

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION & PROJECT CRISS AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

Overview of Response to Intervention

In 2004, the revised IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act) legislation allowed states to move away from the discrepancy model used to identify students with learning disabilities (and, therefore, eligible for Special Education services) to what is called Response to Intervention (RtI). In a nutshell, RtI calls for early and systematic interventions for all students at risk of failure, meticulously monitored, in order to prevent students from being falsely identified as disabled. The first level of RtI, Tier 1, is UNIVERSAL education available to ALL students. RtI demands a high level of pedagogy, with established, high quality educational practices in place to address the needs of all learners. Especially in the early grades, students are screened at least three times each year to identify those at risk of failure.

After the first screening, those students not meeting a minimum standard are provided with TARGETED, Tier 2 interventions and progress monitoring is increased to biweekly intervals in order to measure minute levels of progress. Typically, Tier 2 interventions are provided in addition to student participation in the Tier 1 educational program and are accessed via smaller instructional groupings using research-based curricula. Fuchs, et al. (2008) suggest a minimum of 15-30 weeks of intervention and monitoring before moving a student to Tier 3 INTENSIVE services.

INTENSIVE diagnostic assessments and a team evaluation are the next step for students unresponsive to Tier 2 TARGETED intervention. At Tier 3, an INTENSIVE, individualized program of services is designed and Special Education eligibility is determined. The RtI model changes the nature of the majority of Special Education services from the traditional, pull-out classes based on IQ-performance discrepancies to a push-in, inclusive model of student support provided to a much larger student population (regardless of the presence or absence of disability identification).

Elementary Response to Intervention

The majority of work and implementation of RtI has been focused on the elementary level, and a variety of

implementation models are emerging. Effective instructional techniques need to be identified and used system wide—requiring thoughtful and comprehensive professional development that facilitates consistent language and strategy instruction.

In the diagram, Tier 1 (green) provides examples of school-wide initiatives that facilitate student learning, with attention to socio-economic, emotional, physical, and cultural barriers to student success. Tier 1 activities, labeled “UNIVERSAL,” are available to all students.

When assessments and other evidence identify students in need of more focused, “TARGETED” support, the student is moved into Tier 2 (yellow). It is possible that 20-30% of students may require Tier 2 supports. The need for careful progress monitoring cannot be overemphasized—Fuchs, et al. (2008) support “casting a wide net,” potentially identifying closer to 50% of the student body for additional support in order to avoid missing students at risk of failure. They argue that thoughtful and timely implementation of interventions and monitoring assessments will screen out students who can in fact be successful at Tier 1. Tier 2 TARGETED interventions provided in small groups by highly trained professionals (including paraprofessionals) will meet the needs of the majority of students identified as at risk.

For those students who, after 15-30 weeks of TARGETED intervention, are not making enough progress to catch up with their Tier 1 peers, “INTENSIVE” (red), individualized supports are warranted. At this level, other underlying factors (second language, socio-economics, physical impairments, etc.) are systematically ruled out and learning disabilities are identified through screening and diagnostic assessments. Depending on the nature of the students’ learning needs, alternative placements may be considered. Prior to 2004, the accepted (funded) percentage of the student population at this level was 12%, and many districts had much higher percentages. While there is no clear cut means to identify the exact number of students with disabilities in need of INTENSIVE supports, McLaughlin (2006) argues that it is somewhere between 2% and 6%. Fuchs, et al. (2008) argue that the lower end reflects students with identifiable learning disabilities, but that closer to 8% of students will require this level of intervention.

Project CRISS & Response to Intervention

As previously noted, UNIVERSAL (Tier 1) RtI is dependent upon high quality pedagogy, which in turn is dependent upon high quality professional development. Project CRISS (CREating Independence through Student-owned Strategies), researched and validated by the U.S. Department of Education, the National Diffusion Network, and the Joint Diffusion Review Panel, and noted in the Carnegie Corporation publication *Informed Choices for Struggling Adolescent Readers: A Research-Based Guide to Instructional Programs & Practices* (Deschler et al, 2007) as a promising program of professional development, provides the pedagogical foundation for school-wide implementation of RtI, as well as consistent language and strategies to further student achievement and lifelong learning. CRISS is not a curriculum package, it is a flexible framework for teaching and learning—the structure and toolbox students and teachers need to be successful.

As a UNIVERSAL intervention, Project CRISS focuses heavily on three things: developing engaged, metacognitive students; designing strategic learning plans that match process and content learning goals to assessment and student activities to teach what matters; and implementation of a “gradual release of responsibility” model in which strategies for accessing content are explicitly modeled and repeatedly practiced with feedback from the teacher until students can identify the appropriate strategy for the learning task and implement it independently and successfully. The CRISS Framework for Learning provides an excellent foundation for guided literacy groups, exploring metacognition, before, during, and after reading strategies, and modeling thinking and use of learning tools. The CRISS Framework for Teaching provides the anchor and consistent language across classrooms which guide teachers to effective instruction. As a professional development program, CRISS has an introductory Level I training with follow-up workshops, a collaborative learning team CD Rom (with model lessons and activities) called *CRISS Cornerstones*, *CRISS for Administrators* materials, and a Project CRISS Level II training of trainers) training. CRISS also provides guidelines and tools for hosting *CRISS for Parents* workshops, so families can support their students’ learning.

TARGETED Tier 2 interventions using CRISS can take three forms: a supportive flooding/literacy group that embeds CRISS strategy and metacognitive instruction into the curriculum; for students at grade 5 or higher, participation in a *CRISS for Students* class using that curriculum; or small group tutoring or guided groups using only CRISS-trained staff (teachers, specialists, or trained paraprofessionals). A 15 to 30 week intervention using these academic supports across content areas, especially when partnered with supports to address students’ affective needs, will bridge the gap for the majority of at-risk students.

For the small percentage of students who do not respond to Tier I and II interventions, INTENSIVE interventions are appropriate and must include in-depth diagnostic assessments. Continued use of Project CRISS strategic and metacognitive instruction is appropriate when paired with daily literacy and/or math instruction that is individualized to meet specific deficits identified through assessments.

Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L.S. & S. Vaughn. (2008). *Response to Intervention: A Framework for Reading Educators*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

McLaughlin, M.J. (2006). *Closing the achievement gap and students with disabilities: The new meaning of a “free and appropriate public education.”* Unpublished manuscript. Cited in Fuchs, et al., 2008, p. 79.

“Response to Intervention: Possibilities for Service Delivery at the Secondary School Level,” *The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement Newsletter*, Learning Point Associates under contract with the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education of the U.S. Department of Education, June 2008.

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