

A young girl with curly hair is smiling and hugging an adult from behind. The adult is wearing a dark blue shirt. The girl is wearing a yellow shirt and a blue patterned vest. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Response to Intervention

A Guide for Parents

Introduction

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a general education process of instruction, assessment, and intervention that holds great promise for more effectively and efficiently addressing the needs of all learners in our schools. Through early identification of students at risk, RtI can increase student success and decrease the number of students identified with specific learning disabilities in need of special education. In Vermont, Response to Intervention is currently being implemented in an increasing number of schools, primarily at the elementary and middle school levels.

This guide provides information for parents about Response to Intervention, with specific examples of how RtI is being implemented in Vermont. The Vermont Family Network (VFN) is working with the Vermont Department of Education to bring families information about RtI and its potential benefits for children and schools.

What is Response to Intervention?

Response to Intervention (RtI) is an education framework that takes a multi-step approach to the early identification and provision of support to students who are not achieving in their regular classroom instruction. When a student struggles with learning, the RtI model enables the teacher to provide classroom instruction and support quickly and

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effectively. Most commonly used to address problems in the acquisition of reading, math, and positive behavior skills, RtI may also be used with other academic areas.

In the RtI model, the teacher conducts a short universal screening of the entire class at the beginning of the school year in order to identify students who are not meeting the academic benchmarks expected of students at that grade level (called “grade-level expectations”). The teacher monitors each child’s progress to ensure that classroom instruction is working and the child is making gains. Using information gathered during progress monitoring, the teacher adjusts classroom teaching methods and decides whether the student needs additional or more intensive instruction.

Who implements RtI in the schools?

In order to implement RtI successfully, schools must have a commitment from their staff. A team of teachers and administrators develops a school-based RtI model of student support. All teachers implement RtI practices; however, a team composed of school staff, such as the building principal, classroom teachers, school psychologist, curriculum coordinator, and special educators oversees the RtI process in each school.

Often the school’s Educational Support Team (EST) provides this oversight. The EST helps to evaluate student progress and make recommendations for further, more intensive instruction.

How can my child benefit from Response to Intervention?

The goal of the RtI model in Vermont is to ensure that every student receives high quality, evidence-based instruction in reading. Benefits of the RtI process include

- closing the achievement gap if your child is struggling with learning, especially reading
- enabling your child's teacher to adjust instruction to meet his or her needs as a result of universal screening and progress monitoring
- reducing the number of children identified with specific learning disabilities due to lack of appropriate instruction
- identifying a child with specific learning disabilities in need of special education service before he or she fails to make progress over a long period of time
- improving overall general education instruction.

Another advantage of RtI is the increased collaboration among school staff. Principals, general education teachers, school psychologists, special educators, and others share responsibility for a student's learning success. The RtI process also calls for greater cooperation between you and school staff regarding your child's instruction and progress.



What teaching methods will be used to help my child learn?

RtI relies on evidence-based instruction, high quality teaching techniques that have been shown to be effective through research, data collection, and evaluation. In the RtI model, teachers use materials and strategies that are known to work and have resulted in student learning success. Evidence-based instruction enables teachers to meet the diverse learning needs of students in the general education classroom. And because you play an important role in the RtI process, you should be informed regularly about the instructional methods used with your child.

How will the school determine whether my child needs learning support?

In a Vermont school using an RtI framework, teachers conduct universal screening to identify children who may be in need of support as learners. District-wide tests may also be used to determine whether your child could benefit from further instruction and support. Universal screening occurs in all grades. In kindergarten and first grade reading, the teacher may test your child's knowledge of letters and sounds. Teachers may also screen children who are able to read story selections to determine the number of correct words read in a minute. This type of screening results in a score called the "oral reading fluency rate." Through universal screening, a teacher can get a good idea of which students will have reading difficulties and can begin right away to help these children. Screening will also identify students who may benefit from enrichment or accelerated learning.

How will I know whether my child is making progress?

Progress monitoring, an essential part of the RtI process, measures your child's academic progress and evaluates the effectiveness of instructional methods. The teacher gathers information using a variety of tools, such as curriculum-based measures, and shares this data with others in order to make informed decisions about instruction. Teachers may monitor your child weekly or monthly to track how well he or she is performing, as well as to assess whether instructional methods need to be changed. School staff collaborate to collect student progress data and to set goals for the student. The school should share monitoring data with you regularly so that you are aware of your child's learning progress.

How does the RtI process work?

The RtI framework is usually described as a three-tier model of educational support that uses evidence-based instruction at each tier. The intervention focus increases in intensity from Tier I to Tier III.

Tier I

In Tier I, students receive evidence-based instruction from their teacher in the general education setting. If a universal screening test or district-wide test shows that your child is at risk for a reading problem, for example, the teacher may adapt the curriculum and/or provide extra help for your child in the classroom. During this time, your child's progress is closely monitored. If making significant progress, he or she will continue to receive instruction in the general education setting. If data show that your child has not responded to Tier I instruction, the teacher brings the data to the school team for problem solving and instructional planning.



Tier II

For a student who has not responded to Tier I instruction, more intensive instruction and support may be provided in Tier II. In Tier II, students receive a more intense level of instruction and support in addition to classroom instruction. Typically, Tier II instruction is provided in small groups. Teachers use instructional methods and strategies that are based on evidence and the data collected on a specific student's progress.

If your child is receiving Tier II instruction, the teacher will monitor progress to determine how well he or she is doing and whether the instruction is meeting your child's needs. Additional assessments may be administered to inform instruction and to better understand how your child learns. If progress monitoring and other measures show that your child is not progressing, the teacher and the RtI team will review the data and consider more intensive individualized assistance in Tier III.

Tier III

In Tier III, a student may be referred for a special education evaluation. In making this decision, the team uses information gathered during progress monitoring for Tier II supplemental instruction. Data should show that the student demonstrates a lack of response to increasing levels of instruction. Some form of individualized planning is done for all students in Tier III. If the team decides a special education evaluation is needed, an evaluation and planning team is convened and the required evaluation process begins. In determining whether a student has a specific learning disability, the school team uses diagnostic measures that look at the student's learning strengths and needs. The team assesses features that are characteristic of a specific learning disability. They also evaluate the impact of the disability on the student's ability to learn basic skills. As a result of this evaluation, the evaluation and planning team may identify the student as eligible for special education.

If your child is in Tier III, he or she will receive evidence-based instruction from a special educator or other highly trained professional that emphasizes skills development in addition to classroom instruction. Your child will have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or, if not eligible for special education, some other form of individualized plan. Your child's learning progress will be tracked using progress monitoring and other measures.

Remember: Throughout the RtI process you retain the right to request a special education evaluation if you suspect that your child has a disability that negatively affects learning.



How can I be involved in RtI for my child?

Vermont is in the early stages of implementing RtI in schools. In the future, however, most Vermont schools will be using the RtI or other problem-solving process. To learn whether your child's school is using RtI, talk to the classroom teacher or contact the principal.

As a parent, you play an essential role in supporting your child at school. If your school is using the RtI process, these questions may help you understand how the process is working.

- What curriculum is being taught in my child's classroom?
- What is my child expected to learn in a year?
- What process does the school use to screen students for learning problems?
- If my child is struggling in the classroom, what evidence-based instruction will he or she receive?
- How will the school notify me if my child needs extra help?
- How can I work with the school to support instruction at home?
- How often will my child's teacher monitor progress, and how will I be notified of the results?
- How does the multi-step approach work, and how will I be notified if my child might benefit from Tier II or Tier III instruction?
- How long will my child receive instruction in a particular tier?
- What role does the Educational Support Team (EST) play in RtI?

How can I help my child get the most from his education?

Children succeed when families and schools work together and communicate regularly about student progress. Research tells us that a student achieves more and schools improve when parents are



involved in meaningful ways. Here are some ways you can support what your child is doing in school.

- Make communication with your child's teacher a priority. Be sure to attend parent-teacher conferences and other meetings about your child.
- Read with your child every day. Visit the school or community library and help your child pick out books to read at home.
- Help your child with homework assignments. Talk to the teacher if you are uncertain about how to help your child with math or other programs with which you are unfamiliar.
- Praise your child for achievements in school. Specific praise from parents and teachers boosts a child's self-esteem and confidence.

Resources

You can find out more about Response to Intervention from these resources.

Vermont Family Network (VFN)

(800) 800-4005

www.vermontfamilynetwork.org

VFN is a family support and advocacy organization. Staff can answer questions about RtI and parent involvement in the RtI process.

Vermont Department of Education

Student Support Services

(802) 828-5118

http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/pgm/pgm_spd/forms.html

The Department of Education is spearheading the RtI initiative in Vermont and provides training and technical assistance to Vermont schools.

Stern Center for Language and Learning

(802) 878-2332

www.sterncenter.org

The Stern Center for Language and Learning is a nonprofit literacy center dedicated to helping children and adults reach their full potential.

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)

www.ld.org

The National Center for Learning Disabilities is a resource for parents, professionals, and individuals with learning disabilities.

National Research Center on Learning Disabilities

www.nrcld.org

The NRCLD website contains extensive information for parents about Responsive to Intervention.

National Center on Response to Intervention

www.rti4success.org

The Center is funded by the U. S. Department of Education and provides technical assistance to states and schools districts in implementing proven models for Response to Intervention.

Iris Center for Training Enhancement

<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/onlinemodules.html>

The Iris Center offers on-line educational materials and resources, including information about RtI.