

Response to Intervention (RtI)

By Bradley Lenhardt, DEd

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004* (P.L. 108-446) (IDEA 2004) was signed into law on December 3, 2004. Among its many provisions, there are few that have potential implications as far-reaching for education—general and special education—as Pub. L. No. 108-446 § 614 [b][6][A]; § 614 [b][2 & 3], which states that a local education agency “may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures.” This process is commonly referred to as Response to Intervention (RtI). While the practice of RtI is pertinent to children and youth who have been or

might be classified in the category of specific learning disabilities (SLD), educators are realizing the potential for this approach in improving outcomes in general education, as well. As a result, some educators are beginning to envision the RtI process in a much broader framework; one that I like comes from Dr. Judy Elliott (Chief Officer of the Office of Teaching and Learning, Portland Public Schools) who prefers to think of it as “integrated services delivery.” The reason why some general and special educators are beginning to take an integrated services delivery framework point of view is due, in part, to a critical examination of what researchers and national centers working on RtI (e.g., National Research Center on Learning Disabilities [Responsiveness to Intervention and Learning Disabilities: Concepts, Benefits and Questions, 2005]) have identified as the core components of RtI (see sidebar).

Even from a cursory glance at the bullets in the sidebar, it is clear that RtI and, specifically, the process of SLD identification, is to be considered in a much larger context; that is, what is referred to in *Cultural Considerations and Challenges in Response-to-Intervention Models: A National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems’* (NCCREST) Position Statement (Fall 2005) as an “adequate opportunity to learn.”

The concept of adequate opportunity to learn is a fundamental aspect of the definition of learning disabilities (LD): when children have not had sufficient opportunity to learn, the determination cannot be made that they have LD. It is problematic to conclude that student factors explain lack of progress with a certain intervention, and then move students into second or third tiers in an RtI model, or decide they belong in special education, without considering additional factors. Opportunity to learn is a com-

plex construct that includes not only access to key resources (qualified teachers, funding, relevant and rigorous curriculum), but also factors related to the nature and implementation of school activities (e.g., culturally meaningful task criteria, teacher-student shared understandings of the purpose of tasks and activities, culturally inclusive participation frameworks in classroom discourse, school deficit ideologies about low-income racial minority students used in referral and placement practices) (NCCREST Position Statement of Fall 2005, p. 1).

With these considerations in mind, and before any of us get too far down the road in our rush to “do” RtI, I would advocate placing the processes for SLD eligibility determination (and the current focus of an RtI approach in IDEA 2004) within an integrated services delivery framework—a framework that, in turn, serves as a feedback loop to inform research and practice—to ensure all students have adequate opportunity to learn. Knowing the kind of Herculean efforts it will require from educational researchers, practitioners, technical assistance providers, parents, and students, as well as the tremendous potential it bears, I maintain there are few provisions of IDEA 2004 with potential implications for education as far-reaching as the provision on RtI. In the end, this provision is not about special education alone or general education alone, but about providing appropriate instruction to all students. Therein lies the promise: that general and special education would take up the invitation and the challenge to work together to ensure an integrated approach to the delivery of services for all children.

Bradley Lenhardt, DEd, contributing writer, Oregon Department of Education, may be contacted at brad.lenhardt@state.or.us

Core components of RtI:

- Students receive high-quality instruction in their general education setting.
- General education instruction is research-based.
- General education instructors and staff assume an active role in students’ assessment in that curriculum.
- School staff conduct universal screening of academics and behavior.
- Continuous progress monitoring of student performance occurs.
- Continuous progress monitoring pinpoints students’ specific difficulties.
- School staff implement specific, research-based interventions to address the students’ difficulties.
- School staff use progress-monitoring data to determine interventions’ effectiveness and to make any modifications as needed.
- Systematic assessment is completed of the fidelity or integrity with which instruction and interventions are implemented.

