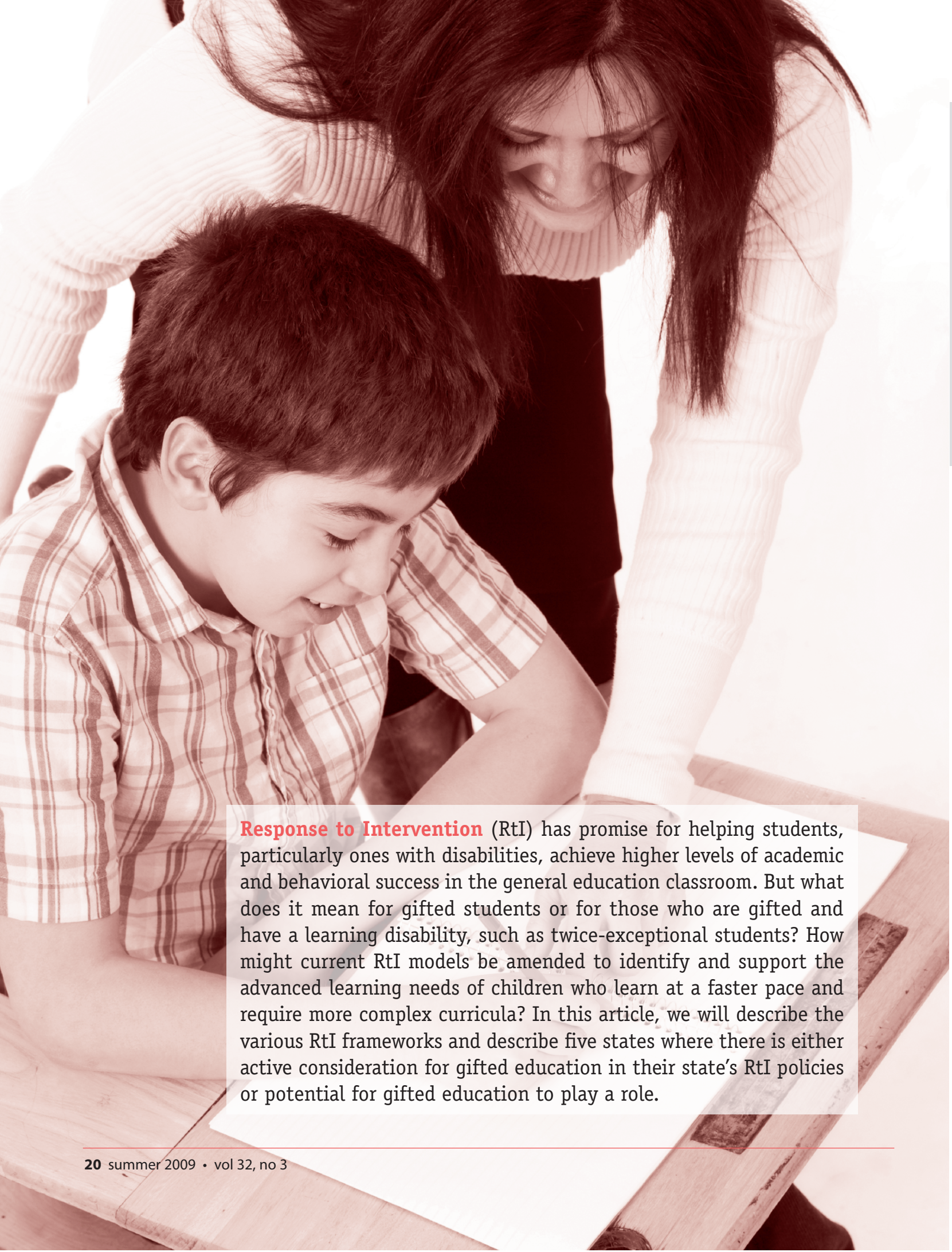


Response to Intervention (RtI) has promise for helping students, particularly ones with disabilities, achieve higher levels of academic and behavioral success in the general education classroom. But what does it mean for gifted students or for those who are gifted and have a learning disability, such as twice-exceptional students? How might current RtI models be amended to identify and support the advanced learning needs of children who learn at a faster pace and require more complex curricula? In this article, we will describe the various RtI frameworks and describe five states where there is either active consideration for gifted education in their state's RtI policies or potential for gifted education to play a role.

RtI Models for Gifted Children

by Karen Rollins, Chrystyna V. Mursky, Sneha Shah-Coltrane, and Susan K. Johnsen

RtI Models That Focus on Children With Disabilities

When examining Response to Intervention practices, most models incorporate multitiered interventions. Within each tier, the intervention varies in terms of identification, intensity, and duration (Mellard, Byrd, Johnson, Tollefson, & Boesche, 2004). The majority of RtI models include a system for monitoring learner progress, leadership and professional development, scientifically based practices in general education and in progressive tiers, and objective cut points for identifying student responsiveness (Mellard et al., 2004).

Two types of methods are generally used within the tiers of services: a standard protocol model (O'Connor, Harty, & Fulmer, 2005; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003) and a problem-solving model (Deno, 2002; Kovaleski, 2002; Tilly, Reschly, & Grimes, 1999).

The Standard Protocol Model

The standard protocol model requires the use of scientifically based classroom instruction for all students using the same curriculum, the same program, and/or the same management strategies; regular administration of curriculum-based assessments; and frequent comparisons of at-risk students to expected or normal growth (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Because educators do not have to make any decisions, it is relatively easy to train practitioners to use an intervention correctly with large numbers of students. Many times the lessons are scripted to ensure the quality of the intervention and to avoid relying on professionals with uneven training and background (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). The goal of this model is to achieve mastery for the majority of students and to ensure the fidelity of the intervention so that students who meet the criterion for more intensive services actually need them—and not because they received inadequate instruction.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) described an elementary school that uses a standard protocol RtI model for students with reading difficulties. For screening, each first-grade student is administered a curriculum-based measurement word identification fluency assessment (CBM-WIF) in September. All students in Tier 1 instruction receive a validated reading curriculum program. To ensure that the reading program is implemented correctly, the school's lead reading teacher observes each first-grade teacher's classroom quarterly. Teachers keep records that monitor each student's progress. Students who are not learning approximately 1.75 words per week receive Tier 2 instruction. In Tier 2, students receive 45 minutes of instruction four times each week in groups of one to three from tutors who have completed training. The lead reading teacher also observes these tutors and provides corrective feedback. Once each week, the lead reading teacher meets with all tutors for one hour to examine the students' CBM-WIF graphs and to problem solve about students whose progress is inadequate. Tutoring sessions then focus on specific areas of student weakness that might include phonological awareness, letter-sound recognition, decoding, sight word recognition, short story reading with highly explicit instruction,

and self-regulated learning strategies to increase motivation and goal-directed learning. In this model, the third tier is referral to special education, which includes a comprehensive evaluation phase. Across all tiers, teams have empirically set decision rules to plan changes based on past research with specific interventions.

In summary, the standard protocol RtI model uses a common, standardized curriculum in Tier 1, monitors students to identify those who are not making progress as expected, provides for collaboration among special and general educators, and refers to specialized services in Tier 3 if the student does not progress as expected (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2008). Although the standard protocol is used primarily for children who may need additional support for success in reading, it also might be used with children who are advanced in reading if the standard curriculum can be differentiated.

The Problem-Solving Model

The problem-solving model does not use a standard program for all students. Instead, it relies on a system of increasingly intensive interventions that are planned and implemented by school personnel with increasing levels of knowledge and expertise that ultimately results in an effective program for a particular student (Deno, 2002; Mellard et al., 2004). The four-level problem-solving model generally involves (a) identifying the problem, (b) designing and implementing interventions, (c) monitoring the student's progress and modifying the interventions according to the student's responsiveness, and (d) planning the next steps. Because the use of a single program is not dictated, the level of expertise and the need for collaborative consultation are much higher.

For example, the Minneapolis Public Schools use a three-stage problem-solving model (Hegranes, Casey, & Marston, 2006). The problem-solving steps include (a) problem identification, (b) problem definition, (c) designing intervention plans, (d) implementing interventions, and (e) problem solution. In Stage 1, classroom intervention, the teacher identifies specific concerns and baseline data are collected for an individual student. Other relevant information is collected from the student, parents, and staff members, and includes school history and relevant health issues. Classroom modifications are then made and the student's progress is documented for 4–6 weeks. Following this modification and perhaps other modifications, the student may enter Stage 2. At this stage, a team of educators provides research-based intervention strategies and ideas to the general education teacher. Besides the general education teacher, the team may include a Title I teacher, counselor, social worker, psychologist, speech and language pathologist, special education teacher(s), and building administrator. The team establishes a goal and an intervention is selected. To maintain the integrity of the intervention, activities are monitored and documented. These data are then used to document student progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the suggested interventions, approximately 6–8 weeks later. The team then decides to continue the intervention, to modify the intervention, or to refer the student for special education evaluation—Stage 3.

In summary, the problem-solving RtI model uses varied curriculum and multiple interventions, monitors students to identify those who are making or not making expected progress, provides for collaboration among a range of educators, and refers to special education services if the suggested interventions are ineffective.

RtI Models That Include Gifted and Talented Students

Although most of the current models address only those students who are not progressing as expected, some RtI models have included gifted and talented students. These models tend to use a problem-solving approach and incorporate (a) curriculum and instructional practices, (b) monitoring of student progress, (c) collaboration, and/or (d) tiered levels of services. This section will describe two of these models in detail and other state RtI models that include gifted students.

U-STARS~PLUS

Sneha Shah-Coltrane describes U-STARS~PLUS (Using Science, Talents, Abilities to Recognize Students ~ Promoting Learning for Underrepresented Students) as focusing on the early nurturing, recognition, and response to children with outstanding potential in the early years of schooling. This focus on early nurturing of potential is especially important for children from historically underrepresented populations. Too often in our schools, outstanding potential of students is not tapped and remains hidden, leading to disengagement of learning and, over time, the loss of talent. It is critical for educators to intentionally create classroom and school environments that bring out the best in young children. By intentionally bringing out the best in students, we are able to maximize outstanding potential, create an achievement-orientation to schooling, and ensure that children's needs are met. With the focus on general education, all of this

can take place prior to formal identification, which for most gifted children is in the later years of elementary school. The U-STARS~PLUS approach is centered in the K–3 regular education classroom and first serves *all* students with more intense interventions for children who show additional needs.

Tiered Approach to Support and Services. Five primary U-STARS~PLUS components are integrated within the principles of RtI: High-End Learning Opportunities, Systematic Observation of Students, centered around the Teacher's Observation of Potential in Students (TOPS) forms, Hands-On/Inquiry-Based Science, Family Partnerships, and Systemic Capacity Building. When taken together, they synergize to have the greatest impact for children to maximize their potential.

Tier I. U-STARS~PLUS focuses on high-end learning opportunities, hands-on/inquiry-based science, dynamic assessment, and a systematic whole-class observation of potential. Using the Teacher's Observation of Potential in Students (TOPS) forms, the general education classroom teacher ensures that *all* children are given the support and opportunity to show their best, without a predetermined decision as to who is "gifted." The TOPS is a classroom observational tool to guide teachers as they observe their children in multiple settings over time and recognize outstanding potential. U-STARS~PLUS is founded on a key principle that a child's needs are best understood by building a body of evidence relating to multiple perspectives of a child. In a classroom environment that intentionally cultivates potential, the TOPS begins with a whole-class observation, ensuring that all children are being observed systematically, and leads to individual observations of children as the need becomes apparent. As teachers utilize the TOPS, their view of children refocuses from "at-risk" to "at-potential" and they further modify the curriculum and instruction to respond to needs.

Tier II. Based on the whole-class observation of students in the general education classroom, which is guided by the TOPS, students who may need more support are recognized. At this point, an individual TOPS is completed, along with work sampling and other classroom assessments to help teachers understand the child's strengths/needs. Based on this evidence, a plan for differentiated curriculum and instruction is developed. Differentiated instruction is primarily delivered in the general education classroom using a variety of strategies, including science as a focused content area. By providing differentiated experiences in science, as well as other areas, children become engaged with learning, problem solve in meaningful ways, and develop literacy skills and content-rich concepts and understandings. Collaboration with gifted education specialists at this level also is helpful. This is an ongoing process and teachers are encouraged to look for students who may need additional enrichment and challenge throughout the year. Families often are included in discussion of the child's strengths at this level of support.

Tier III. As observation and classroom responses continue, more intense and individualized services are provided to meet the needs of particular children with high-end needs. The individual TOPS is augmented with additional information regarding the child's strengths/needs and a body of evidence is built to take a closer look at the child. Nomination for formal gifted identification may be considered at this point, and families are included in the decision-making process. The lead for this high level of support may be the gifted education specialist.

U-STARS~PLUS is founded on a key principle that a child's needs are best understood by building a body of evidence relating to multiple perspectives of a child.

Dynamic Assessment (Progress Monitoring). In order for support and services to match student needs, dynamic assessment that informs instruction is crucial. U-STARS~PLUS uses the TOPS as the focused tool for systematic teacher observation of students and to inform classroom instruction. Beginning with the whole-class observation in Tier I and moving toward more individualized observations ensures that our recognition of the child's strengths is matched with differentiated curricula and instruction early to ensure his or her success. Teachers use basic differentiation strategies so that as students' needs change, so can their learning experiences. Curriculum compacting also is used along with assessments designed to document the students' learning

needs. These assessment practices are similar to progress monitoring in the RtI approach in that they work to document the child's mastery of the curriculum so that appropriate next steps can be planned.

Collaboration. U-STARS-PLUS believes that collaboration with other school personnel and families of students is critical to ensure success for children in school. Meaningful partnerships are established with families so that educators and families learn together and work toward creating the most appropriate learning experiences for children. As teachers use the TOPS to guide their observations and build a body of evidence for the child, they are encouraged to seek input from other school personnel and from family members to provide a more complete understanding of a child's strengths and needs. The decision to formally identify a child as gifted is made through a collaborative process when the child needs more intense support.

Wisconsin

Chrystyna V. Mursky describes how the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has expanded upon the special education application of Response to Intervention to include gifted students. DPI acknowledges the merits of using RtI for students that are at risk for failure, but also recognizes the potential it holds for achieving higher levels of academic and behavioral success for *all* students, including those whose needs extend beyond the core curriculum. For this reason, they have named the framework Response to Intervention/*Instruction,* which reflects their inclusive philosophy. Members who have contributed to the model are from a variety of different DPI teams.

DPI believes that the concept of Response to Intervention/Instruction is, on the one hand, quite simple because it is based on collaborative decision making using sound assessments to determine if what teachers are doing is working. On the other hand, it also believes RtI is quite complex because it represents a systems change—a process that often takes 3–6 years to complete. Individual districts in Wisconsin make their own curricular and assessment decisions, so the DPI does not prescribe any particular RtI framework (such as the three-tiered model), but advocates that a successful RtI system integrates three key components: (a) high-quality instructional practice, (b) continuous review of student progress, and (c) collaboration.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction suggests that RtI begins with high-quality instruction based on rigorous curriculum and research-based effective practice.

High-Quality Instruction. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction suggests that RtI begins with high-quality instruction based on rigorous curriculum and research-based effective practice. Tomlinson (2005) described several key aspects that characterize this curriculum. It (a) focuses on rich and profound ideas of the discipline; (b) engages students emotionally and cognitively; (c) requires students to solve problems, address issues, and create products; and (d) is relevant to students' lives. McTighe (2008) provided guidance on how to design and implement curriculum that reflects Tomlinson's characteristics. Teachers begin by identifying the desired results, a four-step process. First, teachers establish relevant goals based on content standards, course or program objectives, learning outcomes, and the like. Second, they specify the enduring understandings, or the big ideas, that are embedded in the goals. These goals are phrased in ways that are relevant to students' experiences and interests in order to engage them in learning. This step is important as it focuses the curriculum on the profound ideas of the discipline, moving beyond facts and information. Examples of the big ideas include change, patterns, and power. Third, teachers develop essential questions that foster inquiry, understanding of the big ideas, problem solving, and transfer of learning. Finally, teachers define what students will know and be able to do and how the knowledge and skills will help students master the enduring understandings. The core or universal curriculum is comprised of the goals, enduring understandings, and essential questions created as a result of this four-step process. This rich and rigorous core curriculum is designed for all students and is generally not differentiated.

According to McTighe (2008), the next step is determining what evidence will be gathered so that students can demonstrate that they have mastered the targeted knowledge, skills, and understandings. This evidence is composed primarily of authentic, complex performance tasks that provide students opportunities to grapple with ideas and issues. The tasks focus on real-world contexts, ask students to apply knowledge and skills they have acquired to novel situations, and require students to support their work.

Clear criteria for assessing the products or performances are established and communicated to the students. Teachers may differentiate the specific tasks in order to maximize students' chances of demonstrating what they know, understand, and can do. In addition to authentic performance tasks, students are given other opportunities to demonstrate achievement. These might include tests, quizzes, homework, and journals. Students also benefit from reflecting upon and self-assessing their own learning, which helps them become more independent. McTighe suggested that only after the core curriculum has been established and the acceptable evidence defined do teachers plan learning experiences and instruction.

Central to the success of Wisconsin's Response to Intervention/Instruction framework is putting students at the center of these decisions. High-quality classroom instructional practices respond to students' individual differences to help them meet academic and behavioral benchmarks. Teachers are flexible in planning learning opportunities, a method often referred to as differentiated instruction. As previously mentioned, the established goals, enduring understandings, and essential questions represent the core curriculum and are rarely differentiated. Students, however, differ in their readiness, learning profiles, interests, and talents. Learning opportunities therefore must be differentiated to engage each student in meaningful tasks that offer an appropriate level of challenge. Teachers adjust their instruction to meet the needs of the learners rather than expecting the learners to adjust to their teaching. High-quality instruction is useful in several ways: It motivates and challenges the students, requires the students to acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and allows for the students to demonstrate their progress. For students who are not able to meet academic and behavioral benchmarks with simple differentiation or for students who have already met or exceeded the benchmarks, high-quality instruction provides appropriate interventions. These interventions can include targeted support, scaffolding, additional practice, enrichment, compacting, or acceleration. Determining which differentiated learning opportunities or interventions best match student needs is accomplished by assessing student progress.

Continuous Review of Student Progress. The relationship between assessment and instruction is well documented. For example, Wiggins (1998) stated that school-based assessment should aim mainly to improve student performance. Danielson (2007) noted that effective teachers actively and systematically elicit information about students' understanding in order to monitor their progress and make instructional decisions. It's this link between assessment and instruction that makes it evident why the second key component in the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's RtI framework is continuous review of student progress using a balanced assessment system.

Learning opportunities therefore must be differentiated to engage each student in meaningful tasks that offer an appropriate level of challenge.

This balanced assessment system includes sound summative, benchmark, and formative measures that Wisconsin school districts select to provide a complete and clear picture of students' strengths and challenges. McTighe (2008) referred to this system as creating a "photo album" of a student rather than simply taking a "snapshot." In this approach, multiple sources of evidence are gathered over time, each type serving a particular purpose. Summative assessments are large-scale and are used to determine how groups of students, school districts, and the states are progressing. They inform curriculum decisions and determine Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Examples of summative assessments include state testing systems and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Benchmark assessments, such as district common assessments, help determine to what extent students are progressing and how well a program is working. Formative assessments are ongoing and are administered on a daily basis in the classroom. They are used to consider what learning comes next for students and to make timely adjustments in instruction. Formative assessments should include authentic performance tasks as well as other types of assessments, such as tests, quizzes, journals, presentations, and so on (Wiggins, 1998).

Continuous review of student progress draws on a balanced assessment system as a framework for constant inquiry to determine: (a) what students know and can do (screening); (b) how students are responding to differentiated, core instruction (ongoing assessment); and (c) how students are responding to interventions (progress monitoring). Screening precedes instruction. It may be summative

(e.g., standardized achievement tests), benchmark (e.g., common assessments), or formative (e.g., spelling pretest or KWL chart). The purpose of screening measures is to assess what students already know and understand and what they can already do. This information guides decisions about how to differentiate the core curriculum. Teachers are able to determine how they might scaffold learning opportunities to provide struggling students the support to be successful or to provide advanced students additional challenge.

Ongoing assessment is most commonly formative. Teachers frequently use different methods to determine the effectiveness of the differentiation they planned. They may use strategies such as thumbs-up-thumbs-down, quizzes, or oral summaries to ascertain whether students are learning. If students are responding to the strategy being used, it is continued. If students are not responding to the strategy, teachers make adjustments.

Progress monitoring is aimed at students who require interventions beyond the core curriculum, whether it is additional support for struggling students or additional challenge for high-ability students. Individual student targets are set, instructional strategies are outlined, and progress is closely watched. Daily, formative assessments are used to determine whether students are responding to the intervention and whether anticipated progress is being made. Benchmark, diagnostic assessments (e.g., DIBELS and running records) also can add to the information about student progress. Adjustments to instruction and changes in interventions are made as warranted.

Collaboration. Collaboration is key to making these instructional decisions. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction believes that collaboration is the third component of a successful RtI system. It is important that all staff members have a shared sense of responsibility to increase academic and behavioral growth for every student and a shared sense of accountability for student achievement. The literature makes a strong connection between collaboration and high-quality instruction for *all* students, a relationship that Wisconsin's RtI framework emphasizes. These collaborative efforts have a positive impact on student achievement (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Zehr, 2006). The literature also suggests that collaboration is an essential element of school change (Gajda & Koliba, 2008). Because RtI represents a systems change, this finding is important. In these times of budget challenges, collaborative approaches can maximize staffing and community resources to support all students.

In Wisconsin's Response to Intervention/Instruction model, teams of educators collaborate using student assessment data to plan and monitor academic and behavioral instruction and intervention. Parents and community partners also are involved in planning decisions and in supporting students. Many schools in the state have a formal collaborative decision-making team. It's important that the composition of this group is fluid based on the academic and behavioral needs of the students. In one instance, the team might consist of the classroom teacher, the gifted and talented coordinator, the parents, and the school counselor. In another instance, it might consist of the classroom teacher, the special education teacher, the principal, the parents, and a mentor from the local Big Brothers-Big Sisters agency. In yet another instance, the team might consist of the classroom teacher and the reading teacher. Collaboration also can occur on an informal basis, such as when two classroom teachers discuss the needs of a student that they both have.

In Wisconsin, the question asked is, "What systems can be put in place so schools are responsive to *all* learners?" The Wisconsin DPI believes that the answer lies in Response to Intervention/Instruction. RtI is a PK–12 initiative for high-quality instruction, continuous review of student progress using a balanced assessment system, and collaboration that has applications for all education: general education, special education, English language learner education, and gifted education.

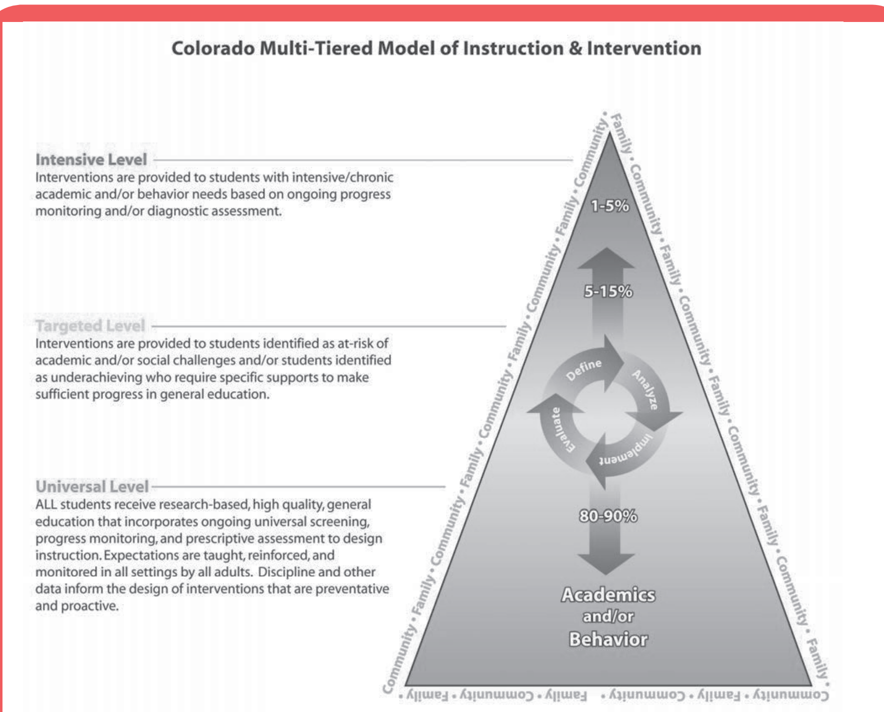
Other State Models

Other state models also have included gifted in their RtI models. With the exception of Ohio, the following states serve gifted students within special education regulations.

Colorado. Colorado includes gifted in its definition of RtI: "Response to Intervention is a framework that promotes a well-integrated system connecting general, compensatory, gifted, and special education in providing high quality, standards-based instruction and intervention that is matched to students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs" (Colorado Department of Education, n.d., para. 1). In a document entitled, "Response to Intervention—Gifted Education Thinking Points" (Colorado Department of Education, 2006), Colorado identifies the rationale for including gifted and talented students in its model. Gifted students are not viewed as part of the RtI model only if they have an identified disability, but instead are a part of the overall systemic program that incorporates interventions in areas of strengths as well. The state of Colorado stresses that all aspects of education—compensatory education, special education, and

gifted education—can be operated as a seamless, unified system (Colorado Department of Education, 2009).

Colorado presents RtI in three tiers (Colorado Department of Education, n.d.; see Figure 1). The Universal Tier uses research-based strategies that are systematic, explicit, and differentiated. The Targeted Tier involves small groups or individual instruction that includes factors such as giftedness. The Intensive Tier provides intensive instruction designed to meet unique learner needs. Colorado's model pyramid shows no lines between the tiers to emphasize the fluidity between them. It also shows a problem-solving "flywheel" in the center of the pyramid to represent how decisions are made regarding intensity and the types of interventions needed by students. In addition, the words "Family" and "Community" surround the pyramid to represent the importance of partnerships outside the walls of the school.



The Colorado RtI Framework has evolved as we learn from implementation. There are no lines separating the tiers because we know that movement between tiers should be fluid; there are no "hoops" for children to jump through in order to receive more or less intensive interventions. The "flywheel" of the multi-tiered model is the Problem-Solving process. This process is how decisions are made regarding intensity and type of intervention students need. Our RtI framework is surrounded by "Family and Community" to illustrate the understanding that the education of the child goes beyond the walls of our schools into the homes and communities of our students and to emphasize the importance of partnerships with family and community to support student success.

Figure 1. Colorado multitiered model of instruction and intervention.

Note. Reprinted with permission of the Colorado Department of Education.

Ohio. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has developed a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports that includes gifted and talented students (Ohio Department of Education, 2007a; see Table 1). An important feature of Ohio's model is the inclusion of interventions for students who show strengths at an advanced grade level and require more accelerated strategies. At Tier 1, "Foundation" or "Schoolwide Interventions," instructional and support systems for all students are provided. At this intervention level, suggestions such as advanced educational options, curriculum compacting, and postsecondary enrollment, which may benefit a system's advanced learners, are given. At Tier 2, "Early Targeted Instructional and Support Interventions," gifted and talented students are provided with interventions such as early graduation, advanced placement, and acceleration. Tier 3, "Intensive Interventions," provides support for students with extensive needs. School-based and community-based resources, such as afterschool programs and counseling, are provided to enhance the school-family-community partnerships along with radical acceleration options for the very highest level students. Interventions are offered for twice-exceptional students at each intervention level (ODE, 2007b, p. 81).

Utah. Utah provides a Four-Tier Model for Gifted and Talented Instruction that provides a framework for providing quality instruction for students from kindergarten through high school (Utah State Office of Education, n.d.). Tier 1 provides challenging instruction, including content, process, and products, for all students. Emphasis is placed on self-directed learning, which might include flexible instructional grouping, open-ended assignments, and enrichment such as guest speakers and field trips. Tier 2 allows for exploration in areas of strengths and interests through individual and small-group work, and is beyond the required core curriculum for many students. More complex knowledge is emphasized, such as problem-based learning, future studies, debate, and competitions. Also included is exposure to inquiry experiences and more focused enrichment such as contracting and compacting. Tier 3 offers specialized classes, independent study, and special-

Table 1
Ohio Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

Intervention/Tier	Academic Systems	Behavioral Systems
Schoolwide Interventions	Differentiated Instruction Schoolwide Enrichment Metacognitive Strategy Instruction Postsecondary Enrollment Curriculum Compacting Advanced Educational Options Learning Strategies Instruction Student-Led Conferencing	Schoolwide Counseling Respecting Differences Leadership Training Team Building Building Self-Awareness Learning Styles Futures Planning Cooperative Learning Metacognitive Strategies
Support Interventions	Acceleration Mentorships Independent Study Distance Learning Coursework Advanced Placement Early Graduation	Counseling—Small Group Social Skills Training Leadership Training
Intensive Interventions	Afterschool Programs Radical Acceleration	Counseling—Intensive

ized programs provided by the school or by outside agencies for some students. More sophisticated instruction is offered by individuals with specialized training with gifted and talented students and/or more specialized content areas such as pull-out programs, cluster classrooms, self-contained classrooms, honors classes, concurrent enrollment, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate. Tier 4 is used by only a few students and is custom designed for meeting individual needs through advanced, high-level instruction, including radical acceleration, early entrance to high school or college, individual advisement, magnet programs, mentorships, and internships.

Hawaii. Although Hawaii does mention gifted occasionally in the explanation of services through RtI, there is no specific reference to gifted students and how they would be served individually in an RtI model. However, within Hawaii's Comprehensive Student Support System, several critical elements specifically address gifted students (Hawaii State Department of Education, 2003). For example, one element, Classroom Climate and Differentiated Instruction, supports all students' learning and progress. This element includes the recognition of a student's background of experiences, as well as the use of effective instructional strategies that address individual learning styles and capitalize on the strengths of students in the classroom. One academic plan for the 2009–2010 year suggests that teachers are expected to provide differentiation and support services so that more students will achieve or exceed proficiency in reading and math. This intervention includes differentiated reading material equal to a child's abilities and interests, as well as providing leveled problems and enrichment activities in math (Hale Kula Elementary School, 2009). In another element, Individualized School and Community Based Programs, programs beyond the regular classroom are emphasized, with an example focused on gifted and talented students (Hawaii State Department of Education, 2003).

Summary of Model Components

Although this list of states that consider gifted students within their specific RtI model or within their school support systems is not comprehensive, it does suggest that possibilities exist for addressing both abilities and disabilities of students. Similarities include (a) differentiated instruction within the first tier, (b) instruction beyond grade level, (c) more intense services not only within the school but beyond the school setting, (d) a balanced assessment system, and (e) gifted education teachers in the decision-making process. Overall, these models emphasize that gifted students have educational needs that should be met with equally intense instruction similar to students with disabilities.

Assessing Your School's RtI Model in Providing for Gifted Students

In examining your school's RtI model, you may want to use the checklist in Figure 2 to determine if it considers gifted and talented students. In general, you will want to examine the overall model, monitoring student progress, tiered levels of service, curriculum and instructional practices, and collaboration.

The more times you answered "yes" to each of the questions, the more likely it is that you may have a model in your school that is inclusionary of gifted and talented students. However, if your model focuses primarily on students with disabilities, you may want to involve stakeholders who might be able to broaden the focus of the services

(e.g., general education teachers, special education teachers, gifted education teachers, administrators, parents, and community members). Use this checklist and the models presented in this article to begin the conversation.

Summary

The reauthorization of Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 2004 included several significant changes. One key revision was the process for identifying specific learning disabilities. Prior to 2004, students were referred for special education services based on a discrepancy model. Students were identified with a learning disability only when there was a large difference between their intellectual ability and their achievement test scores. Students generally had to fail for long periods of time before they showed sufficiently large deficits in academic achievement to satisfy the "severe discrepancy" requirement and begin receiving special education services (Cortiella, 2006). IDEA 2004 removed the requirement for school districts to use the formula for severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic achievement. They were given the option of addressing academic failure early by frequently monitoring student performance and implementing increasingly intensive research-based instructional interventions for children who continued to have difficulty. This early intervention system emphasized improving student performance through collaboration among classroom teachers, special education teachers, and other support professionals (Cortiella, 2006). This model, known as Response to Intervention (RtI), meant that children no longer had to "wait to fail" before they received help.

Overall Model

_____ Does your school use an RtI model that focuses on problem solving?
_____ Is your school's model flexible?

Monitoring Student Progress

_____ Do you collect data on the students' strengths as well as weaknesses?
_____ Do assessments have an adequate ceiling so that advanced students' growth can be measured?

Tiered Levels of Service

_____ Are services at each level based on student need rather than student label?
_____ Are services provided to nurture potential in young children (particularly those from historically underrepresented populations) prior to formal identification as gifted?
_____ Is the Tier 1 curriculum rigorous enough for gifted and academically advanced students?
_____ Are above-grade-level tiers of service available to academically advanced or gifted students?
_____ Do interventions for gifted students include networks and mentors in the community?
_____ Are students able to receive both special education and gifted education services?

Curriculum and Instructional Practices

_____ Does differentiation occur at each tier?
_____ Does the school allow above-grade-level curricular interventions?
_____ Does your school use Individual Learning Plans for academically advanced or gifted students?

Collaboration

_____ Are families actively involved in the collaborative planning process?
_____ Does the collaborative RtI team include educators in gifted education?
_____ Does professional development include information about advanced students?
_____ Are teachers trained to use evidence-based strategies in gifted education such as acceleration, content extensions, high-level problem solving, and ability grouping?
_____ Do administrators in your district support the inclusion of gifted or academically advanced students in the RtI model?

Figure 2. Assessing your school's RtI model in providing for gifted students.

Because the federal government does not require a specific model, each state has been able to design and implement its own RtI model. Although the majority of states have focused primarily on students with disabilities, some have designed models that are inclusive of gifted students. These inclusive models generally use a problem-solving approach that contains these elements: (1) differentiated core curriculum and instruction in the first tier with high-end learning opportunities; (2) ongoing assessment and systematic observation; and (3) monitoring of students and increasing levels of individualized services and support within and outside the school settings based on assessment information and collaboration between general, special, and gifted education teachers. Designers of these models acknowledge that implementing RtI models that positively affect *all* students take time and represent a systems change.

Response to Intervention does not have to be just for students with disabilities. It can serve as a model for increasing the quality and level of services for *all* students and become more responsive to gifted and talented students. Although RtI was originally conceived of as an approach for the early identification of students with learning disabilities, it is now widely viewed as a framework for reform across general and special education. Practitioners, researchers, and community leaders in gifted education need to work together to ensure that policy makers and legislators understand the power of RtI and its ability to transform the nature of the general education classroom. Assessing the degree to which your school's RtI model provides for gifted students is an important first step toward this change. GCT

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