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Response to Intervention: Select State Programs

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INTRODUCTION

Background

In 2002, a National Research Council Panel concluded that, "There is substantial evidence in regards to both behavior and achievement that early identification and intervention is more effective than later identification and intervention" (Donovan & Cross, p. 6). The Panel strongly encouraged multi-tiered interventions to improve results in general education through effective early treatment of identified learning and behavior problems to prevent inappropriate referrals to special education. These multi-tiered interventions are typically referred to as response to intervention (RTI).

RTI arose, in part, from the limited success of the pre-referral process, an approach advocated in the 1980s and 1990s, and accurately measuring the discrepancy between aptitude and achievement in young children. Reflecting these concerns, when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 2004, it added language allowing RTI to be used as a component of evaluation for special education eligibility.¹ Educators are encouraged to use scientific, research-based interventions as part of the process to determine eligibility for special education. Students who succeed in response to the additional intervention continue to receive instruction to meet their needs, while those who continue to struggle and do not show higher achievement are referred for a comprehensive evaluation.

Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) worked with two other OSEP-funded centers, the IDEA Partnership and the National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI), to select six states for review of their RTI frameworks. The review examined documentation provided on the states' websites regarding their implementation of RTI. This document describes information found on state websites and subsequently provided by state staff in the areas of RTI structure, administration, implementation, data and outcomes and challenges. Project Forum completed this analysis as part of its collaborative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

Definition

As defined by NASDSE, "RTI is the practice of (1) providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and (2) using learning rate over time and level of performance to (3) make important educational decisions" (NASDSE, p. 5). Some core features of RTI include:

- universal screening of academics and behavior;
- high-quality, research-based classroom instruction and interventions;
- ongoing monitoring of student progress in response to interventions;
- multiple tiers of increasingly intense interventions;
- a differentiated curriculum; and
- differentiated instruction by various school staff, including the classroom teacher (Mellard, 2004).

U.S. Department of Education's role in RTI

OSEP has funded numerous technical assistance and dissemination (TA&D) projects to support states as they work toward implementation of an RTI framework. One, the IDEA Partnership, began work early with states on how to build partnerships across agencies and levels in order to support the infrastructure necessary to build the capacity and sustain an RTI framework. The National Research Center on Learning Disability (NRCLD) and the National Center on Student Progress Monitoring both have provided the field with preliminary research and best practices for RTI. OSEP has also funded NCRTI to provide TA to the states and non-state jurisdictions. Currently, NCRTI provides intensive TA supports to eight states to help plan, implement and evaluate their RTI initiatives. The remaining states receive either targeted or universal levels of support.

METHODOLOGY

Project Forum, the IDEA Partnership and NCRTI designed a rubric to choose states for review. The criteria for the rubric included looking for states at a variety of levels of implementation, with RTI frameworks that were conceptualized for various purposes and in which RTI work is focused on various areas (e.g., local levels versus state levels). The states chosen for review were *Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Pennsylvania* and *Rhode Island*.

Because of the plethora of information provided by states to many OSEP TA&D projects, the partner projects agreed that a review of extant data from state websites, the IDEA Partnership website, and background information provided by NCRTI and other web-based documentation, mixed with internal and state-level review for content accuracy, would provide the best method for data collection.

STRUCTURE OF RTI FRAMEWORK

Colorado

Colorado's RTI framework is a three-tiered approach that promotes an integrated system connecting general, compensatory, gifted and special education to provide high quality,

standards-based instruction and intervention matched to students' academic, social-emotional and behavioral needs.¹

The state education agency (SEA) describes six components of its RTI framework:

- leadership;
- problem solving;
- curriculum and instruction;
- assessment/progress monitoring;
- positive school climate and culture; and
- family and community engagement.

Colorado uses its RTI model as the means of identifying SLD and believes that it is essential for an RTI/problem-solving process to be implemented prior to or as part of the evaluation for SLD. With this approach, local education agencies (LEAs) collect information through interventions that inform student eligibility decision making. The SEA recommends that this problem-solving process be supported by a consultant model.

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Florida

Florida describes its three-tiered RTI model as a systematic method for evaluating the needs of all students and fostering positive student outcomes through carefully selected and implemented interventions. Additionally, this model is used to make eligibility decisions for special education, most notably for the SLD and emotional/behavioral disabilities (E/BD) categories. For these two categories, the evaluation procedures require systematic problem solving, including interventions and progress monitoring in the general education environment to ensure that difficulties are not due to lack of appropriate instruction. The state intends RTI to help reduce disproportionality, promote achievement for all students, and integrate general and special education.

Iowa

The RTI process used in *Iowa* is called Instructional Decision Making (IDM), a three-tiered, proactive process that uses student data to guide instruction that will best meet the needs of each student, including high-achieving students. Additionally, IDM helps schools and districts align their activities with initiatives, plan for professional development, determine more effective schedules according to the instructional needs of the students and use limited resources more effectively.

The IDM process begins with each student having access to, and an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of, a guaranteed and viable curriculum which demonstrates rigor and relevance. This core instruction (tier 1) is provided through the combination of sound instructional practices, learning objectives, materials and strategies provided in the general education classroom. When data suggest that students require additional instructional supports, they are provided through either 'supplemental' or 'intensive' instruction. Based on individual student data, 'supplemental instruction' (tier 2) is provided to those students

¹ For website information where state-specific information was found, please see the Appendix.

[In Iowa,] 'intensive instruction' is available for students identified as *significantly not meeting* or *significantly exceeding* core-learning expectations.

identified as *exceeding* or *not meeting* core learning expectations. This instruction is evidence-based and designed to meet identified student needs. As with supplemental instruction, 'intensive instruction' (tier 3) provides evidence-based instructional practices designed to meet identified student needs; however,

'intensive instruction' is available for students identified as *significantly not meeting* or *significantly exceeding* core-learning expectations.

Kansas

In *Kansas*, the system-wide practice of responding to the academic and behavioral needs of every learner is referred to as the Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS). MTSS uses increasingly intense, research-based interventions and frequent data-based monitoring of instructional effectiveness to guide instructional decisions and ensure student success. The *Kansas* MTSS Innovation Configuration Matrix (ICM), a description of the MTSS principles and practices, guides planning for implementation of MTSS from preschool through high school, within the LEAs, school buildings and at the SEA. The six components of MTSS are:

- leadership and empowerment;
- assessment;
- curriculum;
- instruction;
- data-based decision making; and
- integration and sustainability.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's three-tiered RTI model contains six core characteristics:

- standards-aligned instruction;
- universal screening;
- shared ownership;
- data-based decision making;
- a tiered intervention and service delivery system; and
- parental engagement.

The goal is to develop a school-wide, early-intervening strategy to improve student outcomes by using research-based interventions that match instructional needs of students. RTI also serves to identify students with SLD prior to failure and might be a replacement for the discrepancy model in the future. The SEA partners with the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN), intermediate unit curriculum and special education departments, Lehigh University and Indiana University of Pennsylvania to implement their RTI framework.

Rhode Island

Rhode Island's RTI framework is based on a school-wide model of problem-solving and data-based decision making. The purpose of RTI is to determine appropriate supports to supplement core curriculum to meet the needs of all learners. *Rhode Island* has five main components to its RTI framework including:

- a problem-solving process;
- a school-wide instruction and intervention system;
- data-based decision making from screening and progress monitoring;
- shared responsibility; and
- integration into the special education and personal literacy planning.

This framework for instruction is built on a shared responsibility of educators and administrators to provide evidence-based instruction and support for all learners.

RTI ADMINISTRATION

Each of the six states in this analysis has some distinct features in the administration (e.g., rules and guidance) of its RTI program.

Colorado

Training and guidance are provided at the SEA level while responsibility for implementation is focused at the LEA and building levels. *Colorado's* special education regulations require the use of RTI and do not allow the use of severe discrepancy between achievement and ability for SLD identification. The SEA encourages LEAs to rethink the use of existing resources including personnel, how general funds are spent and the use of several federal formula grants.

Florida

Special education regulations allow for the use of RTI or severe discrepancy for SLD identification. The SEA draws chiefly on IDEA funds to provide support to the LEAs through collaboration across multiple state offices such as School Improvement, Reading and Math. At the local level, LEAs are encouraged to use Title I, II, III, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), IDEA and state funds to support intervention, including substitutes for staff to participate in training, release time, registration fees and resources.

[In Florida,] LEAs are encouraged to use Title I, II, III, ARRA, IDEA and state funds to support intervention

Iowa

Area education agencies (AEAs) create a plan for their districts and provide support during implementation. As a result, some school districts have been involved in IDM longer than others. Currently, more than 100 schools in *Iowa* are using IDM. Iowa's special education regulations allow noncategorical service provision and IDM assists in identifying students with disabilities; the severe discrepancy model is not an allowed method of determining eligibility for services. AEAs and LEAs are encouraged to use Title I, ARRA, IDEA and state funds to support training and implementation efforts.

Kansas

Special education regulations allow the use of RTI for SLD identification. The SEA supports LEAs by providing district level and school level technical assistance and materials. Guidance is updated annually.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania uses a resource allocation process that requires significant shifting of a school's resources. *Pennsylvania's* special education regulations allow LEAs to use either RTI or a discrepancy model to determine eligibility for special education. LEAs that decide to use RTI must "establish an early intervening program to guarantee the provision of scientifically based interventions delivered with fidelity as well as a system of ongoing assessment that is valid and reliable" (PaTTAN, 2008).

Pennsylvania uses a resource allocation process that requires significant shifting of a school's resources.

Rhode Island

Rhode Island's special education regulations allow LEAs to choose either RTI or the severe discrepancy model for SLD identification. *Rhode Island's* RTI initiative supports LEAs through school-based technical assistance and training materials. LEAs are responsible for travel expenses, substitute pay and tools associated with implementing RTI. LEAs are encouraged to coordinate funding of ARRA, IDEA and other federal programs as well as state and local funds to support implementation.

RTI IMPLEMENTATION

Colorado

In 2008, the *Colorado* SEA developed *RTI: A Practitioner's Guide to Implementation* and began regional trainings in RTI Leadership. *Colorado* encourages the use of designated case managers to support the work of problem-solving teams made up of a variety of educational staff and parents. Their RTI framework is designed for PreK-12. Building and LEA administrators, including superintendents and curriculum directors, are expected to guide RTI implementation, champion and monitor RTI, participate in trainings, develop knowledge of curriculum and research-based instruction across the three tiers and establish long-term plans that include resource allocation. Each of *Colorado's* LEAs has identified an 'RTI contact' who is responsible for disseminating information about current professional development opportunities provided by the SEA available online or within the region. These contacts have developed regional RTI cadres that meet regularly and share implementation challenges, successes and resources. The SEA also participates in order to stay current on needs and get feedback on professional development.

Online classes have been developed for problem solving/consultation and progress monitoring to support the creation of statewide communities of practice around RTI

implementation and SLD determination. Additional resources created by the SEA and used in training sessions include documents and videos.²

Florida

In *Florida*, seven LEAs with 34 pilot schools were chosen by the SEA to participate in training and receive technical assistance to develop demonstration sites and provide a data-based evaluation of implementation from a range of K-12 school settings. Other districts were involved through trainings prior to the model demonstration sites. Most *Florida* LEAs have also committed to various on-going training efforts that include school-based team building, district-based leadership and planning through on-line modules and training-of-trainers to build capacity. In order to initiate formal pilot sites, the state made competitive funds of up to \$100,000 per year available to LEAs for three years to support approximately one coach per three buildings. The state application required ‘full implementation,’ meaning embracing all components of the RTI model. Activities in the demonstration districts include assessing effectiveness of tier one of the three-tiered model and making indicated changes. School leadership fully participates on the team including attendance at training and monitoring the integrity of classroom interventions.

In order to initiate formal pilot sites, [Florida] made competitive funds of up to \$100,000 per year available to LEAs.

Iowa

In June 2009, school personnel, AEA and SEA staff attended a statewide IDM conference showcasing IDM K-12 efforts. Presenters shared their successes, struggles and materials in order for attendees to see the IDM process more clearly as a framework by which to make effective decisions for their students. Positive student achievement data were also shared, especially in the areas of reading and math. Each session was videotaped to share with educators who were unable to attend.

Kansas

Kansas is expanding the grade-level RTI projects to include preschool through high school in the 2009-10 school year.

Currently *Kansas’* three-tiered efforts are strongest in the area of elementary reading in more than 250 schools. Additionally, during the past two years, 12 schools have been participating in a secondary pilot project that integrates behavior and academics.

Kansas is expanding the grade-level RTI projects to include preschool through high school in the 2009-10 school year.

Pennsylvania

In *Pennsylvania*, RTI consists of the Monitoring Progress of Pennsylvania Pupils Project (MP³) and Instructional Support Teams (ISTs) at the building level. MP³ is an OSEP-funded collaborative program with Lehigh University, the University of Pittsburgh and PaTTAN. The

² Documents include *Guidelines for Identifying Students with Specific Learning Disabilities and Family and Community Partnering—On the Team and At the Table* and videos include *Problem-Solving/Consultation Process—Training Video Guide, Problem-Solving/Consultation, and Response to Intervention—Meeting the Needs of ALL Students*)

goal of this project is to monitor the implementation of K-4 reading and facilitate RTI in the target schools. Interventions are provided to students through a standard protocol³ and professional development is provided to train teachers and other school staff. The SEA expects principals to be part of the IST as a means to develop shared ownership.

Rhode Island

The *Rhode Island* Department of Education and the RTI Initiative have provided professional development statewide on six train-the-trainer RTI modules for grades K-12 that were developed by the Initiative in 2007. Starting in 2008, they began providing regional and LEA-level technical assistance (TA). The RTI Initiative invites all LEAs K-12 and selects LEA-level implementation sites based on various criteria including performance on State Performance Plan indicators. They provide external consultants, monthly regional TA sessions and ongoing TA at selected building sites. The LEAs identify a cross-district training team to participate annually. The team consists of 10 people including:

- a curriculum/reading administrator;
- a special education director;
- principals;
- general educators;
- special educators; and
- other specialists.

RTI DATA AND OUTCOMES

Since RTI as a systems change model is a relatively recent innovation, time has not yet permitted extensive evaluation. All reviewed states have begun work to collect data and measure outcomes. *Colorado* and *Iowa* are both developing tools to measure fidelity of implementation.

Other data and outcomes work that states have begun include:

- *Colorado* conducted an RTI Implementation Survey with LEA RTI contacts at the end of the 2008-09 school year. Findings indicate that RTI is being implemented primarily as a unified effort between general and special education. The SEA plans to re-administer this survey in the upcoming year to gather more accurate and reliable data.
- Preliminary reports from *Iowa* schools that seem to be implementing with a high degree of fidelity indicate that fewer referrals to special education and more students becoming proficient on the state assessment.
- The *Kansas* SEA will release a request for proposals for a comprehensive evaluation of MTSS for the 2010-11 school year.
- *Pennsylvania's* assessment of RTI assists in determining the adequacy of the standards alignment program, instructional practices and the standards protocol interventions provided to students. The state uses its pilot programs to collect data on students' movement through the three tiers, changes in student achievement and special education eligibility and the outcomes of interventions (REL, 2009).

³ Standard protocol consists of screening all students using Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM); identifying students in need of support in a given skill area and giving them a pre-determined research-based intervention (Harn, 2006).

Rhode Island's evaluation answer[s] the degree to which TA leads to increased knowledge and skills ... and ... to effective use of progress monitoring data, appropriate and timely instructional services, and increased timeliness and accuracy of special education identification.

- *Rhode Island's* system of evaluation is designed to answer the degree to which the TA it provides leads to increased knowledge and skills of the professionals and if TA and implementation of RTI lead to effective use of progress monitoring data, appropriate and timely instructional services, and increased timeliness and accuracy of special education identification.

RTI CHALLENGES

Florida's greatest challenge is accessing funding other than IDEA funds. The greatest challenge in *Kansas* is scaling up to meet the needs of school and district requests and having the capacity to ensure fidelity of planning and implementation of MTSS. *Pennsylvania* noted that achieving consistency across LEAs is a particular concern (REL, 2009).

In addition to the specific challenges noted by these states, Spectrum K12 School Solutions (2009) found in a study of 728 LEAs nationwide that the following general barriers to state implementation exist:

- insufficient teacher training;
- lack of intervention resources; and
- lack of data, knowledge, and skills for tracking/charting.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The data found suggest similarities and differences across the grade levels of students served in these states; a variance in roles of the general and special education units; a variety of SLD identification methods, the number of tiers, and the inclusion of students in RTI frameworks across the states. Table 1 synthesizes these attributes of the states' RTI frameworks.

Table 1: State RTI Attributes

State	Grade Levels	Roles of General and Special Education	SLD Identification Method	Number of Tiers	Inclusion of Students in the RTI Framework
CO	PreK-12 th grade	RTI is in special education regulations.	RTI is required for SLD identification.	Three	Students in general, compensatory, gifted and special education
FL	K-12 th grade	RTI is in special education regulations; funding comes from across general and special education.	RTI and severe discrepancy models are allowed for SLD identification.	Three	All students

State	Grade Levels	Roles of General and Special Education	SLD Identification Method	Number of Tiers	Inclusion of Students in the RTI Framework
IA	K-12 th grade	Funding comes from across general and special education.	Iowa allows non-categorical service provision. RTI assists in identifying students with disabilities. The severe discrepancy model is not allowed.	Three	All students: Tier three serves students who are 'significantly not meeting' or 'significantly exceeding' core-learning expectations.
KS	PreK-12 th	RTI is in special education regulations.	RTI and severe discrepancy models are allowed for SLD identification.	Three	All students
PA	K-12 th grade	RTI is in special education regulations	LEAs are allowed to use RTI or a discrepancy model for SLD identification. RTI might replace the discrepancy model.	Three	All students
RI	K-12 th grade	RTI is in special education regulations; funding comes from across general and special education.	RTI and severe discrepancy models are allowed for SLD identification.	Three	All students

Of the six states reviewed for this report, all provided some information accessible via state websites regarding the development and structure of their RTI system. Each state has developed a multi-tier system to evaluate and support student progress through interventions for the purpose of improved student outcomes. The responsibilities of the SEAs and LEAs vary as do the sources of funding. Also of note is that only one state specified using a standard protocol intervention system.

As a field, we are lacking sufficient data to provide long-term evaluation of these initiatives. For states interested in expanding their own RTI efforts, different models exist.

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¹ With regard to identifying children with SLD, the IDEA regulations: (1) allow a local educational agency (LEA) to consider a child's response to scientific, research-based intervention as part of the SLD determination process; (2) allow states to use other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has a SLD; (3) provide that states may not require the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement to determine whether a child has a SLD; and (4) require a public agency to use the state criteria in determining whether a child has a SLD and discuss the role that response to scientific research-based interventions plays in a comprehensive evaluation process. 34 CFR §§300.307, 300.309 and 300.311.

APPENDIX

Colorado

The Colorado Department of Education

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/Rti/>

Florida

National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/>

Florida's RTI website

<http://www.florida-rti.org/>

National Center on Response to Intervention (Florida)

http://state.rti4success.org/index.php?option=com_state&stateId=113

Iowa

Learning Supports Initiative

http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=498&Itemid=1296

Special Education Eligibility Standards

<http://www.aea10.k12.ia.us/divlearn/specialeducation/docs/spedeligstandardsjuly2006.pdf>

Kansas

Kansas National Education Association

<http://www.knea.org/>

Kansas Department of Education

<http://www.ksde.org/>

Kansas MTSS

<http://www.kansasmtss.org/>

Pennsylvania

PaTTAN

<http://www.pattan.net/>

PA Department of Education

<http://www.pde.state.pa.us/>

Rhode Island

National Center on Response to Intervention (Rhode Island)

http://state.rti4success.org/index.php?option=com_state&stateId=143

RTI Technical Assistance Plan

<http://www.ritap.org/rti/about/overview.php>