

Chapter 1

Response to Intervention at the Secondary Education Level: An Overview

Pam Epler

Grand Canyon University, USA

ABSTRACT

The Response to Intervention (RTI) service delivery model has been incorporated into elementary schools throughout the United States. This multi-tiered model has been found to assist struggling students in all academic areas through the use of research-based instructional strategies. Because of its success at the elementary level, more and more secondary education institutions are turning to RTI as a viable model that can help students achieve academic success. This chapter provides a history of how the RTI model was established in American elementary schools as well as an overview of how it can be implemented into the secondary educational environment. The chapter also describes the components required for successful implementation along with challenges facing middle and high schools when using the model. This type of service delivery model is a new way of teaching within the secondary educational arena but has been shown to be extremely effective if implemented correctly.

INTRODUCTION

Secondary RTI is about improving Tier 1 content area instruction and building Tier 2 supports for all students in both academics and behavior. —M. Shinn (2007)

Closing the achievement gap among all students has been a struggle that has long concerned educators. Throughout the history of education, various forms of instructional strategies have been applied; some have been successful, and some have not. However, despite teachers' best efforts, the achievement gap continues to exist, and in some cases has increased, because no one teaching method fits the needs of all students.

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The RTI service delivery model appears to be the answer to all educators' prayers. It allows struggling students to start at their achievement level and, through a process of various instructional strategies and data collection, increases academic success (All Kinds of Minds, 2008; Brown-Chidsey, 2007; Canter, Klotz, & Cowan, 2008; Cummings, Atkins, Allison, & Cole, 2008; Duffy, 2007). The National Center on Response to Intervention (2010) defined Response to Intervention as a service delivery model that integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems. With Response to Intervention, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities. This service delivery model has had a powerful impact on the academic achievement of students across the United States (All Kinds of Minds, 2008; Brown-Chidsey, 2007; Canter et al., 2008; Cummings et al., 2008; Duffy, 2007).

Although RTI has been available for school districts to use for more than 30 years under such names as "Teacher Assistance Team Model, Pre-Referral Intervention Model, Mainstream Assistance Team Model, School-Based Consultation Team Model, and Problem-Solving Model" (All Kinds of Minds, 2008, p. 1), it was not until the reauthorization of the federally legislated Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 that school districts acknowledged this model as an alternative method to identify students with learning disabilities. According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2008), RTI has since gone beyond being used only as an identifier for special education services and "has become a comprehensive, data-based prevention model for helping struggling students achieve" (p. 1). Through the use of this service delivery model, teachers can identify any learning difficulties and make necessary modifications to the curricula while the student is still in the regular classroom. As a result, the RTI model has led to decreased referrals to special education programs (Brown-Chidsey, 2007; Canter et al., 2008; Cummings et al., 2008; Duffy, 2007). Furthermore, according to Woodruff (2011) and Hosp (2010), disproportionality, meaning the number of students that are overrepresented in special education, such as students living below the poverty line or students whose first language is not English, has been reduced through the implementation of RTI.

Although it has been an important element within the educational realm for both academic and behavioral purposes, Response to Intervention has been used much more frequently in the elementary school environment, and there are many studies that show its successful implementation (Johnson & Smith, 2008). Annually, Spectrum K12 School Solutions conducts the RTI Adoption Survey, one goal of which is to assess how widely the Response to Intervention service delivery model has been adopted in U.S. school districts (Spectrum K12 School Solutions, 2009, 2010). Table 1 displays implementation-related findings from 2009 and 2010, showing the percentage rates of usage at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in reading, math, and behavior.

It is evident from Table 1 that the RTI service delivery model is being used in the middle and high school environments, although not to the same degree as in the elementary schools. These schools still lag behind the elementary schools by approximately 23-47% in reading, 19-25% in math, and 6-19% in behavior. Regardless, interest in RTI at the middle and high school levels has increased. For example, school districts increased their overall usage of the RTI model from 44% in 2007 to 71% in 2009, with a significant increase in high school implementation, up from 16% in 2008 to 51% in 2009 (Spectrum K12 School Solutions, 2009).

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