

OSEP LD Initiative Update

Lou Danielson
Director Research to Practice
U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

*National SEA Conference on SLD Determination
Kansas City, MO
April 19-21, 2006*

OSEP LD Initiative

- Workgroup
- Commissioned papers
- LD Summit
- Researcher Roundtable
- Finding Common Ground Roundtable
- Funding the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD)
- Work with RRCs



Researcher Roundtable

Concept of Learning Disabilities:

- Strong converging evidence supports the validity of the concept of specific learning disabilities (SLD). This evidence is particularly impressive because it converges across different indicators and methodologies. The central concept of SLD involves disorders of learning and cognition that are intrinsic to the individual. SLD are specific in the sense that these disorders each significantly affect a relatively narrow range of academic and performance outcomes. SLD may occur in combination with other disabling conditions, but they are not due primarily to other conditions, such as mental retardation, behavioral disturbance, lack of opportunities to learn, or primary sensory deficits.

3



Criticisms of IQ-Achievement Discrepancy


- IQ tests do not necessarily measure intelligence
- IQ and academic achievement are not independent of each other
- In the case of word reading skill deficits, IQ-achievement discrepant poor readers are more alike than different from IQ-achievement consistent poor readers
- Children must fail before they can be identified with a learning disability

4



Researcher Roundtable

Response to Intervention:

- There should be alternate ways to identify individuals with SLD in addition to achievement testing, history, and observations of the child. Response to quality intervention is the most promising method of alternate identification and can both promote effective practices in schools and help to close the gap between identification and treatment. Any effort to scale up response to intervention should be based on problem solving models that use progress monitoring to gauge the intensity of intervention in relation to the student's response to intervention. Problem solving models have been shown to be effective in public school settings and in research⁵
- 



SLD Determination and IDEA 2004 (P.L. 108-446)

New language in the law:

“... a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures....”

In the special education research literature, the process mentioned in this language is generally considered as referring to RTI.

Sec. 614(b)6B

6





Public Comments

- 1) Define/clarify terms and overall process
- 2) Enhance regulations
- 3) Time/due process;
- 4) Provision goes beyond the requirement
- 5) Regs are a great improvement
- 6) Fear that an increase in special education will occur unnecessarily
- 7) Unsupportive of language that would require an assessment of the student's psychological processes; and
- 8) Suggests requirements that facilitate the adoption of RTI procedures by LEAs

7



Why RTI?

- RTI is *one* component of SLD determination
- Provides appropriate learning experiences for all students
- Uses school-wide progress monitoring to assess entire class progress and individual student progress
- Promotes early identification of students at risk for academic failure
- Involves multiple performance measures rather than measurement at a single point in time

8






Research Identifies Critical Elements of RTI

- Two goals: prevent future academic problems and assist in identifying students with SLD
 - Two or more tiers of increasingly intense scientific, research-based interventions
 - Intensity addressed through duration, frequency and time of interventions, group size, and instructor skill level
 - Individual problem solving model or standardized intervention protocol for intervention tiers
 - Implementation of a differentiated curriculum with different instructional methods
 - Explicit decision rules for assessing learners' progress (e.g., level and/or rate)
- 9



Potential Advantages of RTI Approach

- Emphasizes use of research-validated instruction.
 - Provides assistance to needy children in timely fashion. It is NOT a wait-to-fail model.
 - Helps ensure that a student's poor academic performance is not due to poor instruction.
 - Assessment data are collected to inform the teacher and improve instruction. Assessments and interventions are closely linked.
 - In some RTI models (e.g., Heartland, IA), non-responders are not given labels, which are presumed to stigmatize and to represent disability categories (e.g., LD, BD, MR) that have little instructional validity.
- 10




Incomplete List of Questions Requiring Answers

• Questions for Level I (Regular Classroom)

- Where to initiate parental involvement?
- Identifying cut-points. Depends in part on whether purpose is prevention, in which case, cut-points would be more lenient, or identification, in which case cut-points would be more severe.
- Identifying appropriate measures for preschool, secondary, nonacademic domains and academic outcomes beyond basic skills.
- Whether to promote local or national norms.
- Identifying and training staff to implement RtI; Who provides the expertise for scaling up?
- Time, resources, and other administrative-logistic concerns associated with implementation.

11



Incomplete List of Questions Requiring Answers (Cont'd)

• Questions for Level II (More Intensive Instruction)

- See questions from Level I, plus . . .
- What constitutes more comprehensive and intensive assessment and where does it fit?
- What is a meaningful taxonomy of intervention intensity that distinguishes level 1 from 2; and 2 from 3?
- What measures and procedures will document its intensity, fidelity, and effectiveness?
- What is meant by “responsiveness”? Pre/post gain on a commercial achievement test? If so, how will progress monitoring be accomplished? How will criteria for adequate growth be established? How will teaching to the test be minimized?
- One-to-one individualized instruction or small group instruction? If small group, how small? How large a caseload per tutor?

12



Final Comments

- Assisting states and locals implement this new practice is a primary focus
- Building a plan while flying – not unlike other areas in the past (assessment, behavior)
- Progress we are making challenges us to go beyond our comfort level
- Blending the state of science with the state of practice (standard treatment & problem solving)
- Where does sped fit into the new multi-tiered model of prevention and intervention
- Challenges ahead but also strong commitment to providing support

13

