

**BUILDING RTI CAPACITY**

RESPONSE TO  
INTERVENTION (RtI):

*Straight Talk*  
FOR PARENTS

**Note: This booklet was updated August, 2010. You can find it and other resources for implementing response to intervention at <http://buildingRTI.utexas.org/>.**

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

# Acknowledgments

This booklet is an updated version of one originally developed by the Spotlight 3-Tier Reading Model Professional Development Project of the Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin. The project, now known as the Building Capacity for Response to Intervention (RtI) Implementation Project, is funded by the Texas Education Agency to promote the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI) in Texas schools. This updated booklet is disseminated to support information provided by Education Service Centers and schools. It includes suggestions and feedback from parents and educators who participated in its development. We are especially grateful to Christie Cavanaugh, Steve Ciullo, Kathy Clayton, Vanessa Cortez, Leta Deithoff, Gene Lenz, Jessica Pruneda, Kim Rodriguez, Sharon Vaughn, and Melanie White. Many thanks also to all of the parents from local schools and organizations who contributed to this booklet.

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# Introduction

This booklet is for parents. It is about Response to Intervention (RTI or Rtl). Rtl is an approach for teaching your child. We include ideas from parents, teachers, school administrators, and university professors. The booklet explains Rtl so you can find out more about how your school is using Rtl to teach your child. This booklet also includes resources so you can learn more about Rtl.

# What is RtI?

RtI stands for **R**esponse **t**o **I**ntervention. 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 are using this approach to make sure that every student has opportunities to learn and that students are working at their 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 that students with specific learning disabilities may be identified. One way is the “discrepancy model.” Schools have used this way for many years. In this model, a student may be identified if achievement is significantly below what is expected for his or her intelligence.

IDEA allows schools to choose RtI as another way. When students struggle with learning, they are “at-risk.” If they get additional help, or intervention, many can catch up. If they stay behind, they may fail. In schools using RtI, teachers provide intervention as soon as students show signs of having difficulties. They do not wait for students to have more difficulties. Intervention is special instruction to help students close gaps in learning. Teachers record student progress. If a student is not catching up, he or she may be evaluated for special education. Information about the student’s response to the intervention helps teachers decide whether a student needs special education.

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** or **math**. It is also 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 make sure students are working at their grade level.
3. Teachers identify at-risk students.

4. Teachers use assessment information to plan lessons that meet at-risk students' needs.
5. At-risk students receive intervention.
6. Teachers check at-risk students' progress often. Students who catch up no longer need intervention.

**1. Classroom teachers provide effective instruction to all students.** Many schools schedule blocks of time for content-area instruction. (Content areas are reading, math, language arts, science, and social studies.) This helps make sure students get enough daily instruction in each of these areas. Teachers also make sure students learn how to behave in school. Effective teachers design daily lessons that focus on what research shows is critical for success. They explain a new concept and show students how to use it. Then they guide students' practice. Students practice what they have learned many times.

**2. Teachers assess all students several times a year.** In schools using Rtl, teachers test or screen all students multiple times. These 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 identify at-risk students.** At-risk students need immediate help to prevent learning problems. In schools using Rtl, teachers know which students are at-risk.

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

**5. At-risk students receive intervention.** Intervention is provided in small groups. Teachers can give students more attention and practice when they are in small groups.

**6. Teachers check at-risk students' progress often.** At-risk students are assessed every 2 or 3 weeks. This is called progress monitoring. Many teachers keep a chart of each student's progress. This helps teachers know whether the intervention is working. When students "respond to intervention," it is working. Teachers change the intervention when students are not meeting their learning goals. If at-risk students meet their goals, they no longer need intervention.

RtI is different in each school. School leaders know their students' needs, and they know their staff. 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 to teach in a group.
- How many weeks the intervention will last.
- How to know when a student no longer needs intervention.
- How to know when an at-risk student needs to be considered for special education.

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## *Will RtI be used in my child's school?*

IDEA lets school districts decide whether they will use RtI. It says that schools can use RtI to identify students who have a specific learning disability. It also focuses on giving high-quality instruction to all students. A lack of effective instruction in reading or math cannot be a reason for a specific learning disability. The Texas Education Agency encourages schools to use RtI, but it is still the school's choice. Ask your child's teacher or principal about the school's use of RtI.

## *What grades use RtI?*

RtI can be used in any grade. Many 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. RtI is most often used in core content areas and in behavior. Most schools use a multitiered RtI approach. Students move to a level, or tier, that targets the kind of intervention they need.

## *Who benefits from RtI?*

All students benefit from RtI. Since all students are usually tested several times a year, teachers can know who is at-risk. These at-risk students receive intervention. Teachers closely monitor student learning in intervention and adjust the lessons. They have a clear picture of student performance.

## *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 monitoring 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.

The team may decide your child needs evaluation for special education. You will be asked to give permission for this. If your child is evaluated for special education, you and the school team may look at RtI information. The team wants to know 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.

# Frequently Asked Questions

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**Q** Is Rtl a specific program that Texas schools must use?

**A** No, Rtl is not a specific program. Any Texas school can choose to use Rtl. Schools using Rtl use “evidence-based” programs or textbooks, which means their use is based on scientific research. Rtl is a way of teaching students and making sure that they stay at their grade level. If students start to struggle with learning or behavior, they get help quickly.

**Q** What information can I expect to receive about my child?

**A** Your school district decides the rules about how information is provided to parents. You can ask your child’s teacher or principal.

**Q** What does instruction look like in a school using Rtl?

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

- Enough 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 immediate, corrective 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 school year.\* Teachers compare each student's scores with the "benchmark score." Benchmark scores are the expected grade-level performance for that time of year. Teachers and school leaders identify which students are struggling and need intervention. They can see which at-risk students need more intervention and which students have caught up and no longer need intervention. Some students are "on the edge" for intervention and may need to be checked often.

**Q If my child needs intervention, and it is provided during the school day, will my child miss important instruction?**

**A** In schools using RtI, all students have daily content-area instruction. Reading and math are especially important. If students do not learn basic skills, they struggle later. 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** Schools using RtI let students know what behaviors are expected of them. All teachers and other school personnel know the same rules and use the same consequences when rules are not followed. Teachers identify students who need assistance with how to behave in school. 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. Often it spells out reminders, cues, and goals for changing behavior. Teachers monitor how often students are following the new behaviors. Your child's teacher may use a chart to know whether behavior is improving.

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

**Q** Our school uses a “pull-out” intervention program for my child. How will this affect his self-esteem?

**A** All parents want their children to be successful. You and the teacher can work together to present this as a positive opportunity. When a child is struggling, there is no time to waste. Many teachers treat intervention time as simply another small-group learning activity. Most often, students like the additional small-group instruction. They realize the support is helpful. Be sure to discuss any concerns with the teacher.

**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 an interventionist may report progress. Either one can discuss how intervention is working to meet your child’s needs. Your child has 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 progress-monitoring measures over time. 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** Rtl 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 child to the next. Some students quickly learn what they were missing 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. This could be a sign that she has a learning disability.

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

**A** Not necessarily. Rtl is designed to prevent learning difficulties. Intervention works for many students. It closes their learning gaps. However, some children have specific learning disabilities. Rtl helps to identify them. If your child has a specific learning disability, he will get the special education instruction he needs.

**Q** When can parents request a full, comprehensive evaluation for special education during the Rtl process?

**A** A parent can request an evaluation for special education at any time. Rtl may be used as data to help identify a specific learning disability. If so, teachers will make notes of how your child responds to intervention. When you meet with the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Committee, you will review this information. It will help you and the committee decide whether your child has a specific learning disability.

**Q My child has specific learning disabilities and already receives special education. Does this mean that my child may not benefit from Rtl?**

**A** When a school uses Rtl, all students benefit. Your child's special education teacher and classroom teacher do many of the same things for students with specific learning disabilities that they do for all others. They will assess your child several times during the school year. They will use the assessment information to plan instruction that closes gaps in your child's learning. One of the teachers will check your child's response to the intervention. Because your child receives special education services, they also will follow the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**Q My child 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 Rtl, your daughter may be getting additional reading intervention. Find out how you will know whether she is improving. Also ask how you can help her practice at home.

If the intervention does not help close her learning gaps, Letti may need special education instruction in reading. An ARD Committee, including you, will study her reading progress. You and the ARD Committee will decide if she needs special education reading evaluation and instruction.

**Q My child 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 Jimmy 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** As a parent, you can request a special education evaluation for Jimmy at any time. So keep that in mind. However, Jimmy's teacher needs time to try the intervention. Interventions often last 10-12 weeks. His teacher will measure Jimmy's progress every 2 or 3 weeks. Ask his teacher to let you know how he is doing.

**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 can formally request that Tony be tested for special education at any time. You can write a note to the school. Or, when you meet with a group of teachers about your son, you can ask. 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 prior written notice. The notice will explain 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 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, 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. Ask what he or she needs to practice. Finally, be positive and celebrate successes.

## Q I want to learn more about RtI. What are some Web sites I can visit?

A For more information, visit these Web sites:

- **Building RTI Capacity**, <http://BuildingRTI.utexas.org> (resources for educators and parents)
- **Center for Development and Learning**, [www.cdl.org](http://www.cdl.org) (many resources and articles available)
- **Council for Exceptional Children**, [www.cec.sped.org](http://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](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/rtiprimer.aspx)
- **National Center for Learning Disabilities**, [www.nclld.org](http://www.nclld.org) (also sponsors RTI Action Network, [www.rtinetwork.org](http://www.rtinetwork.org))
- **National Research Center on Learning Disabilities**, <http://www.nrclld.org/topics/parents.html>, *The ABCs of RTI: A Guide for Parents*, [www.nrclld.org/free/downloads/ABC\\_of\\_RTI.pdf](http://www.nrclld.org/free/downloads/ABC_of_RTI.pdf)
- **Texas Center for Learning Disabilities**, [www.texasldcenter.org](http://www.texasldcenter.org)
- **Texas Education Agency**, [www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=5817](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=5817), *Beginning Reading Instruction: Practical Ideas for Parents*, <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/reading/products/praidepar.pdf>
- **U.S. Department of Education**, [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) (free materials available).

# References

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Many of the questions addressed in the FAQs were raised by parents in focus groups and in contacts with the Texas Education Agency.

