

RTI as a Best Practice in Kindergarten through Third Grade

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Although Response to Intervention (RTI) programs have come under critical scrutiny recently, students benefit from a program that is developed with quality, integrity and uses researched-based approaches for instruction and monitoring. Effective RTI programs center on student needs and student growth. East Amwell School, where I serve as a language arts/literacy specialist, has built a successful RTI program by establishing a school-wide clear and consistent screening process and progress monitoring review. Students in grades K-3 are assessed in September using the DIBELS, the DRA-2, and LINKit, our school-wide assessment and data collection program. As the Literacy Specialist, I review the results and collaborate with classroom teachers and our intervention teachers to assign students to RTI levels based on their individual needs. At designated points throughout the year, the intervention teachers conduct progress monitoring aligned to their instructional material. The progress monitoring results are shared with the principal, curriculum director and myself for review. Adjustments to enrollment, frequency of instruction, levels and materials are made as needed. In addition, classroom teachers assess any students not enrolled in RTI who are at risk of not meeting mid-year grade-level benchmarks with the DIBELS or DRA-2 by February and those results are reviewed to ascertain if the students need RTI for the remainder of the year. Overall goals are clearly established for our RTI program and we work collaboratively to meet our students' needs and promote growth and success.

Experts on intervention and instructional support state that students who find literacy learning difficult should receive MORE direct instruction than their peers. East Amwell classroom teachers provide differentiated instruction to all students through guided reading groups and an interventionist or specialist adds MORE learning time in small groups for students needing Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction. Students receive instruction during the morning literacy block and move among their teachers based on the day and time.

At East Amwell School, Tier ONE differentiated instruction is generally provided by the classroom teacher through guided reading using trade books. Tier TWO teaching is focused on student growth towards grade-level benchmarks provided by an interventionist in a separate room or as a visit to the classroom during the literacy block. Tier THREE is highly focused skill work to fill in learning gaps and reinforce foundational concepts that is provided by a literacy specialist or special education teacher. The chart below demonstrates both the fact that students needing more support spend more time with literacy learning and that each level adds instructional techniques, without removing the types of instruction experienced by students needing less support.

Direct Instruction for RTI Students

LEVEL	INSTRUCTION	FREQUENCY
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Tier One ONLY	Guided Reading	2-3 times per week
Tier ONE and TWO	Guided Reading, Foundations, Reaching All Readers, Leveled Literacy	4-6 times per week
Tier ONE, TWO and THREE	Guided Reading, Foundations, Reaching All Readers, Leveled Literacy	9 – 11 times per week

With careful, purposeful implementation, RTI can benefit students and help them achieve mastery and grade-appropriate reading levels in grades K-3. We find that our carefully articulated plan for RTI allows our students to make substantial gains.