High School Tiered Interventions Initiative

The Implementation of Tiered Interventions and RTI in High Schools

National Center on Response to Intervention

National High School Center

CENTER ON INSTRUCTION

GENERAL

1. Question: Our staff was curious about the method of choosing these eight schools. Were they volunteers or model programs?

> **Answer:** *These schools were nominated by state departments, technical assistance providers, and researchers in the field. We were not looking for models schools. Instead, we were looking for the variations in high school RTI models across the country.*

2. Question: Will there be a report detailing the findings of each individual school?

> **Answer:** *The HSTII team will soon be releasing a document that contains brief descriptions of how each participating school is implementing each tier and component of RTI. We also hope to include representatives from the participating schools in future webinars.*

3. Question: Will contact information from the schools you visited be made available so that we might contact them directly?

> **Answer:** *In order to comply with our Internal Review Board, we are unable to provide any identifying information on the schools who participated, including in which states they are located.*

4. Question: Is this a research study on RTI practices? How do we go about getting a partnership developed with you to evaluate our RTI system?

> **Answer:** *Our work is not a research study; rather, it is a primary look at what high schools are doing in terms of RTI implementation. Our project is not evaluating schools' RTI frameworks.*

STRUCTURE

5. Question: Is RTI recommended for students already receiving special education services?

> **Answer:** *The Texas Center for Learning Disabilities (TCLD) (http://www.texasldcenter.org/faqs.asp) notes the following:*
>
> "RTI is a system for allocating instruction and resources within schools. RTI uses assessment and instructional strategies to ensure that each student's needs are met. RTI can include both students at risk for LD and students identified as having LD, as well as students served in other 'entitlement' programs or simply in general education.
>
> Some schools have chosen to include RTI as part of the special education eligibility process. In these schools, an RTI framework provides part of the data used to decide whether a student should be evaluated for LD. However, simply participating in an RTI process is not sufficient to establish eligibility for special education; IDEA requires a comprehensive evaluation that draws from the multiple sources of information that are deemed necessary by the interdisciplinary team that makes the eligibility determination. Some schools have chosen to include special education within the RTI system of tiered instruction. In these schools, students with individualized education plans (IEPs) are provided services within an RTI framework.

IDEAs that Work

U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION · UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

For students with disabilities, like all students, an RTI framework will help by encouraging teachers to use data to select instructional strategies that meet students' specific needs. A student can be referred for evaluation for special education at any time during an RTI process, but most students need the opportunity to participate in multiple interventions in order to establish educational need."

6. Question: Were there any standard protocols in place or did all the schools use an individual problem-solving model?

Answer: *We saw both. We saw some schools using a standard protocol model. Some were using problem solving models.*

7. Question: Did you see that schools were having difficulty finding staff because of the "highly qualified" definition under No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?

Answer: *The schools that we talked to and visited did not mention difficulty of finding staff due to the "highly qualified" definition under NCLB.*

8. Question: Was the RTI focus determined at the school or district level?

Answer: *We saw both. Some of the schools had a district initiative that the school was implementing. So the district had set the focus, and the high school had looked at their data closely and determined how to move forward given the district focus. In some of the schools, it was the high school itself that created the focus after looking at their data.*

9. Question: How many of these eight sites had leadership involvement from the district level? What are some examples of what that leadership support looked like?

Answer: *We did not specifically ask each site about the level of support from the district. However, several sites volunteered information about the support they received from either the district and/or state level. Very rarely did the support come in the form of fiscal, instructional, and/or assessment resources; rather, the support typically involved giving the schools the latitude and flexibility to use existing resources in a variety of ways and the ability to adjust the master schedule.*

IMPLEMENTATION

10. Question: Where would you begin with a high school staff that has little background with RTI? Do you have a suggestion for a good book study that could get the conversations started?

Answer: *We would suggest that the high school staff begin by taking inventory of existing resources, programs, and ongoing initiatives and then conduct a needs-assessment for implementing RTI. Many times schools already have pieces of RTI in place and simply need to align existing resources in a systematic way. This approach will prevent teachers from becoming overwhelmed and viewing RTI as something completely new that is replacing current practice or as something that is being added to their workload. Having staff review existing data that shows a need for student improvement and explaining how the RTI framework has the potential to improve student outcomes may also be an effective way to achieve teacher buy-in.*

Suggested books include:

Buffum, A., Mattos, M., & Weber, C. (2009). Pyramid response to intervention: RTI, professional learning communities, and how to respond when kids don't learn. *Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.*

Mellard, D. F., & Johnson, E. (2008). RTI: A practitioner's guide to implementing response to intervention. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Shinn, M. R. (2008). RTI at the secondary level. In S. L. Fernley, S. D., Norlin, J. (Ed.) What do I do when…The answer book on RTI. *Horsham, PA: LRP Publications.*

11. Question: At the sites you visited, were any of the CBM tools developed locally used for special education eligibility? In Colorado, our new criteria for SLD requires nationally normed progress monitoring tools, which is tricky in high schools.

Answer: *To our knowledge, the locally-developed CBM tools were not used for special education eligibility.*

12. Question: While it is important to include a range of progress monitoring tools to give a range of information to help guide decision-making, would reliance on decision-making using tools that are Professional Learning Community (PLC)- or staff-developed for progress monitoring in the content areas be considered research-based? This staff -created data would seem helpful while supplementing research-based Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) or normed tools, such as reading, math, and written language progress monitoring tools. What are your thoughts?

Answer: *While the concept of CBM is research-based, tools that are PLC- or staff-developed for progress monitoring in the content areas would not be considered research-based. However, in the absence of research-based progress monitoring tools appropriate for use at the secondary level, CBMs that are aligned with instructional standards can provide utility in secondary schools.*

13. Question: Is it important that universal screening and progress monitoring tools be able to "talk" to each other?

Answer: *Some schools were using state guidance. The state had recommended the use of RTI at the secondary level, and they, in a sense, became early adopters, trying it out. A lot of the schools that we saw were in the initial implementation phase and were working out a lot of the kinks, which will help many of you in your future implementation.*

14. Question: At which point in a multi-tiered framework should parent notification take place while increasing intensity of services in either the standard protocol or problem-solving model?

Answer: *The Office of Special Education provides guidance on this topic at http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CQaCorner%2C8%2C under Section C: Evaluation and Eligibility Determinations. Please check your state guidelines on parental notification for referrals to special education.*

15. Question: Why would you avoid an intervention that was used at a feeder school, especially if it was a successful tool? Wouldn't it be helpful for students to continue with the familiar, as opposed to starting something different?

Answer: *One school decided that if students hadn't made progress with the intervention used at the middle school, then it was important for students to have a different intervention program. The school staff also felt that they wanted to demonstrate that high school was different from middle school and thought that one way of demonstrating this was by choosing a different intervention program.*

16. Question: When you say that the student receives an "elective" credit when he/she is pulled from an elective to receive RTI interventions, does this mean that the student receives a credit from his/her elective class even though he/she hasn't attended/completed work in that class?

> **Answer:** *If a student was pulled from an elective course to receive additional interventions, then he/she received elective credit for the intervention course, not the elective class he/she was originally enrolled in.*

17. Question: For schools with a 90-minute seminar built in, what were students who weren't receiving the intervention services doing?

> **Answer:** *Often, all students still had an assigned room to go to during the seminar time. Those needing additional help were placed with content teachers to receive support or in a seminar with multiple content area teachers to support students. In one school, the seminar time was more flexible and students could also use the cafeteria, which was supervised by an administrator and other school staff.*

18. Question: Can you provide any details about how they operated the tutoring centers? We have one in place in our building and are always looking for ways to improve.

> **Answer:** *The tutoring centers were integrated into their RTI frameworks, meaning that students went to the tutoring center to receive secondary or tertiary interventions.*

19. Question: Can you describe the tiered interventions the schools were using beyond the guided study hall you mentioned? I'd be interested in hearing how students needing more intensive (i.e., Tier III) interventions were having their academic needs met.

> **Answer:** *The Tier III interventions (along with the entire framework) were significantly tailored to meet the focus of each school's framework. The schools we visited that were using guided study halls for Tier II interventions often had students receiving Tier III supports in lieu of an elective class or in place of the Tier II intervention. These ranged from branded programs to teacher-developed curriculum.*

20. Question: What are some of the more effective strategies you've seen for getting buy-in?

> **Answer:** *For this project, we did not evaluate the strategies used by schools. Our purpose was to document how RTI was being implemented within a select group of schools. Of the schools we visited, it appeared that buy-in was gained through coming to a common understanding about what are RTI is and how it could positively impact the student population at the school. Some schools made strategic efforts to focus on the implementation of individual components of RTI (screening, tiered instruction, progress monitoring, and data decision-making) as opposed to implementing "RTI" within the school. Many believed initially avoiding the term RTI was more effective given the misconceptions among many teachers and staff about what was RTI. Once teachers and staff understood the individual components and how they aligned to improve student achievement, it was easier to talk about RTI in general. Some schools did note that getting buy-in from all teachers continued to be a challenge, especially in schools in the initial implementation process.*

21. Question: How do we leverage staff when we have limited resources in terms of personnel and money? Our psychologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, and speech language pathologist are contracted to serve our students from two days a week to two times per month. We have one special education teacher and one administrator.

Answer: *The schools we visited often leveraged staff based on the focus of their tiered intervention framework. In one school, the primary focus was on literacy, therefore the school reorganized to create a literacy coach position. (The literacy coach was previously a classroom instructor). Determining the focus of the tiered framework should then help identify what staff could be involved in the process.*

Although research has established a "first step" for RTI implementation, it sounds like starting with professional development for all content teachers in strengthening the primary level of instruction would be beneficial. This would then reduce the number of students who need to receive secondary or tertiary interventions.

22. Question: How much time should teachers spend in collaboration?

Answer: *Some school staff noted that they believed collaboration was an important component of RTI implementation. However, many also noted that scheduling times to collaborate was a challenge to implementation. Professional learning communities (PLCs; see www.allthingsplc.info for more information) were used in several schools as a structure for collaborating and analyzing data. In some of schools we visited, teachers and other schools staff met once a week or once every other week to review and make instructional adjustments based on assessment data.*

23. Question: How do you avoid "stigma" with regard to moving through tiers, especially with adolescents and the importance of peer approval? This is a question that does not seem to be such a problem for the younger students.

Answer: *It depends on the focus. One of the schools that we visited had a teacher who was talking about how she was now in charge of providing remedial instruction on the content area that they were focused on. Other teachers asked that specific question. The teacher said there was an initial reaction of, "I don't want to do this," but they re-screened the students and had the students help do the scoring process. Once that had taken place and students realized that they saw and had evidence that they were struggling, they realized it was in their benefit to get this information. A few of the schools talked about this initial resistance toward it, but providing the students the opportunity to re-screen and involving them involved in the scoring process mitigated concerns. In general, schools said that the students that were really struggling knew it, and several students were happy that they were getting the support that they needed and weren't getting up to this point.*

Getting students involved early in the identification of at-risk students is important, but there are other steps the schools can take to minimize stigma. I think stigma can materialize if we create "RTI classes" for "RTI kids"; RTI is a pretty neutral word, but we can turn it into something that can stigmatize kids if we're not careful about how we use it. I think it has something to do with how we organize services and how we talk about the things that we're doing. My first reaction is that there's nothing more stigmatizing than to fail in school because usually it's not a secret to anyone. I think there are ways that we can do this. A lot of it has to do with the conversations that we have about these young adults, that we include them in the discussions that we're having—about whether they're an at-risk student and the supports and interventions that we might deliver—and get their input of the delivery of those supports.

24. Question: As a member of a parent organization, what is the percentage of parent involvement in RTI?

Answer: *In the schools that we visited, parental involvement was generally associated with being invited to intervention team meetings and/or receiving information about the tiered intervention framework. We hope to find more examples of active parent involvement in RTI at the secondary level in the future.*

25. Question: Did any of the schools have data or evidence that showed that RTI implementation made a difference?

> **Answer:** *Most of the schools did not have data or evidence that directly showed that RTI or the tiered interventions made a difference on student achievement. However, most of the administrators and staff said that student achievement was improving and they felt that this was related to the implementation of RTI and tiered interventions.*

BEHAVIOR

26. Question: If RTI is to look at the whole student, what is being used on the discipline side?

> **Answer:** *For the schools implementing RTI in both academics and behavior, the schools typically implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which fits nicely under the RTI umbrella. For more information on how PBIS and RTI fit together, please see Rob Horner's webinar from January 2010 posted on the NCRTI's website (www.rti4success.org) or visit the PBIS Center's website at (www.pbis.org).*
>
> *If schools were not implementing PBIS, there was a strong focus on setting expectations around behavior. It's something that we want to look into more in terms of the behavioral side for future work.*

27. Question: Please list some Tier I, II, and III interventions for tardies, absences, or poor homework completion.

> **Answer:** *For this particular project, we did not evaluate interventions nor did we look at interventions for certain populations used by the selected schools. However, of the schools we visited, some employed an individual problem-solving approach to address challenges such as excessive tardies and absences or poor homework completion. They believed this approach was effective since the reasons for these issues vary among the students. Check and Connect is often considered a dropout prevention strategy, but in some cases, people are also using it as a behavioral intervention. Regardless of whether you chose to use individual or school-wide strategies, make sure that the intervention addresses the cause of these issues through an analysis of your school data.*

28. Question: In a seminar-type RTI class, how did the model schools handle students who did not put forth effort or did not wish to be there?

> **Answer:** *Schools participating in this project were selected to represent the variations in RTI implementation at the high school level and not to serve as model schools. That said, we did visit schools where teachers noted that motivation could be an explanation for a student's lack of response to an intervention. These schools often used a problem-solving approach to identify the cause of the student's lack of interest and address the challenge individually. For more information about school connectedness, please the Center for Disease Control's "Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth" at http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/AdolescentHealth/connectedness.htm.*

29. Question: Have you considered the use of universal screening for early warning risks in RTI? (Reference to National High School Center's "Approaches to Dropout Prevention: Heeding Early Warning Signs with Appropriate Interventions").

Answer: *Early warning risks could be an example of a screening system if your focus was on that dimension. This is really going to depend on your focus in terms of how you are framing your overall model. To a certain extent, that's the driving factor for it. It's hard to give a general response to that. When we were discussing the alignment of current initiatives in today's presentation, early warning risks could be part of that. If you already have that in place, that's a great way to start. I think it's one of those things that can really help move the framework and implementation forward.*

REFERENCES

30. Question: Can you please post the research institutions (i.e., universities) that Greg mentioned early on in the presentation?

Answer:

- *Literacy – Research sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) with the following universities and organizations: the University of Texas at Austin (The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk), the University of Houston (Texas Center for Learning Disabilities), Florida State University (The Florida Center for Reading Research), and Johns Hopkins University (Center for Research and Reform)*
- *Math – Anne Foegen at Iowa State University and Douglas & Lynn Fuchs at Vanderbilt University*
- *Content Area – The National Center for Research on the Educational Achievement and Teaching of English Language Learners (CREATE) (For more information, visit http://www.cal.org/create/)*
- *Progress Monitoring in Reading – Research sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) with the following universities and organizations: the University of Texas at Austin (The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk), the University of Houston (Texas Center for Learning Disabilities), Florida State University (The Florida Center for Reading Research), and Johns Hopkins University (Center for Research and Reform)*
- *Progress Monitoring in Writing – Research Institute on Progress Monitoring at the University of Minnesota (For more information, visit http://www.progressmonitoring.net/)*
- *Fidelity – State Implementation of Scaling-up Evidence-based Practices (SISEP) Center led by Dean Fixsen from the University of North Carolina and Rob Horner from the University of Oregon (For more information, visit http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~sisep/)*

31. Question: Where do you recommend that high schools start when implementing RTI literacy and other content area interventions?

Answer: *We have not developed a list of interventions for each core content area and do not feel comfortable recommending specific first steps. However, most schools implementing RTI in literacy and other content areas at all levels began with focusing on assessment data (typically from screening measures) to determine how effective the Tier I curriculum is at meeting the academic, and, if applicable, behavioral needs of the majority of students. For information on researched based interventions in various content areas, please visit the What Works Clearinghouse (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/) and Center on Instruction (www.centeroninstruction.org).*

32. Question: What do you suggest to use as a universal screening tool?

Answer: *The National Center on Response to Intervention provides a review of screening tools available for K-12 (www.rti4success.org). In our observations, we did not see a standard assessment used across all of the schools; the type of screening assessments used depended highly on the outcome of the RTI model of the school. For example, some schools used published screening tools such as AIMSweb or MAPS whereas others used outcome data from previous school year, attendance rates, or class grades to identify students at risk.*

33. Question: What are most schools using for progress monitoring in reading and math?

Answer: *We did not evaluate schools—we want to make that clear. We went in and looked at what schools were using. Many of the schools were using data systems that were already created for their districts, like those that were being used in their elementary schools. Some of them were also using published data systems, such as AIMSweb. Some were using a very rudimentary system with Excel spreadsheets and assessments they had created on their own.*

In math, most schools are using teacher/school-created curriculum-based measurements. These measures are often connected to their state standards. For reading, it is mostly oral reading fluency measures and cloze/maze passages for comprehension. The National Center on Response to Intervention has reviewed tools for math and literacy (http://www.rti4success.org/). Other progress monitoring tools are often dependent on the desired outcome of the RTI model.

34. Question: Are there any examples of high school level ELA essential learnings broken down into reading and writing out there that we could look at?

Answer: *We did not collect any information about ELA learning during our project.*

35. Question: Are there any federal grants available to support RTI in high schools?

Answer: *The School Improvement Fund Grant (SIG) is focusing primarily on secondary schools. If your school is eligible for SIG, RTI is mentioned in the grant language as a school-wide initiative to help student achievement.*

High School Tiered Interventions Initiative

The High School Tiered Interventions Initiative (HSTII) is a collaboration among the National High School Center, the Center on Instruction, and the National Center on Response to Intervention to enhance understanding of how tiered intervention models are emerging in high schools across the country. The National High School Center and the Center on Instruction, funded by the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), are two of five national content centers supporting the Regional Comprehensive Centers. The National Center on Response to Intervention is a national technical assistance center funded by OSEP.

If you have comments and questions about this collaboration and its activities, please visit our websites:

National High School Center: www.betterhighschools.org
Center on Instruction: www.centeroninstruction.org
National Center on Response to Intervention: www.rti4success.org