



Evaluating a Student's 'Non-Responder' Status: An RTI Checklist

When a school attempts to determine whether a particular general-education student has responded adequately to an academic RTI plan, it must conduct a kind of 'intervention audit'—reviewing documentation of the full range of interventions attempted.

The intervention-audit process is complex. After all, before a school can decide whether a struggling student has truly failed to respond to intervention, it must first have confidence that in fact each link in the chain of RTI general-education support was in place for the student and was implemented with quality.

Presented below are the most crucial links in the RTI chain. This listing summarizes important RTI elements to support intervention, assessment, and data analysis. A school must ensure that all of these elements are in place in the general-education setting before that school can have decide with confidence whether a particular student is a 'non-responder' to intervention. Schools can use this RTI 'non-responder' checklist both to evaluate whether general-education has yet done all that it can to support a struggling student and whether that student should be considered for possible special education services.

Interventions: Evidence-Based & Implemented With Integrity		
<i>Tier 1: Classroom Interventions.</i> The classroom teacher is the 'first responder' for students with academic delays. Classroom efforts to instruct and individually support the student should be documented.		
Adequately Documented?	RTI Element	If this element is incomplete, missing, or undocumented...
☐ YES ☐ NO	Tier 1: High-Quality Core Instruction. The student receives high-quality core instruction in the area of academic concern. 'High quality' is defined as at least 80% of students in the classroom or grade level performing at or above gradewide academic screening benchmarks through classroom instructional support alone (Christ, 2008).	Inadequate or incorrectly focused core instruction may be an explanation for the student's academic delays.
☐ YES ☐ NO	Tier 1: Classroom Intervention. The classroom teacher gives additional individualized academic support to the student beyond that provided in core instruction. • The teacher documents those strategies on a Tier 1 intervention plan. • Intervention ideas contained in the plan meet the district's criteria as 'evidence-based'. • Student academic baseline and goals are calculated, and progress-monitoring data are collected to measure the impact of the plan. • The classroom intervention is attempted for a period sufficiently long (e.g., 4-8 instructional weeks) to fully assess its effectiveness.	An absence of individualized classroom support or a poorly focused classroom intervention plan may contribute to the student's academic delays.
<i>Tiers 2 & 3: Supplemental Interventions.</i> Interventions at Tiers 2 & 3 supplement core instruction and specifically target the student's academic deficits.		
Adequately Documented?	RTI Element	If this element is incomplete, missing, or undocumented...
☐ YES ☐ NO	Tier 2 & 3 Interventions: Minimum Number & Length. The student's cumulative RTI information indicates that an adequate effort in the general-education setting has been made to provide supplemental interventions at Tiers 2 & 3. The term 'sufficient effort' includes the expectation that within the student's general education setting: • A minimum number of separate Tier 2/3 intervention trials (e.g., three) are attempted. • Each intervention trial lasts a minimum period of time (e.g., 6-8 instructional weeks).	A foundation assumption of RTI is that a general-education student with academic difficulties is typical and simply needs targeted instructional support to be successful. Therefore, strong evidence (i.e., several documented, 'good-faith' intervention attempts) is needed before the school can



		move beyond the assumption that the student is typical to consider whether there are possible 'within-child' factors such as a learning disability that best explain the student's academic difficulties.
☐ YES ☐ NO	Tier 2 & 3 Interventions: Essential Elements. Each Tier 2/3 intervention plan shows evidence that: • Instructional programs or practices used in the intervention meet the district's criteria of 'evidence-based.' • The intervention has been selected because it logically addressed the area(s) of academic deficit for the target student (e.g., an intervention to address reading fluency was chosen for a student whose primary deficit was in reading fluency). • If the intervention is group-based, all students enrolled in the Tier 2/3 intervention group have a shared intervention need that could reasonably be addressed through the group instruction provided. • The student-teacher ratio in the group-based intervention provides adequate student support. NOTE: For Tier 2, group sizes should be capped at 7 students. Tier 3 interventions may be delivered in smaller groups (e.g., 3 students or fewer) or individually. • The intervention provides contact time adequate to the student academic deficit. NOTE: Tier 2 interventions should take place a minimum of 3-5 times per week in sessions of 30 minutes or more; Tier 3 interventions should take place daily in sessions of 30 minutes or more (Burns & Gibbons, 2008).	Supplemental intervention programs are compromised if they are not based on research, are too large, or include students with very discrepant intervention needs. Schools cannot have confidence in the impact of such potentially compromised supplemental intervention programs.
☐ YES ☐ NO	Tier 1, 2, & 3 Interventions: Intervention Integrity. Data are collected to verify that the intervention is carried out with integrity (Gansle & Noell, 2007; Roach & Elliott, 2008). Relevant intervention-integrity data include information about: • Frequency and length of intervention sessions. • Ratings by the interventionist or an independent observer about whether all steps of the intervention are being conducted correctly.	Without intervention-integrity data, it is impossible to discern whether academic underperformance is due to the student's 'non-response' to intervention or due to an intervention that was poorly or inconsistently carried out.

Academic Screenings: General Outcome Measures and Skill-Based Measures

Peer Norms: The school selects efficient measures with good technical adequacy to be used to screen all students at a grade level in targeted academic areas.

Adequately Documented?	RTI Element	If this element is incomplete, missing, or undocumented...
☐ YES ☐ NO	Selection of Academic Screening Measures. The school has selected appropriate grade-level screening measures for the academic skill area(s) in which the target student struggles (Hosp, Hosp & Howell, 2007). The selected screening measure(s): • Have 'technical adequacy' as grade-level screeners—and have been researched and shown to predict future student success in the academic skill(s) targeted. • Are general enough to give useful information for at least a full school year of the developing academic skill (e.g., General Outcome Measure or Skill-Based Mastery	Academic screening measures provide a shared standard for assessing student academic risk. If appropriate gradewide academic screening measure(s) are not in place, the school cannot efficiently identify struggling students who need additional intervention support or calculate the relative



	Measure). • Include research norms, proprietary norms developed as part of a reputable commercial assessment product, or benchmarks to guide the school in evaluating the risk level for each student screened.	probability of academic success for each student.
☐ YES ☐ NO	Local Norms Collected via Gradewide Academic Screenings at Least 3 Times Per Year. All students at each grade level are administered the relevant academic screening measures at least three times per school year. The results are compiled to provide local norms of academic performance.	In the absence of regularly updated local screening norms, the school cannot easily judge whether a particular student's skills are substantially delayed from those of peers in the same educational setting.

Dual Discrepancy Cut-Offs: Academic Skill Level and Student Rate of Improvement

Establishment of Guidelines for Determining Student 'Non-Response' to Intervention as a Dual Discrepancy: The school has developed definitions for 'severely discrepant' academic performance and student growth.

Adequately Documented?	RTI Element	If this element is incomplete, missing, or undocumented...
☐ YES ☐ NO	Cut-point Established to Define 'Severely Discrepant' Academic Performance. Using local norms, research norms, proprietary norms developed as part of a reputable commercial assessment product, or benchmarks, the school sets a 'cut-point' below which a student's academic performance is defined as 'severely discrepant' from that of peers in the enrolled grade. For example, a school conducts a winter screening in Oral Reading Fluency for 3rd grade and finds based on local norms that 10 percent of students in that grade read 40 words correctly read per minute (wcpm) or less. The school therefore sets 40 wcpm as the winter screening cut-point for reading fluency at 3rd grade, defining any student whose performance falls below that level as 'severely discrepant' in the skill.	The RTI model uses a 'dual discrepancy' approach to identify a student as a 'non-responder' to academic intervention (Fuchs, 2003)--to include (1) a severe discrepancy in academic performance and (2) a discrepancy in rate of student growth during intervention. Demonstration that the student continues to lag severely behind peers in academic skills despite intensive intervention is a key requirement in certifying RTI 'non-responder' status.
☐ YES ☐ NO	Cut-Off Criterion Selected to Define Discrepant Slope. The school has selected a formula for determining when a student's rate of improvement (slope) is severely discrepant from that of peers. Here are two options for generating slope cut-off values: • Slope Cut-Off Option 1 (for use with external and local norm slopes): The student's slope is divided by the comparison peer slope (derived from external or local norms). If the quotient falls below 1.0, the student's rate of improvement is less than that of the comparison peer slope. A quotient greater than 1.0 indicates that the student's rate of improvement exceeds that of the comparison peer slope. The school can set a fixed cut-off value (e.g., 0.75 or below) as a threshold for defining a student slope as discrepant from the comparison peer slope. • Slope Cut-Off Option 2 (for use with local screening data only): To derive a slope cut-off value from local norms, the school uses data collected during its schoolwide academic screening. Because each student included in the screening	A clear formula is needed for determining whether a student slope reaches the threshold of 'discrepancy' to ensure consistency across all student cases.



	will have three screening data points on a given measure – e.g., in oral reading fluency-- by the end of the year, the school can use those successive data points to generate slopes for each student. Once slopes for each student have been calculated, the school can compute a mean and standard deviation for the entire collection of student slopes at a grade level. Any student found to have a slope that is at least one standard deviation below the mean slope would be considered to be 'discrepant' (Burns & Gibbons, 2008).	
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Data Collection		
<i>Intervention Outcome Data:</i> Student baseline level and goals are calculated for each intervention, and a sufficient number of data points are collected during progress-monitoring to judge accurately whether the intervention is successful.		
Adequately Documented?	RTI Element	If this element is incomplete, missing, or undocumented...
☐ YES ☐ NO	Use of Both 'Off-Level' and Enrolled Grade-Level Benchmarks & Progress-Monitoring Measures to Assess Student Skills and Growth. For students with substantial skill deficits (e.g., a 3-year delay in reading fluency), any Tier 2/3 intervention is likely to be off-level to match the student's actual skills. Here are data-collection guidelines for off-level interventions (Shapiro, 2008): • Benchmarks and progress-monitoring should generally match the intervention level. So if a 5th-grade student receives a supplemental reading fluency intervention using grade 2 texts, the school would use grade 2 reading fluency benchmarks and progress-monitoring measures to track student growth and to determine when the student has reached mastery at this off-level intervention point. • It is also recommended that the school occasionally (e.g., once per month) assess an off-level student using benchmarks and progress-monitoring measures from his or her enrolled grade level as a means to assess the student's abilities relative to same-grade peers.	If an off-level student is tracked using <i>only</i> unrealistically difficult progress-monitoring measures from his or her enrolled-grade level, any actual evidence of student progress may be masked by the challenging nature of the assessment materials. This intervention-assessment mismatch could lead the school erroneously to judge the student a 'non-responder' to an off-level intervention when in fact the student is actually making substantial academic progress.
☐ YES ☐ NO	Student Baseline Calculated. For each Tier 2/3 intervention being reviewed, the school calculates the student's baseline level, or starting point, in the academic skill before starting the intervention (Witt, VanDerHeyden, & Gilbertson, 2004).. Baseline is calculated in either of the following ways: • If no previous Tier 2/3 interventions had been attempted, baseline is calculated by assessing the student on at least three separate dates in close proximity using the appropriate the General Outcome Measure or Skill-Based Measure (e.g., CBM Oral Reading Fluency). The median value from this baseline assessment comprises the calculation of 'baseline'. • If a previous Tier 2/3 intervention has been recently attempted, baseline can be assessed by taking the three final (that is, most recent) data points from that progress-monitoring data series and selecting the median value from the three points as a calculation of baseline.	Without information about baseline student performance prior to an intervention, it is difficult to estimate the actual progress that the student made during the intervention. Lack of baseline data therefore comprises a 'fatal flaw' (Witt, VanDerHeyden, & Gilbertson, 2004) that invalidates any RTI intervention.
☐ YES ☐ NO	Student Goal Calculated. For each Tier 2/3 intervention being reviewed, the school calculates a 'predicted' goal for student progress to be attained by the end of the intervention period. The goal:	If no clear goal for student progress is established prior to the start of a Tier 2/3 intervention, the school cannot



	- Is based on acceptable norms for student growth (i.e., research-based growth norms, proprietary growth norms developed as part of a reputable commercial assessment product, or growth norms derived from the local student population). - Represents a realistic prediction of student growth that is sufficiently ambitious—assuming that the intervention is successful—to eventually close the gap between the student and grade-level peers.	know at the conclusion of that intervention whether it was successful. Lack of a specific criterion or goal for student improvement, therefore comprises a 'fatal flaw' (Witt, VanDerHeyden, & Gilbertson, 2004) that invalidates any RTI intervention.
☐ YES ☐ NO	Regular Progress-Monitoring Conducted. Each Tier 2/3 intervention is monitored on a regular basis. - If Tier 2, the intervention is monitored at least 1-2 times per month (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). - If Tier 3, the intervention is monitored at least 1-2 times per week (Burns & Gibbons, 2008; Howell, Hosp, & Kurns, 2008).	A student's observed rate of improvement, or slope, during an intervention is calculated from the total progress-monitoring data points collected. The greater the number of data points, the greater the confidence that the observed slope is a good approximation of the student's actual progress. If, however, the data collected during the intervention are too sparse, the school cannot have confidence that the few data points collected are an accurate representation of actual student progress.

Application of RTI Decision Rules to a Particular Student Case

RTI Data Analysis. The student's individual RTI data is analyzed to determine if that student is a 'non-responder' despite the best efforts to provide evidence-based interventions in the general-education setting.

Adequately Documented?	RTI Element	The importance of this element...
☐ YES ☐ NO	Despite the Tier 2/3 Interventions Attempted, the Student's Skills Continue to Fall Below the Boundary of 'Severely Discrepant' Academic Performance. Using the school's definition for calculating 'severely discrepant academic performance' (above), it is determined that the student's current academic performance is discrepant from that of peers.	A discrepant student performance level is the first element of a 'dual discrepancy' needed under RTI to define a student as a 'non-responder' to general-education interventions.
☐ YES ☐ NO	Despite the Tier 2/3 Interventions Attempted, the Student's Rate of Improvement (Slope) Continues to Be Discrepant. Applying the school's formula for calculating discrepant slope (above), it is determined that the student's slope (growth during the intervention) is discrepant from that of peers.	A discrepant student slope is the second element of a 'dual discrepancy' needed under RTI to define a student as a 'non-responder' to general-education interventions.

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