

Helping Families Understand the Special Education Process within RtI

Why: The RtI process is new for many schools and families. It will be implemented in all Colorado schools by August, 2009 as "insufficient progress in response to scientific, research-based intervention" is now a required criterion for identifying students with specific learning disabilities. Individual schools and districts will be establishing the process in unique ways to best fit their systems.

In Colorado RtI, families are considered full and equal partners who share responsibility with schools for student success. They work with teachers at the universal tier; and are "on the team and at the table" during the problem-solving process for targeted and intensive tiers. It is important that families understand that interventions and progress monitoring become more intense if progress is not satisfactory. Also, it is important for families and staff to know that a referral for special education evaluation is always an option but especially if a child continues to struggle after interventions have been implemented and/or the team suspects a disability. The evaluation process is now "full and individual" which includes and is informed by data gathered through the problem-solving process.

Who: Principals, classroom teachers or other school staff can explain the RtI process to families. If a student is referred to the problem-solving process, it is suggested that someone ("RtI liaison") be available to answer questions, support coordinated home-school interventions, and work with logistical concerns.

When: It is suggested that the multi-tiered RtI framework be explained to all families in a school at the beginning of the school year. When a child is referred to the problem-solving process for more targeted or intensive interventions, a review of the tiers and eventual options, including that of special education, should occur.

Tools: Four tools are suggested to help families understand the RtI problem-solving partnering process. These are as follows: (1) local or Colorado Department of Education RtI brochure or other written article; (2) home information form designed to help families share relevant data with other team members; (3) a school-specific explanation of the process, and team members' (including family members) responsibilities throughout the process; and (4) a meeting invitation focusing on the partnering role.

Sample Team Invitation: *We want every child to succeed in school. In working towards this goal, our school is implementing a multi-tiered Response to Intervention model for academic and behavior learning. In this model, each teacher strives to provide the best possible instruction for all students. Teachers and families work together to support students when they are struggling in the classroom. However, some students*

may need more targeted or intensive instruction to be successful learners. Thus, we have educational specialists and materials to support these students' more intense learning needs. A problem-solving team prescribes interventions, monitors progress, and evaluates effectiveness. Family members of students involved in this process are full team members, working with school staff to coordinate learning opportunities. If a child continues to struggle after interventions and/ or if a disability is suspected, a referral to special education may be considered, using the data from the problem-solving process. {Specific information as to process, team members, meetings, home information, availability etc.}