



COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT SERVICES UNIT
Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee (CSEAC)

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Position Statement Regarding

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI) IN COLORADO SCHOOLS

Respectfully Submitted by the Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee

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BACKGROUND

Response to Intervention (RTI) is not special education reform, it is *education* reform! It requires a collaboration of administrators, general and special education teachers, and parents to develop a systemic plan to meet the needs of students requiring educational supports to prevent them from failing in school. Educational interventions are matched to students' academic needs using data-based decision making. All students are regularly monitored for progress in core content areas (reading, writing, and math) with the intent that instructional planning and decisions be made and implemented immediately with the input of educators, parents, and, in some cases, the students themselves. Since collaboration is an essential component of RTI, it utilizes a "blending of services" by infusing a mixture of educators with specific expertise to provide the various tiers of intervention (i.e., "universal" or general education, "targeted," and "intensive") so that research-based curriculum and instruction can occur.

RTI was included in the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004), signed into law December 3, 2004, with implementation scheduled for July 1, 2005. RTI has been the focus of numerous research papers demonstrating its efficacy

as a model for supporting students toward early identification and intervention, reducing the time and expense inherent in the typical identification systems, and potentially reducing the total number of students needing special education services due to its progress monitoring and early intervening principles. In fact, the state of Iowa has been successfully implementing the RTI model for several years and is widely known to be among the highest "student achievement" states in the U.S.

SUMMARY OF OUR CONCERNS

Students in Colorado schools are not routinely monitored for progress to identify learning challenges and there is not currently a model to match assessment data to intervention. It is more often the case that when students fall far enough behind they are subjected to rigorous, complex and time-consuming evaluations to determine if they qualify for special education services. This approach is known as the "wait to fail" model and leaves many students falling further behind while waiting to qualify for special education services, rather than using progress monitoring and immediate intervention to catch students before they fall. RTI would help provide the student with the appropriate tools to achieve the academic goals in each subject area where assessment had identified a need.

To provide intervention only after a student is already failing is an extreme disservice to the student, the parents, and to the schools charged with educating all children. This identification process does not address students who, though not disabled, still need specific and direct attention to learning issues. In Colorado, schools have effectively been precluded from identifying students for interventions without first conducting the special education assessments. Language in the IDEA 2004 has allowed for early assessment of all students to identify specific learning disabilities as well as for those who are simply struggling academically.

Additionally, school districts are at different points in their "readiness" for implementing RTI. Indeed, RTI preparation and understanding among all educators at all levels continues to be a challenge. As a result, many districts are calling for support and/or guidance from the state and from higher education so that they can proceed with effective RTI practices.

WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND:

- The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) should develop a statewide plan for immediate implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) including all components such as universal screening, continuous progress monitoring, research based curriculum & intervention, and evaluation of curriculum & instruction practices using fidelity measures. This plan should be directed at both the general and special education community and should require each Colorado school district or administrative service unit to conduct an RTI self-assessment before the end of the 2005-2006 school year.

- The CDE should highly encourage all Colorado teacher preparation programs (i.e., higher education) to include RTI training for prospective educators of all licensure areas. RTI training must be integrated into the contents and methods instructional curriculum and must not be restricted to courses dealing with special education (e.g., a class required of all prospective educators be developed within the department of education that addresses the RTI model and best practices).
- Both the CDE and school districts should assure that parents are closely involved in every level of RTI planning and implementation, including, but not limited to, the development of all district RTI plans.
- The CDE should require school districts to implement valid and reliable progress monitoring systems in the areas of reading, writing, and math for all students.
- The CDE should develop clear eligibility guidelines to determine how students who are being served under the RTI model can best be identified as having a learning disability. Without these guidelines, there is concern that each district will employ their own identification methods, thus creating inconsistency and confusion statewide.
- The CDE and school districts should ensure and/or support professional development for everyone involved in the implementation of RTI (i.e., educators, parents, agency representatives, etc.). Consistent training among various professionals leads to consistent—high quality—services for students statewide.