# The Special EDge

**Response to Intervention: An Overview**

# What Is It? Why Do It? Is It Worth It?

*By W. David Tilly III, PhD, Coordinator of Assessment Services, Heartland Area Education Agency, Johnston, Iowa*

**H**elping kids! That's the informal answer most of us give to the question of why we got into education. Far too often, though, this passion-fueled idealism gives way to cynicism, frustration, and skepticism as we are confronted with all of the "new initiatives," "bright ideas," and "reforms" that seem to be mandated on a weekly basis at the state and federal levels. I must confess to frustration at times.

However, I remain extremely optimistic about the future of our kids—they seem to be resilient despite us. And I am especially hopeful about one particular movement that has started to take hold across America. That movement is called Response to Intervention or RtI. In fact, I am greatly encouraged, for reasons I hope will become clear as this article unfolds.

I wrote in another publication that RtI is likely the single best opportunity we have had to improve education for all students with disabilities—and students without them—that has occurred since the passage of the Education of the Handicapped Act in 1975. This is a bold and perhaps biased statement. For many years, I've watched students with disabilities being placed in programs that did not result in positive change. We are all on the constant lookout for something better for our kids. RtI practices offer the opportunity to create that something better.

## What Is RtI?

Lest I end up sounding like some sort of educational zealot, let me explain. First off, RtI is not an instructional program, a curriculum, a strategy, or an intervention. It is not an educational revolution or fad. Indeed, it is more about evolution than it is about revolution. RtI, stated simply, has three general components: (1) it is a logical structure for allocating precious instructional resources efficiently and targeting them specifically to student needs—all student needs; (2) it is a commitment to use the best findings from our current and emerging knowl-edge base (scientific research) as we go about our instruction; and (3) it is a commitment to use a logical, decision-making framework to guide our instruction (this has been variously referred to as data-based decision making or the problem-solving method). Let me expand on each of these a bit.

## Resource Allocation Structure

RtI is implemented by bringing together several components in a single school. The collaboration and coordination that is required is the good news—and it is also RtI's biggest challenge. Even within any single school district, there are notable differences from site to site: the available resources, the teachers, their backgrounds, the history, the politics, the culture, the curriculum, and the students are all going to vary to some degree. Any initiative that is not sensitive to and respectful of these variations is doomed to failure—how many packaged programs can you think of that have not worked because they failed to consider these variables?

One of the biggest challenges in improving results for our students involves giving them what they need. Unfortunately, the historical structures in our schools have gotten in the way of that happening. In many cases, we have organized our resources by

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## Letter from the State Director



*By Mary Hudler, Interim Director, California Department of Education, Special Education Division*

I am pleased to be named Interim Director of the Special Education Division. This provides me the wonderful opportunity to bridge both a change in leadership and an evolution in law that successfully structured California's special education for so many years. A particular challenge for many school districts will be implementing the new requirements of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as amended in 2004 (IDEA).

IDEA confronts the traditional means by which school districts identify students as having disabilities. Under the law's direction, schools first should initiate a system of early intervening services so students receive quality instruction prior to failing. In this way, students are not identified because they lacked appropriate instruction, in reading or mathematics, for example; and only those students who are in need of special education are identified. Second, school districts are no longer limited to using a discrepancy model to identify students as having specific learning disabilities. Instead, as part of the evaluation procedure, school districts may use a process to identify and determine if students respond to scientific, research-based intervention.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) laid the framework for these and other special education reforms in IDEA. Many IDEA activities are closely aligned with NCLB. For instance, local school districts may now use up to 15 percent of IDEA funds to offer early intervening services—including scientifically based academic and behavioral interventions—for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade before they are identified as needing special education services. These funds for early intervening services are intended to supplement the activities associated with NCLB. The components of effective reading instruction, as mentioned in IDEA, parallel the essentials of reading instruction as defined in NCLB.

These changes in IDEA will transform current practices. In the past, students experiencing difficulty in general education classrooms waited to fail before they received academic or behavioral assistance. As authorized in both IDEA and NCLB, the time previously spent in waiting may now be used for teaching, and students will benefit from services more quickly.

Response to Intervention (RtI) is one approach to ameliorating academic and behavioral difficulties. RtI brings together early intervening services and a process to determine if students respond to scientific, research-based intervention for the purpose of special education identification. RtI offers impressive results and helps many students avoid special education.

RtI is an individual, comprehensive student-centered assessment and intervention model to identify and address student difficulties. As part of the general education program, students receive research-based instruction in their general education classroom. To improve academic achievement and behavior, school personnel collect and analyze progress-monitoring data to determine the effectiveness of interventions and to make instructional modifications.

The California Department of Education (CDE) is guiding this transformation. The Special Education Division of CDE has partnered with various general education divisions of CDE to assist schools across California to implement RtI. For instance, CDE is sponsoring a series of webcasts on RtI—how it can make a difference in improving student achievement and behavior in the general education classroom and prevent special education identification. Additional information about

# Intervening Effectively in Literacy

**K**evin Feldman had a conversation recently with a teacher who was providing specialized reading instruction to a small group of students in her class. One of those students wasn't showing any improvement on the periodic progress-monitoring assessments. The graph charting his individual progress was "flat-lining," going nowhere, recalls Feldman, director of reading and early intervention at the Sonoma County Office of Education.

"Upon reflection, she saw that she was doing a lot of work at the word level when the goal was to increase overall fluency and comprehension. She wasn't having the kid read enough connected text every day," Feldman said in a recent interview, "so she re-jiggered her approach, doing half as much word-level work and adding twice as much sentence and passage work and—boom! —the graph started going up immediately."

The teacher was able to make that speedy adjustment because she was in a school that had adopted Response to Intervention (RtI), the innovative, proactive approach to identifying students with reading problems as soon as they enter school, getting immediate help to them in their regular classroom environment, and monitoring them frequently to assess their progress. Classroom teachers, reading specialists, and other educators can see what's working and what's not and make modifications quickly. And because the initial stages of RtI are part of general education, the students are not separated out into special education classes and stigmatized as learning disabled.
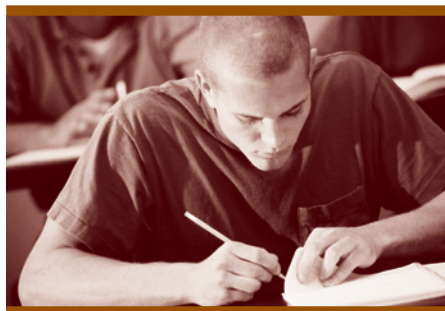
Feldman, who develops and monitors programs related to literacy and prevention of reading difficulties, says RtI is long overdue. Most of the students currently placed in special education are classified as learning disabled, and,

Feldman says, "for 90 percent or more, the primary presenting disability has directly to do with reading."

### Remedying the Discrepancy Model

In most schools today, students needing help are identified by assesors who use the "discrepancy model," which considers the difference between a child's IQ and his or her performance in school. Because it usually takes at least a couple of years to quantify a sufficient discrepancy, most students are placed in special education sometime between the middle of second grade and the middle of fourth grade. Feldman says this "wait to fail" intervention often comes too late.

"Did the kids first start having prob-



lems then?" he asks rhetorically. No, he says, literacy problems can be detected in kindergarten or even in pre-kindergarten. "We've known for a long time that the model we have doesn't make pragmatic sense. You have to fail and fall two to three years behind your peers, feel stupid, and become de-motivated around issues like reading before we can get you help in a systematic way."

Now, with RtI, systematic help is on the way. "We're going to assume that children will come into kindergarten with widely differing needs. Some kids will have difficulty with reading and there's no obvious reason why—they don't have cognitive impairment; they're not learning English as a second language—but they are struggling. And some of them will have needs that are so acute that if we don't meet them now,

they will manifest themselves into what we later call learning disabilities."

### Addressing Learning Disabilities

"Learning disability" is itself a problematic label, Feldman says, because it implies that the child has a disability that is preventing her from reading at the level of her peers. But the reality is usually more complex—literacy problems have multiple sources, often including what and how a student is being taught. "There are curricular disabilities, there are instructional disabilities, there are school organizational disabilities," he says. "A significant school organizational disability would be assuming that everybody needs the same thing and then offering a one-size-fits-all model for kids who are not successful.

"What RtI is attempting to do is provide a plan for schools to organize themselves sensibly, a plan that starts out assuming that kids will have different needs. We're going to screen them in kindergarten, provide the best program we have, and screen them again in the middle of the year. If they're not making progress, we're not going to wait or refer them to special ed or spend thousands of dollars on psychological testing. We're going to provide practical, pragmatic help right now as part of the general education system."

### Adapting a Three-Tier Model

Although the implementation of RtI varies from state to state and even from school to school, a widely adapted approach to reading interventions is the three-tier model promulgated by the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas, where there is an ongoing RtI research program. The model takes the goal of RtI—early intervention to prevent young readers from falling behind their peers—and creates three increasingly intensive levels of instruction. Throughout the tiers,

categorical program or funding stream (e.g., Title I, special education, English language learners, talented and gifted, etc.). But knowing that a student qualifies for Title I assistance, for example, tells us absolutely nothing about that student's specific learning needs. However, most RtI systems adopt what is called a tiered model of service delivery (Figure 1). The basic model reflects much of what we all know about reality: in any group of students within our school, instructional needs will vary. Tier 1 represents the largest group of students, those who are educationally healthy and remain so through instruction in the general education (some call it "core") curriculum. We also know that some smaller group of students, depicted in Tier 2, will need something supplemental (also referred to as "strategic instruction") to their core instruction to support their learning and raise their achievement to proficiency or above. Finally, we also know that there is an even smaller group of students, Tier 3, who will need intensive instruction if their learning is to be appropriately supported.

Some argue that we already have a tiered system: we had general education, Title I, and special education; so how is this different? The answer is that in the tiered system, resources are not allocated based on broad generalities like economic condition or the catch-all "learning disability." They are allocated and specifically matched to exact needs that students have demonstrated based on their performance on efficient diagnostic assessments.



**Academic Systems** — **Behavioral Systems**

**Intensive, Individual Interventions**
• Individual students
• Assessment-based
• High intensity procedures

1–5%  1–5%

**Intensive, Individual Interventions**
• Individual students
• Assessment-based
• Intense, durable procedures

**Targeted Group Interventions**
• Some students (at-risk)
• High efficiency
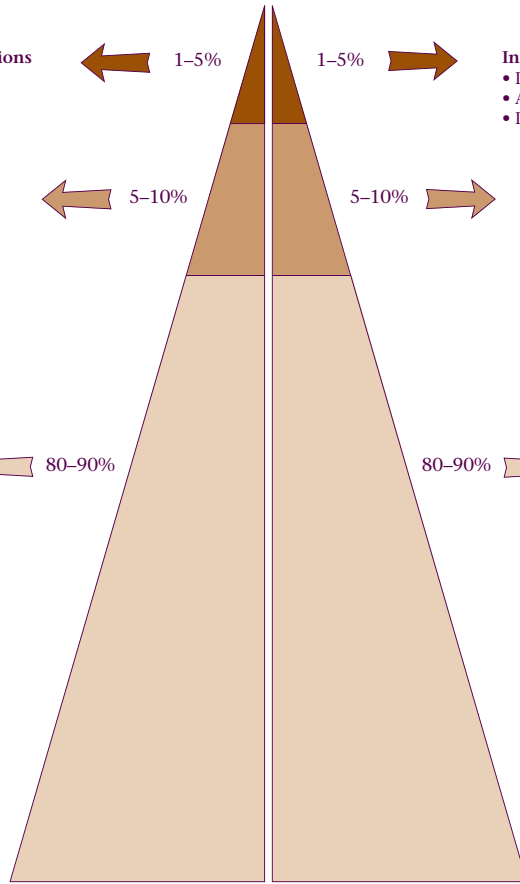• Rapid response

5–10%  5–10%

**Targeted Group Interventions**
• Some students (at-risk)
• High efficiency
• Rapid response

**Universal Interventions**
• All subjects, all students
• Preventive, proactive

80–90%  80–90%

**Universal Interventions**
• All settings, all students
• Preventive, proactive

*Figure 1*

**Scientific, Research-Based Strategies**

In RtI systems, many, many different strategies can and are being used with groups and individuals. These strategies all share a set of characteristics. First, they all respect the rights and the human dignity of children and their families by responding to the uniqueness of specific, individual needs. Second, to the extent possible, they have scientific research supporting their effectiveness. Just as the FDA protects consumers from hucksters and ineffective medical treatments, the RtI principle of using research-based practices protects us from wasting time and protects our students from being subjected to ineffective practice. One caveat, however, is that there are many areas in education where we don't have definitive research on what works best. In these circumstances, we have to implement promising practices, monitor

the effectiveness of the strategies, and modify our implementation based on the results we get. And third, the strategies that are part of RtI implementations work. If they do not, they are systematically rejected and replaced.

**Decision-Making Framework**

One important component of RtI systems is that they are self correcting. Though we wish it were otherwise, in education we cannot predict with certainty whether any instruction, strategy, or intervention is going to work with an individual student before we try it. While we do have research-based strategies and those things we believe in and that work for some, if we are honest with ourselves, we know that nothing works for everyone. As such, we need to have in place for all students a system that gives us feedback when they are learning and that helps us make good instructional decisions when they aren't. That's specifically what the problem-solving method does within an RtI framework—it provides a structure for using data to monitor student learning, in an instructionally relevant way, for groups and individuals so that good decisions can be made. Stated simply,

when we use data to make decisions about our instruction, we make better decisions.

## Where Did RtI Come From?

The answer to where RtI comes from is multifaceted. Many of the practices that are used as a part of RtI implementation (e.g., curriculum-based measurement, formative evaluation, learning strategies, peer tutoring, direct instruction, behavior analysis, lots of research-validated reading strategies, etc.) have their own longstanding and rich foundation in research—in many cases, over 30 years worth. So, in one regard, RtI practice has been around for a long time. But there is the part of RtI that puts all of these practices together in a logical and rational way that can work in schools; this was developed in public schools, not in the research literature. The earliest school-based implementations of what has grown to be known as RtI (in various sites in Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and Iowa) have been working on implementation for only about 15 or 20 years (a little longer in the case of Pine County, Minnesota). One of the special things about RtI is that our field-based people are working closely with our researchers not only to figure out what works but also how to make it work. This latter part has been missing from too many attempts at improving our system, and it's finally begun happening.

RtI has been described as a system structure that is designed to allow the optimally efficient delivery of effective practice in schools. One very exciting dimension is that RtI doesn't tell you what to think; it tells you what to think about.

## Do We Have to Do This?

In the IDEA '04 statute (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, amended in 2004), RtI is offered as an option for schools, not a requirement. But it's critically important for all educators to remember the following: RtI has evolved in the last 15 years or so through a confluence of (1) understanding that what we have been doing isn't getting us as far as we need to go in



*W. David Tilly*
*RtI Author, Consultant, and Trainer*

## RtI Training

A series of webcast presentations, available free to all interested California educators, will be offered from 3 to 5 PM on the following Thursdays:

**March 16: Why RtI? Why Now?** with Dan Reschly, Jack Fletcher, and W. David Tilly

**April 6: What Is RtI?** with Sharon Kurns and Amanda VanDerHeyden

**April 27: Administrative Issues in RtI,** with Judy Elliott, George Batsche, and Roy Applegate

**May 11: Instruction in RtI Systems,** with Barbara Moore-Brown and Dan Reschly

**May 25: So You Want to Do RtI: Getting Started** with Alnita Dunn

The series is designed to provide leadership and guidance in the statewide effort to support a multi-tier RtI system that improves the academic and behavioral outcomes of all children. If you're interested in participating in these trainings, please contact your local County Office of Education. Each presentation will be available as a free, downloadable webstream at *www4.scoe.net/ims/webcasts/index.html* shortly after each of the actual presentations.

terms of student outcomes; (2) understanding that there are some relatively new, effective practices out there; (3) recognizing that, in order to make this all work, we can't tinker around the edges—we have to take on the whole system at once and reengineer it around teaching and learning; and (4) good, bad, or indifferent, understanding that we are now living in the age of accountability. More of our students must do better more of the time. RtI is a very reasonable way to do this.

RtI as a concept currently lives in the IDEA '04 statute under the section related to identifying specific learning disabilities (SLD). This placement has caused some to think that RtI is about identifying students with SLD. While it is true that data collected in RtI systems can be used as one component of a comprehensive evaluation for special education eligibility determination, this was never RtI's purpose, which has always explicitly been to improve instruction for students. Anthing else is tangential.

## Is It Worth It?

RtI is not a panacea. It will not wash the dishes or mow the lawn. In fact, it's a heckovalot of work (I'm a transplanted Californian living in Iowa; this is one of my new Midwestern words). It also makes a huge difference in learning. The data coming out of implementation sites across the country is generally positive. A majority of the research data being published is supportive. It seems like we may be on to something here that has the potential to create for kids the kind of life-changing results that we all got into this for in the first place. ◆

W. David Tilly currently serves as coordinator of assessment services for Heartland AEA 11, an effort that serves 55 public school districts and 36 accredited nonpublic schools. Dr. Tilly has also served as a consultant for assessment, research, and innovation at the Iowa Department of Education. His particular focus was on Iowa's Renewed Service Delivery System (RSDS), which foundationally changed the way that special education is conceptualized and delivered in Iowa. With Dr. Tilly's guidance, Iowa has

## Groundbreaking Work from Vanderbilt

# Response to Mathematics Intervention

**L**ynn Fuchs, PhD, the Nicholas Hobbs Professor of Special Education and Human Development and Co-Director of the Kennedy Center Reading Clinic at Vanderbilt University, has conducted seminal research on classroom assessment methods and effective intervention in teaching mathematics and reading. She is the author and co-author of hundreds of research publications and the recipient of dozens of awards and honors for her contributions to the field of education. Her current areas of specialization include testing and assessment, the study of disabilities in reading and mathematics, student interactions and learning in peer-mediated small groups, and mathematical problem solving. Dr. Fuchs generously agreed to be interviewed for this article. She offers an invaluable voice to the entire RtI effort.

**Q. What research exists in the area of RtI and mathematics?**
**Fuchs:** Much less research exists on RtI in the area of mathematics as compared to reading because reading has been viewed as the higher academic priority for kids with learning disabilities. This is understandable because reading permeates more aspects of schooling. Poor performance in math, however, can also have devastating consequences. For this reason, important work on math has been conducted, and more is underway. Before RtI can be fleshed out fully across the grade levels and the various areas of math, however, a lot of work remains to be done.

One major RtI study conducted in math at first grade was done by our group at Vanderbilt [published recently in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*: "The Prevention, Identification, and Cognitive Determinants of Math Difficulty," 2005, Vol. 97, No., 3, pp. 493–513]. It looked at issues of identification and prevention using an RtI model with 564 first graders—127 of whom were identified at-risk for math difficulties and randomly assigned to tutoring or control groups. After 16 weeks, tutoring had significantly improved mathematics performance on calculation as well as concepts and applications skills for these at-risk learners. Tutoring had also decreased the prevalence of mathematics disabilities, and these effects held through the end of second grade.
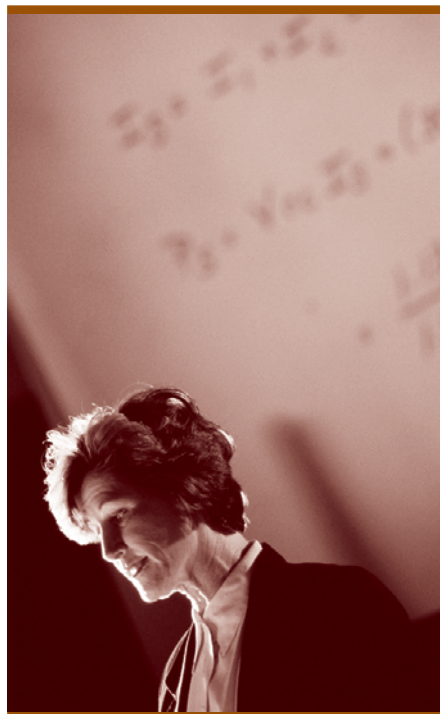


Another study we did, a summary of which appears in *Teaching Exceptional Children*, looked at math problem solving at third grade. Using an RtI framework [see cover article for overview], that study examined rates of unresponsiveness with scientifically validated Tier 1 only; with validated Tier 2 only; and with validated Tiers 1 and Tier 2 both in place. We compared rates of unresponsiveness for these groups to a control group, which had more typical classroom instruction in math problem solving. The scientifically validated math problem-solving intervention we used was Hot Math (go to *www. vanderbilt.edu/CASL/casl7.pdf* ), which combines explicit instruction* and self-regulation strategies with instruction on transferring solutions to novel math problems.

Tier 1 occurred in general education, where all students participate. Tier 2 took place outside of the classroom (in a more intensive tutoring environment) for students deemed at risk of failing. The results showed that students who received either Tier 1 or Tier 2 fared better than control students, but the combination of Tier 1 and Tier 2 worked best synergistically to produce even more dramatically superior outcomes in math problem solving. This was a large study, with 60 classrooms in 13 schools, conducted across two years.

The outcomes of both of these studies suggest promise for the RtI approach in mathematics.

**Q. Do you see the effort to implement RtI with math as requiring a structural change to schools that is different from what is required by any other effort to implement RtI—in reading, for example?**
**Fuchs:** There is nothing about math that would require a different kind of structural approach to RtI. Whether you're teaching reading or math within

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* Explicit (or direct) instruction is a teacher-centered instructional approach that is effective for teaching basic or isolated skills. It has also been used very successfully to teach higher-order math skills. Usually, explicit programs provide step-by-step formats for teachers to use and require student mastery at each step. It is generally fast-paced instruction. Students respond to instruction and receive immediate feedback. Explicit instruction also includes continuous modeling by teachers, followed by more limited teacher involvement and then fading teacher involvement as students begin to master the material.

the context of an RtI approach, what you're talking about is constant assessment as a means of identifying academic problems early on, hand-in-hand with intensive intervention to prevent later failure, and embedding all of that into a multi-tiered system. Then, formulating sound judgments about which students learned adequately (i.e., responded) and those who did not. The main questions for implementing RtI are the same across the curriculum: How do you structure Tier 1? How you structure Tier 2? What are your measures for monitoring response? What are your criteria for designating the lack of response? All of these issues run parallel, regardless of the academic area you're looking at.

**Q. Does the field of mathematics have its own equivalent to the "reading wars" that existed in the 1980s between "whole language" and the phonics approaches to literacy?**
**Fuchs:** I think it does. The constructivist approach to teaching mathematics currently dominates and has had the endorsement of teacher educators, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and the National Science Foundation. [Constructivist math encourages children to "construct" their own approaches for solving mathematical problems rather than having teachers explicitly provide explanations for how to solve problems and for why those solution strategies work.]

Each approach, a constructivist and an explicit instruction approach, has its value. For certain kinds of learners, constructivism works very nicely. But clearly, a large group of learners needs more explicit instruction, especially students with learning disabilities. Just as in reading, there's a large group of learners who need very systematic instruction.

**Q. Research is now suggesting that some kids are born "wired to read," and some are not. A lot of educational research is currently being devoted to figuring out how to effectively instruct those kids for whom reading is not such a natural**

**skill. Are there parallels with math? Are some people simply born with "math wiring"?**
**Fuchs:** Research suggests that the genetic component to math is stronger than in reading. At the same time, research clearly shows that it's possible to improve outcomes for at-risk students. We need additional scientifically validated math programs for achieving strong outcomes for all students. Currently, only a small part of the research portfolio in mathematics education targets intervention. Most of the excellent

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*Much can be done in preschools and at home to create number sense and give kids early math skills.*

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research that's been conducted in the area of math has been aimed at describing mathematics problems and their underlying causes. Also, the intervention work that has been done has been aimed disproportionately at older kids.

Important work is currently being done to try to expand our understanding of the cognitive abilities that underlie math development. In addition, some work in functional brain imaging (where individuals do math tasks in MRI scanners) is designed to increase understanding about how the brain works at math and how the brain can change in response to math intervention. We're doing some of that work at Vanderbilt. Also, the research base on how math can be most effectively taught continues to grow.

**Q. Do children come to kindergarten with the widely varying range of abilities in mathematics that we also see in reading?**
**Fuchs:** By the time kids enter kindergarten, you already see wide variations in their math skills, just as in reading. You see children whose preschool/home experiences have made them already

pretty knowledgeable about math, and you see children who can't count and have no concept of numbers. There are some nice Tier 1 programs available for kindergarten, designed to help those kids catch up.

I think much can be done in preschools and at home to create number sense and give kids early math skills—to create a mental number line representation, for example, so that kids coming to kindergarten are prepared to profit from math instruction. The parallel to reading is there; by the time kids are five years old, there are huge inequities—but these can be remedied; the kindergarten whole-class programs that have been developed for high-risk population show how you can narrow the gap in the area of mathematics.

**Q. How is RtI going to happen in mathematics?**
**Fuchs:** The three-tiered approach, when applied to any field of instruction, is fundamentally a good one. And there are progress-monitoring tools in mathematics for first grade, with some measures being developed for kindergarten. And the research we did offers good evidence of Tier 2 tutoring efficacy at first grade and at third grade. So there are materials and solid research on which school districts can base their efforts. Our first grade RtI study was a large one, conducted in 41 classrooms with a sample of almost 700 children. That work, as well as Joe Witt's [see below], can help school districts understand how to put the pieces together to implement RtI in math.

**Q. Are there any unique challenges around grade levels when it comes to teaching math?**
**Fuchs:** Yes, this is the case in math. With increasing grade levels, the nature of the math curriculum becomes more differentiated. So, for example, a kid might get to grade five and have a lot of difficulty with the geometry strand, even though he may have had no difficulty in the earlier grades when the curriculum focused on calculations and word problems. There's some research

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to suggest that different aspects of math may require different kinds of abilities. We've all known children who've done just fine through middle school math, and then they had problems with trigonometry or geometry in high school. The underlying cognitive abilities may differ for different kinds of math.

We see this sort of thing in reading—a late-emerging disability with a small group of children whose word-level skills have developed well but who manifest comprehension problems beginning around fourth grade. But it's more uncommon in reading—if you're generally strong early on, you maintain that strength throughout your schooling. That's generally true, but less so in math. Even in first grade, some children learn calculation and math facts easily, but struggle with word problems. That presents an additional complication in the area of math.

**Q. What do you see as the primary stumbling blocks to successfully implementing RtI?**
**Fuchs:** It's a fairly complex delivery system. There's a lot of training that needs to happen in the schools to get people up to speed so that teachers know how to assess risk for failure; so that they know how to monitor student performance in general education to decide who among the those at-risk students is not profiting from the general education program. Then there's the huge training challenge of getting an army of support staff ready to do Tier 2 tutoring/strategic teaching in reading and math.

One important, underlying assumption in RtI is that effective instruction is occurring at Tier 1; it's an even more critical assumption for Tier 2. When children are not responding, we need to have excluded poor instruction as an explanation for that lack of response. This is essential for inferring that it's something about the child (not the instruction) that makes learning difficult and that necessitates individualized and intensive special education.

To put all of these pieces in place requires a tremendous amount of time, commitment, and energy from a school. This is the main challenge: to develop the capacity to put all of the pieces together into a smoothly running RtI system.

**Q. Who are these Tier 2 tutors?**
**Fuchs:** Tier 2 tutors don't necessarily have to be certified teachers. They do, however, have to be well-trained, with ongoing supervision so that, as problems surface, there is somebody who has the professional background to problem solve with that tutor so that difficulties can get addressed and worked out.

And there are additional challenges. As you tutor a group of two, three, or four students, behavior problems may arise. At-risk kids are often not easy to handle in groups. In addition, what often happens within a tutoring group is that children don't move at the same pace; so there are also instructional management issues. Essentially, when you have squirrelly, active kids grouped together, kids who catch on to the instruction at different rates, you need tutors with finesse, or things may fall apart pretty fast.

## Recommended by Dr. Lynn Fuchs
## Resources for Mathematics Instruction

**"Integrating Technology into Math Instruction,"** a transcribed conversation between Beatrice C. Babbitt and John Woodward, discusses the benefits of using technology to support the instruction of mathematics, especially for struggling students who would particularly benefit from the features of self-pacing and visualization, as well as the tidiness of automatically aligning numbers that a computer program can provide. Available at *www.ldonline.org/bulletin_boards/techtalk/babbitt&woodward.html*

**Tools for Understanding: A Resource Guide for Extending Mathematical Understanding in Secondary Schools,** a website developed by John Woodward and his colleagues at the University of Puget Sound, offers teachers numerous approaches to help students achieve the kind of mathematical literacy that they will need in the future world of work. Available at *www.ups.edu/community/tofu*

**"Early Warning System,"** an article by G. Reid Lyon and Jack M. Fletcher, provides a powerful rationale for an RtI approach to instruction, particularly for children with learning disabilities or in danger of being labeled such. Available at *www.educationnext.org/20012/22.html*

**"Validity of Alternative Approaches to the Identification of LD: Operationalizing Unexpected Underachievement,"** a presentation by Jack M. Fletcher at the December 2003 Responsiveness-to-Intervention Symposium in Missouri, is available at *www.nrcld.org/symposium2003/fletcher/fletcher3.html*

Numerous additional resources to support the effective instruction of mathematics have been developed by Lynn and Doug Fuchs through their work at Vanderbilt University. Learn more about the Peer Assisted Learning (PALS) materials at *http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals/*

Also available are materials connected with their research:

*First Grade Small-Group Tutoring to Prevent Math DisAbility* (a tutoring method that uses concrete objects to promote conceptual learning)
*HOT Math (*a third-grade math problem-solving program*)
*Progress Monitoring in Math*

For more information or to order, contact Flora Murray at (phone) 615-343-4782, (fax) 615-343-1570, or (email) *flora.murray@comcast.net*.

In our research studies, our tutors are not licensed teachers, but they are very capable people. And every week, all tutors meet with a group of professional, licensed teachers, who help them figure out how to solve the problems they're experiencing with their tutoring groups. This system of supports has to be in place if Tier 2 is going to be effective.

**Q. Who else is looking at mathematics and effective intervention?**
**Fuchs:** Amanda VanDerHeyden, currently at UC Santa Barbara, makes some materials available—strategies to support fluency and accuracy in math facts, word problems, and basic computational skills—on her Intervention Worksheets website [*www.gosbr.net/ math/*]. And there's Joe Witt's good work [*http://bitwww1.psyc.lsu.edu/*] out of Louisiana State University.

Marjorie Montague has done work in the area of teaching mathematics in middle school and junior high. In her article "Meeting the Challenge of Mathematics Reform for Students with LD," she examines efforts to reform K–12 mathematics instruction in this country over the last ten years, and the implications of this reform for students with learning disabilities [available as a download at *www.maththatcounts. com/page46.html*].

John Woodward at the University of Puget Sound is looking at the challenges and the benefits of the new technologies for today's students. His article, "Redoing the Numbers: Secondary Math for a Postsecondary Work World," describes approaches for engaging middle and high school students—with disabilities or with long-standing math insecurities—in the study of mathematics, with implications for their futures in the world of work [*www.dldcec.org/pdf/teaching_ how-tos/redoing_the_numbers.pdf*].

Asha Jitendra is doing interesting work at Lehigh University for elementary teachers. Her article "Teaching Students Math Problem-Solving through Graphic Representations" offers clear, practical, step-by-step instructions for how to teach math problem-solving using a graphic representational strategy. The article also includes assessment strategies [available at *www.dldcec. org/pdf/teaching_how-tos/journal_ articles/article_5.pdf* ].

Although there are many good, strong researchers in the area of math, few who work in the area of math have framed their research specifically in terms of RtI. What that means is that only a small portion of the work occurs in the primary grades or at first grade, where prevention activities may be most appropriate. Only a small amount

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*If the challenge is identified . . . we'll see teachers rise to the occasion.*

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of the work actually looks at rates of unresponsiveness or investigates sound methods for distinguishing response from nonresponse.

**Q. What is the practical outlook for any effort to introduce RtI to math instruction?**
**Fuchs:** There is so much focus—and rightly so—on reading in the first grade, sometimes the focus on math gets diluted. Teachers feel like their primary mission is reading. So sometimes, there's inadequate attention paid to math within the general ed program. This can strain Tier 2 resources. If sufficiently strong attention were dedicated to math at Tier 1, there would be less need for resources at Tier 2. That's one issue. It makes sense that reading is the higher priority in first grade. So the question is "How do we infuse a second priority that's meaningfully serious?" This is not an easy issue to resolve. It's hard enough to ratchet up instructional practice in reading; and once you add a second academic area, like math, things can become more strained. But if the challenge is identified and the reasons for meeting it are clear, we'll see teachers rise to the occasion. ◆

who simply want to learn more about the range of ADR options. It will also feature state SELPA grant recipients who will provide skill development in a variety of areas: IEP facilitation, solutions panels and mediation, and resource parent training (the use of parents who are trained in the IEP process and who then serve as mentors to other families), along with other components of a viable ADR program.

In addition, for any district or SELPA that wishes to implement a specific ADR training, the conference will offer packets that include training outlines, agendas, and other relevant materials, thus providing some ready-made resources. All of the featured trainings address aspects of ADR programs; and they all use and clarify the budgetary language required by the CDE if a SELPA is planning to apply for—or continue to participate in—a state-funded ADR grant.

The ADR Conference also allows interested SELPAs and districts to find SELPAs that are qualified to function as mentors. This mentoring process has been used successfully for the past six years and assists new grant recipients in initial efforts to launch and establish an effective ADR program.

**ADR Future**
Because of proven ADR benefits, legislation has been proposed several times to increase both the number of available grants and the grant amounts. Although both Governors Gray Davis and Arnold Schwarzenegger have vetoed this legislation, sponsors intend to keep pushing the bills, as they make both good programmatic and good fiscal sense. ◆

## 2006 ADR Conference
If you are interested in attending the 2006 ADR Conference in Orange County on April 23–24, please contact Richard Erhard, Santa Ana SELPA Director, at *rerhard@sausd.k12.ca.us* or phone 714-558-5551.

been refining and implementing a Response to Intervention/problem-solving model for approximately 15 years.

Dr. Tilly works regularly with states, school districts, federal offices, and national organizations on improving educational results for all children. He is also the author or co-author of 24 publications, mostly focused on education innovation, systems change, and improving educational results. His research and policy interests include Response to Intervention, educational innovation, and improving educational results.

**Dr. Tilly recommends the following sources for additional information:**

### NRCLD Symposium Web page

There are many policy analyses and research documents available with different perspectives on RtI. In December of 2003, the National Research Center for Learning Disabilities held a symposium with many of the top names in special education research presenting papers on RtI concepts. These papers are mostly special education-centric and deal with the concept of RtI mainly as it relates to students with specific learning disabilities. These papers are available for download at this site:

*www.nrcld.org/symposium2003*

### Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation

By Batsche, G., Elliott, J., Graden, J., Grimes, J., Kovaleski, J., Prasse, D, et al. (2005). National Association of State Directors of Special Education: Alexandria, VA.

This policy guide gives an in-depth overview of what RtI is globally and what it looks like in practice, along with some of the things that are needed to get it going in states and in schools. An accessible and broad treatment of the subject, it can be ordered from NASDSE at *www.nasdse. org* or borrowed, free of charge, from the RiSE Library (see page 17).

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## Awarding Outstanding Individuals and Programs

*T*he California Advisory Commission on Special Education (ACSE) presented its first annual Grazer Outstanding Achievement in Learning (GOAL) award on November 17, 2005, at a ceremony held at the California Department of Education in Sacramento. The award was presented to the Bridges to Youth Self-Sufficiency Project; and to two student graduates, Tarek Sinnukrat from the Whittier Union High School District and Carmelita Hamden from the Capistrano Unified School District.

State Superintendent Jack O'Connell and Senior Gubernatorial Advisor Bonnie Reiss participated with the Advisory Commission in the award presentation ceremony. The award recipients were selected by a panel of independent judges after all submitted applications were reviewed and a site verification visit to the finalist was conducted.

The Advisory Commission on Special Education created the award to recognize exemplary practices in the field of special education, encourage replication of programs that could benefit other California special education students, and recognize individual student achievement in those same programs.

The name GOAL, the Grazer Outstanding Achievement in Learning, reflects the need to establish lofty goals and high expectations for all students, as well as to officially recognize Brian Grazer for the ten-year commitment he has made to honoring special education programs and professionals.

The second annual GOAL award ceremony will be held in Sacramento on September 21, 2006. The theme for this next GOAL award is "preschool services for students with disabilities." Applications are expected to be available in mid-March, 2006. The deadline to submit applications will be April 28, 2006. Winners will be announced at the May ACSE meeting.

Applications and additional information will be posted on the ACSE Web page, located at *www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/as/acse.asp*, when it becomes available. Questions should be directed to Dennis Kelleher, ACSE staff liaison, at *dkellehe@cde.ca.gov*.

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carefully investigate the possibility of any hidden cost.

- How big an effect should I expect? Many evidence-based practices are considered effective even if the improvements are small. As such, it's important to ask if the practice is shown to have a large or small effect. Often with behavioral supports, changes are slow and small; unless they understand this and keep focused on the data, educators can become frustrated with the results.

- Can teachers integrate the intervention into their daily routine? This may be the most important question of all. Many of us are reluctant to adopt behavior support practices that don't fit with the daily life of our classrooms.

### Social Validation

When implementing behavioral supports, it is important not only to ask if the intervention "worked," but also to ask about the social validity of the intervention and its outcomes. Simply stated, students, parents, and educators need to be regularly asked about their acceptance of the methods of support (such as reinforcement or a consequence used to change behavior), whether the outcomes of the plan are important (small change versus dramatic change), and whether the support plan improves the quality of life for the student and his family.

### Conclusion

This article provides a framework for linking RtI practices for academics with RtI practices for behavior support, and then offers some practical ways to accomplish this. The three-tiered approach is identical in both. The call for regular assessment and appropriate intervention is identical in both. And the fundamental requirement to support and benefit every child is identical in both. No one can pretend that implementing these systems is easy; but the research promises great success. The only thing to fear is what happens to too many students if it isn't done. ◆

## Yes, We Get to Do It Here, Too!

# RtI and Positive Behavior Supports

*By Jeffrey Sprague, PhD, University of Oregon, Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior*

**S**ince the recent reauthorization of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, amended in 2004), Response to Intervention (RtI) has become a major stimulus for discussion and action. Educators are focusing on the RtI language in IDEA, especially in relation to the identification and support of students with possible learning disabilities; and schools are increasingly adopting an RtI logic to organize and deliver both academic and behavioral support for all students.

This practice makes good sense. It certainly represents a more efficient use of resources. But there is another dimension that is perhaps even more important, one that stems from the common observation that many students struggle academically and exhibit problem behaviors. Simply, some students will misbehave because they "won't do it," and others will because they try and "can't do it." But regardless of the emphasis, the fact remains that behavior and academic success are intimately connected and need to be intelligently addressed—together.

### What is RtI?

In its simplest expression, RtI involves documenting a change in behavior as a result of intervention. For example, the learner, while being provided with a particular level of instruction and support in an academic area, is periodically assessed and receives continued instruction and support that is adapted or intensified, depending on the assessment results. Similarly, a student who displays challenging behavior is also assessed; and, based on the results, the school staff uses evidence-based practices to support the student in reducing those challenging behaviors and improving attitudes toward academic and social life.

The RtI approach to behavior uses the identical three-tiered logic (see page 4) that is used for academics, and this ultimately simplifies the work of schools in both realms—academic and behavioral. If students are having a problem with learning, they are more likely than not (and sooner or later) going to present problems in behavior, and vice versa. So the effort to evaluate and intervene early on both fronts becomes mutually serving for students, families, and educators. The mirrored three-tiered structures allow schools to evaluate and intervene for both behavioral interventions and academic interventions in an integrated and efficient fashion. It is close to self-defeating not to make a serious commitment to both. Clearly, integrating the approaches—from assessment to intervention to evaluation—makes the most sense.

### What is RtI for Behavior?

Many evidence-based interventions* for behavior are available; they include methods based on applied behavior analysis (e.g., reinforcement), social learning (teaching expected behaviors through modeling and role playing), and cognitive behavioral methods to teach "thinking skills," such as problem solving, impulse control, or anger management. The RtI focus on regular, objective assessment helps us to decide whether to maintain, modify, intensify, or withdraw an intervention.

Frank Gresham published an important paper in the *Journal of School Psychology* outlining four major themes

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\* An evidence-based practice, at the highest level of rigor, is a randomized controlled trial design, followed by a quasi-experimental controlled design (typically denotes non-random assignment to condition). Opinions of respected authorities are also listed. Additional evidence of efficacy is indicated by studies with a statistically significant positive effect, a positive effect sustained for at least one year post intervention, and replication of the effect in one or more settings and/or populations.

related to RtI and behavioral supports.

**1. Academic and behavioral interventions are based on the intensity of the presenting problem**. The "three-tiered" approach to designing and selecting academic and behavioral supports involves providing supports at the universal level (all students), selected level (some students), and targeted/intensive level (a few students). At each subsequent tier, with fewer students and more intense problems, increasing levels of support are provided.

**2. RtI provides the basis for changing, modifying, or intensifying interventions.** Academic assessments are more commonly recognized and used in schools (e.g., reading fluency or comprehension, standardized test scores) to make data-based decisions regarding instruction. Similarly, systematically collected behavioral data (observations, office referral patterns, ratings) provide a powerful basis for making decisions on behavior supports.

**3. Evidence-based practices are used in two ways: for selecting interventions and for evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention and the degree of fidelity with which it is applied** (essentially, is it being used as it was designed to be used; is it being done right?). This sets the stage for the necessary shift in schools from "paper implementation" to "process implementation," involving high quality supports and clear evidence that students are learning or their behavior is changing.

**4. Social validation is the final, critical component to positive behavioral supports.** It requires that we ask every group of people affected by changes and improvements in systems and in student outcomes whether the approaches used, and the results, fit with their culture and values. On the part of school staff, it also requires a consis-

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tent and sincere effort to keep students and families informed, involved, and invested in the outcomes relative to RtI practices.

This article will outline each theme and offer examples of school practices related to each. It's not so hard to do!

### The Challenge of Problem Behavior in Schools

More and more children and youth are bringing to school well-developed patterns of adjustment problems in behavior and academics. At-risk students often come to school with emotional and behavioral difficulties that interfere with their attempts to focus and learn. Others may have interpersonal issues with other students or educators that make concentrating on learning difficult. Bullying, mean-spirited teasing, sexual harassment, and victimization are relatively commonplace occurrences on school campuses, and these behaviors clearly compete with our schools' mission of closing the achievement gap.

Evidence-based best practice for supporting these students begins with identifying problems early, whether the problems are academic, emotional, behavioral, or interpersonal. After identification, interventions become essential to addressing the problem directly and thus promoting successful school adjustment. If appropriate educational and behavioral supports were more widely provided, the long-term benefits would greatly exceed the costs.

### Discipline or Academics?

Many educators remark that intense federal and state requirements for demonstrating gains in academic achievement make it difficult to find time to focus on problem behaviors. Yet many students who misbehave also present serious learning challenges. In a misplaced attempt to be "fair" to typical students who are trying to learn, educators may be inclined to "punish" or exclude children who are acting out.

Research strongly suggests that if schools raise their level of achievement, behavioral problems decrease; and if schools work to decrease behavior problems, academics improve. So why not do both? Especially when we know that punishing the at-risk student populations and using "discipline" to exclude them from schooling does not work. Schools that use office referrals, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion—all without a comprehensive system that teaches positive and expected behaviors and that rewards the same—are shown to actually have higher rates of problem behavior and academic failure. Specifically, chronic suspension and expulsion have detrimental effects on teacher-student relations, as well as on student morale; these kinds of responses leave the student with reduced motivation to maintain self-control in school, do not teach alternative ways to behave, and have been shown in the research to have limited effect on long-term behavioral adjustment. In fact, a history of chronic referrals, suspensions, and expulsions from school is a known risk factor for academic failure, dropout, and delinquency. There must be a better way.

Powerful longitudinal research shows that being engaged in school, bonding with teachers and other students, and experiencing academic success all serve as protective factors for students against a number of destructive outcomes, including school failure, delinquent acts, school dropout, and alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, to name a few. Where do we begin? Positive Behavior Support practices, when adopted, support these students and offer proven ways to reclaim them.

### Basing Interventions on the Intensity of the Problem

The U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) has developed a classification system of approaches to preventing problem behavior. This system has coordinated and integrated a range of interventions—primary, secondary, and tertiary—to address the needs of the three student types that are present in different proportions in every school. Primary prevention refers to the use of approaches that prevent problems from emerging; secondary prevention addresses the problems that already exist, but that are not yet of a chronic nature or severe magnitude; and tertiary prevention uses the most powerful intervention approaches available to address the problems of severely at-risk students.

Hill Walker and his colleagues at the University of Oregon have outlined an integrated prevention model for schools. The model is based upon this classification system and addresses the problem of school-based antisocial behavior patterns. Figure 1 on page 4 illustrates this conceptualization.

Universal interventions, applied at the primary prevention level to everyone in the same manner and degree, are used to keep problems from emerging. These interventions benefit both high- and low-risk schools. Some good examples of such interventions include (1) developing a schoolwide discipline plan, (2) teaching conflict resolution and violence prevention skills to everyone, (3) establishing high and consistent academic expectations for all students, and (4) using the most effective, research-based methods for teaching beginning reading in the primary grades.

Individualized interventions, applied to one case at a time or to small groups of at-risk individuals (e.g., alternative classrooms or "schools within schools"), are used to achieve secondary and tertiary prevention goals. Chronically at-risk students "select" themselves out by not responding to primary prevention approaches; these students need intensive intervention services and supports if they are going to be able to change their problem behavior. Typically, these interventions are labor intensive, complex, intrusive, and often costly, but they can be very powerful if properly implemented. And they are necessary!

At the secondary and tertiary levels of intervention, a functional behavioral assessment* process (FBA) will be necessary to identify the conditions (e.g., antecedents and consequences) that sustain and motivate problem behavior. A comprehensive assessment of family, school, and individual risk (e.g., family stressors, academic failure) and

protective factors (e.g., gets along well with peers, controls impulses) is also invaluable in guiding the delivery of a broader system of interventions. FBA, a very useful data-gathering technique, is an integral part of the Tier 2 problem-solving process; and it will continue to be necessary at Tier 3 where, by definition, the students have not responded to Tier 2 interventions.

This integrated model, although it has rarely been implemented fully in the context of schooling, provides an ideal means for schools to develop, implement, and monitor a comprehensive management system that addresses the needs of all students in the school. It is also a fair system: in it, typically developing students, rather than being penalized, are given beneficial interventions. In addition, the model has the potential to positively impact the operations, administration, and overall climate of the school.

By emphasizing the use of primary prevention goals, achieved through universal interventions, this system makes the most efficient use of school resources and provides a supportive context for the application of necessary secondary and tertiary interventions for the more challenging students. Finally, it provides a built-in screening and assessment process; that is, by carefully monitoring students' responses to the primary prevention interventions, it becomes possible to detect those who are at greater risk and in need of more intensive services, and it helps these students appropriately.

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\* Functional Behavioral Assessment does four things:
1. It clearly identifies the behaviors of concern and those that might replace them.
2. It reveals the function or the purpose underlying the child's behavior (the motivation for the behavior).
3. It identifies the relationship between the ecological context and the behavior.
4. It culminates in the design of an intervention plan.

A functional behavioral assessment involves direct observations of the child, interviews with parents and other key members of the team, and a review of the child's records.

## RtI: the Basis for Changing, Modifying, or Intensifying Interventions

As with academic assessments, a regular "decision point" around behavioral progress is vital. This allows educators to make decisions about any notable difference between pre- and post-intervention results. Assessing a student's progress, and evaluating that progress at specified junctures, gives educators the guidance they need for determining the effectiveness of any intervention being used and for changing, improving, and increasing (or decreasing) the intensity of the intervention. But you have to have the data on two things: individual student behavior and the fidelity or quality of the supports.

Additionally critical is individual student information, which needs to be directly related to behavioral progress. Common measures include the frequency, time of day, and context for problem behavior. FBA provide a perfect structure for gathering and reporting these findings.

Data gathered on office discipline referrals are used by schools as one method for managing and monitoring disruptive behavior. However, referrals are an index of more than just student behavior. They also reflect the consistency and quality of the school discipline system. The major advantage of discipline referrals is that they are already collected in most schools and provide a source of information to document whether interventions result in positive change.

However, caution must be taken when using discipline referrals as a source of information about behaviors. Each school defines and applies referral procedures differently. Just because a school has a high rate of referrals does not necessarily mean that the students are less well behaved than the students at another school with fewer referrals. The same student may evoke different responses from teachers in different schools; and different relationships between teachers and administrators will affect the use of discipline referrals across schools. Despite these cautions,

office referral data is useful for identifying behavior patterns of students, the effects of schoolwide and classroom interventions, and staff training needs, as well as for pointing to problem areas in the school, determining if interventions are working, and identifying problem students.

Many schools make use of regular cycles of data collection and reporting to make decisions about their efforts; they record each referral daily, give monthly feedback to staff, and annually update the system and revise it as needed. If the data are consistent and useful, people will use them. While the process needs to be efficient and involve as little time, effort, and money as possible, it can and does work toward effectively identifying and addressing behavioral challenges.

## Evidence-based Practices for Selecting and Evaluating Interventions

The U.S. Department of Education provides a hierarchy of "evidence-based" practice, based on the level of research rigor applied to test an intervention. For many, selecting an "evidence-based practice" is a matter of going to a number of federal websites and choosing from "the menu." Is there more to it than that?

While many programs have been shown to be effective in research studies, much less is known about what it takes to get them implemented well in typical schools. There are several important questions to ask while selecting and designing behavioral interventions:

- Is there evidence of effectiveness? When looking at the research, it's important to ask if typical educators guided the intervention or if the researchers got the effect only when they ran it.

- How much does the intervention cost? Interventions that are excessively costly are not likely to be used—or even tried. There also may be expensive, ongoing requirements to work with the developers of the program. Educators and administrators will want to

A Systems Approach to School Improvement

# How to Make Change Happen

**T**wo committed educators and one specialist in systems change gathered to discuss what needs to happen systemically in schools and school districts in order for an RtI model to be successfully adopted. The following is an excerpt of that conversation involving Maureen O'Leary Burness, Assistant Superintendent of Placer County SELPA; Bill Tollestrop, SELPA Director and Director of Student Services at the Elk Grove Unified School District; and Steve Zuieback, President of Synectics: Creative Management Strategies; together with the editor of *The Special EDge.* The conversation in its entirety can be downloaded as a podcast from: *www.calstat.org/learningCenter/*

**EDge:** RtI, at heart, challenges many fundamental assumptions about how educational services are delivered. Essentially, it calls for schools to reengineer their basic structures to prevent learning problems and to intervene early when it becomes clear that a student is having a problem—all by using continuous assessments and research-proven strategies to catch these problems and remediate them as quickly as possible, ensuring that, whenever possible, students don't fall so far behind that they can't catch up.

In the minds of some educators, it amounts to eliminating what has been variously called instructional disabilities or curricular impairments.

The research on RtI itself is more than promising. Schools that implement in whole-cloth make significant improvements in both academics and behavior.

There is a great deal of discussion in this newsletter and elsewhere about what specifically RtI is, what its three-tiered model of intervention looks like, what scientifically based practices are and where you find them, how to use assessments to shape curriculum and direct intervention, and so forth. But for most schools there is a huge distance between the idea of RtI and the reality of implementing it—between how it is described in educational journals, for example, and how that translates into what actually goes on in classrooms and in schools. This leads us to the questions of how systems consciously and effectively change, and what is fundamentally unique about RtI that makes implementing it different from any other effort schools make to change.

**MB:** Your question has to do with what's fundamentally unique about RtI. The fact is that we have, over the past

multiple years, separated our system of education into two: special education and general education. RtI is the attempt to put us back into one system for all students. That, to me, is the most fundamental difference.

**BT:** I agree. The whole point of RtI is that it is not a special education process; it is a general education process that can be supported by special education through the use of a multi-disciplinary team; and it can be facilitated by general education and administrative leadership, in particular. I think that the paradigm shift is toward a different way of responding proactively to the needs of students so that we're not waiting for students to fail before we intervene. This is significantly different from the approach we have used in the past.

**EDge:** Are there any overarching

principles that administrators and teachers need to be mindful of in order to make RtI work?

**SZ:** I'm not certain that there will be different principles beyond was has currently been emerging in California in schools that are using collaborative models. I actually think we're perfectly positioned to do this work now. It involves looking at the whole system—finally. And it's going to require the whole system to mobilize. But I think the good news is that it's about all kids. And to make it work properly, it's going to require parents—and students, when age-appropriate—to be involved in a lot of the decisions. People have been waiting for an approach that, by its very nature, integrates what has been separate about general and special education.

**EDge:** What are the primary stumbling blocks to making this work?

**BT:** In its inception, special ed was designed to be a coach to general ed on what kind of unique methodology or strategies need to be used with students to enable them to access the core curriculum of general education and to make academic progress. The focus on processes and labels distracted us from that. I think RtI is going back to the initial relationship—that special ed was never intended to be a separate program or place; that it was a service to general ed to help them be successful with students who have varying degrees of challenges. I also think that, as Steve mentioned, the timing's ideal. The mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) support the response-to-intervention approach for all students that is more specifically spelled out in IDEA '04 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).

**MB:** I think our biggest challenge is the fact that this specific language is in IDEA instead of currently in NCLB. RtI language needs to be in NCLB because it—RtI—is a general ed function.

Another big challenge involves professional development. When we focus

on all students, we have to focus on helping teachers reach *all* students. So we need to be training our teachers to be professional in their understanding of what these research-based strategies are so they can all use appropriate strategies for all children, regardless of age, regardless of labels. And that's a systems change that I think is one of our biggest challenges because of the number of teachers we need here in California, in particular.

We also need to get the information to teachers so they can appropriately defend the instructional strategies they're using. For example, if you look at the language of what an IEP team needs to be able to justify, it requires that teachers assure that children have been provided with research-based interventions and strategies prior to consideration to provide them with special ed. That means that all of our teachers need to know what those strategies are and why a particular strategy would make sense for an individual child, and then to be able to actually articulate that, and execute it. I think it's a huge training need that will have to be accessible to all of our teachers.

**BT:** A critical component that we cannot leave out is training for the administrative leadership at a school site. Once they understand the process, they then become one of the agents of change, the people who have the ability to set aside that important time for teachers to collaborate on what is the best strategy for struggling students; or what is the best strategy for a student who needs to be challenged. They can perform miracles with the school schedule if they really believe it is critical to a successful school and to the success of their students.

So, as the administrators come to understand the process of how to respond to intervention and to the importance of knowing every child's need, as they see the results and the outcomes for that, they also see the need to work with the scheduling and the various elements that can get in the way.

It's amazing to look at different sites that have gone into this and have started to experience success. As they grow and mature in the process, they start to realize that, "Wow, I've got to figure out a way to give my teachers time to meet and honestly discuss students."

There's a vast bounty of data available to teachers—it can almost feel overwhelming if they don't have time to sit down as a team and analyze the data and give it meaning. That's really part of the role of an administrator—to give time for the critical things their staff and teachers need.

**SZ:** Another significant challenge—and it's not just around RtI—is for leadership teams within a school site, or especially within a district and all the way up through the system, to really think long term enough. Educational leaders tend to think in terms of one academic year, and because of that they make a lot of decisions with only the short term in mind. Much of this tendency is due to the pressure, I think, from the system itself, whether at the district level or state level.

To put this whole systems change effort into place, including the professional development piece that Maureen is talking about, we have to have a much longer view about what the work is, what the necessary changes will be, and what the components are that need to be put into place.

With each decision, you need to be thinking about what's the end that we're after. And it's going to take more than one academic year to see anything close to those final results, even though many components can be put in place quickly and effectively. But again, the huge challenge is for school leadership to extend its timeframe and have a long-term view and plan in place. And then be patient and persistent. The RtI effort is going to require leadership to be thinking differently about what their role is in order to bring to their schools the kind of coherence that RtI represents.

**EDge:** It seems to be critical that, as schools are beginning this effort, they have contact with other schools that are well into it. There is a huge comfort level in knowing, for example, that an apparently measly two-point decrease in office behavior referrals, or a two-point increase in overall reading comprehension, is great; so that people know when they are realizing significant gains. Having successful models for what those patterns might be seems to be critical if schools that are just starting out are not to get discouraged.

**MB:** And that is the good news in terms of systems opportunities. There is so much information available now about what it takes to become a community of practice and a community of learners. People can read and share and talk and visit sites that are seeing success in their RtI efforts.

It gets down to hundreds of practical questions: "How do I act on a day-to-day basis? What is the structure of my school? What's the practice in terms of timing, including the structure of each day? How do you fit in progress monitoring; how do you monitor each child on a daily basis; how do you find time in your day and what do you structure into your week so that teachers have a chance to talk to each other about these children, what their needs are, and how to work together for them?"

**SZ:** The same community of practice needs to be available to the whole system. District superintendents and assistant/associate superintendents also need to be meeting with people from other districts. The key is to create the time and conditions where they can very quickly be sharing with one another. Probably all of the best practices are out there. And all the answers for how to create time in your system are out there. All the answers for how to get parents meaningfully involved and being partners in this system, they're out there. So district leadership teams and the state can help by finding a way to convene people across regions and across states, to sit down with one another on a regular, predicable, ongoing basis and have these conversations and share best practices. That supports a healthy, beneficial contagion. ◆

For more information about how to become part of a community of practice, visit the CalSTAT website: *www.calstat.org/training.html*; also, be sure to explore the Technical Assistance link.

instruction is grounded in five specific reading skills: (1) Phonemic awareness, which is recognizing the sounds of spoken language and how they work together; (2) Phonics and word study, which is identifying the letters of the alphabet and recognizing how the sounds of spoken language are represented in a written word; (3) Fluency; (4) Vocabulary; and (5) Comprehension.

## Looking at the Tiers

Tier 1 instruction is part of the general education curriculum and takes place in the regular classroom. All students are tested on the components of reading—usually in the fall, winter, and spring. Students who are not keeping up with the class receive extra instruction in small groups that focus on particular skills—a focus that can be modified depending on what the assessments reveal.

"The classroom teacher might do a little 'after-lunch bunch,' pulling aside the lowest five kids based on their screening assessments, while the rest of the kids are working on something else," Feldman says. "Some kids will need pre-teaching, some re-teaching, some additional practice.

"From an RtI point of view, providing excellent general instruction, supplemental intervention, and assessment of all students as part of the regular program—and doing that systematically over time—is probably a better indicator of which students aren't learning what they need to learn than any single test we can give."

For some students, the extra attention in Tier 1 will be sufficient to catch them up, and no further intervention is needed. For others, whom the assessments have identified as at-risk readers, additional help is needed, and they move on to Tier 2. The more focused intervention of Tier 2 is still part of general—not special—education and is designed to augment the core reading curriculum by concentrating on the particular components of reading in which the student is deficient.

## Identifying Critical Issues

The critical issue in Tier 2, says Feldman, is "Do you have the right kids—and your screening assessments will tell you that you do—and are you matching your instruction to exactly what they need? You might have one kindergarten group that needs more work on hearing initial sounds and blending them at the beginning of words and another group that hears sounds fine but needs work on language and vocabulary development."

A significant number of students will require Tier 2 intervention. The instructor may be the classroom teacher or a reading specialist, and the instruction may take place in the classroom or elsewhere in the school. "It doesn't matter where the students are served; what matters is how they are served," Feldman says. "It's really a question of what's logistically most efficient."

An important characteristic of Tier 2 is frequent, brief assessments of student progress, as often as once a week. "We're working in Tier 2 so we know these kids are already in trouble," Feldman says. "We want to be able to ascertain if we are moving in the right direction."

For a small percentage of students, Tier 2 will not be enough. Those who don't make sufficient progress are eligible for the intensive intervention of Tier 3. For some, that may mean one-to-one instruction; for others, special education services. Each school or district will determine the relationship between RtI and special education, but successful implementation of RtI ultimately will mean fewer referrals to special education.

A program like RtI can feel like a sea change to classroom teachers—indeed, to the whole school community—and the level of training fluctuates from district to district. But people are at the heart of RtI. "While you can't do RtI without a responsive, efficient, and accurate assessment system, numbers are still just numbers," Feldman says. "You have to have human capital that's informed, passionate, and well organized. When a kid isn't doing better,

you get two or three people who know the kid, know the curriculum, know the issues and you problem solve together. Everything is on the table as long as it has some research base and makes sense. And maybe you bring in a crackerjack speech and language person or a really great reading specialist or someone from the district office who can help, because we are, each of us, limited in our knowledge."

When elements of RtI are in place and working—as, for example, in Elk Grove, California, where a version of the model has been used for 15 years—overall student achievement improves and the number of students placed in special education declines.

## Looking to the Future

Today, schools throughout California and around the country are adopting versions of RtI to improve reading skills, and that suits Feldman just fine. "We know absolutely that this notion of prevention and early intervention makes common sense, even though organizing and managing it in the chaos and complexity of a school will be fraught with all kinds of problems. We know scientifically and empirically that discrepancy formulas make little sense and don't work for kids. Given that, it's incumbent upon us to investigate sensible alternatives—like RtI." ◆

training will be forthcoming. CDE is also cooperating with a stakeholder taskforce to make recommendations on how RtI relates to eligibility criteria for specific learning disabilities and to discuss the relationship between RtI and early intervening services.

As CDE reaches out to support school districts in the successful implementation of early intervening services and new approaches to identify students with disabilities, the Special Education Division of CDE and I look to offer technical assistance and resources necessary, in support of RtI, for example, to ensure the success of all students, especially those with disabilities. ◆

# 2006 Calendar

## Thursdays in Spring
### RtI Webcast Training
See page 5 for the dates and titles of a series of RtI webcast presentations, available free to all interested California educators and beginning March 16.

## March 28–April 1
### Prevention is an Intervention
The National Association of School Psychologist's 38th annual convention targets pupil services personnel, trainers, consultants, and researchers. Convention events address assessments, school safety, cultural diversity, family life, academic interventions, and much more. Anaheim, CA. For more information or to register, go to *www.nasponline. org/conventions/2006Anaheim.html* or contact Marcia Harvey at 301-347-1667 or *mharvey@naspweb.org*.

## March 30
### Response to Intervention: A Look at Things to Come—Preparing for the Future
This workshop is an introduction to RTI. Topics include leadership, integrating resources, collaboration, sustainable systems, and more. Concord, CA. For more information, go to *www.cccoe.k12.ca.us/ selpa/inservice/calendar.htm*, or call 925-827-0949, ext. 15.

## March 31
### Sixth Annual Conference on Learning Disabilities and Abilities
Drs. Bennett and Sally Shaywitz, pediatrics professors and research scientists at Yale University School of Medicine and co-directors of the Yale Center for Study of Learning and Attention, will present their latest research on the brain and reading. Santa Ana, CA. For more information, call 714-538-4511 or email *cconklin@prentice.org*.

## April 6–9
### The Heart of Possibilities: Connecting Through Diversity
This CATESOL (California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) Statewide Conference features speakers, workshops, and presentations on current research related to teaching English as a second language and bilingual education classes. San Francisco, CA. Contact Vicki at *vickipabley@yahoo.com*; for more information or to register, go to *www.catesol. org/stateconf.html*.

## April 6–9
### Science, The Universal Language
The National Science Teachers Association's 54th conference on science education features opportunities for professional development on topics such as linking inquiry and literacy, developing assessment, and much more. Anaheim, CA. To register, call 800-328-8998 or email *reg@nsta.org*; or for more information, go to *www.nsta. org/conferences*.

## April 7–11
### Education Research in the Public Interest
The American Educational Research Association 2006 convention is designed to serve the public. Presentations and workshops will showcase evidence- and science-based research, "Evaluation of a Community-based School Readiness Intervention," and more. San Francisco, CA. For more information, go to *www.aera. net/annualmeeting/?id=694*, call 202-223-9485, or email *2005annualmtg@aera.net*.

## April 11
### Behavior Strategies Workshop
This free workshop shows participants how to implement social skill interventions and positive behavior methods. Participants will be walked through writing plans, interventions, and techniques to overcome resistance. Colton, CA. For more information, contact Teresa Saenz at 909-433-4794 or *teresa_saenz@sbcss.k12.ca.us*.

## April 11–13
### Educating Every Child
This annual conference, presented by National Native American Families Together and designed to meet the needs of native children in special education, is for families of children with disabilities, community friends, parent advocates, and professionals who serve children with disabilities. The event includes full-day, in-depth culturally responsive workshops presented by national experts, and a Pow Wow. San Diego, CA. Go to *www.nativefamilynet-work.com/events.html* for more information.

## April 18
### Life After High School—Where Does My Child Go From Here
This free discussion session offers parents an opportunity to find out more about resources available to their children, training centers, community college programs, vocational programs, and more. Rancho Cucamonga, CA. For more information, call 909-481-4547, ext. 255 or email *WE_secretary@sbcss.k12.ca.us*. Para información en español, por favor comuníquese al 909-481-4547, ext. 253.

## April 18–19
### On the Right Track 4: Strategies from Improving Schools
Presented by the California Department of Education and WestEd, this symposium is an opportunity for recently identified Program Improvement schools to interact with and learn from former program improvement schools. Santa Clara, CA. For more information, contact Linda Slayton at 916-319-0248 or *lslayton@cde.ca.gov*.

## May 4
### Response to Intervention: An Alternative to Special Education
This replay of a telephone seminar discusses the results from a two-year study of a large, culturally diverse urban school district. The study used RtI as a way of helping students with learning challenges remain in general education. Many strategies are discussed, with particular attention paid to language and literacy. For more information, call 888-498-6699 or go to *www.asha. org/about/continuing-ed/ASHA-courses/T/ T0502.htm*.

## May 9–12
### Autism Conference
Sponsored by the California's State Council on Developmental Disabilities, this conference features an international panel of presenters. Topics include "People with AS/HFA ... Developing Social-Emotional Skills," "Teaching Pragmatic Language," pivotal response training for implementation and assessment, and much more. Redding, CA. For more information, contact Robin Keehn at 530-895-4027 or *robin. keehn@scdd.ca.gov*.

## May 18–20
### Annual West Coast Literacy Conference and California Early Learning Institute
Sponsored by the Foundation for Comprehensive Early Literacy Learning, this event is designed for teachers from preschool through twelfth grade to explore language acquisition and whole-school reform in combining theory with practice in literacy education. Pasadena, CA. For more information, go to *www.cell-exll.com/conferences. htm* or call 909-335-3089.

# Web Resources

*www.cise.missouri.edu/publications/ innovations/november-2005/beldin.html*
**Center for Innovations in Education**
The CISE provides basic information about what RtI is and what it is not, as well as information about the phases of implementation. There are also links to sites about co-teaching and differentiated instruction.

*www.nasponline.org/publications/ cq334rti_aasp.html*
**"Comprehensive Evaluation of Learning Disabilities: A Response-to-Intervention Perspective"**
This article from the National Association of School Psychologists aims to explain and clarify RtI as it exists in the law, with information presented in a Q&A format.

*www.nasponline.org/publications/ cq322cbminsert.html*
**Curriculum-Based Measurement: A Best Practice Guide**
This article, from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) newsletter, discusses curriculum-based measurement (CBM), a data-based model of monitoring student progress.

*www.joewitt.org/NewWriting.htm*
**Eco-Behavioral Assessment and Intervention**
This chapter from the Handbook of Multicultural School Psychology helps teachers in diverse classrooms appropriately assess students/ and intervene when needed.

*www.opi.mt.gov/PDF/SpecEd/faq/RTI.pdf*
**FAQs about IDEA 2004: Response to Intervention (RtI)**
This two-page document, from Montana's Office of Public Instruction, summarizes what RtI is and what it requires.

*http://dibels.uoregon.edu/*
**DIBELS**
This site features DIBELS: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, a set of standardized, individually administered measures of early literacy development, designed to be short (one minute) fluency measures to regularly monitor the development of pre- and early reading skills.

*www.reading.org/resources/issues/focus_ nclb_IDEA_RTI.html*
**International Reading Association**
This website provides information about RTI in legislation, its affect on minority students, the role of teachers, and more.

*www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/assessment/ response_to_intervention.html*
**LDOnLine**
This website offers basic information about

the RtI model and provides more information about the Discrepancy Model that RtI replaces.

*http://www.studentprogress.org/*
**The National Center for Progress Monitoring**
This organization provides technical assistance and professional development to states and districts about the use of ongoing curriculum-based assessment to measure and monitor student academic growth—particularly in reading and mathematics.

*http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/casl/reports.html*
**National Center on Accelerating Student Learning (CASL) Reports**
This site lists numerous publications written by members of CASL. Some can be downloaded free, such as CASL's newsletter about reading and math interventions.

*www.state.tn.us/education/speced/ sefuopertifaq.pdf*
**Operationalizing Response-to-Intervention (RtI) as a Method of LD Identification**
This document, available online, walks through the steps of LD identification and answers frequently asked questions about the identification process.

*www.reading.org/downloads/resources/ IDEA_RTI_report.pdf*
**Response to Intervention in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 2004**
This document, produced by the International Reading Association, presents a rundown of the law, RtI, and learning disabilities.

*www.rti.ucr.edu/*
**RtI Partnerships at UC Riverside**
The University of California at Riverside assists school districts in California and nationally in implementing RtI. This site offers information about RtI basics, materials for training school staff, and contact information to access more help.

*www.joewitt.org/NewWriting.htm*
**RtI Research**
Visit this website for some of the most current research (some still in process) related to RtI:

"Disproportionality and RtI"

"Response to Intervention and Learning Disabilities by Gresham"

"Troubleshooting Behavioral Interventions that Go Wrong"

"STEEP (Screening to Enhance Equitable Placement) RTI"

"Student Competence, Persistence, and Success: The Positive Psychology of Behavioral Skill Instruction"

"Achieving Science-Based Practice through Response to Intervention: What It Might Look Like in Preschools"

*www.dldcec.org/pdf/teaching_how-tos/ journal_articles/Article_5.pdf*
**Teaching Students Math Problem-Solving through Graphic Representations**
(For Web resources for this and other articles on RtI and mathematics, see page 9.)

*www.dldcec.org/teaching_how-tos/math/ default.htm*
**TeachingLD**
Free downloads of PDF on teaching math for the foremost innovators of RtI and math interventions.

*www.texasreading.org/3tier/*
**Texas Reading Center**
This website provides information about the three-tier reading model in K–3 classes and appropriate placement in special education based on needs, not labels. The project, out of the University of Texas at Austin, is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs.

*www.wrightslaw.com/info/rti.index.htm*
**Wright's Law**
This site provides a collection of free articles and publications about RtI, as well as a list of recommended websites discussing what it is and its implementation.

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## Reasons for Concern

The *Reasons for Concern* brochure provides information on factors that may place young children at risk for health and developmental concerns. The brochure is available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Hmong, and Chinese and can be downloaded at *www. cde.ca.gov/sp/se/fp/concerns.asp*.

A limited number of printed copies, no more than 450 per order, of this brochure are available at no cost from the California Department of Education, CDE Press Sales Office. Ordering information is available at *www.cde.ca.gov/re/ pn/rc/orderinfo.asp*.

If you have questions, contact Janet Canning at *jcanning@cde. ca.gov* or 916-327-4217.

# RiSE Library

The RiSE (Resources in Special Education) Library lends materials to California's residents free of charge. The items listed on this page are just a sampling of what is available. Go to *www.php.com* to view the library's complete holdings and to request materials by email. To order by phone, call Judy Bower at 408-727-5775.

## RtI—Books

### Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation
Published by National Association of State Directors of Special Education: Alexandria, VA, 2005; 60 pages. The book grounds RtI in law and policy predating IDEA 2004, in addition to walking the reader through the array of implementation issues.
Call numbers 23770, 23771.

### Responsiveness-to-Intervention Symposium
Published by National Research Center on Learning Disabilities: Kansas City, MO, 2003; 200 pages. This collection of papers was presented at the Responsiveness-to-Intervention Symposium at Kansas City, MO. Call number 23772.

### Responsiveness to Intervention and Learning Disabilities
Published by Learning Disabilities Association of America: Washington, DC, 2005; 21 pages. The purpose of this report is to examine the concepts, potential benefits, practical issues, and unanswered questions associated with responsiveness to intervention (RtI) and learning disabilities (LD). Call number 23774.

## RtI—Articles

### A Promising Alternative for Identifying Students with Learning Disabilities: Responsiveness to Intervention
By Kristin Reedy. WestEd: Sacramento, CA, 2005; 3 pages. This article conjectures that RtI and monitoring how students respond to interventions can become part of the special education identification process itself. Call number 23777.

### RtI Method Gets Boost in Special Education: Intervention Can Spot Learning Disabilities
By Christina Samuels. *Education Week,* November 30, 2005; 4 pages. This article brings new attention to the RtI approach—which monitors students' learning progress early and intensely, providing immediate and effective intervention whenever needed—in identifying learning disabilities. Call number 23773.

### Responsiveness-to-Intervention: A Blueprint for Practitioners, Policymakers and Parents
By Douglas and Lynn Fuchs. *Teaching Exceptional Children,* 2005; 5 pages. This article addresses the process of identifying nonresponders to generally effective instruction. Call number 23776.

### Understanding Responsiveness to Intervention in Learning Disabilities Determination
By Daryl Mellard. NRCLD: Lawrence, KS, 2004; 4 pages. The history of learning disabilities has included much controversy about the procedures and criteria for determining students with LD. Learn how RtI can help LD identification.
Call number 23775.

## IDEA 2004—Books

### What Do I Do When ... The Answer Book on IEPs: Updated Second Edition
By John Norlin and Susan Gorn. LRP Publications: Horsham, PA, 2005; 262 pages. Updated to incorporate the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, this book discusses the IDEA procedural requirements.
Call number 23763.

### What Do I Do When ... The Answer Book on Special Education Law: Updated Fourth Edition
By John Norlin and Susan Gorn. LRP Publications: Horsham, PA, 2005; 425 pages. This book provides you with easily referenced, conclusive solutions to more than 500 special education questions on eligibility, evaluations, FAPE, and more. The fourth edition incorporates the legal requirements of IDEA 2004.
Call number 23762.

## IDEA 2004—DVDs

### Procedural Safeguards: An A-to-Z Guide to Complying with the Law
By Melinda Baird. LRP Publications: Horsham, PA, 2005; 16 minutes. IDEA 2004 makes significant changes to the child find, eligibility, discipline, and IEP processes. In addition, the law establishes new rules for requesting due process hearings and gives parents the right to refuse special education and related services.
Call number 23766.

### Understanding the Requirements of the Law
By Melinda Baird. LRP Publications: Horsham, PA, 2005; 38 minutes. IDEA 2004 changes the discipline rules for special education students, makes significant changes to the development and content of IEPs, redefines child find and eligibility determinations, adopts many of the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, and more. Make sure you understand these new legal changes. Call number 23765.

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# Successes in Alternative Dispute Resolution

*By Adam Stein, Program Specialist and ADR Coordinator, Sonoma County Office of Education*

I n the mid 1990s, due process disputes in special education were costing California school districts hundreds of thousands of dollars. Litigation was increasing and schools were increasingly held accountable for parents' legal fees. At that time, a new program was proposed, based on emerging alternatives to litigation in fields other than education. This program began with small grants from the California Department of Education (CDE) in the amount $5,000 awarded to interested Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs) to begin building exemplary, alternative models of resolving special education disputes that the remainder of the state could later adopt and benefit from. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) represents the fruit of this CDE funding.

## ADR Defined

ADR offers a set of resolution strategies designed to bring parties together to resolve disputes in the simplest, most cost-effective way, thus avoiding the costly legal fees and the divisive contention that too often accompanies litigated disputes. The ADR strategies that California SELPAs developed over the past ten years came from a healthy interest in maintaining congenial relationships with parents and in surviving financially. CDE continues to support ADR through grants that have grown to $15,000 per year for each participating SELPA.

Most of California's ADR programs are comprised of multiple options from which parents and schools may choose. Typically, a SELPA with ADR will offer mediation either in the form of solutions panels (multiple mediators hearing a case) or single-mediator mediation, most commonly called local mediation. SELPAs also offer the services of program specialists who assist parties in technical ways, such as providing expert consultation about placement options for a student, or informing both parents and districts as to their legal rights and responsibilities. They also offer IEP facilitation, which helps the parties navigate their way through potentially troubling IEPs.

Staff involved in these ADR options have explicit training. Their expertise and the ADR approach itself produce clear benefits. Collected data

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*ADR strategies . . .
came from a healthy interest in
maintaining congenial
relationships with parents . . .*

---

demonstrate that most ADR programs receive many requests for intervention. More importantly, most requests result in a resolution, avoiding the need to file for due process.

## ADR Conference

In 1998, as part of the ADR grant, the first statewide alternative dispute resolution conference was held. This was an opportunity for participating SELPAs to share successes and challenges, and to receive training from a variety of presenters in the elements of successful techniques and promising practices. Since then, a conference has been held every year to retain contact between granted SELPAs and to initiate new and interested SELPAs and districts in the possibilities of an ADR program.

This coming year, the Eighth Annual California Alternative Dispute Resolution conference will be held in Orange County, April 24–25. The event, sponsored by the Santa Ana Unified School District and SELPA and the CDE, is a prime opportunity for districts that are seeking alternatives to due process hearings and looking for ways to resolve disputes smoothly and efficiently.

Nationally known mediators from major universities and professional dispute resolution programs will give keynote addresses and skill-building workshops. The conference is for those who have some experience in special education dispute resolution, and those

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