



Wisconsin RtI Brief

RtI Applications in Early Childhood Settings Guidance for Implementation

The underlying philosophy and model that guides the development of an RtI framework in Wisconsin schools are compatible with current knowledge and trends in early childhood education. A belief in evidence-based teaching, balanced assessment, and collaboration in the context of culturally responsive practices is central to both. Early childhood RtI practices, however, sometime differ from those intended for older students due to the nature of early learning, child development, and the variety of settings that serve young children. The November 2011 RtI Action Network online forum, “Implementing Response to Intervention in Early Childhood Settings: National, State, and Program Perspectives,” offers an in-depth examination of these similarities and differences. The webcast of the forum has been posted on the RtI Action Network website: www.rtinetwork.org/professional/forums-and-webinars/forums/rti-national-online-forum-implementing-response-to-intervention-in-early-childhood-settings.

The research base to guide implementation of RtI models in early childhood settings, defined here as environments serving children from birth to entry into five-year-old kindergarten, is relatively new and emerging. Early evidence, however, provides some guidance for designing an effective RtI framework.

Use early learning standards to guide curriculum and assessment decisions

Early learning standards are statements that describe expectations for young children across all developmental domains and content areas such as emergent literacy and mathematics. They address foundational skills needed for later behavioral and academic success and promote collaboration and continuity of expectations across early childhood settings.

The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) provide developmental expectations for young children from birth to first grade that are foundational to the Wisconsin Common Core State Standards for kindergarten through grade 12. The DPI encourages school districts are encouraged to use both the WMELS and the Wisconsin Common Core State Standards in early childhood special education, four-year-old kindergarten, five-year-old kindergarten programs, and the primary school years (DPI, 2010).



Begin with a comprehensive, evidence-based core curriculum for all children

Because all areas of child development are highly interrelated, core or universal curriculum should include support for all developmental domains and content areas as described in the WMELS. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) suggests “[curriculum] provides the framework for developing a coherent set of learning experiences that enables children to reach identified goals” (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009, p.42). The key to quality curriculum for young children is in the “how,” or the manner in which learning experiences are planned and implemented (Gronlund, 2006). Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) continues to promote practices that are “appropriate to the children’s age and developmental status, attuned to them as unique individuals, and responsive to the social and cultural contexts in which they live” (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009, p. xii). DAP calls for *differentiated instruction* by setting challenging but achievable goals for each child and using a variety of evidence-based strategies to help each child achieve those goals. Preschool curriculum delivered by *intentional teaching* includes not only the “how” and the “what” but also the arrangement of the learning environment, provision of predictable routines and schedules, child and teacher interactions, and assessment of learning (Epstein, 2007).



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Research clearly demonstrates that children learn more in programs where there is a well planned and implemented curriculum. Thus, it is essential for every early childhood setting — be it a school, a center, or a family child care home — to have a high-quality curriculum in written form and for teachers and care providers to use it to guide their planning and implementation of learning experiences. (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009, p.41-42)

Child assessment is essential in a high-quality early childhood program (Epstein et.al. 2004).

Child assessment data are collected for different purposes, at different times, using a variety of different methods. Universal screening should be conducted with all children for Child Find (the public school requirement to locate, identify, and evaluate children with disabilities under IDEA) and as formative assessment to guide decisions about “next steps” to address individual children’s needs and to begin curriculum planning for a group of children. Use of multiple measures — observation, family input, work samples — and standardized screening tools that are easy to administer, score, and interpret is best practice. *Authentic assessment* (collecting data on children’s development and learning while they are engaged in familiar routines and activities in

familiar settings with familiar adults over time) is recommended as an on-going assessment practice because “developmental changes [in young children] may be episodic, erratic, and rapid ... preschoolers’ ability to demonstrate their skills at any particular point in time can vary, rendering the results of any single assessment unreliable” (Ackerman and Coley, 2012, p.6). Periodically, on-going child data should be anchored to assessment tools for the purposes of monitoring progress and guiding instruction; this data is also foundational to establishing developmentally appropriate local benchmarks. When children are engaged in targeted or individualized levels of support, data collection should increase to monitor the effectiveness of these interventions. Refer to the Early Childhood Assessment tutorial by Mary McLean, Ph.D. (www.collaboratingpartners.com/conference/player.html) for general guidance in early childhood assessment and the Wisconsin Rtl Center’s Balanced Assessment webpage (www.wisconsinrticenter.org/parents-and-family/understanding-rtl/femodule/ba-overview.html) for further information.



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Science has established a link between social-emotional development and school success

Young children’s social and emotional competence is a strong predictor of academic performance in early elementary school (Zero to Three, 2003). The ability to identify and regulate emotions, focus attention, play cooperatively, follow directions, persist at tasks, problem-solve, and have positive feelings about oneself and others are some of the skills needed for learning success. Aligned with the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) model, training on evidence-based practices for supporting social-emotional development and addressing challenging behavior in young children is provided through Wisconsin’s Pyramid Model (www.collaboratingpartners.com/social-emotional-competence-sefel-pyramid.php) based on the research through the Center for Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL), and the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI). The Wisconsin Pyramid Model is a multi-level system of support, offering guidance for all children at the universal level with more intensive interventions for children needing targeted and individualized support.



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A multi-level system of support requires a variety of instructional approaches based on individual learner needs

When designing an Rtl framework, primary focus should be on establishing a comprehensive core curriculum. Evidence suggests that implementation of a high quality core curriculum increases student learning and reduces the number of children who need more intense levels of intervention (Greenwood et.al. 2011). Some children, however, will need support beyond the differentiated instruction provided in the core curriculum to meet expectations in early literacy and social-emotional development. Using a collaborative problem-solving team process, programs are encouraged to provide strategies and materials in a multi-level system of support that are research-based *and* developmentally appropriate. Routines-based interventions — those that are embedded into the child’s daily routines and schedules — along with short but frequent small group and/or individualized instruction are developmentally appropriate approaches that yield promising results (Greenwood et.al. 2011). General guidance on tiered instructional practices can be found at the Center for Rtl in Early Childhood (www.crtiec.org/interventionsfortier2and3/).

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