

Reading Expert



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Response to Intervention is NOT a Quicker Route to Special Education

by Linda Diamond

Response to Intervention (RtI) was intended to provide a way to quickly identify students needing extra support and then provide it within the general education setting, instead of deferring identification and assistance until a student has been formally identified as qualifying for special education.

Unfortunately, this appropriate intent has been lost in some schools and districts. Students who score poorly on initial screening tests may be immediately referred to tier 2 or even tier 3 intervention and possibly after a rather short trial moved quickly to a special education referral. What is wrong with this picture?

As originally conceived, RtI should first and foremost address deficiencies in tier 1 (core) curriculum. Rather than immediately

"RtI urges schools to use evidence-based practices in all tiers and to provide intensive services only to students who fail to benefit from a well-designed [and executed], evidence-based intervention."

—IES Practice Guide, *Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention and Multi-Tier Intervention*

assume that students with low screening scores need extra support, it is important to first gauge whether or not the general education tier 1 program is sufficiently well designed and executed to enable most students to be successful. In fact, faithful implementation of the tier 1 program is the first intervention.



The RtI 11th Commandment

"Thou shalt not try to fix thy core program through supplemental and intensive instruction."

—Dave Tilly, Ph.D.



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Steps to Ensure Effective Tier 1

1
Carefully select a well-designed reading program.

2
Purchase all essential materials and extra support components.

3
Provide adequate initial training of staff to ensure they can start effectively.

4
Establish a system of ongoing coaching, practice, and support to guide teachers as they implement.

5
Regularly collect programmatic assessment data to enable leadership to identify staff development and coaching needs of teachers, fidelity of implementation, and needs of students.

6
Provide training to teachers on how to gather and interpret student data in order to differentiate within tier 1.

7
Ensure teachers understand the difference between differentiation within tier 1 and intensified assistance in tier 2.

8
Develop a schoolwide plan for differentiated instruction organization and time allocations as part of tier 1.

9
Design clearly understood decision rules for student differentiation within tier 1 and for moving students to tier 2.

About CORE

CORE works collaboratively with schools, districts, state organizations, and education agencies around the country as a trusted advisor at all levels of K–12 education to support literacy and math achievement growth for all students.



What About Adolescents?

Similar to elementary schools and early grades, schools need to start by ensuring their core general education classes are robust. All classes must include strong instructional practices to enable students to learn increasingly academic and sophisticated vocabulary and strategies to comprehend complex narrative and informational text. Multi-tier models also work in secondary schools. Intervention classes, specifically tailored to meet the needs of struggling adolescents, need to be built into the master schedule. In order to place students in intensive interventions, it is vital to know student achievement data. The IES Practice Guide *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices* recommends a two-step process:

1. An initial screening (ideally completed at the end of the prior year) to identify students needing extra help
2. Diagnostic tests to pinpoint literacy strengths and weaknesses

"IES Panel members recognized that some students [in upper grades] need more intense help to improve literacy skills than classroom teachers can provide"

—IES Practice Guide, *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*, August 2008

Once learning needs have been identified, schools should select (if not already planned for) specific intervention materials and approaches targeted to the student. In some cases, the intervention can be a supplemental or add-on to a regular English class. In other cases, students will need smaller classes and a longer, more specialized intervention that might replace the standard English course. While no one model will fit all schools, all schools must plan for the needs of struggling adolescents.

