Book Study
Prepared by the
Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) Project

A Principal's Guide: Implementing Response to Intervention
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(Corwin Press, 2008)

Book Description
This book is a practical overview of a Response to Intervention system.

Target Audience:
Principals or other administrators who are considering or currently in the structuring process for a Multi-Tiered System of Supports are the target audience for this book.

Core Team Note: Throughout this book, you will see the term Response to Intervention or RtI. Since the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 the term Response-to-Intervention (RtI) has became a buzz word within education. RtI is built upon a broad research base resulting in multiple models with the common features of (1) multiple tiers of intervention service delivery, (2) problem solving method and (3) data collection/assessment to inform decisions at each tier of service delivery (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2006).

It is not uncommon to hear the term RtI and Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) used interchangeably. However, in many instances the meaning applied to RtI does not align with the principles and practices of a MTSS. The principles and practices of a MTSS are based upon what research has shown to be effective in **both** creating successful and sustainable **system change** as well as what is necessary in providing **the most effective instruction to all students**. The MTSS framework is designed to address the academic and behavioral needs of every student, regardless of whether the students are struggling or have advanced learning needs.

In laymen's terms, RtI is what happens in the triangle at the center of the MTSS trademark. MTSS is the triangle PLUS everything else that builds and supports the system. That being said, there are enough "crossing over" points to make a book study based on an RtI model a worthwhile pursuit. For our purposes, we will be using the term MTSS in the questions to give the book a broader perspective.

Lincoln Elementary School Case Study &
Chapter 1: Response to Intervention

Helpful Hints
At the first book group meeting have everyone brainstorm questions they have about MTSS. Record the questions and post at each meeting so that as the group goes through the book they can begin to see what questions are being answered and what questions will need to be researched further.

Discussion Questions

1. Share your thoughts about the Lincoln Elementary School Case Study.

2. Are there similarities between how Lincoln Elementary uses data and how you use data?

3. Teachers have been collecting data for years to report on grade cards. How does the data collection and use of the data described in the case study differ from the typical use of data at your school?

4. Consider the case study and Chapter 1. On page 19 it is noted that there may be some who resist MTSS. Have a discussion about the changes. How significant would they be in your school or classroom? Could you consider this an evolution of education rather than a revolution?

5. How is your current reading program like or unlike what was described? Do you have a basal or are you using a balanced literacy approach? Does your program cover the five critical components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension)?

6. What evaluation model does your local education agency or district use for special education services?

7. What have been your experiences with the discrepancy formula and evaluations? Have the evaluations lead to instructional recommendations for the classroom teacher, regardless of the placement decision?

8. How do the evaluations in your district address the three critical elements indicated: insufficient progress, level of performance, and instructional needs?

9. Discuss the possibility of maintaining fidelity to the core program while differentiating? Does your program provide the necessary materials to do this?

Chapter 2: Setting the Stage for RTI

Helpful Hints

This chapter describes various reasons for implementing MTSS and underscores how important the principal, as the instructional leader, is for success. During discussion of this chapter, remember to keep focused on the fact that improving schools to have better or maintain positive results for children is really the reason for this change.

Discussion Questions

1. "It is wise to anticipate that there will be reluctant or resistant teachers (pg. 36)." Think back upon your experiences to other initiatives and discuss the factors that contributed to their success or failure.

2. How can a principal be a good instructional leader but also allow teachers professional freedom, individuality, and flexibility in the classroom?

3. How would you phase in MTSS?

4. What are some things that might already be in place that will contribute to the MTSS initiative? What are some areas that will have to be revisited?

5. What would work in your school to address the issue of reliability of the screening measures?

6. Do the current assessments used meet the basic criteria to be considered "good screening assessment" (effective and accurate in identifying the right students, take little time to assess, and include progress monitoring)?

7. What changes will have to be made to get the data to teachers in a timely manner and in a format that is easy to understand?

Chapter 3: Delivering Intervention Instruction

Helpful Hints
Before reading the chapter it would be helpful to talk about your current system and how interventions are delivered to students keeping the following questions in mind.

- Which students are served?
- How do you figure out who they are?
- How do you know what intervention/instruction they need?
- How is progress monitored?
- How are groups determined?
- How are parents informed?
- What if the interventions are or aren't successful?
- Others…

Discussion Questions

1. Consider the two important factors identified at the beginning of the chapter (familiarity / experience with teaching small groups and using data to guide instruction). Discuss what possible staff development teachers may need related to these two issues. What is their current comfort level in these areas?

2. Discuss the benefits of having classroom teachers teach intervention groups. Will this be a change for your school?

3. Middle School: Is the current schedule conducive to creating an intervention block? What would need to change to make it possible?

4. Have teachers share ways that they've implemented centers with success. What were some effective behavioral management systems used during centers?

5. The author has repeatedly emphasized that "skill" groups are not the same as "ability" groups. How will you explain this to parents? Some teachers may need new language in order to convey this difference.

6. Many schools are using a balanced literacy approach to reading instruction where there are not set lessons created by an outside source. If you are in a school using such a program, have a discussion about how the five critical reading areas are being taught in an integrated and systematic way. Is there consistency across classrooms and grade levels?

7. What support would be necessary for more data-based decision-making?

8. What staff development will be needed in order to analyze data at the level the book outlined? Do you already have individuals in the building that are skilled or interested in this?

9. Discuss ways that data analysis can be built into the schedule.

10. How will you communicate your efforts to parents?

Chapter 4: Using Progress Monitoring Data

Helpful Hints

This chapter indicates that progress monitoring is often one of the first elements of MTSS that is resisted because it can seem daunting to be collecting data so frequently. However, the author says, "It is the heart of RTI." Keep this in mind as you read the chapter and grapple with how to work "smarter" not "harder."

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the issue of time. How can what is done during the school day be transformed into what is described in the chapter?

2. Review the charts in the Sample Administrative RTI Data Notebook. Discuss how charts such as this would improve communication about performance, both for individual students and the school as a whole.

3. Most educators are familiar with the phrases of "he just needs more time" or "she's a slow learner" or "the light bulb will eventually go on." The notion of "closing the gap" for all students may be a paradigm shift for many educators. What are some ways to assist educators in thinking this way and overcoming long held beliefs about children and the power of instruction?

4. What type of data do you currently collect and report regarding a student's performance in a reading intervention? How is what is described different?

5. If a child continues to struggle in an intervention, how do you currently respond and intensify the instruction? How is what is described in the chapter different?

6. What structures are already in place that would facilitate the type of data meetings that were described? What would need to change?

7. Not all schools have an MTSS Coordinator, how can a principal serve the dual, and possibly conflicting, roles of supervisor and supportive instructional coach?

Chapter 5: Effective Models of Professional Development

Helpful Hints

This chapter is clear and concise. During discussion of staff development it is often easy to become overwhelmed and overly focused on the aspect of time. Keeping the discussion positive and solution focused will be important and enable the group to come up with new ways of looking at staff development.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your current model of staff development?

2. What would need to change in order to develop ongoing, focused, and differentiated staff development?

3. What have been some effective ways that you've dealt with resistant or reluctant staff members in the past?

Chapter 6: What the Future Holds for RTI

Helpful Hints

Although many of the critical elements of MTSS have been around for years, the integration and application of the processes at the system level is a paradigm shift for many public educators. This chapter highlights many of the questions that are yet to be answered.

Discussion Questions

1. Integrating research and policy to impact practice is a difficult and complicated task and often the true intentions of an initiative are lost in the process. For example, many of the intentions of IDEA are often lost in the rigid application of procedures making the results merely meaningless symbols and ceremonies. The author highlights this as she mentions the notions of "prescriptive" versus "descriptive." How can this trap be avoided with MTSS?

2. Discuss the benefits and limitations of both packaged reading programs and teacher created materials?

3. Review the list of questions you created at the beginning of the book study. What questions have or have not been answered?

4. What are your next steps?