

Understanding the Roots of RTI

PURPOSE

Although RTI frameworks are relatively recent, many RTI components have been in practice for many years. Historically, RTI finds its roots in research, legislation, and policy. Trends in these areas have developed and converged into many current day RTI frameworks. Following are selected examples.

THE INFLUENCE OF RESEARCH

- **Tiered models of intervention.** Two early studies often are cited as precursors to present-day RTI work. Deno and Mirkin (1977) investigated the effectiveness of a three-tiered intervention model for students' reading difficulties that incorporated curriculum-based measures for progress monitoring. That same year, Bergan (1977) investigated the effectiveness of a problem-solving model focused on implementing behavioral interventions with students that included a progress monitoring component. These early studies provided a foundation for future research and the development of two recognized RTI problem-solving models—the Standard Protocol Model is based on the work of Deno and Mirkin and the Problem-Solving Model is based on the work of Bergan.
- **Findings of the National Reading Panel (2000).** In 1997, the U. S. Congress asked the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to work with the U. S. Department of Education in establishing the National Reading Panel (NRP). Members of NRP met for two years and considered research studies on reading. They used research screening criteria that required the use of experimental or quasi-experimental designs and minimal sample sizes to eventually select several hundred studies for review and analysis. Their process of studying the research was a significant contribution to the field, and this group is credited with coining the term “scientifically-based reading research,” which is an essential element of most RTI approaches.
- **Use of a three-tiered model in reading research.** As a follow-up to the NRP report, a number of research studies were undertaken to examine the most effective ways to teach reading, assess progress, and remediate reading difficulties. For example,

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Vaughn and her colleagues (for a summary see Haager, Klingner, & Vaughn, 2009) investigated the effectiveness of a three-tiered intervention model for at-risk students experiencing reading difficulties. Students received early intervention. Those students who did not respond to the early intervention were provided with increasingly more intensive instruction. Many early RTI frameworks focused on reading and incorporated the types of practices used with these students.

THE INFLUENCE OF LEGISLATION

- **The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).** NCLB legislation included the NRP findings that focused on the need for literacy proficiency, funding, and resources. States were directed to establish reading instruction programs that utilized proven, research-based strategies. As a result of this focus, the use of research-based curriculum-based measures to assess the effectiveness of intervention instruction has become more widespread and has contributed to the movement toward RTI.
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA).** IDEA guides states in how to implement special education services. The specific term *response to intervention* is not stated in IDEA; however, Congress alludes to RTI by permitting the determination of how a child responds to scientific research-based intervention when identifying a learning disability and by prohibiting states from requiring the use of a discrepancy model. The statute states:

When determining whether a child has a learning disability, a local educational agency shall not be required to consider whether a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability. . . a local education agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to a scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures. [20 U.S.C. §1414(b)(A) and (B)]

IDEA also acknowledges the components of reading instruction as defined in NCLB:

A child shall not be identified to be a child with a disability if determinant factor is lack of appropriate instruction in reading, including in the essential components of reading instruction (as defined in section 1208 (3) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965). [20 U.S.C. § 1414 (b)(5)(A)]

Early Intervening Services is another component of IDEA that supports the development of RTI. The law indicates that up to 15 percent of IDEA funds targeted for students with

disabilities may be used to provide early intervention for at-risk students without individualized education programs (IEPs) who require additional support in order to make progress in general education.

THE INFLUENCE OF POLICY

- **Overrepresentation of minority students in special education.** In 2002, the National Research Council, commissioned by the National Academy of Sciences, presented their report, *Minority Students in Special and Gifted Education*, to Congress. This report included findings that children are most often referred for special education due to behavior and poor performance in basic reading skills and that the traditional approach to special education eligibility can be described as a “wait to fail model” due to the lack of early intervention and supports. The National Research Council recommended a model to identify students at risk of failure and to provide effective intervention that would precede and reduce the need for special education.
- **Changing relationship between general education and special education.** In recent years, there has been a call for the unification of special education and general education. Often, this is the context of inclusionary practices. Two of the major issues associated with this discussion relate to requiring that the student must fail before receiving help and the misdiagnosis of students as disabled. In an RTI framework, prevention and early intervention are provided to students as needed.
- **Access to academic monitoring tools.** In response to increased accountability requirements, schools have relied more and more on assessments. In recent years, schools have started to acquire monitoring assessments and tools for tracking academic progress. A cornerstone of RTI is progress monitoring.

The development and convergence of key research, legislation, and policy reports have generated broad ongoing discussion, debate, and action across many U. S. state departments of education, institutions of higher education, school divisions, and professional organizations. These influences have fueled much of the current interest in RTI.

The purpose of this tool is to provide the RTI Leadership Planning Team with an opportunity to consider RTI in the context of the school's response to historical trends.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

The tool is designed as a series of questions to guide discussion.

Decision point: The RTI Leadership Team should determine the extent to which an RTI initiative supports or enhances current thinking and efforts in the various areas.

TIPS AND VARIATIONS

1. In cases where an RTI approach does not support current efforts in an area, the RTI Leadership Team may want to reflect on whether the school's approach in that area is effective or requires further discussion. For example, if the school's vision of special education and general education is that they are separate systems (e.g., with their own policies and goals), then the team may want to spend some time focusing on how that perspective might need to be changed to embrace RTI fully.
2. Identify aspects of a trend that the school may find challenging. Discuss how RTI might provide an impetus for supporting improvement in that area.
3. Invite individuals who have considerable seniority in the school to share their perceptions of how the trends looked over the years. Discuss unique aspects of the school's community in relation to how the trends played out.

REFERENCES

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No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Public Law 107-110, 5, 115 Stat. 1427 (2002), et seq.

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Discussion Questions Regarding Historical Influences	Notes
<p>NCLB What aspects of NCLB has our school embraced? How might an RTI framework help us enhance our work on related issues and goals?</p>	
<p>IDEA What is our school philosophy regarding the education of students with disabilities? How might an RTI framework help us enhance our work on related issues and goals?</p>	
<p>Reading In what ways has our school made investments in improving reading skills? How might an RTI framework help us enhance our work in improving reading achievement?</p>	
<p>Addressing the Needs of Students from Diverse Cultural and Ethnic Backgrounds How has our school demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that all students, including those students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, achieve? How has our school addressed challenges related to this topic? How might an RTI framework help us enhance our work in ensuring effective and equitable educational experiences for all students?</p>	
<p>Use of Research-Based Practices How has our school made investments in ensuring that, to the extent possible, instructional practices are research based? How might an RTI framework help us enhance our work in this area?</p>	

<p>Use of Data for Instructional Decision Making</p> <p>In what ways has our school made investments in ensuring that, to the extent possible, staff members have access to instructional data for decision making?</p> <p>How might an RTI framework help us enhance our work in this area?</p>	
<p>Recommendations and Individuals Responsible</p>	