

Introduction

The purpose of *Jumpstart RTI* is to assist teachers, principals, and district staff in efficiently and effectively implementing response-to-intervention practices to improve an elementary school's reading scores.

WHY THIS BOOK IS NEEDED

Much has been written about response to intervention, or RTI. Educators don't need another "me too" book; *Jumpstart RTI* is different. The motivation to write this book came from watching many schools waste a great deal of time trying to figure out how to implement RTI. The books currently available on this subject include the following topics:

- Definition of RTI
- Overview of RTI
- The history of how the ratification of IDEA 2004 led to RTI
- A three-tier pyramid showing that smaller numbers of students need Tier II and even smaller numbers need Tier III
- The legal foundation for RTI as a means to identify students for special education services
- Forms for self-assessment before launching RTI
- Forms for identifying RTI team members
- Forms for reporting data
- Forms for many other things

Author's note: Throughout the book, the pronoun *her* is often used when referring to a teacher. Using this pronoun avoids the awkward language of "his or her," and its predominance reflects the high proportion of female teachers in elementary schools. The author does not intend to exclude male teachers and asks for the reader's understanding in this decision. When referring to an individual student, the pronouns *he* and *his* are often used to differentiate a student from a teacher. Additionally, when the author uses the words *we* or *our*, she is referring to herself and her consulting company, 95 Percent Group, Inc.

Jumpstart RTI is practical, results oriented, and evidence based, focusing on practical tips on how to initiate RTI in a school. I've been in a fortunate position of watching hundreds of schools during the past 10 years while assisting them in implementing early literacy intervention practices, now named RTI. The suggestions in this book originate from my observations of schools implementing RTI and determining what it takes for a smooth implementation. This book is a bit shorter on forms than most other books on this topic. It also does not position RTI as driven by a legal or regulatory approach to the qualification procedure for special education services. Although that's important, RTI is so much more than special education qualification; it offers schools a unique opportunity to nurture a paradigm shift that affects how reading skills are measured, how struggling readers are identified and addressed, and how teachers think about meeting the needs of *all* students.

This book is results oriented because my perspective is consistently riveted to achieving gains in student reading scores. Not only is data used to make every key decision about the appropriate instruction for an individual student, but it's also paramount to determine whether RTI is making a difference for the student population as a whole. Improvement in student reading is what really matters. Just like a race-car driver's job is not done until she safely crosses the finish line, hopefully in first place, an educator's job is not done until a school's RTI practices result in at least 95% of students reading at benchmark levels.

The suggestions and recommendations in this book are all evidence based. During the past 10 years, I've been carefully tracking the student data in schools that are implementing these practices. Although I've recommended some practices in the 2005 publication of the book *I've DIBEL'd, Now What?* most of the information in this book has emerged since then. My consulting company has amassed a great deal of data about best practices by tracking curriculum-based measure (CBM) and screener data on thousands of students taught by the hundreds of teachers we serve via professional development during multiyear client engagements. We can see which practices bring the greatest gains in student achievement.

The evidence is clear that if schools follow the recommendations in this book, student reading scores will rise to high levels. Equally clear is how very difficult it is for schools to implement some of these practices, not because they are challenging but because they require a high level of staff buy-in and strong leadership from administrators. When either staff commitment or leadership is missing, the implementation suffers and gains in student reading scores are not as strong as they could be.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS

Having stated that a focus on gains in reading scores is paramount, it will be no surprise that the first chapter starts with the end in mind. It's a story about one district that effectively implements response to intervention, the gains in their students' reading scores, and the path the district took to get there.

Chapter 1. Ninety-Five Percent of Students at Benchmark Is Achievable: A District Example: How high should you expect your school's reading scores to be if you implement the recommendations in this book? Schools need to set ambitious goals. Many researchers are shocked at the results that our client schools achieve. We aren't shocked anymore; we are motivated. So how will you know how high to set goals? Chapter 1 addresses this question from the perspective of a single school and also from that of a medium-sized district. It's much easier to point out an example of a single teacher or school whose results are fabulous. It's far different to see how an entire district implemented RTI and, after five years, how 95% of students reached benchmark across 38 schools at multiple grade levels.

Chapter 2. Getting Ready: Many books and RTI speakers recommend an extensive planning process before launching RTI. This book takes a different approach. While planning is imperative, Chapter 2 describes the planning that is critical to articulate a "call to action" and to build staff buy-in and commitment. Also included are tips on how to address resistance or reluctance from teachers who would rather continue to do the same thing they have been doing than embrace the changes needed. Most schools designate an RTI coordinator; the responsibilities of this role are outlined.

Chapter 3. Getting Started: This chapter describes several structural components that affect the number of minutes of intervention instruction and addresses allocating time for intervention groups, determining who will teach groups, and choosing a delivery model. Best results are achieved when the school's master schedule includes intervention blocks. Determining who teaches the intervention groups and the content of instruction during group time is imperative.

Chapter 4. Analyzing Data and Forming Groups: One of the main messages of this chapter is that CBMs do an excellent job at identifying which students are at risk of later reading difficulties but don't provide information that enables teachers to pinpoint skill deficits. The CBM data provide adequate information to determine the next steps, that is, to decide whether to administer a diagnostic screener and, if so, which screener is appropriate. Schools making the most progress are placing students in

skill groups based on diagnostic screener data in addition to CBM data. Which assessment to use for progress monitoring is addressed, along with some guidance on how grade-level teams can form initial groups and regroup after collecting progress-monitoring data.

Chapter 5. Delivering Effective Intervention Instruction: What does effective intervention instruction look like? Chapter 5 begins with a description of the characteristics that make intervention different from whole-class or other small-group instruction. Activities should follow explicit and systematic instruction and serve as practice for students after the skill has been taught. There are many misconceptions about materials and programs; many schools are confused about what *research based* means. They believe that they need to purchase programs that are stamped *research based* and then attempt to implement them with fidelity. In this chapter, I'll explain the issues related to this belief and recommend that schools should be using materials that include research-based strategies and invest in professional development to help teachers learn to make good decisions during instruction.

Chapter 6. Initiating a Problem-Solving Process: Nearly every document written about RTI mentions the need for facilitating problem-solving meetings. Chapter 6 includes a sample agenda for a 15- to 20-minute team meeting to decide whether to intensify a student's intervention and how to accomplish that. The process for how teachers can prepare to discuss a student whose progress is below expectations and the information needed for the meeting is also included. In addition to providing a vision for a problem-solving meeting, this chapter includes a recommendation of the data that should be discussed at grade-level meetings.

Chapter 7. Referring a Student for Special Education Testing: When the IQ-achievement discrepancy was no longer required for qualification for special education services, it seemed a vacuum was created. What will replace that process? Many states have taken different approaches to address this question. Chapter 7 provides advice on what to bring to a child study meeting and includes data on declines in special education referrals and qualifications after three years of RTI. Recommendations for when and how to communicate with parents are also included.

Additional materials and resources related to *Jumpstart RTI: Using RTI in Your Elementary School Right Now* can be found at <http://my.95percentgroup.com/Jumpstart>.