

Two Approaches to RTI

If a school or district elects to utilize an RTI approach to intervene early and identify students with learning disabilities, the federal government requires a multi-tiered model, but it does not specify a requisite set of procedures to follow. So, many options are available for the implementation of RTI. In general, however, two basic approaches to RTI are followed, and they are described below.

Descriptions of Two RTI Approaches

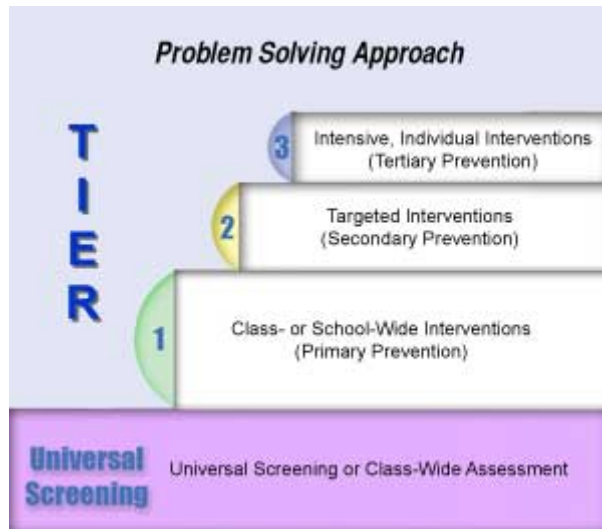
The two most commonly used RTI approaches are *problem solving* and *standard treatment protocol*. While these two approaches to RTI are sometimes described as being very different from each other, they actually have several common elements. In practice, many schools and districts combine or blend aspects of the two approaches to fit their needs. Regardless, to better understand them, these two approaches are described separately.

Problem Solving Approach to RTI

The *problem solving approach* has been used by school districts for more than two decades and is often credited to work done by the Heartland Area Education Agency in Johnston, Iowa. The process that educators work through in each tier is illustrated in the figure to the right. For each student of concern, a school-based team of professionals (sometimes referred to as *teacher assistance teams* or *instructional support teams*) works together at each tier to:

- Identify the problem and determine its cause
- Develop a plan to address the problem
- Implement the plan
- Evaluate the plan's effectiveness





In the problem solving approach, the utilization of a team for selecting interventions and making decisions allows for more brainstorming and flexibility in the process. Because the school-based team has a menu of intervention options from which to choose, a student can receive instruction that is aligned more closely with individual or specific academic needs. On the other hand, the quality of the instruction depends on the skills, knowledge, and training of the team personnel who plan each individualized program.

To highlight some of the major points found in the table comparing the problem solving and the standard treatment protocol approaches:

Major Similarities:

- The use of validated practices in the core classroom instruction
- The provision of instructional intervention to those who need it early
- Progress monitoring to inform decision-making
- Evidence-based interventions in multiple tiers/phases
- Reduced inappropriate referrals for special education services

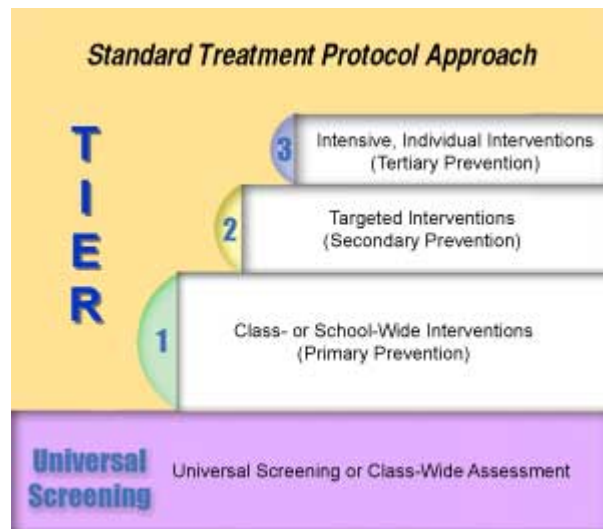
Major Differences:

- Teams versus instructors making instructional and placement decisions
- The number of interventions used with individual students

Standard Treatment Protocol Approach to RTI

The second major approach is called the *standard treatment protocol approach* and is supported by a strong research base. The words *standard* (consistent, the same for all students), *treatment* (instruction, intervention), and *protocol* (predetermined format or delivery system) describe this approach to RTI. This option uses one validated intervention, selected by the school, to improve the academic skills of its struggling students.

Because a single, consistent intervention is used, it is easier to ensure accurate implementation, or treatment fidelity. Additionally, a variety of support staff (such as paraprofessionals, tutors, or parent volunteers) can deliver the instruction; however, it is critical that they receive comprehensive training before assuming their instructional responsibilities. They also need to receive ongoing support and professional development while delivering the standard treatment protocol procedures to ensure that the intervention is delivered correctly.



Comparison Between Problem Solving and Standard Treatment Protocol

The table below reviews some key features of these two basic approaches to RTI. Notice that both approaches utilize universal screening, multiple tiers, early intervening services, validated interventions, and student progress monitoring to inform decisions. The main differences between the two approaches (highlighted in the table below) lie in how

instructional decisions and placement are made and in the number of interventions used with individual students.

Comparison of RTI Approaches		
	<i>Problem Solving</i>	<i>Standard Treatment Protocol</i>
Universal Screening	Class-wide assessment/universal screening is administered to determine the effectiveness of classroom instruction. Struggling readers are identified.	
Tier 1	Frequent <u>progress monitoring</u> is conducted to assess struggling students' performance levels and rates of improvement.	
Tier 2	A team makes instructional decisions based on an individual student's performance. Struggling students are presented with a variety of <u>interventions</u> , based on their unique needs and performance data.	The person delivering the intervention makes instructional decisions that follow a standard protocol. Struggling students are presented with one standard, validated intervention that addresses a variety of skills.
Tier 3	Students whose progress is still insufficient in Tier 2 may receive even more intensive instruction. Depending on a state's or district's policies, some students may qualify for special education services based on the progress monitoring data. In some states or districts, they may receive either an abbreviated or comprehensive evaluation for the identification of a learning disability.	