

Information Sheet for Regional Resource Centers
Response-To-Intervention Models
Identify, Evaluate, & Scale

Introduction

The reauthorization of IDEA provides an opportunity to address concerns about the appropriate identification of students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Presently, states and school districts use many variations to make that determination. Furthermore, research has described the consequences of those variations. Those consequences have raised issues of equity, accuracy, timeliness, outcomes, feasibility and consistency as alternative SLD identification models are considered. The concept of Response-to-Intervention (RtI) is part of an alternative approach to the identification process.

The RRC's will be working with local school district staffs to implement this plan for identifying, evaluating and scaling up (where appropriate) Response-to-Intervention (RtI) models. This document provides an overview of RtI and some description of this activity.

Rationale for the Response-to-Intervention Activity

There are several models that implement the RtI concept. RtI models in combination with other IDEA criteria such as the exclusions and the other safeguards such as multidisciplinary team decisions may provide more immediate help to struggling students and reduce inappropriate identification of disabilities. To explore the extent of use of RtI as an alternative method of SLD identification and feasibility of using current sites as training venues, we need to engage in carefully planned, sequenced activities:

- (a) Identify districts using an RtI model and recruit their participation.
- (b) Collect data on the effectiveness of the districts' RtI model including systematic measurement of fidelity of interventions, associated student outcomes such as their academic progress and comparisons of outcomes for referred students in RtI schools with outcomes for students in otherwise similar schools that use other methods.
- (c) Provide assistance to enable RRC's to assist States in scaling up these models.

This process will pinpoint instances of effective RtI use which can become beacons or exemplars that can be scaled up for broad adoption. In the event that the evaluation does not uncover enough appropriate sites as training venues, we can provide useful information for others with interest in developing effective and feasible RtI models.

Over the next two years the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD) will work with the nation's six Regional Resource Centers (RRCs) to implement this activity.

What is Meant by an RtI Model?

RtI refers to an individual, comprehensive student-centered assessment and intervention concept that has generated several models used in schools. RtI is sometimes referred to as a problem-solving method. RtI models focus on applying a problem solving framework to identify and address the student's difficulties using effective, efficient instruction and leading to improved achievement. The core characteristics of RtI include:

- (a) Students receive high quality instruction in their general education setting;
- (b) General education instruction is research-based;
- (c) General education instructors and staff assume an active role in students' assessment in that curriculum;
- (d) Universal screening of academics and behavior;
- (e) Continuous progress monitoring of student performance;
- (f) Continuous progress monitoring to pinpoint students' difficulties;
- (g) Implementation of research-based interventions to address the student's difficulties;
- (h) Systematic assessment of the fidelity or integrity with which the intervention is implemented; and
- (i) Using progress monitoring data to determine interventions' effectiveness and to make any modifications as needed.

In this activity, information will be gathered to determine the extent to which these core characteristics are met by various RtI models used in districts and their influence on learners' outcomes.

A frequent method of universal screening and continuous progress monitoring is the use of curriculum-based assessment or measurement (CBA or CBM), which also has several variations of implementation. A shared characteristic of CBA/CBM is that of timed, short interval (one to three minute) tasks in which both the rates of correct and incorrect responses are recorded.

RtI models have also been implemented with variations. Some attributes common to many RtI model implementations include (a) the concept of multiple tiers of increasingly intense student focused interventions, (b) implementation of a differentiated curriculum, (c) instruction delivered by staff other than the classroom teacher, (d) varied duration, frequency, and time of interventions, (e) categorical or noncategorical placement decisions, and (f) severity levels for placement decisions. Another feature on which RtI models can be distinguished is whether the student's intervention is individualized. In some RtI models, the student's deficits are addressed by implementing a research-based intervention that is specially designed for that student (i.e. problem-solving model) and for which implementation integrity is uniquely assessed. An alternative RtI model involves students with similar difficulties (i.e. problems with reading fluency) who are given a research based intervention that has been standardized and proven effective for students with similar difficulties (i.e.

standard treatment protocol approach) and has a standard protocol to assess implementation integrity. This latter approach results in students more likely to receive the same intervention and the intervention received is delivered with greater fidelity. Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages.

How Does RtI Fit the SLD Characteristics?

Unexpected underachievement is a central concept of SLD. The concept of SLD involves measurement of an underlying construct that is presumed to be different from other forms of low achievement. Students with SLD include those students whose achievement in one or more areas is unexpectedly lower when compared to some other standard (i.e. the student's achievement in some other academic areas, the student's achievement in comparison to class peers, or the learning rate in comparison to classmates). In the current aptitude-achievement discrepancy model, the standard of unexpected underachievement is when the student's achievement score is significantly lower than a predicted achievement score or a measure of cognitive ability or aptitude. In contrast, in the RtI concept, the student's achievement is lower than expected when compared to his/her grade level placement or same-age peers' performance where all students have been provided appropriate, scientifically-based instruction. RtI proposes discrepancy relative to opportunities to learn as a way of defining unexpected underachievement and, as such, offers promise for identifying a unique group of poor achievers for whom appropriate instruction has not proven effective.

What Benefits Are Associated with a District's Participation in this Activity?

Internal and external benefits are associated with a district's participation. From an internal perspective, districts would benefit from learning extensive information about their implementation of the RtI concept (i.e. their RtI model). They would learn how their model's student outcomes compare to a different or contrasting model or method of identification. Such information could inform stakeholders (i.e. parents, school board members, and staff) about compatibility with the district's mission, strategic goals, staff development plans, and resource needs and allocations.

A significant external benefit is that the district may be recognized for its accomplishments. Its RtI model may pose challenges to successful implementation. Districts that implement RtI models with fidelity would be recognized for their accomplishments and highlighted among schools with effective, innovative practices. Their accomplishments would benefit students, staff, and schools nationally.

Funds are budgeted to address any incidental expenses (up to \$2,000) that a school might experience, such as phone calls, mileage, copying, and substitute teacher pay. In some cases where additional data are needed compensation will be provided.

What are the Expectations of a District's Participation?

Between fall 2003 and spring 2004, RRC project staff will work with sites in their region to participate in this activity. All of the details of the activity have not yet been determined. Work at the sites will be clarified after the initial site selection. All sites, whether they are identified as model training sites or as potential model (PM) sites, will receive support (monetary and staff) from both the RRC and the NRCLD as needed.

In part the expectations of a district depend on if the district is serving as a model training site or is participating as a PM site. Model training sites will be those sites that, based on a panel of judges, are determined to have an RtI model in place that is used for the purpose of identification and the site has appropriate data to support the effectiveness of that model. Other sites may be identified that are implementing an RtI model but are not determined to be appropriate for designation as a "model". These sites may lack appropriate critical elements, may not use their model as a means of identifying children for services or may lack the effectiveness data needed to serve as a model. These sites may be identified as potential model sites and will work with the NRCLD, RRC, and other model sites to either improve implementation or collect needed effectiveness data. Some of the expectations of each of the types of sites are described below.

Model training sites at a minimum will be required to:

- (a) Provide a detailed description of their RtI process;
- (b) Provide data on the effectiveness of their model or participate in the collection of data;
- (c) Serve as a model training site for other sites participating in the activity to visit; and
- (d) Contribute staff to providing training to other sites as requested.

Potential Model (PM) sites at a minimum will be required to:

- (a) Participate in regional training activities;
- (b) Visit model training site schools;
- (c) Implement components of a selected RtI model;
- (d) Collect detailed descriptive information on the process of implementing an RtI model; and
- (e) collect data required to document implementation including measures of fidelity, professional development and other support variables, and student outcomes.

What are the Desired Characteristics of the RtI Sites?

RRC staffs elicit the names of school districts and schools interested in participating. These characteristics should be considered in nominating model training sites:

- (a) Students receive high quality instruction in their general education setting;
- (b) General education instruction is research-based;
- (c) School staff conduct universal screening of academics and behavior;
- (d) Frequent progress monitoring of student performance occurs;
- (e) Frequent progress monitoring pinpoints students' specific difficulties;
- (f) School staff implement specific interventions to address the student's difficulties;
- (g) School staff uses progress-monitoring data to determine interventions' implementation integrity and effectiveness and to make any modifications as needed;
- (h) The RtI model is well described in written documents (so that the procedures and criteria used in schools can be compared to the documents); and
- (i) Sites can be designated as using a "standardized" treatment protocol that can be combined with an individualized, problem-solving model.

Sites identified as models will have data documenting their eligibility model, the outcomes of using the model and the fidelity with which the model is implemented.

However, at this point RRC's are being asked to nominate any site that they think is doing something that may qualify as a RtI model. This first "cast of the net" should be as broad as possible. If RRC's have initial questions regarding site selection they should contact the NRCLD.

The work will focus on schools within a district with students in first through the fifth grade.

When selecting sites the RRC's should ask potential sites if they have a comprehensive description of their model and data on the effectiveness of the model. These data will be needed for the OSEP panel to make the final selections (the panel is described later in this document). The questions and descriptions below provide some guidance as to the types of information that will be useful to have for sites that are being considered for designation as a model training site. In cases where a site is being considered for a model training site but the data are not available the RRC and the NRCLD may assist the site in collecting needed data.

Is an RtI model being implemented?

Description of an RtI model:

For each level of service (i.e. primary, secondary, tertiary - Levels of service reflect increased intensity of intervention with primary referring to what we do for all children, secondary referring to interventions we do with a small number of children and tertiary interventions referring to intensive individualized intervention we do with only a very few children).

- Selection procedures for entry to secondary intervention AND
- nature, frequency, format (teacher : student ratio), duration of secondary intervention AND
- measures and criteria for judging responsiveness

Documentation of fidelity of RtI model using:

- direct observation
- records inspection

Is RtI model used for eligibility?

Description of eligibility determination procedures:

- definition of unresponsiveness AND
- additional assessment procedures following unresponsiveness AND
- decision-making criteria applied to additional assessment information
- due process procedures

Documentation that RtI is used for eligibility:

- direct observation
- records inspection

Is the RtI model an effective prevention system?

Reading data:

- using a tool approved by the Reading First Assessment Committee for "outcome" assessment demonstration of improved achievement

Does the RtI model enhance LD-Identification?

Data on all students referred for secondary intervention in RtI site showing reduction in referral patterns.

What will happen following this first nomination process?

After the RRCs have submitted nominations for model training sites to the NRCLD, the NRCLD will do an initial screen on the nominations and may eliminate some nominations (this depends of the number of nominations received and the quality of data). The RRCs will be notified of the sites that pass through the first screen and asked to help collect available data from these sites. Then an OSEP expert panel will review the nominations, request additional data as needed and make determinations regarding which sites will serve as model training sites and may also indicate those that may be appropriate as PM sites. Finally, the NRCLD will notify the RRCs which sites have been chosen. At that time, RRCs may be asked to identify an additional set of sites that are willing to participate as PM sites. The RRCs will provide a list of the sites to the State Director of Special Education after the final selections are made. Our goal remains to have sites identified by the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year. Based on site selection additional guidance and a timetable on this activity will be provided. Training for RRC staff and selected staff from scale-up sites will also be provided.