Taking a Snapshot of Early Childhood Response to Intervention (RTI) Across the USA (R324C08001)

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Abstract

The RTI approach to assessment and service delivery is becoming common in elementary schools nationally. Less common however, is an RTI approach to early childhood education and early intervention. Yet interest is increasing in Pre-K programs in public schools, and early childhood special education. This study reports findings from a national survey regarding states' interest in and implementation of preschool RTI.

Introduction

The RTI approach in elementary schools nationally is increasing common (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). They reported that 15 states have adopted an RtI model with 9 implementing on large and 6 on small scales. Twenty-two states are in development phases. Similar knowledge regarding the status of RTI implementation in early childhood programs (e.g., Pre-K, Head Start, etc) is unknown. **The purpose of this investigation was to add to this knowledge by examining the implementation status of RTI in Early Childhood across US states and territories.**

Research Questions

The specific aims were to determine:

1. The extent that the RTI approach is being implemented nationally?
2. What specific settings are seeing RTI implementation?
3. Which specific components of RTI are being implemented?
4. What curricula and learning outcomes are being emphasized?
5. Do states have RTI models ready to share with others?
6. The challenges implementing RTI in early childhood setting as perceived by early childhood professionals?

Methods

Sample

The population of knowledgeable state early childhood special education leaders including IDEA-Part B [619] directors and state PreK directors were surveyed in order to generalize findings to the USA. A listing of these leaders in each state and territory and their contact information was obtained from the NECTAC website (online at http://www.nectac.org/contact/619coord.asp). In all 57 responded.

Measurement and Procedures

An 8-item survey was developed based on a brief review of the literature and discussions among colleagues to determine relevant questions. The first item was a multiple choice question where the choices were ordered ranging from *No Implementation* to *Full Implementation* in my state. The last survey question contained 9 statements reflecting challenges to RTI implementation. Each was evaluated on a 4-level Likert scale ranging from *Little/No Challenge* to *Significant Challenge*. Separating these two extremes were *Some Challenge* and *Moderate Challenge* values. If a respondent indicated that No RTI activities were going on in the state, the

Methods (Continued)

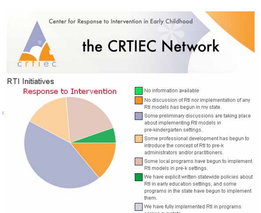
Measurement and Procedures

respondent was directed to the last question regarding challenges, skipping the intervening items because these details tapped only aspects of implementation when reported happening in the state. A driving concept behind the survey was collection of information that might inform research, practice, and policy; by determining aspects of need that research and development could be profitably focused. The survey was developed and delivered to respondents using the Survey Monkey website (online at www.surveymonkey.com) and related tools. After developing, revising, and testing the survey, respondents were sent an introductory email explaining the purpose and value of this inquiry, as well as the human subjects protection procedures used to maintain confidentiality of the information.

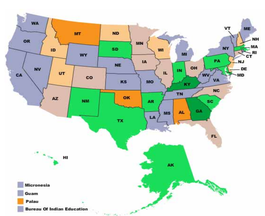
The actual survey was accessed by respondents through a link in the email that delivered the survey form ready for completing. Following this first email, 3 subsequent email reminders were sent to those not responding at approximately 2 week intervals. In all, data was received representing 44 entities (40 states and Washington, DC, 3 territories [i.e., Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau], and other entities, i.e., the Bureau of Indian Affairs). Of these 44, 11 received input from both the state 619 coordinator and Pre-K leader. A MS-EXCEL dataset containing the set respondents records including written comments was downloaded from the website and analyzed using basic descriptive statistics and graphical displays.

Results

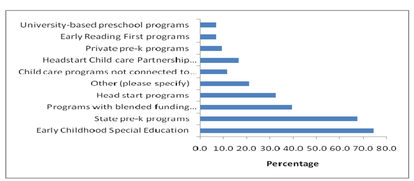
What was the Reported Status of National Early Childhood RTI Implementation?



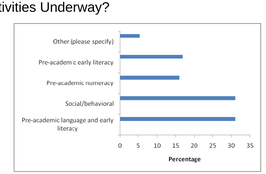
What was the State-by-State Status of Early Childhood RTI Implementation?



If being implemented, In What Early Child Program Types are Activities Underway?

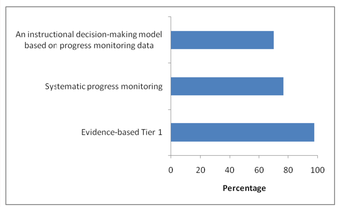


If Implemented, In What Curriculum Areas/Topics are Activities Underway?

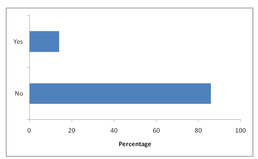


Results (Continued)

If Implemented, What RTI Components are Being Used?



If Implemented, are there Promising, Interesting, and Innovative RTI Models Available that can be Shared?



What Challenges Were Reported?

Challenges Implementing RtI Models?

Challenge	Little/no Challenge	Some Challenge	Moderate Challenge	Significant Challenge	Ave Rating	Count
Insufficient trained personnel who could implement the components of RtI	0.0% (0)	14.3% (7)	24.5% (12)	**61.2% (30)**	3.47	49
Lack of resources for developing an infrastructure to implement a RtI model	2.0% (1)	24.5% (12)	20.4% (10)	**53.1% (26)**	3.24	49
Lack of knowledge about how to put together an RtI model in early childhood	0.0% (0)	24.5% (12)	34.7% (17)	**40.8% (20)**	3.16	49
Lack of intervention strategies for Tier 2 or Tier 3	6.1% (3)	24.5% (12)	30.6% (15)	**38.8% (19)**	3.02	49
Lack of progress monitoring measures	6.1% (3)	26.5% (13)	30.6% (15)	**36.7% (18)**	2.98	49
Lack of evidence-based Tier 1 programs	10.2% (5)	**38.8% (19)**	26.5% (13)	24.5% (12)	2.65	49
Lack of administrative support and leadership	6.1% (3)	36.7% (18)	**42.9% (21)**	14.3% (7)	2.65	49
Difficulty in establishing collaborative relationships between early education and special education systems	16.3% (8)	**30.6% (15)**	28.6% (14)	24.5% (12)	2.61	49
Other	**53.1% (26)**	10.2% (5)	10.2% (5)	26.5% (13)	2.10	49

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to assess the implementation status of RTI in Early Childhood nationally. Results indicated that states are beginning to have discussions about RTI and are introducing RTI concepts in professional development. Programs most likely to be implementing RTI are early childhood special education and state-funded pre-k programs targeting language/early literacy and social/behavioral outcomes. The greatest challenges reported were untrained staff, limited resources, lack of knowledge, and lack of Tier 2 and 3 interventions. Most states report implementing evidence-based Tier 1. The vast majority of states report not yet having RTI models that can be shared with others. Clearly, early childhood RTI is of interest by only just beginning to be considered.

References

Berkeley, S., Bender, W. N., Peaster, L. G., & Saunders, L. (2009). Implementation of response to intervention: A snapshot of progress. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 42*(1), 85-95.

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