No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), high-stakes testing, accountability requirements, and accreditation demands are all public mandates for schools across America to intentionally work together to improve student achievement—not just for a select few but for every student. Although independent Christian schools are not required to comply with these laws, it would be hard to argue that the principles forming the foundations of these laws and school improvement processes are not what all private schools should be striving to achieve. There is no controversy in our shared desire both to help more students learn and to reduce the achievement gap. The challenge is how to improve the complex work of teaching the students who have diverse learning needs.

The intent of this article is to serve as a basic introduction to the response to intervention (RTI) model. The model can help us address the learning gaps of all students. RTI is a problem-solving framework that can be used to detect student academic and behavioral difficulties and that can guide the use of research-based interventions to provide intense, individualized, student-centered instruction. Response to intervention is the practice of providing high-quality classroom instruction and interventions matched to individual student needs, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions. RTI can be applied to decisions—in remedial, general, and special education practice—intended to create an integrated system of instruction and intervention guided by student assessment data.

All response to intervention practices are founded on the assumption and belief that all students can learn. The corollary is that it is our responsibility to identify the curricular, instructional, and environmental conditions that support learning. We then must intentionally and courageously determine the means and systems to provide those resources.

Common sense tells us that response to intervention is the practice of providing high-quality classroom instruction and interventions matched to individual student needs, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions.
it is best to intervene early regarding learning and behavior problems. During early intervention, the problems may be relatively small. At the classroom level, solving small problems is more efficient, and it tends to be more successful than working with more intense and severe problems. There is strong empirical evidence that supports the use of effective research-based universal interventions for at-risk primary-grade students when these interventions are coupled with a protocol for continuous progress monitoring (Johnson et al. 2006).

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An RTI approach incorporates a multitiered model of educational service delivery in which each tier represents increasingly intense services that are associated with increasing levels of student needs. The various tiers of interventions are designed to provide a set of curricular and instructional processes aimed at improving student responses to intervention that is related to student outcomes or standards of learning. In this system, primary supports and interventions, commonly known as Tier 1 universal interventions, represent the least intensive and least restrictive levels of service delivery. Tier 1 is designed to serve all students in the school by using well-supported general education instructional programs. Tier 1 interventions are intended to be proactive and preventive. In other words, the core foundation of curriculum, instruction, and school organization not only increases the likelihood of improved student achievement and success for all students but also may reduce the number of students who are referred for remedial and special education services and supports. Although Tier 1 interventions are intended for all students, it is estimated that Tier 1 supports will successfully address about 80 percent of a school’s student population.

Tier 2 and Tier 3 form a school’s line of defense for reducing the number of students who are performing at low levels or who may be referred later for a disability determination and for special education programs. In Tier 2, supplemental instruction is provided to those students who display poor response to classroom instructional procedures used in Tier 1. These services are provided in addition to core instruc-

in spirit of intensive supports, are referred for more intensive interventions and a possible determination of eligibility for special education.

Tier 3 creates intensive instructional interventions to increase an individual student’s rate of progress. It is estimated that if the RTI model is effectively implemented, about 5 percent of a school’s student population will need these more intensive services. More intensive services or interventions can be provided for students who are not making satisfactory progress in the classrooms. These services could include a variety of organizational remediation programs or special education programs. Individual diagnostic assessments are conducted to determine specific patterns of skills that the individual student has and does not have for the purpose of designing effective instruction to remediate the student’s deficits. To access information on the Colorado RTI system for student success and on Indicators of School Readiness for RTI, and to find related links, visit www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/rti.asp.

Finally, an important premise of the RTI model is that the responsibility for the success of a student belongs to all the adults in the school community as well as to the student and the parents. Having a sense of ownership for every student who walks through the front door of our schools is one of the criteria that make the RTI model problem-solving process effective.

In order to address this important premise of the RTI model, it is important to establish an on-site student...
intervention team made up of the referring teacher, general education teachers, the special needs teacher, the administrator, the counselor, the parent, and, when appropriate, the student to find learning solutions for the student. The team problem-solving process includes four basic steps:

1. Define the problem. What is the problem, and why is it happening?

2. Develop a plan. What are we going to do about it?

3. Implement the plan. Carry out the intervention, and monitor progress.

4. Evaluate. Did our plan work?

It is important to note that if the intervention was successful, the team must plan for maintenance of the intervention and ensure follow-up. If the intervention shows a promising trend, the intervention should continue, perhaps with modifications. If the intervention was not successful, the team members need to revisit the original hypothesis in order to create a new intervention. Finally, if multiple interventions have not been successful or require unreasonable resources, the team may refer the student for further assessment regarding potential special education support. For detailed information on how to establish school-based intervention teams, visit www.interventioncentral.com.

Response to intervention represents a promising way of addressing many issues related to student achievement, and truthfully the implementation phase will be a significant challenge. It is our belief that educators will effectively tackle this challenge only if they turn what they already know into action and do so in a collaborative culture. In a school, collaboration by itself does not lead to improved results unless the school focuses on the right issues. The RTI model will help with identifying the right issues in a school—where no student is left behind—where student failure is not an option, and where professionals who have heart and courage are providing the leadership necessary to achieve this student achievement imperative.

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References


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