

RTI 101: Frequently Asked Questions

What is at the heart of RTI?

The purpose of RTI is to provide all students with the best opportunities to succeed in school, identify students with learning or behavioral problems, and ensure that they receive appropriate instruction and related supports. The goals of RTI are to:

- Integrate all the resources to minimize risk for the long-term negative consequences associated with poor learning or behavioral outcomes
- Strengthen the process of appropriate disability identification

What impact does RTI have on students who are not struggling?

An important component of an effective RTI framework is the quality of the primary prevention level (i.e., the core curriculum), where all students receive high quality instruction that is culturally and linguistically responsive and aligned to a state's achievement standards. This allows teachers and parents to be confident that a student's need for more intensive intervention or referral for special education evaluation is not due to ineffective classroom instruction. In a well designed RTI system, primary prevention should be effective and sufficient for about 80% of the student population.

What is universal screening?

The National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI) defines universal screening as brief assessments that are valid, reliable, and demonstrate diagnostic accuracy for predicting which students will develop learning or behavioral problems. They are conducted with all students to identify those who are at risk of academic failure and, therefore, need more intensive intervention to supplement primary prevention (i.e., the core curriculum). NCRTI provides a review of tools for screening at <http://www.rti4success.org>.

What is student progress monitoring?

NCRTI defines student progress monitoring as repeated measurement of performance to inform the instruction of individual students in general and special education in grades K-8. These tools must be reliable and valid for representing students' development and have demonstrated utility for helping teachers plan more effective instruction. Progress monitoring is conducted at least monthly to:

- Estimate rates of improvement
- Identify students who are not demonstrating adequate progress
- Compare the efficacy of different forms of instruction to design more effective, individualized instruction

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<http://www.rti4success.org>.

What are culturally and linguistically responsive practices?

The use of culturally and linguistically responsive practices by teachers and other school staff involves purposeful consideration of the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors that may have an impact on students' success or failure in the classroom. Attention to these factors, along with the inclusion of cultural elements in the delivery of instruction, will help make the strongest possible connection between the culture and expectations of the school and the culture(s) that students bring to the school. Instruction should be differentiated according to how students learn, build on existing student knowledge and experience, and be language appropriate. In addition, decisions about secondary and tertiary interventions should be informed by an awareness of students' cultural and linguistic strengths and challenges in relation to their responsiveness to instruction.

What are differentiated learning activities?

Teachers use student assessment data and knowledge of student readiness, learning preferences, language and culture to offer students in the same class different teaching and learning strategies to address their needs. Differentiation can involve mixed instructional groupings, team teaching, peer tutoring, learning centers, and accommodations to ensure that all students have access to the instructional program. Differentiated instruction is NOT the same as providing more intensive interventions to students with learning problems.

What is the RTI prevention framework?

RTI has three levels of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Through this framework, student assessment and instruction are linked for data-based decision-making. If students move through the framework's specified levels of prevention, their instructional program becomes more intensive and more individualized to target their specific areas of learning or behavioral need.

What is primary prevention?

Primary prevention, the least intensive level of the RTI prevention framework, typically includes the core curriculum and the instructional practices used for all students. Primary prevention includes:

- A core curriculum that is research-based
- Instructional practices that are culturally and linguistically responsive
- Universal screening to determine students' current level of performance
- Differentiated learning activities (e.g., mixed instructional grouping, use of learning centers, peer tutoring) to address individual needs
- Accommodations to ensure all students have access to the instructional program
- Problem solving to identify interventions, as needed, to address behavior problems that prevent students from demonstrating the academic skills they possess
- Students who require interventions due to learning difficulties continue to receive instruction in the core curriculum.

What is meant by core curriculum within the RTI framework?

The core curriculum is the course of study deemed critical and usually made mandatory for all students of a school or school system. Core curricula are often instituted at the elementary and secondary levels by local school boards, Departments of Education, or other administrative agencies charged with overseeing education.

What is secondary prevention?

Secondary prevention typically involves small-group instruction that relies on evidence-based interventions that specify the instructional procedures, duration (typically 10 to 15 weeks of 20- to 40-minute sessions), and frequency (3 or 4 times per week) of instruction. Secondary prevention has at least three distinguishing characteristics: it is evidence-based (rather than research-based); it relies entirely on adult-led small-group instruction rather than whole-class instruction; and it involves a clearly articulated, validated intervention, which should be adhered to with fidelity. NCRTI has established a Technical Review Committee (TRC) which is conducting a review of the rigor of instructional practices for secondary prevention. The results of this review will be posted at <http://www.rti4success.org>.

Secondary prevention is expected to benefit a large majority of students who do not respond to effective primary prevention. As evidenced by progress monitoring data, students who do not benefit from the interventions provided under secondary prevention may need more intensive instruction or an individualized form of intervention, which can be provided at the tertiary prevention level.

What is tertiary prevention?

Tertiary prevention, the third level of the RTI prevention framework, is the most intensive of the three levels and is individualized to target each student's area(s) of need. At the tertiary level, the teacher begins with a more intensive version of the intervention program used in secondary prevention (e.g., longer sessions, smaller group size, more frequent sessions). However, the teacher does not presume it will meet the student's needs. Instead, the teacher conducts frequent progress monitoring (i.e., at least weekly) with each student. These progress monitoring data quantify the effects of the intervention program by depicting the student's rate of improvement over time. When the progress monitoring data indicate the student's rate of progress is unlikely to achieve the established learning goal, the teacher engages in a problem-solving process. That is, the teacher modifies components of the intervention program and continues to employ frequent progress monitoring to evaluate which components enhance the rate of student learning. By continually monitoring and modifying (as needed) each student's program, the teacher is able to design an effective, individualized instructional program.

Why is a common framework for RTI helpful?

A common RTI framework may strengthen RTI implementation by helping schools understand how programming becomes increasingly intensive. This helps schools accurately classify practices as primary, secondary, or tertiary. These distinctions should assist building-level administrators and teachers in determining how to deploy staff in a sensible and efficient manner.

How many tiers of intervention should an RTI framework have?

Schools and districts vary widely in the number of tiers included in their RTI frameworks. Regardless of the number of tiers of intervention a school or district implements, each should be classified under one of the three levels of prevention: primary, secondary, or tertiary. Within this three-level prevention system, schools may configure their RTI frameworks using 4, 5, or more tiers of intervention. In choosing a number of tiers for their RTI framework, practitioners should recognize that the greater the number of tiers, the more complex the framework becomes. All students receive instruction within primary prevention level, which is often synonymous with tier 1.

Is RTI a special education program?

No. RTI is not synonymous with special education. Rather, special education is an important component of a comprehensive RTI framework that incorporates primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of prevention. All school staff (e.g., principal, general educators, special educators, content specialists, psychologists) should work together to implement their RTI framework and make decisions regarding appropriate intensity of interventions for students. Movement to less intensive levels of the prevention framework should be a high priority, as appropriate.

What does RTI have to do with identifying students for special education?

IDEA 2004 allows states to use a process based on a student's response to scientific, research-based interventions to determine if the child has a specific learning disability (SLD). In an RTI framework, a student's response to, or success with, instruction and interventions received across the levels of RTI would be considered as part of the comprehensive evaluation for SLD eligibility.

How does an RTI framework work in conjunction with inclusive school models and Least Restrictive Environment? Aren't students requiring more intensive levels of instruction removed from the general education classroom to receive those services?

Within an RTI framework, the levels refer only to the intensity of the services, not where the services are delivered. Students may receive different levels of intervention within the general education classroom or in a separate location with a general education teacher or other service providers. This is an important decision for educators to consider carefully.

Can students move back and forth between levels of the prevention system?

Yes, students should move back and forth across the levels of the prevention system based on their success (response) or difficulty (minimal response) at the level where they are receiving intervention, i.e., according to their documented progress based on the data. Also, students can receive intervention in one academic area at the secondary or tertiary level of the prevention system while receiving instruction in another academic area in primary prevention.