



# Tennessee Association of Administrators

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## Gain familiarity with popular RTI approaches

A number of models have been used to implement response to intervention, but in reality many of the approaches share similarities.

For example, both the “problem-solving” and “tiered” RTI models may involve direct teacher referral to teams that may result in a form of what has been thought of as pre-referral, says **Judy Schrag**, co-principal of the **Education and Human Services Group**

in Seattle. Pre-referral models require general education teachers to modify instructional and classroom management approaches in order to better meet the needs of diverse learners.

Problem-solving approaches typically involve a team of teachers who engage in a systematic process of problem identification and intervention implementation. The underlying assumption in problem-solving models is

that the presence of a disability is the least likely variable and explanation for a student’s failure, Schrag said.

In problem-solving approaches, teams of teachers and other specialists typically will review a student’s history and known attributes in an attempt to identify issues other than disability that explain his academic struggles.

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## RTI can’t be sole means to identify LD

The 2006 final IDEA Part B regulations say you must include a variety of assessment tools and strategies for identifying a learning disability, as opposed to solely using IQ discrepancy models or response to intervention as your evaluation tool. Final regulations take effect Oct. 13.

The regulations specifically state you cannot rely on any single procedure as the sole criterion for determining eligibility for special education and related services. This requirement applies to all children suspected of having a disability, including those suspected of having a specific learning disability.

“RTI is important for children who are suspected of having a learning disability,” said **Troy Justesen**, former deputy secretary of **OSERS**. “We have added more in the steps taken for evaluations.”

Having more than one evaluation process is consistent with evaluating children with disabilities, he said. You don’t want to use one single

method. You need input from parents, teachers and multiple ways to identify these children. To rely solely on one way would misidentify and overidentify children as having LD.

**John McCook**, pupil personnel director for the **Knox County (Tenn.) Schools**, said that after reading the regulations he thinks the RTI process is mandated as a first step for identifying children with learning disabilities.

“The portion of the regulations that say you must have data-based and scientifically based research interventions before you identify a child as SLD is RTI, no matter what you call it,” McCook said. “Along with RTI, you still have to take a look at other issues, such as the rule-outs in terms on motivation, social economics and cultural situations.

The **Education Department** said after reviewing the proposed regs, many experts said RTI should be considered one component of the evaluation process and not the sole component. ■

## Use the 6 critical components of an RTI model

Response to intervention requires a six-stage academic intervention program that addresses the needs of low-performing students before they are referred to special education. Here are the six critical components of an RTI model, as addressed at an **LRP Publications** audio conference by **John E McCook**, pupil personnel director for the **Knox County (Tenn.) Schools**.

### Initiate universal screening

The first critical component of RTI is universal screening. Universal screenings are given to children three times a year beginning in mid-kindergarten and are used to pinpoint early academic difficulties.

To employ screenings, McCook recommends that you:

- Develop “benchmark” data norms for the classroom, grade level, school and district.
- Collect the benchmark data during the fall, winter and spring.
- Make sure the data are user-friendly so general education teachers will use them.
- Make the data from benchmarks available to general education teachers, principals and your district staff.
- Share data with parents.

### Measure problem areas

Once an assessment is completed, McCook said it results in the development of plausible hypotheses regarding:

- Whether a student’s problem represents a skill or performance problem.
- Why the problem is occurring in measurable and observable terms.
- The circumstances and factors that are associated with the occurrence and nonoccurrence of the problem.

The measurable definition of a student’s “problem area” should:

- Be specific.
- Lend itself to objective measures, not anecdotal or opinion data.

### Establish baseline data

You should use curriculum-based measurements to identify the performance of an individual child on a specific skill measure. This could entail seeing how many words the child can read correctly in one minute, then comparing the child to the class, McCook said.

During your data analysis, review the previous benchmark data for the class, school and district and identify where the majority of the students appear.

“If the student doesn’t stick out like a sore thumb, and most students are having difficulty, then the problem is either instructional or a core curriculum area,” he said. “The small group of students who aren’t performing relative to the class are the students you have identified for an intervention.”

### Write an accountability plan

Now that you have defined the problem, you have to develop a plan, McCook said. This is where many teams go awry.

“They go back and continue to try the same practices using the same materials that they have used all along and expect the child to perform differently,” he said.

Written intervention plans should delineate:

- A description of the specific intervention being used.
- The duration of the intervention.
- The schedule and setting of the intervention.
- The people who are responsible for implementing the intervention.
- Measurable outcomes which can be used to make data-based adjustments as needed during the intervention process.
- A description of the skill measurement and recording techniques.
- A progress monitoring schedule.

### Monitor progress

Formative progress monitoring should use a variety of data collection methods, McCook said.

It should examine student performance frequently over time, to evaluate the response to intervention in making data-based decisions. An ongoing, systematic process should be used to collect:

- Academic data.
- Social data.
- Behavioral data.

### Compare data

McCook said by comparing pre-intervention data to post-intervention data, you will see if the RTI worked and if the decision-making rubric applied. ■

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## Give general educators resources to make RTI work

The new IDEA underscores the need for local level administrators to develop models of intervention and observation to intervene on behalf of struggling students.

Though the response-to-intervention model is typically discussed within the scope of special education, school districts in Mississippi and Missouri are beginning to rely on general education resources to launch initiatives in this area.

Administrators there are realizing special educators alone cannot provide the funding and human resources needed to deploy RTI, so they've created a teacher support team structure to give general educators the resources to make RTI work.

"Without general education teachers buying into [the RTI] process, it will not work," said **John E McCook**, pupil personnel director for the **Knox County (Tenn.) Schools**.

Thus, you should have a training program to teach general educators how to conduct intervention and providing ongoing assistance after the training to make sure general educators follow-through.

"Special education comes into that role in terms of literally helping provide the training and being the catalyst that makes the intervention happen," he said.

### Create teacher support teams

**Steven Beldin**, director of pupil services for the **North Kansas City (Mo.) School District**, said his district created teacher support teams to guide general educators through the RTI process

"Teacher Support Teams are school-based problem solving teams built on the assumption that teachers in general education have the ability to resolve many of the instructional and behavioral difficulties experienced by their students," Beldin said. "These teachers need and deserve the support of their colleagues within the school."

**Judy Couey**, director of Mississippi's **Office of Curriculum and Instruction**, said the teacher support team functions to:

- Clarify a student's area of difficulty in specific measurable terms.
- Collect and analyze data concerning student deficiencies.
- Design or redefine intervention processes that address problem areas.
- Provide immediate and accessible support to referring teachers.
- Assign support personnel to observe the fidelity of selected interventions. ■

### How support teams fit into process

The teacher support team should guide the process of response to intervention, says **Judy Couey**, director of Mississippi's **Office of Curriculum and Instruction**.

In the **North Kansas City (Mo.) School District**, members of the teacher support team initiative are involved during phase two of RTI, when an assessment is used to identify children with dual discrepancies. These might be students who have a level of performance and rate of improvement that falls significantly below those of classroom peers, said **Steven Beldin**, North Kansas City's director of pupil services. A baseline of performance in the area of concern is established through curriculum-based measurement.

During phase three of the RTI process, the district implements targeted researched-based interventions in the general education classroom through general education support services, Beldin said. Frequent assessments through curriculum-based measurements are used to monitor progress.

"It is essential that the strategy or program be consistently implemented as described in the research in order to accurately evaluate its effectiveness with the student and increase the likelihood of success," he said. "The intervention is changed if the data show that the student isn't making progress and the process is repeated." ■

### Not just anyone can be on support team

The staffing of your teacher support teams should be determined by the needs of individual students, says **Judy Couey**, director of Mississippi's **Office of Curriculum and Instruction**. The teams should have between three to five members.

Members should be:

- Committed to the school's instructional goals.
- Willing to accept responsibility of at-risk students' progress.
- Knowledgeable of multiple teaching strategies.
- Respected staffers who are approachable to other staff.
- Experienced in interpreting data.
- Organized and capable of mapping a course of improvement.
- Confidential concerning student data and outcomes discussed in the team setting.

The core team members should include:

- The principal as an instructional leader.
- A referring teacher.
- An instructional specialist
- A counselor.
- A respected classroom teacher. ■

## COMPONENTS (continued from page 1)

Problems a teacher or team investigates could include interrupted school experiences caused by moving, illnesses, trauma or behavioral challenges.

Variables that hinder students' academic success also could include inadequate instruction in previous grades or the presence of other undiagnosed disabilities, she said.

### Pre-referral approach

The assumption in the pre-referral model also is that a student's poor academic performance is often the reflection of his unmet instructional or curricular needs rather than an intrinsic disability, Schrag said. Through pre-referral, teachers are guided to differentiate instruction in order to maximize the number of students who benefit from the general education program.

The most typical pre-referral models have at their heart a teacher assistance team, known as care teams, student study teams or student assistance teams, she said. The team processes cases of students who teachers identify as struggling.

The team may design specific interventions or make suggestions to the teacher for possible interventions, Schrag said.

If the team finds positive results, no referral is made to special education. If, however, a lack of improvement is noted, educators refer the student for a special education evaluation.

### The three-tiered model

Under the three-tiered model, teams of teachers examine a standard set of data that is gathered on a periodic schedule.

Students are sorted into groups that are provided with increasingly intensive interventions depending on their achievement and response-to-intervention, Schrag said.

Movement through the tiers is a dynamic process, with students entering and exiting according to their progress data.

In this model, it is assumed that students who don't respond to the most intensive intervention are likely to have a learning disability, she said.

Frequently, the tiered approach is combined with more traditional assessment models or with problem-solving procedures before educators determine a student has a disability.

This approach requires "blurring" of the lines between general and special education, as well as close cooperation or merging of compensatory education services for English language learners, Schrag said.

## TAASE news and notes

This year the **Tennessee Association of Administrators in Special Education Board** has strived to communicate the concerns of its membership to the **Legislature**, the **State Board of Education**, and the **Department of Education**.

President **Sandie Earnest**, of Maryville, and President-elect **Barbara Bolton**, of Memphis, have worked along with the **Speech-Language Task Force** and the **Gifted Task Force** to share members concerns about EASY IEP and Medicaid Fee For Service claim programs.

### Legal conference planned

The annual *Legal Conference*, which will be held at the **Music Road Inn and Hotel** Dec. 4-6 in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., has been a large focus of year-round planning by the board members. It promises to be the best ever.

Registration and membership information will be mailed very soon.

If you plan to go, you better act fast. The conference is so popular during past years we have had registration at and over the capacity of the facility.

Have news about your school or district? Please send it to **Jo Bellanti**, secretary. We'd love to spotlight you in the *TAASE Advisor* and perhaps even on our new Web site. Yes, Web site!

Thanks to **Jeff Romanczuk** of Sevier County, TAASE has a new Web site. He is putting the finishing touches on it, and soon we'll be ready to share it with everyone. Thanks, Jeff! ■

## Inclusion workshops planned

Research supports inclusion as a way to achieve positive outcomes. Inclusion offers gains in test scores, improvement of students' self-esteem, decreases in drop-out rates and behavior problems, and increases in graduation rates.

To highlight the importance of inclusion, East Tennessee will be offering several one-day workshops for schools who were interested in adopting a more inclusive philosophy. Led by the **Robert Winstead**, director of **East Tennessee Regional Resource**, the workshops will focus on schools that are new to inclusion, as well as follow up for schools that have been utilizing inclusive practices but might need to brush up on their skills and knowledge.

The ETRRC plans initial workshops and additional follow up workshops throughout the 2006-07 school year. Most of the workshops will be conducted by personnel from districts that are successfully implementing effective inclusive practices. Teams from interested districts will be attending the regional workshops. ■

## Employ RTI as safety net for struggling students

The common three-tier response-to-intervention model is designed to meet the instructional needs of all students, including those who are slow starters and those who continue to struggle in school.

RTI should be thought of as a safety net for struggling students and as an alternative to a “wait-until-they-fail” model of instruction, **John E. McCook** told attendees of the the 27th annual *National Institute on Legal Issues of Educating Individuals with Disabilities*. It incorporates flexible practices to group students based on their progress, interests and changing needs.

McCook, pupil personnel director for **Knox County (Tenn.) Schools**, said Tier 1 instruction should encompass:

- A high-quality program of instruction.
- Use of quality research-based instructional strategies.
- Ongoing assessment of students to determine instructional strengths and needs.
- Ongoing professional development to provide teachers necessary tools to ensure every student receives quality instruction.

Tier 1 instruction is designed to address the needs of the majority of a school’s students, said McCook. By using flexible grouping, focusing on ongoing assessment, and targeting specific skills, classroom teachers are able to meet instructional goals.

**Joseph Witt**, professor emeritus at **Louisiana State University**, and senior scientist for **iSTEEP Learning**, told the conference that in Tier 1 your teachers should screen the data that are collected to determine which students, by grade, have not achieved the benchmark skills required for that specific grade at that time of year.

The key purpose of the Tier 1 process is to identify students who haven’t developed the essential skills required for success at the next level of instruction, Witt said. Data should be collected for the whole class at least three times per year to establish benchmarks and local norms for the school and the district.

The task set forth in Tier 1 is to upgrade general instruction in a manner that effectively addresses the needs of deficient students in a whole group setting, he said. Steps for successful implementation of a Tier 1 process include the following:

- Data are collected and presented in a user-friendly manner and preferably in a graphical context. A team meets at least three times per year to address the data and make instructional changes.
- Students are identified using pre-set benchmark scores, and measurable goals are established for the class and for deficient students within the classroom.
- Measurable goals are set for the next data-collection period.

### Offer supplemental instruction in Tier 2

For 20 percent to 30 percent of students, focused instruction within the regular classroom setting isn’t enough. These students require supplemental instruction in addition to the standard classroom instruction.

The supplemental instruction in Tier 2 of response to intervention is designed to meet the needs of these students by providing additional individual instruction, small group instruction, and/or technology-assisted instruction to support and reinforce skills being taught by the classroom teacher, **John E. McCook** said.

In Tier 2, the interventionist may be the classroom teacher, a specialized teacher, or an external interventionist specifically trained for Tier 2 supplemental instruction.

Tier 2 provides additional instruction to students who score below benchmark criteria in one or more critical areas of instruction, said McCook, pupil personnel director for **Knox County (Tenn.) Schools**. Tutoring sessions reflect the important learning targets of content area subjects based on the grade level of the students.

**Joseph Witt**, professor emeritus at **Louisiana State University**, and senior scientist for **iSTEEP Learning**, said the amount of assistance and the method used are planned according to progress monitoring data. ■

- Teachers utilize problem-solving methods to address the needs of the deficient students and formulate these in relation to the instruction provided for the entire class.

- Teachers determine the level of supports and programming needs that are necessary to accomplish the whole class goals.

- Observations are conducted by teachers, psychologists, principals or others to ensure the fidelity of the instruction in the classroom.

- Teachers implement the strategies and interventions in the classroom.

- Teachers evaluate the efficacy and fidelity of the changes.

**Dan Reschly**, professor of special education at Peabody College at **Vanderbilt University** in Nashville, Tenn., told conference attendees the process should develop teachers’ skills to differentiate instruction for students and succeed with whole class instruction.

The process should identify through objective data those students who need more intense interventions and more frequent progress monitoring, Reschly said. A positive aspect of appropriate Tier 2 interventions results in the ability to focus resources for more intense instructional or behavioral problems in Tier 2 and Tier 3. ■

## Intense reading instruction should be hallmark of RTI's 3rd tier

For students with reading problems, Tier 3 of response to intervention should be the most intense level of intervention students receive while still in general education. The theory is that you will have a legitimate reason to suspect a need for special education services if a student doesn't respond to this concentrated intervention.

While there is no set number of tiers required in the response-to-intervention model you adopt, the three-tier model is the most common. As such, experts recommend Tier 3 include daily instruction in each of the **National Reading Panel's** five building blocks of reading. It should include nine weeks of one-hour daily instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, vocabulary development, fluency, and text comprehension.

When this tier is complete you have daily data on all five areas from the national reading panel so it won't be necessary to conduct another evaluation in these areas, said **Judy K. Montgomery**, who has developed this evidence-based Tier-3 process with **Barbara J. Moore-Brown**, director of special youth services for the **Anaheim (Calif.) Union High School District**. Both special educators recommend students complete 16 tasks during each session. Those tasks include that the student:

- Read three-to-five pages from a book aloud.
- Do three phonological awareness activities orally.
- Complete a syllable activity.
- Write or say 10 words from a book.
- Create new words from letters of a word included in the book the student is reading.
- Create and use a personal word chart for phonics activities so the student can create word families, phonograms, inflective endings, prefixes and suffixes.
- Read a book, magazine or story for five minutes.
- Read the same story with expression, stress and fluency.
- List compound words from the book.
- Read a list of familiar words horizontally from the book at the rate of one per second.
- Read a list of 60 less familiar words horizontally at a rate of one per second.
- Use a highlighter to highlight 11 sentences from the student's grade-level text.
- Read a story orally and then write the story.
- Read up to 21 of 100 words by sight from the personnel word chart, then add two new words and retire two other words.
- Read one paragraph of grade-level text to find an answer to a question posed by the teacher.
- Create a daily seven-page personal book and enter information given to the student by the teacher.

### Increase frequency of intervention in latter stages of RTI

Tier 3 of response to intervention is designed for students with low content area skills and/or a sustained lack of adequate progress when provided with primary and secondary interventions. Tutoring at this level is more intensive and includes more explicit instruction that is designed to meet the individual needs of struggling students.

Instruction is tailored to specific individual student learning targets or goals, and the duration of daily instruction is longer, said **Dan Reschly**, professor of special education at Peabody College in **Vanderbilt University** in Nashville, Tenn. The interventions at this level are intensive and targeted to specific deficiency areas for the individual student's needs.

The main differences between Tier 2 and Tier 3 aren't the interventions, but the frequency, duration and progress monitoring requirements of Tier 3, he said. Remember the frequency and duration become at least daily for an hour per day, while the progress monitoring requirement becomes a minimum of weekly. ■

### Staffers should see daily results

Montgomery, a professor of special education at **Chapman University** in Orange, Calif., said your staff should follow the 16 tasks closely and keep records on:

**Response rate.** Some students will immediately recognize there are 16 tasks they must complete every day. "One of the first things your teachers should notice is students learn the sequence," she said. "They know what is coming next and the learn how to anticipate it without directions."

**Student progress.** Most students should show growth in each activity.

**Student anticipation.** Students should look forward to the independent reading time and anticipate how to read for a certain purpose.

After the Tier 3 instruction, your referral team should decide if the student should go back to Tier 2 or be recommended for special education, she said. Students who respond to the intervention should stay in the general education classroom with support within the Tier 2 intervention.

"Your teachers will know more about each student's reading habits and can use this information to help the student," Montgomery said, "If a student doesn't respond to instruction after 45 hours, we recommend you use the information you have gathered rather than giving the student a test." ■