

Chapter 49

Response to Intervention in the State of Florida

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ABSTRACT

The 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act led to an era of educational reform that called for scientifically based curriculum and data-driven decision-making when devising instructional strategies. Response to intervention was subsequently endorsed. Because students with disabilities were being included within the general education setting during this time, many states like Florida, made use of the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). This process was used to plan and problem-solve effective teaching strategies to improve student performance in reading and in mathematics. This chapter explores how Florida has used MTSS to narrow achievement gaps and create educational opportunities for all students.

INTRODUCTION

When referring to Response to Intervention (RTI), researchers mean multitiered, evidence-based interventions; this concept was championed by education researchers, administrators, and policy makers after the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 (Florida Department of Education [FDOE], 2013a; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). RTI, as it is most commonly known, has influenced reading and mathematics instruction by restructuring the service delivery model to include prevention of reading and mathematics difficulties (Afflerbach, Cho, Kim, Crassas, & Doyle, 2013; Bryant et al., 2016; FDOE, 2013a; Fuchs et al., 2014; Gilbert et al., 2013). This multi-tiered prevention system was developed to improve the performance of students struggling with learning difficulties and to provide educators with a valid means for determining eligibility for special education (FDOE, 2013b; Fuchs et al., 2014; Hughes & Dexter, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). RTI has also exerted influence on the general education setting by invoking widespread screening to identify academically at-risk students and progress monitoring to evaluate receptiveness to instruction.

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In RTI, the students' rate of learning and acquisition of skills, along with their level of performance over time, are used to inform instructional decisions. RTI involves systematically using assessment data to allocate resources in an efficient manner to improve learning for all students. RTI is also referred to as *data-based decision-making* applied to education. The key aspects of RTI include:

1. A service delivery model of multiple tiers of evidence-based instruction.
2. A method for problem-solving designed to inform how interventions are developed.
3. An integrated system of data collection, progress monitoring, and assessment to assist with decision-making at every tier of the service delivery model.
4. High-quality instruction and intervention matched to student needs (FDOE, 2013a; U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) in Florida

In June of 2008, FDOE published an **RTI Implementation Plan**, which included an initial, formal, state-level framework to assist districts with critical components, definitions, and applications to support the development of schoolwide implementations (FDOE, 2013b). This document marked an important point in the state's development—Phase I, Implementation for Problem-Solving and Response to Instruction/Intervention. Since 2004, Florida had engaged in continuous efforts to make sense of how systematic problem-solving and the RTI framework would integrate the various elements of Florida's system of education (FDOE, 2013b). As Florida's Phase I came to a close in 2011, Phase II of the statewide implementation emerged and became known as the Multitiered System of Supports, or MTSS (FDOE, 2013b). The statewide Florida Positive Behavior Support and Florida Problem-Solving/RTI Projects merged their efforts with Technology and Learning Connections for Assistive Technology and Universal Design for Learning to support the districtwide implementation of an integrated (academic and behavior), data-based planning- and problem-solving system (FDOE, 2013b).

The MTSS process in Florida is used with students who are struggling in one or more content areas. Florida's MTSS process is also used with students who have been identified as students with disabilities and are included in general education classes (FDOE, 2013b). Since the philosophy of MTSS centers around the needs of students and providing adequate supports and efficient use of resources, students with disabilities also reap the benefits (FDOE, 2013b).

MTSS includes three tiers of support, just like RTI. Tier 1 represents both the academic and behavioral instruction and interventions that are provided to all the students within a school. Tier 1 uses the core curriculum. Tier 2 is the academic and behavioral instruction and interventions afforded to students who demonstrate a need for support in addition to the instruction and intervention provided in Tier 1. *Supplemental* instruction and intervention is another term used when referencing Tier 2. Finally, Tier 3 encompasses the academic and behavioral instruction and interventions that are supplied to students who show a need for intensive and individualized assistance in addition to Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports. The term commonly used to describe Tier 3 is *intensive* instruction and intervention. Data collected at each tier are used to measure the efficiency of the supports. Based on the data, meaningful decisions can be made about the effectiveness of instruction and how interventions should be layered and maintained.

In Florida, at the school level, MTSS teams are formulated that use a data-driven, problem-solving process to make decisions about instruction, interventions, and supports. MTSS teams systematically use multi-source assessment data to efficiently allocate resources to improve learning for all students by

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