

RTI Implementation Tool for Reading: Best Practices

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BACKGROUND

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (P.L.108-446) (IDEA 2004) includes provisions that could lead to significant changes in the way in which students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) are identified. Of particular relevance to the process of SLD determination and incorporating a scientific, research-based intervention process are the following provisions of the statute:

§300.541 (c) For a child suspected of having a specific learning disability, the team may consider, as part of the evaluation described in 300.532-533, the data from a scientific, research-based intervention process that must include

- (1) High-quality, research-based instruction and behavioral supports in general education settings
- (2) Scientific, research-based interventions focused specifically on individual student difficulties and delivered with appropriate intensity
- (3) Use of collaborative approach by school staff for development, implementation, and monitoring of the intervention process
- (4) Data-based documentation reflecting continuous monitoring of student performance and progress during interventions
- (5) Documentation of parent involvement throughout the process
- (6) Documentation that the timelines described in §300.532-300.533 are adhered to unless extended by mutual written agreement for the child's parents and a team of qualified professionals as described in §300.540
- (7) Systematic assessment and documentation that the interventions used were implemented with fidelity.

Researchers have endorsed the incorporation of a scientific, research-based intervention process as an identification criterion because it combines the important features of assessment and instruction and addresses many of the limitations currently associated with aptitude-achievement discrepancy models of SLD identification. The RTI concept is conceptually connected to previous federal statutes regarding the determination of SLD. Those previous statutes included a provision for evaluating that students had received appropriate learning ex-

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periences. The responsiveness to intervention (RTI) concept in IDEA 2004 is an elaboration or greater specification on this basic concept. In addition to the provision of appropriate learning experiences for all students, essential features of RTI also include the early identification of students as being at risk for academic failure.

Optimal learning outcomes occur when students' skills and abilities closely match the curriculum and instruction within the classroom. When a mismatch occurs, student outcomes and learning suffer. Quality classroom instruction usually provides a good match for most students. But for other students, success is not easy. The hypothesis is that, with RTI, these struggling students can be identified early and provided appropriate instruction, thus increasing the likelihood they can be successful and maintain their class placement.

INTENDED USES

Understandably, RTI looks different across school settings. The implementation checklist (beginning on page 3) is offered as an evaluation or planning tool. It can help you review and prioritize features that you have implemented or are considering implementing. Please periodically check our web site (www.NRCLD.org) for additional materials and information to help you with RTI implementation, e.g., curricular materials and interventions, self-questionnaires, guidelines for allocation of staff time.

CONSIDERATIONS

As you use this tool, please keep the following points in mind:

- At this time, information from scientific, research-based interventions is primarily focused on reading. This is understandable when one considers that, according to the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002), the reason that most students identified as having learning disabilities were in special education was that they had reading difficulties. In addition, research has indicated that the number of students identified for special

education and as having learning disabilities decreased following the implementation of early and rigorous reading programs (Fletcher et al., 2004).

- As the research base expands, this tool can easily be adapted as needed for other content areas, such as social behavior, math, and writing.
- The RTI components featured in this tool extend beyond the regulations and are included to help you facilitate implementation rather than only guide you in regulation adherence.
- The items listed in the implementation tool are based on a review of school-based and research-based RTI implementation procedures (e.g., Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003; Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002; NRCLD 2003 Symposium).

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Checklist

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What *does* RTI implementation look like in your school?

What *will* RTI implementation look like in your school?

DIRECTIONS

The RTI Implementation Tool is formatted so that you can indicate your current and planned implementation. If the practice is implemented, indicate this with a checkmark (✓); if the practice is being developed, rank by priority: 1 = of highest priority; 3 = of lowest priority. (Thus, practices ranked as “1” would be implemented before those ranked as “2”; those ranked as “2” would be implemented before those ranked as “3.”)

EXAMPLE:

	STATUS
Core reading program occurs for ≥ 90 minutes each day.	1
Interventions are scientific, research-based.	✓
Parents can give examples of improved instruction.	2

SCHOOL-WIDE SCREENING

	STATUS
1. Screening is school-wide, meets psychometric standards, has evidence of standard errors of measurement, and has concurrent and predictive validity.	
2. Persons involved in the screening measures' administration, scoring, and interpretation are appropriately trained.	
3. The site obtains reading screening data or information about reading skills, following a designated fixed schedule.	
4. At least 90% of the students participate and reasons for excluding students from the school-wide screening are reasonable and appropriate, e.g., severe/profound disabilities.	
5. Alternative methods to obtain information about reading skills for students excluded from reading assessments have individual curricular relevance and have an idea of achievement that allows gains to be measured and evaluated.	
6. A rationale is provided for the cut points and decision rules, e.g., normative or specific criteria reference.	

TIER INTERVENTION PRACTICES

ALL TIERS	STATUS
7. All interventions have clearly described protocols/procedures that include objectives, curricular materials, instructional procedures, service delivery personnel, schedule, setting, and validation information.	
8. Curricular materials match each student’s skill level and provide students multiple opportunities to respond.	
9. The intervention intensity is judged by considering __ A) the frequency with which the intervention is provided, __ B) amount of time (minutes) the intervention is provided, __ C) duration of the intervention (weeks), __ D) size of the instructional grouping, and __ E) qualifications of the instructor.	
10. Teachers use benchmark data, progress monitoring data, and decision rules to re-group students as needed.	
11. Explicit decision rules about placement and movement in tiers (e.g., entering, continuing in, repeating, and exiting tiers) are specified.	

TIER 1 - GENERAL EDUCATION PRACTICES	STATUS
12. Scientifically-based reading instruction/curriculum emphasizes the five critical elements of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).	
13. Core reading program for Tier 1 occurs for ≥ 90 minutes each day.	
14. Professional development focuses on improving instructional methods in the core reading program.	

TIER 2 AND BEYOND	STATUS
15. Tier 2 and Beyond interventions are scientifically based.	
16. Tier 2 and Beyond curricular materials differ from the curricular materials used in Tier 1 instruction.	
17. Tier 2 and Beyond interventions begin as soon as possible after identification/selection of those not responding adequately to Tier 1.	
18. In addition to Tier 1 instruction, students receiving Tier 2 and Beyond interventions do so for at least 30 minutes each day for 10 to 12 weeks.	
19. Size of instructional group is no more than a 1:5 teacher-student ratio.	
20. Decisions about students repeating/continuing the Tier 2 and Beyond intervention cycle are based on progress monitoring data.	
21. Appropriate instructional settings are designated by the school and include areas within the regular classroom, pod areas, separate classrooms, etc.	
22. Students may have more than one Tier 2 and Beyond intervention cycle.	

SPECIAL EDUCATION	STATUS
23. Special education interventions are scientifically based.	
24. Special education interventions use standard treatment/intervention protocols.	
25. In addition to Tier 1 instruction, students in special education meet for a minimum of two 30-minute sessions each day for at least 10 to 12 weeks.	
26. Size of instructional group is one teacher for three or fewer students.	
27. Decisions about students repeating/continuing the special education intervention cycle are based on progress monitoring data.	
28. Students may exit from special education intervention during the middle of the school year only if they demonstrate grade-level performance on specified benchmarks or progress measures (e.g., curriculum-based measurement [CBM]).	
29. A student who has received previous special education instruction and has exited may re-enter special education as needed.	

COLLABORATION WITHIN THE RTI PROCESS	STATUS
30. Classroom teachers, special education teachers, reading specialists, and other related services personnel collaborate to effectively implement high-quality, research-based instruction/curricula in general education under the overall direction of the school administration.	
31. The building administrator is involved in the essential features of RTI implementation.	
32. Tier-level instructors meet with the building administrator informally on a regular basis and formally at least once a month to discuss individual and group data.	
33. After each school-wide screening and testing period, building administrators have updated graphs of all individual student progress data by class, school, and district level.	
34. Staff members willingly participate in continuing discussions about RTI procedures and the development of the model.	
35. All participating teachers meet at least annually to share ideas about methods that have helped with the more difficult aspects of RTI.	
36. Implementation of interventions, progress monitoring, and student outcomes are enhanced for general education teachers with effective coaching and in-class support.	
37. Time spent on RTI activities is appropriately shared among staff members, depending on component and specific expectations for staff members' roles.	
38. Staff members understand and participate in relevant procedures and practices for orienting new staff members.	
39. The practices and procedures are relevant to the implementation of the SLD determination model and support consistent and accurate implementation.	
40. Staff members have a clear understanding of the key factors related to the SLD determination model and the procedures.	
41. Staff members have a clear understanding of the benefits and disadvantages related to the SLD determination model and procedures.	
42. Staff members understand methods of reaching consensus with regard to SLD determination procedures.	
43. Staff members can give relevant examples of, and reflections about, the issues and barriers related to RTI.	

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FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION	STATUS
44. Specific, qualified staff member or members are designated to observe instructional methods.	
45. Staff members are trained in fidelity procedures and have authoritative status (can take action, if necessary).	
46. To document fidelity of instruction with direct assessment, a teacher who is using a newly-learned instructional method should be observed immediately and then weekly or twice a week, as needed. A “master teacher” can be observed less frequently (three times per year or less).	
47. Observers complete a written checklist comprising the specific critical features of the instructional methods to document degree of fidelity.	
48. Specific criteria (e.g., percentage of critical features observed) are used to judge instruction as having, or lacking, fidelity.	
49. Feedback to instructional staff members includes a scheduled plan for improvement.	
50. Professional development should include a discussion of the factors that may reduce the fidelity of implementation of an intervention.	
51. Professional development should include a discussion of the indicators of deficient implementation and the practices to remedy the deficiencies.	
52. Professional development should include a discussion of the three categories of fidelity assessment: direct assessment, indirect assessment, and manualized treatments. (Research considers direct assessment to be best practice.)	

PROGRESS MONITORING	STATUS
53. Scientifically-based instruction includes the continuous progress monitoring of student performance across tiers.	
54. Teachers follow a designated procedure and schedule for progress monitoring and for regrouping students as needed.	
55. Measures are administered frequently to inform instruction and curricular placement decisions (in Tier 1, at least once every 3 weeks; in Tier 2 and Beyond, 1–2 times per week; in special education, 3–5 times per week).	
56. Progress monitoring occurs in all tiers (including general education).	
57. Progress monitoring measures are appropriate to the curriculum, grade level, and tier level.	
58. Data resulting from classroom-level progress monitoring are documented and analyzed.	
59. Teachers use progress monitoring data to evaluate instructional effectiveness.	
60. An established data-management system allows ready access to students’ progress monitoring data.	
61. Progress monitoring data are graphed to indicate percentages of students at varying levels of achievement. A graph is completed to display data for analysis and decision making to indicate percentages of students at risk, at some risk, and at low risk.	
62. Staff members receive training in the administration and interpretation of progress monitoring measures.	
63. The school has designated reasonable <i>a priori</i> cut points and decision rules for the level, slope, or percentage of mastery to help determine responsiveness and distinguish adequate responsiveness from inadequate responsiveness.	
64. The efficacy of cut points is reviewed frequently; cut points are adjusted as necessary.	
65. A rationale is provided for the cut points and decision rules, e.g., normative or specific criteria reference.	

PARENT INVOLVEMENT	STATUS
66. Standards for parent involvement are aligned with IDEA statutes and regulations (e.g., due process, hearing, placement decisions).	
67. Parental notification includes a description of the problem; clear, unambiguous documentation that shows the specific difficulties that the child is experiencing; a written description of the specific intervention; a clearly stated intervention goal; and a long-range timeline for the plan and its implementation.	
68. Parents and staff reach mutual agreement on the implementation, plan, and timeline.	
69. Parents receive continuing progress data.	
70. Parents are actively supported to participate at school and at home.	
71. Parent questionnaires and surveys assure parents that the school values their opinions.	
72. Parent questionnaires and surveys assure school staff that parents find school staff and school programs (e.g., interventions and instruction) to be of high quality.	
73. Parents view the implementation of due process procedures and protections as timely, adequate, and fair.	
74. School staff members strive to help parents feel welcome, important, and comfortable in the school setting.	

RTI AND SLD DETERMINATION	STATUS
75. RTI is one component in disability/SLD determination.	
76. The disability procedures include specific operational descriptions of how and what RTI information is integrated into disability determination and the need for special education and related services.	
77. Procedures and cut-off scores for SLD determination are specific.	
78. RTI procedures within the SLD eligibility determination system are gender and racially neutral.	
79. The SLD components assessed are fully explained, and the procedures or tests are described.	
80. Descriptions/written documentation of the circumstances, characteristics of students, and practices related to psychological testing are clear and detailed. The procedures are transparent and easily replicable.	
81. A cognitive measure is used for students determined to be eligible.	
82. Specific guidelines are established for the process of distinguishing between students who are eligible and those who are ineligible for special education.	
83. The site uses established school-wide methods to evaluate student progress in special education.	
84. The site specifies the special education exit measures and criteria that are used for students with disabilities.	
85. The site's process of monitoring student success is replicable because the site specifies how monitoring takes place and who does the monitoring.	

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STAFF MEMBERS COMPLETING THIS TOOL:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

DATE COMPLETED: _____

NEXT REVIEW DATE SCHEDULED FOR _____

COMMENTS: _____

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