BEST PRACTICES
FOR BETTER SCHOOLS™

Early Childhood Education

Response to Intervention
in Primary Grade Reading

naesp™ **National Association of Elementary School Principals**

About NAESP

The mission of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) is to lead in the advocacy and support for elementary and middle-level principals and other education leaders in their commitment for all children.

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About BEST PRACTICES FOR BETTER SCHOOLS™

Best Practices for Better Schools™, an online publications series developed by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, is intended to strengthen the effectiveness of elementary and middle-level principals by providing information and insight about research-based practices and by offering guidance for implementing them in schools. This series of publications is intended to inform discussion, strategies, and implementation, not to imply endorsement of any specific approach by NAESP.

About This White Paper

The content of this issue of Best Practices for Better Schools™ is excerpted with permission from Doing What Works (DWW), a website sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The goal of DWW is to create an online library of resources to help principals and other educators implement research-based instructional practice. DWW is led by the Department's Office of Planning, Evaluation & Policy Development (OPEPD), which relies on the Institute of Education Sciences (and occasionally other entities that adhere to standards similar to those of IES) to evaluate and recommend practices that are supported by rigorous research. Much of the DWW content is based on information from IES' What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), which evaluates research on practices and interventions to let the education community know what is likely to work.

NAESP was the only national education association awarded a grant to widely disseminate highlights of best-practice content from the DWW website. Readers are encouraged to visit the website to view all of the resources related to this best practice and to share this online resource with colleagues, teachers, and other educators. No additional permission is required.

NAESP cares about the environment. This white paper is available from NAESP as an online document only. NAESP members and other readers are encouraged to share this document with colleagues.

Reponse to Intervention in Primary Grade Reading

PRINCIPALS KNOW that achievement in reading is critical to the future success of students. Response to intervention (RtI) is a comprehensive early detection, prevention, and support system approach to help students before they fall behind. This white paper outlines implementation of an RtI framework along with these three recommended practices:

- Universal screening;

- Progress monitoring and differentiation;

- Systematic skill instruction.

Summaries of these practices follow.

Screen all students for potential reading problems in the beginning and middle of the year.

Effective RtI begins with universal student screenings. Research shows that teachers can use beginning- and middle-of-the-year screenings in the primary grades to accurately predict future reading performance. Accurate identification of at-risk students requires efficient, reliable, and valid measures of appropriate grade-level reading skills. Setting cut-point scores allows schools to identify an initial pool of students who may require interventions. Because no single assessment is perfectly reliable, schools should engage in regular progress monitoring to track at-risk students' achievement. A building-level intervention team can help coordinate the staff and resources needed to implement a schoolwide screening process.

ACTIONS

Create a building-level RtI team to help implement universal screening.

Universal screening requires schoolwide coordination of staff members and resources. A building-level RtI team can address logistical issues (e.g., scheduling and assigning staff members to administer assessments), select screening measures to identify at-risk students, and establish progress monitoring procedures. The team may include teachers, administrators, reading specialists, school psychologists, ELL specialists, and special education staff.

Select a set of screening measures to identify at-risk students.

Select a set of screening measures to identify at-risk students. Screening instruments need to be efficient, reliable, and valid measures of appropriate grade-level reading skills, such as phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, vocabulary, decoding, word identification, and text reading. Using at least two screening measures can enhance the accuracy of the process. Schools should consider a screening measure's ability to correctly identify students at risk for reading difficulties (sensitivity) and students at low risk for such difficulties (specificity).

Progress monitoring is critical for regrouping students based on changing skill levels. Teachers will need professional development to learn how to collect and use data to differentiate instruction.

Use benchmarks and set cut-point scores in student screenings.

Schools can use benchmarks and set cut-point scores to identify children at low, moderate, or high risk for developing reading difficulties. Each district or school can develop its own benchmarks and cut-point scores for screening students; however, it may be more feasible to use guidelines from national sources or instrument developers, especially during the early phases of implementation. Setting cut-point scores allows schools to identify an initial pool of at-risk students, but no one assessment measure is perfectly reliable. Therefore, schools should engage in regular progress monitoring to track student achievement.

WHAT PRINCIPALS SAY

Principals can see how these actions are implemented in schools by viewing these web-based interviews with teachers and specialists:

Screening All Students

Implementing a Screening Program

Conducting Universal Screening

The Power of Data

Creating a Building-Level Team

TOOLS

The following tools are designed to help principals and teachers implement this best practice in their school. Each tool is a downloadable document that principals can adapt to serve their particular needs.

Universal Screening—Establishing District Benchmarks: PowerPoint describing the use of universal screening measures.

Screening and Intervention Record Forms: Forms used by teams in Pennsylvania to record student performance, goals and strategies.

School Leadership Team Process: Worksheet to outline team processes for interventions.

Screening Decision Rules: Rules for reading in kindergarten through grade five.

Schoolwide Screening Guidelines, Resources, Examples: Ouline with the features of universal screening and guidance for implementation.

Screening Tools Chart: Chart rating a variety of screening tools based on accuracy, reliability and more.

Monitor progress and differentiate instruction (based on assessed reading skills for all students).

Differentiated instruction is essential for all students, not only those receiving Tier two and Tier three interventions. Teachers can vary instruction by changing content focus, amount of instructional time, and degree of scaffolding. In Tier one, differentiation can be provided during independent work or small groups. In Tiers two and three, teachers should use progress monitoring and analyze data to assess reading proficiency growth, differentiate instruction, and to determine if students need additional help.

Progress monitoring is critical for regrouping students based on changing skill levels. Teachers will need professional development to learn how to collect data, interpret results, and use data to differentiate instruction. Staff members might want to work collectively to develop guidelines for grouping students for instruction. Teachers need strong classroom management skills to provide Tier one differentiated instruction. Some teachers will need help developing classroom routines that allow them to lead small groups with selected students while others work independently.

Schools need to establish decision rules to ensure that screening and progress monitoring data guide student placement.

ACTIONS

Use screening and other assessment data to differentiate instruction in Tier one for all students.

Tier one reading instruction is high-quality, evidence-based instruction provided to the whole class. Differentiated instruction at Tier one is vital, and teachers should use reading measures data to identify the skills students need to target for improvement. Differentiation can occur by varying the time, content, and degree of teacher support and scaffolding and might be carried out during independent work time or small group instruction.

Use progress monitoring to differentiate instruction for at-risk students receiving Tiers two and three interventions.

RtI uses progress monitoring data to differentiate instruction for at-risk students. In Tier two, progress monitoring should occur at least monthly to determine if students need additional instruction. Since students' skill levels change in varying degrees over time, schools should consider reevaluating student placement every six weeks and regrouping as necessary. If students are not making sufficient progress in Tier two, the classroom teacher should involve the building-level RtI team in planning Tier three interventions. Ongoing analysis of progress monitoring data continues to be critical in Tier three.

Provide professional development on collecting data, interpreting results, and using data-driven decision rules.

Schools need to establish decision rules to ensure that screening and progress monitoring data guide student placement. Teachers should use the data in planning differentiated instruction at all tiers. To help teachers who lack training in efficient, reliable methods of data collection and interpretation, schools should provide ongoing professional development on administering assessments, collecting data, interpreting the results, and using the information to differentiate instruction.

WHAT PRINCIPALS SAY

Principals can see how these actions are implemented in schools by viewing these web-based interviews with teachers and specialists:

Tier One Differentiation

Progress Monitoring at Tier Two

Managing Progress Monitoring in the Classroom

Differentiation Within the Kindergarten Core

Managing Differentiation With Small Groups

Reteaching in Small Group Interventions

Helping Teachers Use Progress Monitoring

Early Elementary Assessment: Phonemic Awareness

TOOLS

The following tools and templates are designed to help principals and teachers implement this best practice in their school. Each tool is a downloadable document that principals can adapt to serve their particular needs.

Steps for Monitoring and Graphing Progress: Outline with seven steps for monitoring and using data.

Data-Driven Instructional Plan: Graphic outline with four sequenced steps for data-based instruction.

Data Analysis Worksheets and Team Protocol: Script for conducting data meetings.

Systematic instruction gradually builds skills and ensures that students attain mastery before moving on.

6

Data-Informed Decision-Making: A School-Level Blueprint: Blueprint to guide school leaders in supporting data use.

Core Program Review Tool: Self-assessment for evaluating and selecting research-based core programs.

Progress Monitoring School Example: PowerPoint describing how a school can implement progress monitoring.

Systemic skill instruction: Plan intensive instruction on foundational reading skills for students in Tier two and Tier three interventions.

Instruction at Tier two and Tier three must be intensive and focused on the critical grade-level reading skills, such as phonemic awareness, decoding, reading comprehension, and fluency. Students in Tier two interventions should receive small group instruction focused on up to three foundational reading skills three to five times a week for 20 to 40 minutes per session. At Tier three, schools should intensify instruction by focusing on fewer skills and providing extended daily sessions. Research suggests systematic, explicit instruction is most effective, so teachers should incorporate instructional strategies and supports, such as modeling, scaffolding, thinkalouds, and graphic organizers, and provide students with immediate corrective feedback. Teachers need to build skills gradually and provide frequent practice opportunities to ensure that students have mastered a reading skill before moving on.

ACTIONS

Implement intensive reading interventions on a regular basis.
Tier two intervention should take place in small group instruction three to five times a week for 20 to 40 minutes per session. Students who show minimal progress after a reasonable amount of time in Tier two will require more intensive assistance. Tier three intensifies instruction by focusing on a small set of targeted skills and providing multiple and extended daily sessions, including one-on-one tutoring.

Use an intervention curriculum focused on foundational reading skills.
The RtI curriculum must address appropriate foundational reading skills at each grade level, including comprehension, fluency, phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary. Students whose screening scores fall within Tier two should receive supplemental instruction on up to three foundational reading skills. Tier three intervention should focus on fewer high-priority reading skills to promote reading proficiency.

Provide systematic reading instruction with opportunities for practice and feedback.
Systematic instruction gradually builds skills and ensures that students attain mastery before moving on. It provides a high level of teacher-student interaction with opportunities for practice and feedback. Lesson pacing can be adjusted for increased focus on targeted skills, and teachers should use a mix of instructional strategies, including modeling, scaffolding, and thinkalouds, and material supports such as graphic organizers. In Tier three, teachers should provide one-on-one instruction with extensive practice and immediate corrective feedback.

WHAT PRINCIPALS SAY

Principals can see how these actions are implemented in schools by viewing these web-based interviews with teachers and specialists:

Tier Two Instructional Programs

Intensive Tier Three Instruction

Districts and schools need leadership and specific guidance at all levels to support implementation of the components of a multi-tiered system.

7

Implementing Reading Interventions

Modeling Initial Sounds in Tier Three

Thinkaloud Examples in Comprehension and Phonics

TOOLS

The following tools and templates are designed to help principals and teachers implement this best practice in their school. Each tool is a downloadable document that principals can adapt to serve their particular needs.

Thinkaloud Survey: Survey to help teachers reflect on implementation of the thinkaloud strategy.

Systematic Teaching Strategies: Strategies and instructional principals for explicit teaching.

Five Essential Reading Components: Chart of essential reading components.

Foundational Reading Skills: Instructional Routines: Routines for teaching reading skills in kindergarten through grade three.

Reading Skills Error Analysis Sheet: Worksheet to analyze student errors and plan interventions to address specific needs.

K-2 Essential Reading Standards Assessment Form: Standards that identify skills that all students should master at specific grade levels.

Establish a systemwide framework for RtI to support the three recommended practices.

Implementation encompasses the groundwork and support needed to put the recommended practices into action. RtI begins with a systemwide framework that includes universal screening and ongoing progress monitoring, differentiated instruction based on data, and systematic teaching that is explicit and focused on foundational skills. Districts and schools need leadership and specific guidance at all levels to support implementation of the components of a multi-tiered system. State-level leadership teams can inform policy decisions and provide guidance on assessments, instructional resources, and funding allocation. Some states have provided high-level support for RtI implementation through special training or technical assistance centers that are charged with working with local districts and schools. In those cases, district-level teams can access professional development and coaching in RtI implementation. Schools will need to provide extensive training and ongoing support to staff members to ensure fidelity and sustain an RtI framework.

ACTIONS

Build a comprehensive framework that addresses reading and mathematics.
The components of an RtI framework are consistent whether or not a district is focusing on reading or math or addressing both subjects at the same time. Those components include: universal screening, ongoing progress monitoring, high-quality core instruction for all students, and a system of tiered interventions to address students' skill needs. When schools take stock of what they already have in place, it is likely that some components of an RtI system are already part of the instructional program—for example, a system of formative assessments for monitoring progress. Districts and schools will take different paths to building out an RtI framework depending on what is already working well and what components they need to develop. Implementation will involve cooperation among school personnel at many levels, so it is a good idea to create a leadership team that includes representatives from special education, services to English learners, subject matter and assessment

Implementing an RtI framework ensures that all students develop the skills they need and that no students are left behind.

8

specialists, and classroom teachers. Full implementation of an RtI framework usually requires several years.

Establish core reading instructional programs focused on foundational skills.

Once schools have established a core curriculum aligned with state and district standards, they can choose intervention programs that are compatible with the core program and then provide intensive small-group or individualized instruction. Alignment with the core program is not as critical as ensuring that tiered instruction is systematic, explicit, and focuses on high priority reading skills.

Create leadership teams in districts and schools to facilitate implementation of RtI components.

Leadership teams are responsible for building the infrastructure to support an effective RtI framework. District teams are able to provide guidance to schools in evaluating and selecting core programs and assessment measures, managing data collection and reporting, and coordinating professional development opportunities and instructional resources across schools. Building-level teams facilitate direct implementation of the key components by coordinating staff and resources, scheduling and other logistics, and guiding teacher teams in using data and providing interventions at each student's level of need.

Provide professional development and instructional supports to sustain high-quality implementation.

Staff members will require adequate training and support to successfully implement the recommended practices. Districts can work with regional and state networks to bring external opportunities for training and technical assistance to schools. At the building level, coaches and specialists can provide staff development, ongoing

classroom support, and collaborative experiences to advance teachers' skills in implementing RtI components.

WHAT PRINCIPALS SAY

Principals can see how these actions are implemented in schools by viewing these web-based interviews with teachers and specialists:

The Phases of RtI Implementation

How RtI Changes Special Education

Partnering General and Special Education

State Leadership: Building an RtI System

Setting the Stage for RtI Implementation

Lessons From Iowa About RtI

RtI Training for School Districts

Charting the Path

Principal's Role in Instructional Decision Making

Powerful RtI Training Experiences

TOOLS

The following tools and templates are designed to help principals and teachers implement this best practice in their school. Each tool is a downloadable document that principals can adapt to serve their particular needs.

RtI Readiness Self-Assessment Tool for Elementary Schools: Tool that assesses ten readiness categories within RtI.

Scaling-Up Instruction and Technical Assistance Briefs: Framework for leadership teams to develop capacity for using evidence-based practices.

Funding Considerations for Implementing RtI: Descriptions of funding sources for RtI.

Professional Development Continuum: Chart with a training continuum for RtI

components.

District Implementation Tracking Plan: Sample plan focusing on requirements to implement RtI.

Progress Monitoring Training Plan: Plan for training staff on the principles of progress monitoring.

RtI Parent Guides: Description of RtI framework for parents.

RtI Comprehensive Evaluation Tool: Tool to evaluate RtI components and identify key needs.

Conclusion

Good instruction in reading is critical to the success of all students. Implementing an RtI framework that incorporates universal screening, progress monitoring and differentiation, and systematic skill instruction ensures that all students develop the skills they need and that no students are left behind. Solutions based on solid research and the best thinking currently available in the field are available to principals through NAESP and the Doing What Works website. As more white papers in NAESP's Best Practices for Better Schools series are developed, principals will continue to find help in addressing critical issues in elementary and middle school education.

Related Links

The Access Center: Resources to enhance students with disabilities' access to general education, including:

- Components of an Effective Reading Program (PDF)

- Computer-Assisted Instruction and Reading (PDF)

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC): Professional organization devoted to improving the academic success of individuals with disabilities, gifts or talents.

Center on Instruction (COI): Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, this research hub offers free resources, including:

- A Comprehensive K-3 Reading Assessment Plan—Guidance for School Leaders (PDF)

- Choosing a Progress Monitoring Tool That Works for You (PDF)

- Intensive Reading Interventions for Struggling Readers in Elementary School—A Principal's Guide (PDF)

IDEA Partnership: Response to Intervention Collection: Library of tools, partnership briefs and dialogue guides.

Institute of Education Sciences (U.S. Department of Education): Effective Literacy and English (PDF)

International Reading Association (IRA): Implications of RTI for the Reading Teacher

The IRIS Center: A national center devoted to providing free, online interactive training enhancements for educators working with students with disabilities.

- Case Study Unit—RtI Data-Based Decision Making (PDF)

- Providing Instructional Supports Online Module—Facilitating Mastery of New Skills

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE): RtI Project

National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt): A Cultural, Linguistic, and Ecological Framework for Response to Intervention With English Language Learners (PDF)

National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRtI): Housed at the American Institute for Research, the Center provides technical assistance to states and districts for building capacity for RtI implementation.

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP): Ideas That Work—Responsiveness to Intervention in the SLD Determination Process

Oregon Response to Intervention Project (OrRTI): How the EBIS/RTI Process Works in Elementary Schools (PDF)

Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN): Materials to build capacity of education agencies serving special education students.

Reading Rockets: A national multimedia project offering information and resources to guide struggling readears.

RTI Action Network: An organization devoted to guiding educators to RtI implementation.

U.S. Department of Education (USDE): Implementing RTI Using Title I, Title III, and CEIS Funds—Key Issues for Decision-Makers (PDF)