The Nuts and Bolts of RTI for English Language Learners

Bernice Moro, Ph.D.
NYC RBERN @ Fordham University
Talking Points

- Introduction to RTI
- Description of Tiers 1, 2 and 3 for ELLs
- Concerns when working with ELLs
- What educators need to know about ELLs
- Considerations when implementing RTI with ELLs
What is Response To Intervention (RTI)?

• A process NOT a program
• Provides high quality instruction/intervention
• Matches individual student’s needs
• Uses student’s learning rate and level of performance over time
• Information gathered is used to make educational decisions about an individual student. (NASDE, 2006)
What is the purpose of RTI?

• To close the achievement gap of ALL students, including students at-risk, students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs)
• To prevent smaller learning problems from becoming larger ones
• To accurately make a determination that a student’s learning difficulty is not the result of the instructional program or approach, or lack thereof, or of a language difference.
What are the minimum requirements of the RTI process in NY State

• Appropriate instruction
• Screening applied to all students
• Instruction matched to student’s needs
• Repeated assessments of student’s achievement
• Application of student information to make educational decisions
• Notification to parents
What is an RTI Model?

• The RTI model describes a process of three tiers
• Supports both academic and behavioral issues
Key Features of an RTI Model

• Evidence-based core curriculum; goal is for all students to reach grade-level benchmarks. Assumes effective instruction in core for all students.

• Universal screening in foundational components of reading (or math) to determine who is at-risk for reading difficulties.

• Intervening early in reading (or math) with increasingly intense evidence-based interventions taught with fidelity.

• Uses screening and progress monitoring data to determine students’ responsiveness to instruction/intervention and progress towards grade-level benchmarks and standards. (Esparza-Brown & Rosa-Lugo)
Intensive evidence-based Intervention, includes oral component (5% of all students)

Core plus strategic evidence-based interventions; “double dose;” must include oral component (15% of all students)

Core curriculum & instruction for ALL students: school-wide reading, behavior, math and/or writing, includes sheltered and linguistically appropriate instruction and culturally relevant teaching (80% of all students disaggregated by subgroups)

For ELLs: Core includes English as a Second Language

Pre-teach critical vocabulary
Concerns When Working with ELLs

RTI Feature

• Evidence-based core curriculum and instruction for all students to meet grade-level standards.
• Universal screening in foundational components of reading (or math) to determine who is at-risk for reading difficulties.

Concern for ELLs

• Limited core curriculum that adjusts instruction to meet ELL students’ language levels; educators often lack basic competencies in working with ELLs
• Must determine the reliability and validity of screening tools used with ELLs

Esparza-Brown & Rosa-Lugo
Concerns When Working with ELLs

RTI Feature

• Intervening early in reading (or math) with increasingly intense evidence-based interventions taught with fidelity.
• Use screening and progress monitoring data to determine students' responsiveness to instruction/intervention and progress towards grade-level benchmarks and standards.

Concern for ELLs

• Limited intervention programs that have been researched on English Learners (e.g., What Works Clearinghouse).
• Assessment tools must be reliable and valid for use with ELLs; ELLs cannot be expected to meet grade-level benchmarks within the time frame as English-only students.

Esparza-Brown & Rosa-Lugo
What Do We Need to Know About English Language Learners?
NYC ELLs Defined

• 41% of students enrolled in NYC public schools speak a language other than English at home
• ELLs make up 14.4% (159, 162) of the entire DOE student population
• There are slightly more male than female ELLs
• Almost half (47.5%) were born in another country
• 30.8% of these were born in the Dominican Republic
• Remaining majority come from China, Mexico, Bangladesh, Ecuador and Haiti
ELLs Defined

• Majority of ELLs were born in the U.S. and have received all of their education in American schools.
• ELLs achieve oral fluency in everyday language but lag in measures of academic success and tasks requiring academic language proficiency.
• The term “ELL” does NOT include fluent bilingual students.
• Not all ELLs are homogeneous.
ELLs and Language Acquisition

Factors that influence language learning process and academic development

• Familiarity with/and exposure to English
• Degree of proficiency in English and the native language
• Opportunities to learn language(s) and build knowledge (in any language) in school and the community

NYC DOE, Office of ELLs, 2012
ELLs and Language Acquisition

• Prior schooling experiences
• Whether both languages are being learned at the same time (simultaneous bilingual) or whether one is learned, followed by the other (sequential bilingual)
• Whether the student actively wanted to learn another language (elective bilingual) or had to learn a 2\textsuperscript{nd} language in order to survive (circumstantial bilingual)

NYC DOE, Office of ELLs, 2012
Three Categories of ELLs who Experience Academic Difficulties

1. Those with ineffective instructional programs and environments
   – Instruction is not appropriately adjusted to student’s language needs

2. Difficulties due to life circumstances
   – Interrupted schooling, limited formal education, mobility, limited access to standard English, etc.

3. ELL students with intrinsic and true disorders

Esparza-Brown & Rosa-Lugo
Considerations when implementing RTI for ELLs

• Appropriate instruction
  – Instruction that is linguistically and culturally responsive
  – Instruction and intervention must consider and build upon a student’s cultural background/experiences and their linguistic proficiency

• Culturally responsive
  – Student’s prior experiences, including funds of knowledge, home language and socio-cultural background are considered
Considerations when implementing RTI for ELLs

• Reading Instruction
  – Consider relationship between the student’s language proficiency and his/her literacy skills
  – For ELLs, reading fluency and comprehension may be strongly determined by vocabulary comprehension and linguistic proficiency in the first and second language

• Math Instruction
  – Issue of language proficiency and vocabulary important when collecting and measuring math skills
Considerations when implementing RTI for ELLs

• Screening
  – Screening instruments should be administered in the language of instruction in addition to English.
  – Need to be validated with this population

• Instruction Matched to Student Need
  – Differentiated instruction should be used
  – Student’s level of English proficiency
  – Prior educational experiences
  – Grouping to address levels of proficiency in L1 and L2 and knowledge and skill that are to be learned
Considerations when implementing RTI for ELLs

• Areas of Differentiation
  – Amount and type of ESL instruction currently receiving and in the past
  – Type of native language instruction currently receiving and in the past, if applicable
  – Ensure that the language(s) used for intervention matches language(s) used for core instruction
  – Consider the impact of language and culture on instruction and learning
Considerations when implementing RTI for ELLs

– Contact the family to receive feedback and guidance regarding student’s strengths, interests and needs

– Ensure that bilingual and/or ESL personnel serve on the instructional decision-making team

• Tier 1: Core Instruction for ELLs

– Analyze assessment/screening data to determine performance levels is both L1 and L2

– Use this assessment data to plan instruction
Considerations when implementing RTI for ELLs

– Differentiate instruction based on academic performance levels; the student’s L1 and L2 levels; and the cultural background of the student

– Base L2 performance levels of NYSED Proficiency Levels for English as a Second Language

• Tier 2 and 3: Strategic and Intensive Levels of Interventions for ELLs

  – If using problem-solving model, student and classroom instructional data should be provided to decision-making team for analysis and appropriate instructional plan
Considerations when implementing RTI for ELLs

– Review and analyze data collected in Tier 1 documentation and conducted further assessments, if needed

– Make recommendations for Tier 2 intervention(s)

– For ELLs include:
  • Explanation of how instruction was differentiated to address native language and second language issues and cultural differences
Considerations when implementing RTI for ELLs

- Amount and type of ESL instruction
- Amount and type of native language instruction
  - Select the instructional areas that need further, more intense intervention
  - Determine the extent of ESL instruction and/or native language instruction needed during Tiers 2 and 3 interventions
  - If using standard protocol model, develop one for ELLs which includes a menu of interventions that have been validated for ELLs
Considerations when implementing RTI for ELLs

• Progress Monitoring
  – If instruction is being provided in L1 and L2, all on-going assessments should be conducted in both L1 and L2
  – When evaluating programs for students in either L1 or L2, the results of instruction should be compared to the same population (true peers). The performance of “true peers” should be used to benchmark progress and decided if student is responding adequately or needs more interventions
Considerations when implementing RTI for ELLs

– When possible, comparative sampling of “true peers” should be large enough for making educationally valid decisions

– Knowledge of typical first and second language use should be considered when setting benchmarks and interpreting progress

• Language Difference or Disability
  – Don’t confuse language differences with language disorders
Considerations when implementing RTI for ELLs

– Or patterns of performance related to student’s socio-cultural background or interrupted schooling

– Assessments in both L1 and L2 should be conducted for comparison
References

2013 Demographic Report, Office of English Language Learners, NYC DOE, 2013
Creating an RTI Model for ELLs’ Academic Success, Office of English Language Learners, NYC DOE, 2013
Response to Intervention: Guidance for New York State School Districts, October 2010
RtI with English Learners, Esparza Brown and Rosa Lugo (tapestry.usf.edu/response_to_intervention/ppt/Rti_and_ELs.ppt)
Thank You

Bernice Moro, Ph.D.
NYC RBERN @ Fordham University
bmoro@fordham.edu