

Response to Intervention and Gifted: The Learner, the Services and the Programs

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

The Relationship Between RtI and Gifted

1. How does Response to Intervention (RtI) Relate to Gifted and High Ability Students?

RtI is a framework involving all students including those who are gifted. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) noted that RtI “must be viewed as a school-wide initiative”. In Florida RtI evolved into a collaboration to ensure challenging instruction and services for all students. It is appropriate to look at how RtI might help accomplish positive outcomes for gifted learners. This may include consideration of providing additional supports and services to increase the level of challenge for a student. A student who has met or exceeded grade level expectations may evidence a need for RtI strategies in order to make appropriate learning gains. A December 2008 Florida Department of Education memo from Bambi J. Lockman, Chief, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, indicated districts were encouraged to include the gifted coordinator in developing the district plan to support highly able learners. Since that time, there has been increasing attention state and nation-wide to how gifted education and services for high ability students mesh with RtI implementation.

2. Should RtI be used to establish gifted services?

In Florida, the Educational Plan (EP) team decides what services are appropriate for students who are gifted. Components of RtI include universal screening, assessment and progress monitoring which may serve as a guide to identifying students with potential who evidence a need for additional support and services. The RtI process provides educators with a wealth of knowledge about the student regarding strengths and needs based on the data collected. The problem solving teams should meet to determine that students who are high-achieving receive the depth and complexity of instruction necessary to meet their needs in all content area courses.

3. Are there underachievement gifted factors that need to be addressed?

Yes. There is always the possibility that a student who is gifted could be an underachiever, since that is not an uncommon characteristic. In the RtI process, student performance is measured through data, rather than perceptions. A student who presents data reflecting little or no progress should draw attention for consideration of additional supports and services. The supports and services may be in the form of behavior and motivation as well as academics. If a gifted student is performing at an average level in their area of strength, the problem solving team might consider the underachievement and address the issue. Problem solving teams must understand that gifted students are not gifted in all areas and that performance expectations should be specific for the student.

Eligibility for Gifted Services

4. Will RtI make it more difficult for students to meet gifted eligibility?

No. The goal of RtI is for the educational system to meet the needs of all students by implementing interventions that allow the student to make continuous progress. The RtI process may be of assistance with eligibility determination for gifted services by helping to identify the need for services. RtI provides teachers with a familiar framework for collecting and communicating the data required to reflect a need for services.

5. How are the strengths of a student recognized in RtI?

In the RtI process, the strengths of a student may be identified through off-grade level assessments. Other sources of data may include progress monitoring, formal and/or universal assessments, and classroom performance including informal assessments.

6. If a student shows success with interventions that provide increased challenge, might testing for gifted then be pursued?

In the case of any student who exhibits a need for more challenging or accelerated curriculum, consideration for gifted eligibility could be indicated. It must be clear that RtI and eligibility for gifted services are separate issues. Data may indicate that a student is experiencing learning gains and whether the student's needs are being met. RtI supports progress for all students. Students identified as gifted might have a need for specialized instruction that would be provided by gifted endorsed instructors. For a twice exceptional student, service should be available with both a gifted endorsed teacher and ESE certified providers, as needed.

7. If a student shows a need for more challenge, can that need alone qualify he or she for a gifted program?

No. RtI and gifted eligibility are two separate issues. Testing for intellectual ability is part of the eligibility process as indicated in State Rule 6A-6.03019, *Special Instructional Programs for Students Who Are Gifted*. A measure of intellectual development provided by the IQ test provides additional data and insight regarding the potential of a student. RtI data collection is part of a framework based in classroom instruction and assessment that prompts monitoring to assure continual learning gains.

8. What tier allows us to identify a student for gifted?

A student may be determined as having a need for gifted services at any time.

Supports and Services of RtI

9. Does a student need to be twice exceptional to receive additional supports and services?

All students are entitled to have their instructional needs met. If a student has been identified as twice exceptional, meaning the student is identified as both gifted and as having a disability, the student has the right to receive services for the area(s) of disability and for gifted.

10. Could supports provided through consultative services be considered an intervention?

If the problem solving team determines that consultation would be appropriate for a gifted student who is receiving instruction in a general education class, the EP team must convene to consider this service. RtI focuses on the instruction that occurs through any supports and services. Therefore the team must determine the student's needs related to the service, frequency, duration and how the service will be monitored to document continued learning gains.

11. What is the role of the teacher of the gifted?

Input from teachers of the gifted is integral to the problem solving team in determining appropriate services for students. As experts in the field, they might assist with designing interventions, consult with teachers on individual student needs, provide information on effective learning strategies or characteristics unique to this population, and suggest resource materials. Teachers of the gifted also provide direct instruction to students identified as gifted as determined by the EP.

12. Does RtI replace the need for gifted classes?

No. Service for a student determined eligible for gifted is mandated by the state. Like all supports and services in the RtI model, special instructional programs are designed to enhance the core curriculum and foster continual high student achievement as reflected by progress monitoring. For a student determined eligible, the interventions provided through differentiation in general education are in addition to the gifted services outlined in the EP.

13. What might Tier I look like for gifted students?

Tier I for all students is core instruction, which is founded on high quality curriculum differentiated to meet the diverse needs of learners. Teachers may embed additional supports and strategies in the basic core instruction to ensure students continue to make learning gains. This differentiation will require changes to the depth and complexity of content or rate of mastery.

14. What supports are available for implementing the differentiation for gifted/advanced learners in Tier I?

The front line support for addressing gifted students in any educational setting is the gifted endorsed teacher who has been appropriately trained through extensive course work. The next level of support could be the district program contact for gifted. Other supports include guided instruction for high achievers as well as instructional materials and resources at the WOGI website's RtI link.

15. What might Tier II look like for gifted students?

Tier II services are supports and services that extend beyond the core curriculum. Tier II is categorized as having more intensity and is delivered in smaller, more specialized groups. Tier II services for gifted may include matching a student's area of strength to a specialized class, acceleration in core subject areas, targeted small group instruction or counseling, or enrichment in an area of interest. These services must involve the development and/or implementation of curriculum and instruction by a teacher of gifted.

16. What might Tier III look like for gifted students?

Tier III interventions are unique supports and services for any student in need of intensive, specialized individual learning experiences. These are designed around a specific area of need. For a student who is gifted this could be in an area of significant strength and might include intensive acceleration (whole grade), specialized individual counseling or an independent study. These services are coordinated by the teacher of gifted and require collaboration with multiple professionals.

Documenting Services and Supports

17. Is an EP required for Tier III?

An EP is required for any student identified as gifted who is receiving services. It does not correlate to a tier.

18. How do we measure and collect data for students who are consistently performing at highest levels on academic measures?

It is the responsibility of the educational system to appropriately measure learning gains of all students. Above level assessments may be used for the purpose of appropriately measuring student learning gains. These may be commercial or teacher-created assessments as long as reliability and validity are ensured. There are many ways to collect data on gifted students, including the IOWA Acceleration Scale, SAT/ACT test scores, formative and summative assessments, portfolios, journals, rubrics, performance, products, rating scales, etc.

19. What type of documentation should teachers keep?

Progress monitoring teams would consider any documentation of student gains including a portfolio of evidence, universal screenings, district and state assessments, student products, learning styles inventories, interest profiles, formative and summative assessments, report cards indicating above level instruction in core subject areas, parent conferences, lesson plans, etc. just as for other students. All data helps to inform decision-making.

20. Who should be involved in the Problem-Solving team for gifted learners?

The Problem Solving team for all students should include the parent, those who have knowledge of the resources available who can interpret data, and individuals trained to identify and understand the needs of the students. When discussing a gifted or high achieving student, a teacher of the gifted would be an appropriate member of the team. Other members could be a general education teacher, counselor, an instructional coach, and/or an administrator.