CHAPTER 9

Developing RTI Blueprints

Connecting the Dots

PROCESS MATTERS

At about the same time that we were working on the first edition of this book, another team of educators who had been doing RTI for a number of years were working on a book as well. That book, titled *Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation* (Batsche et al., 2005), differed from ours in a number of significant ways. While our book focused on the detailed steps needed to implement RTI, theirs offered a comprehensive view of the systems-level changes that must accompany RTI. The Batsche et al. (2005) book is an important contribution to the overall literature on RTI because it provides guidance about the process of making RTI happen. You may have been wondering to yourself, "How can I possibly put all 10 steps of RTI in place in my classroom or school?" *You can't.* No one person can implement RTI alone (Brown-Chidsey, Bronaugh, & McGraw, 2009). This is why guidance about the process that school teams need to follow to make RTI happen is important. This chapter provides information about the overall process that a school, district, or state must follow to make responsive intervention a reality. RTI is a general education initiative but it requires collaboration between general and special education, and many special educators have assisted with developing RTI practices (see Box 9.1).

Batsche et al. provided a very strong framework for how to begin the process of considering and implementing RTI. In that initial work, they encouraged educators seeking to implement RTI to create a *blueprint* for their work. They recommended the blueprint framework because it shows all the underlying plans needed before RTI actions (such as those we have described in Chapter 7) can happen. Just as a builder must have a blueprint before constructing a building, educators need a blueprint for the RTI system they seek to build. The initial blueprint model that Batsche et al. developed has been revised, and there are now three types of blueprint models available, matched to the three main levels of RTI implementation: school, district, and state (Palenchar & Boyer, 2008) (see Box 9.2 for infor-

BOX 9.1. If RTI Is a General Education Initiative, Why Are So Many Special Educators Involved?

You might be wondering why so many of the resources related to RTI also have links to special education. After all, we did tell you that RTI is a general education "thing" and that it's not about changing special education. You are right—but there *are* ways that resources once found only in special education can be helpful also in general education.

The transition of a tool from a specialized use to a more general purpose is called *technology transfer*. There are many helpful tools that we use every day that are the result of technology transfer. Look at the following list of items; what do they have in common?

Radar
Microwave oven
Velcro
Nylon tights or pantyhose
Cell phones

All of these items are examples of technology transfer. All of these products were originally researched and developed for highly specialized (and sometimes top-secret) military or space purposes. In time, these technologies were supplanted by even fancier ones. The original ones still have great value in everyday life; so the technologies were transferred to commercial applications.

RTI includes a great deal of technology transfer as well. Many of the teaching and assessment methods useful in RTI started out as special education programs and methods. For example, CBM, direct instruction, and PBIS were all initially developed to help students with disabilities. In time, research has shown that these are technologies that can be useful to *all* students; so they have been transferred for use in general education.

mation about how to get copies of the blueprint templates). Equally important to the role of RTI blueprints is the role of school-based teams who work together to make RTI happen. Next we discuss the importance of these teams and then describe the key features of an RTI blueprint and how it supports the long-term use of RTI.

RTI blueprints are just like architectural blueprints in that they provide a detailed plan for how a school will construct its RTI supports.

TEAMWORK IS ESSENTIAL

A variety of different teams play an important role in RTI. The most important teams are those at the school level. Two types of teams that help to support RTI are grade-level teams and problem-solving teams. Importantly, we call them teams because they must work together just like a sports team in order to succeed. Teams must have a common goal and a commitment to sharing the work to achieve that goal. This arrangement is different from other groups that might come together in schools. For example, schools often have many

BOX 9.2. School-, District-, and State-Level RTI Blueprints

The initial blueprint publication by Batsche et al. (2005), *Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation*, was published by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). The subsequent school, district, and state blueprints were jointly published by NASDSE and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE). All of these documents can be downloaded from the NASDSE website at *www.nasdse.org*. Once at the site, click on the Publications tab. In the Keyword Search box type "blueprint" and then select *Response to Intervention* as the category. For type, use *any*. This selection will bring up a list of items. The items can be purchased in hard copy, or, if you click on the title of the item, a new screen appears where you can download the blueprint for *free*.

committees that are assigned to work on a task. Unlike a team, a committee does not necessarily have a common purpose. Committee members may well not have a common goal, and sometimes they do not even want to be together. By contrast, teams have to share a common goal and must rely on each other to reach that goal.

Grade-Level Teams

Grade-level teams include all the teachers who teach the same grade in a school. If the school has multiage classrooms, the grade-level team can include teachers of more than one grade. Some very small schools have only one teacher per grade, and in such cases teachers of grades near each other (e.g., K–2) can come together to be a grade-level team. In cases where there are a very large number of teachers in a school who teach the same grade (e.g., more than eight), two or more teams can be created. This ensures that all teachers will get a chance to participate fully in the meetings. Grade-level teams play a key role in RTI because they provide a setting where each teacher can get support from colleagues to support students who are struggling. The reason why having teachers meet and use grade-level teams for this work is that teachers of the same, or very close, grade levels know what the grade-level learning expectations are and can suggest ideas for helping students based on those learning goals. Grade-level teams work best if they can meet frequently and long enough to share details about individual students. While there are no data to suggest the best meeting schedule, grade-level teams that meet at least once monthly can offer the best support to participating teachers; some grade-level teams meet twice a month or even weekly.

Once established, grade-level teams can establish their own meeting agendas. For example, a team might decide to talk about one student in detail at each meeting. Alternatively, a team might decide to give each teacher 10 minutes at each meeting. A very effective use of grade-level team meeting time is to review data. At the start of the year, this approach would entail reviewing the screening data for all classes and having teachers identify the students of concern. During the year, teachers can bring and discuss progress data for students participating in Tier 2 interventions. Through the sharing of data from each class, teachers could compare how students in their own classes are doing and discuss what other

interventions they might want to try. Through regular meetings and data sharing, grade-level teams strengthen teachers' common goal of supporting all students in their classes.

Problem-Solving Teams

In addition to the grade-level teams, it is important that there be one schoolwide team that helps teachers get additional assistance for students who are not successful with Tier 1 plus Tier 2 interventions. In many schools such schoolwide teams are known as problem-solving teams (PSTs) but other terms used include student support teams, student success teams, child study teams, and teacher assistance teams (Brown-Chidsey, 2005b). Here, the term PST will be used to describe these schoolwide teams. The main purpose of the schoolwide team is to facilitate data-driven decision making, especially at Tier 3 (Tilly, 2002). The exact duties of the PST at each school vary, depending on the size of the school and how long RTI has been in place. Usually the PST has a more precise and closely specified role in larger schools because of the need to ensure consistency. PSTs often also have a major role when RTI is first being initiated because they serve to assure that all staff members know the RTI steps. PST members will get a sense of how RTI is being implemented, and this information can be used to recommend additional professional development to support RTI.

The PST usually meets on a regular basis and has a set schedule of activities at each meeting. Activities generally include reviewing data and considering options for students not making progress. PST members can be selected in a number of different ways. At some schools, there is a representative for each grade as well as for specialists and other staff members. In other cases, PST membership is driven by teacher interest and experience with RTI. It is important for PST members to realize that they are not expected to provide additional instruction, or be "experts," in data review. *All* teachers must actively participate in gathering and reviewing student data. The PST serves the function of making sure that teachers have the resources they need to collect and review data in grade level teams as well as provide additional problem-solving capabilities when an intervention has not resulted in sufficient student progress. For example, after a classroom teacher identified a student with reading difficulties, she worked with her grade-level team to develop and implement two reading interventions during the daily intervention time block. If the progress data showed that the interventions did not work, the teacher would consult with her grade-level team colleagues to see whether another intervention should be tried or whether she should take the case to the PST. If the latter, the PST would then review the data and either recommend a different intervention or initiate a referral to Tier 3 and a comprehensive evaluation.

Both grade-level teams and PSTs play significant roles in creating successful outcomes with RTI. The grade-level teams provide teacher support on a regular basis. When efforts to help students in the classroom and with Tier 2 interventions have not been successful, the PST offers a way for teachers to get additional assistance in meeting student learning needs. The use of these teams ensures that no single teacher—or principal—is running RTI alone. RTI cannot be accompanied by any single individual, but, rather, depends on the collaboration and active teamwork of all the school officials and teachers. These functional teams are

typically formed during the RTI planning stage, and they in effect create the blueprints that inform long-term RTI activities in the school, district, and state.

RTI BLUEPRINTS

Blueprints for implementation of RTI—whether at the school, district, or state level—generally must feature three key organizational steps, namely:

1. Consensus building
2. Infrastructure development
3. Process implementation

Next we describe each of these in turn and then discuss how these steps fit together to "connect the dots" for your school, district, or state.

RTI requires commitment to a process of school change.

Consensus Building

Consensus building is the first key organizational step reflected in RTI blueprints because it has such a strong impact on the long-term success of RTI. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*'s definition of *consensus* includes three parts: (1a) general agreement, (1b) the judgment arrived at by most of those concerned, and (2) group solidarity in sentiment and belief. When used in terms of RTI, *consensus* refers to the extent that all the educators in the school, district, or state agree that RTI will be helpful for all of its students. This high level of consensus is critical because RTI requires everyone to work together to be effective. As one of us noted in another context "it takes a village" to successfully implement RTI because it is necessarily a *systemic* way of helping students (Brown-Chidsey et al., 2009).

The consensus-building aspect of the blueprint process includes educating peers and colleagues about the core components of RTI (Glover & DiPerna, 2007; Kovaleski, 2007). This education can, and should, take on many forms so that everyone has a chance to ask questions and think over the implications of a universal responsive intervention system. For example, it is important that all key staff members understand that embracing and implementing RTI generally means that they are making a commitment to the following principles:

- All children can learn.
- All children have a right to an efficacious education.
- Not all children have disabilities, but they all might need extra help at various times as they make their way from kindergarten through grade 12.
- Differentiating instruction for individual students is an important part of general education.

- Education outcome data are effective tools for determining what types of extra support a student needs.
- Multi-tier standard protocols and problem-solving methods are effective ways of addressing the learning needs of all students.

The consensus-building phase provides staff members with the opportunity to consider the foregoing statements and decide whether they agree with them. In addition, there need to be conversations about the implications of these ideas and how they will be addressed.

The length of time that the consensus-building phase takes will be depend on the prior experiences with RTI that staff personnel have. If staff members are very familiar with RTI and eagerly embrace the related principles, this step, or phase, may take just a few months. If, however, staff members hold a variety of beliefs about RTI and are not in agreement about its underlying principles, building consensus may take one or more school years to achieve. Having consensus about how to proceed with RTI is important because it is a form of staff "buy-in" or "ownership" of what RTI is all about. Without this "ownership," staff members are unlikely to invest adequate time and energy into making RTI work. Building a genuine consensus may require inordinate time and efforts by key leaders, but that time and effort are very much worth the energy because having a commonly agreed-upon vision for RTI in the school, district, or state will help assure its long-term sustainability.

Infrastructure Development

The second blueprint step or phase is infrastructure development. This phase includes inventorying all the "nuts-and-bolts" materials needed to put RTI firmly into place. This phase is very different from consensus building because it focuses on concrete needs rather than beliefs and ideas. Three main concerns are likely to emerge during this phase: (1) inventories, (2) resource gathering, and (3) professional development. Each concern is very important because adequate provision for all three is crucial to success of the overall RTI plan. Just as an architect needs to know about and specify the right building materials, educators need to know about and use effective instruction and assessment practices. Most of the time, the infrastructure development work is completed by teams of teachers, administrators, parents, specialists, and others. By using goal-specific teams, the work of provisioning inventories, gathering resources, and engaging in professional development is shared equitably among the available personnel.

The inventorying process provides a way for all educators in a school, district, or state to know authoritatively what instructional and assessment materials are currently being used. Instructional materials inventories include lists of all the current instructional tools being used at each grade level, classified according to the specific RTI tier to which they apply. Before starting to gather the inventory information, it is important to think about the types of instructional and assessment tools that the schools are already using; these tools can be grouped by tier according to how they are being used. An organizing tool that can be used to assist teams as they plan an inventory is shown in Form 9.1 at the end of this chapter. This inventory guide includes reminders about how instruction and assessment dif-

fer at each tier. For example, Tier 1 calls for the use of scientifically based core curricula in *all* subject areas for *all* students. This requirement means that the Tier 1 inventory process will include identifying all the instructional materials and methods adopted and in use in general education classrooms.

Tier 2 provides *additional* instruction for those students who specifically need it. The inventory of Tier 2 instruction will include instructional materials and methods that are used *in addition to* the Tier 1 core programs. Usually these are materials and methods that work with small groups of students who need to work on the same skill. Tier 3 includes very intensive programs for students who have not been successful with Tier 1 *plus* Tier 2 interventions. The Tier 3 list will include programs that require a very small group typically two students per teacher or one-on-one instruction and that might replace the core program. As seen in Form 9.1, the focus of instruction at each tier becomes increasingly more narrow. *Because this guide may not provide all the room necessary to compile an inventory across both tiers and grade levels, a full-page inventory form can also be used.* A sample reading instruction inventory is shown in Figure 9.1 and the blank inventory form itself is provided as Form 9.2 at the end of the chapter. The instructional materials cited in Figure 9.1 exemplify and were derived from a small elementary school and represent the actual programs in place at that school.

A similar inventory process is used to identify the assessment resources currently in use. Form 9.2 can be used for both instructional and assessment inventories. Figure 9.2 shows a sample math assessment inventory for grades K–5. Also shown on the sample assessment inventory is a description of the type of assessment needed at each tier. At Tier 1, screening assessments are needed to identify which students need help. At Tier 2, progress assessments are essential so that student improvement can be recorded. Tier 2 progress data are the evidence of RTI practices. Tier 3 assessments often include two main elements, but they come under one main heading: diagnostic assessments. These assessments include progress data as well as results from specialized assessments of specific knowledge or skills. Together such Tier 3 data help a team to determine whether a student needs special education. Importantly, for RTI to work, there must be routine assessments at each tier. Without these assessments, it will be impossible to know if the students are meeting their instructional goals.

Once the instruction and assessment inventories are complete, the information gathered is shared with colleagues to identify what other resources are needed. Often the inventories are done by grade-level teams and then shared with the PST to consider what else is needed. The additional resources might include different or additional instructional materials as well as other assessments (Dessof, 2008). Location-specific needs should be considered as well. Schools in urban areas will have different needs than those in rural settings (Dexter, Hughs, & Farmer, 2008). Resources can also include changes in daily schedules and time to meet as colleagues. At the resource gathering stage there are key questions that are likely to come up during discussions, such as:

1. Is anyone really using any of the materials listed in the inventory?
2. Is enough instructional time allocated at each tier?
3. Which staff members are best suited to provide the various levels of instruction?

School: Lincoln Elementary Subject Area: Reading Instruction

Tier	K	1	2	3	4	5
1	Imagine It	Core Program				
2	Earobics Early Reading Intervention	Early Reading Intervention	Read Naturally Great Leaps	Great Leaps	Read Naturally	Questioning the Author
3	Lindamood–Bell Language for Learning	Language for Learning Reading Mastery	Reading Mastery Sonday	Wilson Sonday	Wilson Spalding	Wilson Corrective Reading

FIGURE 9.1. Sample reading instruction inventory.

School: Lincoln Elementary Subject Area: Math Assessment

Tier	K	1	2	3	4	5
	Universal: Screening					
1	AIMSweb Tests of Early Numeracy (TEN)	AIMSweb Math	Aimsweb Math	Aimsweb Math	Aimsweb Math G-MADE	Aimsweb Math G-MADE
	Weekly: Progress Monitoring					
2	TEN: selected measure(s)	AIMSweb addition easy CBM	AIMSweb subtraction easy CBM	AIMSweb mixed problems easy CBM	AIMSweb mixed problems easy CBM	AIMSweb mixed problems easy CBM
	In-Depth Assessment: Diagnostic					
3	Survey-Level Assessment Key Math, K-TEA	Survey-Level Assessment Key Math, K-TEA	Survey-Level Assessment Key Math, WIAT	Survey-Level Assessment Key Math, WIAT	Survey-Level Assessment Key Math, WJ-III-ACH	Survey-Level Assessment Key Math, WJ-III-ACH

FIGURE 9.2. Sample math assessment inventory.

Some of these questions can be answered through additional dialogue among team members at both the grade and schoolwide level. Other answers may require additional inventories or professional development. In terms of the long-term RTI blueprint, it is important that staff members be both thoughtful and thoroughgoing about all the resources needed to support instruction and assessment at each tier (Carney & Stiefel, 2008).

It's important to encourage team members to be flexible. Occasionally RTI planners will have to go back to the drawing board and perhaps totally revise the blueprint.

Professional development (PD) is the last major activity within the infrastructure development phase. The reason that it comes at this point is that it serves as a crucial bridge between current and future practices (Kratochwill, Volpiansky, Clements, & Ball, 2007). The inventory and resource gathering stages provide ways to know what has happened in the past and what is needed in the future, but implementation cannot really occur until there is training to equip staff members with the knowledge and skills needed (Danielson, Doolittle, & Bradley, 2007). The specific types of PD that each school, district, and state will need prior to implementation will vary a great deal and may vary for different providers (Nelson & Machek, 2007). The importance of PD in the overall success of RTI cannot be overstated. Teachers need—and deserve—to have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide the instruction and assessment expected of them (Nunn & Jantz, 2009). Just as it is not appropriate to ask a student to demonstrate a skill we have not yet taught him or her, we cannot expect teachers to engage in different instruction and assessment if we do not give them the training needed. Well-designed professional development includes not only the initial training but also frequent "booster" sessions so that teachers can ask questions and practice newly learned skills with supportive feedback from colleagues (Hawkins, Kroeger, Musti-Rao, Barnett, & Ward, 2008). One of the most common complaints that teachers have about any new innovation in schools is that there is not enough PD for them to learn the new practices well. School-level teams must consider carefully what PD will be essential to their local needs and make sure to build it into the RTI blueprint. PD is important at all levels, including state RTI initiatives (Bergstrom, 2008; Palenchar & Boyer, 2008).

Process Implementation

The last step, or phase, of the RTI blueprint process is implementation. This must come after the other phases because only with sufficient consensus and adequate infrastructure can effective implementation be assured. Some staff members may be eager to implement RTI steps right away, but doing so prematurely only results in failure. One of the precautionary elements built into the school, district, and state blueprints is typically a section known as "wisdom from the field." This section normally offers sage advice from those who have been implementing RTI for a while. Examples of how such "wisdom" can help include useful advice on how best to use existing staff in new ways (Hoover & Patton, 2008; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Such advice based on experience avoids having to "reinvent the wheel" as we make RTI happen. A key part of implementation—and why it needs its own portion

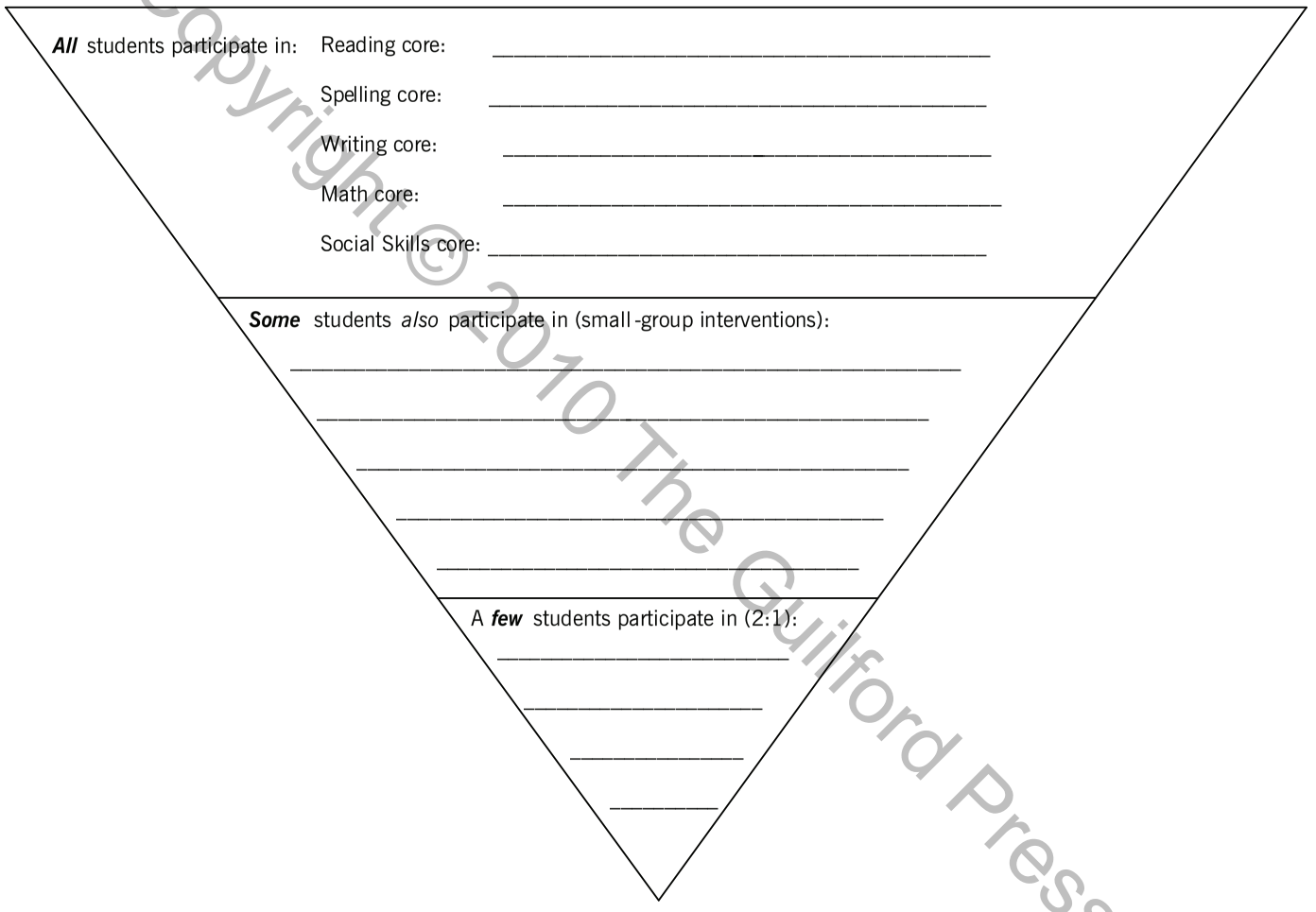
of the RTI blueprint—is that it must happen in phases over time. RTI requires a concerted team effort, and, just as "Rome wasn't built in a day," all parts of a blueprint cannot be put into place instantly. A core feature of the implementation section is a detailed plan for what will happen when within a given extended time frame. This plan can be modified over time, if needed, but a schedule for each step is very important so that the right people are in the right place at the right time to make responsive instruction a reality in your setting.

SUMMARY

This chapter has provided information about the importance of long-term planning to support RTI. Templates for school, district, and state RTI blueprints are available for free, and we recommend them as excellent starting points. Creating your own customized blueprints will require staff members to take into account their essential beliefs, resources, and schedules in order to make RTI a functioning reality. In the process of creating the blueprint, staff members will need to create teams, align instructional and assessment practices, and plan for how they can evaluate their own progress toward supporting all students. Much of the day-to-day work in RTI includes teaching well, checking regularly on students' progress, and using performance data to inform subsequent instruction. By having school, district, and state blueprints in place to monitor overall RTI progress, school personnel are positioned to connect the dots generated by student learning so that all students have a greater chance to meet their potential.

FORM 9.1

Inventory Guide



FORM 9.2

Inventory Form

School: _____ Subject Area: _____

Tier	K	1	2	3	4	5
1						
2						
3						

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