



“RTI Scheduling Processes” – Webinar

Slide 1: Hello, my name is Sara Prewett and I’m with the National Center on Response to Intervention at the University of Kansas. Today I’m going to talk a little about RTI scheduling processes for middle schools. The reason we’re talking about this today is that implementing RTI involves significant shifts from many of school staff members and the elements within school buildings and school operations. A lot of schools and school personnel and state Departments of Education have contacted us, asking questions about how do you go about changing some of these structures and schedules in middle schools. So today’s talks will hopefully provide some guidance to you and your staff as you prepare your schedule to implement RTI.

Slide 2: Our agenda today is to first tell you a little bit about how we gathered this information from middle schools, so how do we know what we know about RTI and middle school schedules. Then we’ll move on to how these middle schools got started with their own schedules and schedule changes and after that, we’re going to talk about how they scheduled meetings, leadership meetings and team meetings, and finally we’ll conclude with the most important question that most people have which is rearranging their own class schedules to accommodate interventions.

Slide 3: So first I want to talk a little bit about how we gather this information, what did we do to find out about how middle schools are implementing RTI and how we know then about their schedules within RTI.

Slide 4: If you look at slide number four, you’ll see that we looked at schools and talked to schools across our nation from 28 different states and in doing so, we wanted to recruit as many schools as possible who already are implementing Response to Intervention and we found these schools by a snowball sampling method where we really wanted to find anybody at all who has been implementing and we identified them through their own school websites, through RTI websites, through conference presentations, self nomination, peer nomination, and publications that identified these schools. We then contacted 82 schools that potentially were implementing RTI, and of those, 42 schools actually were implementing or at some stage of RTI implementation and also agreed to participate with us.

Slide 5: So once they agreed to participate, we conducted two two-hour phone interviews with them about their RTI practices and then we followed up with twelve schools and actually went for on-site visits so we could see how their RTI structure, schedules, and processes worked. How did it look like when it’s actually in place in middle schools? And the information that I’m going to tell you about today on schedules really comes from those twelve schools that we learned the most information about.

Slide 6: So if you look at slide number six, the demographics of these schools were that they really were pretty limited to mostly middle schools, so really we were looking at sixth, seventh,



and eighth grade schools. We did have a few that were junior high schools and we even visited a few that were junior highs and served seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. These schools also represented urban, suburban, and rural areas, so the school populations ranged from very small rural schools with 160 students to very large urban schools with over 1,300 students and they also, what was interesting to us, is that their IEP student population ranged from a pretty low level of seven percent to twenty percent, which is a pretty significant portion of the population.

Slide 7: So, now that you know a little bit about how we got this information, I would like to tell you about how these schools really got started with trying to prepare their structure and their schedule to implement RTI.

Slide 8: So what they said, the majority of them, really started with a planning team in which they identified relevant school staff, those members who are very invested and very interested in implementing RTI, who maybe have a little bit more knowledge about RTI. Really these members included teachers and counselors, of course special education teachers, reading specialists, sometimes school psychologists, and the most critical person in these meetings were the principal, were the administrators. A lot of times it was both a principal and an assistant principal who both really participated as a key person on the planning team. And why I say this is so important is because those administrators, those principals, have the ability and the authority to make a lot of structural changes to the school that maybe some of the other staff members, such as a general education teacher, who wouldn't have that ability. Those key people, the principal can really lead the way in the conversation about what is possible for the school, how can we start to make our structure more flexible, and then the principal can lead that conversation and then the other staff members can feel more comfortable to jump in and brainstorm, discuss what is in existence and what they would like to get to and maybe figure out some methods and some techniques and some ideas about how to get there, how do you get to the place where you can be able to put in smaller intervention classes. So important in this is also setting a regular meeting time, which we'll talk about in a couple minutes for this planning team. This isn't a team that meets one time, figures it out, and then moves on. This is something you'll want to revisit throughout the school year, especially. So as they got started with this discussion with how to change these schedules, they also reviewed the student data profiles. So even if your school doesn't have necessarily a screening process in place yet, or maybe it's not consistent, you still have data, you still have some kind of assessment data, maybe it's state assessment data, maybe it's some kind of a formative assessment data, but you really do have some idea about what's happening with your students and what their needs are. So, as you're reviewing these student profiles, that gives you an idea of which of these students need which intervention classes, it's likely that the majority of your students are succeeding and are doing just fine in your primary level of prevention, which is general education. However, these meetings will identify what percentage and which students need an intervention of some kind, whether it be a secondary level of intervention, which is just a little bit more help, or really maybe need some significant help and significant intervention and need a tertiary level of intervention and this is where we really, as a rule of thumb, think of about probably 80% of the students in your school building needing just the primary level, just general education, whereas maybe 15% of those students need a little extra help, which would be secondary level, maybe about 5% for tertiary.



So once you have those groups identified, even if that's not the exact percentage or number of your students, you can still then begin to figure out how will you arrange your classes, how big do you want these intervention classes, is it ten students for secondary and three for tertiary, do you need to go up in the numbers, down in the numbers, and then who's going to teach them? So, once you identify who needs which class, you can start to figure out what classes you can fit into your schedule and which teachers are available to teach those classes. And so that's really how these schools began to get started and that's why that preparation and planning time is so pivotal and why you also need a team to make these pretty critical decisions.

Slide 9: So if you look on the next slide, I'm talking here about RTI meetings, so clearly when I talked earlier that you need an ongoing time set so you're continuing to revisit these issues, you need to figure out how to schedule those times, and what we learned from a lot of schools is that what they did in order to set this scheduling time was they evaluated what kind of meetings they already have in their structure. So schools have regular staff meetings and administrative meetings and a lot of schools have content area meetings and grade level meetings, so what is it that you have in place already that you can start to accommodate this planning team. Can you repurpose some of those other meeting times for this RTI purpose, for this planning team or leadership team meeting. And also, you need to set the agenda for these meetings, so a lot of it, at the beginning, is going to be for this planning, it's going to be for reviewing student data and figuring out what your structures are that exist, what you need to change, what you need to tweak, but beyond that, once you get some of those pieces rolling, what are you going to do with this time? Well, you need to figure out what is your purpose for implementing RTI and your goals and your anticipated outcomes for each meeting. Maybe this is a weekly meeting, maybe it's bi-weekly, maybe it's monthly, but what is it that you really need to get established to be able to continue moving forward with these decisions in both your schedule, but also your RTI framework as a whole. One of the things we talk about, the last bullet on this slide, you want to evaluate your own progress and your efficiency of the meetings. So if you're sitting there and really not sure why you're having this meeting today, that's a key reason to maybe re-look at the future of where you need to get. What is your bigger goal and how do you get there and break that down into pieces? Figure out if this is working for you or not. So, for example, I talked about how a lot of these schools used already existing meeting times, but others didn't. One of the schools we went to had just really established a separate meeting time for their RTI planning team, and what they did is they figured out which staff members needed to be present and this school in particular had both administrators, the principal and the assistant principal, plus a district person, plus a counselor, two special ed teachers, and two representatives from the general education teacher group and they figured out that they could get this group together, in particular, every Tuesday first thing in the morning, and so they met during the first hour of the class day, from eight to nine, that's what happened to be for this school. And because of that, they were able to make sure that all of those people were present every week and were able to attend those meetings. So, it doesn't have to be a repurposing of a meeting, it can be a created new one, but at the same time, they had a set agenda, they had their purpose, they had their goals and their outcomes for each meeting, so even though they were meeting frequently, they really were keeping it very purposeful and very structured for themselves.



Slide 10: So I'm moving on now to scheduling intervention classes, which is, I think, the heart of what people want to know. A lot of staff are very concerned about the typical rigidity of middle school schedules. So, how do you become flexible in that? How do you arrange to have small intervention classes throughout the day?

Slide 11: Well, if you look at the next slide on scheduling intervention classes, it gives you an idea here about what schools did. So a lot of them added the intervention classes as an elective period, so really when a student needed say a reading comprehension intervention at the secondary level, they lost an elective time and got the intervention class instead. This is a tricky course for some schools because you still want to be able to make sure that students are interested in coming to school, that they're actually in a class that's interesting to them, and a lot of times, those are the classes that are their elective classes, so it's a fine balance between making sure that students stay engaged and motivated and yet are also getting those courses that they desperately need in order to achieve success academically. So in order to use these elective classes, oftentimes schools would really just use one of maybe two of the student's elective times and make sure that that other elective time was still intact in their schedule so they can have that course in their day that really engaged them, whether it be choir, band, or computer programming or something like that. That's a lot of times what they did for the secondary level and often in the tertiary level, they determined that these students were at this point so far behind that maybe they needed both elective periods to be intervention courses. Now, a lot of schools also commented that once students were being instructed on the level that they needed, so at that more basic academic level, they actually started feeling more success themselves and more intrinsically motivated to keep learning and it helped all of the rest of their classes, so not all is lost if you have to end up giving some of those children or students two of their elective times as intervention times. Now in addition to that, using elective periods wasn't the only method for these schools. Some schools chose to shorten the time of their classes or their transition periods between classes by a small amount of time, so if each transition period between classes is only two minutes long and your classes are shortened by, say another three minutes, you can add an additional class to the day. In many cases, the schools were able to provide an intervention time across the board for everybody, so there would be the more basic intervention times for students who were really struggling, but they would also be able to give students who were really achieving academically some extra support that's on that higher level for them, so rather than just focusing on solely remediation kinds of courses, they also were able to give something that was really, really rewarding and more advanced to some of the other students, and they saw a lot of success with that, but this method is tricky, too, because it also requires of your staff to teach an extra class in the day, so if you're adding an extra class throughout the entire day for the entire school, every single teacher in your school really needs to be on board and buy in to that because their workload has increased as well during this, so we really need to be able to identify the needs of your staff as well as the needs of your student. So another of the methods that we saw, one of the middle schools in particular and a couple others were investigating this idea, but they shifted students from, say their social studies class to the reading class, or from their science class to their math intervention class. So they really were pulling out of that core class rather than taking away an elective class and this really was—it wasn't across the board, we really did just see it in one middle school in particular, however it was incredibly successful in this middle



school, so what they found was they could be flexible with their schedule, if a student couldn't read, they really weren't really succeeding very well in the social studies class to begin with, so they were able to pull that student into the intervention class for a short amount of time, regularly progress monitor that student, ensure that student got back to where they needed to be on grade level, and then put them back into the social studies class. So they really, the teachers and staff were quite concerned about losing, say, six or eight weeks of content knowledge, however what they discovered were that those students returned to that social studies class, picked that knowledge back up rather quickly with the help of a little extra time with the teacher, and then they were able to succeed far more than they were before the intervention class and they did the same thing with science and discovered the same results, so their data was indicating that these students were succeeding far more with that little bit of break from the core class but the addition of the intervention class and then the return to the core class and in order to do this, your teachers really have to be working with each other. Everybody needs to be in constant conversation and you have to have a school schedule that allows for that kind of flexibility within the school year. So, you're talking about, how do you account for grades, how do you count for the reporting system to your state and to your district? So, you've got a lot of variables that you'll need to think about and work with as you look at those kinds of changes. And the final thing we really saw that was popular was that a lot of schools scheduled some sort of extended learning time period that was outside of the regular school day. A lot of schools initiated some kind of—it was really a tutoring type of class or special session or just this extra time that was given to students who really, really needed that extra bit of intervention. Often it was either right before school, maybe thirty minutes before the school bell or a class after the school, which could even be up to an hour after school. Some schools even had a Saturday session in which students could come for two to three hours on Saturday, and again, this kind of schedule modification requires a lot of thought and communication and you need to get a lot of different people on board. Who are going to teach these extra sessions outside of the day and on Saturday? The parents need to be well informed and on board to make sure that there's transportation for these kids, and also you really need to be considering what about these outside of the day structures are going to really help provide intervention? Is it simply tutoring or is there more of a formal class and evaluate whether or not this time, this extra time is really working for these students and you can do that by really progress monitoring and making sure that it's effective and worth everybody's time. And finally, these students also have to be on board. They have to find value in this extra time because if they're forced to stay after school, that's not exactly motivating, so how do you encourage them that this is really something that's really going to be beneficial. Those are some of the techniques that we saw and by no stretch of the imagination are these the only ways to modify your schedule. We really encourage a lot of innovation and brainstorming because each school's structure, each school's organizational elements are slightly different from others. You have unique staff and administrators and students, so you need to really figure out what is it about your school that you can change. What is it that will accommodate the processes of RTI and get these students the intervention classes they needed and what is it that you can kind of start to tweak and modify? A lot of the staff we talked to really emphasized that their first go at this wasn't the magical way to change things. They constantly were tweaking, they were putting something in place, seeing what worked about it, and then changing it as they needed to and they weren't afraid to do that, so it wasn't like, "Oh now we've got this new schedule and we have to



stick to it.” No, you have this new schedule, now evaluate what works about it and start to tweak what doesn’t and schools we’ve talked to that are now in their eighth year of RTI say that that tweaking just constantly occurs, and it’s not major changes at this point, it’s just enough to make sure that everything is still going really smoothly and that students are having their needs met, so as your students population changes and modifies, too, you need make sure that the schedule and the RTI limits you have meet their needs. So as you’re listening to this, you might be wondering, I talked earlier about how maybe 15% and 5% of your students might need secondary and tertiary interventions and I know that sometimes causes concern in staffs’ mind when they hear those numbers because maybe that doesn’t fit you exactly, and I don’t mean for it to, I don’t mean for definitely you need to have that in place.

Slide 12: So if you look at my next slide where I talk about scheduling secondary classes and tertiary classes, what you really need to look at is what is your student population. So a lot of the administrators talked in particular about how they focused first on making sure that their primary level areas of prevention and secondary levels of prevention were providing such solid instruction and they focused on those two levels first, in particular primary and then trying to get secondary implemented, before moving on and establishing that tertiary level, so this isn’t a let’s jump in and put it all out there and we have to have everything perfect right at the beginning; this is a process that’s going to be building for you as you’re implementing RTI. The goal here for most of these administrators was to provide such solid instruction, especially at the primary and secondary levels; that tertiary was truly for those students who really needed the most intensive help. They weren’t just a little behind, they’re desperately behind and really need that really small class ratio size, so say three students to one teacher. So when you are able to give the students that kind of instruction in primary and secondary level, your tertiary level are such small numbers, it’s a lot easier to be able to implement all three levels of intervention. So a lot of the school administrators we talked to reported struggling with scheduling these really, really intensive resource intensive classes and several of these administrators talked about using special education classes for their tertiary level and the special education teachers who are trained to teach students who really do need this more intensive level of instruction, so when they’re revising their schedules, they were starting to have students who were not necessarily identified as having a learning disability or as needing special education services, receiving instruction in these special education classes. So we are describing just the practices we observed and we’re not necessarily endorsing using these special education resources to provide tertiary level instruction, however this was a method that we did observe schools using in order to accommodate their students.

Slide 13: So on the next slide, I wanted to give you an example of one school’s actual class schedule for their day. They did several things to modify their schedule, so you can see that they have a lot of different changes. So one of the things they did, this is a six, seven, eight school and each grade has a slightly different time schedule, so what they discovered is that for the sixth grade in particular, they really needed not more intervention time necessarily, but they needed to make sure that those students got their intervention time first thing in the morning, so they shortened their homeroom for the sixth grade and then the sixth grade had a modified schedule for the rest of the day that was slightly different than the seventh and eighth grades. In seventh



grade, they determined that they needed for those seventh graders, an actual blocked time, so the seventh graders needed a little bit more time during their day in intervention classes. Now the eighth grade just went back to a regular traditional about forty minute session of intervention time. But you'll notice when I'm saying this is the intervention class is the same for all sixth graders, same for all seventh graders, and the same for all eighth graders, so this is one of those schools that I mentioned earlier that they provide all students in their school something during this intervention time, whether it be something more advanced or something that's a little more basic and a little more of the remediation course. And I want you also to notice that their transition times between classes is incredibly short. They really only have a two minute transition time to get from one class to the next and they reported that this really wasn't a problem, they just set those tight expectations for the students, and the students, of course, rose to that and they are able to get themselves from class to class in those two minutes. Since they did this, they're able to have an extra class time during their school day. Now this is just one school's example. This isn't something we saw throughout the entire group of schools, but I wanted to give you an actual concrete idea of what a school did to accommodate their students.

Slide 14: So if you look at the next slide, and I've mentioned this a little bit, but I haven't gone in depth about it, but we've talked about how you have to identify which staff can teach which class and who is it that are teaching these intervention courses and often times we're finding that a lot of staff are recruited to do this and they're also the staff that really have some investment and some professional development and understanding of intervention classes, so a lot of times the general education teachers taught secondary level interventions and often times the special education teachers taught tertiary level interventions. However, a lot of times, schools also used staff like the counselors or their school psychologists or other staff, reading specialists, in particular, were used pretty frequently. Sometimes it was school coaches who really could teach these classes and the common denominator for all of these teachers was that they really had the professional development and understanding of the intervention programs and classes, so they were truly able to go in and teach these courses with fidelity and to teach them successfully. And finally, I'd like to mention that while not every school had the resources and funding to be able to do this, some of them were able to either hire full-time intervention teachers or they were able to repurpose already existing staff members to be full time intervention teachers. For these schools, they were able to offer intervention classes throughout the entire day, so it didn't matter when a student needed to be put into an intervention class, there was an intervention class for them and that was another way that they had modified their schedule and this is really an important piece, looking at your staffing is so critical during this planning stage when you really are looking at your school resources and your staff available to you, especially during when we're looking at budget constraints and funding cuts, we really need to be able to use what exists in our school and we have really expert teachers who can teach these classes and who want to, so we, as the planning team, meet, you really need to be able to look at who is available for you.

Slide 15: Finally, I want to talk a little bit more about having a flexible class schedule. I mentioned it several times while I've been talking, school administrators were really, really speaking to us very frankly about the need for flexibility, so students really can move fluidly between their classes as they needed intervention supports and in no matter what time of the



semester or the school year it may be. So most administrators reported that they really manipulated their existing structure so they could move students into or out of an intervention course at any point and the schools that had something in place that made their schools more rigid, for example, one junior high school is already on a credit system because of their ninth grade students and they don't have that flexibility that they felt like they needed and they were really working hard to try to figure out how to be flexible because they did feel that their students needed to have that ability to move into and out of their classes during the school year. The administrators and staff were really seeing this as something that was essential within their schedule and that's a pretty major change for middle schools. This is something that they really had to work on and really have to tweak for themselves.

Slide 16: So finally, we know that scheduling and changing that schedule is sometimes a potential barrier to full RTI implementation. Scheduling challenges mean that you have to adjust your schedules, that you have to schedule these planning meeting times for your RTI teams and that you have to be able to find time in your schedule to look at students' data, to look at who needs what class and when, and this isn't just a onetime meeting, this is ongoing. So the staff need to be able to find times to make these decisions about students responsiveness and that really happens within your school schedule. So the scheduling changes really include establishing those meeting times and adjusting those classes and you also have to monitor students' progress and make those changes and all the while accommodating the needs of your students and your staff members. So, ultimately, students found that they start to accommodate these changes in a slow manner. You don't go and change everything all at once but you start to implement little changes to your schedule, little changes for your organization and your process and grow from there. So I hope that this talk helped you today and I know that this isn't as comprehensive as we possibly can be, but I hope it gives you some ideas about how you can take some ideas from other schools and begin to put them in place for yourself.

Slide 17: If you look at the next slide, we do have a brief at the National Center on Response to Intervention website where we talk a little bit more in depth about the scheduling processes for middle schools and provide a resource or two for you as you start to thinking about this for yourselves. So, please go look at that, download it, take it for yourself, distribute it as you need to, make sure the staff in your school is on board and have these pieces of knowledge themselves so they can start to understand why it is that you're starting to make these changes.

Slide 18: And finally, we do have a few other resources for you on middle school implementation, also at our website, and all of these pieces are based on these middle schools who participated in this study, so they might give you some ideas on how you can go about making these changes for yourself.

Slide 19: Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or want some more in depth information about any of these things. We are more than happy to have a conversation or to be able to point you to other resources.