

# Response to Intervention (RtI)

Straight Talk for Parents

<http://buildingRTI.utexas.org>

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# Introduction

This booklet is for you, a parent. It is about Response to Intervention (RTI or Rtl). Rtl is a new approach for teaching your child. We included ideas from parents, teachers, school administrators, and university professors. It explains Rtl so you can find out more about how your school is using Rtl to teach your child. This booklet also includes resources so you can learn more about Rtl.

# What is Rtl?

Rtl stands for **R**esponse **t**o **I**ntervention. It is an approach schools use to help struggling learners. It is not a special kind of program or book. Many Texas schools are using it to make sure that every student has opportunities to learn and that students are working on grade level. The goal of Rtl is to help *all* students be successful.

Rtl is getting a lot of attention now. In 2004, Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). This is a special education law. It includes two ways that students with specific learning disabilities may be identified. One way is the “discrepancy model.” Schools have used this way for many years. In this model, a student may be identified if achievement is significantly below what is expected for his or her intelligence.

IDEA allows schools to choose Rtl as another way. When students struggle with learning, they are “at risk.” If they get additional help, or intervention, many can catch up. If they stay behind, they may fail. In schools using Rtl, teachers provide intervention as soon as students show signs of having difficulties. They do not wait for students to have more difficulties. Intervention is special instruction to close gaps in learning. Teachers record student progress. If a student is not catching up, he or she may be evaluated for special education. Information about the student’s response to the intervention helps to decide whether special education is needed.

Rtl can be used in any content area. It is used most often in **reading** or **math**. It is also used to improve student behavior. In schools that use Rtl:

1. Classroom teachers provide effective instruction to all students.
2. Teachers assess all students several times a year. This helps make sure students are working on grade level.
3. Teachers identify at-risk students.
4. Teachers use information about what at-risk students need to learn to plan lessons that meet students’ needs.
5. At-risk students receive intervention.
6. Teachers check at-risk students’ progress often. Students who catch up no longer need intervention.

**1. Teachers provide effective instruction to all students.** Many schools schedule blocks of time for content area instruction. (Content areas are reading, math, language arts, science, and social studies.) This helps make sure students get enough daily instruction in each of these areas. Teachers also make sure students know how to behave in school. Effective teachers design daily lessons that focus on what research shows is critical for success. They explain a new concept and show students how to use it. Then they guide students' practice. Students practice what they have learned many times.

**2. Teachers assess all students several times a year.** In schools using Rtl, teachers test or screen all students multiple times. These times often are the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Teachers compare students' scores to "benchmark" scores. Benchmark scores are what are expected for all students at that grade level for that time of year. Students whose scores are below the benchmark are at risk for learning problems. Teachers may test them more to find out where they are having trouble.

**3. Teachers identify at-risk students and provide them with intervention.** At-risk students need immediate help to prevent learning problems. In schools using Rtl, teachers know which students are at risk. They plan interventions to meet these students' needs. They set goals to help these students close the gaps in their learning.

**4. Teachers use assessment information to plan instruction to meet students' needs.** Teachers use students' benchmark scores to form small groups. They plan lessons for students with similar needs. Assessment information is used to plan intervention lessons for at-risk students.

**5. At-risk students receive intervention.** Intervention is provided in small groups. Teachers can teach and give students more practice when they are in small groups.

**6. Teachers check at-risk students' progress often.** At-risk students are assessed every 2 or 3 weeks. This is called progress monitoring. Many teachers keep a chart of each student's progress. This helps teachers know whether the intervention is working. They change the intervention when students are not making enough progress. When students "respond to intervention," it is working. At-risk students who meet their goals no longer need intervention.

Rtl looks different in each school. School leaders know their students' needs, and they know their staff. They work together to design how Rtl will work in their school. They have to plan:

- How to know when a student is at risk.
- Who will teach the intervention lessons.
- The amount of time intervention is provided.
- A schedule for intervention lessons.
- How many at-risk students can be taught in a group.
- How many weeks the intervention will last.
- How to know when a student no longer needs intervention.
- How to know when an at-risk student needs to be considered for special services.

Sometimes an at-risk student does not make enough progress in the intervention. The teacher knows this from monitoring the student's progress. When this happens, the teacher tries a different strategy. The student's progress is checked again. If the student is still not meeting goals, the teacher may ask other teachers for ideas to solve the problem. When a student continues to struggle with learning, a school team may meet to figure out what is needed. Your child's team will meet with you. Together you can decide whether your child needs evaluation for special services.

If your child is evaluated for special education, you and the school team may look at Rtl information. The team wants to know what interventions were taught and how your child responded. You and the team will look at other information, too. Together, you will decide whether your child needs special education services. Rtl information also helps you and the team plan your child's instruction.

# Will Rtl be used in my child's school?

IDEA lets school districts decide whether they will use Rtl. It says that schools can use Rtl to identify children who have a specific learning disability. It also focuses on giving high-quality instruction to all students. A lack of effective instruction in reading or math cannot be a reason for a specific learning disability. The Texas Education Agency encourages schools to use Rtl, but it is still the school's choice. Ask your child's teacher or principal about the school's use of Rtl.

# What grades use Rtl?

Rtl can be used in any grade. Many schools that use Rtl are elementary schools, but some middle and high schools are starting to use it. Rtl in middle and high schools is still very new. Rtl is most often used in reading, math, and behavior. Most schools use a multitiered Rtl approach. Students move to a level, or tier, that targets the kind of intervention they need. All schools with Texas Reading First grants use a 3-tier model of Rtl in grades K–3 for reading.

# Who benefits from Rtl?

All students benefit from Rtl. All\* are usually tested several times a year, so teachers can know who is at risk. These students receive intervention. Teachers closely monitor student learning in intervention and adjust the lessons. They have a clear picture of student performance.

\* Kindergarten students may not be screened at the beginning of the year.

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Q** Is RtI a specific program that Texas schools must use?

**A** No, RtI is not a specific program. Any Texas school can choose to use RtI. Schools using RtI use programs or textbooks that are “evidence based,” or based in scientific research. RtI is a way of teaching students and making sure that they stay on grade level. If students start to struggle with learning or behavior, they get help quickly.

**Q** What information can I expect to receive about my child?

**A** Rules about how information is provided to parents are decided at the district level. You can ask your child’s teacher or principal.

**Q** What does instruction look like in a school using RtI?

**A** All RtI schools aim for high-quality instruction. When you visit your child’s class, look for:

- Enough time for content area instruction.
- Students with content area textbooks and materials.
- Daily, direct instruction.
- Students working in small groups or pairs to practice what they have learned.
- Classroom routines that promote learning.
- Students getting immediate, corrective feedback from the teacher.

There are many other features. Ask your child’s teacher or principal to tell you about how they provide high-quality instruction.

**Q** How does my child's teacher decide that my child needs intervention?

**A** In schools using RtI, students are assessed several times during the school year.\* Teachers compare each student's scores to the "benchmark score." Benchmark scores are the expected grade-level performance for that time of year. Teachers and school leaders identify the students who are struggling and need intervention. They can see which at-risk students need more intervention and which students have caught up and no longer need intervention. Some students are "on the edge" and may need to be watched and checked often.

\* Kindergarten students may not be screened at the beginning of the year.

**Q** If my child needs content area intervention, and it is provided during the school day, what might my child miss?

**A** In schools using RtI, all students have daily content area instruction. Reading and math are especially important. If students do not learn basic skills, they struggle later. Teachers try to schedule daily intervention time so at-risk students do not miss content area instruction.

**Q** How does RtI work for students with behavior problems?

**A** Schools using RtI let students know what behaviors are expected of them. All of the teachers and other school personnel know the same rules and use the same consequences when rules are not followed. Teachers identify students who need assistance with how to behave in school. They meet with these students to help them understand what specific behaviors need to change. Sometimes teachers make an agreement or contract with the student. Often it spells out reminders, or cues, and goals for changing behavior. Teachers monitor how often students are following the new behaviors. Your child's teacher may use a chart to know how quickly behavior is improving.

**Q** Our school uses a “pullout” intervention program for my child. How will this affect his self-esteem?

**A** All parents want their child to be successful. You and the teacher can work together to present this as a positive opportunity. When a child is struggling, there is no time to waste. Many teachers treat intervention time as simply another small-group learning activity. Most often, students like the additional small-group instruction. They realize the support is helpful. Be sure to discuss any concerns with the teacher.

**Q** What should I expect to see on a progress report if my child is at risk?

**A** In a school using Rtl, either the classroom teacher or an interventionist may report progress. Either one can discuss how intervention is working to meet your child’s needs. Your child has intervention goals to close gaps in learning. You may see work samples of what your child is learning. The report may show your child’s scores on progress monitoring measures over time. At-risk students often are checked every other week. This helps teachers know that the intervention is working. You can ask the teacher about your child’s progress: What do the scores mean? What gaps in skills does my child have? How is my child behaving? How does the intervention work to close the gaps in my child’s knowledge? What strategies can I use with my child at home?

**Q** What does it mean if my child does not make enough progress to close her achievement gap?

**A** Rtl focuses on closing a student's achievement gap. That is why it is so important for teachers to check student progress often. Rates of learning can be different from one child to the next. Some students quickly learn what they were missing and no longer need intervention. Others take longer. When the progress checks show a student's needs are not being met in intervention, she may need other services. It could be a sign that she has a learning disability.

**Q** If my child receives Rtl support, does this mean that he won't need special education later?

**A** Not necessarily. Rtl is designed to prevent learning difficulties. Intervention works for many students. It closes their achievement gaps. However, some children have specific learning disabilities. Rtl helps them to be identified. If your child has a specific learning disability, he will get the special education instruction he needs.

**Q** When can parents request a full, comprehensive evaluation for special education during the Rtl process?

**A** A parent can request an evaluation for special education at any time. Rtl may be used as data to help identify a specific learning disability. If so, teachers will make notes of how your child responds to intervention. When you meet with the Admission, Review, and Dismissal Committee, you will review this information. It will help you and the committee decide if your child has a specific learning disability.

**Q** My child has specific learning disabilities and already receives special education. Does this mean that my child may not benefit from RtI?

**A** When a school uses RtI, all students benefit. Your child's special education teacher and classroom teacher do many of the same things for students who have specific learning disabilities that they do for all others. They will assess your child several times during the school year. They will use the assessment information to plan instruction that closes gaps in your child's knowledge. One of them will check your child's response to the intervention. Because your child receives special education services, they also will follow the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**Q** What is my role as a parent?

**A** Your role is to help your child be successful. You can do this in many ways. Monitor your child's learning. Ask your child to tell you what he or she is learning and to show you examples of work. Read to your child, and ask your child to read to you. When your child has homework, be nearby. Review your child's work, or help with practice, and give feedback. Ask your child's teacher how you can help at home. If your child is at risk and receiving intervention, find out specific ways you can lend support. Ask what he or she needs to practice. Finally, be positive and celebrate successes.

**Q** I want to learn more about RtI. What are some Web sites I can visit?

**A** For more information, visit these Web sites:

- U.S. Department of Education, [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) (free materials available).
- Texas Education Agency, [www.tea.state.tx.us/curriculum/RtI/index.html](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/curriculum/RtI/index.html).
- Building RTI Capacity, <http://BuildingRTI.utexas.org> (resources for educators and parents).
- National Center for Learning Disabilities, [www.nclد.org](http://www.nclد.org) (also sponsors RTI Action Network, [www.rtinetwork.org](http://www.rtinetwork.org))
- Center for Development and Learning, [www.cdl.org](http://www.cdl.org) (many resources and articles available).
- Council for Exceptional Children, [www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org) (professional organization for parents, teachers, and professionals).

## References

National Association of State Directors of Special Education. (2005). *Response to Intervention: Policy considerations and implementation*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Many of the questions addressed in the FAQs were raised during two parent focus groups devoted to understanding RtI, held in Austin, TX, on Nov. 10, 2005, and on April 26, 2008.

