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# *Foreword*

**R**esponse to Intervention (RTI) is a national education initiative for providing services to all students and improving identification of students with learning disabilities. Many states and districts are viewing RTI as an important framework for aligning many of their school improvement initiatives. Given the potential of an RTI framework to result in improved student learning outcomes, one might anticipate much interest in implementing RTI as a means for school improvement. RTI can be an effective but complex initiative to implement well. To implement RTI successfully, a number of essential components are required. Essential components within an RTI framework include the careful coordination of instruction, intervention, and assessment procedures, to include scientifically supported practice and high-quality instruction in general education classrooms.

School staffs face multiple challenges in implementing RTI, and these challenges can be exacerbated at the secondary level. One critical task is implementing the specific tools of RTI—student assessment and interventions. Although the tools are important, implementation of RTI will only work when school staff also integrate RTI as part of their vision for educating students and for their roles and responsibilities as professionals. As part of that process, RTI requires changes in the interaction among administrators, teachers, parents, and other professional staff. Another significant challenge of RTI is integrating the approach into the existing structure of a school. When a student is struggling with learning, RTI can provide a system to support a student by first ensuring that the general education instruction includes the use of evidence-based practice, that all students are screened for academic difficulties, and that research-based interventions are available to students who require additional support.

The implementation literature is rife with examples of education initiatives that are not successfully implemented on a large scale. A growing body of literature supports the strong role that shared vision and common understandings play in successful implementation efforts. For example, in an RTI model site study conducted by the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD), strong administrative leadership and a

commitment to ongoing professional development were two of the most consistently found features of sites with successful RTI models. Conversely, challenges that were noted across sites included ensuring that staff members understand their role and responsibilities and that they work out the “chemistry” or needed interaction patterns to make the system work effectively.

With RTI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions, and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student’s responsiveness. The fundamental issue at the secondary level is the quality of the primary level of curriculum and instructional practices. Some critical questions that can be addressed through the use of an RTI framework in the context of school reform include determining what happens for students whose performance is well below grade level, what strategies are in place to ensure that students will get the critical content, and whether procedures for teaching powerful learning strategies are embedded in courses across the curriculum. Strong school leadership will be critical to answering these questions and coordinating the staffs’ efforts and talents.

The necessary conditions for ensuring successful RTI implementation include sustained investments in professional development programs; engaged administrators who set expectations for adoption and proper implementation; district-level support to encourage staff to embrace the principles of RTI and develop the requisite skills; and, finally, developing a willingness to stay the course. The essential point is that rigorous implementation will have to be a core focus of the school’s agenda. To successfully bring about change, schools will need to address the forces at play, including not only understanding the specifics of the new framework, but also redefining roles and being provided sufficient time to make sense of the changes required under RTI. In other words, the combination of skill development coupled with new understandings of roles, responsibilities, and shared vision is what will support schools’ successful RTI implementation.

In their text, Johnson, Smith, and Harris cogently capture this combination of tasks: explaining the specifics of the RTI and the RTI implementation process within the larger context of school functioning. In addition, the authors’ integration of RTI with other existing frameworks, such as Professional Learning Communities (PLC), Data-based Decision Making, and Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, present helpful strategies of supporting schools in their “sense-making” endeavors for RTI implementation. By drawing on specific examples of RTI implementation at the middle and high school levels, the authors have provided a powerful means of demonstrating the components in practice. In short, practitioners will find this text an extremely useful resource as they begin their implementation process.

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