

Response to Intervention Teacher Guide Book

Mentoring Minds' Product Development Team attended RtI sessions, studied the literature and available research, and held numerous work sessions prior to developing a product to support a campus as an RtI approach is initiated. The *Response to Intervention Teacher Guide Book* addresses the need for easy access to information that describes the RtI process presented in a simplified, easy to understand language. Other essential parts of the book include instructions detailing the process from start to finish, a model for the RtI approach and the problem-solving process, a glossary of pertinent RtI terms, and a CD with RtI forms including a progress-monitoring system.

As reported in a paper by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (2005), the focus of Response to Intervention (RtI) is on the accountability of the teaching and learning process in general education. A key component of RtI is early intervention at the first sign of academic and/or behavioral difficulties with the result being the improvement in achievement of all students, including any students who may have a specific learning disability (SLD). The Council of Exceptional Children (CEC, 2006) recognizes RtI as a special education initiative. CEC further notes that general education must lead the way in providing evidence-based instruction to all students and utilize research-based interventions with all struggling learners.

The intent of RtI is to provide a database for making instructional decisions for particular students. These identified students respond to evidence-based interventions in the RtI process using a multi-tiered model. The responsiveness of students to such interventions provides a basis for determining the intensity and duration of additional instruction. RtI focuses on which interventions are most beneficial in delivering needed instruction to close learning gaps in a timely manner. The RtI approach encourages schools to ensure that students receive a high level of instruction in the general education classroom followed by close monitoring of students' academic progress in that setting (IDEIA, 2004). The *Response to Intervention Teacher Guide Book* provides detailed support for a classroom teacher entailing their responsibilities at each of the tiers.

Research substantiates a number of reasons that lead to questioning or perhaps abandoning the use of the discrepancy model. "The IQ-discrepancy criterion is potentially harmful to students as it results in delaying intervention until the student's achievement is sufficiently low that the discrepancy is achieved. For most students, identification of having a specific learning disability (SLD) occurs at an age when the academic problems are difficult to remediate with the most intense remediation efforts" (Torgesen, et. al., 2001). Donovan and Cross (2002) state "... the *wait to fail* model does not lead to closing the achievement gap for most students placed in special education. Many students placed in special education as SLD show minimal gains in achievement and few actually leave special education."

Due to the increased focus on accountability and assessment in the legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act, researchers Ernst, Miller, Robinson and Tilly (2005) note how critical it is that appropriate evaluative measures and intervention practices be in place for students who are not performing at the expected standard. Marston, Muyskens, Lau, & Canter (2003) report a positive finding on the use of RtI in Minneapolis Public Schools. The field research data shows a reduction in the number

of African-American students referred for special education and a decrease in the number placed in special education over a four-year period.

There are several reasons that justify a campus implementing the RtI approach as developed by the Mentoring Minds team. RtI is regarded by researchers Gresham (2002) and Marston (2001) as an alternative approach for identifying learning disabilities (LD) due to the concerns raised about the discrepancy model. Another reason RtI looks promising is it is seen as a means to serve struggling learners earlier and provides a way to reduce referrals to special education by offering high-quality instruction and intensified intervention in general education. Still another reason for the support of an RtI approach centers on the research of reading. Numerous research studies by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD, 2000) and Lyon, et al. (2001) advocate that early-identified students served by prevention programs can lead to a reduction in the number of students with reading problems by 70% and above.

All students need to develop the skill of reading. It is imperative that educators collaborate early how to best teach all students to read. Lyon (2004) found that the application of high quality, effective instruction and interventions, proven by research to work, help achieve this goal. Research conducted through the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at universities throughout the country and reviewed by the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) eliminated some long-held beliefs about reading and disabilities.

NICHD has found evidence to substantiate there are characteristics of early language that predict future reading and writing skills. Adams (1990) and Catts (1997) report that studies which show 80 percent of preschool age children with language disorders later display some degree of reading difficulty. These researchers also report that children who overcome early language difficulties before the age of five are not at risk. When children enter kindergarten, research purports about 20 percent of them have significant difficulty learning to read.

The content of the *Response to Intervention Teacher Guide Book* stresses screening of all students followed by early identification and immediate intervention of students who are not achieving due to specific academic and/or behavior concerns. The instruction offered in grades K-3 has an effect on whether they continue to experience difficulties in reading or not. Children enter school with a variety of experiences which affect the differences in skill level upon entry into kindergarten. Studies show approximately 5 percent of students have absolutely no difficulties learning to read whereas about 60 percent find learning to read somewhat of a challenge. Approximately half of that 60 percent find learning to read extremely difficult (Lyon et al., 2001 as cited in Finn, Rotherham & Hokanson).

In the past, educators waited until second and sometimes third grade to provide intervention to students who exhibited reading difficulties. According to Fletcher, et al., (1994 as cited in Gossen, 1997), this practice results in about 74 percent of these students continuing to experience reading problems in ninth grade. Shaywitz et. al., (1990) found that boys and girls are equally likely to have reading problems. More boys are usually identified to have reading problems because it appears teacher evaluations are sometimes influenced by gender. The *Response to Intervention Teacher Guide Book* provides implementation support so students do not wait until failure to receive appropriate instruction and intervention.

The reauthorized *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* of 2004 (IDEIA) and *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2001) advocate the use of interventions and instruction based on defensible research. Both require effective reading and behavior programs that result in improved student performance and fewer students needing special education services. Provisions of IDEA 2004 allow school districts to use scientific, research-based interventions as an alternative method for identifying students with SLD.

Differentiation, the use of small-group instruction, and using databased decisions are areas that teachers must acquire skill to implement. Mentoring Minds acknowledged differentiation as another viable section for inclusion in this valuable educator's tool. Differentiation is a classroom practice that engages all learners by addressing their interests, their learning profiles, and their readiness levels. Differentiated instruction occurs in the curriculum, in lessons, and in assessments. Tomlinson (2001) and Roberts and Inman (2007) share that differentiation addresses variance in content, process, and product. Tomlinson states that this approach is "responsive" teaching rather than planning instruction that reflects "one-size-fits-all" students. Differentiation is delivered to help all students, no matter what age, learn efficiently as possible (Tomlinson, 2003a). Improved achievement can be addressed when teachers are attentive to students' preferences of learning. Tomlinson (2003) reports that student motivation and student attention to tasks increase when the topics of study reflect personal interests of students.

The use of data is a critical part of the RtI process. Data collection should include functional academic and behavioral assessment measures as well as some type of monitoring of curriculum-based assessments and curriculum-based measures as a measure of student progress and a way to make changes in instruction. These practices are valuable in helping campuses reach and sustain high standards within all classrooms. The Mentoring Minds Product Development Team recognized the significant value of grouping, differentiation, and use of data-informed decisions as reported in the literature review. These findings are incorporated into the the *RtI Teacher Guide Book*.

The option is available for local education agencies to use up to 15% of IDEIA funds for students who need early interventions for academic and/or behavioral support to succeed in the general education setting but who have not been identified as needing special education support. Viable activities include professional development to deliver scientifically-based interventions, services and supports, including scientifically-based literacy instruction. These kinds of experiences relate to RtI and help to reduce the numbers of students who might be placed in special education programs due to their frustration and lack of academic and/or behavioral success.

Both the No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB, 2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) focus on the quality of instruction received by students in the general education setting. IDEIA 2004 and NCLB require the use of research-based instruction and interventions. The intent of the Response-to-Intervention (RtI) model, suggested by IDEIA, is to change and place the identification process into the general education setting where a student receives evidence-based instruction. A tiered system of interventions increasing in intensity and duration is needed to address the diverse needs of students. Effective reading and behavior programs that result in improved student performance have become an essential focus.

The literature indicates a tiered system of interventions is necessary to adjust the type and intensity of instruction in order to address the diversity of student needs (Kovaleski, 2003; Vaughn, 2003). Although no universal RtI model exists, it is generally understood that multiple tiers provide services that are needed to support academic and/or behavioral difficulties. Vaughn found that a tiered system demonstrates the flexibility to layer instruction over time and provides essential instruction early before a student lags too far behind. Kovaleski noted that several researchers suggest a three-tier model yet models do exist that vary from three tiers or more.

In determining the effectiveness of RtI, it appears that all students can benefit when the instruction matches their current level of needs. Research based upon several studies by Mellard, Byrd, Johnson, Tollefson, & Boesche (2004) indicated that the RtI approach does benefit students who experience academic difficulties if the interventions are individualized and used in a timely manner. Gresham (1989) states that it is imperative that interventions be implemented with integrity which means they must be closely monitored. However, evaluation of integrity can prove challenging due to time constraints in schools and teacher resistance (Gresham, 2001). Emerging research seems to show success implementing the RtI approach at Tiers 1 and 2 in the area of reading in elementary grades with some research on RtI and early mathematics and behavior. Little appears to be known about the effectiveness of RtI for other subject areas or for students in the upper grades notes Mellard (2004).

It appears that few studies focus on strategies for individualized interventions or the number of students who are identified for special education services (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003). Researchers do not seem to agree on certain elements of the RtI process such as, length of time for an intervention or length of time an intervention plan is in use prior to evaluation (Gresham, 2001; Kovaleski, 2003), or the intensity of the intervention (Barnett, Daly, Jones & Lentz, 2004; Gresham, 2001). Yet the literature review points to RtI as a favorable model for instruction and interventions.

Mellard, from the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities at the University of Kansas, found that most schools used RtI as a prevention model. Mellard further explained that students received intense instruction in the academic or behavioral areas as soon as data showed the student lagging behind peers. If after a predetermined period of time, the student continued to underachieve, a more intense instructional intervention was offered. Thus, RtI is designed to address under-achievement early and to individualize the problem and instruction to fit the student. Using RtI as a model for the identification of SLD does not appear to have broad application data at this time. Those who support the RtI approach attest that RtI assessments are sufficient for SLD determination. There appears to be little data on RtI models and their effectiveness in secondary schools. Researchers advocate that any well-designed model that requires assessment over time is an improvement over a single snapshot approach. This RtI product supports teachers in their endeavors to implement an RtI model on their campuses.

Marston (2001) reported a 40% decrease in special education placements for LD programs in the public schools in Minneapolis. This drop is likely due to the use of RtI to determine eligibility. Students appear to get the help needed in skill development with a three-tier model of prevention and intervention.

Based on RtI findings and the review of related literature, Mentoring Minds developed the *Response to Intervention Teacher Guide Book* to provide educators with a tool to address intervention implementation. This teacher resource book helps educators understand and apply the process of early identification for students who are experiencing difficulty in academic and/or behavioral domains.

The *Response to Intervention Teacher Guide Book* is a complete guide for establishing and implementing an RtI approach. This resource book contains a wide array of pertinent RtI information including a rationale, the laws behind RtI, an overview of an RtI approach, a suggested RtI model, a description of each of the three tiers, suggestions for implementing interventions at each tier, RtI forms, flowcharts, a progress monitoring system, and a glossary. A CD provides an electronic or hard copy of a system for documenting the effectiveness of the overall academic/behavioral assessments. This monitoring data will automatically be calculated and placed into a graph format. Campuses, who utilize the *RtI Teacher Guide Book* for their faculties, will be provided an instrument that encourages and supports school personnel to reach favorable academic results for students.

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