

## Response to Intervention—A Status Report: Policies and Procedures in the West Region and Five Other States

Response to intervention (RTI) can be both a system for providing early intervention to struggling students and a special education diagnostic tool for evaluating and identifying students with specific learning disabilities. Interest in RTI has been growing since the 2004 reauthorization of the federal special education law—the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 2004—explicitly recognized RTI as a diagnostic tool. While the reference to RTI in the IDEA places it in the special education domain, the term also refers to a framework that addresses reforming general education and improving the performance of all students through preventive academic and behavioral interventions.

Currently all 50 states are implementing some form of RTI policy, but there has been relatively little research on their approaches, policies, and procedures. A new report prepared by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) and the American Institutes for Research<sup>1</sup> provides descriptive information on state-level RTI policies and procedures in nine states: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Illinois, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Washington. The study addresses the following research questions:

- \* How is RTI defined in the nine study states, and how are RTI efforts supported at the state level?
- \* What considerations do state respondents report about developing state RTI policies and procedures, and how have their states addressed them?

### *What the study found*

Respondents and documents from all nine states in this study described RTI as an approach that changes how the state educates students, cutting

across areas such as bilingual education, special education, and early childhood education. In addition to descriptive information on policies and procedures for RTI, the study also presents considerations that administrators reported in developing RTI at the state level and how their state has addressed them.

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### *Among the report’s key findings:*

- \* Respondents from all nine states described RTI in terms that extended its application beyond special education. RTI was viewed as an overarching conceptual framework guiding the state’s overall school improvement process for all students.

- \* While two of the nine states mandated the use of RTI in identifying students with specific learning disabilities for special education services, the other seven states were more permissive in orientation.
- \* Respondents from all nine states cited the importance of establishing buy-in and ownership of RTI by general education.
- \* Respondents from seven states indicated that the general education division had either taken charge of RTI at the state level or held joint responsibility with the special education division.
- \* While respondents from all nine states mentioned the importance of evaluating RTI, only three states have conducted implementation and outcome studies of pilot programs, and two others reported specific plans for future evaluation.
- \* Respondents from six states expressed concern about their state's personnel capacity and leadership to fully implement and support RTI at the state level.

Despite a generally broad vision of RTI, most study respondents indicated that full RTI implementation was occurring in only a few schools and districts in their state.

### *Data sources and selection*

In addition to the four West Region states, the study included five states outside the region to provide more context for others involved in designing an approach to RTI. To select the five additional states, technical assistance documents were examined from state education agency websites of the other

46 states; candidates were narrowed to those with at least one guidance document and one form or tool related to RTI. Of the 23 states that met these criteria, 4 were selected that were similar in population to the West Region states, and Pennsylvania was purposefully selected because of its long history of using instructional supports teams, which share many characteristics with the RTI model.

This descriptive study relied on data collected between June and August 2008, from two sources:

- \* Phone interviews with a key administrator overseeing RTI in each state, including directors and associate directors of special education, as well as administrators leading the state's RTI efforts (for example, curriculum and instruction division, school and district improvement offices); and
- \* Review of state technical assistance documents and materials relating to RTI collected from state agency web sites and respondents, including state legislation, non-regulatory guidance, training presentations, technical assistance materials, and evaluations.

The report also discusses the types of technical assistance and additional research from which state respondents said they could benefit.

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<sup>1</sup>Harr-Robins, J.J., Shambaugh, L.S., and Parrish, T. (2009). *The status of state-level response to intervention policies and procedures in the West Region states and five other states* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2009–No. 077). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West.

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