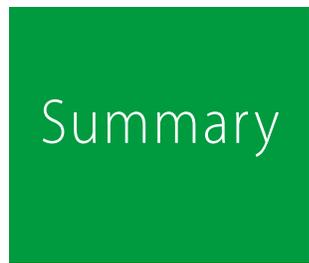




Features of state response to intervention initiatives in Northeast and Islands Region states





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Summary

November 2009

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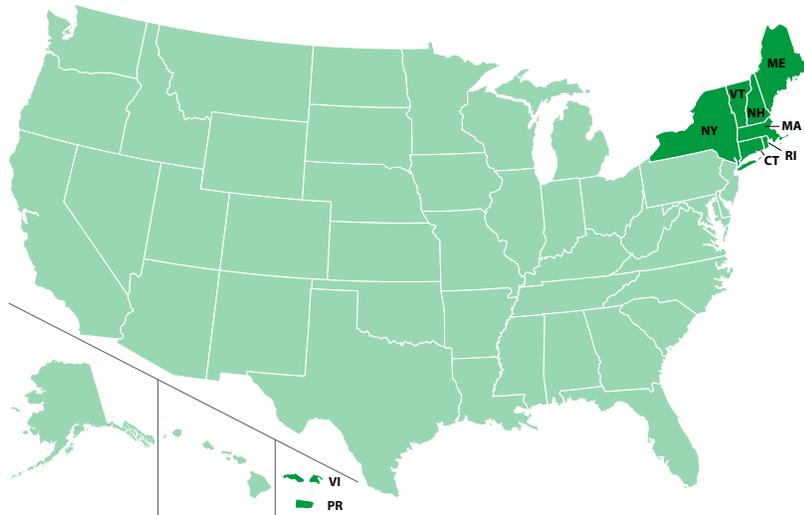
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Features of state response to intervention initiatives in Northeast and Islands Region states

This review of documents on response to intervention (RTI) available on state education agency web sites in the nine Northeast and Islands Region jurisdictions concludes that RTI is supported in seven jurisdictions as an overall school instructional improvement approach or an approach to determining special education eligibility. It also finds that RTI documents in the seven jurisdictions address the core features of RTI as defined by the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities.

Response to intervention (RTI) is an approach to instruction, assessment, and intervention that enables early identification of students who are experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties (Mellard and Johnson 2008). The jurisdictions served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands expressed interest in a study of whether and how state education agencies are addressing RTI in state-level policy and guidance to local school districts. This report describes an analysis of documents related to RTI that are publicly available on state education agency web sites in the nine Northeast and Islands Region jurisdictions: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Vermont, and the Virgin Islands.

RTI was introduced into federal policy through the reauthorization of the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, P. L. 108-446) as a means of early identification and determination of special education eligibility under the category of specific learning disabilities (Fuchs et al. 2003). However, RTI is increasingly promoted as an overall approach to school improvement through general education (Batsche et al. 2005; Cummings et al. 2008). In this context, RTI is a comprehensive support system aimed at maximizing achievement of all students by closely monitoring student response to instruction and adjusting instructional approaches based on student progress data (Cummings et al. 2008; Fuchs and Fuchs 2006; Fuchs and Young 2006).

An RTI framework typically contains eight core features outlined by the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities: high quality classroom instruction, research-based instruction, assessment of classroom performance, universal screening, continuous progress monitoring, research-based interventions, progress monitoring during interventions, and fidelity measures (Mellard 2004).

State education agencies across the country are adopting RTI policies, including revising their special education regulations to comply with IDEA 2004 (Ahearn 2008). While IDEA 2004

is clear that states must permit the use of RTI in determining special education eligibility, the statute and its regulations are silent on RTI implementation (Fuchs and Fuchs 2005; Zirkel and Krohn 2008). Thus, state and local education agencies considering RTI must make several key policy and implementation decisions.

This report addresses a single research question:

What are the features of state response to intervention initiatives as evidenced by publicly available information from state education agencies?

This knowledge may inform how each jurisdiction proceeds in the development of its policies, procedures, and practices.

The primary data collection strategy in this descriptive study was a systematic review of publicly available documents addressing RTI on state education agency web sites. Data were collected between July and September 2008. Documents were first classified with respect to document type (legislation, regulation, nonregulatory guidance, request for proposals or applications to become a pilot site, tool or form, technical assistance, meeting minutes, and other). Documents were then coded according to evidence of the core RTI features (Mellard 2004).

There is not one particular approach to or definition of RTI; the literature on RTI covers several core features that constitute an RTI framework (see, for example, Fuchs and Fuchs 2005; Newman-Gonchar, Clarke, and Gersten 2009; Mellard 2004; Mellard and Johnson 2008; National Association of State Directors

of Special Education 2006). The results of the web search and analysis of documents were captured in narrative descriptions of each jurisdiction's approach to RTI. Documents were also categorized by theme: use for determining eligibility for special education under a specific learning disability, use of a three-tiered model, requirement for a readiness self-assessment or plan, and mention of implementation of pilot sites.

The review finds that seven of nine jurisdictions—Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont—have developed state documents on RTI that address core features of RTI identified in the literature (Mellard 2004). Six of these jurisdictions had documents addressing all eight core features (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, had and Vermont). And one state (Rhode Island¹) had documents demonstrating evidence of all but one core feature (universal screening). These seven jurisdictions have documents that indicate that RTI may be used to determine eligibility for special education. As of July 2009 Connecticut requires use of RTI to determine eligibility for special education, and New York will do so by 2012. All seven also require or recommend a three-tiered model of intervention, five require or recommend use of a readiness self-assessment or plan (Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont), and four have appropriated funds for RTI pilot or demonstration sites (New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont).

There was no evidence of state education agency documents on RTI for Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands, but this is not evidence that these two jurisdictions do not allow RTI.

Based on the review of state documents, the report concludes that RTI is supported in seven of nine jurisdictions as an overall school instructional improvement approach in general education or an approach to determining special education eligibility. RTI documents in the seven jurisdictions address the core features of RTI as defined by the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities.

This study, conducted between July and September 2008, was limited to a scan of the publicly available RTI-related documents on state education agency web sites. Thus, the review captures only documents that were publicly available at that time and uncovered through a keyword search. It does not include documents developed by state education agencies that were not publicly available on their web sites or documents created by other agencies.

The study was not designed to explore the more nuanced and context-specific

implementation considerations and constraints that jurisdictions may face, nor was it intended to evaluate local district- or school-level implementation status or the effectiveness of RTI policies. The report examines only state-level evidence and distinguishes between the enactment of state regulations or guidance and local practice. Further study through interviews with key state and local policymakers and practitioners would provide a more comprehensive description of RTI implementation in the Northeast and Islands Region jurisdictions.

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Note

1. Rhode Island's self-assessment tool mentions the use of screening and benchmark assessments, but it does not specifically describe universal screening for both academic and behavioral indicators.