



RTI Scheduling Processes for Middle Schools: Question and Answer

Question: Where can we find on your site or elsewhere the standards and procedures for the RTI process? It is just hard to grasp this at the middle school level when they have so many classes.

Answer: You can find our RTI Essential Components document that provides an overview of RTI at <http://rti4success.org/resource/essential-components-rti-closer-look-response-intervention>. The website also has several resources about the basics of RTI, as well as specific resources for Middle School students.

Question: In regards to RTI at the middle school level, when a child scores low on state testing, is that when a child would be able to be a part of the RTI process?

Answer: All students in a school that is implementing an RTI framework are part of the RTI process. It sounds like you are asking about the screening process that is used to identify students who are possibly at risk for academic problems. From the middle school study, we have seen some schools that do use their state assessment scores as screening data. When schools get the state assessment scores for the students, they will review all the students scoring below their proficiency score. Often the school staff reviews the students' other available data, too, to determine what level of intervention the students may need. Most of the participating middle schools used screening assessments in addition to the state assessment scores. For example, if the staff realize the students struggle with reading comprehension, the school staff may implement a screening assessment several times (once to three times) each year to collect immediate data on which students may need additional help. That collected data are used in conjunction with the state assessment scores and provide an additional level of information about the student population.

Question: I have been hired by a school that has not had an intervention program before. Also, the school cannot "identify" students because of cultural sensitivity. Any suggestions for where I should begin?

Answer: Schools, regardless of identification methods, are constantly collecting data of some sort. Because of state assessments and other high stakes tests, your school already does have data about which students are high-achieving, expected achievers, and low achievers. That initial data will give you a good idea about where to start, whether it be in math, reading, behavior, or a content area. From there, you can begin to decide which areas will best serve the students. RTI should be about serving ALL students to reach their learning potential, regardless of cultural background. That being said, the instruction should be culturally sensitive and appropriate for your student population.



Question: Do you all have an RTI Representative for each state? Who makes the preparations (decisions) for RTI to be implemented?

Answer: Decisions regarding RTI implementation are up to individual states. Some states mandate that RTI be implemented; other states support “local control,” leaving these decisions up to the local districts. The National Center on RTI does not have a representative in each state, but we do work with many state departments of education, providing either intensive or targeted technical assistance.

Question: Have you all ever considered doing a RTI Process Training for parents to better understand the success of the program?

Answer: We know that including parents in the RTI process is critical. On the National Center on RTI website you will find a booklet written specifically for parents of elementary students, which would be of some use to parents of middle schoolers: http://www.rti4success.org/pdf/ABC_of_RTI.pdf. In addition, the NCRTI is currently working on updating the resources for parents, including a booklet specifically for parents of middle school students, and in the next few months we intend to have a webinar focused on how to include parents in the RTI process in schools.

Question: I worry constantly about funding. With things getting cut left and right here in Texas, where do folks find the funds for computerized assessment (universal screens, progress monitors) and Tier II specific (aren't being used in Tier I) intervention programs?

Answer: This is a very good, timely, and relevant question! Schools across the country are worried about funding, and with good reason. Many schools get started by first identifying what tools they already have in their toolbox. For example, they will create a "menu" of their available assessments, ones that could be used to screen or monitor progress. Often, schools have common assessments or similar programs in place. Special Education OFTEN is a great place to get started. What programs are they using with their students? How do they monitor their progress? This is also a good way to figure out what kinds of gaps exist and where you need to fill in with other resources. I've also heard that middle schools will collaborate across their district, or several districts will develop a consortium to share resources and costs for programs. Additional resources on funding for RTI can be found on our website at http://www.rti4success.org/search-view?title=&body=&tid_3%5B%5D=25.

Question: What is an appropriate length of time to remain in Tier I gathering information before moving on to Tier II?

Answer: I think in middle school, staff members tend to move a lot more quickly than in elementary schools. The reason is that these students come into your school with an achievement history and data. Often, from the first screening data, the staff can determine quickly which students will benefit from additional help (tier 2), and even can



immediately provide tertiary level services (tier 3) when data indicate that those students will benefit best with that most intense level of intervention. It is important that you have established decision making rules and then stick with that data-based decision making process. This will help you determine whether the students are responding to the instruction, regardless of the level of intensity. It often becomes harder at the secondary level to fluidly move students during the middle of the semester, but ideally, that is what your school will do as you see that students need more or less intensive instruction.

Question: How are you scheduling intervention times for students?

Answer: Overwhelmingly, the schools in this study used elective periods as the most common approach to scheduling 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. In addition to using elective periods, some schools chose to shorten the length of their classes (e.g., by 5 minutes) and add an additional class period to the school day. In many cases, these schools also shortened transition times between classes to increase instructional time. The added instructional period provided either intervention or elective time for students. This method required all instructional staff to teach an intervention or an elective class. Finally, some schools provided extended learning time outside the existing school schedule. For example, classes met before or after the school day or on Saturdays. The sessions outside of the school day were voluntary, and schools had to gain the support of staff, parents, students, and the community to put these structures in place.

Question: What would be the essential steps/elements to consider or plan before implementing RTI in High School or Middle School?

Answer: Careful implementation planning will help ensure the success of RTI efforts. The National Center on RTI wrote a document about the steps of RTI implementation, including exploring and adopting, planning, and implementation processes at the middle school level. It can be downloaded at <http://rti4success.org/resourcetype/rti-implementation-processes-middle-school>. We also talked through some of the implementation processes on a webinar last April, which you can find on our website at <http://www.rti4success.org/webinars/video/920%20>.

Question: My hope is that you can find the resources to train the support groups, the principal groups, the school boards, the parents, and the higher education deans. Is there any talk of launching such things through a major “blitz?”

Answer: The NCRTI is working very intensely with many states to help the state departments of education scale up the ability of local education agencies in RTI implementation efforts. Furthermore, as part of this effort, the NCRTI is developing



many training modules on the RTI essential components, which you will be able to find on our website. Beyond the work of the NCRTI, there are other organizations also providing quality information, products and training opportunities, such as the RTI Action Network.

Question: Does the RTI-process promote only in school legwork or home input as well?

Answer: We do think it is vital to include the parents in the process - RTI requires the whole community to help the students achieve success. We did talk with some middle schools that actively worked to include the parents and ensured they understood the processes of the schools. For example, one school even invited parents to community forums (provided pizza), and explained the process. Another sent out fliers to provide information, then met with parents to ensure they understood the terms, processes, and procedures. Another method used to maintain the communication pathways was to designate a staff person to keep in frequent communication with the students' parents about their progress. For example, one staff would have 12 or so students for whom they contacted parents frequently to discuss grades, screening and progress monitoring data, tier movement, and academic success. In addition, schools found it important to also ensure that the students themselves were highly involved in the process, i.e., they knew exactly why they were in the various classes, why they took progress monitoring assessments, what their goal scores were, etc. Students found this level of participation very motivating, and they were engaged in their learning in ways they hadn't previously experienced.

Question: What scientific method based RTI programs are available?

Answer: RTI is considered an organizational change model, rather than an added program. There are a few different conceptions of the RTI framework, depending on where you look, but the essential components are the same: screening, progress monitoring, multi-level interventions, and data-based decision making. A variety of high-quality organizations are available to help you understand the basics of RTI including the NCRTI, The RTI Action Network, and the IDEA Partnership. The foundation of RTI is that schools use high-quality, research- and evidence-based assessments and instruction to effectively teach all students.

Question: Are there studies on RTI examining during school interventions compared to after school interventions and what are your thoughts?

Answer: I don't know of any studies that show the efficacy of in-school instruction compared to extended learning time, which doesn't mean that such studies are not out there. However, in practice, we saw both methods. One school only provided before-school interventions, and they stated that their own data showed it was not effective enough. They saw some gains, but not big enough gains, so they were about to add interventions to their in-school schedule during elective times. Most other schools



offering extended learning time outside of the school day also provided in-school interventions as well. In addition, they had to recruit the full support of the parents and community to provide the extended learning time (due to transportation, time, etc). In addition, school staff must agree to facilitate these classes. Finally, it is crucial that the students be heavily invested in taking additional time to take the intervention courses outside the school day. So, the extended learning time can be tricky, but can work with the right procedures and support of the community involved.

Question: Are there times to move students directly to a Tier III Program?

Answer: Unlike in elementary school, students arrive in middle school with a history of grades, assessment scores, and achievement background. In some of the participating middle schools, school staff would review the data of their incoming students and determine that those students need the most intensive level of intervention. The decisions are truly based on the student's performance data.

Question: Which areas primarily were targeted for intervention? Reading, math, and writing only?

Answer: As we looked across middle schools, most of them focused first on reading interventions, then added math interventions, and often included behavioral interventions. Very few schools tackled writing, although a couple did. Once schools felt they had adequate procedures in place for reading and math, some of them started working on content area interventions too, such as science or social studies.

Question: It can be hard to find age appropriate materials; what supplemental curriculums and/or materials are being used during the intervention times?

Answer: The National Center on RTI has developed an Instructional Intervention Tools Chart. You can find it at <http://www.rti4success.org/instructionTool>. This chart, which is updated annually, reviews the research behind instructional interventions. You can sort the tools chart by grade level and/or topic.

Question: Do you have information regarding researched based interventions for RTI and PBS?

Answer: The National Center on RTI focuses on RTI and academics. The PBIS center has information about behavior; you can access their site at <http://www.pbis.org/>

Question: Has anyone considered RTI at the HS level for kids who still can't read?

Answer: As a matter of fact, yes! People are working on how to implement RTI at the high school level to help students who cannot read. We have a very basic overview of processes at the high school level on our website. Beyond that, some high schools have started implementing intervention classes, with very small class sizes, for students with



low literacy skills. Often, by this grade level, those students are already well-known, and the school staff can immediately provide intervention instruction in their needed area. However, knowledge about how this works in high schools (with credit systems) is still being developed.

Question: Do you know if time allotments are the same for middle school as they are for elementary...90 minute core reading block, an additional 30 minutes for Tier II instruction and an additional 60 minutes for Tier III instruction?

Answer: There are not specific time allotments in middle school for reading and math. Some middle schools have adopted the 90-minute block specifically for those students that need the more intensive instruction time. However, a 90-minute long period is not mandatory. The schools that did adopt it were highly complementary of the effectiveness of the extra time for their students. In addition, other schools added longer “block” sessions (e.g., around 90 minutes) for their students needing intensive math instruction. It appears that it is more about the exposure length and fit for students needing advanced instruction than a specific time allotment.

Question: Are there data documenting the relationship between parent participation and student success, specifically in an RTI context?

Answer: I personally don't know of specific data documenting parent participation in an RTI context. However, as with any instructional and educational change, the schools that participated in this study found (anecdotally) that including the parents on the entire RTI process (implementation efforts, information dissemination, parents' meetings and forums, parent-friendly reports on student progress, etc.) greatly facilitated the student and parent engagement in the organizational changes. Furthermore, the more the teachers and staff discussed the changes and reasons for those changes, the more they understood it themselves. There are several parent guides available. On the National Center on RTI website you will find a booklet written specifically for parents of elementary students, which would be of some use to parents of middle schoolers: http://www.rti4success.org/pdf/ABC_of_RTI.pdf. This booklet is currently being updated, and one version will include information for middle school. These will be released in Spring 2012.

Question: Has any state or organization such as the National Center made a policy statement on the credentialing requirements for staffing the intervention classes?

Answer: To my knowledge, no one has made a policy statement on the actual credentialing requirements to teach intervention classes. However, the findings from the middle school study strongly suggest that teachers who are teaching intervention classes should be prepared to teach those classes. Universally, the schools that participated in this study used professional development to ensure that staff members who were responsible for beginning implementation had the appropriate skills and support to implement their



areas of responsibility. Furthermore, school administrators scheduled RTI-related in-services throughout the year to provide ongoing professional development. Continuous knowledge building facilitated teachers' understanding of the RTI process and prepared them to teach interventions with fidelity, monitor students' progress, and use data to make instructional decisions. Finally, your other point of "good fit" is also vitally important. Ideally, the most expert teachers should teach the students with the greatest needs.

Question: Our elementary teachers have plenty of resources to use to monitor. But, I am looking for cost-effective or free ways to monitor middle schoolers. Any advice?

Answer: The National Center on RTI maintains a Progress Monitoring Tools Chart, found here: <http://rti4success.org/progressMonitoringTools>. This is a chart that shows the results of an annual review of tools and provides you data on the reliability, validity, age-range, sensitivity, and more, for many progress monitoring tools. This chart also provides in-depth descriptions of each tool.

Question: Is differentiated instruction and RTI the same?

Answer: The two are not the same, and do not necessarily have to both be in place for either to be successful. That being said, the schools that had differentiated instruction in place found that it greatly facilitated RTI implementation. Differentiated Instruction is a teaching method that adjusts instruction to the varying abilities and background knowledge and experiences of the students in a classroom. This approach focuses on the fact that students are diverse and learn in different ways; thus the instruction is adjusted for those various learning abilities. For example, many differentiated instruction classrooms may have a general lesson for everyone, and then have the students break into groups. Sometimes the teacher will work with one or two of the groups more intensely (as needed) and sometimes students will be paired or grouped together. Differentiated instruction takes a great deal of professional development, practice and feedback. Many of the participating schools in the study found that their efforts for implementing differentiated instruction in the general education classrooms greatly facilitated their later introduction of RTI, in particular, the tiered intervention classes. They were already used to providing instruction based on students' needs, and then were more easily able to collect assessment data and determine and provide interventions.