

Response to Intervention (RTI) FAQs

California Reading Association

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W **HAT IS RTI?**

Response to Intervention (also called Responsiveness to Intervention) is a multi-tiered, early intervention approach to identifying learning disabilities in reading and mathematics. It is a requirement in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) and is used as a component in identifying students with specific learning disabilities. Students participating in RTI are **not** special education students. Instead, RTI is intended to prevent unnecessary referrals to special education, and to accurately identify students in need of services earlier, rather than later. RTI policy and practices require collaboration between general and special educators and families in order to better meet the needs of struggling readers and mathematicians.

WHEN DID RTI GO INTO EFFECT?

Response to Intervention has been in effect since October 2006 when Congress approved the regulations of IDEA 2004.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF RTI?

For decades, general and special educators have been concerned that the dominant approach to identifying students with learning disabilities required that students had to fall far behind their same-age peers before they would qualify for services. This “discrepancy model” was based on determining a statistically significant gap between intelligence and achievement tests, compared to the child’s school performance. Therefore, many were not diagnosed until second grade or beyond, missing vital instruction that could have minimized the gap.

RTI, on the other hand, requires that students who are showing early signs of falling behind in reading or mathematics receive more small-group, needs-based instruction, with frequent formative assessments to guide teaching. This model is proactive and consistent with the mission of the California Reading Association and the International Reading Association. In particular, IRA notes that a Response to Intervention approach emphasizes:

- High quality instruction for all students
- High quality teachers
- Ongoing student assessment
- A coherent instructional plan that provides coordinated reading lessons every day for every student at every level of intervention
- Interventions to help students learn how to read
- Special education placement on basis of ability to learn (IRA, 2005).

HOW DOES RTI WORK?

RTI is usually described as multi-tiered, meaning that students showing early signs of difficulty participate in

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increasingly intensive interventions. Teachers use student response data for making instructional and programmatic decisions (see Figure I).

Tier I: Core Program

This is the universal reading program all students participate in. Students received research-based instruction from the general education teacher using flexible grouping, formative assessments, and benchmark assessments administered three times a year. Children showing early difficulty in Tier I programming are identified and receive additional instruction at the Tier II level.

Tier II: Supplemental Instruction

Students who are not progressing as expected in the core reading program receive small-group supplemental instruction

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DOES THIS MEAN RTI IS AN OFF-THE-SHELF PROGRAM?

No, in fact, it should be anything but a prepackaged program. Intervention for struggling readers should always be tailored to the needs of the learner. This means ongoing assessment that informs instruction. Dick Allington, former president of the International Reading Association, and Sean Walmsley (2007) note that there are specific hallmarks of effective intervention:

- Small group instruction of 3:1 or less.
- Expert teachers delivering sound instruction.
- Instruction that matches the child’s needs and abilities.
- The intervention is closely coordinated with the core curriculum.
- Shared knowledge and collaboration between classroom and intervention teachers.

Educators should approach RTI the way they do when designing effective instruction of any kind. In other words, they should assess students to determine their instructional level, carefully match the child to accessible text, teach for strategies that the child can use in independent reading, and link reading to oral language and written expression. In addition, they should build background knowledge and vocabulary, and teach alphabets for students who have incomplete knowledge of phonemic awareness and sound/symbol relationships.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN RTI?

Response to Intervention requires collaboration among general and special educators, related services personnel, and administrators. Because this is not a special education initiative (it is general education students who are being served), it is important that participating students are not simply sent to the special

in addition to the time allotted for core reading instruction. The purpose of a Tier II approach is to supplement, enhance, and support Tier I instruction (Vaughn, 2003). This level of intervention should occur daily, with assessments happening 1-2 times per month. Tier II instruction typically lasts 10-20 weeks. In many communities, Reading Recovery has become a model for Tier II instruction for first grade students.

Tier III: Intensive Intervention

Students who have failed to respond to Tier II instruction receive Tier III instruction that is intensive, strategic, and supplemental (Vaughn, 2003). This phase of intervention can last much longer than Tier II, as students in need of this type of instruction are likely to require more individualized daily instruction, with frequent assessment measures. In some schools, a reading specialist provides this level of instruction. In the case of students who have met eligibility, Tier III intensive intervention can also include special education services.

education teacher. Due process protects students from being placed in special education without meeting eligibility criteria.

Therefore, students participating in RTI should be served in the general education classroom, using a “push-in” model of support. In many schools, RTI teams are organized at the building level and include classroom teachers, reading specialists or coaches, speech/language pathologists, and family members.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT RTI?

Many state and national organizations have resources available for educators, administrators and families as they develop sound Response to Intervention approaches:

IRA Resources

- The International Reading Association has assembled a resource library on RTI, including background information, and articles from *The Reading Teacher* and *Reading Research Quarterly*, and PowerPoints for use by educators for professional development. These resources can be found at <http://www.reading.org/Resources/ResourcesByTopic/ResponseToIntervention/Overview.aspx>
- The International Reading Association formed a Response to Intervention Commission that is populated with representatives from general and special education researchers and leaders. An advisory group to the Commission consists of representatives from each of the state organizations. The CRA representative is Nancy Frey. Please contact Nancy at nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu to share insights, innovative programs, and continuing challenges in implementing RTI in your school or district.

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California Department of Education Resources

- The CDE emphasizes a Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²) model that melds quality core instruction (Tier I) with intervention (Tiers II and III) to offer a more seamless educational experience for all students. Information and resources about RTI² can be found at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/rtiresources.asp>
- Some students who participate in an RTI² approach are subsequently identified for special education. However, their educational progress doesn't end there! Learn more about supporting students with disabilities at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/iepresources.asp>

Other Resources

- The IRIS Center for Training Advancements offers free online resources, modules, and readings for general and special educators. The IRIS Center is jointly administered at Vanderbilt University and Claremont Graduate University. They offer extensive resources on RTI and other topics, and can be found at <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resources.html>

Podcasts

- The International Reading Association has a free 13-minute podcast by Richard Allington on RTI available at <http://www.reading.org/resources/podcasts/index.htm>. It is also available for free at iTunes.
- Listen to Speech/Language Pathologist Sharon Martin discuss in-class supports for students participating in RTI at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/iepresources.asp>
- Listen to district leaders discuss RTI and federal stimulus monies at <http://www.districtleaderspodcast.org/wordpress/2009/05/24/ep-39-and-38-part-2-stimulus-funding-and-rti-expert-discussion/>

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Figure I. Response to Intervention Tiers of Support.

