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referrals. These behavioral indicators become very important in decisions about interventions for older students.

4. *Determining Decision Rules.* The essential decision in the screening process is determining the criterion for classification. What is the cut score for determining risk? Some students will perform on the edge of the cut score, so guidelines must be established for determining when a particular student's performance warrants further investigation.

## Screening in Practice

This section provides one school-based example of how screening occurs and how the results are used to inform decisions about curricular choices and students' tier placement.

### **Jefferson Elementary School, Pella, Iowa**

#### *Overview and Demographics*

Jefferson Elementary School has a total enrollment of 500 students, with two sections each of kindergarten through third grade and six sections each of fourth and fifth grades. Nearly equal numbers of boys and girls attend the school. About 14% of the students (70) are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch, and about 6.6% (33) receive special education services. Five percent (25) of the students are minority students, and the rest are Caucasian; 1.2% of the students (six) are English language learners.

Jefferson Elementary's RTI model consists of five tiers, in which the first four tiers represent interventions that become increasingly intense; the fifth tier is special education.

#### *Screening for Reading Problems*

Kindergarteners and first graders are screened using Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (Kaminski & Good, 1998) assessments in the fall, winter, and spring. The school also uses DIBELS fluency and accuracy assessments for students in the second and third grades; and the Fuchs, Hamlett, and Fuchs (1997) fluency and accuracy assessments for students in the fourth and fifth grades. In addition to the fluency and accuracy measures, students in the second through fifth grades are assessed with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in November, and the Gates-McGinitie (McGinitie, McGinitie, Maria,

Dreyer, & Hughes, 1999) in April. Second graders are also given the Gates-McGinitie in October.

#### *Screening Data and Reference Points*

When analyzing students' screening data, the school uses reference points, not specific cut scores. The reference points are used to indicate whether a student is performing below expectations and to guide school staff members as they determine appropriate interventions for students. The reference points, or scores, match up with proficiency scores of standardized tests.

No single score stands alone in determining interventions for students. Data from multiple sources are used to determine which students need instruction beyond Tier I and which interventions would be most effective in meeting student needs.

#### *Analyzing Data*

The literacy team, which includes general and special education teachers, reading intervention teachers, district staff, the curriculum director, and the principal, meets three times a year for Literacy Day sessions. These sessions, which occur just after districtwide student screenings, allow team members to review the districtwide screening data as well as data from the other schoolwide screening measures. Data are then used to make changes to student interventions and to identify students who require interventions that are more individualized and more intensive.

The team collects data on a "Literacy Day Data" sheet, which includes the names of the students in a class and scores earned by each of those students on fluency and accuracy measures, as well as the Gates-McGinitie comprehension and vocabulary tests. A companion sheet, "Literacy Day Notes," is used during meeting discussions to note a student's area of need, current intervention, and comments. An end result of the discussion is to make adjustments as needed based on student data. Students with skill deficits are considered for services, whereas students with extension needs are considered for gifted and talented placement.

#### *Screening Challenges*

Time is the biggest challenge. Staff members have trained a group of volunteers to administer fluency and accuracy screenings to reduce

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the time teachers spend on assessments. They also have student interns from Central College to help administer, score, and record data.

Determining appropriate screening materials is another challenge. Finding screening measures to assess particular skills is difficult. Additionally, using multiple sources of data to inform the decision-making process takes organization, time, and careful analysis.

Finally, using the data to make appropriate decisions regarding interventions has been challenging for Jefferson Elementary staff. The data must be collected, recorded, and sorted in a way that facilitates analysis. At times, student screening data suggest the need for an intervention for which the school has no resources.

## Summary

When RTI is implemented with fidelity and rigor, all students should benefit. An initial step in the RTI process is ensuring that students who are at risk for academic or behavioral difficulties are identified as early as possible. Early identification avoids the added complications students encounter through repeated failure, including negative changes in self-concept and efficacy. Schoolwide screening provides the initial closer examination at students' learning and performance, and those screening results can be used for indicating those students needing closer monitoring and more intense interventions and supports than are available in the Tier 1 of general education.

## Resources

The following resources may support your implementation of universal screening efforts:

- **National Research Center on Learning Disabilities**  
(<http://www.nrclid.org>)

The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities engages in research designed to help the learning disabilities field understand policies, practices, and prevalence of learning