Preface

OVERVIEW

As part of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), the United State federal government decided that the severe discrepancy model of having a “gap” between a student’s intellectual quotient (IQ) and his or her academic achievement score was no longer a valid way to determine whether or not a child qualified for special education services under the specific learning disabilities (SLD) category. The reason for this change was that government officials felt that there was a “more accurate distinction between children who truly have SLD from those whose learning difficulties could be resolved with more specific, scientifically based, general education interventions” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, para. 8). Hence, the federal government decided to change the way a student with a possible specific learning disability qualifies for special education services under IDEA. With the final regulations to implement IDEA, which became effective in October of 2006 (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), the United States federal government decided to allow the local educational agencies (LEAs) or school districts to qualify a child who may have a specific learning disability according to these guidelines:

(1) allow a local educational agency (LEA) to consider a child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention as part of the SLD determination process; (2) allow States to use other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has a SLD; (3) provide that States may not require the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement to determine whether a child has a SLD; and (4) require a public agency to use the State criteria in determining whether a child has a SLD and discuss the role that response to scientific research-based interventions plays in a comprehensive evaluation process. (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, para. 2)

This is not to suggest that local state agencies cannot still use the severe discrepancy model to qualify children under a specific learning disability category, but due to the government’s mandate, it can no longer be the only assessment used. Subsequently, the Response to Intervention (RTI) service delivery model emerged as the new way to identify specific learning disabilities and provide early intervention assistance. RTI is now used with or without the severe discrepancy model by most school districts in the United States.

Response to Intervention is defined as “the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes
in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions” (Batsche et al., 2005). According to the Montana Office of Public Instruction (2009), there are eight essential components of RTI, all of which will be discussed in detail throughout this book:

1. Evidence-based curriculum and instruction.
2. Ongoing assessment.
3. Collaborative teaming.
4. Data-based decision-making.
5. Fidelity of implementation.
6. Ongoing training and professional development.
7. Community and family involvement.
8. Strong leadership (p. 5).

Response to Intervention has been used with great success at the elementary level for quite some time. Typically in this type of educational learning environment, one teacher can incorporate the various interventions and progress monitoring necessary at each tier. Taking notice of such success, secondary education professionals, meaning middle and high school teachers, wanted to continue the success of the elementary schools and decided to try RTI. At first they tried duplicating what the lower-level schools had implemented, but they quickly learned that because secondary education has different demands, like a student seeing at least five different teachers daily or needing specific credits for graduation, the Response to Intervention service delivery model would have to be changed to better fit secondary education’s needs.

**RTI AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL**

Unlike at the elementary level, where the Response to Intervention service delivery model can be duplicated to fit almost any lower-level school, secondary schools are very different, and almost every school will need to have its own plan or model that best fits its unique needs. Some schools will be able to use their content area teachers as their Tier 1 and 2 providers of the interventions. Other middle and high schools will have to use the academic area teachers as their Tier 1, a study hall filled with a variety of content teachers as their Tier 2, and a specialty teacher like a Title One teacher as their Tier 3 intervention providers. Still other schools will use the general education teacher for Tier 1, use a content area teacher for Tier 2, and use a specialized school with computers for Tier 3 interventions. On the secondary level, how the Response to Intervention model will be approached and used truly depends on each school’s needs, faculty, and available resources.

Some in education feel that RTI requires too much time to identify a student who may need special education services. However, one of the great things about this service delivery model is that as soon as the general education teacher notices that a student is struggling in the classroom, he or she can start to provide interventions for that specific student. On the secondary level, this can be done in each content area or only in the academic subjects in which the student is struggling. Oftentimes, a student may simply need to adjust to the different type of learning environment within the middle and high schools or even to the teacher’s instructional strategies. In the past, all struggling students may have been considered
as heading toward needing special help for a learning disability, but with RTI, teachers can provide a student with a variety of interventions immediately until they find one that best fits the student’s needs and makes the child successful.

One of the things that is essential at the secondary level but that does not occur too often is that teachers outside of their academic content area need to have time to meet with their colleagues and discuss any students who may seem to be struggling with their peers. School administrators need to plan for this type of collaboration to occur, ideally on a weekly basis, but at least monthly if nothing else can be worked out.

Another thing to consider is the types of interventions that will occur at each tier. On the elementary level, a teacher can use numerous research-based interventions in the classroom. However, most secondary teachers are not trained to use things like centers or differentiated instruction and for this reason need to be provided in-service trainings on these topics; they should also be provided with a toolbox of interventions to use within their content area. If training and resources are provided to teachers, students stand a much greater chance of being successful academically.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002) requires that all educational stakeholders educate every child. All students must be able to find success in the general education classroom. One way to do this is to incorporate the Response to Intervention service delivery model into secondary educational environments. As such, this book will benefit anyone within the field of middle and high school education.

Middle and high school content teachers will be interested in this book as a resource for their academic subjects because gone are the days when teachers can simply “teach to the middle” and not worry about students on the extreme fringes of their classroom. Teachers need to have a variety of research-based interventions within their toolbox. To satisfy this necessity, one of the requirements of the Response to Intervention service delivery model is to provide different interventions at each tier. In addition, if a student is not successful with one type of intervention, another one within that same tier needs to be tried. Thus, within the chapters of this book are resources for teachers to use to accomplish these goals.

Progress monitoring is another essential component of RTI for middle and high school teachers. Completing this required part of the service delivery model can become a challenge since many educators have limited knowledge on this topic. Examples of how to conduct progress monitoring are also provided herein.

Middle and high school administrators will also be interested in this book because there has not been a lot written about the Response to Intervention service delivery model at the secondary level. What has been written focuses specifically on how to incorporate reading and math into the high school schedule, but very little has been written about other content areas, such as science and social studies, or about using the RTI model in elective classes, such as computer and career tech courses. These topics, along with how secondary schools incorporate reading and math into their RTI service delivery model, are discussed within this book. Secondary school administrators will also be interested in the book because there is information about how to establish the Response to Intervention service delivery model within a school along with various examples of what different schools have used and what has worked for their particular needs.
Moreover, colleges that offer a master’s or doctorate degree in educational administration or leadership will be interested in this book because it not only provides guidance on how to establish the Response to Intervention service delivery model at the secondary level but also offers insight into establishing collaboration within a secondary school. Working in teams across content areas is a practice that most secondary teachers are not familiar with, but in order for the RTI model to be successful, collaboration must be incorporated school wide. This book also informs future administrators of the advantages and disadvantages of using the Response to Intervention service delivery model at the secondary level and explains why there is not one correct way to incorporate it within a middle or high school. Each school must establish its own version of the model according to its own needs.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

The chapters in this book cover a wide variety of RTI topics. The early chapters provide general information about RTI and its implementation, the middle chapters focus on content-specific interventions, and the latter chapters present case studies and examine ongoing issues. Following is an overview of each chapter.

Chapter 1 provides for the reader a general overview of what the Response to Intervention service delivery model is and how it can be applied to a middle or high school environment. It discusses the various definitions that have arisen within the literature and explains the differences between establishing the RTI model in an elementary setting versus a secondary school setting. Furthermore, the chapter describes the key components that are an integral part of the Response to Intervention service delivery model. When middle and high schools are planning to establish this model in their schools, they must think about incorporating team planning time, which is not a common component in secondary schools. Furthermore, they must use data to guide and vary their classroom instruction, and they must be equipped to provide a variety of interventions at each tier. Another important component of the Response to Intervention service delivery model is that it must be done with fidelity, and trainers should be put into place to assist teachers in order to ensure that this occurs.

Moreover, the chapter discusses two different problem-solving methods that can be used within the Response to Intervention service delivery model. These two methods are the standard-protocol approach and the problem-solving approach. Of these two, most schools use the problem-solving approach, which involves a team discussing as a group what type of intervention a specific student may need.

Chapter 1 concludes with a discussion of the challenges secondary schools face when wanting to establish the Response to Intervention model in their building. One such challenge is scheduling since students often do not have room in their schedules to take an additional class for which they will not get credit. Another challenge is that a typical student will have at least five different teachers on a daily basis, and those teachers often do not communicate with one another. Hence, collaboration is something that must be established in order for the RTI model to be successful at the secondary level.

Chapter 2 looks at the Response to Intervention service delivery model from the perspective of the secondary school leader. It starts by providing an overview of the RTI model and discusses how even though it has both federal and state support, there is not a standardized model, especially within the middle and high school academic environments. Schools must implement a model according to their own needs and resources. No two models will be exactly the same.
The chapter also examines some challenges that are unique to implementing the RTI model within the secondary educational environment. The difficulties include (a) teacher resistance—e.g., middle and high school teachers are used to lecturing about their content area and are hesitant to change the way they teach; and (b) fear of failing—e.g., teachers on the secondary level may not be confident in how to assist struggling students and therefore will need a great deal of support from their school administrator. Without this support, the RTI service delivery model will fail.

The structure and culture of middle and high schools do not tend to lend themselves to the Response to Intervention service delivery model. Within this model, teachers need to collaborate with each other and discuss struggling students on a weekly basis. Most secondary schools do not have their schedules set up to have this type of interaction. Thus, Chapter 2 discusses ways to overcome these barriers.

The chapter concludes by offering a variety of solutions to the dilemmas presented in the first part of the chapter. It discusses the importance of school administration support for both the model and the teachers and points out the necessity of continuous professional development on the RTI model.

Chapter 3 discusses how to incorporate assistive technology into the Response to Intervention service delivery model. Using technology within the secondary school environment will assist teachers with providing alternative interventions in order to help students achieve academic success. With the constant barrage of technology in our everyday lives, students are accustomed to using technological devices, so technology should definitely be incorporated into the RTI model.

Most teachers and school administrators are familiar with smart boards since they seem to be a staple within the secondary school arenas. However, this chapter takes assistive technology a step further and discusses other assistive technology presentation tools, such as smart pens and interactive tablets. Both of these devices can be used within any of the tiers, and Chapter 3 explains exactly how to do this.

The chapter also examines and provides a list of content-specific tools and assessments that a teacher can use for any of the tiers. Some examples of the content-specific tools discussed include Khan Academy, Brain POP, and Dragon Naturally Speaking. In addition, there is a discussion of alternatives to the basic paper and pencil tests, such as Glogster, which allows a student to create a digital poster of the content being assessed, and Voki, which allows the student to create a fictitious person and complete his or her presentation in that person’s voice.

Chapter 3 concludes with a case study of a school district that has infused technology into its middle and high school as part of its Response to Intervention service delivery model. This school district has developed an individualized educational plan for every student, regardless of whether the student has an identified disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act or not. Also included is an interview with some of the stakeholders at the school.

Chapter 4 shifts to the content-specific discussions of RTI and focuses on reading. Without learning to read effectively, a student will struggle tremendously, especially at the middle and high school levels where the student is expected to read for content knowledge and information. Unfortunately, a number of students do not master elementary reading skills during their formative years, which then creates reading fluency problems and comprehension problems at the secondary level. Because very little, if any, time is allotted at the secondary level for additional reading instruction to fill reading skill gaps, secondary teachers rely on RTI to help identify and assist in meeting the needs of struggling readers in order to close the achievement gaps in all content areas. The RTI process at the secondary level attempts to address these reading deficiencies through differentiated reading instruction using a variety of research-based intervention strategies, and Chapter 4 focuses on presenting a variety of research-based strategies that can be implemented to promote the academic success of struggling readers.
Preface

The chapter begins by discussing the cognitive structures that must be fully developed in order for a student to read effectively. The structures include recognition, memorization, classification, spatial orientation, temporal orientation, and metaphorical thinking. Underdeveloped cognitive structures result in unsuccessful and struggling readers. The chapter then provides numerous instructional strategies that can be implemented as part of the RTI model to help develop the necessary cognitive structures. The recommended strategies are presented by tier level in order to aid teachers in implementing the interventions with fidelity.

Chapter 4 provides an important reminder: Reading, particularly at the secondary level, is not simply a “subject” that is taught in an English course; reading is a skill that is necessary for academic success in all content areas. Thus, the strategies revealed in the chapter were chosen based on their appropriateness for implementation by any content teacher to help students be academically successful in every class, and in their lives beyond high school.

Chapter 5 examines the role of writing within the RTI model. Aligned closely with reading, effective writing skills are necessary in all disciplines to promote learning and ensure success. For struggling writers, difficulties with written communication that emerged during elementary school will persist into middle school, high school, and beyond if effective interventions are not employed. Implementing an RTI literacy model that promotes the integration of writing across the curriculum can help schools make huge strides in improving the motivation, skills, and outcomes of struggling writers. Thus, Chapter 5 discusses specific elements of effective writing instruction as well as instructional writing strategies that can be employed within an RTI framework school wide. The focus is on informing not only English/language arts teachers but also content area teachers on research-based classroom writing supports.

Chapter 5 begins by examining the reading-writing connection. Reading and writing have traditionally been lumped together in RTI programs; however, because a large number of students are exiting high school without the writing proficiency needed to succeed in college or the workforce, research is beginning to recognize the need to treat reading and writing as complementary yet separate skills that require individual interventions. Thus, a primary focus of Chapter 5 is on presenting specific writing strategies that can be employed in secondary classrooms.

In addition, Chapter 5 discusses how writing interventions will be most fruitful if schools implement a writing across the curriculum framework within RTI. A writing across the curriculum program will promote writing as a method of learning content area subject matter by encouraging writing instruction and practice across all academic disciplines. The chapter provides detailed information on how educators can promote writing across the curriculum by teaching and utilizing a specific guided writing process method in all classrooms and offers specific strategies that secondary teachers can use throughout the process to promote learning.

Chapter 6 focuses on math and how to incorporate it into the Response to Intervention service delivery model within a middle or high school. A discussion of the Adolescent Mathematics Intervention Structure, or AMIS, is presented. This structure actually incorporates a four-tiered RTI model, with the students passing through the different levels prior to being evaluated for special education services. The chapter includes a description of what type of instruction occurs at each tier, who is responsible for providing the intervention, how frequently the intervention is administered, and how often progress monitoring occurs. The chapter also provides interventions appropriate for each tier and describes how they should be used.

Math is not a favorite academic content area for many students, especially for those who struggle with the subject. Thus, Chapter 6 also provides motivational strategies, such as errorless learning, scaffold-
ing, and charted progress reports, to assist teachers in getting students excited about math. There is also a discussion about the research that supports using the concrete, representational, and abstract method (CRA) to teach students, at risk or not, mathematical concepts. This method was originally used with students who displayed math learning disabilities but can and should be used to teach math to all students.

Centers and the use of manipulatives are not interventions one frequently hears about in the middle and high school math classrooms. However, because students nowadays are used to seeing information almost instantaneously, they need to be taught in this same fashion. Therefore, this chapter explains how to use centers and manipulatives and how to incorporate them into the various tiers. The chapter concludes with a list of considerations a secondary school will need to reflect on prior to establishing a math Response to Intervention service delivery model.

Chapter 7 examines how the Response to Intervention service delivery model can be used in science and social studies classes within a middle and high school learning environment. The chapter gives a brief overview of the RTI model and provides examples of universal screenings that are used to determine whether a student needs to be included in this service delivery model. It also provides examples of progress-monitoring tools to be used in science and social studies classes, as well as tools to conduct progress monitoring. There is a brief description of the importance of using fidelity when conducting interventions and monitoring progress before moving on to another intervention.

The chapter also examines a variety of interventions at each tier and discusses the importance of all academic area teachers being responsible for teaching literacy as it pertains to their content. Since each subject matter views literacy a little differently, there is no one correct way to teach students the importance of reading and writing in each subject. Therefore, each content area must pave its own road.

Although the interventions for both science and social studies are separated in this chapter, many of the activities—for example, a knowledge rating chart or Cover, Copy, Compare—can be used in either content area. The important thing to remember is that once an intervention is used in one tier, it cannot be used again in a higher tier. A discussion of why this is the case is included in this chapter.

Chapter 8 explores how the RTI model can be incorporated into elective classes, specifically career and technical education; this discussion is particularly important because when a middle or high school decides to implement the Response to Intervention service delivery model, it must comprise every teacher and class in the entire school building. This chapter provides groundbreaking discussion because there is little to no information in the literature about the use of the Response to Intervention service delivery model in elective courses in middle and high schools.

All students must take the core content areas, such as language arts, science, social studies, and math, in order to graduate from high school. Besides these courses, though, students are provided with elective classes that they can take simply because they have an interest in them. Often, students who are struggling in the core subject areas will excel in their elective classes because they tend to take a more hands-on approach to learning. In these classes, the RTI model can be incorporated exactly as it is in the core content classes by following the tiers and ensuring that there are different interventions used at each level and that progress monitoring and fidelity are honored at all times. Chapter 8 offers a variety of RTI interventions that can be implemented in elective courses at the different tier levels.

Chapter 9 provides the reader with an overview of how the Response to Intervention service delivery model can be used to assist the English language learner (ELL). According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2014), public schools educating ELL students across the United States increased from 8.7% in 2002-2003 to 14.2% during 2012-2013. Because educators are often not trained to recognize or address learning issues related to students whose first language is not
English, those students are often misdiagnosed with speech and language learning disabilities and even placed into special education services when in fact they do not belong there. Chapter 9 discusses this issue and provides suggestions on how general and special education teachers can teach children who are culturally and linguistically diverse in order to avoid improper placement that can greatly hinder ELL students’ potential for achievement.

The primary focus of Chapter 9 is on how the RTI service delivery model can be used with ELL students to avoid misdiagnosis and improve academic achievement. Using RTI with an ELL student is no different than using it with an academically challenged English-speaking student; the same components must still be in place. However, some of the assessments and specific interventions may be a little different, and this chapter provides examples.

Chapter 9 concludes with several case studies that demonstrate how the Response to Intervention service delivery model was used with ELL students. The case studies are unique because they emphasize that although the RTI model’s main focus is to investigate the causes of a lack of academic progress on the part of the student, RTI can also sometimes illuminate other factors that slow progress, such as depression or home life. The case studies explain how to manage these external circumstances and still have success.

Chapter 10 presents a case study of a high school that was not making adequate yearly progress according to the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) regulations. The district personnel, school administrators, and teachers, along with specialists from the state, came together and decided to implement the Response to Intervention service delivery model to assist them with increasing academic success for their students. One year after establishing the model, the school drastically increased its scores on the state assessments and then continued to improve yearly. In fact, this school made such a dramatic turnaround in the education of its students that it is now used as an example for other high schools in the state to emulate.

The chapter explains the types of changes that were established in order to make the RTI model successful. These changes included the hiring of a new administrator, collaborative meetings with content and department educators to discuss lesson plans and teaching strategies, and professional development to ensure teaching instruction was aligned with the state educational standards.

Chapter 10 also discusses the changes that needed to be made to the school culture. A positive behavior plan was put into place. Banners outlining good behavior practices were displayed all over the school, and student and staff were expected to abide by them; students and teaching faculty were “caught being good” and were rewarded for such actions. With the implementation of this plan, poor behavior dropped drastically and good behavior permeated throughout the school. This change assisted with boosting academic success, as well.

In addition to the aforementioned, Chapter 10 also provides a list of interventions that were used in each tier within the high school. The discussion is presented in a way that other schools can duplicate the measures put into place with ease. The chapter concludes by going over some challenges the school faced, such as convincing all school personnel to buy into the RTI model, and listing future changes that the school was considering based on what it had learned. The information can serve as a guide to others for implementing a successful RTI program.

Chapter 11 presents another case study—a comparative case study of the RTI program at two schools, one a middle school and the other a high school. Unlike at the elementary level, there is not one particular established way to conduct RTI within the secondary educational environment. Thus, schools
are expected to develop their own programs based on their needs. The comparative case study in this chapter illustrates how the RTI model can be implemented in different ways—depending on such things as the school’s budget, personnel, and other resources—yet still be successful.

The middle school in this case study started its service delivery model from scratch upon the arrival of a new school administrator. The school took a year to introduce the model to teachers and explain what was expected of them and how interventions were going to be conducted at each tier. The high school, on the other hand, already had some components of the Response to Intervention service delivery model established when a new administrator arrived and decided to expand the model to include professional learning communities.

Both schools in the case study used a four-tier model, but many of the components within the models differed. The chapter specifically examines the diagnostic practices, data collection methods, intervention strategies, administrative support, and professional development opportunities of each school’s model and provides profound insight by front-line stakeholders (teachers, counselors, reading specialists) at the schools regarding these components.

Chapter 12 focuses on some specific ongoing issues that need to be addressed with any Response to Intervention service delivery model that is instituted. One of the most important issues is evaluating an RTI program’s effectiveness. Although schools are diligent about evaluating individual interventions being used with students, they often do not assess the effectiveness of the program overall. This chapter discusses the importance of program evaluation and provides methods on how to do so.

Other prevalent issues examined in this chapter include how much time students should spend within each tier, how the roles of certain school personnel have changed with the implementation of the RTI model, how important it is to provide transition services for all struggling students within RTI, how involved parents should be in the RTI process, and how assessments are conducted within the model.

The last issue discussed in the chapter examines an issue not dealt with elsewhere in this book but is of increasing interest in the education community; namely, that issue is how gifted and talented (GT) students fit into the RTI model. Just as RTI works with students who are at risk of failing academically and behaviorally, it can also be used with students who are gifted and talented in order to increase their academic success. The difference between the RTI frameworks for at-risk students and GT students is that while the at-risk framework uses remediation-based interventions within tiered instruction, the GT framework employs strength-based interventions within tiered instruction.

In order for the GT framework of RTI to be implemented in a school, several things must take place. Specifically, there must be a clear understanding by administrators on how to establish the service delivery model with GT students, there must be school-wide advocacy for all students to be involved in the RTI process, there must be professional development provided to teachers on how RTI applies to GT students, and there must be a priority placed on collaboration time between gifted and talented teachers and general education teachers.

The book closes with a Final Thoughts section that reflects on the overall purpose of this book—i.e., to provide a wealth of research-based information that can be used to implement or improve the RTI model in secondary schools—and offers a takeaway in the form of the most critical lessons learned during the compilation of this book. Those lessons include recognizing the importance of several aspects of RTI implementation, such as having patience, providing ongoing professional development, keeping accurate records, expecting all content teachers to participate in the model, including students and parents in the RTI process, and ensuring fidelity in strategy implementation.
REFERENCES


