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## Response to Intervention Practices in Middle Schools Question and Answer

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**Question:** How do you know that the essential components that apply to elementary schools also apply for middle schools?

**Answer:** Our purpose was to identify middle schools that implemented RTI. Since we knew very little about what exactly the essential components for middle school looked like, we used Shinn (2008) to base our search criteria. We found that many middle schools used the same RTI frameworks and essential components as we expect in elementary schools (screening assessments 2-3 times each year, regular progress monitoring assessments, multi-level prevention system, and data based decision making practices).

Shinn, M. (2008). Implementation in secondary schools. In S. Fernley, S. D. LaRue, J. Norlin (Eds.), *What do I do when: Answer book on RTI* (pp. 1–17). Arlington, VA: LRP Publications.

**Question:** Why do you use these implementation stages?

**Answer:** The NCRTI (adopted from Fixsen, et al, 2005) suggests schools focus on the following four steps: (1) exploring and adopting, (2) planning, (3) implementing, and (4) sustaining. For the purposes of initial implementation, this webinar focused on the first three stages of the process. Within each implementation stage, we selected topics that middle school practitioners identified as pivotal for implementation. We could not be comprehensive in scope for all stages of implementation. Instead, we provided considerations based on the experiences of these middle school practitioners. We recommend using a variety of information sources to carefully plan implementation activities (e.g., Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; RTI Action Network, NASDSE RTI Blueprints, NCRTI).

**Question:** How do schools establish a leadership team? What are the teams other responsibilities?

**Answer:** The Leadership Team refers to the staff members and leaders who are involved in planning, consensus building, and implementation activities. Many administrators in middle schools stated that one of the most important actions they took while exploring RTI was to assemble this RTI team. Several principals in the study assembled their teams very early in the process; one stated that assembling the leadership team was the first activity she did. When determining which staff members would best fit on the leadership



team, principals in the study were careful to consider the abilities, backgrounds, and characteristics of staff. The ways in which schools developed their team, selected members, composed the team, and set priorities and responsibilities varied. The leadership team should establish a realistic schedule to discuss RTI planning, guidance, and implementation of next steps.

**Question:** What is the purpose of the data-based decision making system?

**Answer:** The purpose of a data-based decision making framework is for school administration and teaching staff to have an established procedure to make instructional decisions that are immediately responsive to students' needs based on the screening and progress monitoring data collected. The decision-making framework is a set of established routines and procedures for making decisions at all levels of RTI implementation, and provides explicit decision rules for assessing student progress. As we described briefly with progress monitoring data, school staffs have an established decision-making system for collecting and analyzing data. The data-based decision making process facilitates analysis of the student data to evaluate whether students are benefitting from the instructional interventions and curriculums. Collecting and analyzing student data on a regular basis allows staff to be immediately responsive to student instructional needs.

**Question:** Is screening necessary for middle schools when students enter with a history of data from elementary schools?

**Answer:** Adolescent students arrive in middle school with a school performance history. Middle school personnel will want to consider this performance history and data records of their incoming students. While past performance history provides school staff initial information about future academic performance, all middle school personnel advocated the value of continuing screening assessments to identify potentially at-risk students needing additional instruction or intervention. One principal stated, "Because we are screening so quickly we see problems in real time, so we are catching kids before there is a major deficit and we are catching kids who are experiencing problems." Several administrators referred to the importance of collecting data from a mid-year screening assessment. With that mid-year screen, staff could identify when (a) students' at-risk status changed, (b) students were making expected gains, and (c) classes were making expected gains.

**Question:** How did other middle schools organize resources to accommodate such small tertiary level class sizes?



**Answer:** In order to accommodate students needing tertiary-level support, schools either used all the students' elective time for intensive instruction classes, or they chose to remove them from a social studies or science class. Removal from a core class provided students the opportunity to gain the strategies and skills they needed to return to and succeed in general education classes. Frequently, intervention teachers and special education instructors taught tertiary-level classes. Many times, instruction was provided in a co-teaching model with general education, para-education or other assistant teachers, thus reducing class sizes. When para-educators or other assistants were in the classrooms, the lead, expert teacher carefully supervised them, as their role was to support the lead teacher to carry out the specified interventions, but not to make instructional decisions.

**Question:** How did other schools use their data to move students from tertiary to secondary or from secondary to primary levels of instruction?

**Answer:** Frequent progress monitoring data provides teachers and students immediate feedback about whether students are reaching their learning goals and if the intervention meets the students' needs. When determining responsiveness, many schools used a trend line with three to six data points, and made instructional decisions based on students' progress toward a goal score (or aim line). Instructional decisions were often made in a team setting using multiple data sources (e.g., screening scores, progress monitoring data, formative assessments, behavior reports, grades).

**Question:** How often did schools progress monitor students?

**Answer:** Very few schools progress monitored their general education students – but reported monitoring their progress with their screening assessments. At the secondary level of intervention (tier 2), progress monitoring typically occurred at least every other week, though once per month was not uncommon. Importantly, around half the schools monitored progress once a week or more frequently (e.g., 2 times per week). At the tertiary level of intervention (tier 3), schools reported progress monitoring as little as two times per month or as often as daily, and half reported progress monitoring on a weekly basis. Several schools reported that progress monitoring at the tertiary level of instruction varied according to individual student needs and the interventions implemented. “For our most at-risk students, those who are farthest off of grade level, progress monitoring needs to be the most frequent.”

**Question:** What tools or assessments did schools use to progress monitor their students?



**Answer:** Overall, schools used a wide variety of tools and had varying practices. Most schools provided interventions and progress monitoring practices for literacy and numeracy. For reading, most schools reported that they used multiple tools to progress monitor in reading. For example, they used published, nationally-available assessments, used curriculum-based measures (CBMs), and measures included with various reading intervention curricula they used in their intensive classes. In math, many schools reported struggling identifying appropriate measures for numeracy. Most used a nationally-published CBM, and the others used district- and school-normed CBMs. Other common progress monitoring tools reported include measures bundled with the math intervention curricula used in their intervention classes.

**Question:** How did schools build their schedules to account for smaller class sizes of secondary and tertiary-level classes?

**Answer:** The schedule is often reported as an implementation challenge for middle schools. In the webinar, we provided one school's example of a modified class schedule, but clearly there are a variety of techniques schools can use, based on their individual needs, to integrate multi-level intervention classes into their schedules. Such integration generally depends on the already existing school structure. Overwhelmingly, the participating schools used elective periods to provide intervention classes and were the most common approach when they manipulated their schedule to provide secondary- and tertiary-level classes. For example, if a school used a 7-period school day, and two of those periods were for elective classes, then the school designated the electives as intervention classes for students needing interventions. The common goal for staff and students was to have students meet academic benchmarks and move back into their elective courses of choice. For more information on scheduling at the Middle School level, see the NCRTI document, [RTI Scheduling Processes for Middle School](#).