

BUILDING **RTI** CAPACITY

RESPONSE TO
INTERVENTION (RTI):

Straight Talk

FOR PARENTS

Note: This booklet was updated June, 2015. You can find it and other resources for implementing response to intervention at <http://buildingRTI.utexas.org/>.

©2015 The University of Texas System/Texas Education Agency

These materials are copyrighted © by and are the property of The University of Texas System and the Texas Education Agency. The University of Texas System and the Texas Education Agency hereby grant permission for the reproduction of this booklet, Response To Intervention (RTI): Straight Talk for Parents, for dissemination in Texas school districts and charter schools. In granting the right to reproduce this booklet, the parties involved will adhere to the following guidelines:

- The copyright statements must not be removed.
- The booklet may not be altered in any manner.
- The material may not be sold or used in any other capacity.

To obtain a license to disseminate these materials in a manner that differs from those indicated above or to reprint large quantities, contact licensing@texasreading.org.



The Meadows Center
FOR PREVENTING EDUCATIONAL RISK
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Acknowledgments

This booklet, *Response to Intervention: Straight Talk for Parents*, updates the 2010 version developed by the Building Capacity for Response To Intervention Project team at the Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk, College of Education, The University of Texas at Austin. The Texas Education Agency funds the Project to promote the implementation of Response To Intervention (RTI) in Texas schools. To this end, we partner with Education Service Centers to provide professional development and technical assistance to schools. Thanks to the following parents and educators who provided suggestions and feedback to improve this booklet: Christie Cavanaugh, Kathy Clayton, Leta Deithoff, Gene Lenz, and Kim Rodriguez.

2015 Project Team

Pamela Bell, Ph.D., *Lead Author*

Kathleen Walker, *Project Coordinator*

Adrian Gaspar

Mary Ndande, Ph.D., M.S.S.W.

Thea Woodruff, Ph.D.

Introduction

This booklet for parents is about Response To Intervention (RTI). RTI is an approach for teaching your child. The booklet explains RTI. Once you understand it, you can find out how your school uses it to teach your child. This booklet also includes resources you can use to learn more about RTI.

What is RTI?

RTI stands for **R**esponse **T**o **I**ntervention. Some schools refer to RTI as a “multi-tiered system of support,” or MTSS. It is an approach schools use to help all students, including struggling learners. It is not a special kind of program or book. Many Texas schools use this approach to make sure that every student has opportunities to learn and work on grade level. The goal of RTI is to help *all* students be successful.

RTI is getting a lot of attention now. In 2004, Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). This is a special education law. It includes two ways to identify students as having specific learning disabilities. One way is the “discrepancy model,” which has been used for many years. In this model, a student may be identified as having a specific learning disability if he or she is working below what is expected for his or her IQ.

RTI is the other way that IDEA allows schools to choose. When students struggle with learning, they are “at risk.” With additional help, or intervention, many can catch up. In schools using RTI, teachers provide intervention as soon as students show signs of having difficulties. They do not wait for students to fail.

Intervention is special instruction to help students close gaps in learning. Teachers record the progress of at-risk students. Over time, if a student does not catch up, it may be a sign of a learning disability. If the student is evaluated for special education, RTI records can be useful. They can help you and your child’s teachers decide whether special education is needed.

RTI can be used in any content area. (Content areas are reading, math, language arts, science and social studies.) It is used most often in **reading** and **math**. It may also be used to improve student behavior. In schools that use RTI:

1. Classroom teachers provide effective instruction to all students.
2. Teachers assess all students several times a year. This helps them know whether students are working on grade level.
3. Teachers use this assessment information to identify at-risk students. These are students who are working below grade level.
4. Teachers use assessment information to plan intervention that meets at-risk students' needs.
5. At-risk students receive this intervention.
6. Teachers check the progress of at-risk students often. Students who catch up to grade level no longer need intervention.

1. Classroom teachers provide effective instruction to all students. Many schools schedule blocks of time for content-area instruction so that students get enough daily instruction in each area. Based on research, effective teachers design daily lessons that focus on what is important for success. They explain a new concept and show students how to use it. Then they guide students' practice. Students practice many times what they have learned. Teachers also make sure students know how to behave in school.

2. Teachers assess all students several times a year. These test or screening times often are the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Teachers compare students' scores to "benchmark" scores. Benchmark scores are what are expected for all students at that grade level for that time of year. Students whose scores are below the benchmark are at risk for learning problems. Teachers may test them more to find out where they are having trouble.

3. Teachers use this assessment information to identify at-risk students. These are students who are working below grade level. At-risk students need immediate help to prevent learning problems. In schools using RTI, teachers know which students are at risk.

4. Teachers use assessment information to plan instruction that meets at-risk students' needs. Teachers review students' scores. They form small groups of students with similar needs. They identify the at-risk students' gaps in learning, set goals, and plan interventions.

5. At-risk students receive intervention. It targets the skills students need to close learning gaps. Intervention is provided in small groups where students can get more attention and practice. Ideally, students receive intervention daily.

6. Teachers check the progress of at-risk students often. At-risk students are assessed every 2 or 3 weeks. This is called progress monitoring. Teachers can chart each student's progress to know whether the intervention is working. It is working when students close their gaps in learning, or "respond to intervention." When students do not meet their learning goals, teachers adjust the intervention. If at-risk students meet their goals and catch up to grade level, they no longer need intervention.

RTI is different in each school. School leaders know their staff, and together they know their students' needs. They work together to design how RTI will work in their school.

They have to plan:

- How to know when a student is at risk.
- Who will teach the intervention lessons.
- The amount of time provided for intervention.
- When the intervention lessons will be taught.
- How many at-risk students will be in a group.
- How many weeks the intervention will last.
- How to know when a student no longer needs intervention.
- How to know when a student needs to be considered for special education.

RTI methods can be used to support good school behavior too. Many schools use Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) to help students learn how to behave in school. In schools using PBIS, all teachers know the behaviors students need to use. They teach these behaviors to their students. They use a system to remind students how to behave. When students have behavior problems, teachers help them learn a better way to act. They reteach the correct behavior. Some students may have a contract to help them change their behavior.

Will RTI be used in my child's school?

The RTI approach is not required. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) encourages schools to use RTI, but lets school districts and charter schools decide. Using RTI is your school's choice. Ask your child's teacher or principal whether their school uses RTI.

What grades use RTI?

RTI can be used in any grade. Most schools that use RTI are elementary schools. Middle and high schools are starting to use it. RTI in middle and high schools is still new.

Who benefits from RTI?

All students benefit from RTI. RTI focuses on high-quality instruction for all students. Since all students are usually tested several times a year, teachers have a clear picture of student performance. They know who is at-risk, and can give those students interventions to close their learning gaps. Teachers chart students' progress and adjust lessons to meet their needs.

How do I know if my child is at-risk and receiving intervention?

The school will inform you if your child is identified as at-risk and is receiving intervention. At-risk students automatically receive intervention. You do not need to give your permission. You should get a description of the intervention. You will also be told how your child's progress will be measured. A teacher or specialist will provide intervention that matches your child's needs. Your child will be taught in a small group of children with similar needs, or work on a computer.

How do I know if RTI is helping my child?

Every two or three weeks your child will be assessed to measure progress. The teacher uses this information to make sure the intervention is working. Meet with your child's teacher to learn how your child's needs are being met. The intervention should be helping your child to close his learning gap. Ask the teacher how your child's progress will be reported to you.

What if RTI doesn't work for my child?

Sometimes an at-risk student does not make enough progress in the intervention. The teacher knows this from checking the student's progress. When this happens, the teacher tries a different strategy. The student's progress is checked again. If the student is still not meeting goals, the teacher may ask other teachers for ideas to solve the problem. Then if the student continues to struggle with learning, a school team may meet to figure out what is needed. You may meet with the team.

At any time, you have the right to request an evaluation for special education for your child. Or, the team may decide that your child needs an evaluation for special education. You must give permission for this. After your child is evaluated, you and the school team will meet. The team may look at RTI information, such as what interventions were taught and how your child responded. You and the team will look at other information, too. Together, you will decide whether your child needs special education. RTI information also helps you and the team plan your child's instruction.

Remember, you can ask for an evaluation at any time if you think your child has a learning disability. This is different from being at-risk. Your child does not have to wait until intervention is over. To do this, give a written request for the evaluation to the school. The school must respond to your request:

1) The school will begin the evaluation process. Your rights will be explained, and you will give written consent. Your child can continue to receive intervention.

OR

2) The school will not evaluate your child. You will get a written explanation about why a disability is not suspected. Your child can continue to receive intervention.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q Is RTI a specific program that Texas schools must use?

A No, RTI is not a specific program. RTI is a way of teaching students and making sure that they stay on grade level. Texas schools are not required to use RTI, but any school can choose to use it. Schools using RTI use “evidence-based” programs or textbooks. This means they are based on scientific research. If students start to struggle with learning or behavior, they get help quickly.

Q How will I receive information about my child’s progress?

A Your school district makes the rules about how parents receive progress information. Ask your child’s teacher how you will get this information.

Q What does instruction look like in a school using RTI?

A All RTI schools aim for high-quality instruction. When you visit your child’s class, look for:

- Scheduled time for content-area instruction.
- Students with content-area textbooks and materials.
- Daily, direct instruction from the teacher.
- Students working in small groups or pairs to practice what they are learning.
- Classroom routines that promote learning.
- Students getting clear feedback from the teacher.

There are many other features. Ask your child’s teacher or principal to tell you about how they provide high-quality instruction.

Q How does my child's teacher decide that my child needs intervention?

A In schools using RTI, students are assessed several times during the year.* Teachers compare each student's score to a "benchmark score." This is the level that students should be on for their grade at that time of the school year. Teachers identify struggling students who need intervention. Assessments help teachers know which at-risk students need more intervention and which students have caught up and don't need it any more. Some students are "on the edge" for needing intervention and might need to be checked more often.

* Kindergarten students may not be screened at the beginning of the year.

Q My child needs intervention, and it is provided during the school day. Will my child miss important content-area instruction?

A All students get daily content-area instruction. Reading and math are especially important. If students do not learn basic skills, they struggle later. In schools using RTI, teachers try to schedule daily intervention time so at-risk students do not miss content-area instruction.

Q How does RTI work for students with behavior problems?

A Students at RTI schools are taught which behaviors are expected of them. All teachers and school staff know the rules. They all use the same responses when rules are not followed. Teachers identify students who need help behaving. Then they meet with these students to help them understand the specific behaviors they need to change. Sometimes teachers make an agreement or contract with the student. It clearly spells out reminders and goals for changing behavior. Teachers monitor whether the student uses the new behaviors. They may use a chart to show how behavior is improving.

Q Our school uses a “pull-out” intervention program for my child. Will this make him feel bad?

A All parents want their children to be successful. Be sure to talk with your child’s teacher about any concerns. Work together to present this as a good thing. When a child is struggling, there is no time to waste. Many teachers treat intervention time as simply another small-group learning activity. Students often like the additional small-group instruction. They start to feel confident as their learning skills improve.

Q What should I expect to see on a progress report if my child is at-risk?

A In a school using RTI, either the classroom teacher or a specialist may report progress. Either one can discuss how intervention is working to meet your child’s needs and intervention goals to close gaps in learning. You may see work samples of what your child is learning. The report may show your child’s scores on multiple progress checks. At-risk students often are checked every other week. This helps teachers know whether the intervention is working. You can ask the teacher about your child’s progress: What do the scores mean? What gaps in learning does my child have? How is my child behaving? How does the intervention work to close the gaps in my child’s learning? What strategies can I use with my child at home?

Q What does it mean if my child does not make enough progress to close her learning gap?

A RTI focuses on closing a student’s learning gap. That is why it is so important for teachers to check student progress often. Rates of learning can be different from one student to the next. Some students quickly learn and then no longer need intervention. Others may take longer. When the progress checks show a student’s needs are not being met in intervention, she may need other services. It could be a sign that she has a learning disability.

Q If my child receives RTI support, does this mean that he won't need special education later?

A Not necessarily. RTI is designed to prevent learning difficulties. Its purpose is to close a student's learning gap. Intervention works for many students. But intervention may not work for some. These students may need special education for their learning disabilities. RTI helps to identify them.

Q When can parents request a special education evaluation?

A A parent can request an evaluation for special education at any time. Your child can continue to get intervention while she is being evaluated. When the evaluation is done, you will meet with the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Committee. RTI information may be used to help identify a learning disability. You will review the teacher notes about how your child responds to intervention. This will help you and the committee decide if your child has a learning disability and needs special education.

Q My child has specific learning disabilities and already receives special education. Can my child also benefit from RTI?

A All students can benefit from RTI. Your child's special education teacher and classroom teacher do many of the same things for students with learning disabilities that they do for all others. They will both assess your child several times during the school year. They will both use the assessment information to plan instruction that meets your son's needs. They also will follow your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) to close his learning gaps.

Q My daughter Letti receives speech therapy and has an Individual Education Program (IEP). Now she is having trouble with reading. Can she get help with reading, too?

A Letti's IEP specifies the special instruction she gets to improve her speech problems. Talk to her classroom teacher to find out about her reading problems. Her teacher can tell you what is being done to meet her needs. If your school is using RTI, your daughter may also be getting reading intervention. If she is, find out how you will know whether she is improving. Also ask how you can help her practice at home.

If intervention does not help, your child may have a learning disability. She may need special education instruction in reading. An ARD Committee, including you, will study her reading progress. You and the rest of the ARD Committee will decide if she needs special education reading instruction.

Q My son Jimmy is having trouble in school. He's in third grade. I asked his teacher if he needs special education. He says that he knows Jimmy is struggling, and he wants to try RTI. He will put him into a daily intervention group for extra help. How long should I let the teacher try RTI before I ask to have him tested for special education?

A A parent can request a special education evaluation at any time. However, Jimmy's teacher needs time to try the interventions. Interventions often last 10-12 weeks. Jimmy's progress will be measured every 2 or 3 weeks. Ask his teacher to let you know how he is doing. If you think Jimmy is falling behind, then request a special education evaluation. He can keep receiving intervention during the evaluation process.

Q My child's school uses RTI. Tony is in intervention, but I think he is getting farther behind. I think he has a learning disability. How can I get him tested for special education?

A You must formally request testing for special education. You can write a note to the school. When you make a formal request, you will get a booklet about your rights. It is called the *Notice of Procedural Safeguards*.

If the school agrees that Tony may have a learning disability, you will be told about the evaluation process. Be sure to ask any questions you may have. Once you sign a consent form, Tony's testing can begin. During this time, Tony will continue in the intervention. When the testing is completed, you and other members of the ARD Committee will meet to decide if he needs special education.

If the school does not agree that Tony may have a learning disability, you will receive a written notice. The notice explains why Tony will not be tested. If you still think the school should test him, there are steps you can take. You can call the Texas Education Agency and ask about "Dispute Resolution."

Q What is my role as a parent?

A Your role is to support your child and to help your child be successful! You can do this in many ways. Monitor your child's learning. Ask your child to tell you what he or she is learning and to show you examples of work. Read to your child, and ask your child to read to you. When your child has homework, be nearby. Review your child's work or help with practice, and give feedback. Ask your child's teacher how you can help at home. If your child is at-risk and receiving intervention, find out specific ways you can lend support. Finally, be positive and celebrate successes.



I am a foster parent. My foster child is behind in reading and math. Can she get intervention services too?

A

Yes. If the school is using RTI, tell her teacher about her needs. When you enroll her, give the school the 2085 form. It shows who the child's Education Decision Maker is (usually you, the foster parent). Share information from her education portfolio. If the school is using RTI, ask how soon she can be assessed. If your foster child moves to a different school, be sure to get her intervention records. These records are not required, but they are very helpful. They can save valuable time in assessing her and can help find the right intervention for her at the new school.

If the school does not use RTI, ask about tutoring and other services. Children in foster care can get many academic support services at no cost. School counselors and caseworkers know about these services.

If your foster child receives special education, he or she must have a surrogate parent. This is someone trained to represent the child when educational decisions are made. You or someone else, such as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), may be appointed as the surrogate parent.

Q I want to learn more about RTI. What are some websites I can visit?

A For more information, visit these websites:

- Building RTI Capacity, <http://BuildingRTI.utexas.org> (resources for educators and parents).
- Center for Development and Learning, www.cdl.org (many resources and articles available).
- Council for Exceptional Children, www.cec.sped.org (professional organization for parents, teachers, and professionals).
- National Association for School Psychologists, Response to Intervention (RTI): A Primer for Parents, www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/RTIprimer.aspx
- National Center for Learning Disabilities, www.nclld.org (also sponsors RTI Action Network, www.RTInetwork.org)
- National Research Center on Learning Disabilities, <http://www.ncrld.org/topics/parents.html>, The ABCs of RTI: A Guide for Parents, www.ncrld.org/free/downloads/ABC_of_RTI.pdf
- Texas Center for Learning Disabilities, www.texasldcenter.org
- U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov (free materials available).

References

National Association of State Directors of Special Education. (2005). Response to Intervention: Policy considerations and implementation. Alexandria, VA: Author.

