



## RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI)

Response to intervention (RTI) may sound complicated, but it's based on a fairly simple idea. Early in the year, your child's school can start looking at everyone's skills in reading, writing and math. They can provide targeted teaching—called interventions—to help struggling students catch up. A big part of the RTI process involves closely monitoring student progress. That way the school can see which kids need more academic support.

### What is RTI?

If you look inside any general education classroom, chances are good that you'd see different students struggling for different reasons. Some kids may have undiagnosed learning and attention issues.

*"The goal is for the school to intervene, or step in, and start helping before anyone falls really far behind."*

Others may be trying to pick up English as a second language. Some students might be shaky on certain skills due to frequent absences or inadequate teaching.

It's often hard for a teacher to tell right away which students are struggling or why. RTI aims to identify struggling students early on and give them the support they need to be successful in school.

The word *intervention* is key to understanding what RTI is all about. The goal is for the school to intervene, or step in, and start helping before anyone falls really far behind. RTI isn't a specific program or type of teaching. It's a

proactive approach to measuring students' skills and using this data to decide which types of targeted teaching to use.

### How does RTI work?

The RTI process begins with your child's teacher assessing the skills of everyone in the class. These assessments help the school's RTI team tell which students need instructional interventions. That's the term for focusing on specific skills in an effort to improve them.

Interventions can be part of classroom-wide instruction. The teacher may break students into small groups tailored for different skill levels or learning styles. This is also known as differentiated instruction. Students who don't make enough progress getting this kind of help during class may start to work on skills in small groups that meet during enrichment activities like music or art.

As part of the RTI process, schools help struggling students by using teaching interventions that researchers have studied and shown to be effective. Many research-based interventions deal with reading. But there are also some scientifically proven methods of improving writing and math skills. Some schools also use research-based behavior interventions.





## How do teachers track student progress?

Another essential component of RTI is progress monitoring. The school frequently assesses your child's skills to determine whether an intervention is working.

During an intervention, your child's teacher or another member of the RTI team uses an assessment tool that research has shown to be an effective way to measure certain skills. This tool is used to assess your child's skills every week or every other week. That may sound like a lot of testing. But each assessment only takes a few minutes to complete.

For example, let's say your child's school is using curriculum-based measurement (CBM) to assess spelling skills. During each test or probe, the teacher asks your child to spell words that are at the appropriate grade level. In total, your child will only spend a couple minutes writing down these words.

After each assessment, his score is plotted on a graph. This makes it easy for the RTI team to see if he's improving at the expected rate or if he needs additional support.

## How much support do students receive?

There is no single way of doing RTI, but it's often set up as a three-tier system of support. Some school districts call this framework a multi-tier system of supports (MTSS) instead of RTI. One way to understand this tiered system is to think of it as a pyramid, with the intensity of support increasing from one level to the next.[1]

### Tier 1: The Whole Class

In the general education classroom, the teacher measures everyone's skills. This is known as a universal screening. The screening helps the teacher work with students in small groups based on their skill levels. All students are taught using methods that research has shown to be effective.

The school will let you know if your child is struggling and will update you on his RTI progress. In some schools, the majority of students need Tier 1 instructional support because their reading and math skills are not at grade level.

During the intervention, the RTI team monitors students' progress to see who might need additional support. Many students respond successfully to Tier 1 support and achieve grade-level expectations.

### Tier 2: Small Group Interventions

If your child isn't making adequate progress in Tier 1, he'll start to receive more targeted help. This is *in addition* to the regular classroom instruction, not a replacement for it. Tier 2 interventions take place a few times a week during electives or enrichment activities such as music or art so your child won't miss any core instruction in the classroom.

During these extra help sessions, he'll be taught in small groups using a different method than in Tier 1 because the first method wasn't successful. The teacher may also ask you to work with your child at home on certain skills.

The school will monitor your child's progress so it's clear whether the Tier 2 intervention is helping.



### Tier 3: Intensive Interventions

Typically, only a small percentage of the class—perhaps one or two students— will require Tier 3 support. In many schools, though, that number is much higher. If your child needs Tier 3 support, it will be tailored to his needs. Every day he'll receive one-on-one instruction or work in very small groups. The groups may include some students who are receiving special education services and who need to work on the same skills. Your child will continue to spend most of the day in the general education classroom. If he doesn't make adequate progress in Tier 3, it's likely that the school will recommend an evaluation for special education services. This can open the door to individualized teaching, assistive technology and other resources provided at no cost to you.

### How is RTI related to special education?

Even though RTI isn't a special education program, it can help general education teachers pick up on early signs of learning issues. It can also play an important role in helping schools determine who qualifies for special education services.

Federal law says that when deciding whether a student is eligible for special education, the school district can use a "process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention." [2] That's one of the reasons many states have started to use RTI. If your child qualifies for special education, the interventions used during RTI can help the school decide which types of services and supports to include in his Individualized Education Program (IEP).

There are a few other key things to keep in mind about the relationship between RTI and special education:

- RTI can't be used to reduce your child's workload. That kind of modification may be used for some special education students, but it shouldn't be used for general education students.
- Just because your child is getting extra help through the RTI process doesn't mean you have to wait to request a special education evaluation. You have the right to ask for that at any time. The federal Department of Education has stated very clearly that RTI cannot be used to delay or deny an evaluation. [3]
- As part of the evaluation, the school can gather information from the RTI process, such as screening, progress monitoring and instructional adequacy data. But the school still needs to follow the time frame of completing an initial evaluation within 60 days of receiving your consent.



### How many schools use RTI?

According to a study published in 2013, 17 states require schools to use RTI to help determine which students are eligible for special education.[4] All states mention RTI in their regulations. Most states offer schools guidance on how to use this kind of framework to decide which students have learning disabilities that qualify for special education.



RTI is more commonly used in elementary schools. But it can be used all the way up through high school.

“The RTI process can help schools focus the use of special education resources on kids who truly need them.”

One reason advocates like RTI is because it can increase the number of students who are successful in general education classrooms. It may also reduce the number of students who are referred for special education evaluations. That's because many students performing below grade level do *not* have learning disabilities.

With the right teaching methods, these students can make progress without getting accommodations or individualized teaching, which can be expensive to provide. In other words, the RTI process can help schools focus the use of special education resources on kids who truly need them.

### What are the benefits of RTI?

RTI is a fluid process. At any time during the school year, you can talk to the teacher and find out which interventions are available to help your child. (If the school doesn't use RTI, you can still ask for extra help. But it might not be provided as extensively or as systematically as it would in a school that uses RTI.)

RTI is designed to take kids from where they are in terms of skills and help them move toward grade-level expectations. That means adjustments can be made to your child's instruction based on his individual response to an intervention, not the response of the whole class or even a small group.

Here are some other reasons why some parents like RTI:

- Students continue to receive their core instruction in the general education classroom.
- The increasing levels of support mean that if the first intervention method doesn't work, there are other options before special education.
- With RTI, the school isn't taking a “wait and see” approach to your child's learning. Your child can start to get extra help before he falls so far behind that he needs to attend summer school or repeat a grade.
- Progress monitoring means that if your child is referred for special education services, there's already documentation about which type of instruction has not been helpful for your child.

### Will the school give us a written intervention plan?

Your child's school isn't required to give you a written intervention plan. Interestingly, all the school needs to tell you about RTI is that your child is getting extra support and that you have the right to request an evaluation for special education services at any time. However, many schools provide much more information because they know that parental involvement plays such a big role in a child's success in school.[5]

A written intervention plan can be a handy way to let you know what's happening and to inform you when your child gets more support. Some schools are already in the habit of giving parents a written intervention plan. If your child's school doesn't automatically give you a written



plan, you can ask for one. It might include:

- A description of the skills your child is having trouble with and documentation about these weaknesses, such as assessment results or samples of your child's work.
- A description of the research-based intervention your child is receiving.
- Details about how often the intervention will be provided and for what length of time—how many minutes per day over how many weeks.
- Details about who will be providing the intervention and in which schoolroom.
- The criteria for determining whether the intervention is successful.
- A description of how progress monitoring works and how often your child's progress will be measured.



### How can parents participate in RTI?

Requesting a written intervention plan can help you take an active role in RTI. There are others ways you can be involved in the process:

- Ask the school for more information about the intervention your child is receiving, such as which studies show it is effective.
- Ask the school to give you a copy of your child's progress monitoring graph after every assessment.
- Give the intervention time to work. To know if it's helping, the school needs data. Wait at least a few weeks before you ask the school if it's time to try something different.
- Ask the school how you can help your child at home.
- If you think your child's skills aren't improving, you may want to request an evaluation for special education. Remember that you can make this request *at any time*.

RTI is not a replacement for special education. But it can help many struggling students make progress. The more details you have about your school's RTI process, the more you can help your child get the kind of support he needs to succeed.

### Key Takeaways

RTI is a process that aims to identify kids who are struggling in school and uses targeted teaching to help them catch up.

- RTI isn't a specific program or teaching method. It's a systematic way of measuring progress and providing more support to kids who need it.
- You can ask for a special education evaluation even if your child is getting extra help through RTI.



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### About the Author



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### Reviewed by



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

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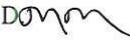
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OSEP 11-07

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Directors of Special Education

FROM: Melody Musgrove, Ed.D.   
Director  
Office of Special Education Programs

SUBJECT: A Response to Intervention (RTI) Process Cannot Be Used to Delay-Deny an Evaluation for Eligibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The provisions related to child find in section 612(a)(3) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), require that a State have in effect policies and procedures to ensure that the State identifies, locates and evaluates all children with disabilities residing in the State, including children with disabilities who are homeless or are wards of the State, and children with disabilities attending private schools, regardless of the severity of their disability, and who are in need of special education and related services. It is critical that this identification occur in a timely manner and that no procedures or practices result in delaying or denying this identification. It has come to the attention of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) that, in some instances, local educational agencies (LEAs) may be using Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies to delay or deny a timely initial evaluation for children suspected of having a disability. States and LEAs have an obligation to ensure that evaluations of children suspected of having a disability are not delayed or denied because of implementation of an RTI strategy.

A multi-tiered instructional framework, often referred to as RTI, is a schoolwide approach that addresses the needs of all students, including struggling learners and students with disabilities,

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and integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level instructional and behavioral system to maximize student achievement and reduce problem behaviors. With a multi-tiered instructional framework, schools identify students at-risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions, and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness.

While the Department of Education does not subscribe to a particular RTI framework, the core characteristics that underpin all RTI models are: (1) students receive high quality research-based instruction in their general education setting; (2) continuous monitoring of student performance; (3) all students are screened for academic and behavioral problems; and (4) multiple levels (tiers) of instruction that are progressively more intense, based on the student's response to instruction. OSEP supports State and local implementation of RTI strategies to ensure that children who are struggling academically and behaviorally are identified early and provided needed interventions in a timely and effective manner. Many LEAs have implemented successful RTI strategies, thus ensuring that children who do not respond to interventions and are potentially eligible for special education and related services are referred for evaluation; and those children who simply need intense short-term interventions are provided those interventions.

The regulations implementing the 2004 Amendments to the IDEA include a provision mandating that States allow, as part of their criteria for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability (SLD), the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention<sup>1</sup>. See 34 CFR §300.307(a)(2). OSEP continues to receive questions regarding the relationship of RTI to the evaluation provisions of the regulations. In particular, OSEP has heard that some LEAs may be using RTI to delay or deny a timely initial evaluation to determine if a child is a child with a disability and, therefore, eligible for special education and related services pursuant to an individualized education program.

Under 34 CFR §300.307, a State must adopt, consistent with 34 CFR §300.309, criteria for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability as defined in 34 CFR §300.8(c)(10). In addition, the criteria adopted by the State: (1) must not require the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement for determining whether a child has an SLD; (2) must permit the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; and (3) may permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has an SLD. Although the regulations specifically address using the process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based interventions (i.e., RTI) for determining if a child has an SLD, information obtained through RTI strategies may also be used as a component of evaluations for children suspected of having other disabilities, if appropriate.

The regulations at 34 CFR §300.301(b) allow a parent to request an initial evaluation at any time to determine if a child is a child with a disability. The use of RTI strategies cannot be used to delay or deny the provision of a full and individual evaluation, pursuant to 34 CFR §§300.304-

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<sup>1</sup> The Department has provided guidance regarding the use of RTI in the identification of specific learning disabilities in its letters to: Zirkel - 3-6-07, 8-15-07, 4-8-08, and 12-11-08; Clarke - 5-28-08; and Copenhaver - 10-19-07. Guidance related to the use of RTI for children ages 3 through 5 was provided in the letter to Brekken - 6-2-10. These letters can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/index.html>.



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300.311, to a child suspected of having a disability under 34 CFR §300.8. If the LEA agrees with a parent who refers their child for evaluation that the child may be a child who is eligible for special education and related services, the LEA must evaluate the child. The LEA must provide the parent with notice under 34 CFR §§300.503 and 300.504 and obtain informed parental consent, consistent with 34 CFR §300.9, before conducting the evaluation. Although the IDEA and its implementing regulations do not prescribe a specific timeframe from referral for evaluation to parental consent, it has been the Department's longstanding policy that the LEA must seek parental consent within a reasonable period of time after the referral for evaluation, if the LEA agrees that an initial evaluation is needed. See Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities, Final Rule, 71 Fed. Reg., 46540, 46637 (August 14, 2006). An LEA must conduct the initial evaluation within 60 days of receiving parental consent for the evaluation or, if the State establishes a timeframe within which the evaluation must be conducted, within that timeframe. 34 CFR §300.301(c).

If, however, the LEA does not suspect that the child has a disability, and denies the request for an initial evaluation, the LEA must provide written notice to parents explaining why the public agency refuses to conduct an initial evaluation and the information that was used as the basis for this decision. 34 CFR §300.503(a) and (b). The parent can challenge this decision by requesting a due process hearing under 34 CFR §300.507 or filing a State complaint under 34 CFR §300.153 to resolve the dispute regarding the child's need for an evaluation. It would be inconsistent with the evaluation provisions at 34 CFR §§300.301 through 300.111 for an LEA to reject a referral and delay provision of an initial evaluation on the basis that a child has not participated in an RTI framework.

We hope this information is helpful in clarifying the relationship between RTI and evaluations pursuant to the IDEA. Please examine the procedures and practices in your State to ensure that any LEA implementing RTI strategies is appropriately using RTI, and that the use of RTI is not delaying or denying timely initial evaluations to children suspected of having a disability. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Ruth Ryder at 202-245-7513.

References:

Questions and Answers on RTI and Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS), January 2007

Letter to Brekken, 6-2-2010

Letter to Clarke, 4-28-08

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Letters to Zirkel, 3-6-07, 8-15-07, 4-8-08 and 12-11-08

cc: Chief State School Officers  
Regional Resource Centers  
Parent Training Centers  
Protection and Advocacy Agencies  
Section 619 Coordinators



## Evaluation and Reevaluation Tips

### Requesting an Initial Evaluation

A request for an initial evaluation for special education and related services (an IEP) should always be made in writing by you, the parents or guardians.

The school district has 30-days to respond to your request for an initial evaluation. The initial evaluation must be completed within 60 days from when your informed consent was obtained.

You should receive a written response from the school district to your request for the initial evaluation in the form of a Prior Written Notice (PR-01) which must give detailed information about how the school district came to its decision to evaluate or not evaluate.

### Evaluation Planning

If the school district agrees to evaluate your child, an Evaluation Planning Meeting will be held.

You are to be members of the evaluation planning team.

An evaluation for special education must assess your child in **all** areas related to your child's suspected disability. The evaluation planning team will identify the suspected disability(ies), the areas to be assessed, as well as the person(s) that will be conducting the assessment in each area. This information will be recorded on an evaluation planning form (see pg. 12 & 13).

It is important to note the type of testing that will be done in each area, whether it is a

simple screening or a comprehensive standardized test.

A screening may be a checklist and may not provide enough information to determine the need for special education.

You will be asked to sign the evaluation planning form after it has been completed. You should request and keep a copy of the planning form.

The school district must obtain your informed, written consent before your child is evaluated.



### Evaluation Results

The evaluation results will be compiled in a report known as the Evaluation Team Report (ETR). The evaluation team is composed of qualified professionals and you, the parents or guardians. The team will review your child's evaluation results.

The evaluation team will determine:

- 1) If your child is a child with a disability, and
- 2) If your child has an educational need requiring specially designed instruction because of the disability.



If the answers to both questions are yes, the team will make the determination that your child is eligible for special education and related services and qualifies for an IEP.

After the determination is made that your child qualifies for special education, the IEP must be written within 30 days.

If the team determines your child does not qualify for special education, and you disagree, you have the right to request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) at the school district's expense.

If you disagree with the school district's evaluation, it is important to indicate on the ETR form that you do not agree. You are not required to provide your reason for disagreeing.

## Reevaluation

For a child that is receiving special education, a reevaluation may be done not more than once a year, unless you and school district agree otherwise. A reevaluation must occur **at least once every three years**, unless you and the school district agree that a reevaluation is not necessary.

You or the school may request that a reevaluation be done more frequently than every three years, if there is a need for additional information or if your child is diagnosed with a new disability. There is no law that prohibits the school district from conducting an early reevaluation.

Each time your child is reevaluated, the team determines if your child continues to be a child with a disability. The reevaluation also is used to gain updated

information about your child's present levels of performance and to better understand your child's educational needs.

A reevaluation can be waived if you and the school district are in agreement.

A record review of existing information may be done instead of a reevaluation.



Your child's right to a reevaluation only should be waived with extreme caution. If data is needed to determine your child's progress, or to better identify your child's educational needs, the reevaluation should not be waived.



## ETR Evaluation Team Report

### EVALUATION PLANNING FORM (Required)

School Age Disability Determination

CHILD'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF PLAN: \_\_\_\_\_

ID NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF BIRTH: \_\_\_\_\_

INITIAL EVALUATION

TEAM CHAIRPERSON: \_\_\_\_\_

REEVALUATION

SUSPECTED DISABILITY: \_\_\_\_\_

TEAM MEMBERS \_\_\_\_\_

ASSESSMENT AREAS RELATED TO SUSPECTED DISABILITY(IES)	DATA AVAILABLE <sup>1</sup>	FURTHER TESTING NEEDED <sup>2</sup>	PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR ASSESSMENT AND REPORT
Information Provided by Parent		<input type="checkbox"/>	
General Intelligence		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Academic Skills		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Classroom Based Evaluations and Progress in the General Curriculum		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Data from Interventions		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Communicative Status		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Vision		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Hearing		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Social Emotional Status		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Physical Exam/General Health		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Gross Motor		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Fine Motor		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Vocational/Transition		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Background History		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Observations		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Behavior Assessment		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Adaptive Behavior		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other: (circle) Braille needs as determined by VI teacher or appropriately trained/licensed personnel. Audiological needs as determined by certified/ licensed audiologist. Assistive Technology needs.		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other:		<input type="checkbox"/>	

<sup>1</sup> Sufficient data to determine eligibility

<sup>2</sup> Additional data required to determine eligibility. Check if further testing is needed

The Team has taken into consideration limited English proficiency to plan this assessment

The Team has taken into consideration possible sources of racial or cultural bias in planning this assessment

### SIGNATURES

\_\_\_\_\_  
School District Representative (Name/ Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parents (Name/ Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Regular Education Teacher (Name/ Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Intervention Specialist (Name/ Date)



## ETR Evaluation Team Report

CHILD'S NAME:	ID NUMBER:	DATE OF BIRTH:
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### **5** SIGNATURES

### DATES

DATE OF MEETING: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF LAST ETR: \_\_\_\_\_

REFERRAL DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

### EVALUATION TEAM

The names, titles and signatures below identify the members of the evaluation team and indicate whether or not each team member is in agreement with the conclusions of the report.

NAME	TITLE	SIGNATURE	DATE	STATUS
	Parent			<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
				<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
				<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
				<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
				<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
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				<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
				<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
				<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
				<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree

### STATEMENT OF DISAGREEMENT

If a team member is not in agreement with the team's determination, the team member shall attach to this report a written statement explaining his or her reason for disagreeing with the team's determination.



**Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities**  
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