Book Study
Prepared by the
Kansas Technical Assistance System Network (TASN)

The RTI Approach to Evaluating Learning Disabilities
Kovaleski, Joseph, VanDerHeyden, Amanda, and Shapiro, Edward
(The Guilford Press, 2013)

Book Description:
While much has been written about response to intervention (RTI) as a construct for school reform, little has been written about the process and procedures of using RTI within a comprehensive evaluation of students suspected of having a learning disability. This book provides guidance for members of evaluation teams who are using the RTI method of evaluation for initial and re-evaluations. The authors present information about the framework that needs to be in place in order to implement RTI, as well as information about regulatory requirements and best practices for RTI evaluations. Most examples in the book come from grades K-5, because those are the grades during which most students with a learning disability are initially identified. However, the authors make it clear that they believe the guidelines presented apply to all K-12 students and schools.

Target Audience:
>   Special Education Administrators
>   School Psychologists
>   Members of Special Education Evaluation Teams
>   General Education Administrators
>   Members of MTSS Leadership Teams
>   Members of MTSS Collaborative Teams

<Chapter 1—Historical and Legal Background for Response to Intervention>

Brief Overview:
The first half of this chapter focuses on the historical background of RTI—including the EHA—concerns about ability-achievement discrepancy, the Learning Disabilities Summit, and the influence of NCLB and IDEA 2004. The second half of the chapter focuses on provisions for RTI in law and regulation, especially as it applies to comprehensive evaluations for suspected learning disabilities. Readers should be aware that the authors focus on the use of RTI for evaluating learning disabilities, but, in Kansas, the RTI method can be used for identifying any area of exceptionality.

Discussion Questions:
1. Consider the historical background for RTI presented by the authors. What do you think had the greatest influence on current RTI practices and requirements?

2. IDEA regulations require evaluation teams to rule out "lack of instruction." How is this defined for reading?

3. The authors identify four criteria for identifying a student as having a learning disability. What are they?

4. What role does observation play in identifying a student with a learning disability?

5. Why is planning the comprehensive evaluation important?

**<Chapter 2—Implementing RTI as School Reform:
Instructional Prerequisites for Using RTI for Eligibility Decision Making>**

Brief Overview:
The authors define RTI as a system of assessment, curriculum, and instruction that includes:
- Multiple tiers of increasingly intense, evidence-based interventions
- Standards-aligned core curricula
- Research-based differentiated instructional strategies in general education
- Universal screening of students' academic skills
- Team-based analysis of student data using the problem-solving method
- Continuous monitoring of student performance
- Monitoring of treatment integrity for instruction and intervention

They also describe a three-tier system of supports.

Discussion Questions:
1. Do you think it is possible to have all of the prerequisites listed above in place without implementing a school-wide multi-tier system of supports?

2. If your district has a three-tier system in place, discuss to what extent you have the tier pieces in place, as described by the authors.

3. Discuss Table 2.2 (Key Factors Related to Standards-Aligned Curricula). Do you agree with their list of key curricular factors? Do you believe your building could provide evidence for each of the factors? Do you think it would be important to have these factors in place before an RTI method is used for comprehensive evaluation?

<Chapter 3—Determining Inadequate Academic Achievement>

Brief Overview:
This chapter describes how to determine whether or not there is a difference (and the degree of difference) between the student's achievement and achievement expectations based on state standards or same-age or same-grade peers.

Discussion Questions:
1. What are some sources of existing data that need to be gathered to help determine inadequate academic achievement?

2. What is benchmark gap analysis?

3. How is inadequate academic achievement defined?

4. Why do you think the authors recommend that districts set requirements for inadequate academic achievement?

5. What are some methodologies the authors describe for conducting follow-up individual student assessment? What is the relevance of ICEL and RIOT?

<Chapter 4—Determining Rate of Improvement>

Brief Overview:
Rate of Improvement (ROI) is about rate of growth. ROI gap analysis involves comparing the growth rate of peers (based on 50th percentile scores across norming times) to the growth rate of the individual student, from progress monitoring data.

Discussion Questions:
1. What are typical, attained, and targeted benchmark ROIs?

2. Discuss why growth rates are not linear across the year. Why do the authors recommend that the benchmark ROI be calculated on a half-year basis?

3. Discuss the non-CBM example of computing ROI for both benchmark and progress monitoring.

4. Describe interpreting ROI through a gap analysis.

5. Why is it important to know if the intervention is effective at closing the gap between the student and his/her peers?

6. Why is information about whether or not the student is closing the gap important for determining eligibility?

<Chapter 5—Ruling Out Other Conditions>

Brief Overview:

These provisions require evaluation teams to consider whether the academic deficit might stem from other disabling conditions or aspects of the student's life, rather than a learning disability. The authors note that it is important to have sensitive measures to rule out other conditions (also known as exclusionary criteria). If screening does not provide the information needed, the team will need to conduct additional assessment.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the "other conditions" that the authors say must be ruled out.

2. Conduct a jigsaw discussion by having each study group participant read about a different condition, then share what they learned with the group.

3. Can you think of other ways that any of the conditions described could be assessed?

<Chapter 6—Ruling Out Inadequate Instruction>

Brief Overview:
This provision requires evaluation teams to consider whether the academic deficit might stem from lack of appropriate instruction, rather than from a learning disability. Ruling out inadequate instruction has two components: (a) analyzing sufficiency of core instruction and (b) analyzing sufficiency of Tier 2/3 interventions. To analyze core instruction, it is important to collect and analyze building-wide screening data. To analyze the sufficiency of Tier 2/3 interventions, building teams need to consider the impact of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for all students receiving those levels of support.

Discussion Questions:
1. Discuss how your building or district might assess the sufficiency of core instruction. What data might you use?

2. Discuss how your building or district might assess the sufficiency of Tier 2/3 interventions. What data might you use?

3. Discuss Table 6.2 (Summary of Effective Intervention Programs and Strategies). Are any of these practices in use in your building?

4. Why is it important to assess treatment integrity?

5. Consider having someone in the study group try out Form 6.3 (Intervention Troubleshooting Checklist). Was it helpful in improving interventions?

<Chapter 7—The Observation Requirement>

Brief Overview:
The authors identify key behaviors to be observed, including academic engagement—both active and passive—as well as off-task behavior. They review various methods of observation, and recommend using systematic direct observation, not just providing a narrative.

Discussion Questions:
1. According to the IDEA regulations, what is the purpose of the observation? Where is it to be conducted?

2. Must the observation be conducted after parental consent for the evaluation has been obtained?

3. Discuss how your evaluation teams document the results of the observation. How might you improve that documentation?

4. How do you think observations might influence eligibility decisions?

<Chapter 8—Parent Involvement in an RTI System>

Brief Overview:
The authors make the following key points regarding involving parents:
– Provide information to parents about the results of universal screening
– Provide information to parents about tiered interventions
– Involve parents in intervention planning and follow-up
– Involve parents in intervention teams and in intervention implementation
– Make sure parents are informed about their right to request an initial evaluation
– Make sure parents understand their rights and the reasons for seeking notice and consent for an initial evaluation
– Make sure parents understand the results of the comprehensive evaluation

Discussion Questions:
1. What types of data should be provided to parents? What are some ways to help parents understand this data?

2. Why is it important to involve parents in an RTI system?

3. What efforts does your district/building engage in to involve parents?

<Chapter 9—Determining Eligibility for Special Education:
Pulling All the Pieces Together in a Comprehensive Evaluation>

Brief Overview:

This chapter reviews all the criteria and steps for determining eligibility for special education. These steps include:

- For criteria #1 (level of performance) and #2 (ROI):
    - Gather the data
    - Establish points of comparison
    - Perform gap analysis
    - Determine if local district criteria are met
- For criteria #3 and #4 (exclusionary criteria):
    - Document screening or follow-up assessment results
    - The information provided needs to answer the question: "How do we know this is not the determinant factor for the student's learning difficulties?"
    - Failure to rule-out indicates the student does not have a learning disability
- Document observation:
    - How are the student's skill deficiencies affecting his/her attention to instruction?
    - How are the student's skill deficiencies affecting overall on-task behavior?
- Determine need for special education:
    - Are the student's needs beyond what can be addressed in general education when the curriculum, instruction, or environmental conditions needed for student growth are different than those needed for typical students?

In order to illustrate the comprehensive evaluation process, examples and case studies are provided.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the third paragraph on page 152 and Figure 9.3 (report excerpt). Do your evaluation teams currently use similar criteria? Do they report data in a similar way?

2. Could a student be identified as having a learning disability, but not be determined eligible for special education?

3. Review the case studies provided, as well as the authors' comparison of the case studies in Table 9.3. Do you agree with the authors' conclusions?

<Chapter 10—Using RTI Data to Build an IEP>

Brief Overview:
In this chapter, the authors discuss how RTI data can be used in the following ways:
- Specifying Present Levels of Performance (PLAAFPs)
- Setting IEP Goals
- Designing Specialized Instruction
- Using progress monitoring measures to evaluate annual progress
- Sharing results with parents and school personnel
- Using data during reevaluation to determine continued eligibility

Discussion Questions:
1. Discuss how you have used RTI data to build a student's IEP. What parts of the IEP seem easier to develop when RTI data is available?

2. The authors recommend analyzing the effectiveness of special education services as a system in addition to analyzing the effectiveness of services for individual students. How might a building or district do this? How is your building or district analyzing the effectiveness of special education services?

3. How might RTI instructional data be used during reevaluation?

<Chapter 11—Frequently Asked Questions about RTI and SLD>

Brief Overview:
This chapter provides the authors' answers to frequently asked questions about RTI. Note: The authors frequently contrast RTI with ability-achievement discrepancy as possible methods of evaluation. Federal and state regulations describe the alternate method of evaluation to RTI as "pattern of strengths and weaknesses." There are several ways to carry out an evaluating using a pattern of strengths and weakness, one of which is aptitude-achievement discrepancy. KSDE has provided guidance that aptitude-achievement discrepancy should not be used to identify a student as having a learning disability, so other models of the pattern of strengths and weaknesses method should be used.

Discussion Question:
1. Select one or more of the FAQs to discuss as a group. Try to select an FAQ that addresses an issue of concern for your building or district. If the FAQ discussion generates questions about Kansas requirements, please contact KSDE, or make a request for assistance through the TASN website (www.ksdetasn.org).