

What is this thing called RTI?

Process is a response to “over-referral” of students into special education



AN RTI WEB SOURCES SAMPLER

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION is a complex subject, but there are valuable Web sites that educators can visit to learn the intricacies of the practice. Here are several of the sites.

AFT ONLINE

Visit www.aft.org/topics/rti for a variety of information and resources.

IDEA PARTNERSHIP

The AFT and dozens of other partner organizations in education have produced a useful overview of the RTI process. Visit www.ideapartnership.org/page.cfm?pageid=18.

RTI ACTION NETWORK

The RTI Action Network, a program of the National Center for Learning Disabilities, offers one of the most comprehensive sources of information on the practice. The network is located at www.rtinetwork.org.

NATIONAL CENTER ON RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Located at www.rti4success.org, the National Center on Response to Intervention offers discussion forums, “Webinars,” tools for educators and parents, and much more.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

The group has produced “RTI Blueprints for Implementation at the School-Building Level.” It is available at www.nasdse.org/Portals/0/SCHOOL.pdf. Also featured on the site is “RTI Blueprints for Implementation at the District Level,” located at www.nasdse.org/Portals/0/DISTRICT.pdf.

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI) is a three-step practice that is gaining currency in classrooms around the country. Teachers provide high-quality instruction and interventions matched to a student’s need, then they gather and monitor data about how the student is progressing, and finally they apply that data to important decisions about what instructional changes are needed (or what new goals should be set) for the student.

RTI has grown in part because the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 puts a big premium on curbing the “over-referral” of students into special education, and it does so by encouraging data-driven decisions on placements. IDEA doesn’t prescribe RTI. But, when it comes to the placement of students in general or special education settings, the law does require states to “permit the use of a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention.” Done correctly, RTI fits that bill. And it is often used in lieu of other placement models, since IDEA allows states to prohibit approaches such as the “discrepancy model” (special education placements that are made when it’s determined that a student’s intellectual ability is grossly at odds with achievement).

One thing is certain about RTI: The federal law offers scant details about how to implement the practice. That accounts for wide variations in how RTI has been rolled out in different districts and states. Local education agencies can—and

do—use a lot of discretion when it comes to incorporating RTI. That means classroom teachers need to come to the discussion armed with the facts. Here are some common misconceptions, along with relevant citations in federal law and professional literature, to help you separate RTI fact from fiction.

MYTH #1: RTI is only “pre-referral”; special education staff will have to sort it out.

IDEA refers to the use of scientific, research-based strategies (see “Identification of Specific Learning Disabilities” at <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view>), and there is no doubt that this effort will involve the entire school community. A successful RTI process should be a comprehensive service delivery system—one that requires significant changes in how a school provides services to all of its students. That means RTI will involve the entire school.

MYTH #2: RTI delays special education referrals.

The goal of RTI is to broaden the range of academic and behavioral interventions in general education, not to prevent or deny students access to needed academic services and support. Interventions should be designed and implemented over a period of time, and relevant data from these interventions should be taken into consideration and should inform an instructional support team’s decisions over time. But the fact remains: A successful RTI process will identify at-risk students as early as possible. (See the “Progress

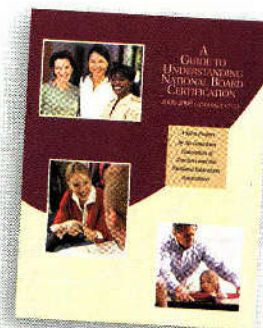


ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN SHERBO



Understanding National Board Certification

New AFT-NEA guide helps members navigate the process



ASSISTING MEMBERS who are working toward certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is an important part of our union's efforts to strengthen the profession and improve student achievement.

The AFT, in collaboration with the National Education Association, has produced the 2008-2009 edition of "A Guide to Understanding National Board Certification." The 68-page book demystifies the certification process by translating its rigorous requirements into manageable tasks that are clearly explained.

National Board Certification (NBC) is a voluntary assessment of teaching that involves a detailed examination of a teacher's actual classroom practice. To date, about 64,000 teachers have

attained NBC—the teaching profession's highest credential.

As a complement to the materials provided by NBPTS, the AFT-NEA guide offers practical advice, strategies and suggestions for potential, current, advanced or renewal candidates. It provides advice on how to prepare a portfolio, including tips on collecting student work samples and preparing video/DVD entries.

Materials from the guide can be adapted for professional development activities being conducted by locals or as a resource for candidates in union-developed NBPTS support programs.

To obtain copies of the 2008-2009 guide, go to www.aft.org/edissues/pubs. If you have questions about the guidebook or about NBPTS, contact Patricia Sullivan at psulliva@aft.org.

Monitoring" discussion under RTI Topics at www.rti4success.org.)

MYTH #3: You cannot refer a student for special education evaluation if your school or district has an RTI process.

A parent and/or educator may submit a request for an initial evaluation to determine if the student has a disability. RTI does not weaken that right. Beyond that, states and districts adopting RTI processes to assist in identifying students with learning disabilities must make sure that these are not "add on" features to the current system. RTI procedures must be core components of the full and individual (comprehensive) assessment. (See "Identification of Specific Learning Disabilities" at <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view>.)

MYTH #4: "Tier 3" is another name for special education.

A "3-tier model," which refers to different levels of intervention in a general education classroom, is a concept advocated by many education organizations and researchers and is closely tied to RTI. The most intensive level of intervention provided to students in general education is often known as "Tier 3." Any student who does not respond to intensive interventions may indeed qualify for special education services—but only when it has been definitively established that the general education setting provides neither the intensity nor type of

intervention necessary to improve student performance (the IDEA Partnership, www.rtinetwork.org/essential/tieredinstruction).

MYTH #5: RTI interventions should be tried for no more than six to eight weeks.

Student performance data, not a specified period of time, should determine how long interventions are used (National Research Center on Learning Disabilities, www.nrcld.org). Adequate time must be provided to determine if the intervention will work. And adequate time must be provided to allow successful approaches to narrow the gap between the level at which the student is performing and where he or she needs to be.

MYTH #6: RTI reduces the need for special ed teachers.

Special education teachers are invaluable to an RTI process. They can work with students and monitor performance via curriculum-based measures and other means to assess whether students are meeting goals. Successful RTI programs promote more effective use of their skills and expertise. Special educators and general educators both will be required to collaborate more effectively to plan, implement and monitor students' responsiveness to interventions.

And general educators should always bear in mind that RTI, done correctly, will reinforce many good practices that teachers already are using.

AFT WEB SITE BY TEACHERS FOR TEACHERS

NEARLY 33 PERCENT of beginning teachers leave the profession after only three years, and almost half leave after five years. Many of them cite the lack of professional support and guidance as their chief reason for leaving.

The AFT's "Tools for Teachers" Web site (formerly called t-source) is aimed at assisting novice teachers and other educators with some of the most fundamental challenges, including how to arrange your classroom and how to set rules and procedures.

Designed by AFT members, the Web site features resources and communications opportunities in a way that is certain to appeal to all teachers. The interactive features allow educators to access a range of research-based information and to reach out to one another. These features include opportunities to configure a well-designed classroom using an interactive tool, advice on working with paraprofessionals and parents, and funding sources for loan forgiveness and grants for teachers.

During the 2008-09 school year, the "Tools for Teachers" Web site will be expanded to include such features as ask-a-mentor, Web chats and specialized forums on classroom topics, and a searchable database of classroom resources and tips for teachers. You can access the site at www.aft.org/tools4teachers.



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