

RTI: What it is, What it Isn't

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You may have heard of a new term at your son or daughter's school this year. Yes, yet another set of letters to add to your alphabet soup maze! RtI, or Response to Intervention, refers to a model designed to assure that all students have access to scientifically-based instruction and a system of positive behavior supports within general education.

What RtI Is

According to the National Association of State Directors of Special Education and the Council of Administrators of Special Education, RtI is the practice of (1) providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and (2) using learning rates over time and level of performance to (3) make important educational decisions (NASDSE, 2006). This model is a general education problem-solving practice designed to assess and support students who are having difficulty learning. RtI stems from language found in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and from the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA that focuses on improving academic achievement by using scientifically-based instructional practices.

Unofficially, the theory is that most children are in special education because they have reading problems. Over the years, education and government officials have questioned whether those children have true learning disabilities or have suffered from lack of good instruction in reading. In theory, if reading instruction within general education could be improved, then the number of students identified as needing special education services might be reduced and the available funding might cover a greater degree of the costs for those remaining children who have true disabilities (current federal government funding only covers about 10% of special education costs). Regardless of the unofficial or official rationale for RtI, education and government entities have embraced this concept and hope that when implemented correctly, achievement for all students will be raised.

In order to clarify appropriate implementation, NASDSE identified the following core principles of RtI:

- all children can be effectively taught
- intervention must occur early using a multi-tier model of service delivery
- a problem-solving methodology must be used to identify appropriate interventions
- interventions must be research-based and scientifically-validated
- student progress is monitored in order to inform

instruction

- student progress data informs decisions about programming and service delivery
- assessment is used to screen and diagnose potential learning problems by assessing specific skills embedded in school standards, and to monitor progress made by students

Again, these are principles that are applied PRIOR to referral to special education and to assure that the need for special education services is not a result of inadequate instruction. The figure below shows the three-tiered model that illustrates the multiple levels of support that are provided to all students with increasing intensity: at Tier 1, 80% of students benefit from interventions that are preventative and proactive; at Tier 2, we find another 15% of students who need more intensive supports that consist of targeted group interventions; and Tier 3 is reserved for the approximately 5% of students who need intensive, individualized interventions (NASDSE, 2006).

What RtI Is Not

First, this is a model originally designed for students with learning or behavior problems. It is not a model to prevent students with hearing loss or other sensory impairments or significant disabilities from receiving special education and related services. Response to Intervention is a general education problem solving process to assist students to learn by improving and adjusting the instruction provided. It should not be considered a pre-referral step for special education. However, once all of the core elements of RtI are implemented, any child who is not making adequate progress within the model should be referred to determine whether they are eligible for special education and related services.

What does all of this mean for students who are deaf and hard of hearing? What can you do?

1. RtI cannot be used as a reason to stall or prevent a referral for special education. If your child has a diagnosed hearing loss, sign the referral for special education evaluation and proceed with the process to determine eligibility.
2. Since most of our students who are deaf or hard of hearing receive the majority of their instruction within the general education classroom application of the key components and core principles of RtI identified by NASDSE should result in improved instruction and accommoda-

tions. Ask your child's general education teachers to describe how they are implementing the principles of RtI in the classroom.

3. The focus on research-based and scientifically-validated interventions emphasizes the need for use of curricula and teaching strategies that have documented evidence of success. Specialized reading and other academic programs commonly used in deaf education do not usually have the necessary proven evidence to support their use. The need to use scientifically validated interventions should fuel more research in deaf education to develop programs and strategies that are research-based (Luckner, Muir, Howell, Sebald, & Young, 2005; Easterbrooks & Stephenson, 2006). Ask your child's deaf education teacher for evidence that demonstrates the validity of the programs and strategies that are being used with your child. Ask how progress is being monitored and to see evidence that your child is making good progress.
4. Speaking of progress, a term that is frequently used in RtI discussions, and is a basic component of the program, is "progress-monitoring". Progress monitoring involves the use of frequent probes (daily, weekly) to monitor the progress that a student is making AND, when necessary, to use the performance information to adjust the strategies, accommodations, and instruction to assure that the student is making appropriate learning gains. While it is primarily academic progress that is monitored, the adjustments that can be made to improve learning include accommodations. Therefore, if your child is having difficulty in school and the teacher fails to consistently implement a recommended accommodation, such as using the FM system or providing access to what other students have said by repeating their comments, remind the teacher how critical appropriate use of the accommodation is to your child's ability to learn. In this example, clearly the lack of access to information from the teacher and the other students limits what the child is able to learn.
5. There are many students who have varying degrees of hearing loss who are not eligible for special education services because the hearing loss does not have a significant impact on the student's ability to learn. This pyramid of strategies suggests increasing supports that can be applied to assist students with hearing loss in the general education classroom within gen-

eral education. Whether your child is in special education or not, use this checklist to determine if basic interventions are being applied within the general education classroom to assist your child. (Note: This is not an exhaustive list of interventions but meant to represent common strategies.)

Tier 1:

Core Intervention- all students, preventive, pro-active

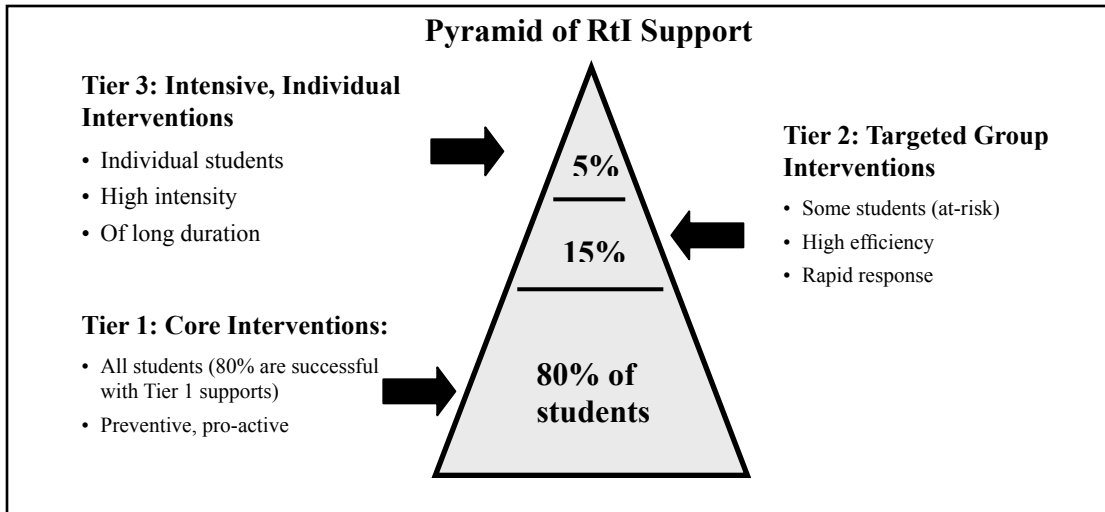
- Staff awareness of signs of hearing loss
- Hearing screening to identify hearing loss
- Hearing loss prevention education
- Classroom acoustical modifications
- General classroom communication accommodations including consideration of classroom sound distribution system in classrooms with high ambient noise levels
- Multi-sensory reading techniques
- Frequent checks for comprehension
- Experiential education opportunities
- Good lighting
- Reduction of visual/auditory distractions
- Predictable routine with structure and paired with language
- Graphic organizers
- Monitor learning rate and level of performance
- Problem-solve to adjust strategies

Tier 2:

Targeted Group Interventions

Tier 1 Interventions plus:

- Inservice education about implications of HL for staff and students
- Specialized assessments
- Targeted accommodations to provide communication access
- Assistive Technology
- Monitor implementation of accommodations and use of assistive technology to assure appropriate use (when used)
- Discuss and problem-solve concerns with parents/student



Tier 3:

Intensive, Individualized Interventions

Tier 1 & 2 Interventions plus:

- Core and expanded core curriculum
- Specialized instruction
- Determine interventions with parent and student input
- Individualized accommodations
- Training for general educators about deaf education and the roles of other support service providers
- Team meetings to assure interventions are implemented appropriately
- Resources for specialized assessments/consultation

RtI has many benefits for children with hearing loss. Expectations that all children can learn, the use of high-quality instruction and intervention, close monitoring of your child's learning rate, and use of problem-solving techniques to guide instruction and interventions are

important components that must be part of every child's educational program whether receiving special education services or not. For more information on RtI, the NASDSE publication, *Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation (2005)* is recommended. It may be ordered from: www.nasdse.org/projects.cfm?pageprojectid=23 ~

References

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