



“Implementing Response to Intervention”

Slide 1: Welcome to the webinar, “Implementing Response to Intervention.” This is one of 11 webinars developed by the National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI). This webinar provides an overview of effective strategies that can lead to successful RTI implementation.

My name is Jessica Agus, and I am a technical assistance support specialist for the National Center on Response to Intervention.

Slide 2: NCRTI has developed a series of webinars to cover information that is important for RTI implementation. On this slide you can see the different webinars available in the series. While you can watch the webinars in any sequence, we recommend that you first watch the “What is RTI?” webinar in order to ensure you have an understanding of how RTI is discussed in this series. It may also be beneficial to complete all of the other webinars in the first row, Defining the Essential Components, before watching this presentation.

Slide 3: The webinar today will cover the following topics.

- We’ll have an introduction and we’ll talk about what implementation is and why it is important;
- We’ll talk about the stages of Implementation that NCRTI has identified; and
- We’ll go through some considerations for implementing RTI; we’ll look at some ineffective strategies and some effective strategies.

The content of the webinar is focused on the research on best practices for successfully implementing a new program or practice. This implementation research is general and can be applied to any program or practice, so in this presentation, we will focus on its application of the research to RTI, but in the future you could use this information for whatever program or practice you are trying to implement.

Slide 4: By the end of this webinar, hopefully you will be able to ...

- Explain why implementation activities are important and how they affect outcomes;
- Characterize each stage of RTI implementation;
- Differentiate between ineffective and effective implementation strategies; and
- Determine next steps to improve your district or school’s RTI implementation.

Slide 5: Before we get started, I just want to quickly go over the Essential Components of RTI graphic developed by NCRTI so that we can review the essential components of RTI.

You can see that on the top left is screening, which is a brief assessment that we use to identify whether students are at risk for poor learning or behavioral outcomes. On the top right is progress monitoring, which is brief assessments that we use to monitor the progress of students and to gauge the effectiveness of instruction or interventions that we’re providing. On the bottom



is the multilevel prevention system, which includes three levels of prevention or instruction for students. The first is the primary level, which is where we provide all students with high quality instruction. The second is the secondary level of prevention, which is where we provide students who may be at risk for learning outcomes with some kind of intervention. And the tertiary level of prevention is more intense than the secondary level of intervention and more individualized to the particular student's needs.

In the center of the graphic is data-based decision making, because we feel that data-based decision making really needs to drive the entire process. Data is used in screening and progress monitoring to determine when a student should move through different levels of intervention and also to assess the quality of the core instruction and the interventions that are provided.

We also expect that these essential components are “culturally responsive,” and that if these components are implemented together, we would expect to see improved student outcomes. And this is really the goal of RTI—to improve the performance of students in school.

Slide 6: Getting back to the implementation: What is implementation, and why is it important?

Slide 7: We have one definition that is from Dean Fixsen, a researcher who has done a lot of work looking at implementation science; he said that implementation is “a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions or policies into operation” (Fixsen et al., 2005).

Implementation is a process, not an event. Implementation processes are purposeful and are described in sufficient detail that independent observers can detect the presence and strength of the “specified set of activities” related to implementation.

Slide 8: We’re using two different words here. One is *innovation*, and one is *implementation*.

- Innovation is really the *what*. It is the introduction of something new. In our case, that *what* is RTI, but it may be another program or practice that you are putting into place.
- Implementation is the *how*. How do we put that innovation into place? Implementation is the efforts to incorporate a program or practice at the community, agency, or practitioner level or levels.

Both of those aspects, the innovation and the implementation, are important to put into place in order for the program to be successful.

Slide 9: Why is the implementation piece important? Why do we even need to focus on the implementation activities when we know that our innovation activities are great?

When thinking about implementation, we must be aware that two sets of activities, innovation and implementation activities, will determine student outcomes.



Even if we have a strong innovation like RTI, where there is research behind it, we are not guaranteed to have strong student outcomes unless we have strong implementation activities.

We tend to neglect the second piece, however: the implementation. How do you get that innovation in place? What do you need to do to ensure that all teachers and building principals are implementing RTI with fidelity? Are teachers trained? Do you have all the necessary materials to support the innovation? Is the infrastructure in place to allow RTI to happen? Both the innovation and implementation activities are essential in order to implement RTI with integrity, and attending to both will affect student outcomes and the overall efficacy of RTI.

Slide 10: The term *fidelity* is used a lot in this webinar, so let's define it now.

- Fidelity of implementation refers to how closely the prescribed procedures of a process are followed (Mellard & Johnson, 2007).
- For RTI, this means implementing each component of RTI as prescribed in every school and every classroom.
- Note that “fidelity” and “integrity” are interchangeable terms.

It is crucial that fidelity be central to our discussions and plans for the implementation of evidence-based programs. Otherwise, what you are implementing is not evidence-based and is unlikely to lead to improved student outcomes.

Slide 11: We will now move into the next segment of the presentation, in which we will discuss the stages of RTI implementation.

Slide 12: NCRTI has identified 4 stages of RTI implementation. We have based this off of Dean Fixsen's implementation research at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and they are similar stages that the RTI Action Network (www.rtinetwork.org) has identified. Though they are labeled and numbered a little bit differently, they are based on the same research.

One common mistake that people make in implementing RTI or other initiatives is to jump into implementation before they have really laid the groundwork for it. To address this common problem, we've looked at the literature on implementation to determine the stages, or steps, that are important to pass through in order to make implementation of RTI most effective.

The NCRTI stages are ...

- 1: Exploring and Adopting
- 2: Planning
- 3: Implementing
- 4: Continuously Improving

It is important to note that these stages are not mutually exclusive. A site may be at the Continuously Improving stage but also Exploring and Adopting at the same time for a new practice. And this will certainly be cyclical; once you finish implementing and working on



continuously improving, you're going to need to go back to exploring and adopting new practices.

Slide 13: As we discuss each stage of implementation, you can use the Stages of Implementation Handout to take notes. This will help you differentiate the notable features of each stage. If you have not already printed out this handout from the website, you may wish to press the pause button and do so now.

Slide 14: Stage 1 is Exploring and Adopting. The purpose of this stage, according to Fixsen et al. (2005), is "To assess the potential match between the community needs, ... program needs, and community resources and to make a decision to proceed (or not)."

At this stage we're looking at ...

- What are the needs of a particular school or district?
- What is it that this innovation provide? And
- Is there a match between our needs and what the innovation can provide for us? (And if there is, let's proceed with it; and if not, let's make the decision that we're not going to.)

That happens at the very first stage, and there really needs to be a decision made about whether to proceed or not.

Slide 15: Until stakeholders are clear about what is being implemented and why it is being implemented, many will be reluctant to support implementation efforts. In this stage 1, effective leadership is really needed to create momentum for the implementation of RTI by bringing in a variety of stakeholders and talking through the process of selecting RTI as an innovation to be implemented.

During the Exploring and Adopting stage, sites should ...

- Gather information about the RTI framework;
- Assess the needs of the site and determine whether they match the expected outcomes of RTI;
- Achieve a consensus among key stakeholders to put RTI into place;
- Identify implications of implementing RTI for existing systems and policies;
- Establish a clear vision, mission, and measurable goals of RTI implementation; and
- Develop a culturally and linguistically responsive framework for RTI.

Slide 16: At this stage, needs assessment data could be used to prioritize needs of the larger organization (district or state), individual sites (for example, schools), and even subgroups (for example, English language learners or particular grade levels), and then prioritize those needs and determine desired outcomes. Next is looking at whether there is a match between needs, desired outcomes, and RTI, or whatever innovation is being put into place.

Slide 17: Since there are a lot of activities involved in Exploring and Adopting, we have created the Exploring and Adopting Stage Handout to help teams in this stage plan each of the activities.



If you are in this stage, we encourage you to complete this handout with your team following the webinar. Go ahead and print that out from our website as well.

Slide 18: The second stage of implementation is the planning stage. This is the stage in which sites prepare for implementation. The purpose of this stage is to develop clear plans, processes, and procedures that lead to successful implementation and to construct the infrastructure and structural supports necessary to support RTI implementation.

Research has shown that if people do not have clear processes and procedures, they are unlikely to achieve desired outcomes. Some sites fail to plan, or move too quickly through the planning process. Poor planning can lead to frustrated administrators and teachers, wasted resources, ineffective implementation, and little (if any) positive impact on student outcomes.

By establishing infrastructure and proper supports *prior to* implementation, sites are more likely to experience fuller practitioner and community support, more timely student benefit, and more efficient use of resources.

Slide 19: During stage 2, there are other actions that you might take. That includes ...

- Define leadership roles;
- Develop plans for implementation, professional development, and evaluation;
- Reallocate resources to support RTI implementation (thinking about what kind of resources would be duplicative if you are implementing RTI, or what kind of resources could be moved from another area to support the new innovation);
- Create policies, procedures, and guidance that support the new innovation;
- Perform an “audit” of existing assessment and curricular materials and, if necessary, acquire or eliminate materials (before adding something new, check and see what you have already and see how it might align or how it might not align and how it might need to be changed);
- Plan for and provide ongoing professional development; and
- Plan for ongoing evaluations.

Slide 20: During this stage of implementation, effective use of data is central to developing an action plan and in determining measurable benchmarks of progress. At this stage, we are not just creating an action plan; we are using data to determine what is needed, and we are setting measurable objectives. Data-based decision making during the planning stage should continue to incorporate student needs assessment data and should also consider data on existing and needed resources and evaluation data collected at trainings and other planning activities.

Slide 21: The third stage is Implementing. Full operation of RTI occurs when the RTI framework is embraced by staff and integrated into all schools and classrooms with fidelity. This may take several years to achieve. You might choose to begin implementing RTI on a small scale. This might mean implementing in one school, grade, content area, or classroom, or focusing on one or two of the components of RTI. Regardless of where and how implementation begins, sites will need to make adjustments and adaptations based on their initial attempt to



implement RTI. In making these adjustments, sites may need to revisit earlier stages, to explore their needs and adopt new guidelines and procedures, to plan for implementation of the adaptations and adjustments, and to build infrastructure for new procedures.

When RTI is fully implemented, it is “business as usual” and has become woven into the culture of the school. In addition, the staff is skilled in data-based decision making, administrators and leaders support and facilitate these practices, procedures and processes are routine, community members understand and accept the framework, and expected outcomes are clear. Instruction is evidence based and culturally responsive. It is important to remember that significant changes in student achievement are unlikely to be seen until all of the components of RTI are fully implemented with fidelity.

Slide 22: During the Implementing stage, sites ...

- Deliver components of RTI with fidelity;
- Plan to scale up RTI to include additional classrooms, grades, and/or content areas;
- Evaluate implementation fidelity and outcomes;
- Establish and refine procedures and guidelines; and
- Provide ongoing professional development.

Slide 23: In stage 3, data-based decision making is fully integrated into all the essential components of RTI. At the practitioner level, educators are using data in screening, progress monitoring, and delivering instruction within a multilevel prevention system. More information about how to integrate data-based decision making into each of these components can be found in the Assessment and Data-Based Decision Making webinars in the Implementer Series.

At the organizational level, evaluation data should consider both fidelity of implementation and achievement or other student outcomes. I will discuss evaluation of fidelity more in later slides.

Slide 24: Stage 4 is Continuously Improving. Effective schools continuously strive to improve practices to achieve better outcomes for students. This stage ensures that the RTI framework remains relevant to the needs of districts and schools. During this stage, sites evaluate their progress, adjust practices based on the evaluation, and monitor changes to ensure sustainability of RTI. Innovative practices might be introduced to enhance the match between the RTI framework and the evolving needs of the schools, district, or state. In instituting innovative practices, though, care must be taken to ensure that these practices do not have adverse effects that threaten the fidelity of RTI. Changes in the community, personnel, funding, and political support may also present challenges to the RTI framework during initial implementation. Addressing these challenges and understanding how they relate to training, guidance, and allocation of funds are necessary to ensure that RTI implementation can be sustained in times of change.

Slide 25: During the Continuously Improving stage, sites ...

- Conduct ongoing evaluations of the impact of RTI on student achievement (with a particular focus on subgroups) and the fidelity of implementation;



- Refine plan, guidance, and practice;
- Identify desirable and undesirable innovations based on data;
- Provide ongoing professional development, especially to new teachers, but in addition, to teachers who have already been implementing RTI (we've found that when ongoing professional development has not been provided, teachers tend to lose some of the practices that they may have been conducting already);
- Monitor and address changes to ensure sustainability.

Slide 26: The graphic on the slide summarizes the evaluation data cycle. Evaluation should be an ongoing process that incorporates both evaluation of fidelity of implementation and evaluation of student achievement outcomes. This data should be used to regularly refine the plan, including goals and benchmarks, and provide guidance for practitioners. The data also should be used to identify professional development needs and plan professional development in those areas. Finally, evaluation data can be used to determine whether innovations are achieving the desired outcomes. Once these improvements are in place, the evaluation process does not stop. The improvements should then be evaluated, and as a result, the cycle is continuous. That is why this stage is called “continuously improving.”

Slide 27: Let's review the implementation stages.

- First, you decide you want to do “**it.**” (That's the Exploring and Adopting stage.)
- Then, you plan for “**it.**” (That's the Planning stage.)
- Then, you just do “**it.**” (That's the Implementing stage.)
- And then you improve and sustain “**it.**” (That's the Continuously Improving stage.)

And throughout the process, especially at the Planning stage, the Implementing stage, and the Continuously Improving stage, you are evaluating it. You evaluate at each stage to determine movement to the next stage.

Slide 28: We are now going to turn our attention to what research tells us about several implementation strategies. We will discuss both those that have been shown to be effective and those that have been shown to be ineffective.

Slide 29: Most commonly, groups will use one main strategy to support implementation. None of these strategies alone, however, is effective. They need to be used together to have the greatest effect.

1. With dissemination alone, people are simply told what to do, maybe through an email or through a staff meeting, and they are expected to begin implementing without any training or guidance. As I'm sure you have seen, this does not lead to any change.
2. Many of you are probably also familiar with the “training or professional development alone” scenario. In this case, you come to training, you learn about the new intervention, and you are then expected to do it without additional support. This alone also does not lead to changes in practice.



3. We've also seen states try laws and policies alone: In 2006, a state mandated RTI in grades K–12 and did nothing else. Nothing changed in that state. There was no change in the practice just because of the mandate. Now the state is putting in training and coaching, but this is an example of how laws and policies alone do not achieve positive outcomes.
4. Special funding alone (grants): Funding often helps schools that are starting a new intervention but when the money runs out, the intervention also runs out.

In conclusion, it needs to be a combination of multiple strategies.

Slide 30: In a review of the research, Fixsen et al. (2005) identified core components that should be integrated into an implementation approach. These are staff selection, staff training, ongoing coaching, and evaluation. No one of these can lead to effective implementation in and of itself, but they can lead to effective implementation when combined.

Slide 31: Before a program is implemented, it is important to make sure that qualified staff will be carrying out the program. You need to select practitioners as well as organization staff, including trainers, coaches, evaluators, and administrators. The skills required for each role are unique, so selection criteria should match accordingly. More research is needed on the best practices for staff selection. Evidence suggests, however, that background, GPA, and direct observation and assessment of skills may be important aspects of staff selection.

Slide 32: Next, these qualified staff should be trained so that they understand the program's background information, theory, philosophy, and core components. Trainings should also provide opportunities for staff to practice new skills and receive feedback in a safe environment. Although training is important, it is important to keep in mind that training in itself does not guarantee behavior change or lead to effective implementation.

Slide 33: After staff are trained, most of the learning takes place on the job with the help of a consultant or a coach. The coaching process allows practitioners to learn how to implement RTI in their unique situations and ensure that they are implementing RTI with fidelity. Changing practices often can be stressful, and the provision of emotional and personal support can help teachers continue in spite of the stress.

Slide 34: Evaluations should be used to ensure that individual staff and the larger organization are implementing the program with fidelity. Fixsen et al. (2005) describe three types of fidelity that are important to evaluate: context fidelity, compliance fidelity, and competence fidelity.

- Context fidelity: prerequisites that must be in place for a program or practice to operate (e.g., staff qualifications, student/teacher ratios, and facilities)
- Compliance fidelity: the extent to which staff use the essential components of the evidence-based program
- Competence fidelity: the level of skill shown by the practitioner while delivering the program (like RTI)



These results can then inform needs for staff selection, training, and coaching.

Slide 35: You also can think about the level of support provided for RTI implementation efforts in terms of a continuum of dissemination from “letting it happen” to “making it happen” (Greenhalgh et al., 2005).

- Letting it happen—This would be when an innovation, such as RTI, is disseminated (such as during a meeting or through email) with the hope that it will be implemented. Can you imagine telling staff in an email to start progress monitoring? Most likely, nothing would happen.
- Helping it happen—This is when the information is disseminated and training is provided. In this case, there is more hope that the innovation will be implemented. If staff receive training on progress monitoring, they have a bit more guidance and understanding of how it works. It is still unclear, however, how it would play out with their students in the classroom.
- Making it happen—In this case, strategic, evidence-based support is provided so that RTI is implemented with fidelity. This requires active participation by those implementing the programs (the school staff).

This leads to more effective implementation and greater benefits to students because the interventions get to students more quickly and effectively.

Slide 36: Here is a research example of this continuum of support. In a meta-analysis of the effect of training and coaching on teachers’ implementation in the classroom, this research shows (Joyce & Showers, 2002) the effects of different levels of support. As you can see, with only a discussion of what would be implemented, only 10 percent of teachers were able to demonstrate knowledge, 5 percent could demonstrate skills, and none could use their skills in their classrooms. With professional development that includes theory and discussion and adds a demonstration in training, the percentage of teachers demonstrating knowledge jumps up to 30 percent, and those who can demonstrate new skills jumps up to 20 percent, but still none are able to use their skills in the classroom. By adding practice and feedback in training, the percentage demonstrating knowledge jumps to 60 percent and new skills triples to 60 percent, yet still only 5 percent can use their skills in the classroom. It is not until teachers receive coaching in the classroom that most can demonstrate knowledge, new skills, and actually use their skills. While it is important for teachers to learn the background of a new program and its core components during a training, most learning occurs on the job with the help of a consultant or coach.

Slide 37: When getting ready to implement an innovation, we can feel overwhelmed by the perceived barriers. We think that we will never have the time, the right policies, buy-in from staff, funding, or structure within our schools to make an innovation work.

These barriers perpetuate the idea that we don’t have any control. But we need to ask, “Who sets these policies? Who creates these schedules?” If we always think in terms of barriers, we will always see barriers instead of the opportunities to overcome them.



Slide 38: Inevitably, there will be barriers to implementation, so we need to plan for them.

- Start by identifying potential barriers prior to implementation. Ask yourselves, “What is going to block us from doing this?”
- Then, prepare for potential barriers.
- Build capacity of implementation teams to identify and address issues immediately.

The biggest mistake is to ignore barriers and hope they will resolve themselves.

Slide 39: Teams often encounter barriers when they try to shove a new innovation, like RTI, into an existing service delivery system. Evidence shows that this strategy is not effective. It will lead to poor outcomes: the innovation will rarely be fully implemented in a reasonable time frame; components will be viewed as incompatible and will be ignored or not be implemented with fidelity; and the innovation will eventually disappear.

Slide 40: Let’s give a hypothetical example of a school team that decides that it will implement RTI. However, the team looks at implementation only in the context of the existing system.

- Implementing a research-based core curriculum makes sense to the team and is easily implemented because other policies support this (for example, funding, resources from the district, and guidance already support a strong core curriculum, so that’s something they are already on board with).
- The team thinks that universal screening and progress monitoring will be relatively easy. The core curriculum comes with its own premade measures. The professional development schedule for the year is already made, however, and conducting screening and progress monitoring is not on the list. It is up to the teachers to do it with fidelity (no additional time is given to teachers to learn on their own). They think this will not be a big deal, but they do not take the time to plan for it or change the existing structures that they have.
- In addition, the system for providing tiered interventions is not implemented as intended. The schedule for the year is predetermined and teachers must figure out when interventions will be delivered. In addition, training in intervention delivery was not on the PD schedule and materials are limited to what the principal purchased over the summer. They are trying to use what they already had in place.
- Finally, the current system does not include sufficient time and systematic routines for analyzing and using data. They have no time allocated for this and it is not part of existing meetings. Teachers have to try to make their own time.

In essence, RTI never becomes fully implemented and is unlikely to make any impact. Teachers never received the training to implement screening, progress monitoring, or tiered interventions with fidelity, and data-based decision making was completely ignored. After “trying it for a while” and not seeing results, RTI soon disappears.

Slide 41: In order for the innovation to be effective, we must first evaluate the current infrastructure. We will need to ask:

- What do we need?
- What needs to be in place in order to do those things?
- How do we put those things in place?



- What supports the implementation and what doesn't?

Instead of changing the innovation to fit the service delivery system, we change the service delivery system to fit the innovation.

Slide 42: This is what that process might look like in relation to RTI. First, we ensure that we have a full understanding of how to implement each of RTI's core components. Then we evaluate our service delivery system to determine what must be changed in order to fully implement RTI. In this case, we decide to make changes in professional development, schedule teaming time, schedule times for assessments and interventions, and restructure our school's priorities.

Slide 43: As you are planning and implementing, here are some important points to keep in mind:

- Training itself will not lead to effective implementation. Efforts in staff selection, training, coaching, and evaluation should be combined to ensure that staff are skilled and are implementing RTI with fidelity.
- Barriers are inevitable, but if we plan for them, we can overcome them.
- If the current system is not compatible with RTI implementation, RTI cannot be implemented with fidelity.
- Remember that the RTI framework has multiple components, and it is important that all the components are implemented together with fidelity. If you pick and choose which elements to implement, you are unlikely to achieve positive outcomes.

Slide 44: Here are some resources that can help you at any stage of implementation.

The first three websites have webinars, checklists, timelines, and other tools that can help you at any stage of RTI implementation. The National Implementation Research Network provides a host of resources, including papers and presentations on implementation research. These materials are not specific to RTI, but many of them provided the background research for this presentation and other RTI-specific resources on implementation.

Slide 45: Here are the references cited in this presentation:

Slide 46: (references shown)

Slide 47: Thanks for taking the time to listen to "Implementing Response to Intervention." To find more resources on this topic or to view other webinars in the implementer series, visit www.rti4success.org.