Taking a Snapshot of Early Childhood Response to Intervention Across the United States: 2009-2012

Maura W. Linas, Judith J. Carta & Charles R. Greenwood

Center for Response to Intervention in Early Childhood (CRTIEC): *A Consortium of the University of Kansas, The Ohio State University, University of Minnesota, and the Dynamic Measurement Group*

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Abstract

The Response to Intervention (RTI) approach to assessment and service delivery is common in elementary schools nationally and its prevalence is increasing nationwide. Less common however, is an RTI approach to early childhood education and early intervention. This ongoing study examines the extent to which the field is reporting implementation of RTI practices in early childhood programs. This study reports findings from an annual national survey (2009-2012) of state 619 coordinators, preschool directors, and Head Start State Collaboration Office Directors regarding states' interest and implementation of preschool RTI.

Introduction

The RTI approach in elementary schools nationally is increasing common (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). Similar knowledge regarding the status of RTI implementation in early childhood programs (e.g., Pre-K, Head Start, etc.) is less well known (Greenwood, Bradfield, et al., 2011). **The purpose of this investigation is to update this knowledge by examining the reported implementation status of RTI in Early Childhood settings across US states and territories.**

Research Questions

1. What is the extent that the RTI approach is being implemented nationally across 2009-2012?
2. What is the extent that the RTI approach is being implemented nationally in 2012 compared to previous years?
3. What are the challenges in implementing RTI in early childhood setting as perceived by early childhood professionals?
4. In states where some initiatives are underway:
   a. What program types are currently implementing RTI?
   b. What specific components of RTI are being implemented?
   c. What curricula and learning outcomes are being emphasized?
   d. Do states have RTI models ready to share with others?

Methods

Sample

Two populations of state early childhood leaders (a) IDEA-Part B [619] directors, and state Pre-K directors (in years 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012) and (b) Head Start State Collaboration Office Directors (in years 2010, 2011, and 2012) were surveyed. A listing of these leaders in each state and territory and their contact information was obtained from the NECTAC website (online at htttp://www.nectac.org/contact/619coord.asp), the Head Start website (online at http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Head%20Start%20Program/State%20collaboration/HSSCO/StateCollaborati.htm) and through a Senior Advisor to the Office of Head Start State Initiatives. The number of IDEA-Part B [619] directors and state Pre-K directors responding was 57(2009), 51(2010), 53(2011), and 56(2012). The number of State Head Start Collaboration Office Directors responding was 27(2010), 41(2011) and 44(2012).

Measurement and Procedures

Two highly similar surveys were used for each set of program directors tailored to their programs mission with highly similar items, several specialized items, and, a very brief discussion of RTI. Items, ranging from 8 to 14 items in all, were developed based on brief reviews of the literature, expert feedback, discussions among colleagues, and analysis of commentary input in the 2009 survey that allowed derivation of additional relevant items.

Following items requesting demographic information (name, state, role/position), the first item on all surveys was a multiple choice question regarding the status of RTI planning and implementation where choices were ordered ranging from "No Implementation" to "Full Implementation in my state."

Methods

Measurement and Procedures, cont.

If a respondent indicated any type of RTI implementation, questions followed asking in which early learning settings implementation was taking place, in what areas of curriculum it was focused, which RTI components were included, and which curriculum, progress monitoring tools, instructional decision-making models were being used. If a respondent indicated that no RTI activities were occurring, the respondent was directed to a question near the end of the survey regarding challenges, without addressing the intervening items.

That survey question (all years) contained 9 statements reflecting challenges to RTI implementation. Each was evaluated on a 4-level Likert scale ranging from "Little/No Challenge" to "Significant Challenge." Separating these two extremes were "Some Challenge" and "Moderate Challenge" values.

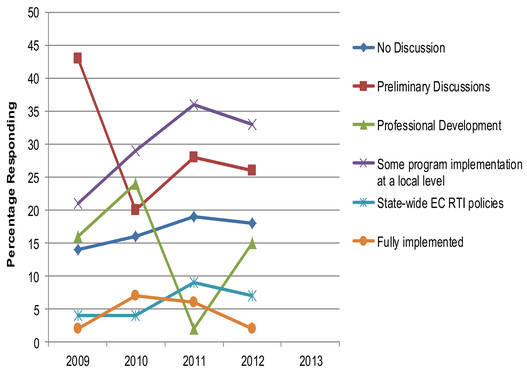
The final survey question (2010, 2011 only) asked respondents to indicate concerns about the implementation of RTI in early education settings and included options such as a "lack of professional development, lack of staffing, unclear policy, delay in services, lack of funding, infrastructure or state standards," as well as offering the option of open ended comments.

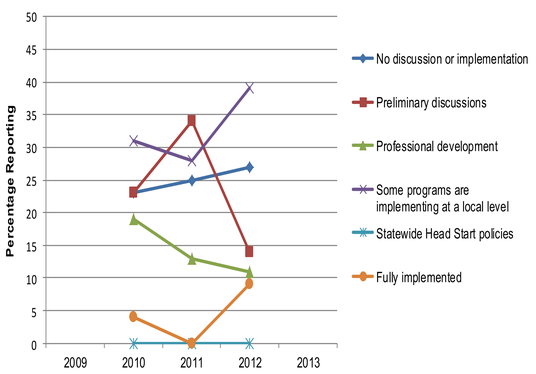
Surveys were accessed by respondents through an email which included a link that delivered the survey ready for completing. In all years, following the initial email request, state early childhood education and early childhood special education leaders received 3 subsequent email reminders at approximately 2 week intervals followed by individual phone contact and at least one follow-up email. In the case of the Head Start survey in 2010, following the initial email, a subsequent email that requested participation and included the survey link was sent out by the Senior Advisor in the Head Collaboration Office. In 2012, all initial email requests were sent by a Senior Advisor to the Office of Head Start State Initiatives with only a follow-up email sent by the researchers.

In all, 2009 data was received representing 44 entities (40 states and Washington, DC, 3 territories, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs). 2010 data was received representing 49 entities (46 states and Washington, DC, and 2 territories. In 2011, data was received representing all 52 US states, Washington, D.C, and Puerto Rico. 2012 data included responses from all 52 states, DC, and 3 US territories. A MS-EXCEL dataset containing the set respondents' records including written comments was downloaded from the website and analyzed using basic descriptive statistics and graphical displays. The percentage of all respondents combined contributing surveys were 25%, 34%, 41% and 86% or years 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 respectively.

Results

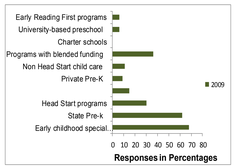
What was the Reported Status of National Early Childhood RTI Implementation?

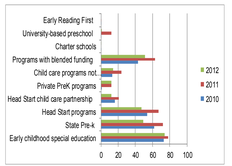


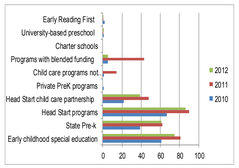


Results (Continued)

What program types are currently implementing RTI Early Childhood Settings?







What are the Challenges to RTI Implementation identified in 2012?

Level of Challenge	*Little/None*		*Some*		*Moderate*		*Significant*	
	619	HS	619	HS	619	HS	619	HS
Insufficient trained personnel to implement RTI components.	6%	7%	19%	29%	33%	20%	42%	43%
Lack of knowledge in how to create an early childhood RTI model.	8%	10%	29%	33%	27%	27%	29%	33%
Lack of evidence-based Tier 1 programs.	13%	32%	36%	32%	40%	15%	10%	22%
Lack of administrative support and leadership.	11%	20%	36%	37%	36%	20%	17%	24%
Lack of Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention strategies.	4%	7%	21%	41%	48%	24%	27%	27%
Lack of progress monitoring measures.	5%	20%	29%	41%	37%	17%	17%	22%
Difficulty in establishing collaborative relationships between early and special education systems.	19%	22%	48%	39%	17%	20%	17%	20%
Lack of resources to develop the infrastructure to implement a RTI model.	10%	7%	23%	32%	19%	20%	48%	43%

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to assess progress implementing of RTI in Early Childhood nationally. Results indicated that states were increasing their focus on RTI and moving in that direction based on trends in further discussion and implementation at a program level. Programs most advanced in implementing RTI were early childhood special education (Part B-619) and Head Start programs. Domains in which RTI is most commonly focused were those targeting language and social/behavioral outcomes. The greatest challenges reported were staff with insufficient training to implement RTI components, limited resources, and lack of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Less challenging for many states, appear to be implementing evidence-based Tier 1 and having developing collaborative relationships. Increased numbers of State 619 Coordinators and Head Start State Collaboration Office Directors indicated that their states had RTI models and/or RTI components ready to share with others. These data suggest that in at least these select early childhood programs, RTI and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support are of increasing interest nationally, and beginning to realize more than minimal implementation nationally.

References

Berkeley, S., Bender, W. N., Peaster, L. G., & Saunders, L. (2009). Implementation of response to intervention: A snapshot of progress. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 42*(1), 85-95.

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