

Testimony
On
Response to Intervention Initiative (S-445 (Ruiz))
Before the
Senate Education Committee
November 16, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to share the thoughts of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA) on S-445 (Ruiz) which establishes a Response to Intervention initiative (RTI) within the Department of Education and would encourage school districts to implement a Response to Intervention framework.

Our members are the principals, assistant principals and supervisory employees at the school building level who are responsible for: developing the educational vision of a school; ensuring a safe and secure learning environment for students and staff; implementing curriculum and assessment; and, leading teachers and school staff

NJPSA supports efforts to ensure that ALL children who are struggling learners receive the educational support and instruction they need to excel. It is why we support the “Response to Intervention” or RTI process and why we support this legislation.

What is RTI?

RTI is a referral system within the regular education program of a school that provides early intervention and referral services to general education students with learning challenges. Authorized under the 2004 revision to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), RTI requires schools to monitor a child’s progress and results are used to make decisions about further instruction and intervention.

While RTI is most commonly used in addressing problems with reading and math, it can be used in other areas. The RTI process is flexible and designed by school districts to meet the needs of their students. The RTI process typically has three tiers. Each tier provides differing levels of support:

- In Tier I, all students receive high quality curriculum and instruction in the regular education classroom. The teacher assists all learners.
- In Tier II, the school provides interventions to students who need more support than they are receiving from the general curriculum.
- In Tier III, students are given individualized instruction.

Why it Works

One of RTI’s key components is its focus on universal screenings. Universal Screenings review the progress of all students through state and district test scores or other academic screenings. These assessments help schools identify students who may need more support or other types of instruction. As a result of universal screening, students may be identified as needing targeted assistance (a Tier II level of support) in addition to the high quality instruction they are receiving in Tier I. Research based interventions (teaching strategies or methods that have been proven to be effective in helping children learn), are used to support students in the area they are struggling.

Another key component to the RTI process is progress monitoring. Progress monitoring is a way for teachers to take a snapshot of how children are doing on a specific skill. It shows how well an intervention is working. It includes observations, tests, and other formal and informal assessments. Progress monitoring helps determine whether an intervention is successful or needs to be changed. Guidelines for progress monitoring are generally developed by the school, and detail how long a child will receive a particular intervention and how they will determine whether the intervention is helping the child.

When the child meets the goals developed by the school, the intervention is no longer needed and the child continues to receive support from the general education curriculum. However, when monitoring shows that a child is not responding to an intervention, another approach or type of intervention may be tried. And, if a higher level of support is needed, children are given individualized instruction which further focuses on the supporting the skills they need to be successful learners (Tier III). This individualized support may include a referral for special education.

Why We Support This Legislation

Fundamentally this process requires schools to focus on the individual needs of the child. This ensures that students receive unique supports that reflect their educational needs. But, the process also helps school's focus resources more appropriately. That is why NJPSA is proud to support S-445 (Ruiz) which seeks to bolster efforts to promote RTI in districts through a Department led initiative. This initiative would provide support, training and assistance to districts in implementing RTI.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important proposal. We stand ready to work with the Sponsors, this Committee, and our fellow advocates on this important initiative.