

The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities presents

The ABCs *of*



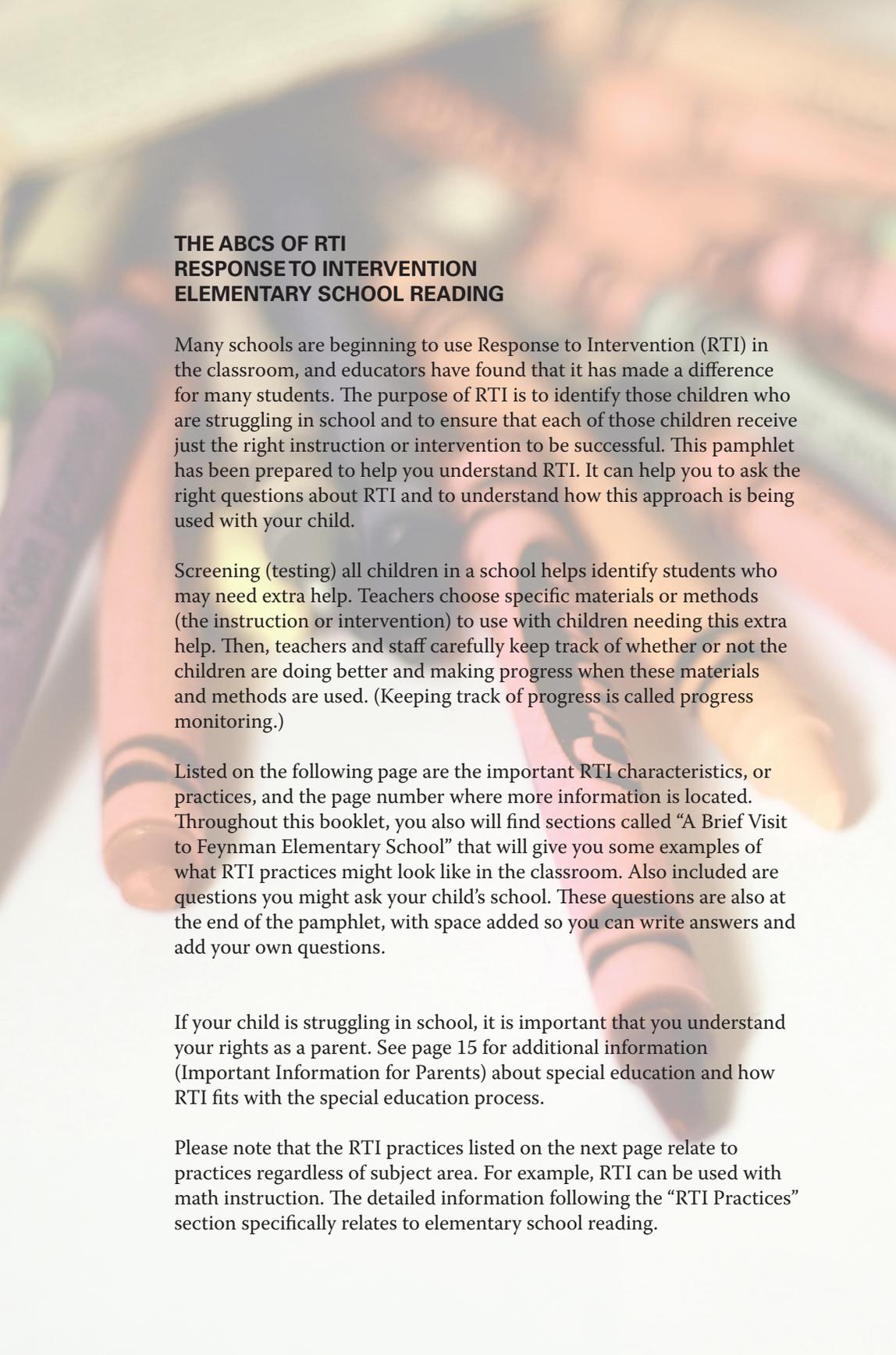
Elementary School Reading

A Guide for Parents

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A blurred background image showing a child's hands holding a pencil and a yellow highlighter over a book. The text is overlaid on this image.

THE ABCS OF RTI RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL READING

Many schools are beginning to use Response to Intervention (RTI) in the classroom, and educators have found that it has made a difference for many students. The purpose of RTI is to identify those children who are struggling in school and to ensure that each of those children receive just the right instruction or intervention to be successful. This pamphlet has been prepared to help you understand RTI. It can help you to ask the right questions about RTI and to understand how this approach is being used with your child.

Screening (testing) all children in a school helps identify students who may need extra help. Teachers choose specific materials or methods (the instruction or intervention) to use with children needing this extra help. Then, teachers and staff carefully keep track of whether or not the children are doing better and making progress when these materials and methods are used. (Keeping track of progress is called progress monitoring.)

Listed on the following page are the important RTI characteristics, or practices, and the page number where more information is located. Throughout this booklet, you also will find sections called “A Brief Visit to Feynman Elementary School” that will give you some examples of what RTI practices might look like in the classroom. Also included are questions you might ask your child’s school. These questions are also at the end of the pamphlet, with space added so you can write answers and add your own questions.

If your child is struggling in school, it is important that you understand your rights as a parent. See page 15 for additional information (Important Information for Parents) about special education and how RTI fits with the special education process.

Please note that the RTI practices listed on the next page relate to practices regardless of subject area. For example, RTI can be used with math instruction. The detailed information following the “RTI Practices” section specifically relates to elementary school reading.

RTI PRACTICES - TABLE OF CONTENTS

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| The school gives all students a screening test – usually three times each year – so that teachers and staff will know which students need extra help with academic work or behavior. | |
| Progress Monitoring | Page 4 |
| For students needing extra help, school staff members frequently (for example, at least once every week) check the progress of each child to see what changes, if any, need to be made in the instruction. | |
| Tiered Instruction | Page 6 |
| Within the RTI structure are several tiers, or levels, of instruction. General education is referred to as Tier 1. Additional tiers, usually two or three, use increasingly intense levels of instruction (for example, smaller groups, more time, more progress monitoring). | |
| High-Quality, Research-Based Instruction and Interventions | Page 10 |
| All school staff members use instructional methods and materials that have been proven to work effectively. | |
| Collaboration Among School Staff Members | Page 12 |
| School staff members (including the principal, general education teachers, special education teachers, reading specialists, and school psychologists) work together to help each child be successful. | |
| Fidelity of Implementation | Page 14 |
| School staff members make sure that instructional materials and methods are used exactly as intended. | |
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SCHOOL - WIDE SCREENING

To find out whether a child needs extra help, schools use “universal” or “school-wide” screening. Some schools look at the results of yearly national, state, or district tests. Other schools give all the children in all of the grades screening tests early in the year and again in the middle and at the end of the school year. Some schools do both. It is not unusual for schools to find that one out of every five children could benefit from some sort of extra help. Schools are happy to know early in the year which students need help so that teachers can begin helping them right away.

In 1997, Congress established a National Reading Panel. This group of 14 people studied the research about how children learn to read. They learned a number of things, including the following:

- Parents play a very important role in helping their child learn to read.
- It is very important for schools to find out whether a young child may have trouble learning to read.
- It is critical to provide help as early as possible to children who may have trouble learning to read.

If the school or parents wait to provide the help that a child needs, the child will get further and further behind in reading. When you have concerns, it is important that you ask questions so that you and your child’s school can work together to help your child.

There are a number of ways to screen for and identify those children who need extra help. For example, one type of screening test for students in kindergarten and first grade quickly measures how well a student understands the sounds that letters make within a word. (Making the sounds of letters in a word is called “decoding.”) Teachers have found that students who have a good understanding of sounds and letters will be more successful in learning to read than students who don’t have that same understanding. Another type of screening test for students who already know how to read asks students to read a paragraph or story. The teacher checks to see how many correct words the student reads in one minute. (The number of words read in one minute is called “the oral reading fluency rate.”) Scores on this type of test give teachers a good idea of whether or not the child is having difficulties in reading.

Teachers also check to see how well students understand what they read. (Understanding what you read is called “reading comprehension.”) If students have a good understanding of what they read, we say that they have good reading comprehension.



**SCREENING – AN EXAMPLE:
A BRIEF VISIT TO FEYNMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
EVALUATING ORAL READING FLUENCY RATES**

Morgan is in third grade. In mid-September, Morgan and her classmates were given individual screening tests. The teacher listened to Morgan read part of a story for one minute and then counted how many words she read correctly during that time. The number of correct words read in one minute is known as the oral reading fluency rate. Morgan had an oral reading fluency rate of 87 correct words per minute. This is an average or above average oral reading fluency rate for a child at the beginning of third grade and means that Morgan is probably not having trouble with reading. Maren, also in third grade, had an oral reading fluency rate of 48 correct words per minute. This score of 48 lets the teacher know that Maren may need some extra help with reading.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT SCREENING

- What tests does the school use to screen students for reading problems?
 - How many times are the tests given during the year?
 - Does the school use screening tests that measure decoding? fluency? reading comprehension?
 - What other areas are measured?
 - What are my child's reading scores from the screening tests?
 - Did any of the screening tests show that my child needs extra help? What kind of help?
 - How do my child's scores compare with other children who are at the same grade and age level?
- * **TIP** - You may want to keep a record of your child's scores so that you can compare them with scores on future tests.

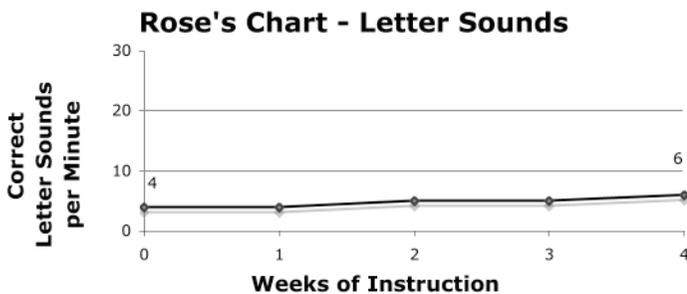
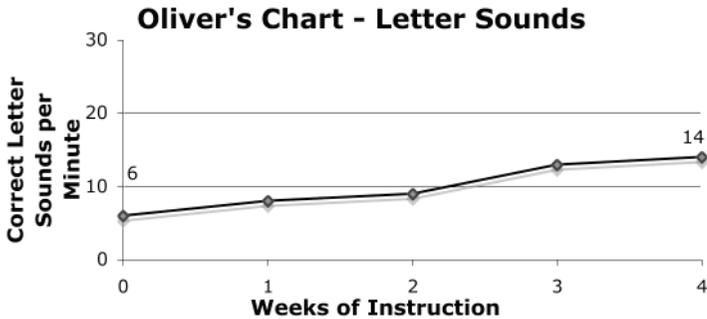
PROGRESS MONITORING

If a child's reading screening scores indicate lower than expected achievement, he or she may need extra time with a teacher or skilled staff member in addition to regular reading instruction. When a child receives extra help, the teacher will want to find out whether the extra instruction is making a difference. To do this, the teacher will need to collect information about the child's reading by monitoring the child's progress, often as frequently as every week. Keeping close track of progress is called progress monitoring. Teachers use the information gained through progress monitoring to determine whether the instruction is, or is not, working and to make decisions about instruction.

PROGRESS MONITORING – AN EXAMPLE: A BRIEF VISIT TO FEYNMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHECKING DECODING SKILL PROGRESS

Oliver, Maddie, Rose, and Wes are in kindergarten. The results of the fall screening tests show that they are all having difficulty with letter sounds. Three times each week, their teacher provides additional instruction to this small group using methods and materials that have been shown by research to do a good job with helping students learn the sounds of letters. The teacher wants to be sure that this extra instruction is helping these students, so he spends several minutes at least once each week testing each of them to see whether their understanding of the sounds of letters is improving.

The teacher marks each child's progress on a chart. After each brief test, the teacher puts a mark on the chart to show how many letter sounds the child can say in one minute. At the beginning of the year, Oliver could say only six letter sounds in one minute, but after four weeks of extra instruction, he could name 14, gaining an average of two letter sounds per minute each week. This is considered good progress, and the teacher believes that he is using the right kind of instruction for Oliver. Oliver's chart shows an increase each week in the number of letter sounds he knows. Rose's chart, however, shows that she has made very little progress during the four weeks. She gained only two letter sounds per minute over four weeks. Her teacher, along with other school staff members, decides that another kind of instruction should be used. Both Oliver and Rose like being able to look at the charts to see how they are doing. You can see their charts on page 5.



QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT PROGRESS MONITORING

- What does the school use to find out whether my child is doing better after receiving extra help? Charting? More testing? A computer program?
 - What is being measured?
 - How often does my child's teacher monitor my child's progress?
 - Does the school have a chart that shows the results of the progress monitoring?
 - Does the progress monitoring information show that my child is making progress because of the extra instruction?
 - If my child is not making progress, how long will the teacher wait before moving my child to a different tier or making a change in instruction?
- * **TIP** – You could ask for a copy of the progress monitoring information on a regular basis so that you can follow your child's progress.

TIERED INSTRUCTION

Instruction that occurs in tiers, or levels, is called tiered instruction. Tiered instruction is usually organized into three or four tiers, although some schools include more. Each tier is different, with each level having an increase in intensity, or an increased number of teacher-student interactions.

TIER 1

The instruction that students receive in the general education classroom with their regular classroom teacher is called Tier 1 instruction. All children receive this first level of reading instruction, which usually lasts about 90 minutes each day. When a screening test shows that a child is at risk for reading problems, the child may receive extra help in the general education classroom with the general education teacher. If, after a brief period of time, progress monitoring shows that there has been very little progress, the teacher will consult with other staff members at the school. Together, they might decide that the best way to help a child who has not improved with the general education curriculum (Tier 1), even with extra help, would be to give the child Tier 2 instruction.

TIER 2

Instruction in Tier 2 is in addition to that provided in Tier 1. Tier 2 instruction and interventions are provided with an increased level of intensity. For example, Tier 2 instruction might be provided to a small group of children for 30–40 minutes each day. Small-group instruction for an additional period of time each day has many benefits for a child needing extra help. With fewer children in a group, an individual child has more opportunities to respond, and the teacher has more opportunities to give immediate and appropriate feedback to that child. For example, if a child reads a difficult word correctly, the teacher responds “Good. That’s right.” If the child is having trouble, the teacher might say, “You are close; try that again and be sure to look carefully at the first letter in that word.” Think of how many more times this type of exchange can happen with a group of three or four students compared to a group of 25 or 26. The teacher is more easily able to guide the child along the right course. An increase in the amount of time a child receives small-group instruction also increases the number of teacher and student interactions.

In some schools, the classroom teacher gives the small-group Tier 2 instruction in the general education classroom—perhaps in a quiet corner of the classroom. In other schools, other school staff members, such as

a reading specialist or librarian, provide Tier 2 instruction within the classroom. Small-group instruction might also take place in another room in the school—maybe in the school library or in an available office.

Tier 2 instruction also includes careful monitoring and charting of the progress each student is making. For example, each child may take a brief test once a week with the teacher recording each score as a dot on the chart. After several weeks, the teacher and student will be able to tell whether a line connecting the dots that represent the test scores is going up (indicating that progress is being made) or going straight or down (indicating that little or no progress is being made). If the student succeeds in Tier 2, this more intense instruction may no longer be necessary. The classroom teacher, however, will need to pay close attention to the student's progress if Tier 2 instruction is discontinued to make sure that the gains are maintained.

When a student is not successful in Tier 2 instruction, the teacher meets with the parent and other school staff to decide what is best for the student and to plan for the next steps. Sometimes, it is best for the student to continue with Tier 2 instruction but with a different type of intervention or instruction. At other times, it is best to have the child receive increasingly intense Tier 3 instruction with a reading specialist or special educator working individually with the student for a longer period of time each day.

TIER 3

The intensity of services is again increased in Tier 3, because the teacher typically is working with only one student at a time. This results in a larger number of teacher-student interactions. Instruction can be tailored specifically to the needs of that one student.

Progress is again monitored and charted frequently in Tier 3 to make sure the student is doing well and to help the teacher decide whether he or she needs to make changes in instruction. The teacher may learn from the child's progress charts that the child needs more instructional time, for example, or needs to be taught using a different method or different materials. Just as in Tier 2, school staff, the parents, and the student all benefit from having a chart of progress up to date and close at hand. When the student is successful in Tier 3, school staff and the parents decide the best way to maintain success: to continue the intense instruction or to have the child receive instruction at a lower tier.

Information about a student's instruction and progress during tiered instruction also can be very helpful in determining whether the student has a learning disability and thus would be more successful receiving special education services, often considered to be the highest, and most intense, tier in tiered instruction. (See "Important Information for Parents" on page 15.)

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT TIERED INSTRUCTION AND TIER 1

- How many tiers does my child’s school use?
- For how many minutes each day is my child participating in Tier 1 reading instruction?
- What are the guidelines from the local school district and the State Department of Education regarding the amount of reading instruction that a student should receive each day?
- What are my child’s specific strengths and weaknesses in reading?
- For how many minutes each day is my child receiving extra help in Tier 1 reading instruction?
- What interventions is my child receiving?
- What methods and materials are being used?
- Who is the instructor?

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT TIER 2 INSTRUCTION

- How is Tier 2 different from Tier 1?
- Who determines that my child might benefit from Tier 2 instruction?
- What are the reasons that the school might decide to move my child to a higher or lower tier?
- What interventions are being used for my child in Tier 2?
- How many students are in my child’s group in Tier 2?
- Do the others in my child’s group have the same types of reading problems that my child has?
- For how many days per week is Tier 2 instruction provided and for how many minutes each day?
- What methods are used to monitor progress in Tier 2?
- How frequently is progress monitored in Tier 2?
- At what point do teachers consider a different intervention within Tier 2?
- Who is involved in that decision?
- How will you let me know when changes are made?

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT TIER 3 INSTRUCTION

- How is Tier 3 different from Tier 2?
- What factors determine that a student might benefit from Tier 3 instruction?
- Who is involved in that decision?
- What interventions are being used for my child in Tier 3?
- For how many days per week is Tier 3 instruction provided and for how many minutes each day?
- What methods are used to monitor progress in Tier 3?
- How frequently is progress monitored in Tier 3?
- At what point do teachers consider a different intervention?
- How will you let me know when changes are made?



HIGH-QUALITY, RESEARCH-BASED INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTIONS

Schools that use RTI practices need to make sure that the materials and instructional methods they use are of high quality and have been shown by research to be effective (research-based). This means that the materials and methods that the teachers are using are known to work well. Think about when you follow directions for baking a cake or changing a tire. You want to feel sure that the methods have been used before and that they worked! In the same way, teachers must use teaching methods and materials that have been successful.

The term “intervention” is used to mean a specific type of instruction that is used to help with a specific type of problem. There are many high-quality, research-based instructional methods, programs, and interventions. However, some lack this research support. Therefore, an important part of RTI is choosing the appropriate methods, programs, and interventions for students who need extra help.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION

- What reading materials and methods of instruction are used in my child’s general education class?
- How does the school know that the reading program is research-based?
- Is my child receiving extra help (over and above the reading instruction in general education)?
- Who is helping my child?
- Do the teachers and staff helping my child have special training in reading?



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|----|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---|--|----------------------------|
| 12 | school-wide screening | progress monitoring | tiered instruction | high-quality, research-based instruction/ interventions | collaboration among school staff members | fidelity of implementation |
|----|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---|--|----------------------------|

COLLABORATION AMONG SCHOOL STAFF MEMBERS

One of the many positive results of RTI practices is that school staff members experience an increased level of collaboration, or working together. The principal, the general education teachers, the special education teachers, the reading specialists, the school psychologists, and others all feel a shared responsibility for helping each child succeed.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT COLLABORATION AMONG SCHOOL STAFF MEMBERS

- Other than the general education teacher, who might be helping my child?
- Do the different teachers and other school staff members share information with each other about how my child is doing? How often?
- * TIP – Let the school staff know that you will work with them by helping your child at home and letting the school know your concerns.



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|----|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
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FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION

Fidelity of implementation is using instruction or materials in the way they are supposed to be used. Educators design and develop good instructional methods and materials and then test them long enough to be sure they work well. When teachers in schools use these methods and materials, it is important that they use them the right way. For example, developers have designed left-handed scissors for left-handed children. The developers know they work well – for left-handed children. What would happen if a teacher gave a pair of these scissors to a right-handed child? Would using these scissors be the easiest way for a right-handed child to learn to cut? No. Is it likely that the child would be as successful as possible with cutting? No. The same is true for other materials and methods used in the classroom – they work best if used in exactly the way developers designed them to be used.

This example also points out how important it is to have the materials be a good “fit” or match for the child.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION

- What process does the school have in place to ensure that instructional materials and methods are being used as they are supposed to be used?

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

All parents have a legal right to ask that the school evaluate their child to determine whether he or she is eligible for special education services. If you suspect that your child has a disability, you can write a letter of referral to the school. All that you need to do is to write a very simple letter. Here is an example:

Dear Principal (Principal's Name),

Please evaluate my child (Your Child's Name) for a possible learning disability. Thank you.

(Your Name)

When you give this letter to the school, school officials then are legally required to respond to your request. In the response, school staff may want to meet and explain the school's procedures, goals, and timelines for the individual evaluations. They also will want to listen to your reasons for requesting the evaluation.

You can request that the school conduct a special assessment at *any* time, regardless of where your child is in the RTI process. Teachers also can refer a child for special education assessment.

- What are my child's reading scores from the screening tests?
 - Did any of the screening tests show that my child needs extra help? What kind of help?
 - How do my child's scores compare with other children who are at the same grade and age level?
- * TIP - You may want to keep a record of your child's scores so that you can compare them with scores on future tests.)

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OTHER QUESTIONS

RESOURCES

A Parent's Guide to Response to Intervention, National Center on Learning Disabilities. Available online at http://www.nclld.org/images/stories/downloads/parent_center/rti_final.pdf)

A Parent's Guide to Response-to-Intervention, Parent Advocacy Brief, National Center for Learning Disabilities. Written by Candace Cortiella, Director of the Advocacy Institute. (Available online at <http://www.nclld.org/content/view/954/18/>)

A Training Curriculum on IDEA 2004 Module 6: Early Intervening Services and Response to Intervention, National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities. (Available online at <http://www.nichcy.org/training/contents.asp>)

Parent Pages, The Learning Disabilities Resource Kit: Specific Learning Disabilities Determination Procedures and Responsiveness to Intervention, NRCLD (National Research Center on Learning Disabilities). (Available online at http://www.nrclld.org/resource_kit/)

Responsiveness to Intervention: Questions PARENTS Must Ask, Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2006. (Available online at <http://www.ldanatl.org/news/responsiveness.asp>)

Response to Intervention (RTI): A Primer for Parents, 2006. Written by Mary Beth Klotz and Andrea Canter, National Association of School Psychologists. (Available online at <http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/rtiprimer.pdf>)

Schwab Learning: *A Parent's Guide to Helping Kids with Learning Disabilities*. (Available online at <http://www.SchwabLearning.org>)

To talk with a parent in your state, go to www.taalliance.org

If you want more detailed information about RTI, you can find it in the RTI manual titled "Responsiveness to Intervention (RTI): How to Do It." (Available online at http://www.nrclld.org/rti_manual/)

Disclaimer: The *ABCs of RTI* contains information from other public and private organizations that may be useful to the reader. These materials are merely examples of resources that may be available. Inclusion of this information does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any products or services offered or views expressed. This publication also contains links to web sites created and maintained by outside organizations, provided for the reader's convenience. The Department is not responsible for the accuracy of this information.

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