

**2008-2009 Colorado Council
International Reading Association Survey:
RtI Implementation**

CCIRA Issues and Research in Education Committee
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Introduction

The Colorado Council of the International Reading Association (CCIRA) identified Response to Intervention (RtI) as its focus for the 2008-2009 school year. As a result of 2004 RtI legislation, school districts are charged with accountability for meeting needs of all learners. As Colorado school systems develop, communicate, and implement more effective ways of meeting needs of diverse student populations, professional educators within those systems may be asked to work in new and different ways. The purpose of this survey was to collect a snapshot in time through the eyes of CCIRA members of the successes and challenges of implementing RtI legislative mandates.

Survey

A survey consisting of 15 multiple choice and short response questions was sent via an email blast to 3,300 CCIRA members in January of 2009. Respondents were asked to participate in the survey by following a link to a web-based survey provider.

Respondents

Four hundred nine CCIRA members responded to the survey. The tables below provide more specific information about professional role, type of school population, category of district of represented, amount of teaching experience of respondent, and when respondents first learned of an RtI model within their own district.

Table 1. Choose a category below that best describes your professional role.

%	
51.7	Classroom Teacher
11.8	Literacy Teacher
11.3	Instructional Coach
6	Special Education Teacher
5.7	Building Administrator
3.0	District Administrator
2.2	English Language Learner Teacher
.2	Consultant
7.3	Other

Table 2. Choose one category below that best describes your school population.

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%	
24.4	High achieving, not at risk
46.8	Average achieving
28.8	Low achieving/at risk

Table 3. How many years have you been a professional educator?

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%	Years
13.8	0-5
20.2	6-10
18	11-15
16.7	16-20
31.3	20+

Table 4. Would you describe your school as rural, suburban, or urban?

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%	
30.8	Rural
52.2	Suburban
17	Urban

Table 5. When did you first become aware of the existence of an RtI model in your district?

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%	
26	During, or prior to, the 05-06 school year
33.2	During the 06-07 school year
39.3	During the 07-08 school year
1.5	I have not heard of RtI

Findings

Respondents were generally seasoned educators with almost five of ten indicating they had 16 or more years of teaching experience. Five of ten worked in suburban districts and almost three of ten represented rural districts. Five of ten respondents were classroom teachers compared to administrators who comprised 1 of every 10 responses. Of the 409 respondents, six had not heard of RtI.

Quantitative Findings

RtI: Teaching, Learning, and Collaboration

Respondents were asked how implementation of an RtI model impacted teaching, learning, and collaboration.

Table 6. Implementing a model for RtI has had a positive impact on INSTRUCTION in your classroom.

%	
8.6	Strongly Disagree
26.8	Disagree
51.9	Agree
12.7	Strongly Agree

Table 7. Implementing a model for RtI has had a positive effect on LEARNING in your classroom.

%	
8	Strongly Disagree
27.5	Disagree
54.4	Agree
10.1	Strongly Agree

Table 9. Your school (or district) is more responsive to all students' needs as a result of the implementation of your district's RtI model.

%	
8.6	Strongly Disagree
28.4	Disagree
54.2	Agree
8.9	Strongly Agree

Table 10. What level of partnership/collaboration around RtI exists between teachers from the following disciplines in your school: special education, literacy, ESL, and general education? (Note: All disciplines mentioned may not be represented. Please answer according to the disciplines that are represented.)

%	Level of Collaboration
9.3	1 Low
18.8	2
34.5	3
24.8	4
12.8	5 High

Findings

Respondents reported positive changes for teaching and learning in their schools as a result of RtI implementation. More than 6 of 10 teachers reported that implementing their district model had positively affected both teaching and learning. Additionally, more than 6 of 10 respondents indicated their school was more responsive today in meeting needs of students as a result of implementing their district's RtI model.

Respondents were less glowing in their assessment of how RtI implementation affected collaboration. Less than 4 of 10 indicated that collaboration was at, or approaching, a high level. Further analysis of data showed that the longer respondents had been aware of a district RtI model, the more positively they rated their capacity to collaborate. For example, those respondents who learned about their district's RtI model during the 05-06 school year reported a higher level of partnership/collaboration than those teachers who first heard about their district's RtI model during the 07-08 school year (Table 11).

Table 11. What level of partnership/collaboration around RtI exists between teachers from the following disciplines in your school: special education, literacy, ESL, and general education? (Note: All disciplines mentioned may not be represented. Please answer according to the disciplines that are represented. The data below have been disaggregated.)

Year RtI Model Communicated	Percent				
	1 Low	2	3	4	5 High
05-06	6.6	19.8	31.1	22.6	19.8
06-07	3	15	42.1	27.8	12
07-08	15.9	20.4	31.2	24.2	8.3

RtI: District and Building Leadership Support

Respondents were asked to describe how district and building-level leadership responded to lead RtI implementation. The following tables address how respondents regarded the systems of support available to them and their schools. Participants also assessed the impact of RtI implementation on school culture and rated the degree of implementation of their RtI model.

Table 12. An RtI model was/is being initiated in your district by ...

<u>%</u>	
21.5	Special Education
9.9	General Education
48.8	Both, in partnership
19.8	I don't know

Table 12. How has your district responded to meet RtI guidelines? (Check all that apply)
 (Note: Totals will exceed 100% due to number of responses allowed)

29.1	Buy scripted instructional programs
23.2	Buy additional learning materials/programs that are not scripted
61.3	Build and communicate a conceptual model for using assessment to drive instruction
50.8	Design a flowchart of meetings during which academic progress of students is addressed
49.4	Change/add assessments
5.9	Hire more teachers

Table 13. Implementation of an RtI model has changed the culture of your school for the better.

<u>%</u>	
4.6	Strongly Disagree
18.7	Disagree
43	Neutral
29.1	Agree
4.6	Strongly Agree

Table 14. To what degree is RtI fully implemented in your school or district?

<u>%</u>	<u>Level of Implementation</u>
6	1 We have not begun
23.5	2
30.5	3
26.3	4
13.8	5 We are fully implemented

Findings

Almost five of ten respondents stated that implementation of an RtI model was the result of a partnership between special and general education personnel. Nearly 6 of 10 respondents said their district had supported them by creating a conceptual model that featured assessment driving instruction. Just over 5 of 10 respondents said their districts created flowcharts of meetings to outline support procedures for students.

Regarding resource support for RtI implementation, almost 5 of 10 respondents indicated that assessments had either changed or been added. Almost three of ten responded that scripted instructional programs had been purchased to meet students’ needs. Just over 2 of 10 indicated that unscripted learning materials or

programs were purchased. Hiring more personnel was not a widely shared strategy among districts.

Respondents were lukewarm on the positive effect of RtI model implementation upon their school culture. Just over 3 of 10 agreed, or strongly agreed that implementation of RtI affected school culture for the better.

Just over one of ten respondents felt their RtI model was fully implemented.

Qualitative Findings

Respondents were asked to provide further insight into the above data by adding comments in the following areas:

(a) partnership/collaboration, (b) professional learning opportunities, and (c) additional support needed to more fully implement an RtI model in their building.

RtI: Partnership/Collaboration

Nearly 6 of 10 respondents added a comment about collaboration. Of those comments less than 3 of 10 indicated that collaboration was going well in their schools and less than 2 of 10 stated they were in the beginning stages of developing better collaboration.

A sample of comments from respondents for whom **collaboration is going well** included:

- There is a high degree of collaboration in our school. Decisions are based on “what’s best for kids;”
- We generally have excellent collaboration. In fact, I co-teach with a special education teacher;
- We have a very strong staff that works together effectively. It is a climate of how do WE accomplish this;
- There is a high level of collaboration between most professional educators within my school;
- It is fantastic to have so much knowledge and experience in one room, brainstorming and collaborating on what’s best for our kids. Everyone is eager to talk about kids in this manner because we have confidence that when we pool our resources, we can at least try some interventions, and that’s better than playing the complain-and-blame game;
- We have been able to collaborate more. Mild-moderate teachers are not solely responsible for students who are struggling. All teachers are implementing strategies and documenting this; and
- We lean heavily upon each other to help kids succeed.

A sample of comments revealing that participants' schools were in the **beginning stages of developing better collaboration** around the implementation of RtI included:

- We are a newer school and this is only our third year. Each year we seem to get better at collaborating to provide necessary interventions for our students;
- We do collaborate, but we are still learning how our current practices and RtI are the same, and what changes we need to make;
- This is something my school is working on but has not quite achieved;
- We are having growing pains with this, but certainly giving it our best efforts; and
- We talk about collaboration but it is not really in effect.

Six of ten respondents identified **barriers to healthy collaboration**. A sample of those comments included:

- We do not have the time to meet regarding students who need RtI;
- It is clear that the success or failure lives almost exclusively in the principal of the school and the willingness of the district to mandate an implementation plan and to follow through on the implementation of that plan;
- We are currently trying to build a PLC and it is just getting off the ground. Some grade level teams are working well others are not. It takes good leadership to make this happen at a school;
- Communication is weak;
- RtI was implemented poorly and now we are all trying to “catch-up” and work together as a team. It will take some time and professional development;
- Since no additional time is provided for this collaboration it has to be carved out of an already overloaded 40 minute per day plan time. The impact is negligible since the special education and ESL teachers are trying to collaborate with so many different classroom teachers. They seem to view their role as giving suggestions for what I can do to better meet the needs of struggling students in the classroom. Obviously, I resent this being labeled as support;
- It is very confusing and each group does not fully understand what the other groups are doing;
- We have just begun exploring RtI this year, 2008-2009. There is a true resentment among our school's classroom teacher and sped teachers--sped feeling that their workload has increased exponentially and classroom teachers feeling that the differentiation & progress monitoring is overwhelming and leaves them little time to teach. Not a good situation;

- (We are) still in initialization, people are afraid and don't know who should do what or how;
- There seems to be less collaboration for teachers who teach ELA-Spanish programs because of the unqualified facilitators. English speaking classrooms get training and materials. Even though I have asked for two years...I have received nothing as far as interventions for my kindergartners;
- Philosophical differences among staff stall the process and create barriers/hurdles to meeting students' needs;
- Most special education teachers have a different view on how reading is taught from the classroom teacher and/or regular education literacy coach. This differing view has led to all kinds of instructional approaches to supporting struggling readers. Data is showing that not much is working; and
- Sometimes our special interest teachers seem to be at odds with each other.

Findings

Quantitative results indicated that fewer than 4 of 10 rated collaboration at a high, or approaching high, level. The sample of qualitative data above provides more insight into what is, or is not, going well in the area of collaboration.

Respondents for whom collaboration is at a high level, or “on its way,” identified the following three practices as contributing factors: (a) a focus on kids, (b) a mindset of “we,” and (c) shared learning among professional staff.

Respondents for whom collaboration was dysfunctional, or nonexistent, identified the following barriers: (a) philosophical battles over assessment and/or instruction, (b) lack of communication regarding the model and/or roles and responsibilities, (c) lack of leadership, and (d) lack of time.

RtI: Professional Learning Opportunities

Respondents described professional learning opportunities for RtI implementation. Comments were categorized into the following groupings: (a) received little, or no, professional learning opportunities, (b) received some opportunities, and (c) received comprehensive and/or systematic professional learning opportunities.

Comments from the four of ten respondents who revealed that they had participated in **little, or no**, professional learning opportunities included:

- None, the district has stated that each school will provide their own RTI model;
- A few teachers attended a district RTI training several years ago, but some of those teachers have gone. New teachers in our Special

Ed. department have been hired with knowledge of RTI, but I think they are frustrated with the lack of our school's knowledge;

- None for teachers. Some for interventionists;
- A brief outline but nothing more;
- Very little;
- None. I learned about RTI by reading;
- Whatever the sped teacher can provide;
- We had a short presentation (about 15 minutes) and basically no one knew anything. Because I had been a literacy coach at a previous school and implemented RTI there, I was able to help most of our third-fifth grade teachers understand what was going on. This district has a history of jumping in the middle of something and neglecting to build a solid foundation with adequate training;
- None at the high school I am at;
- Just a little for read naturally, one meeting, which was not mandatory;
- There has been little or no training;
- There is no identified model. No training;
- Just an intro to what RTI is;
- We are reading a book and discussing it;
- It has been mentioned in a staff meeting; andRtI
- Zero--that is our frustration.

Another 4 of 10 stated they had received **some professional learning**, however it was neither comprehensive nor systematic. A sample of their comments included:

- Four teachers have had district training;
- A wee bit offered by the team of teachers serving on our committee;
- A couple of staff meetings this year have been used to introduce the plan to the staff;
- A quick 'drive by' inservice. Examples of how to fill out paperwork left in mailbox;
- For the SPED staff- a full day inservice. For the general ed staff- a 30 minute power point so far;
- No one at our school knows about the identified district RtI model. When asked about the document sent to CDE, no one knew;
- Who wrote it or that it even existed. Training about RtI has come only from special education teacher and BOCES;
- Only a few have gone - we heard about it from them at staff meetings, but it was only about the flowchart and forms - not really the meat of RTI;
- I went to a Data Leadership team meeting and then the participants were expected to go back to their schools and teach what we just

learned without any application or real understanding of what, why, and how;

- I am on the RTI committee in my school and I have no idea what is going on so I can guess teachers who are not on the committee are even more frustrated; and
- We need a clear, precise and timely plan to meet ALL kids.

Fewer than 2 of 10 respondents indicated they had benefited from **comprehensive and/or systematic professional learning opportunities**. A sample of their comments included:

- Teachers and staff have been fully trained;
- The RtI model was introduced and implemented by a principal who had full knowledge of the program and took pains to be sure the staff understood and implemented RtI well. We have also undertaken PBS;
- A core group of 4 teachers and the administrator were trained over a 3 month period for 6 days. All special education teachers will be trained. The core group in our school after every training had brought back information and discussions to share with the staff. The principal and I (literacy/instructional coach) meet with every grade level team on a weekly basis to help implement pieces of RtI. (e.g., essential learnings, assessments, etc.); and
- We have an A to Z menu of trainings, protocol for steps of implementation and an agreed upon process and definitions.

When asked what was **helpful, or not helpful**, about their **professional learning opportunities**, respondents stated the following:

- Teachers are beginning to think differently about students who exhibit greater need for differentiation. Not just plopping them in SPED, but looking at how instruction within the classroom can be adapted to student need.
- Schools where principals are on board are making dramatic progress. Where they are not, no amount of training sustains the process;
- It has provided great awareness of the handicapping conditions some students have and how to remediate them;
- The training assured us of the consistency of planning across my district and helped us realize that schools fall on a continuum of application and helped the district personnel become aware of our needs and support issues;
- Help understand process and purpose;
- It's awesome. We're all using similar terminology which makes communication clearer. Kids are followed by many sets of eyes - principal, counselor, classroom teachers, and tutors;

- Most training is geared to elementary rather than secondary, especially with progress monitoring vehicles and responsibilities. If a student has 8 teachers at the high school, who is responsible for progress monitoring and what data is monitored?;
- (Our) special education department started work on the RTI process for the district, but has basically kept all the regular education teachers in the dark;
- I don't believe the trainers even understand the model;
- We are still unclear as to our role as teachers in this whole process; and
- Too little too late - offered only after school-- started in the fall when teachers are already overwhelmed with daily plans and teaching -- no time for the volume of new expectations.

Findings

Most respondents, more than 8 of 10, described professional learning opportunities that were incomplete and/or not congruent to implementation of their district model. In many cases some teachers were sent to a training, then were expected to return to their building site and duplicate that training for the remainder of their staff on top of their regular teaching duties. This model provided little opportunity for follow-up support.

When trainings and learning opportunities went well, they provided a clearer picture of the district RtI model, promoted a consist terminology, and supported a collaboration plan. When trainings and learning opportunities were incomplete or ineffective they were described as incoherent, not applicable to needs (e.g., the content or processes did not fit the audience), and/or they did not appropriately support the implementation of the district's RtI model (if one existed).

Respondents stated that even the best-designed professional learning opportunities were less effective if leadership was lacking.

RtI: What is Needed to Attain Full Implementation?

According to quantitative data collected, just over 1 of 10 respondents said they were at full implementation of their district's identified RtI model. With 9 of 10 respondents still working towards full implementation, the following comments lend insight into what respondents felt was needed to move forward:

- A clearer understanding of each professional's roles and responsibilities in regard to RTI;
- Classroom teachers don't understand how it will work. We have not been told what would qualify for "researched based" interventions. We have nothing in place for Tier 2 intervention. I

don't believe any money will be spent on any new materials or programs, and staff will be reduced;

- Identify diagnostic assessments and research based strategic interventions;
- The district is still working on the model. Unfortunately the leaders in charge seem to think there is a silver bullet that will make the difference. What we know about reading instruction in terms of "best practice" doesn't seem to matter all that much;
- Effective secondary models are needed, especially in the area of progress monitoring;
- Design and communicate a model; share more information; expectations and terms clarified; provide revenue to support intervention alternatives; continued training to support effective green zone interventions;
- Clarification and follow through from administration;
- Better communication about expectations and more guidance on the responsibilities of all the participants. More follow through;
- Training and leadership to translate intention into action;
- School-wide training by knowledgeable RTI personnel;
- Increased training, information about what is in which tier, data management for progress monitoring, good assessment and progress monitoring tools;
- A better understanding of what resources (interventions) are possible and when they might be of use to a student);
- Time to take the bumps in the road out;
- Time and training;
- Time, people, resources, tracking system;
- We need a district model and a process students go through before receiving intensive supports. Currently, it appears that the teacher who speak the loudest gets intensive supports for their students even if the student would benefit from a less intensive intervention;
- District leadership to direct the process and set non-negotiables; willingness to replace weak leadership at the building level, willingness to replace non-compliant teachers; willingness to give up the idea of building level decision-making for essential elements of RTI;
- How about actual SUPPORT rather than simply more to do for the classroom teacher?! As far as I can see, RTI means less frequent, less intense SPED support. It has simply shifted the burden to the classroom;
- Reading Recovery teachers in ALL schools;
- The MODEL with how it should all work;
- A commitment that All means All; and
- Time to work together.

Findings

To more fully implement their districts' RtI models, CCIRA respondents stated they needed the following: (a) clearly defined models and expectations from district and building leadership that identify specifics of expected processes and philosophies for implementation, (b) professional learning opportunities that are congruent with these models and expand their repertoire of expertise, and (c) additional time to meet diverse needs of students. Respondents recognized the importance of leadership and support from administrators so they could use their time efficiently and effectively to meet student's needs.

Summary

- **6 of 10 respondents stated that teaching and learning have improved as a result of RtI;**
- **6 of 10 said that they are doing a better job of meeting needs of every student;**
- **More than 8 of 10 described professional learning opportunities surrounding RtI implementation to be lacking in scope and quality;**
- **1 of 10 reported they are at full implementation of their district's RtI model, while 3 of 10 report they are approaching full implementation;**
- **When implementation was going well, respondents offered glowing comments;**
- **When implementation was going poorly, respondents pointed to lack of clarity, leadership, and ineffective or incomplete professional growth opportunities. Furthermore, in the absence of district guidance, philosophical disagreements as to how to best assess and instruct students have emerged in some buildings;**
- **The longer a school has been implementing their district's RtI model, the higher respondents rated their level of productive collaboration; and**
- **Effective leadership was cited numerous times throughout the survey as being a critical factor.**