

Response To Intervention (RTI)

Three letters mean big changes

Greetings,

We all know a struggling student who is having trouble reaching his potential. What if there was a proven process where we could try different teaching approaches until we found the most effective way to help that student learn?

This process has a name - Response to Intervention (RTI). RTI says when a student is struggling, the first way to help is by changing the instruction being provided to the student. These changes in instruction delivery techniques are known as "Interventions." The students responses to these interventions are measured to see if the changes in instruction have helped - hence the term "Response to Intervention."

As part of the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, Federal regulations included the concept of RTI. Delaware law requires the use of RTI beginning in the 2008-2009 school year. It is hard to over emphasize the importance of RTI. It may be as important as "Inclusion" for the education of students with disabilities long term. We already know of students getting extra reading help because of RTI.

While it may seem like a paradox, the reason RTI will have a huge impact on our students receiving special education services is that RTI is primarily an initiative for the General Education population. Because RTI is a change directed at the broadest possible group of teachers and students, it will have a profound effect on the entire school - far more than if the change was only geared towards students with disabilities .

Keep reading to understand why.

By the way, this **Monday, Dec 3rd** there will be a presentation on RTI at the [Brandywine School District Board Workshop](#). If you want to see how Brandywine's implementation of RTI will affect students you know, attend this meeting.

Pat Heffernan and Alex Rittberg - Co-Presidents, BSNPTA

Why Do We Need RTI?

From "fix the child" to "fix the system"

In the past, there was a presumption that if a student was having problems learning, the issue was with the student. This concept is illustrated by the Discrepancy Model for determining a student's eligibility for receiving special education services. The Discrepancy Model says that if student achievement is significantly lower than student ability, that student must have a learning disability.

On the other hand, the RTI model says before we can determine a student's poor performance is the result of a learning disability, we first need to make sure there are no changes in instruction that could allow the student to succeed. RTI says that sometimes the problem is with the instruction, not the student and with the appropriate instruction, most students can be successful.

RTI applies the scientific method to education at the individual student level. Changes are made in how instruction is delivered and the student is assessed and reassessed to determine if the changes have made a difference.

One real advantage of RTI is quite practical. We don't spend time on lengthy evaluations to determine whether a student is eligible for extra services based on complex criteria before providing additional help in the classroom. RTIs says start helping the struggling student in the classroom immediately.

- [Education Policy Brief on RTI](#)
- [RTI: How to do It](#)
- [2003 Study: "Discrepancy" Approach is Inconsistent](#)
- [Demise of IQ Testing for Children with Learning Disabilities](#)
- [NICHCY Training on RTI](#)
- [RTI: A Primer for Parents](#)

If First You Don't Succeed ... **or the story of the Three Little Tiers**

At the heart of RTI is the idea of successive, progressive levels of help. If a student is struggling, RTI increases the frequency and intensity of support and then evaluates the student to see if the changes have helped. The three tiers of RTI augment the instruction on the core general curriculum delivered in the General Education classroom. Special education services are not part of the three tiers of RTI although they could in some ways be considered the 4th tier. Here are the basic rules of RTI as defined by Delaware Law :

- *Universal screenings for reading and math occur at least 3 times each year - with the initial screening in the first 2 weeks of the school year.*
- *Students enter Tier 1 interventions if they score below standard on the screening test. In Tier 1, the school must assure that the child is receiving appropriate, differentiated, needs-based instruction. The school must also review the program implementation, pacing and instructional groupings.*
- *Students who score below the 25th percentile on the screening will be moved directly to Tier 2.*
- *Once in the RTI process, a student's progress toward end-of-the-year benchmarks occurs at least every 2 weeks until it is clear the child is on a trajectory to meet end-of-the-year benchmarks. The word **trajectory** is key. Trajectory allows us to predict where a student will be based on present level of performance and rate of progress. RTI is designed to provide additional help BEFORE the student fails.*
- *If, after 6 weeks of progress monitoring in Tier 1, the child is not on a trajectory to meet end-of-the-year benchmarks, the child is moved to Tier 2*

unless the school-based team overrides the process.

- **Tier 2** interventions are in addition to regular core instruction in the General Education curriculum.
- Tier 2 interventions are delivered in a small group, at least 3 times each school week for at least 30 minutes per session.
- In Tier 2, progress is monitored weekly against benchmarks.
- Tier 2 interventions last at least 6 school weeks.
- If, after 6 school weeks of Tier 2 intervention, a child is not on a trajectory to meet end-of-the-year benchmarks, a specialized Intervention Support Team (IST) meets to determine if the student is getting appropriate instruction and will determine whether: additional assessments are required; additional changes to instructional or behavioral methods are required; or if the child moves to Tier 3.
- If, after an additional 6 school weeks of Tier 2 intervention (or up to a total of 12 school weeks of intervention) a child is not on a trajectory to meet end-of-the-year benchmarks, the child moves to Tier 3.

- **Tier 3** interventions are in addition to regular core instruction in the General Education curriculum
- Tier 3 interventions are delivered in group settings smaller than Tier 2, at least 5 times each school week for at least 30 minutes per session.
- Tier 3 interventions last at least 6 school weeks.
- In Tier 3, progress is monitored weekly against benchmarks.
- If, after 6 school weeks of Tier 3 interventions (or up to a total of 18 school weeks of intervention), a child has made no progress toward benchmarks, the IST refers the child for an initial evaluation for special education services.
- If, after 6 school weeks of Tier 3 interventions (or up to a total of 18 school weeks of intervention), a child has made progress toward benchmarks, but is not on a trajectory to meet end-of-the-year benchmarks, the IST meets to determine if the student is getting appropriate instruction and to review the program implementation, pacing and instructional groupings. The IST also determines whether: additional assessments are required; additional changes to instructional or behavioral methods are required; or the child should be referred for an evaluation for special education services.
- If, after an additional 6 school weeks of Tier 3 interventions (or up to a total of 24 school weeks of interventions), a child is not on a trajectory to meet end-of-the-year benchmarks, the IST must refer the child for an evaluation for special education services.

- [Nat'I Research Ctr on LD Technical Assistance Page](#)

- [Research Institute on Progress Monitoring](#)

- [Practical Help and Links for the Classroom](#)

- [Nat'I Ctr on Student Progress Monitoring](#)

- [Delaware DOE RTI resource Page](#)

- [Fact Sheets from Nat'I Assoc. of School Psychologists](#)

RTI is not a Special Ed Initiative

Changes in teaching for all students

Some folks will read about RTI and see a pre-referral process for special education services. They may think once a student enters RTI, they are destined for special education services. While some students entering the RTI process may end up with special education services, that is not what RTI is all about. Other folks may add up all the intervention time lines from tier to tier and think RTI is a way to delay providing special education services to an obvious candidate. While some students who end up receiving special education services will move through the tiers of RTI, it is not to prevent them from getting the help they need in a timely manner.

So if RTI is not a way to funnel students into Special Education and it is not a way to delay providing special education services, what is it?

RTI is primarily a General Education initiative. Good teachers have been doing many of the pieces of RTI for years. Calling it RTI and creating specific rules and regulations about it merely helps more teachers add these tools to their belts. Martha Toomey, Delaware's Director of Exceptional Children and Early Childhood Education, compares RTI to the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) initiative a few years ago. PBS was originally conceived as a behavior support for students receiving special education services but the benefits of PBS are felt school-wide in places where the entire school population was included in the program.

Did you really read the details in the previous section about what moving through the various tiers means? At each RTI tier a student receives additional instruction in smaller and smaller groups. Progress is monitored at increasingly tighter intervals to see if the intervention is helping that student learn. Not only are benchmarks for short term progress required by law, the school is required to extrapolate performance to determine if the students will be caught up at a future point. It is not good enough to be making progress, students must be on track to catch up with their peers. The idea is to create an environment where students begin getting more fitting instruction as soon as they are projected to be falling behind. Did you also notice that behavioral supports are required on equal footing with instructional supports. These requirements are now the law!

All this makes for a huge difference in how student progress is measured, tracked and affected school-wide. The purpose of RTI is to transform how the schools treat struggling students. This will raise the bar on all schools, teachers and students to create a new kind of school environment where identifying and addressing the needs of struggling students is better integrated into the system. And, most importantly, over time these requirements will change school culture because they are for everyone - not just students receiving special education services.

- [Incorporating RTI into NCLB](#)
- [RTI for 3 to 5 year olds](#)

RTI and Inclusion

Another step along the continuum

First we needed laws to allow students with disabilities to attend their local public school - even in an isolated hallway. It took longer to allow the students to physically integrate in the building just for art and lunch. Later, the concept of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) put the students in the same classroom but often with a clear delineation where some students received special education "pull out" services outside of the classroom.

RTI will have more students in smaller group settings getting additional help in an environment where needs and abilities are blurred along a smoother continuum. Remember, in reality every student is first and foremost a "General Education" student although some students receive additional services and supports. RTI will be providing a wider range of supports to a larger pool of students.

RTI will contribute to a school climate where differences in student learning are expected. A climate where everyone in the building understands that all students are expected to succeed while accepting that different students need different levels of support. RTI will eliminate the black and white division between "Special Ed" and everyone else and recognize all students are shades of gray.

We're not naive, we know none of the other phases of Inclusion really reached their potential, nor were they even fully implemented in a timely manner. Still, this is another step, another way to raise the bar a notch and we welcome it.

If you are curious how Brandywine and the other Districts in Delaware are doing on key benchmarks of IDEA like LRE (Inclusion) and proficiency on state assessments (DSTP), check out the Delaware DOE's [Annual Report on Progress Toward Targets in the State Performance Plan for Students with Disabilities](#). This reports provides a District-by-District breakdown on targets states are required to track.

RTI and Special Ed Eligibility

How does RTI affect who's in Special Ed

While the focus of this newsletter has not been on Special Ed, RTI does figure into whether some students are eligible for Special Education and related services.

Looking at IDEA, we see that in order for a child to be considered to have a disability and be eligible for Special Education and related services, the child must be classified as having one of these disabilities:

- *mental retardation*
- *a hearing impairment (including deafness)*
- *a speech or language impairment*
- *a visual impairment (including blindness)*
- *a serious emotional disturbance*
- *an orthopedic impairment*
- *autism*
- *traumatic brain injury*
- *an other health impairment*
- *a specific learning disability*
- *deaf-blindness*
- *multiple disabilities*

The RTI regs related to identifying a student for special education services apply to the category of "specific learning disability". The rationale is simple- sometimes what appears to be a learning disability may be a mismatch between a student's needs and the instruction the student is receiving. On the other hand, improper instruction is not likely to look like a hearing impairment, deaf-blindness, or traumatic brain injury.

Delaware law says elementary schools must implement RTI by the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year. Middle and High schools have another year, until 2009-2010. In 2007-2008, districts have the option to implement RTI procedures for any school or grade. In this context, implementation of RTI means using RTI to determine whether a child is eligible for special education services under the "specific learning disability" category.

After the RTI model becomes effective, the "discrepancy model" can no longer be used to determine eligibility under the learning disability category. Source: [14 Del Admin Code 925 6.11.1](#)

If a child has already been identified as having a learning disability and is already receiving special education services when the new RTI regulations go into effect, the child continues to be eligible for services until the child's next scheduled reevaluation.

From age 3 to 9, a child can be eligible for Special Education under the "developmental delay" category, through manifestation of delays in one or more of the following areas: Physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, or adaptive development. Qualification for Special Ed services under the "developmental delay" category is not directly related to RTI.

Parents may initiate a request for an initial evaluation of their child at any time, including during the RTI process. If the district conducts an initial evaluation, a child may be determined ineligible for services under the learning disability category if there are insufficient data to demonstrate that the child was provided appropriate instruction in the regular education setting, or where there are insufficient assessment data. If a child is determined ineligible for special education services on these grounds, another evaluation can occur after more RTI data is collected.

- [Del Regulations Title 14 Section 925 \(Web Page\)](#)
- [Del Regulations Title 14 Sections 922 - 929 \(PDF version\)](#)

Highlights from the BSD Web Site

brandywineschools.org

- [Mt Pleasant's Courtney Cox is Del Teacher of the Year](#)
- [Springer's Meg Nortz is Del Phys Ed Teacher of the Year](#)
- [Maple Lane's Julianne Pecorella Del Principal of the Year](#)
- [Space Consolidation Page - learn about what schools may be affected](#)
- [Join BSD Electronic Mailing List - stay informed](#)
- [Superintendent Jim Scanlon on Inclusive Education](#)

Upcoming Events

Follow the links for the details

BSNPTA Mtg: Coping With The Crisis in Child Mental Health
Wed, Jan 9th, 6:30pm [Springer Middle School](#)

Back by popular demand, W. Douglas Tynan, Ph.D., ABPP, from Nemours Health & Prevention Services, will present on what to do when dealing head-on with crisis situations and give teachers, parents, administrators perspective taking and tools on helping the child navigate the crisis.

[BSD Board Workshop on RTI](#)

Monday, Dec 3rd, 7pm [District Office](#)

[Social Skills and Behavior Supports](#)

Dr. Jed Baker

Thursday, Dec 6th, 8:30am-2:30pm West Orange, New Jersey

[Section 504 in Delaware: A Closer Look](#)

Thursday, Dec 13th, 9am-4pm, Holiday Inn Select, Claymont

David Kane, J.D.

Section 504 overview - including similarities and differences with IDEA.

North Wilmington Asperger Support Group

Thursday, Dec 13th, 7pm, Brandywine Hundred Library on Foulk Road

[Childhood Bipolar Disorder: An emerging Trend](#)

Thursday, Dec 13th, 8am-3:40pm, Cherry Hill, NJ

Jonathon Gransee, Psy.D.

[10th Annual Life Conference](#)

Thursday, Jan 24th, 8:30am-3:45pm, [Dover Sheraton Hotel](#)

Delaware's premier conference for persons with disabilities and those who support them.

[Helping Children with Auditory Processing Disorders](#)

Monday, Jan 28th, 8:30am-4pm

Jay Lucker, Ed.D., CCC-A/SLP, FAAA

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BSNPTA - Advocating for our Students and our Teachers who help them.