

# Context makes a difference: Variations in RTI across different early education settings

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# RTI in Pre-Kindergarten

- \* RTI is a new concept in many Pre-K programs
- \* Definitions of what constitutes RTI or multi-tiered intervention vary in the literature, including those related to Pre-K
- \* Emerging literacy skills and a well developed vocabulary are goals for many Pre-K programs, especially those serving children “at risk”
- \* Language and emergent literacy are to date the most common focus of RTI in Pre-K

# Early Reading First (ERF)

- \* Between 2004 and 2010, USDE funded applications to implement and demonstrate emergent literacy teaching in Pre-K
- \* The terms “tiered,” “multi –tiered,” and “RTI” began appearing in Abstracts of funded projects in 2004 (1 project) and increased over the years (7 projects in 2009)
- \* Total of 23 projects (19 unduplicated lead agencies & project directors) using these terms were identified from the abstracts
- \* Key staff or coordinators from 18 projects (14 unduplicated) agreed to be interviewed (78% of total possible) during Spring, 2011
- \* Projects represented ranged from completed projects to 1<sup>st</sup> year

# ERF Requirements as Context

- \* Curriculum
  - \* “Research-based” emergent literacy curriculum; all areas of emergent literacy addressed
- \* Assessment (screening, monitoring; benchmarks set)
  - \* PPVT (minimum of twice/year)
  - \* Upper-case alphabet (minimum of twice/year)
- \* Literacy-rich Environment
  - \* ELLCO (minimum of once/year)
- \* Professional development – substantial, often including weekly or more frequent coaching

# Characteristics of Programs

- \* Majority of children were high-needs
- \* Settings were in rural to urban settings, with from 4 – 12 classrooms
- \* Programs included Head Start, child care, pre-school public, pre-K charter, and university-based programs
- \* Lead agencies were primarily districts and universities
- \* Teaching staff ranged from high-school graduates to MA with certification

# Interview Protocol

- \* Semi structured, recorded, transcribed telephone interview, approximately one hour in length
  - \* Description of program (demographics, settings)
  - \* Description of each of Tiers 1, 2 and 3 (e.g., curriculum, assessments)
  - \* For Tiers 2 and 3 – procedures & criteria for selection of children for RTI and movement between tiers
  - \* Factors influencing sustainability
  - \* Recommendations for moving forward with RTI

# Methods: Content Analysis

- \* All recorded conversations transcribed
- \* The authors
  - \* Read and reread each transcript
  - \* For each Tier:
    - \* transferred descriptions of key elements of interventions to tables
    - \* identified issues and challenges
  - \* Summarized more general comments related to sustainability and recommendations
  - \* Met to discuss coding of each interview addressing any differences through consensus

# Content Analysis (continued)

- \* Categories related to implementation within Tiers included:
  - \* Curriculum
  - \* Teaching formats (timing, grouping, staffing patterns)
  - \* Assessments/Monitoring (what, when)
  - \* Decision process for movement between tiers (criteria)
  - \* Fidelity to curriculum protocol (how, who)
- \* Narrative statements summarized into:
  - \* Types of issues & challenges
  - \* Types of factors influencing likely sustainability
  - \* Recommendations for achieving RTI



# Results

## How Participants Defined a Tiered Model

- \* Small group instruction
- \* Differentiated instruction
  - \* Variation (“transition model” – children grouped into levels, based on assessment; instructional strategies vary by level)
- \* Fit with definitions of RTI in literature
  - \* Specific children selected based on assessment
  - \* Instruction varies in intensity, content, or both

# Tier 1: Curriculum

- \* Broad early childhood curriculum that included emergent literacy
- \* Early childhood emergent literacy curriculum targeting multiple areas of language and literacy
- \* Most also extended on the chosen curriculum with additional, project-developed materials
- \* Some supplemented with additional, more targeted literacy curricula

# Tier 1: Assessments

- \* Approach
  - \* Required by ERF (above)
  - \* Typical additions
    - \* Other PALS sub-tests
    - \* IGDIs
  - \* Less common additions – GRTR, TOPEL, DIBELS, ALL, language sample, own assessment (e.g., related to state standards)
- \* Who implemented
  - \* Required assessments - external team, project staff or university students; no teachers
  - \* Added assessments – same, with a few using teachers

# Tier 1: Ongoing monitoring

- \* Approaches used
  - \* No assessments (status or monitoring) other than required ones, twice per year
  - \* Repeat of fall assessments mid-year (typically PALS and/or IGDIs)
  - \* Curriculum-based measures (project developed, from curriculum; published [e.g., IGDIs])
    - \* End of curriculum unit (range 3-12 weeks)
    - \* Set schedule (typically monthly, bi-monthly)
    - \* More frequent (e.g., weekly) for small number of “marker” children
- \* Who implemented
  - \* Usually same as benchmark assessments but teachers involved in monitoring in a few projects

# Tier 2: Selecting Children for RTI

- \* Approaches Used
  - \* Status measures (fall or winter status measures)
  - \* Progress monitoring
    - \* Compare fall and winter status measures
    - \* CBMs, IGDIs
  - \* Professional judgment
  - \* Combination
- \* Who decides
  - \* Project staff, with input from program administrators and teachers

# Examples of Selection Criteria

- \* Status
  - \* Lowest scoring children up to XX slots available in classroom
  - \* Lowest XX% of children (e.g., 20-25%)
  - \* Cut score (s) on one or combination of assessments
- \* Progress
  - \* Progress on CBMs within specified time (e.g., 10 lessons, 2 months)
- \* Combination
  - \* Risk or marginal status on status measures plus lack of progress on CBMs

# Tier2: Models of RTI

Including only projects that met our definition for RTI (children selected based on assessment; children receive higher dosage and/or more targeted instruction)

## Models

- \* Repeat (additional dosage) of Tier 1 activities
- \* Separate curriculum but matched with themes and/or vocabulary from Tier 1
- \* No correlation to Tier 1 – separate curriculum

## Who

- \* All children in get same content
- \* Different children get different content

## What

- \* One or two target areas
- \* Inclusive coverage of several or most areas

# Tier 2: Logistics

- \* Frequency
  - \* 2-3 days per week
  - \* 10-30 minutes per session
- \* Format
  - \* small group, based on selection criteria (most typical)
  - \* small group, grouped together if same needs, otherwise 1-1
  - \* 1-1
- \* Who implements
  - \* Tutors (e.g., retired teachers or university students)
  - \* Project staff (e.g., coaches)
  - \* Teachers (usually with extra teacher or assistant teacher)



# Tier 2: Structure of lessons

- \* Activity-based
  - \* designed by teachers to address target skills
  - \* designed by project staff to address target skills
- \* Scripted lessons
  - \* designed by project staff to address target skills (e.g., code skills, target vocabulary)
  - \* in supplemental, published curriculum (e.g., code skills)

# Tier 2: Ongoing monitoring

- \* Approach

- \* Same tools as Tier 1 but more frequently (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly, monthly)
  - \* Implemented by same individuals as Tier 1 monitoring or those delivering Tier 2
- \* Different tools from Tier 1 (e.g., CBMs on Tier 2 target skills, probes on vocabulary) (as well as more frequently)
  - \* Usually implemented by those delivering Tier 2

## *Example A: Scripted, Focus on Code Skills*

- \* Focus: Phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge
- \* Organization: Scripted lessons from separate, published curriculum; direct instruction
- \* Format: Small groups, 3 days per week; re-teach same content, 2 children, during center time
- \* Who implements: teachers

## *Example B: Scripted, All Areas of Emergent Literacy*

- \* Focus: Code skills and meaning skills
- \* Organization: Scripted lessons – direct instruction of code skills; meaning and print skills embedded into project-developed scripted books
- \* Format: 2 days per week, small group (3-4); 20-30 minutes per lesson; all children get same intervention, individualized within lesson
- \* Who implements: Tutors; eventually by teachers if achieve high quality Tier 1

# Example C: Semi-scripted, differentiated content within Tier 2

- \* **Focus (with 2 sets of children receiving different content):**
  - \* Phonological awareness
  - \* Letters, words and reading for meaning
- \* **Format:**
  - \* 2 different RTI groups, each selected based on district-developed assessment in above areas
  - \* 30 minutes, 5 days per week
  - \* Planned by coaches, based on specific pattern
- \* **Organization:** Small group time, pulled in sets of 2 children; might combine children from across classrooms
- \* **Who:** Coaches

# Tier 3: Minimal usage

- \* Definitions of Tier 3 included:
  - \* Referral for special education services (most)
  - \* Additional, more intensive and targeted instruction
- \* Few projects had yet undertaken Tier 3 as instruction beyond Tier 2

# Characteristics of Tier 3 where included

- \* Additional time beyond Tier 2 (e.g., 2-3 times per week for 10-15 minutes)
- \* Additional time might be embedded within daily activities using individualized instructional plans
- \* Implemented by college students, project staff (e.g., coaches), speech/language pathologists

# Criteria for moving between Tiers

- \* Maintain in Tier 2
  - \* Still meet criteria and/or making little progress
  - \* No exit criteria set
- \* Move from Tier 2 to Tier 1
  - \* No longer meets criteria for Tier 2
  - \* Scoring same as children in Tier 1, or other children have lower scores
- \* Move from Tier 2 to Tier 3
  - \* Lack of progress in Tier 2 (e.g., benchmark; specific # of data points)
  - \* Professional judgment indicates no response to Tier 2 (may be combined with rating)



# Challenges to Accomplishing RTI

- \* Children
  - \* Turnover
  - \* Percentage of children with low scores
- \* Teaching staff
  - \* Turnover
  - \* Availability
  - \* Ability
  - \* Attitudes
- \* Other staff
  - \* Availability
  - \* Turnover
  - \* Ability
  - \* Attitudes
- \* Overall quality of Tier 1

# Challenges (continued): “Systems”

- \* Local System/Program
  - \* Availability of:
    - \* Extra people to support Tier 2
    - \* Expertise in giving and interpreting assessments
    - \* Problem solving team
    - \* Knowledgeable supervisory staff
  - \* Knowledge of RTI
    - \* What it is, how it works, what it takes
    - \* Supervisory roles in relation to RTI
- \* State System
  - \* Policies (e.g., time, testing, direct instruction)

# Contributors to Sustainability

- \* Began project with higher quality classrooms (e.g., public schools, certified teachers)
- \* “Buy-in” by teachers and other staff re expectations and accountability
- \* Planned for sustainability within the project
  - \* Simplified assessments and curriculum
  - \* Established fidelity to the curriculum
  - \* Provided needed resources that will remain at the sites
  - \* Developed continuing Professional Development to use as staff turn over “buy in” (or training modules)

# Bottom Lines for Achieving RTI

- \* High quality Tier 1
  - \* Teachers have skills in:
    - \* Planning & teaching small groups
    - \* Using data to inform instruction
    - \* Using different instructional strategies for specific purposes
    - \* Achieving fidelity to Tier 1 curriculum
- \* Scheduling & staffing small groups
- \* Tier 2 curriculum used with fidelity
- \* Administration and system support its use (knowledge, decision-making structure, policies)
- \* Ongoing professional development for teachers

# Recommendations from Participants

- \* Teachers must have the necessary skills
- \* Systemic support must be in place to assist with resources, PD, coaching, assessments, collaborative decision-making
- \* Pre-k must be viewed as important and a true precursor to kindergarten and later achievement
- \* Proven Tier 2 curricula need to be developed and made available to the field
  - \* scripted lessons provide greater fidelity
  - \* Tier 2 be linked to Tier 1 so that children experience consistency in their learning