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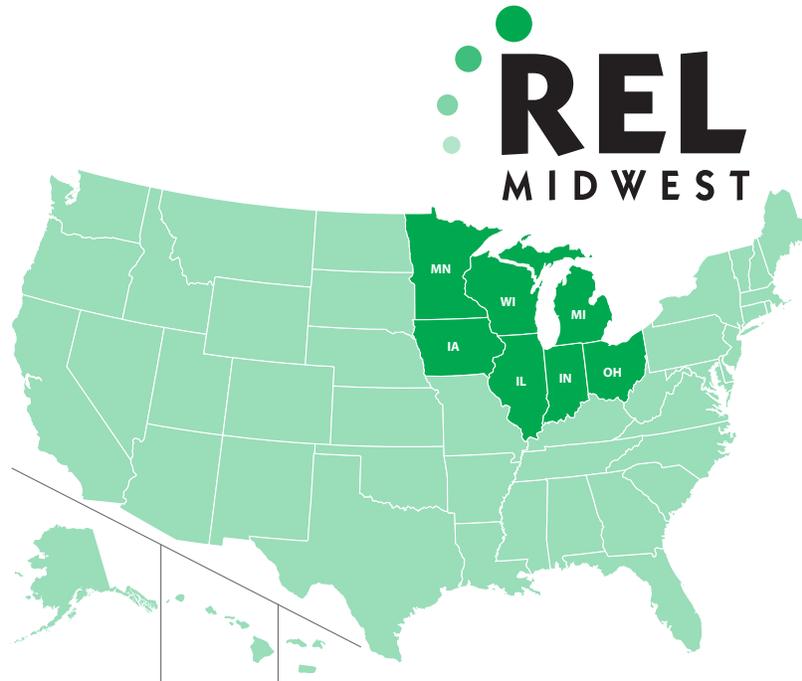
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State policies and procedures on response to intervention in the Midwest Region

Based on a review of state documents and interviews with state and local officials in six Midwest Region states, this qualitative study describes state education agency policy development and planning for response to intervention approaches to instruction. It also looks at the support provided to districts and schools implementing response to intervention.

Response to intervention is the practice of providing high-quality core instruction based on students' needs, using data and progress monitoring to provide increasingly intensive educational interventions in a timely manner for students who struggle in core instruction (National Association of State Directors of Special Education 2005; National High School Center, National Center on Response to Intervention, and Center on Instruction 2010). It has garnered much interest among policymakers, researchers, and educators, both as a promising approach to improving student academic achievement and as an alternative means of identifying students for special education services. Since the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which requires states to permit the use of response to intervention in evaluating student eligibility for special education, states have become increasingly interested in supporting,

and in some cases mandating, this approach. However, few studies have been conducted on state-level response to intervention policy, planning, or support.

This report provides detailed information for state, district, and school education leaders and policymakers on the status of response to intervention in six Midwest Region states: Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin (Indiana declined to participate because its guidance on response to intervention was in development at the time of data collection, September 2009–March 2010).

Using a voluntary sample of six Midwest Region states, the study examines two research questions:

- What do the six states report about their interest in and planning and policy development for response to intervention?
- How and to what extent are the six states supporting response to intervention?

The following are the key findings:

- Interest in response to intervention was driven initially by the special education departments in each state, but state-level discussions of response to intervention are

now a collaborative effort between general and special education departments. Interviews with state and local officials indicate that response to intervention is viewed as a vehicle for improving education for all students and informing decisions about eligibility for special education.

- Three states (Illinois, Michigan, and Minnesota) used pilot projects to plan for response to intervention.
- Planning by state education agencies often involved partnerships with response to intervention content experts and organizations such as the National Center on Response to Intervention and the State Implementation and Scaling-up Evidence-based Practices Center.
- One state (Illinois) requires the use of response to intervention in general education with all students. Another state (Iowa) requires its use to determine eligibility for special education; Illinois planned to do so in the 2010/11 school year.
- All state respondents emphasized the importance of allowing districts the flexibility to tailor implementation of response to intervention to their needs.
- Response to intervention is connected to other state initiatives in all six states. Officials in four states (Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, and Minnesota) reported that response to intervention is related to Reading First. All six states offer general guidance to districts and schools on what response to intervention typically entails. Four states (Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin) have formulated initiatives guiding district implementation.
- Of the four states with response to intervention initiatives, Illinois, Iowa, and Michigan promote a three-tiered model (in which tier 1 provides evidence-based instruction for all students, tier 2 provides specialized group instruction for students who fail to make progress in tier 1, and tier 3 provides specialized intensive individualized instruction). Wisconsin's model includes two tiers. All four models are designed for use in grades K–12 for behavior and reading. The models in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin can also be used with other subjects. Wisconsin's model is used for students who exceed as well as students who fail to meet benchmarks.
- In all four states with response to intervention initiatives, implementation decisions—such as selecting interventions and designating staff roles—are left largely to districts and schools.
- To support implementation of response to intervention, all six states provide professional development to districts, often with the assistance of intermediate regional education agencies.
- The most common sources of funding for response to intervention initiatives are Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part B funds (Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin); early intervention funds (Iowa, Michigan, and Minnesota); and state funds (Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio).

- All states have collected or are collecting data on the extent to which response to intervention is being implemented. One state (Michigan) has collected outcome data.
- Officials in three states (Illinois, Iowa, and Minnesota) mentioned that measuring fidelity of implementation is a challenge, especially because of the implementation flexibility given to districts.

While two states require the use of response to intervention (Illinois, in general education with all students, and Iowa for special education eligibility), all six states in the study support district implementation of response to intervention by providing general guidance on what it entails. State officials generally acknowledged the importance of maintaining district flexibility and local control. State and district officials indicated that state response to intervention models serve as a resource for districts and schools rather than a prescribed approach. States also support districts with

professional development, technical assistance, and funding.

This study adds to the limited research on state-level response to intervention policy and practice. It provides a better understanding of policy development and implementation supports in the Midwest Region states and offers examples of response to intervention practices for states nationwide.

The findings are limited by the small number of interviews conducted—one per state and one per local district—and cannot be generalized beyond the study period, especially as state-level policies and supports are continually evolving and may have been updated since the completion of data collection. The report is nevertheless useful, because it maps the six states' orientation to response to intervention and the steps each has taken to establish or support the approach in practice.

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