

Chapter 12

Ongoing Issues Surrounding RTI

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ABSTRACT

Despite federal and state mandates regarding the use of the Response to Intervention (RTI) service delivery model and its widespread adoption in school districts across the nation, many issues still surround the model and its implementation, particularly at the secondary level. This chapter focuses on some of the more prevalent issues, including the importance of determining whether the RTI model as a whole is effective within middle and high school educational environments, how much time students should spend within each tier, how the roles of certain school personnel have changed with the implementation of the RTI model, the importance of providing transition services for all struggling students within RTI, how involved parents should be in the RTI process, how assessments are conducted within the model, and how gifted and talented students fit into the model.

INTRODUCTION

As part of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), the United State federal government decided that the severe discrepancy model was no longer a valid way to determine whether a child qualified for special education services under the specific learning disabilities category. With this change came Response to Intervention (RTI), an education reform movement focused on providing differentiated instruction “while reducing the number of students erroneously identified as having a learning disability when all they need is focused instruction to close education deficits” (Samuels, 2013, para. 4). The RTI service delivery model includes “effective general instruction, frequent progress monitoring of students, and research-based interventions with students who are not mastering the general curriculum” (Samuels, 2013, para. 5).

As of 2013, 14 states required that the Response to Intervention (RTI) service delivery model be used to determine whether students have a specific learning disability (Samuels, 2013). Per IDEA (2004), the remaining states must allow schools to use RTI for that purpose. Despite these mandates and widespread adoption of RTI in school districts across the nation, many issues still surround the model and its implementation. These issues will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

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ONGOING ISSUES

As Chapter 2 discussed, even though RTI has both federal and state support, no standardized model exists, especially within the middle and high school academic environments. Schools must implement the model according to their own needs and resources. This lack of a standardized model and specific federal direction regarding the implementation of RTI has led to a number of issues over the years. Some issues have existed since the inception of RTI, while others have arisen over time. A few of the more prevalent issues that continue to plague educators are discussed below.

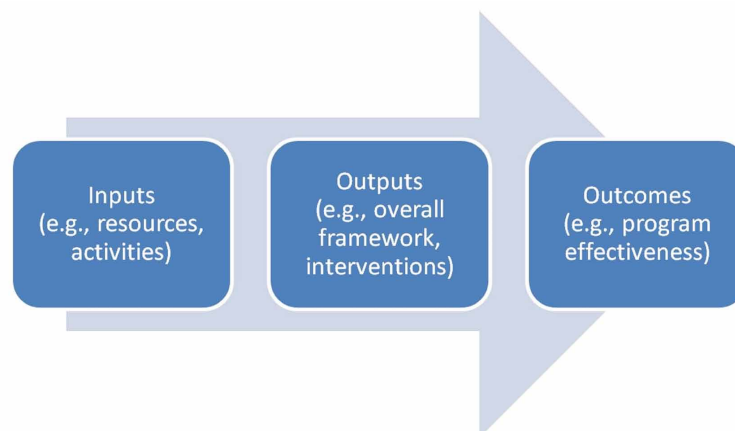
Effectiveness of RTI

One of the primary issues surrounding RTI has to do with how to determine whether RTI programs are functioning effectively within a specific school and/or district. Although schools spend a great deal of time evaluating students' success or failure within the model via progress monitoring, not nearly as much attention is given to evaluating the effectiveness of the model itself. Because school districts are permitted to design and implement the RTI model according to their own needs and resources, it is critical that they take the time to continually assess the effectiveness of their RTI program as a whole.

Howell, Patton, and Deiotte (2008) suggested that schools evaluate their RTI model using a logic model. According to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2004), "A logic model is a systematic and visual way to present and share your understanding of the relationships among the resources you have to operate your program, the activities you plan, and the changes or results you hope to achieve" (p. 1). Figure 1 shows an example of a basic logic model that could be employed with an RTI program.

With this model, the evaluation process begins by "assessing root causes or issues determining success or failure of RTI in five areas: leadership, management, curriculum, instruction and assessment" (Howell et al., p. 117). Once the successes and areas that need improvement are identified, goals can then be developed and data collection can begin. After a specified period of time, the data should be analyzed and conclusions and recommendations can be made. Howell et al. recommended that the logic model be followed at least twice during any given school year. This suggested level of frequency will allow the school and/or district to avoid any mid-year crises or surprises and handle any difficulties in a swift and timely manner.

Figure 1. Example of a basic logic model framework for RTI evaluation



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