



The status of state-level response to intervention policies and procedures in the West Region states and five other states



Institute of Education Sciences
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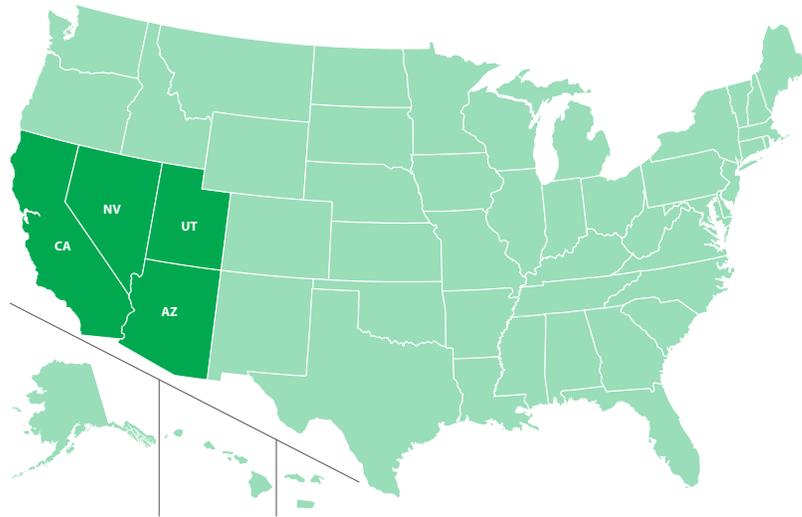
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Response to intervention (RTI) can be both a system for providing early interventions to struggling students and a special education diagnostic tool for evaluating and identifying students with specific learning disabilities. Contributing to the very limited literature on state-level approaches, this report describes how nine states define and support RTI at the state level.

RTI programs are intended to provide evidence-based interventions that are aligned with individual student needs by identifying students requiring support early, monitoring their progress frequently, and providing more intensive interventions for students showing the least progress (National Association of State Directors of Special Education 2005).

Interest in RTI has been growing since the 2004 reauthorization of the federal special education law—the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004—explicitly recognized RTI as a diagnostic tool for evaluating and identifying students with specific learning disabilities. Today, all states are attempting to implement some form of RTI policy at the state level (Westat and Abt 2007).

Despite the growing attention, little has been published on the state-level approach to RTI. This report expands the limited research base by providing descriptive information on state-level RTI policies and procedures in nine states: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Illinois, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Washington. While the focus is on West Region states (Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah), RTI practices in five states outside the region (Arkansas, Illinois, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Washington) provide additional insights into state-level approaches to RTI.

The study addresses the following research questions:

- How is RTI defined in the nine study states, and how are RTI efforts supported at the state level?
- What considerations do state respondents report about developing state RTI policies and procedures, and how have their states addressed them?

To address these questions, information was reviewed from state technical assistance documents and materials relating to RTI, and phone interviews were conducted with a key

administrator in each state from the office overseeing RTI.

Several key findings emerged from the analysis of this information:

- Respondents from all nine states described RTI in terms that extended its application beyond special education. RTI was viewed as an overarching conceptual framework guiding the state's overall school improvement process for all students.
- While two of the nine states mandated the use of RTI in identifying students with specific learning disabilities for special education services, the other seven states were more permissive in orientation.
- Respondents from all nine states cited the importance of establishing buy-in and ownership of RTI by general education.
- Respondents from seven states indicated that the general education division had either taken charge of RTI at the state level or held joint responsibility with the special education division.
- Respondents from all nine states indicated that their state provided support for RTI implementation at the local level, with support varying across states from providing fiscal resources or technical assistance to establishing state support networks, training, and collaborative activities with institutions of higher education.
- While respondents from all nine states mentioned the importance of evaluating RTI, only three states have conducted implementation and outcome studies of pilot programs, and two others reported specific plans for future evaluation.
- State documents and respondents from six states cited the importance of implementing RTI with fidelity at the local level.
- Respondents from six states expressed concern about their state's personnel capacity and leadership to fully implement and support RTI at the state level.
- Respondents from four states also remarked on the limited research on evidence-based interventions associated with RTI in specific circumstances, such as implementation at the high school level.
- Respondents from four states mentioned concerns about the supplemental fiscal resources needed to carry out RTI.
- Respondents from four states remarked on the importance of understanding and incorporating the needs of demographically and geographically diverse student populations when supporting districts in implementing RTI.
- Respondents from four states discussed the importance of establishing state-level policies or guidance on RTI at an appropriate pace; however, respondents from two states felt that the state should have rolled out information faster, while respondents from two other states expressed concern about doing it too quickly.

Despite a generally broad vision of RTI, most respondents in this study indicated that full

RTI implementation was occurring in only a few schools and districts in their state. At the time of the study, California was still developing its model, and Utah's official RTI framework across all subjects was still in development, with only its tiered reading model having been adopted by the state board of education. Illinois and New Mexico had mandates in place for statewide implementation of their RTI frameworks over the next few years, but

respondents noted that much work remained to achieve this. And while Arizona's rollout of RTI appeared to be highly structured, the state respondent explained that only one district had received approval to use RTI as an alternative to the traditional model (IQ discrepancy) for identifying students with specific learning disabilities.

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