

Multi-level Systems of Support through a Culturally Responsive Lens

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Response to intervention (RtI) is predicted to decrease bias in identification, prevention and early identification, and to increase outcomes for those experiencing learning difficulties (Fletcher, Coulter, Reschly, & Vaughn, 2004; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). RtI is comprised of three salient characteristics: a) scientifically researched interventions and instructional practices based on student need, b) decision-making based on a student's growth and performance on achievement, and c) intensity and duration of intervention is based on student responsiveness (Batsche, et al, 2005).

In addition, the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 provided local education agencies (LEAs) with the flexibility regarding its identification of students suspected of learning disabilities (Section 1414 (b) (6). Districts will no longer be required to use the significant discrepancy model between achievement and ability when determining eligibility, but may employ a response to intervention/instruction (RTI) model of identification.

In a research summary report on National Implementation of Response to Intervention, the authors cited the work of Gresham (2005) who identified four advantages that RTI holds over the previously used discrepancy model: (a) early identification of learning problems, (b) use of a risk model rather than a deficit model, (c) reduction of identification biases, and (d) focus on student outcomes (Hoover, et. al p. 2 2008).

In the state of Wisconsin, educators have identified the core belief that RtI is a process for achieving higher levels of academic and behavioral success for all students. Wisconsin's

guiding principles about RtI and the essential elements of RtI include high quality instruction, continuous review of student progress, and collaboration. The three essential elements exist within a multi-level system of support as the structures to increase success for all students. Central to Wisconsin's model is culturally responsive practices or viewing these elements through a culturally responsive lens.



According to the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt), “culturally responsive RTI frameworks have the potential to address issues of disproportionate representation for diverse students in special education programs by providing access to curriculum and instructional practice grounded in research that attends to the powerful role of culture in teaching and learning.” In fact, “without consideration of how culture mediates and influences everything we do, the potential for inappropriate eligibility decisions are still

present if the team does not apply a Culturally Responsive RTI model to such determinations (Murri, King, Rostenberg, p. 781, 2006).

It is within that vein that schools must reflect on the impact of culture on education. Considering the fact that numerous school districts in the state have a disproportionate number of students of color in special education programs, it only seems appropriate that the state and local school districts begin implementing an RtI model with the newly focused component of culturally responsive practices. The benefit of doing this is to determine appropriate placement for students of color rather than falling prey to some of the deficit thinking and identification biases Gresham (2005) expressed concern about. Only by viewing education from this culturally responsive lens can we move towards equity in addressing the changing demographics of our school districts across Wisconsin.

To implement this effectively practitioners need to explore the three previous guiding principles and essential elements through this lens of cultural responsiveness. We would like to make a few recommendations on resources to support how incorporating this addition to the RtI model might be achieved. Educators in the state will benefit from making themselves aware of the Culturally Responsive Classroom Practices component of CREATE Wisconsin which can be found at http://www.createwisconsin.net/classroompractices/classrooms_training.cfm and staying current with the work coming out of the Wisconsin RtI Center <http://www.wisconsinrticenter.org/>. Both this training and this organization are working to provide a framework of how best to support educators in incorporating RtI within a culturally responsive framework.

Resources

Hoover, J. J., Baca, L., Wexler-Love, E., Saenz, L. (2008). National Implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI): *Research Summary*. Retrieved from <http://www.ocde.us/SchoolImprovement/Documents/National+Implementiion+RTI+Summary.pdf> on 12-5-11.

Harris-Murri, N., King, K., & Rostenberg, D. (2006). Reducing Disproportionate Minority Representation in Special Education Programs for Students with Emotional Disturbances: Toward a Culturally Responsive Response to Intervention Model. In *Education and Treatment of Children*. Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 779-799.

NCCRESt, (2005). Cultural Considerations and Challenges in Response-to-Intervention Models: *An NCCRESt Position Statement*. Retrieved from http://www.nccrest.org/PDFs/rti.pdf?v_document_name=Culturally%20Responsive%20RTI on 12-1-05.