Chapter 8
RTI in Career and Technical Education

Mary Ann Remsen
Middle Tennessee State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Successful implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) models at the secondary level is dependent on school-wide execution. However, because academic content is the primary focus of secondary educators, little attention has been focused on how to integrate RTI within elective courses, such as career and technical education courses. This chapter examines RTI practices at the secondary level with a focus on school-wide implementation to include career and technical education courses. RTI components and protocols, a proposed revised RTI framework and inclusive elements, and specific intervention strategies are discussed, all as they specifically relate to career and technical education. The information presented herein will be useful for educators seeking to improve RTI outcomes through school-wide integration of intervention strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an intervention and prevention educational delivery model designed to assist struggling learners through a multi-tiered approach that provides research-based instruction at increasing levels of intensity over time. According to Fuchs, Fuchs, and Vaughn (2014), RTI intends to "improve the academic performance of struggling students with and without disabilities and to provide practitioners with a more valid means of disability identification" (p. 13). Although subject-matter mastery is a primary focus of secondary teachers, little attention is given as to how to support students struggling within elective courses, such as career and technical education (CTE) courses, even though those struggles are often linked to poor reading and math skills. It is critical that educators keep in mind that the success of RTI is dependent on its implementation as a school-wide intervention process (Johnson & Smith, 2008).

Career and technical education has a primary role at the secondary level in preparing students for employment due to the impact of globalization and the need for a more highly skilled workforce. Accordingly, current legislation is aimed at raising the academic and technical rigor of secondary and postsecondary CTE instruction to prepare students for entry into high-skill and wage occupations (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). As a result, many of the states have adopted common core standards (CCSs). These standards were developed to "ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life" (Common Core Standards Initiative, n.d., para. 2). As such, high schools are now taxed with providing all students with courses that will meet this Common Core Standard goal. Specifically, school districts are required to improve academic and technical quality in CTE programs by providing courses that combine academic and technical content.

While some type of postsecondary education is the future focus for many students, others prefer to get their formal training while in high school and start their employment upon graduation. These are the types of students for which the career and technical education classes were established. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2002), in 2002, high schools who had less than 50% of their student population on free and reduced lunch plans had 59% enrollment in career and technical education classes, and high schools that had more than 50% included in this program had 49% enrollment in these classes. Based on these statistics, approximately half of the high schools in the United States have students enrolled in career and technical education classes. Due to this large number, the Response to Intervention service delivery model should be incorporated into these courses so that the RTI-eligible students receive the same type of support they are receiving in their other academic courses, thus making RTI success more likely. Because students enrolled in career and technical courses are typically preparing for gainful employment or continued training after graduation, rather than college, Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2010, p. 27) maintained that one important question that should drive RTI for struggling students in CTE courses is the following: "What are the critical targets for increasing the probability of successful adult life outcomes?"

The process of integrating the Response to Intervention tiers into multiple career and technical classes is extremely complex. However, it is an important endeavor to undertake since it affects so many students and can play a key role in improving RTI outcomes. Thus, this chapter examines RTI practices within career and technical education at the high school level. More specifically, this chapter discusses RTI components and protocols, a proposed revised RTI framework and inclusive elements, and specific intervention strategies, all specifically related to career and technical education.

RTI COMPONENTS IN CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The primary role of career and technical educators is to improve their students' access to an academic program and maintain a strong technical program through the integration of scholarly and specialized content (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The requirement of meeting the combined goals of academic and career preparation is a unique challenge for secondary educators, as students who are enrolled in career and technical courses are not typically successful in language arts and math classes. Thus, these students would benefit from school-wide RTI implementation, as such implementation would focus on building and improving reading and math skills as they relate to career and technical education, and those increased skills would carry over to academic subjects as well. The students would be immersed in intervention throughout the school day, rather than in one or two content area classes.

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