years in Iowa, the Minneapolis School District, and by the Fuchs from Vanderbilt and Sharon Vaughn from University of Texas. One excellent resource that has pulled a lot of these data together has been published by NASDSE. There is also a book by Jimmerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden available from Springer Publishing.

**Question:** Did you get any "push back" from stakeholders in your state? If so, how did you deal with it? Basically, how did you get consensus to move forward and avoid turf wars?

**Answer:** We of course had push back from stakeholders, but not at the state level. Push back usually came at the local level of implementation. The reason we did not have push back from state stakeholders is that in the early stages of the process, we went to the key state stakeholders, the Director of the Bureau of Teaching and Learning as well as Special Education, made clear that this needed to be viewed as a regular education initiative, and asked that RTI be brought out of the state level from the Bureau of Teaching & Learning. They heard and did exactly what we asked for. In addition, our state Secretary recognized that RTI was only one of many initiatives for school change and incorporated the language of school change within RTI processes. As such, there has not been a lot of push back from the state level. I really advise anyone looking at RTI to bring the top levels of the state administration on board before you go to any kind of scaling up effort within the state.

## National Center on Response to Intervention

Please visit our website [www.rti4success.org](http://www.rti4success.org) or contact The National Center on Response to Intervention at [rticenter@air.org](mailto:rticenter@air.org), if you have questions or comments.

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