

Introduction

Our combined forty years of public school experience have all been in the fifth largest school district in the United States: the Clark County School District (CCSD) in Nevada. During that time, we have watched the evolution of assistance to struggling students, and we have helped lead our school to integrate RTI successfully school-wide.

Like many other districts, the CCSD once used a team Problem-Solving Model known as the Student Intervention Team (SIT) or Student Intervention Process (SIP). The team consisted of a random number of teachers and/or administrators who met on a regular basis to “monitor student progress.” We use the phrase “monitor student progress” loosely because, in many cases, the process did not actually monitor anything.

Traditionally, what happened at these team meetings was quite the opposite of progress monitoring. A teacher would fill out an enormous packet of information about a failing student and request an appearance at one of the team meetings. Because so many students would fall into the failing category, a teacher could wait several weeks before getting scheduled to present information on a student. If the teacher came to the meeting prepared, she would share the student’s work samples, assessment results, and strategies that had been implemented to help the student make progress. The team would listen to the teacher and then provide one of two sets of advice.

Many times, the teacher would be sent away with additional ideas for interventions that should be tried and then scheduled for a date to return to the team a few weeks later to discuss the results. If the teacher had provided the team with enough evidence of instruction and support, however, the team would recommend that the student be referred to a Multidisciplinary Team (MDT). The MDT would review all the same information and would again determine if the teacher had exhausted all possible options to provide the student with adequate instruction.

Once *again*, the teacher could be sent back to try more interventions on her own. If the teacher was lucky, the MDT would recommend assessing the student to determine if the child was eligible for special-education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In the meantime, the calendar year would pass at an alarming rate, and the student would continue to fail while awaiting the outcome of the assessments. The entire process of referring a student for assistance could take an academic school year or longer. Many teachers experienced severe frustration with this process and, at times, simply refused to participate in it at all. The traditional process was set up as a lose-lose for everyone.

Enter RTI

At the end of the 2002-2003 school year, our director of psychological services asked the school to pilot a new process for helping struggling students called Response to Intervention (RTI).

Luckily, we had already created a strong Professional Learning Community (PLC) in which the teachers collaborated regularly on instructional strategies and crafted common expectations and common assessments (Dufour and Eaker, 1998).

At this time, IDEA was in the process of being reauthorized, recommending documentation of a child's response to research-based interventions as part of the evaluation procedure. As a result of the IDEA reauthorization process, the newly assigned psychologist was very excited to implement RTI, and we began experimenting with the process.

Initially, the only change we made was to begin pencil-and-paper tracking of student progress in some basic skills. During the next eight years, we experimented with our procedures, and the process transformed into something nobody could have predicted.

During that time, we dramatically reduced the number of students who were referred for special-education testing. Eventually, 100 percent of the students we referred qualified for special-education services.

The best outcome was that we increased our overall student achievement on state proficiency tests by more than twenty percentage points in English/language arts and more than thirty-five percentage points in math. (Figure 1 shows proficiency growth throughout the seven years of implementation.)

We were invited to present our findings at various conferences and schools throughout Nevada. Because the requests continued, we decided to create this resource to guide principals and teachers through the step-by-step process as they implemented RTI at the building level.

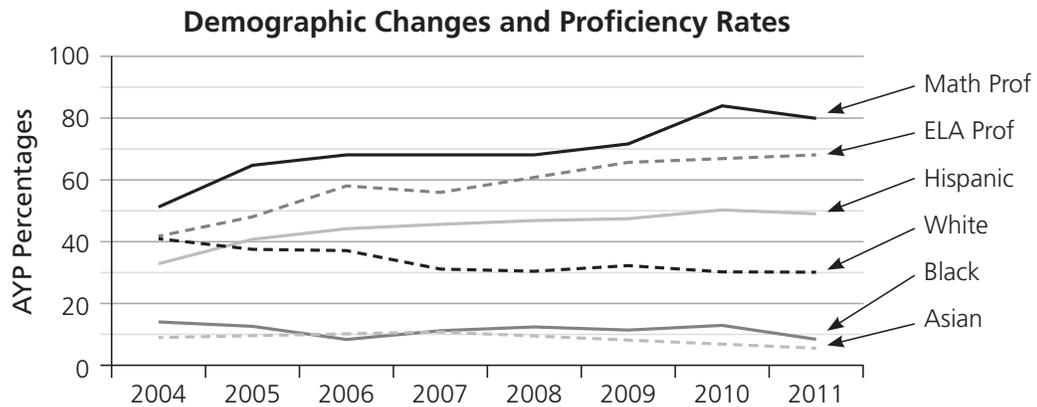


Figure 1: Demographic Changes and Proficiency Rates

What You Will Find in This Resource

This book compiles all the fine-tuning we have done on the RTI process since 2003. It is still a work in progress. Although we have data that supports our success with RTI, at heart, we are practitioners writing this book for other practitioners who simply want to know where to start and how to sustain RTI in a practical and effective way.

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It is important to note that the six steps flow together so smoothly that it is often difficult to separate them completely. We have attempted to separate them for teaching purposes and then illustrate how the steps work together in three case studies.

Chapter One begins with a discussion of tiered instruction. Chapter Two reviews the institutional underpinning required for RTI success: a collaborative, problem-solving culture and a team that is able to plan and/or support the RTI process and tiered instruction.

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The next six chapters take you through six steps for implementing a three-tiered RTI intervention process. Chapters Three and Four lead you through identifying and diagnosing the exact skill deficiencies of students who struggle with Tier 1 instruction. Chapter Five provides tips to plan interventions—e.g., how to set achievable goals, identify an acceptable threshold for success, and determine the interventions necessary to achieve the goal.

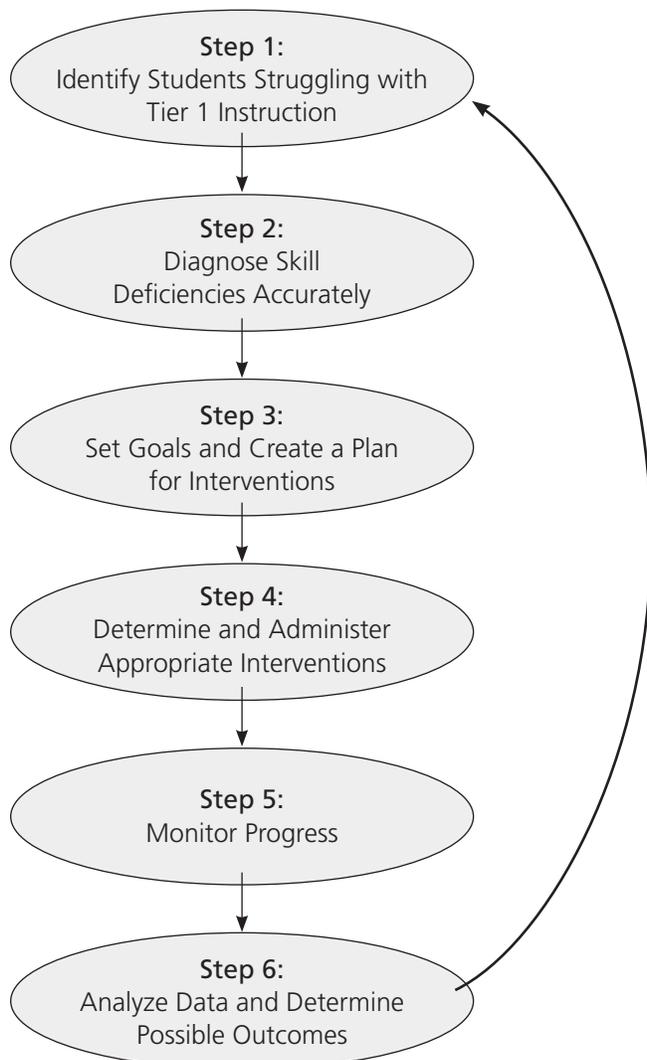


Figure 2: Six Steps to School-wide Success

In Chapters Six and Seven, we will share ideas for implementing interventions and discuss how to monitor progress. Chapter Eight highlights possible outcomes and explains how to plan for your next steps.

The case studies in Chapter Nine follow the journeys of three students: a first-grade ELL student from Mexico, a fourth-grade ELL student who had been retained at his previous school but made rapid gains at our school, and a student who, beginning in the first grade, moved through tier levels for multiple years before being referred to special-education status.

You will find additional sources for RTI information and assessments in the Appendix as well as directions to digitally download all the charts in the book and templates to use at your school.

What You Will Not Find in This Resource

We do not focus on the details of *establishing* a school-wide community that supports RTI. Many resources have been written on this topic, and because the foundation for a school’s learning-ready community begins with the principal, this resource assumes that the school has already created the fertile foundation on which a successful RTI program may flourish.

This resource also is not about how to implement high-quality, comprehensive Tier 1 instruction, which is really the first and best way to ensure all students perform at grade-level expectations.

Instead, we focus on what to do for those students for whom Tier 1 is not enough to ensure their successful achievement at grade-level expectations.

Our goal is to guide a school through the RTI implementation process from start to finish. We do not, however, elaborate on the eligibility process for special-education services, but we take you to the point just before the evaluation for determination.

One more disclaimer is that we only have personal experience using these procedures in an elementary school setting. However, many of the procedures presented are the same for secondary schools, and we provide some suggestions for applying them at that level.

This book includes a free digital download of blank templates to use at your school. For directions, turn to the Appendix (p. 93).

We hope this resource will demystify the RTI process and help your school embed RTI as a school-wide culture that supports each student's academic journey.