

The Five Principles of RTI*

Except from *RTI Success*, by Elizabeth Whitten, Ph.D., Kelli J. Esteves, Ed.D., and Alice Woodrow, Ed.D.

1. All children can learn. RTI is a model designed on the principle that every student can learn and achieve his or her full potential. It recognizes that helping students succeed is about *how* they are taught and *what* they are taught. In an RTI model all students are assured quality teaching, thus eliminating weak instruction as potential cause for failure. Students' individual learning strengths and deficits are accounted for in the classroom by teachers able to differentiate instruction for diverse needs. Learners in need of extra support receive it at varying levels of intensity in a multi-tiered service delivery model. This framework of research-based, differentiated instruction and early intervention has the potential to minimize the severity of learning problems and prevent negative impacts on a students' self-esteem that can result from sustained school failure.

2. Quality assessment informs instructional practices. It's important that decisions about student instruction are driven by data. While progress monitoring is essential to the RTI process, it is not the only type of assessment needed. Personalized learner assessments allow for understanding of students learning strengths and interests. Diagnostic evaluation targets specific academic strengths and needs. Outcome assessment reveals whether or not the instruction was effective. And universal screening identifies students who might be at risk. A multifaceted approach to assessing learners is most effective in determining appropriate instruction.

3. Quality teaching makes a difference. A critical element of RTI is the proper use of research-based teaching methods. The focus is on proactively creating an instructional environment that sets students up for high levels of achievement. Core curriculum, interventions, and instructional methods should all be grounded in research and have a high probability for success. Research-based teaching goes beyond validated programs and strategies to include proven instructional methods such as differentiated instruction. This is an important principle of RTI because all learners must have the opportunity to learn (and demonstrate their learning) in ways that allow them to be successful. Instruction should be designed to account for students' learning strengths, interests, and academic readiness.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 defines scientific, research-based interventions as those that have been accepted or reviewed by peers who are experts in the appropriate field of study and the strategy, program, or intervention has been subjected to rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain and provide reliable and valid data using experimental or quasi experimental designs across multiple settings. This book features many such methods in diverse content areas as well as resource connections to many others.

*These principles encompass important aspects of RTI identified by the Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) in *Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation* (2006).

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4. Positive relationships within the classroom maximize learning. Studies show the importance of positive and supportive student/teacher relationships. When students feel safe and accepted by teachers, they demonstrate greater academic growth. Respecting students learning strengths and interests promotes learning and fosters an environment where students can thrive. Flexible grouping and peer-assisted learning, both essential components of RTI, allow teachers to simultaneously build students' social and academic skills; as relationships are strengthened, so too are students' academic skills.

5. Educators must work as a team. Response to Intervention is a general education initiative. Responsibility for carrying out the model, however, should not fall solely on the shoulders of classroom teachers. Rather, educators of all backgrounds and experiences participate in various forms of teamwork to meet the needs of students. For example, it is through a group problem-solving process that academic interventions are determined. Educators also engage in teaming to differentiate instruction for diverse learner needs. Successful teaching within the RTI framework is not an isolated act. Instead, educators support one another in efforts to ensure academic success for all students. Parents are also involved in the teaming process as they provide insight into children's learning strengths, interests, and academic needs.