CONVERSATIONS WITH PRACTITIONERS: CURRENT PRACTICE IN STATEWIDE RTI IMPLEMENTATION

Recommendations and Frequently Asked Questions

CENTER ON
INSTRUCTION

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary highlights key ideas and recommendations for readers who are familiar with the Center on Instruction (COI) project on state-level implementation of RTI. For more about this project, the Center on Instruction, and the meeting that this document summarizes, please refer to the Introduction beginning on page 5. It is our intent that readers will find value not only in reading this document from beginning to end but also in using it as a reference, turning to specific sections when necessary.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an area of focus for the U.S. Department of Education-funded Center on Instruction. The Center is working to identify practices that may be effective for implementing RTI at the state, district, and school levels. State-level efforts are described in this document, which is divided into three sections. The first section outlines the larger project that led to this document. The second section describes important implementation considerations identified by project participants, and the third summarizes their recommendations for technical assistance. Frequently asked questions (FAQs) about state-level RTI implementation accompany the discussions of implementation considerations.

Information about school-level implementation can be found in an archived online presentation at http://centeroninstruction.org/pdevents.cfm, listed under "WebEx: Snapshots from Five Schools Implementing RTI: Practices and Perspectives - 12/4/2007" and in a report at www.centeroninstruction.org entitled *Implementing Response to Intervention: Practices and Perspectives from Five Schools. Frequently Asked Questions*.

The potentially effective technical assistance strategies identified during a planning meeting held in March 2008 in Phoenix, Arizona will be of particular interest to technical assistance providers and state-level administrators. These strategies, nominated and agreed upon by officials from eight state departments and representatives from the seven Regional Comprehensive Centers (RCCs) supporting these states, may also be useful to RCCs assisting in large-scale (including statewide) implementation of RTI. The day-and-a-half discussion that led to the content in this document is outlined according to four implementation considerations, followed by related recommendations, which appear on the following page.

Implementation Considerations

Definition of RTI and Alignment with Existing Initiatives

- The state's RTI vision must clearly support its educational vision.
- State-specific definition and common language should support the vision, integration, and implementation of RTI.
- Collaboration among various stakeholders is crucial to developing a definition of RTI within the state.

Leadership

- States need to involve a range of stakeholders on the leadership team and leaders need to agree on the essential elements of implementation.
- Professional development opportunities should be provided to all stakeholders.
- The purposes (or goals) of implementing RTI need to be tied to existing state goals.

Implementation Capacity

- States need to assess their own capacity for supporting implementation before requiring it of schools and districts.
- A coaching or mentor model for training can build and sustain capacity at all levels.
- Regional and statewide meetings featuring national experts will build capacity in both the general education and special education communities.

Instructional Aspects of Implementation

- States should communicate clear, consistent messages for high-quality general (core) instruction.
- States must be constantly aware of the importance of high-quality Tier I instruction (throughout the implementation process and beyond).
- States need to identify or build a state system of support.

Recommendations for Technical Assistance

RCCs can provide technical assistance by:

- serving as skillful, impartial facilitators of RTI leadership meetings and trainings;

- participating in stakeholder groups;

- accessing national resources;

- sponsoring regional and cross-regional meetings;

- acting as liaisons among states and providing case examples of other states' implementation processes;

- building state capacity for sustainability;

- assisting in creating processes and templates to help states with implementation;

- assisting in creating self-assessment and needs-assessment protocols; and

- disseminating state-level RTI information.

INTRODUCTION

Current Practices in Statewide Implementation of RTI

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an increasingly prominent feature of the educational landscape, and RCCs are being asked with greater frequency by education departments in their states to provide technical assistance (TA) in large-scale RTI implementation, often at the state level. In 2007–2008, for example, the majority of TA requests related to special education or students with learning difficulties were, in fact, about implementing RTI.
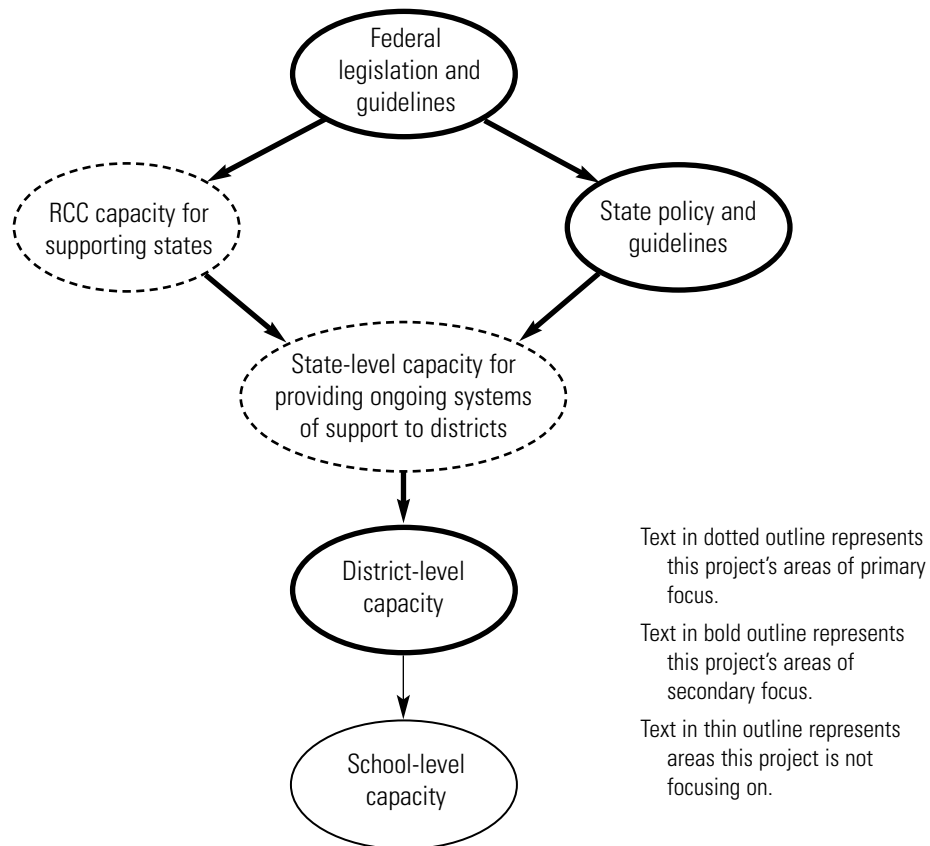
While much is known about implementing individual components of an RTI framework in classrooms and schools, less is known about implementing the framework as a whole at the district level, and very little is known about implementation on a large scale, such as at the state level, especially in the context of federally funded TA centers' work with state departments of education. In response to these needs, the Center on Instruction initiated the project outlined below to document current technical assistance practices that RCCs and state education departments are using in pursuing large-scale RTI implementation.

This ongoing project has three goals. The first is to begin building a body of knowledge based on the experiences of technical assistance providers with states implementing large-scale RTI implementation. To this end, the project includes observation and documentation of the relationships and processes states and RCCs negotiate during the RTI implementation process. The second goal is to identify and promote understanding of common issues and goals among RCCs and states implementing RTI on a large scale. The third goal is to identify state-level characteristics that may influence the RTI implementation process in order to understand unique factors in each state. The meeting content summarized in this document focuses on the first and second of these goals.

Several factors contribute to a state's capacity to implement an educational initiative or process such as RTI. As Figure 1 illustrates, federal policies and decisions affect RCC and state capacity, which in turn affect a state's ability to support its districts and, by extension, its schools. For this project, COI has focused on the RCC and state levels of the educational infrastructure, as

guided by federal and state decisions. School- and district-level RTI implementation is the focus of another COI project. Information on that project is available at http://centeroninstruction.org/pdevents.cfm under "WebEx: Snapshots from Five Schools Implementing RTI: Practices and Perspectives— 12/4/2007" and in *Implementing Response to Intervention: Practices and Perspectives from Five Schools* at www.centeroninstruction.org.

Figure 1. Statewide implementation of RTI: Capacity and areas of focus

Federal legislation and guidelines

RCC capacity for supporting states

State policy and guidelines

State-level capacity for providing ongoing systems of support to districts

District-level capacity

School-level capacity

Text in dotted outline represents this project's areas of primary focus.

Text in bold outline represents this project's areas of secondary focus.

Text in thin outline represents areas this project is not focusing on.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Because of the lack of research on state-level implementation of RTI and the necessity for timely information, this project was based on a participatory evaluation model (Cousins and Earl, 1992). This involved inviting each of the 16 RCCs to participate in order to draw on as much of the professional wisdom in the field as possible. Each RCC was asked to nominate a state with which it was working on statewide implementation of RTI and with which it would like to collaborate on this project. Each RCC was also asked to submit a list of the RTI implementation questions it was asked most frequently by the states it serves. These frequently asked questions (FAQs) follow the discussions of related implementation considerations. Answers are based on the technical assistance and implementation strategies used by the states and RCCs collaborating on this project.

Phone calls were conducted with each nominated state and its RCC to explain the purposes of the project and to ask whether they would be willing to let a COI team "tag along" as the RCC and state worked with each other. Eight states and their RCCs agreed to take part in this project: Alaska and the Alaska Comprehensive Center, California and the California Comprehensive Center, Idaho and the Northwest Regional Comprehensive Center, Mississippi and the Southeast Comprehensive Center, Pennsylvania and the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center, Texas and the Texas Comprehensive Center, Vermont and the New England Comprehensive Center, and Wyoming and the Northwest Regional Comprehensive Center. COI staff attended RTI planning meetings in all of the collaborating states and received numerous resources and artifacts used in the implementation process from the states and the RCCs.

On March 12 and 13, 2008, representatives from each of the eight participating states and their seven RCCs were brought together to discuss the considerations they felt were most pertinent to the implementation process. This meeting had two main goals. The first was to give the collaborating states and RCCs the opportunity to discuss, clarify, and classify information the COI team had collected about their RTI implementation processes. The intention

was to identify high-impact implementation considerations that could be shared with others and to gather participants' feedback on the types of resources they considered to be most valuable in statewide implementation of RTI. The second goal emerged in response to initial conversations with the states and RCCs in which they identified interaction with other participants as a potential benefit of being involved in this project. Therefore, as reflected in the meeting agenda (see Appendix), time was set aside for the state-RCC dyads to interact and share ideas, challenges, and successes.

The list of participants appears in the Appendix. The Appendix also includes each organization's website address, which contains links to Web pages containing state RTI information (state-specific RTI-related documents, forms, and other tools) where applicable. Presentations, templates, and other materials used during this March 2008 meeting can be found on the Center on Instruction's Web site at: http://centeroninstruction.org/pdevents.cfm, under "State RTI Implementation Meeting, 3/12/2008–3/13/2008." Some of these materials were based on existing research on large-scale implementation as well as dissemination and knowledge utilization. Readers may be especially interested in the work of the National Implementation Research Network (Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, and Wallace, 2005) accessible at www.fpg.unc.edu/~nirn/default.cfm; the Research Utilization Support and Help (RUSH) project of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL, 2008) accessible at www.researchutilization.org/learnru/welcome2ru/index.html; and work done by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research at SEDL (Sudsawad, 2007) accessible at http://www.ncddr.org/kt/products/ktintro/allinone.

What follows summarizes the discussions that took place at the March 2008 meeting in Phoenix. It includes recommendations that arose from those discussions regarding useful technical assistance (TA) strategies and procedures for large-scale RTI implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Participants identified four categories of considerations in implementing RTI statewide: 1) Definition and Alignment of RTI; 2) Leadership; 3) Capacity for Implementation; and 4) Instructional Aspects of RTI Implementation. Each category reflects issues and challenges that participants faced in their implementation processes as well as successes they experienced. Figure 2 illustrates how these four categories interact during the implementation process.

Figure 2. How it all fits together: Implementation considerations.
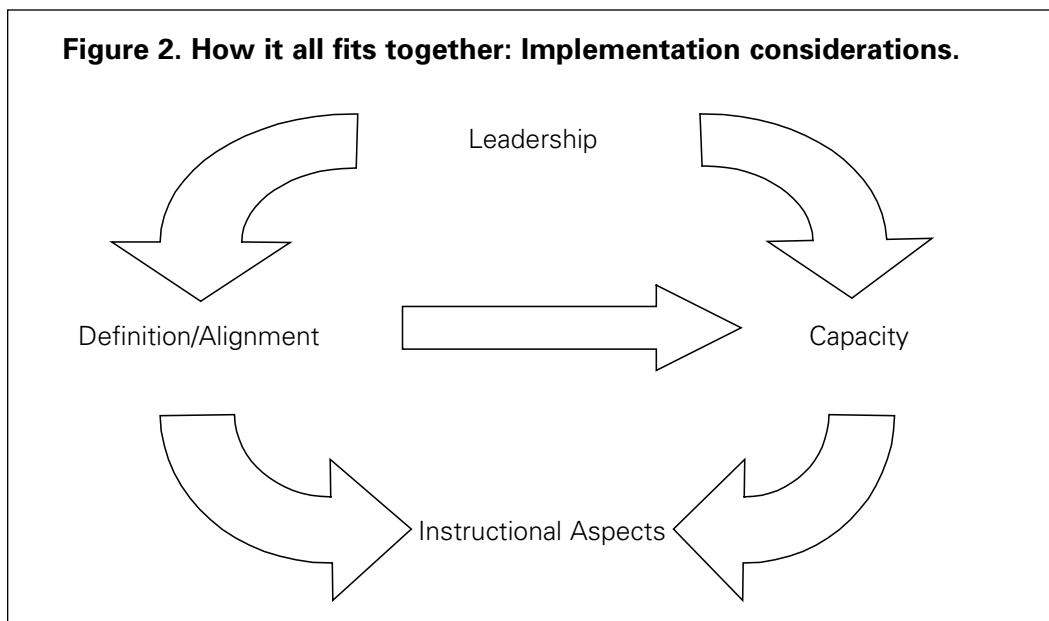
Definition of RTI and Alignment with Existing Initiatives

Participants identified the creation of a clear, state-specific definition of RTI and the alignment of RTI with other instructional resources and initiatives as key considerations in implementing RTI at the state level. Discussions included concerns such as:

- ensuring clarity of the purpose of implementation;
- thinking and talking about RTI as a coherent instructional framework that includes both curricula and assessments;

- "de-siloing" state departments (i.e., fostering communication and collaboration across state department divisions); and

- "braiding" (i.e., integrating) and aligning existing initiatives with RTI.

Participants asserted that having a clear definition of RTI and illustrating how it aligns with other initiatives and practices at all levels could help ensure shared ownership of RTI by highlighting areas of common ground. Participants noted that this definition and alignment could help to stem miscommunication further along the implementation process and help schools and districts self-assess their implementation. Participants also thought that this definition and alignment could potentially help schools and districts involve other local stakeholders (such as parents) by giving them clear and authoritative language to use when describing RTI to others.

Collaborating states created "fast fact sheets" containing definitions and examples of practices that fit the state's definition of RTI as well as counterexamples of practices that did not fit the definition. A noted challenge, however, was how strongly the membership of the leadership team could influence the state's eventual definition of RTI. Participants also cautioned that local agencies might interpret a clear RTI definition and guidance as a monitoring or compliance mechanism, which may not be intended.

It was also noted that other unique state factors or characteristics that might affect implementation included the state department's level of knowledge about RTI and its ability to integrate RTI into existing initiatives. Some states are limited by statutory language that restricts their latitude to create and integrate their RTI implementation as they would like. Even in states with more freedom, other factors such as political climate, biases of popular opinion, media, large districts, teacher unions, or parent groups, may hinder implementation.

Frequently Asked Questions

General RTI Information

Where can one find knowledge and resources for RTI implementation?

Some of this information will be provided by the state. Many RTI-related resources, including those pertinent in a general education setting, can be found in the Special Education section of the Center on Instruction website, www.centeroninstruction.org (click on "Special Education" on the left). These resources include some developed by the IRIS Center (iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu), the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD; www.nrcld.org), the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE; www.nasdse.org), and the IDEA Partnership (www.ideapartnership.org), among others.

RTI-related resources are also available at: the National Center on Response to Intervention (www.rti4success.org), the RTI Action Network (www.rtinetwork.org), State Implementation & Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices (SISEP; www.fpg.unc.edu/~sisep), and the Equity Assistance Center Network (www.ed.gov/about/contacts/gen/othersites/equity.html).

What are some of the most effective ways for state departments of education to support districts as they transition to an RTI model?

Several of the eight states provided funding (e.g., California's use of state improvement grant money) and training to a small number of demonstration sites within each of their states to tailor RTI implementation to meet unique local needs. Funding was also provided for state or district RTI professional development programs. California found it helpful to link RTI implementation explicitly to school improvement efforts. Some states also helped districts by finding existing examples of successful RTI implementation within the state and promoting them to other schools and districts in the state. Finally, state departments have also conducted needs assessments to help districts and schools determine elements of RTI they already have in place and those they would need assistance in implementing.

How do states plan for and provide information about RTI implementation (professional development, assessment tools, schedules, core programs, etc.) at the secondary level?

While these eight states do not discourage implementation at the secondary level, most are concentrating on elementary and middle school implementation as they await further research on implementation at higher grades. However, Pennsylvania has released its guidance document for implementation in secondary schools, Wyoming held a one-day overview training session with an external trainer on this topic, and California recently highlighted implementation in a secondary school; archives of the California presentation can be found at www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/wested/view/e/2841. The National High School Center has authored a report addressing this issue, which can be found at www.betterhighschools.com/docs/NHSC_RTIBrief_08-02-07.pdf.

Are states promoting or supporting one or multiple models of RTI implementation through grant programs or other support efforts?

Some of the states collaborating in this project developed guidance on "hybrid" RTI models rather than advocating for specific problem-solving or standard protocol models. Others selected the model that seemed best suited to their existing infrastructure. State guidance documents usually describe models of implementation in detail. These documents can often be found on state websites.

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Coordination and Communication

How do states coordinate among different divisions that are responsible for RTI (school improvement, special education, and curriculum) so that RTI is not seen as a special education initiative?
States have tried to include various stakeholders in the leadership group early in the process of implementation (e.g., in developing the state's RTI guidance document). Another approach (e.g., in Mississippi) has been to explicitly identify existing department initiatives that are either closely aligned with the RTI process or share goals with RTI. In the participating states, such initiatives included Reading First, school improvement, and special education.

Can RTI be combined with other teaching and instructional initiatives that are already being used in the state? If so, what types of programs would go hand-in-hand with RTI?
Yes. The goal of RTI is, first and foremost, instructional improvement. States participating in this project have aligned RTI with Reading First, existing professional development training models, and other initiatives such as school improvement processes.

How can states best coordinate all available RTI-related resources, such as comprehensive centers, regional labs, regional resource centers, equity centers, etc.?
Get all of these groups on the RTI leadership team, and get them talking! For example, Wyoming disseminates resources from all of these centers about the specific technical assistance each can provide. The California Comprehensive Center, Western Regional Resource Center, and the National RTI Center have initiated a community of practice to facilitate collaboration among these groups. Pennsylvania and the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center also participate in a similar community of practice that includes all of these groups in their region.

Where is state-level leadership for RTI situated (general education, special education, school improvement, etc.)?
The eight participating states share the goal that all these groups hold leadership roles. However, RTI may also be run out of the special education office, which then facilitates the leadership meetings and may be responsible for much of the fiscal management. For example, in Wyoming, RTI leadership and funding come through the Special Education Department via a special professional development grant (SPDG), but the leadership team includes members throughout the state department. Another state has developed guidance for RTI implementation primarily through the special education department, but is waiting to release that document through the office of curriculum and instruction in the general education division of the state department.

How are the state education agencies organized to support districts and schools in implementing an RTI approach?
Each of the eight states formed a cross-departmental RTI leadership team that included their providers from the Technical Assistance and Dissemination Network. Some chose to develop the initiative through grants, others looked for pockets of successful implementation and promoted them, others preferred a top-down (writing and disseminating guidance documents) approach, while still others combined approaches. One recommendation that emerged from conversation among the eight states was to ask districts what support they require from the state before the state creates a plan for technical assistance and support.

Leadership

Participants identified the following important leadership considerations:

- defining the roles of general education, special education, and the state department;

- identifying applicable policy at the federal, state, local (district), and school levels;

- identifying and building the required expertise (knowledge, skills, and abilities [KSAs]) for implementation; and

- constructing leadership teams at different levels of administration (e.g., state, local/district, and school).

Local agencies have requested leadership assistance (e.g., leadership academies, guidance on who should be on the local RTI leadership team) from both state departments and RCCs. Strong state-level leadership can involve and inform all parties who need to be involved.

One participating RCC is supporting all its states with RTI implementation. The RCC performed a gap analysis to identify areas of need. As a result of the gap analysis, the RCC sought assistance in these areas of need from various groups, including some from outside the Technical Assistance and Dissemination Network. The RCC organized its entire group of state representatives to work on several different areas, which facilitated cross-state collaboration and allowed people to focus on their areas of greatest interest. In one of this RCC's states, the commissioner of education was willing to use RTI as an organizing framework for overhauling the entire state system. In this state, all the departments or divisions in the state department are collaborating to implement RTI.

Participants found it challenging to bring leaders together to discuss RTI. They found that leaders required a springboard, a reason to take interest in RTI implementation. Another ongoing challenge was that various groups outside the state department of education developed and disseminated their own RTI materials, often in the absence of official state guidance. Participants expressed concern that leadership (at all levels) cannot always be aware of all the RTI resources and materials that are being presented to their constituencies. This situation is compounded in larger states where intermediate units or agencies operate between the state department and

the schools, so that state leaders cannot know for sure whether the training and guidance being provided in the state's name is, in fact, true to the state's definition and vision for implementation. States are still developing approaches for responding to this problem.

Frequently Asked Questions

Policy

Is RTI being addressed as an approach to school improvement under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act? Is RTI policy integrated with school improvement efforts or reading initiatives or is it a separate, stand-alone policy?

Two of the participating states integrated RTI implementation with school improvement plans and emphasized this link in their RTI guidance documents.

What RTI models and strategies are other states using?

Standard protocol, problem-solving, and hybrid models are all in use. Examples of models in use at five schools across the country are available in *Implementing Response to Intervention: Practices and Perspectives from Five Schools. Frequently Asked Questions* available at www.centeroninstruction.org.

How have state regulations changed with regard to the special education eligibility process?

None of the participating states has moved to an RTI-only model of identification; instead, they permit the use of both RTI and severe discrepancy as possible means of identifying students with learning disabilities. Many allow the use of RTI data to make a case for evaluation or as the first step in an identification process. Several states have disseminated guidance about how RTI can be used in the identification process. Others have adopted "Intent to Implement" forms or "Implementation Readiness Checklists" as part of the application process through which schools and districts can request permission to use RTI as part of their identification process.

Where can one find a list of states' (and local agencies') guidance documents on RTI, including research on RTI and guidance for using RTI in the specific learning disability (SLD) determination processes?

Many of these documents can be found on the Center on Instruction's website at www.centeroninstruction.org and at state department websites included with the list of participants in this document. The IDEA Partnership also maintains a list of state RTI initiatives, with links to state websites, at www.ideapartnership.org/report.cfm?reportid=309.

Implementation Capacity

Participants stressed the importance of considering:

- the changes in roles that RTI implementation requires;
- how capacity is built and maintained in the face of challenges such as small schools, unique populations, or changes in funding;
- the capacity of existing funding streams to support implementation; and
- professional development that may be required, including initial training to build expertise at the state, local, and preservice levels, as well as job-embedded supports for sustaining expertise.

Participants acknowledged the potential concern that only special education departments and staff members feel prepared for the challenges of implementing RTI. General educators may feel less equipped and hence less interested in being a part of implementation.

Collaborating states had success involving general educators early in the implementation process and providing training to special education and general education professionals together as a way of illustrating the importance of integrating instructional services that have in the past been delivered separately. A coordinated approach also helps to standardize the training content, while creating opportunities for differently credentialed professionals to interact around RTI-related concepts, problems, and plans.

Another promising capacity-building approach was to highlight schools with demonstrated success in implementing RTI, which may prompt other schools to take notice and encourage principals to collaborate in RTI efforts. This kind of informal professional development can also help to build and expand local capacity. Participants found it challenging to identify existing resources and disseminate them to all who could use them. One successful approach used technology to reach a broad audience at relatively low cost. A series of "webinars" (online seminars) and online trainings provided TA to a large number of districts at the same time.

Sustainability was also a concern for implementation capacity, especially in states with high numbers of small schools or districts or highly mobile populations of students and teachers. One possible solution involves using a coaching model for training so that a single coach can provide support to multiple small schools or districts; another is a mentorship model, so that knowledge is retained when a trained teacher moves.

While participants felt that a good capacity-building strategy was to make the RTI leadership team an indispensable resource within the state, they acknowledged that access to state superintendents, assistant superintendents, and school boards varies by state and may present challenges, depending on the state department structure and the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) of the people involved.

Frequently Asked Questions

Professional Development and Support

What RTI-focused professional development (PD) do special education and general education classroom teachers need?
This depends largely on the local situation. In general, states need to communicate their vision and definition of RTI to local leaders. One approach is to capitalize on existing training offered for general and special education initiatives that have been identified as being closely aligned with the state's goals for RTI.

What type of ongoing TA and PD support can be provided for the staff at each school to ensure that teachers have the capacity to implement RTI effectively?
With respect to technical assistance, a state can provide: guidance on its goals and vision for RTI implementation, including its use in the SLD identification process; training and coaching on essential components of RTI; and help with funding and selecting core programs, assessments, and interventions. For examples of professional development that is being offered in schools, see *Implementing Response to Intervention: Practices and Perspectives from Five Schools. Frequently Asked Questions* available at www.centeroninstruction.org.

How can state departments best support RTI professional development for school staff?
State departments can provide guidance on RTI implementation and its possible use in the SLD identification process. In addition, states can endorse their districts' PD efforts on RTI by providing time and funds for teachers to participate. Perhaps the best way to determine useful state support is to ask schools and districts, either informally or through the use of a needs assessment, what they would value.

Have any states incorporated RTI professional development for teachers under their school improvement grants (SIGs)? If so, do these states have any resources they could share?
At least two of the eight participating states (Vermont and California) have incorporated teacher RTI professional development under SIGs and Wyoming is implementing RTI through a special professional development grant. All three states' websites have more information.

Instructional Aspects of Implementation

While acknowledging that all instruction is important, participants concurred that Tier I instruction (core instruction provided to all students in the general classroom) is the implementation level with the greatest impact. Taking both behavior and academics into account, considerations in this area included:

- the cultural relevance of instruction and assessment;

- the consistency and fidelity of instruction;

- the concept of fluidity between tiers of instruction (providing instruction based on the needs of students, not simply labeling students); and

- the role of assessment and data systems in an RTI framework (i.e., ensuring that providers understand the purpose of assessment and data, and having systems in place to get meaningful data to providers in a timely manner).

Without high-quality Tier I (core or general) instruction, intervention tiers will become overburdened. Participants found it challenging to implement RTI with a focus on both behavior and academics at the same time. They suggested focusing on one area until screening and progress-monitoring data show that at least Tier I (core), but preferably both Tiers I and II (targeted intervention), are effective before beginning implementation in the other area(s).

Participating states had success with wide dissemination of definitions and guidance related to Tier I instruction. School leaders who know what is expected of them and what satisfactory core instructional practices look like are better able to implement them. Some participating states used reports produced by Reading First schools to generate interest in data-driven instructional decision-making. Others provided direct support and recognition to schools for Tier I quality and publicized the state's view that Tier I is the foundation for all school improvement and RTI implementation.

Sustainability was an instructional concern, as were monitoring and implementation fidelity. Many states found it difficult to communicate their Tier I expectations nonprescriptively; they would rather be a resource for good instruction than an instruction-monitoring agency. It could also be challenging to differentiate training, TA, and professional development for schools and districts. Local versus state control is another instructional factor that states felt could affect implementation. In states with local control, implementation of instructional frameworks such as RTI may be voluntary and general instruction

may be especially difficult to affect. Indeed, there may be no state-level policy or guidance in local control states, making consistent implementation very difficult to achieve.

Frequently Asked Questions

Implementation

Are there established tools, such as checklists, that state staff can use to monitor RTI implementation?
The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities' RTI Manual (www.nrcld.org/rti_manual) has a section on fidelity of implementation. Wyoming has developed an action-planning template and is creating an onsite monitoring checklist. Generally, monitoring is assessed at the district or school level; materials mentioned below in the question regarding implementation readiness may be adapted to measure fidelity.

Which department would be best suited for monitoring RTI?
This is an area of exploration for the eight participating states. Typically, monitoring is left to local administration. At the state level, monitoring will probably be led by a collaborative effort among special education, school improvement, and federal programs. Fidelity of implementation data on some RTI components are being gathered in states with demonstration sites.

Are states mandating the use of core programs and assessments? Are they providing recommended lists of appropriate core programs and assessments? Are they providing guidance for selecting core programs and assessments and leaving the decision to districts or schools?
Districts often make these decisions. Many districts incorporate statewide, standardized assessment data into their RTI model, and states with RTI demonstration sites have offered districts guidance in selecting programs, assessments, and interventions. States with greater guidance include California, which has a standard curriculum and a list of approved instructional materials (www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/index.asp). Wyoming has mandated that schools that have not met Adequate Yearly Progress goals include scientifically based reading programs in their improvement plans. Vermont has drafted a matrix of possible assessments, interventions, and programs for use within an RTI framework. Guidance on selecting programs, interventions, and assessments can be found at various national technical assistance center websites with links at www.centeroninstruction.org.

How does a district determine whether a school is ready to implement RTI?
Participating states usually have schools complete an RTI self-assessment survey. Three of the eight states (Vermont, Wyoming, and Pennsylvania) have created self-assessment, intent to implement, or application for RTI implementation checklists; these forms may be found on their websites. Mississippi has drafted matrices and self-assessments that are available in draft form on its website. Other states have decided to wait to post such documents pending additional data on what is working in local schools. Some implementation self-assessments and readiness checklists are available at www.centeroninstruction.org.

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Disproportionality

Can RTI meet the unique needs of every state, including those with large numbers of diverse students (i.e., English language learners, minority groups, and migrant students) and high rates of learning disability identification?

Current research and experience show that while RTI has the potential to meet the needs of all students, including those with diverse backgrounds and characteristics, its success depends on how it is implemented. Several components in an RTI framework have demonstrated improved learning outcomes for all students (see Foorman, Francis, and Fletcher, 1998; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986; Vellutino, Scanlon, and Lyon, 2000), but implementation success depends on the capacity and buy-in of implementers and on the fidelity with which components are implemented. One state found the Rinaldi and Samson article on disproportionality (2008) helpful.

What are other states doing about this problem?

Although the use and impact of an RTI framework on disproportionality is an emerging area for the eight collaborating states, all states must address the needs of significant populations of diverse learners. School improvement (specifically, instructional improvement) that includes implementation of an RTI framework for measuring and addressing students' instructional needs systematically is one way in which states can address disproportionality. By matching instructional intensity to student need, decisions are based on students' actual performance in well-planned and carefully implemented instructional sequences. Thus, RTI, when faithfully implemented, can reduce the influence of more subjective elements of the referral-making process, indicating whether the barrier to achieving grade-level standards truly lies within the student (i.e., a learning disability). This emphasis on individualized research-based instruction can potentially reduce inappropriate referrals to and placements in special education. The 10 federally funded Regional Equity Assistance Centers have jointly released an issues paper that outlines discussion topics for states to engage in when considering the relationship between RTI, equity, and disproportionality (www.idra.org/South Central Collaborative for Equity/RTI).

Commonalities

Several ideas are prominent across these four broad considerations and are summarized in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Common Ideas among the Implementation Considerations and Recommendations for TA Strategies			
Definition and Alignment	**Leadership**	**Capacity**	**Instructional Aspects**
Stakeholders influence the state's definition, goals, and vision for RTI.	Can include a wide range of ***stakeholders***.	***Stakeholders*** help build state constituency.	
Common language for RTI aids communication across the state and will support the state's vision.			
The definition and alignment of RTI determine the state's ***professional development*** needs.	Continuous ***professional development*** means meeting the needs of the leadership team.	***Professional development*** boosts implementation capacity at all levels.	***Professional development*** for Tier I includes building or identifying systems of support.
RTI is a framework that can be ***integrated*** into many existing education initiatives and practices.	The purposes of RTI are ***tied to*** the individual goals of different stakeholders.	In many states, RTI training is already ***embedded*** in existing delivery methods and models.	RTI implementation can address ***existing, ongoing*** concerns in the general education classroom.
Comprehensive Centers may create templates to help states work through defining and aligning RTI.	Facilitation of RTI meetings by the ***Comprehensive Center*** removes "ownership" of RTI from any one group within the state.	Access to national regional, and cross-regional trainings/experts/models could be provided by the ***Comprehensive Center***.	

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Acknowledging that they are tasked with building state capacity in several areas in order to support state-level implementation of RTI, RCCs could provide assistance in each area of implementation considered below.

Definition and Alignment

- Create templates to help states develop their definition of and common language for RTI implementation.
- Facilitate collaboration among state department divisions through:
  - offering external facilitation of meetings to ensure that implementation is not seen as owned by a single department in the state education agency;
  - increasing awareness of needs (at all levels);
  - facilitating a systematic communication process at all levels of implementation; and
  - creating an exit strategy for technical assistance (developing ownership of the initiative and ensuring sustainability within the state department).

Leadership

- Develop case study examples of other states' frameworks.
- Design a process for building a state implementation framework.
- Create processes and tools to help states map their current initiatives to RTI elements.
- Facilitate meetings of or participate in stakeholder groups.

Implementation Capacity

- Facilitate interstate collaboration within and outside the region to discuss and share common challenges (e.g., small schools), solutions, and goals (e.g., coaching, developing a coaching model).

- Develop tools to assess states' capacity to meet the needs of schools and districts.

- Serve as a liaison among states, access more national resources, and sponsor regional and cross-regional trainings or meetings.

- Assist in creating self-assessments and needs assessments.

Instructional Aspects of Implementation

- Implement strategies for getting all state-level stakeholders working together.

- Serve as a clearinghouse to guide states to useful resources.

- Serve as a vehicle for disseminating a state's message.

SUMMARY

In summary, participants felt that RCCs could be instrumental in facilitating state-level RTI implementation because of their lack of affiliation with particular divisions within state departments as well as their access to national experts and resources. The RCCs are also uniquely equipped to help states plan and accomplish statewide RTI implementation and disseminate state-specific information related to RTI (within a state) to ensure consistency of message and fidelity of implementation. The Center on Instruction will continue working with RCCs and states in the area of statewide RTI implementation and will make future products and resources available to the public via its website, www.centeroninstruction.org.

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APPENDIX:
MARCH 2008 MEETING PARTICIPANTS AND AGENDA

Meeting Participants

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www.eed.state.ak.us/nclb/RTI.html

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posted resources.)

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March 2008 Meeting Agenda

DAY 1 – FULL DAY

Purpose: Review and summarize the information collected from the eight participating states and RCCs.

Result: Consensus on the content to be disseminated.

8:15	Welcoming Remarks and Introductions
8:45	Discussion of Purposes and Anticipated Outcomes
9:15	Description and Synthesis of Information Gathered by COI
10:15	Break
10:45	Discussion and Identification of Implementation Considerations and Existing Practices
11:45	Lunch
1:00	State-RCC Dyad Work Session
1:30	Small-Group Work Session
3:00	Display of Work Session Charts
3:15	Break
3:45	Development of Content Summary and Discussion by Marty Hougen

DAY 2 – HALF DAY

Purpose: Plan for the development of a first deliverable.

Result: Consensus on design and outline of a first deliverable.

8:30	Recap, Goals for Today
9:00	Description of Design Template
9:30	Design Template Work Session
10:15	Break
10:30	Whole-Group Discussion (Dissemination and Design of Deliverable)
11:30	Discussion of Next Steps