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Regional Educational Laboratory
At SERVE Center UNC, Greensboro

State policies and procedures and selected local implementation practices in Response to Intervention in the six Southeast Region states

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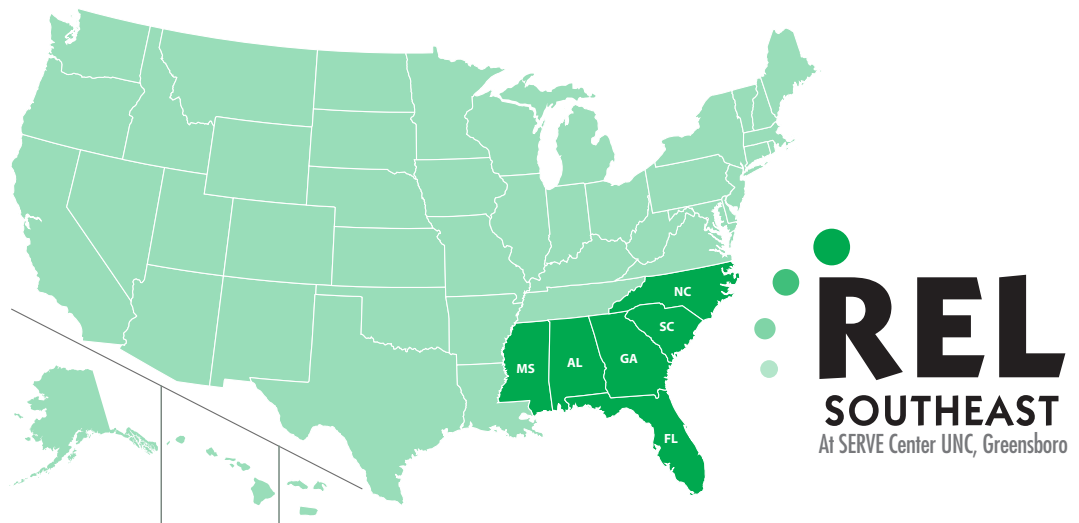**September 2008**

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Issues & Answers is an ongoing series of reports from short-term Fast Response Projects conducted by the regional educational laboratories on current education issues of importance at local, state, and regional levels. Fast Response Project topics change to reflect new issues, as identified through lab outreach and requests for assistance from policymakers and educators at state and local levels and from communities, businesses, parents, families, and youth. All Issues & Answers reports meet Institute of Education Sciences standards for scientifically valid research.

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This report is available on the regional educational laboratory web site at http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs.

Summary

State policies and procedures and selected local implementation practices in Response to Intervention in the six Southeast Region states

This report describes how six state education agencies and three local education agencies in the Southeast Region are adopting and implementing Response to Intervention—an education approach designed to provide effective, evidence-based interventions for struggling learners.

Response to Intervention has garnered recent interest from policymakers, researchers, and educators. Studies of its effectiveness have found it promising (Compton et al. 2006; McMaster et al. 2005; Speece and Case 2001; Torgesen et al. 1999). And state education agencies are increasingly interested in the approach.

Yet few published studies describe the experiences of states as they plan and implement Response to Intervention. This report helps address that need. It supplies basic information about state planning and implementation of the approach in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

Although the report focuses chiefly on states, it also illustrates implementation of Response to Intervention with examples from three local education agencies.

Two broad research questions guided the study. Each appears below, followed by a brief summary of the findings.

1. **What do the six states report about their interest in Response to Intervention, about state planning and development for it, and about policy development for it (and for related areas)?**

The report identifies four main reasons why Southeast Region states adopted Response to Intervention:

- To address disproportionality—the overidentification or underidentification of students from minority subgroups for special education.
- To promote overall student achievement.
- To better integrate general and special education.
- To inform, or possibly determine, special education eligibility for students with learning disabilities.

All six Southeast Region states were adopting Response to Intervention at the state level: from planning in Alabama and South Carolina, to pilot initiatives in Florida and North Carolina, to statewide rollouts in Georgia and

Mississippi. Leadership for such efforts has been split, residing sometimes in special education departments and sometimes in general education departments. Still, state initiatives—except in North Carolina—have been presented as initiatives based in general education.

Of the six Southeast Region states, only Mississippi has adopted a formal state Response to Intervention policy. Florida and North Carolina, however, have pilot initiatives that will inform future policy development for both Response to Intervention and special education identification procedures.

Except Georgia, the Southeast Region states have drawn chiefly on funds from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 to support their Response to Intervention initiatives and have relied on a variety of national and regional technical assistance resources and experts. New organizational and planning structures—with new roles and responsibilities—have accompanied Response to Intervention at state education agencies.

2. **How are the six states considering or implementing Response to Intervention?**

The researchers examined nine aspects of each state's Response to Intervention approach, beginning with the state's Response to Intervention model.

Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina, which have begun state implementation, were using a problem-solving model, which assesses student strengths and weaknesses, identifies evidence-based instructional interventions, and evaluates the effectiveness of interventions being implemented. It differs

from the standard protocol model, which uses schoolwide or classwide screening and relies on predetermined instructional techniques and resources with proven effectiveness. Some states have articulated their models and procedures more fully than the others.

The other aspects of Response to Intervention approaches in each state examined for this report were:

- Tier design.
- Student performance monitoring.
- Targeted subject areas and school levels.
- Professional development.
- Technical assistance provided.
- Facilitating factors.
- Challenges.
- Technical assistance needs.

In the four states now implementing the approach, Response to Intervention models described at least a tier structure, with some other components and practices. But many decisions about implementation reside with districts and schools. For example, states and schools select interventions, set criteria for moving between tiers, and decide the means and frequency of student performance monitoring.

The schools and districts in this report's case studies have all adapted their state Response to Intervention structures and materials to their local settings. As with state implementation, local implementation has forged new planning structures and working relationships among school and district staff.

Southeast Region states have different strategies for scaling up Response to Intervention. Some are beginning with an exclusive focus on

the elementary level; others are rolling out the approach to all grade levels. All six states have Response to Intervention initiatives that focus on reading, yet it is almost as common for the state initiatives to focus on mathematics and behavior.

States encounter both facilitating factors and challenges as they plan and implement Response to Intervention. Collaboration among state education departments and external partners is an important consideration for state planning. To succeed, collaboration requires a common language and a shared understanding of the initiative. Related challenges arise for planners working across special and general education: such challenges include blending funding, developing staff training, and staging rollouts so as not to overwhelm schools with new and complex practices.

State education agency lead staff identified many other challenges that come with Response to Intervention initiatives. More work is needed to share and empirically compare states' experiences with such concerns as funding options, state planning practices,

fidelity in implementation, identification of effective mathematics and behavior interventions, and secondary school implementation.

The researchers used a descriptive study design with two data collection strategies:

- A scan of state policies and program descriptions, using a structured search protocol for Response to Intervention materials.

- Key informant interviews with state and local education agency lead staff, using semistructured protocols.

The data sources for this report comprised transcripts of these key informant interviews and program documents from each state (including policies, manuals, training and informational materials, and technical assistance documents). A literature review also informed the research revealing planning concerns and other features of Response to Intervention models.

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