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Introduction

This book, *RTI Toolkit: A Practical Guide for Schools*, was written to provide educators with the necessary guidance and tools to implement **Response to Intervention (RTI)** in a school setting. A guiding philosophy of this book is that “the quality of a school as a learning community can be measured by how effectively it addresses the needs of struggling students.” (Wright, 2006, p.1). Schools are judged by their success in working with marginal learners who would otherwise fall through the cracks and become lost. RTI is a means to expand schools’ capacity to reach and support diverse learners.

As will be discussed in the first chapter, the RTI model encompasses three Tiers of intervention: Tier I, universal strategies for all children; Tier II, interventions individualized to the needs of at-risk learners; and Tier III, intensive interventions for students with severe, chronic academic or behavioral needs. It is clear that RTI has the potential to grow into an immense, sprawling initiative, spanning the breadth of programs and services available within a school or district. A school that is just beginning the RTI process should choose its initial goals carefully to avoid becoming overwhelmed at the magnitude of the task.

For example, Tier I, universal strategies fall squarely within the domain of general education. And many forces, e.g., Boards of Education, staff and community expectations, state and federal regulations, exert a controlling influence on the content of general education, including its curricula and grading and testing criteria. Those implementing RTI must recognize, therefore, that, at least in the short term, their ability to reform the domain of general education is probably limited. In a similar manner, Tier III, intensive, intervention resources in many schools are largely restricted to those available through special education. Because special education services tend to be both expensive and highly regulated, those spearheading RTI in a school are likely to have only a limited impact in changing the manner in which these Tier III resources are allocated.

The book operates with the expectation that a group introducing the RTI process to a school is likely to have only limited resources with which to work and will be most successful if it concentrates the majority of its initial energy at the Tier II, individualized, intervention level. It was written expressly to help administrators, teachers, school psychologists, parents, and other school stakeholders accomplish this task. Although it does provide suggestions to schools for inventorying and organizing their Tier I universal and Tier III intensive student supports to integrate them into RTI. In the first year, the initial task of an RTI, implementation group should be to build the school’s capacity at the Tier II level to:

- Identify students at risk for learning or behavioral issues,
- Tailor intervention plans to meet their needs,
- Monitor these students' progress over time to ensure that they are closing the gap with their peers, and
- Adopt decision rules to know when struggling students have not responded to intervention and should be referred on to Special Education.

Three assumptions form the foundation of this book:

1. *The primary focus of Tier II (individualized) interventions is the classroom.* Under the RTI model (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003; Kovalski, 2003, December), schools may choose to establish stand-alone programs for students who require individualized interventions using the standard protocol approach, develop unique intervention plans for every student that the classroom teacher is expected to carry out using problem-solving approach, or adopt a combination of classroom and stand-alone intervention options. This book assumes that most of the interventions that the school designs will be centered in the classroom with a problem-solving approach; furthermore, these interventions will require the full participation of the classroom teacher. (However, the resources in this volume will also be very useful to schools that opt instead to establish stand-alone intervention programs.)
2. *The best mechanism to plan and support Tier II, individualize, interventions is a multi-disciplinary problem-solving team.* To implement RTI correctly, schools must be familiar with: a structured format for problem-solving; effective research-based interventions to address a range of academic and behavioral concerns; methods for student progress-monitoring and data analysis; and other specialized skills and knowledge. In any school, the most efficient way to get quick access to these competencies is to assemble a problem-solving team made up of teachers, support staff, and administrators. A bedrock assumption throughout this book is that RTI Teams will serve as the vehicle to assist teachers in putting together and monitoring individualized student intervention plans. Recruiting and training such a team should be a primary objective for any school starting RTI.
3. *Response to Intervention is the dominant initiative of the school.* RTI is an ambitious undertaking. Among other things, RTI requires that a school change its culture so that classroom teachers feel empowered to put individualized intervention plans in place for struggling students with support from

the building's RTI Team. It will be difficult to win over "reluctant" teachers to RTI however, if school staff believe that this initiative is just a fad that will vanish in one or two years. To promote RTI, schools should make an effort to educate staff about the initiative and make clear that RTI is the dominant organizing framework to be used in the school when planning group or individual student intervention services. To reinforce this message, schools should explicitly link RTI to other school-wide initiatives (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and services provided through Reading First grant funds).

This book is organized as a series of steps that are essential to creating a successful RTI project:

- Chapter 1: Decision-makers in a school educate themselves about the elements of the Response to Intervention model, including its 3-tier system for organizing intervention resources and the use of a dual-discrepancy formula to diagnose Learning Disabilities.
- Chapter 2: The school develops a plan to launch the RTI project, by informing stakeholders about the model, setting up an RTI Steering Group, and otherwise preparing the building for this initiative.
- Chapter 3: The school establishes an RTI Intervention Team, with the skills necessary to implement and monitor individualized student intervention plans.
- Chapter 4: The school builds its capacity to select evidence-based interventions, package those interventions into classroom-friendly plans, and monitor the quality with which those plans are implemented.
- Chapter 5: To monitor the effectiveness of its individualized student intervention plans, the school uses academic and behavioral measures that are valid, reliable, and sensitive to short-term progress.
- Chapter 6: The school adopts decision rules to judge student academic progress and decide whether the intervention plan is effective.
- Chapter 7: The school strives continuously to update and improve its Response-to-Intervention process to take advantage of advances in RTI research.

In closing, the reader is reminded that RTI is a vast and rapidly evolving topic. No single book, including this one, can hope to answer all questions about how to

implement RTI in schools. Any attempt to write a truly comprehensive RTI book would result in a multi-volume set the size of an encyclopedia. But it would be outdated the moment that it was published. This book does, however, provide the essential framework and set of practical tools required to begin the very important process of implementing RTI in a school or district.

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