

RTI & Early Childhood:

This reference guide explores the application of Response to Intervention (RTI) to early childhood populations. While RTI is currently expanding across P–12 school settings, its use with younger children has not yet been fully documented. It is expected that the more professionals understand the benefits of the RTI process in early childhood environments, the more it will be embraced as a successful approach to addressing the learning and behavioural needs of young children.



What is Response to Intervention?

In its simplest form, RTI is a problem-solving process that provides research-based instruction and interventions to struggling learners. The process is built on matching the needs of the child with specific instruction/interventions. RTI is designed as an early intervention to prevent long-term failure; it emphasises the monitoring of progress on a continuous basis. It is regarded as a general education initiative which, when successfully implemented, serves as a prevention model and increases access to services prior to a referral for special education. RTI is applicable to cognitive/academic areas, as well as to social/emotional and behaviour areas. It focuses on school readiness and transitional skills. When applied to early childhood settings, RTI may truly function as an early warning system!

How Does RTI Relate to IDEA?

The goal of the RTI process is to increase a child's immediate access to needed instructional and/or behavioural supports. It should be viewed as a prevention model that assists in determining whether a child should be referred for an evaluation for special education services. Therefore, RTI is not intended to delay or deny a child's access to assessments designed to determine eligibility or to those special education supports and services that are provided under state law. In fact, it provides the school and/or the parent with initial information that may support referral or eligibility for your state's relevant intervention resources or programs.

Differentiated Instruction (DI) and RTI

RTI requires early childhood professionals to better understand how the teaching and learning process impacts students in classroom environments. It is based on the assumption that all students can learn. Student diversity, including ethnicity, race, creed, language, social-economic level, experience, interests and learning styles, has a profound effect on how instruction is planned and delivered, as well as on how learning is assessed. DI's goal is to provide "multiple pathways" in the teaching and learning process so that each child's unique needs can best be addressed. The key components of differentiated instruction (DI) that impact foundation classrooms include:

What We Teach:

Focus on Planning and Preparation which includes:

- Working collaboratively to articulate and map curriculum and assessments
- Independently designing coherent and cohesive curriculum
- Engaging in instructional planning that attends to classroom environment, learning activities, materials/resources and groupings/structure

How We Teach:

Focus on the Implementation of Instruction which includes:

- Choosing only specific learning activities and projects which advance children's understanding
- Employing participatory approaches to maximise children's involvement and interaction
- Promoting active learning to increase student engagement
- Modifying instruction to accommodate diverse needs

How We Measure Progress:

Focus on Assessing the Evidence of Learning including:

- Using products and assessments that are determined during the planning process to measure children's understanding
- Recognising that evidence of learning takes many different forms (i.e., projects, demonstrations, etc.)
- Incorporating both formal and informal instruments to measure growth