



Features

- Disproportionate Representation & RTI
- Digital Corner
- Current Research

Important Dates

- **September 16:**
SPED 448
4:00 - 4:50
- **September 30:**
SPED 488
4:00 - 4:50
- **October 21:**
SPED 448
4:00 - 4:50
- **November 18:**
SPED 448
4:00 - 4:50

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Disproportionate Representation & Response-to-Intervention

We focus this newsletter on the relationship between disproportionality in special education; that is, the higher rates of placement for students from historically disenfranchised cultural and linguistic groups into special education, and Response to Intervention (RTI) that is a multi-tiered method of assessment and intervention for identifying students having disabilities. The integral connection rests upon the following: the primary goal of pre-referral processes (like RTI) is to prevent students being placed into special education with problems resulting from factors other than the presence of a disability.

The argument is that students should first have chances to respond to a range of intensive and alternative instructional or behavioral interventions over time. Prevention and early intervention can significantly improve the academic achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students. This, in turn, reduces the number of students perceived to be at risk of failing, inappropriately referred to remedial or special education programs, and/or inaccurately identified as having a disability (Garcia & Ortiz, 2004).

Several research studies (e.g. Artilles, 2003; Klinger & Harry, 2006) have examined the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse groups in special education programs. As the diversity of students increases, the special education system is at risk of being overwhelmed by referrals of culturally and linguistically diverse students because the general education system has failed at providing culturally-sensitive pedagogy. Appropriate pre-referral strategies consequently become critical to alter what is happening.

Ensuring that students' cultural and linguistic experiences are addressed at all phases of

assessment is critical. It should include review of student performance, consideration of reasons for student difficulty, design of alternative interventions, and multiple interpretations of assessment results. Garcia & Ortiz (2004) highlight four key elements of culturally and linguistically responsive pre-referral intervention: a) preventing school underachievement and failure, (b) early intervention for struggling learners, (c) diagnostic teaching, and (d) availability of general education problem-solving support systems.

Those components link with RTI since the reauthorization of IDEA gives all states the option to discontinue the use of IQ achievement discrepancy formulas and use RTI criteria as part of the special education identification process (Klingner & Harry, 2006). RTI models usually consist of three tiers with different levels of intervention intensity. The first tier consists of quality instruction and ongoing progress monitoring within the general education classroom. Students making inadequate progress are identified early for receiving intensive intervention and instruction support that becomes the second tier intervention. When students do not adequately respond to that, they either qualify for special education or for an evaluation for possible placement in special education.

Central to RTI and the possible ways the system could affect change in overrepresentation of minorities in special education is for teachers to try different models of instruction at the second tier before determining that a child needs a referral. The purpose of RTI strategies is to provide students with assistance within the general education environment before an official request is made for possible special education placement. The expectation is that by adjusting

the way children are taught, some students will make enough progress that a special education referral will not be necessary.

Assessing and monitoring students' response to interventions needs to be a well-designed process. Yet, many challenges exist for assessing the effectiveness of the intervention. They include a) confusion about when to refer; b) referrals based solely on poor academic performance or behavioral difficulties; c) not knowing when a child is ready to be assessed in English; d) misinterpreting a lack of full proficiency in English as low IQ or a learning disability; and e) over-reliance on test scores (Klingner & Harry, 2006). Most importantly, pre-referral problem-solving must be embedded in a school-wide effort to create a culturally responsive learning environment.

Garcia and Ortiz (2004) have developed a flowchart to guide practitioners through that decision-making process. It can help school personnel evaluate whether students have been provided with

meaningful, appropriate pre-referral strategies and adequate opportunities to learn across time and settings.

Ultimately, the decision to refer a child for special education placement needs to be made only after full consideration of the student's biography *and* if the student has received adequate opportunities to learn.

References:

Artiles, A.J. (2003). Special education's changing identity: Paradoxes and dilemmas in views of culture and space. *Harvard Educational Review*, 73, 164-202.

Garcia, S.B. & Ortiz, A.A. (2004). Preventing disproportionate representation: Culturally and linguistically responsive prereferral interventions. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 38(4), pp. 64-68.

Klingner, J & Harry, B. (2006). The special education referral and decision-making process for English Language Learners: Child study team meetings and placement conferences. *Teachers College Record*, 108(11), pp. 2247-2281.

Research Corner

Special Issue: Responsiveness to Intervention. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, May/June 2007, Vol. 39, Issue 5.

This special issue provides a framework to understand RTI as a means of preventing academic failure. The articles feature research and practice about how a multi-tiered approach to providing instructional services can be implemented. They present a coherent set of developmental practices that provide administrators and practitioners with a firm grasp of the underlying argument for using RTI in schools and classrooms.

These articles focus on instruction using preventive intervention strategies to give students having academic difficulties an authentic opportunity to improve their academic performance before requesting special education services.

A range of issues are featured through titles such as "Primary Prevention in Classroom Reading Instruction", "Children at Risk for Reading Failure: Constructing an Early Screening Measure", "Secondary Interventions in Reading: Providing Additional Instruction for Students At Risk", and "Dynamic Assessment as Responsiveness to Intervention: A Scripted Protocol to Identify Young At-Risk Readers", "A Model for Implementing Responsiveness to Intervention", "Tertiary Intervention: Using Progress Monitoring With Intensive Services."

Digital Corner

Official Teaching

<http://www.officialteaching.com/sbps.html>
Official Teaching is a free site maintained by a teacher and features up-to-date interactive educational web sites and resources. The site includes a section on school based problem solving.

Intervention Central

<http://www.interventioncentral.org/>
Intervention Central offers resources for school staff and parents to promote positive classroom behaviors and foster effective learning for all students. Created by a school psychologist and administrator, the site includes academic and behavioral intervention strategies, publications on effective teaching practices, and tools that streamline classroom assessment and intervention.

I-ASPIRE

<http://www.luc.edu/cseit/aspire.shtml>
The Illinois Alliance for School-based Problem-solving and Intervention Resources in Education (I-ASPIRE) project is a statewide effort to establish and implement a coordinated, regionalized system of personnel development that will increase the capacity of school systems to provide early intervening services, aligned with the general education curriculum, to at-risk students and students with disabilities.

RTI Action Network

<http://www.rtinetwork.org>
The RTI Action Network offers strategies and tools needed for school-wide reform, accurate identification of students with learning disabilities, and parent involvement in the RTI process.