

What Is the Response-to-Intervention (RTI) Approach?

One basic premise of the RTI approach is that classroom instruction should be of high quality; therefore, ineffective instruction can be ruled out as the reason for inadequate academic performance.

High-quality instruction implies the effective use of curriculum and instructional procedures that have been validated through rigorous research. These instructional procedures are referred to in a variety of ways, including such terms as scientifically based practices, evidence-based instruction, and research-validated instruction.

In the RTI approach, struggling students' skills are monitored to determine whether they show adequate growth (referred to as *responsiveness*) after high-quality instruction is implemented. Students who do not respond adequately to research-validated instruction delivered in the general education classroom are provided with increasingly intensive and validated interventions. Students' progress in skill areas of concern is monitored frequently (e.g., weekly), and the data collected inform subsequent decisions about whether a student is either appropriately responsive or still needing more intensive instruction.

The RTI approach can be implemented in a variety of ways. In broad terms, RTI is a multi-level approach that is comprised of the following components.

RTI Components

- **Universal screening:** All students are given a screening measure. Students at risk for academic failure are identified.
- **Tier 1:** Students receive effective instruction in the general education setting, using validated practices. Student progress is monitored on a weekly basis. (In some approaches, universal screening is considered part of Tier 1.)
- **Tier 2:** Students whose progress is less than desired receive different or additional support from the classroom teacher or another educational professional. Student progress continues to be monitored.
- **Tier 3:** Students whose progress is still insufficient in Tier 2 may receive even more intensive instruction, which can be provided in a variety of ways. Then, depending on a state's or district's policies, students may qualify for special education services based on the progress monitoring data, or they may receive either an abbreviated or comprehensive evaluation for the identification of a learning disability.

The new Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act—IDEA 2004—allows states and school districts to use either the IQ-achievement discrepancy model or the RTI approach for determining special education eligibility for students with learning disabilities. Key features of each option are found in the following table.

	IQ-Achievement Discrepancy Model	Response -to- Intervention Approach
What is the underlying purpose?	To eliminate low intellectual ability (IQ) as the reason for reading problems	To eliminate inadequate instruction as the reason for reading problems
Who is targeted?	Students with suspected learning disabilities	Struggling readers Students with suspected learning disabilities
What process is used?	A prescribed set of standardized tests Identification of discrepancy between IQ scores and achievement scores	Ongoing monitoring of students' performance Data-driven decisions leading to increasingly intensive services
What information is typically used?	Scores from standardized tests of intelligence (IQ) (e.g., <i>Stanford-Binet</i>) Scores from standardized tests of achievement (e.g., <i>Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Test</i>)	Data collected frequently on students' performance Possibly some standardized test scores
Who is responsible for collecting the data?	Primarily a certified diagnostician or school psychologist	Primarily the general education teacher or other personnel providing instructional interventions
What is the data used for?	To identify whether or not a disability exists	To guide instructional placement