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RtI Infrastructure – Coordinating a Team and Organizing Stakeholders

With the principles and practices of general education and special education coming together, the RtI process involves many different individuals and requires significant leadership and collaboration. When RtI is functioning effectively, professionals’ roles expand and adapt to implement interventions, monitor progress, and make data-based decisions, all with linguistic diversity in mind.

RtI works when teams and school leaders create a culture of sharing data, thinking objectively about struggling students, and discussing quality of instruction within each tier. Most successful models use grade-level planning meetings for examining, interpreting, and sharing data. Although team members should create a problem-solving perspective, these students are not problems; they are the responsibility of all those involved.

RtI Implementation and ELLs: a Team-Based Strategy

Special attention is needed when implementing the RtI model with the ELL population, particularly in coordinating the various stakeholders who regularly work with and support ELLs. To begin crafting a strategy, administrators need to bring together invested key players and generate a team. Leaders would be smart to carefully consider the team’s composition; members should be diverse (however you define it) and respected by their peers. The people on the team should be “nodes” in the professional network of the building, and the process of deciding who is on the team must be perceived as fair and transparent. One possible team combination is a teacher from every grade level, a parent, and key supporting staff members (e.g., ESL teacher, reading specialist, bilingual teacher, and social worker). Teams should stay together a minimum of 2 years to dispel the response that this is yet another initiative, and to recognize the fact that more than one year will be necessary to get things well off the ground.

Who's Involved in RtI and in What Way?

There are many individuals involved in the implementation of an effective RtI model. As you consider the members of your team and your RtI model more generally, bear in mind that individuals can provide diverse guidance and input as members of the team, as well as participating in any RtI-related decisions by consulting and/or meeting with the team along the way. Key information about a child and/or the instructional context, in the service of improved teaching and learning, is the basis for the RtI process. Use the lists below to determine how members of the school community can help as you plan to implement RtI effectively.

Administrator Support

Administrators are essential for communicating a shared vision of RtI at the school, and for providing practitioners with the tools they need to collaborate. Having an administrator who is actively involved in the RtI process on many levels is an essential component. Leaders should:

- design the school's model
- provide logistical support (time and organizational structures as well as materials and assessments) for implementing RtI. Specifically, this support must afford educators with built-in time to collaboratively analyze data, problem-solve, and plan. It should also include relevant and ongoing professional development. Have frequent communication with teachers, students, and parents about student progress.

Overall, leaders are charged with spearheading the RtI effort by sharing data, addressing needs, and celebrating successes.

Classroom Teachers

Classroom teachers play a central role in implementing a successful model. Teachers' responsibilities include:

- using high-quality research-based instruction that is differentiated for ELLs
- understanding how to collect data, monitor ongoing progress, and collaborate with colleagues in making student decisions based on the data collected
- sharing their knowledge of student performance in the context of the regular classroom, as well as their expertise in the classroom content and grade-level skills
- maximizing student potential by sharing insights into the student's home life, family background, and interests that affect decision-making

Reading Interventionists/Specialists

The reading specialist also has an essential role in the RtI process, providing both expertise and leadership. Specifically, reading specialists, and/or trained, knowledgeable, and skilled school personnel, should:

- provide all Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, as recommended by the International Reading Association (2009)
- share knowledge in the key areas of reading research, development, and teaching methodology
- help clarify appropriate reading goals
- oversee progress monitoring
- help interpret assessment data
- serve as a resource for literacy practices
- assume a key role coaching teachers in literacy instruction
- share knowledge of how second language literacy instruction differs from first language instruction, and discuss common challenges ELLs may encounter
- lead the school-wide implementation of RtI

ELL/Bilingual Specialists

ELL and bilingual specialists have specialized expertise about language and literacy development, how to use assessment tools and techniques, and how to use effective instructional practices for ELLs. As a result, it is essential that the ELL/bilingual specialist be included in the RtI decision-making process. As a result of this knowledge, their roles should include:

- clarifying needs associated with second language acquisition
- providing evidence for differences between learning differences and disabilities
- putting RtI data into a cultural context
- modeling effective instructional strategies for classroom teachers (Garcia & Ortiz, 1988)
- assisting with culturally responsive assessment practices

Special Education Teachers

Special education teachers have expertise regarding how to support struggling students. As a result, they have critical roles to play in consulting, collaborating, and supporting as a school takes part in the RtI process, even when students are not being considered for special education. In some schools, intervention teachers and special educators work side-by-side to provide supplemental intervention to all students experiencing difficulty, whether or not they

have an IEP. In other models, the special education teacher only works directly with students with IEPs, but serves on the RtI decision-making team and consults with classroom teachers regarding effective intervention methods. More specifically, special educators should assist in:

- interpreting data
- setting appropriate student goals
- ensuring appropriate referral procedures
- supporting targeted classroom instruction

Other Personnel

School psychologists, social workers, and speech language pathologist (SLP) also have important roles in the decision-making process:

- Psychologists need to have training and knowledge about comprehensive measurement and assessment tools for ELLs, and how to interpret the data acquired through those measures.
- Social workers need to use their specialized skills to incorporate families into the process, and help the rest of the RtI team to understand the home and community factors influencing a student's learning.
- SLPs' expertise in language development is beneficial in understanding the differences between first and second language acquisition.

Parents and Families

Parents and families have invaluable knowledge to share about their child's previous schooling experiences, and language experiences. They can:

- provide insight into their cultural values and norms, as well as interactions with community members and experiences outside of school
- help plan learning and behavior goals that are appropriate for their children, based on cultural norms