



# State policies and procedures and selected local implementation practices in Response to Intervention in the six Southeast Region states



Institute of Education Sciences  
U.S. Department of Education



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practices in Response to Intervention  
in the six Southeast Region states

**September 2008**

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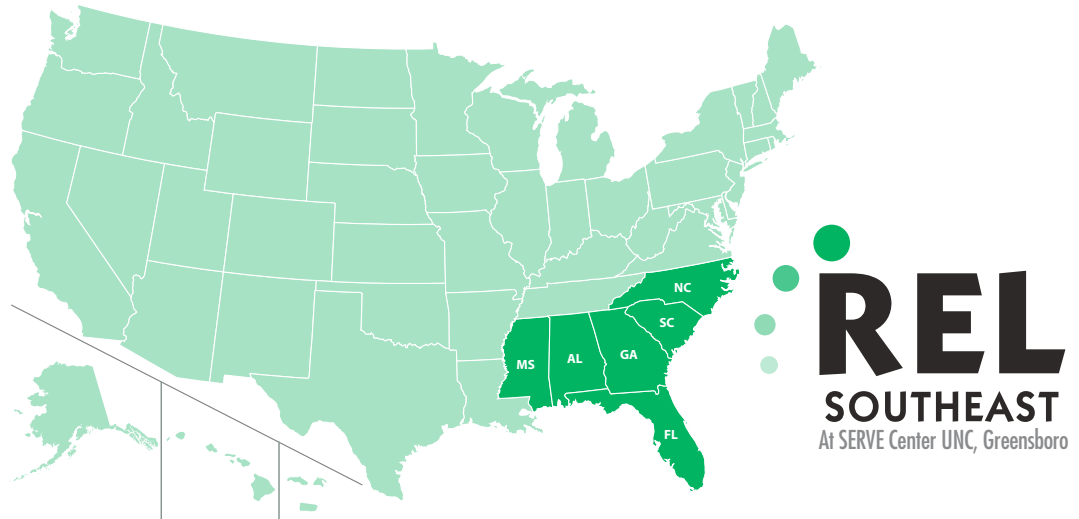
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# State policies and procedures and selected local implementation practices in Response to Intervention in the six Southeast Region states

**This report describes how six state education agencies and three local education agencies in the Southeast Region are adopting and implementing Response to Intervention—an education approach designed to provide effective, evidence-based interventions for struggling learners.**

Response to Intervention has garnered recent interest from policymakers, researchers, and educators. Studies of its effectiveness have found it promising (Compton et al. 2006; McMaster et al. 2005; Speece and Case 2001; Torgesen et al. 1999). And state education agencies are increasingly interested in the approach.

Yet few published studies describe the experiences of states as they plan and implement Response to Intervention. This report helps address that need. It supplies basic information about state planning and implementation of the approach in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

Although the report focuses chiefly on states, it also illustrates implementation of Response to Intervention with examples from three local education agencies.

Two broad research questions guided the study. Each appears below, followed by a brief summary of the findings.

1. **What do the six states report about their interest in Response to Intervention, about state planning and development for it, and about policy development for it (and for related areas)?**

The report identifies four main reasons why Southeast Region states adopted Response to Intervention:

- To address disproportionality—the over-identification or underidentification of students from minority subgroups for special education.
- To promote overall student achievement.
- To better integrate general and special education.
- To inform, or possibly determine, special education eligibility for students with learning disabilities.

All six Southeast Region states were adopting Response to Intervention at the state level: from planning in Alabama and South Carolina, to pilot initiatives in Florida and North Carolina, to statewide rollouts in Georgia and

Mississippi. Leadership for such efforts has been split, residing sometimes in special education departments and sometimes in general education departments. Still, state initiatives—except in North Carolina—have been presented as initiatives based in general education.

Of the six Southeast Region states, only Mississippi has adopted a formal state Response to Intervention policy. Florida and North Carolina, however, have pilot initiatives that will inform future policy development for both Response to Intervention and special education identification procedures.

Except Georgia, the Southeast Region states have drawn chiefly on funds from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 to support their Response to Intervention initiatives and have relied on a variety of national and regional technical assistance resources and experts. New organizational and planning structures—with new roles and responsibilities—have accompanied Response to Intervention at state education agencies.

## 2. How are the six states considering or implementing Response to Intervention?

The researchers examined nine aspects of each state's Response to Intervention approach, beginning with the state's Response to Intervention model.

Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina, which have begun state implementation, were using a problem-solving model, which assesses student strengths and weaknesses, identifies evidence-based instructional interventions, and evaluates the effectiveness of interventions being implemented. It differs

from the standard protocol model, which uses schoolwide or classwide screening and relies on predetermined instructional techniques and resources with proven effectiveness. Some states have articulated their models and procedures more fully than the others.

The other aspects of Response to Intervention approaches in each state examined for this report were:

- Tier design.
- Student performance monitoring.
- Targeted subject areas and school levels.
- Professional development.
- Technical assistance provided.
- Facilitating factors.
- Challenges.
- Technical assistance needs.

In the four states now implementing the approach, Response to Intervention models described at least a tier structure, with some other components and practices. But many decisions about implementation reside with districts and schools. For example, states and schools select interventions, set criteria for moving between tiers, and decide the means and frequency of student performance monitoring.

The schools and districts in this report's case studies have all adapted their state Response to Intervention structures and materials to their local settings. As with state implementation, local implementation has forged new planning structures and working relationships among school and district staff.

Southeast Region states have different strategies for scaling up Response to Intervention. Some are beginning with an exclusive focus on

the elementary level; others are rolling out the approach to all grade levels. All six states have Response to Intervention initiatives that focus on reading, yet it is almost as common for the state initiatives to focus on mathematics and behavior.

States encounter both facilitating factors and challenges as they plan and implement Response to Intervention. Collaboration among state education departments and external partners is an important consideration for state planning. To succeed, collaboration requires a common language and a shared understanding of the initiative. Related challenges arise for planners working across special and general education: such challenges include blending funding, developing staff training, and staging rollouts so as not to overwhelm schools with new and complex practices.

State education agency lead staff identified many other challenges that come with Response to Intervention initiatives. More work is needed to share and empirically compare states' experiences with such concerns as funding options, state planning practices,

fidelity in implementation, identification of effective mathematics and behavior interventions, and secondary school implementation.

The researchers used a descriptive study design with two data collection strategies:

- A scan of state policies and program descriptions, using a structured search protocol for Response to Intervention materials.
- Key informant interviews with state and local education agency lead staff, using semistructured protocols.

The data sources for this report comprised transcripts of these key informant interviews and program documents from each state (including policies, manuals, training and informational materials, and technical assistance documents). A literature review also informed the research revealing planning concerns and other features of Response to Intervention models.

**September 2008**

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**This report describes how six state education agencies and three local education agencies in the Southeast Region are adopting and implementing Response to Intervention—an education approach designed to provide effective, evidence-based interventions for struggling learners.**

## WHY THIS STUDY?

Response to Intervention is an education approach designed to provide effective, evidence-based interventions for struggling learners. Most Southeast Region state education agencies now have Response

to Intervention initiatives in early adoption or implementation. They have expressed an interest in learning about others' approaches and experiences and in obtaining their advice. This report describes how state Response to Intervention initiatives in the Southeast Region involve different state agencies, provide policy guidance, plan and develop Response to Intervention models and rollouts, and access resources such as funds, information, and external partners. The report does not compare the efficacy of particular approaches, nor does it pass judgment on Response to Intervention's ability to fulfill the various purposes that states have cited for its adoption.

The report discusses all six Southeast Region state education agencies. It also examines three Southeast Region local education agencies and schools. State education policymakers and program managers will find the report informative; so will district and school administrators.

Two broad research questions guided the study:

- What do the six Southeast Region states report about their interest in Response to Intervention, about state planning and development for it, and about policy development for it (and for related areas)?
- How are the six Southeast Region states considering or implementing Response to Intervention? To answer this question, the researchers examined nine aspects of each state's approach:
  - Response to Intervention model.
  - Tier design.
  - Monitoring of student performance.
  - Subject areas and school levels targeted.
  - Professional development.
  - Technical assistance provided.
  - Facilitating factors.
  - Challenges.
  - Technical assistance needs.

The study methodology is briefly described in box 1 (for more details see appendix A). Key terms are defined in box 2.

## BOX 1

**Study methodology**

This report uses a descriptive study design with two data collection strategies:

- A scan of state policies, procedures, and program descriptions for Response to Intervention.
- Interviews with key informants involved in Response to Intervention at state and local education agencies (appendixes B and C).

Data were collected between April and November 2007. Analyses comprised qualitative and quantitative approaches. The quantitative approaches were limited to frequency counts.

The researchers developed the conceptual and analytical framework for this study by reviewing background materials and literature on Response to Intervention, including scholarly articles, research studies, and issues briefs and policy statements produced by national

education organizations involved in Response to Intervention. The review focused on issues pertinent to state planning and implementation. In addition, the key informant and policy scan protocols pointed the researchers toward other information categories (details of the study methodology are in appendix A; results of the literature review are in appendix D).

The review was not intended as an examination of the effectiveness of Response to Intervention.

## BOX 2

**Definitions of key terms**

*Adequate yearly progress.* A statewide accountability system, mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, that requires each state to ensure that all schools and districts make adequate yearly progress as defined by states and approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

*Curriculum-based measurement.* Tools for measuring student competency and progress in the basic skill areas of reading fluency, spelling, mathematics, and written language.

*Differentiated instruction.* Designing lesson plans to meet the needs of a range of learners. Includes learning objectives, grouping practices, teaching methods, varied assignments, and varied materials chosen based on student skill levels, interest levels, and learning preferences.

*Disproportionality.* Overidentifying or underidentifying students from minority subgroups for special education.

*Evidence-based practice and instruction.* Education practices and instruction strategies supported by scientific research.

*Fidelity of implementation.* Implementation of an intervention, program, or curriculum in a way that is faithful to research findings or developer specifications.

*IQ achievement discrepancy.* Difference between scores on a norm-referenced intelligence test and a norm-referenced achievement test.

*Learning disability/specific learning disability.* According to federal regulation §300.309(a)(1), a child has a learning disability or specific learning disability when the child does not achieve adequately for his or her age or does not meet state-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas (when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child's age or state-approved grade-level standards): oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression,

basic reading, reading fluency, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, or mathematics problem solving.

*Monitoring student progress.* A scientifically based practice for assessing student academic performance and evaluating the effectiveness of instruction, either of individual students or an entire class. (Progress monitoring can also mean the process used to monitor implementation of specific interventions.)

*Tiered model.* A common model with three or more tiers for instructional interventions based on student need.

*Universal screening.* Reviewing student performance, through formal or informal assessment measures (or both), to determine progress against student benchmarks. Universal screening is directly related to student learning standards.

*Source:* IDEA Partnership at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2007).

## OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The following sections highlight the report's main findings and suggest areas for future research that might be helpful as state and local education agencies move forward with Response to Intervention. A side-by-side summary, enabling comparisons among the six states' Response to Intervention activities, appears in appendix E.

### What do the six Southeast Region states report about their Response to Intervention initiatives?

All six Southeast Region states are planning or implementing Response to Intervention. Implementation status varies by state—Alabama and South Carolina are in the initial planning stages, Florida and North Carolina are conducting pilot projects, and Georgia and Mississippi have begun statewide rollouts.

With the exception of Mississippi Southeast Region state policies on Response to Intervention are still largely in development. Florida, Mississippi, and North Carolina are considering how to use Response to Intervention instead of, or in addition to, their existing procedures for determining special education eligibility. Lead staff from their state education agencies discussed the need for transition time—to prepare local education agency and school staff for new procedures and to consider how best to combine Response to Intervention with traditional or other eligibility determination approaches. Planning for a Response to Intervention initiative can take several years and continues beyond early implementation as pilot projects or statewide rollouts expand. Future research or field studies examining state planning procedures and timelines may help states as they explore Response to Intervention.

State education agency departments have shown varying degrees of leadership for state Response to Intervention efforts in the Southeast Region. In North Carolina the state education agency's special education department leads Response to Intervention efforts. In Mississippi and South Carolina

the general education departments are taking the lead. In Georgia leadership is shared among two general education departments and one special education department. Four lead staff reported the need for coordinated decisionmaking and resource sharing among program areas. Two mentioned the need for a common language about the initiative across departments. In Mississippi, for example, lead staff believe that framing Response to Intervention as a general education initiative has reinforced the idea that Response to Intervention is the responsibility of general as well as special education. Future research on state education agencies' strategies for organizing Response to Intervention initiatives and on effective ways to bring special and general education departments together would be of interest.

Each of the four Southeast Region states with a formulated Response to Intervention initiative—Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina—has integrated the approach into its existing education infrastructure. Parts of the approach, such as teacher support teams, progress monitoring, and data-based decisionmaking, existed before Response to Intervention was adopted and have been incorporated into it. For example, Reading First includes screening and progress monitoring procedures familiar to many teachers and school staff. Existing practices can thus help states introduce Response to Intervention. Yet Mississippi lead staff noted that teacher support teams needed to be explicitly redefined to show practitioners that they were different under Response to Intervention.

### How are the six Southeast Region states considering or implementing Response to Intervention?

All four Southeast Region states with formulated Response to Intervention initiatives have adopted the problem-solving model. Each state's model provides the basic tier structure for Response to

**While all six Southeast Region states are planning or implementing Response to Intervention, implementation status varies by state**

Intervention and defines key parts of the approach in the state. But many details and procedures, such as intervention selection, are left to be determined locally.

**All four Southeast Region states with formulated Response to Intervention initiatives have adopted the problem-solving model**

Response to Intervention models in Florida and Mississippi have three tiers; in Georgia and North Carolina they have four. Progress monitoring is common to all four models. Only North Carolina has developed state and district norms for curriculum-based measure-

ment. All four state models have an elementary-school focus, though Georgia's and Mississippi's also include middle and high school. Reading is the most common subject area focus, followed by mathematics and behavior.

Sustained investment in professional development is a feature of implementation in all four Southeast Region states with formulated Response to Intervention initiatives. States regarded the lack of information and skills among practitioners as a challenge. Georgia has incorporated Response to Intervention into other professional development; the other three states that have begun using Response to Intervention—Florida, Mississippi, and North Carolina—train staff both in the state's model and in certain components and practices, such as monitoring progress. In Mississippi and North Carolina teams of staff with different key roles in Response to Intervention (such as teachers, specialists, and administrators) are encouraged to attend training together. State informants characterized this team-based training as a way to ensure that all key players support the process and go on to educate their peers. Local education agency case examples indicated that, once trained, such teams keep working together to plan and troubleshoot Response to Intervention, adapting it to local conditions.

Beyond professional development, state education agencies have provided various other implementation supports. Florida's pilot includes ongoing coaching, Mississippi created a Response to Intervention manual, and North Carolina is developing

one. Georgia has incorporated its Response to Intervention model into curriculum and standards documents. More research on the effectiveness of different training and professional development models would likely help state and local education agencies that are considering how to disseminate Response to Intervention practices across school systems.

Lead staff also identified technical assistance needs that suggest other areas for future research on planning and implementing Response to Intervention. Future studies should describe and compare how different states are planning and funding Response to Intervention, how they promote implementation fidelity, how they implement the approach in secondary schools, and how they provide professional development for it. State and local education agency administrators could also benefit from more research on applying Response to Intervention to subject areas other than reading (including selecting interventions and monitoring student progress). Finally, studies of how different state Response to Intervention models influence implementation fidelity would be especially helpful. Lead staff say that they want practical tools and case examples of others' experiences with implementation.

## WHAT IS RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION?

Nationally prominent organizations and experts define Response to Intervention as providing high-quality, evidence-based instruction with interventions matched to student need, frequently monitoring student progress, and applying data on student progress to important education decisions (National Association of State Directors of Special Education 2005; Vaughn and Fuchs 2003).<sup>1</sup>

The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities at the University of Kansas defines core features of Response to Intervention as including (Mellard 2004):

- Universal screening of academics and behavior.

- High-quality, research-based classroom instruction.
- Research-based interventions.
- Ongoing monitoring of student progress in response to interventions.
- Multiple tiers of increasingly intense interventions.
- A differentiated curriculum.
- Instruction by various school staff, including the classroom teacher.

Past education practice has promoted and presented many of these features. Yet Response to Intervention initiatives typically endorse emphasizing and integrating them into instructional practice much more—applying them broadly to students (and especially to those achieving below expectations).

A possible challenge to the large-scale implementation of Response to Intervention will be that it is not one activity, but several integrated parts and procedures (Graden, Stollar, and Poth 2007; Batsche et al. 2007). Because the large-scale use of Response to Intervention by districts and states is new, most information yielded by a literature review is based on policy recommendations, opinion pieces, and practice guidance—not on rigorous empirical investigations. (See appendix D for a discussion of potential state interest in Response to Intervention, with information about policy development and resources, model designs, and other issues based on a national literature review.)

## RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION INITIATIVES IN SOUTHEAST REGION STATES AND DISTRICTS

The following sections present the findings for the two research questions. The first section answers the question about what the six Southeast Region states reported on their reasons for adopting the Response to Intervention approach, on

state planning and development, and on policy development. The next section presents findings on how states are considering or implementing Response to Intervention—with separate attention on models, tier design, monitoring of student performance, subjects and school levels, professional development and technical assistance, facilitating factors, challenges, and technical assistance needs.

What do the Southeast Region states report about their interest in Response to Intervention, about state planning and development for it, and about policy development for it (and for related areas)?

### *Reasons for the states' interest in Response to Intervention.*

Five Southeast Region state education agencies have developed specific interests in adopting Response to Intervention. The sixth, Alabama, is in the beginning stages of considering the approach, and at the time of data collection had not yet formulated a specific purpose for it. The main reasons for each state's interest in Response to Intervention appear in table 1.

Proponents advocate Response to Intervention as an alternative to the traditional IQ achievement discrepancy model for identifying and intervening with student learning problems and disabilities. North Carolina state education agency lead staff mentioned three reasons for adopting Response to Intervention: to serve struggling learners through the school program (rather than only through special education eligibility), to identify academically challenged students in the early grades, and to intervene within general education classrooms (minimizing the number of students referred and placed in special education).

One possible advantage over the IQ achievement discrepancy model is that Response to Intervention provides information

**Because the large-scale use of Response to Intervention by districts and states is new, most information yielded by a literature review is based on policy recommendations, opinion pieces, and practice guidance—not on rigorous empirical investigations**

TABLE 1

**State education agencies' reasons for interest in Response to Intervention**

State	Reasons for interest
Alabama	Not yet identified.
Florida	Promote achievement for all students. <sup>a</sup> Better integrate general and special education, promoting inclusion. <sup>a</sup> Reduce disproportionality. <sup>a</sup> Possibly use Response to Intervention for special education eligibility determinations. <sup>a</sup>
Georgia	Promote adequate yearly progress achievement of students with disabilities. <sup>a, b</sup> Reduce disproportionality. <sup>a, b, c</sup> Reduce the number of students identified as having a disability. <sup>b</sup> Provide a common conceptual framework and language for instruction practices and interventions. <sup>b</sup> Better integrate general and special education, avoiding a two-track system. <sup>c</sup> Encourage instructional differentiation. <sup>a</sup> Provide guidance on the use and intensity of interventions. <sup>a</sup>
Mississippi	Reduce disproportionality. <sup>a, b</sup> Institute statewide service delivery model requiring use of baseline and progress monitoring data to support academic success of all children. <sup>b</sup> Reduce placement of nondisabled children in special education. <sup>a</sup>
North Carolina	Identify students early who are at risk of school failure. <sup>b</sup> Provide appropriate interventions in general education and reduce special education referrals. <sup>b, c</sup> Reduce placement of nondisabled children in special education. <sup>a, b</sup> Reduce disproportionality and enhance culturally responsive instructional practices. <sup>b</sup>
South Carolina	Reduce disproportionality. <sup>b</sup> Improve performance of students with disabilities on statewide tests. <sup>b</sup>

*Note:* This table represents the specific reasons for implementing Response to Intervention stated in state education agency online materials or during key informant interviews. The reasons listed may not be exhaustive.

a. Item was mentioned in interviews with state officials in response to a specific question about state interest in adopting Response to Intervention.

b. State interests in Response to Intervention are articulated in written documents: Georgia Department of Education 2006; Mississippi Department of Education 2005; North Carolina State Board of Education 2005b; South Carolina State Performance Plan 2005. For Florida no documents available at the time of data collection addressed the issue.

c. The item was spontaneously mentioned during interviews with state officials at some point after the initial questions was asked.

*Source:* Documents and interviews with state officials as cited in the notes.

directly relevant to instruction design and delivery and to monitoring of student progress (Bradley, Danielson, and Doolittle 2007). State education agency lead staff in Florida reported that the state is trying to shift from categorizing students to focusing on their instructional needs, basing instruction decisions on how students are progressing rather than the types of disability they have. The staff expressed the hope that this shift would streamline resources and promote more inclusion of students with special needs.

Some researchers argue that the IQ achievement discrepancy model has contributed to disproportionality—the overidentification or underidentification of students from minority subgroups for special education—as cognitive measures can be culturally biased (Fletcher et al. 2002). Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi are under consent decrees requiring them to eliminate disproportionality. State education agency lead staff in Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina discussed Response to Intervention

assessment procedures as a possible way to better identify student instruction needs and so to reduce disproportionality.

Five state education agency lead staff mentioned Response to Intervention's potential for integrating program areas. For example, Florida staff mentioned that breaking down the special and general education "silos" would likely help to blend and maximize resources. Mississippi staff similarly believed that Response to Intervention might reduce inconsistencies in the quality of instruction in different program areas, assisting all students including struggling learners.

*State planning and development.* Online materials and state education agency staff interviews suggest that the status of Response to Intervention varies across Southeast Region states. Alabama lead staff reported being in the initial planning stage, with two coordinators leading a committee to pursue information and consider options. The staff explained that in late 2007 a full-time Response to Intervention coordinator was hired to work under the joint direction of the Director of Classroom Improvement and the Assistant State Superintendent. Although no interview was conducted for South Carolina, web site materials suggest that at the time of data collection it was also in the planning stage for Response to Intervention at the state level (South Carolina Department of Education 2007).

Florida and North Carolina have moved beyond planning into implementing pilot Response to Intervention projects. After two years of planning, Florida's Problem-Solving/Response to Intervention State Project initiated a demonstration pilot in 38 schools—a partnership between the University of South Florida and the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services at the Florida Department of Education (Florida Department of Education and University of South Florida n.d.). In North Carolina, where Response to Intervention pilot implementation began in 2005, a task force studied options and enlisted input for several years before the state's Response to Intervention

pilot was initiated (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction n.d.-a; North Carolina State Board of Education 2005b). State lead staff described how both Response to Intervention pilots have built-in research components to guide future Response to Intervention planning, policy development, and implementation. Florida's pilot involves both a randomized controlled trial and a process evaluation; in North Carolina researchers are monitoring process and outcome data associated with the pilot. Both Florida and North Carolina are providing statewide awareness training on Response to Intervention in addition to the pilots.

Response to Intervention statewide rollouts are under way in Georgia and Mississippi. Both states are starting small, according to lead staff; for initial implementation the two states are focusing on training and on consolidating tier 1. Florida's pilot project also has an initial focus on the core education program in tier 1.

A major consideration for state Response to Intervention initiatives is how to organize the effort. Which departments should be involved in planning and implementation?<sup>2</sup> How should general and special education work together? Departmental leadership for Response to Intervention at state education agencies in the Southeast Region is shown in table 2.

Despite differences in departmental leadership, lead staff from four state education agencies—in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi—emphasized the importance of presenting Response to Intervention as a general education initiative, not based in special education. In Alabama, which is in the planning stage, lead staff conjectured that educators will likely be more receptive to an initiative that broadly includes a range of program areas—general education,

**Staff believed that Response to Intervention might reduce inconsistencies in the quality of instruction in different program areas, assisting all students including struggling learners**

TABLE 2

**Departmental leadership for Response to Intervention at the six Southeast Region state education agencies**

State	Lead program areas	Department
Alabama	Current plans are for general education to lead (whereas the concept originated with special education)	All sections in the Instructional Services Division
Florida	Student support services	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
Georgia	Shared among two general education departments and special education	Office of Standards, Instruction, and Assessment; Office of Education Support and Improvement; Division of Special Education Services and Support
Mississippi	General education	Office of Academic Education
North Carolina	Special education	Exceptional Children Division
South Carolina	General education	Office of Instructional Promising Practices

Source: Key informant interviews with lead staff in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina; fact check review from state education agency representative in South Carolina.

curriculum and instruction, assessment, and special education.

For Mississippi lead staff general education leadership in the initiative shows the state, districts, and schools that Response to Intervention is the responsibility of general as well as special educators, whose programs are now “truly complementing each other.” Mississippi’s interdepartmental collaboration extends beyond planning, providing technical assistance to districts through three programs: Reading First (which offers Response to Intervention training to schools), special education (because it generally has more resources), and general education (the lead department for Response to Intervention).

In Florida and Georgia state education agency lead staff stressed the importance of forging a common conceptual framework and language among program areas involved in the initiative. Lead staff in Florida elaborated: “We spend a lot of time trying to ensure alignment, especially with our terminology in written and spoken communication. We try to avoid potential misperceptions in the field.”

In contrast to other Southeast Region states, North Carolina’s Response to Intervention effort has been led and organized by the Exceptional Children Division. However, the division meets with general education departments about the approach. Efforts

are under way to support Response to Intervention in North Carolina by creating a more collaborative state infrastructure, grounded in a common language and concern about helping students.

State education agency lead staff cited a variety of information resources for Response to Intervention (box 3). In addition, four Southeast Region state education agencies—in Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina—either have forged or plan to forge relationships with institutions of higher education around some aspect of Response to Intervention. The Florida state education agency is partnering with the University of South Florida. Mississippi’s state education agency has been working with higher education institutions to revise teacher preparation programs, aiming to better provide graduates with the knowledge and skills needed for work in inclusive classrooms and with tiered interventions. The state’s Blue Ribbon Committee for the Redesign of Teacher Preparation was convened in November 2006. Recommendations to the committee from a state education agency lead staff member involved in the Response to Intervention initiative included increasing teachers’ knowledge of good assessment practice, improving their ability to work with data, and helping them better identify student behavior problems.

According to the interviews, the most common source of funds for state Response to Intervention

BOX 3

**Information resources cited by state education agency lead staff**

Each of the following information resources was mentioned by one state education agency lead staff member (unless otherwise noted):

- National Resource Center on Learning Disabilities.\*
- National Association of State Directors of Special Education.
- National Center on Educational Outcomes.
- National Technical Assistance Center on Student Progress Monitoring.\*

- The IRIS Center at Peabody.\*
  - *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*, by Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek.
  - Response to Intervention: Training for California Educators (California Department of Education five-part video series).
  - Florida Center for Reading Research.
  - Iowa Heartland Model.
- National experts and regional organizations were also named as

informational resources. Specific mentions included the following (each one mentioned by one state education agency lead staff member):

- Southeast Regional Resource Center.
- Southeast Comprehensive Center.
- Southeast Equity Center.
- Exceptional Children's Assistance Center.

\* Mentioned by lead staff in two state education agencies.

initiatives in the Southeast Region is discretionary funding from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina were all using it. Georgia is also implementing its initiative through integration with existing programs and funding structures—though state education agency lead staff reported a few districts using IDEA funds for early intervention. Two states reported combining IDEA funds with other resources. Mississippi uses some Reading First administrative funds as well as Title I funds for tier 3 interventions. Alabama, in the early stages of formulating a Response to Intervention plan, has pooled resources from Reading First, the Alabama Writing Initiative, and the state education agency's Classroom Improvement Section, with IDEA funds to hire consultants to assist in the planning process. Lead staff from Florida, Mississippi, and North Carolina hope that, as special and general education continue working together on their initiatives, more general education funds will be contributed to the effort.

*Policy development.* State initiatives to improve academic achievement are intersecting with tiered

approaches in the Southeast Region. Two states have established a task force and forum: one to address special education eligibility procedures, the other to address disproportionality. A North Carolina task force, established in 2000, addressed concerns about traditional learning disability identification by recommending Response to Intervention (North Carolina State Board of Education 2005b). State lead staff in Georgia described a recent disproportionality forum to help districts examine how their procedures and practices may contribute to disproportionality. All five of the state education agency lead staff interviewed indicated that Reading First and other reading reform efforts are promoted to educators for possible use within tiered instruction. Florida staff mentioned that data-based decisionmaking is the common thread for efforts conducted in that state by various entities, such as the problem-solving Response to Intervention project, Reading First, Just Read, Florida!, and the Positive Behavior Support Project.

Creating state policy on Response to Intervention is one way for state education agencies to clarify

Three of the four Southeast Region state education agencies reported actively considering how Response to Intervention will be used instead of, or in addition to, current special education eligibility procedures

an initiative's purpose and outline how it will be used in schools. The six Southeast Region states are in various stages of policy development for Response to Intervention (table 3).

At the time of data collection Mississippi was the only Southeast Region state with a Response to Intervention policy. Its State Policy 4300 includes the following language (Mississippi Department of Education 2007):

*The Mississippi Department of Education shall require an instructional model designed to meet the needs of every student. The model shall consist of three tiers of instruction:*

- *Tier 1: Quality classroom instruction based on MS [Mississippi] Curriculum Frameworks.*
- *Tier 2: Focused supplemental instruction.*
- *Tier 3: Intensive interventions specifically designed to meet the individual needs of students.*

Mississippi policy further requires using progress monitoring and teacher support teams in tier 3,

requiring a process for referring students to such teams (Mississippi Department of Education 2007). State and local education agency lead staff in Mississippi reported that the policy has provided structure and credibility to the initiative.

Five Southeast Region state education agencies (all but South Carolina's) responded to an interview question about plans for policy changes in determining eligibility for students with learning disabilities. Aside from Alabama, which is in the early planning stages, three of the four other state education agencies reported actively considering how Response to Intervention will be used instead of, or in addition to, present special education eligibility procedures. In North Carolina Response to Intervention was initiated to better identify and serve students with special needs. To expedite its use for special education identification, the state Board of Education granted a waiver allowing Response to Intervention to be used as an alternative identification procedure by schools and districts participating in the pilot initiative. In Florida, though rules are still under review, state education agency lead staff anticipated that Response to Intervention will eventually be used to determine eligibility. Meanwhile, the agency is providing guidance to help schools and local education agencies make the transition before eligibility procedures change (Florida Department of Education 2007). Finally, as Mississippi revises its special education policy to align with IDEA, lead staff reported recent discussions in the state education agency about possible problems with using Response to Intervention to determine special education eligibility:

*There needs to be some sort of a mixed approach or some combination. . . . I think people have seen that implementing Response to Intervention is complicated and more demanding than most schools are prepared to do. Certainly they can't do it very quickly. And so if there is this reliance strictly on Response to Intervention [for determining eligibility], there probably is a little bit of a danger, especially initially because schools are just trying to figure it out.*

TABLE 3

**Status of Southeast Region states' Response to Intervention policies**

State	Response to Intervention policy
Alabama	Plans to develop
Florida	In development
Georgia	No current activity
Mississippi	In place
North Carolina	In development
South Carolina	In development

Source: State education agency lead staff interviews for Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina; fact check review from state education agency representative in South Carolina.

All five state education agency lead staff interviewed expressed a need for some local flexibility, especially early in an initiative, as procedures are formulated and refined. In Georgia—where participation in the initiative is not required—lead staff stated that the state agency expects schools to improvise on the state model, develop their own specifics within its structure, and adapt it to how each school works. Mississippi—where Response to Intervention is required—mixes flexibility and prescriptiveness: the state prescribes progress monitoring, but allows flexibility in how it is conducted at the school level. The Mississippi state education agency also defines the membership of teacher support teams used in tier 3, but allows local flexibility in determining personnel to be involved in the lower tiers. In North Carolina lead staff explained that one of the main reasons for the state to begin Response to Intervention as a pilot is to give local education agencies the flexibility to try different approaches and adjust them.

State lead staff saw local flexibility as good for the initial stages of implementation. But three of the five state lead staff interviewed anticipated more prescriptiveness in later stages. For example, North Carolina lead staff mentioned that the state education agency will add more structure to ensure that the initiative model is consultative (one in which teachers solve problems collaboratively). And Georgia lead staff mentioned that reevaluating local flexibility might be needed if the initiative appears to have any negative effects, such as increasing disproportionality.

**How are the six Southeast Region states considering or implementing Response to Intervention?**

*Response to Intervention models.* Opinion papers describe two Response to Intervention implementation models: problem-solving and standard protocol (Fuchs et al. 2003; Hollenbeck 2007). State documents show that the four Southeast Region states with formulated Response to Intervention models all favor the problem-solving model (Florida Department of Education and University of South Florida n.d.; Georgia Department of

Education 2006; Mississippi Department of Education 2005; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction n.d.-b). Table 4 lists the names of the state Response to Intervention initiatives.

Each of the four states with formulated Response to Intervention initiatives under way—Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina—has incorporated existing programs into the Response to Intervention model. For example, Mississippi lead staff explained that the state’s Response to Intervention model evolved from an existing teacher support team prereferral initiative. Created by the Mississippi state legislature in 1988, the teams were adopted by the state Board of Education in 2005 as a formal part of the new three-tier instructional process (Mississippi Department of Education n.d.-b). North Carolina’s model was influenced by Iowa’s, from which it borrowed materials and design features (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction n.d.-b). North Carolina also incorporated the existing teacher support team structure into Response to Intervention and has provided guidance in how the team’s role differs under the new policy (Burke County Public Schools 2005).<sup>3</sup>

The local examples investigated adapted their state Response to Intervention models to fit their needs. The Ocean Springs, Mississippi, district has altered

TABLE 4  
**Response to Intervention models in Southeast Region states**

State	Name
Alabama	Not yet identified
Florida	Problem-Solving/Response to Intervention
Georgia	Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions
Mississippi	Three-Tier Model
North Carolina	Responsiveness to Instruction/North Carolina Problem-Solving Model
South Carolina	Response to Intervention [at present]

Source: Key informant interviews with lead staff in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina; fact check review from state education agency representative in South Carolina.

the state model for parent involvement: whereas the state education agency requires parent notification for students entering tier 3, Ocean Springs alerts parents immediately to encourage their involvement. In North Carolina Mull Elementary uses the state Response to Intervention model but has, for example, scheduled initial student support team meetings for tier 1 rather than for tier 3 as the state requires. And in Georgia Morgan County High School involves students directly in decisionmaking—a variation on the state model.

*Tier design.* Florida’s and Mississippi’s Response to Intervention models have three tiers; Georgia’s and North Carolina’s have four. Alabama’s and South Carolina’s are to be determined (South Carolina anticipates three).

In the four states with formulated Response to Intervention models the approach is generally consistent with that reported in the literature: tier 1 emphasizes quality instruction in the core curriculum, tier 2 involves supplemental instruction (typically in a small-group format or with recommended interventions, or both), and tier 3 consists of intensive interventions designed to meet individual student needs (see appendix E for full state-by-state descriptions).

Two states include a fourth tier. In Georgia tier 4 is specially designed instruction that includes, but is not exclusively for, special education students. In North Carolina tier 4 corresponds to determination for special education eligibility.

In Florida and Mississippi special education eligibility is informed by data generated through Response to Intervention, but is not formally part of it.

Three of the four states with formulated Response to Intervention models reported that the relation of tier 3 to tier 4 or to special education eligibility determination (or both) has been under discussion. For example, Florida

state education agency lead staff characterized the state model as expressly designed to avoid equating the highest tier with special education, instead emphasizing the effort to identify what works instructionally—so that if a student is eventually identified for special education, a substantial basis for future instruction decisions will exist.

A review of materials and interview responses suggests that the four states with formulated Response to Intervention models provide different types of guidance about student movement through tiers. North Carolina’s state guidance to local education agencies and schools about tier movement is most specific for the upper tiers (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction n.d.-a). The state model includes sample “red flags” for educators to consider in deciding whether to move a student from tier 2 to tier 3. Topic areas cover issues related to a student’s health, behavior, parent concern, academic performance and background, and responsiveness to interventions. Similarly, Mississippi’s model—though it characterizes movement through tiers as dynamic, with students entering and exiting depending on team-based decisions—also has provisions for automatically referring students to tier 3, the most intensive intervention before special education referral (Mississippi Department of Education 2005). In contrast, state Response to Intervention models in Florida and Georgia leave movement through tiers to be determined locally.

Mississippi’s Ocean Springs School District has taken the state education agency’s tier design as a foundation, but has incorporated several features that the agency recommends for upper tiers into lower tiers. For example, the district promotes differentiated instruction in tier 1, rather than initiating it in tier 2 as recommended by the state model.

*Intervention selection.* Both IDEA and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 require research-based interventions. Each of the four Southeast Region states with formulated state Response to Intervention models reports using such interventions. According to lead staff, the

**The four Southeast Region states with formulated Response to Intervention models report using research-based interventions**

state education agencies allow considerable local flexibility in what interventions to select and how to use them.

Georgia and Mississippi training materials list specific interventions that have been identified as effective for each tier. But like other states, Georgia and Mississippi stop short of mandating particular options or vendors (Georgia Department of Education n.d.-a; Mississippi Department of Education 2005). The Mississippi model also includes guidance on practices that are not appropriate interventions—such as simple setting alteration, student placement in special education, retention, homework, suspension, and consultations that are not targeted to need and do not generate data that show change over time (Mississippi Department of Education n.d.-a).

Florida state education agency lead staff expected that the instructional content of Response to Intervention would be provided by relevant state initiatives. Response to Intervention initiatives and monitoring tools for reading have been supplied by Just Read, Florida!, Reading First, and the Florida Center for Reading Research; for mathematics, lead staff anticipated that Response to Intervention would draw resources from the Office of Mathematics and Science and from the Florida Center for Research in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

The local education agency lead staff interviewed were concerned about selecting interventions and matching them to student needs. To address both issues, Mull Elementary School in Burke County, North Carolina, has created a resource library where staff pool their experiences with interventions. This effort has support in grade-level meetings, where a related service staff member has worked with teachers on collaboration and encouraged discussion about using strategies and interventions. Mull Elementary’s related service staff is also working with district staff to create a matrix that teachers can use to identify interventions for addressing specific student needs. At Morgan County High School in Georgia the high school context has meant that activities associated with Response to Intervention focus on remedial and enrichment opportunities, such as credit recovery programs, summer school, Saturday school, parent conferences, and after school programs.

*Monitoring of student performance.* Data are central to any Response to Intervention model. Monitoring of student progress is common to the four Response to Intervention models formulated in Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina (table 5).

In the four states with formulated state models, decisions about how to monitor progress generally reside with local education agencies or schools.

TABLE 5

**Data collection approaches in Response to Intervention models in Southeast Region states**

State	Approaches
Alabama	Not yet identified
Florida	Schoolwide screening, diagnostic assessment, progress monitoring
Georgia	Encourages universal screening and progress monitoring using benchmark assessments
Mississippi	Progress monitoring using informal classroom assessments, benchmark assessments, and large-scale assessments
North Carolina	Functional assessments through progress monitoring with curriculum-based measures; both statewide and local education agency-specific achievement norms and growth rates for reading and mathematics (K–5) have been developed
South Carolina	Benchmark assessments

Source: Florida Department of Education and University of South Florida n.d.; Georgia state key informants; Laney n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Mississippi Department of Education 2006a, b; 2007; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction n.d.-d; and South Carolina Department of Education, 2007.

Georgia state education agency lead staff described the state’s approach as encouraging, but not requiring, school staff to use universal screening and benchmark assessments to monitor student progress and need. Mississippi’s policy requires progress monitoring through informal classroom assessment, benchmark assessment instruments, or large-scale assessments, and provides guidance about the frequency and duration of interventions for the upper tiers (Mississippi Department of Education 2005). North Carolina’s model includes functional assessments through progress monitoring using curriculum-based measures. Unique among the four states, North Carolina has generated statewide achievement norms and growth rates for progress monitoring in reading and mathematics for grades K–5, as well as local norms for the local education agencies participating in the state Response to Intervention pilot (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction n.d.-d).

Two local examples, Pecan Park Elementary School in Mississippi and Mull Elementary School in North Carolina, illustrate different approaches to state guidance on progress monitoring. Pecan Park uses AIMSweb to conduct schoolwide universal screenings three times a year, as well as regular progress monitoring in tiers 2 and 3. The efficacy of an intervention is determined by student progress toward established goals, which are informed by general achievement compared with classroom

peers. Mull Elementary School also conducts universal screenings and progress monitoring, but relies on a dual discrepancy approach, using county-derived, curriculum-based measurement norms to gauge the adequacy of student progress in achievement and growth rates. School staff have found that using local norms has helped parents, who are more responsive to data that compare their children with others in the community (as opposed to students in other states). Mull Elementary has also had success involving students in progress monitoring—for example, in including collecting data, creating graphs, and interpreting their own progress.

*Subject areas and school levels targeted.* The four Southeast Region states that are implementing Response to Intervention began with a focus on elementary reading because, according to interviews with lead staff, the most research-based interventions and statewide content support structures are available for this area. Mathematics was the next most common area targeted, followed by behavior.

The most common school-level focus among the four state initiatives has been elementary; only Georgia is rolling out Response to Intervention to all schools at each level. North Carolina state education agency lead staff noted that some local education agencies in the state pilot are “working their way up” in phases, initiating Response to

TABLE 6

**Subject areas and grade levels targeted by Southeast Region state Response to Intervention initiatives**

State	Subject areas	Grade levels
Alabama	Planning to focus on reading, mathematics, and behavior	Not yet determined; K–12 anticipated
Florida	Reading, mathematics, and behavior	Elementary schools
Georgia	English, language arts, and reading; next focus will be mathematics	Elementary, middle, and high schools
Mississippi	Reading and mathematics	Elementary schools and a few middle and high schools
North Carolina	Reading and behavior; early stages with mathematics and writing	Elementary (K–5) schools
South Carolina	Not yet determined	Not yet determined

Source: Key informant interviews with lead staff in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina; fact check review from state education agency representative in South Carolina.

Intervention at the elementary level and then introducing it at middle and high schools as students move up. Subject and grade levels targeted by state initiatives are shown in table 6.

*Professional development.* All six Southeast Region states are either planning or currently providing training on Response to Intervention and related activities. Mississippi's and North Carolina's state education agencies are using a train-the-trainer model, encouraging localities to send teams of key school and local education agency staff to the trainings. Although the North Carolina state education agency cannot mandate who attends trainings, it strongly encourages school administrators' attendance to promote cohesiveness and efficacy in school-based teams. Similarly, Florida's Response to Intervention pilot initiative, which began in the fall of 2007, provided five days of training across the academic year for school-based teams. Schools and districts in the Florida pilot also have ongoing coaching, with one coach for every three schools (Florida Department of Education and University of South Florida n.d.). The Florida initiative also offers a five-day training—led by regional coordinators and support staff—to schools across the state. Florida appears to be the only Southeast Region state that conducted awareness training across the state several years before starting its pilot, educating superintendents, special education directors, principals, reading supervisors, curriculum supervisors, student services personnel, and others (Curtis 2007).

Professional development on Response to Intervention in Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina has generally focused on elements, steps, and key procedures in the state model, particularly the use of data in education decisions.

For example, North Carolina schools and local education agencies in the state's pilot receive training on the North Carolina Problem-Solving Model, as well as on Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, curriculum-based measurement, team building, establishing local achievement and growth norms for screening and progress

monitoring, reading interventions, writing interventions, mathematics interventions, behavior interventions, data collection and progress monitoring, implementation steps, and report writing (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction n.d.-a). In addition, step-by-step details about procedures and forms are covered with case studies (Jenkins n.d.).

At the local level in North Carolina, professional development was considered key to implementing Response to Intervention. The state's Mull Elementary School, following the format encouraged by the state, sent a team of teachers, speech therapists, principals, psychologists, and counselors to Response to Intervention training. They then returned to the school to train others. For each training the team changed slightly to distribute the opportunity to more staff and thus build their commitment.

Whereas Florida, Mississippi, and North Carolina have focused training on the state model, Georgia has instead embedded its state Response to Intervention initiative—the Pyramid of Interventions—into professional development in other areas, including special education policy and procedures, state performance standards, and disproportionality. For example, a six-day training on the new Georgia mathematics curriculum for high schools devotes one day to differentiated instruction and the Pyramid of Interventions.

*Technical assistance provided.* In addition to professional development, all four Southeast Region states with formulated state Response to Intervention models are providing technical assistance and guidance to schools and local education agencies. Some materials clarify and define a state's initiative; others provide procedural guidance or a visual framework. For example, according to technical assistance documents online (reviewed for completeness by state

**All four states with formulated state Response to Intervention models are providing technical assistance and guidance to schools and local education agencies**

education agency lead staff), Mississippi has a comprehensive Response to Intervention manual (Mississippi Department of Education 2005), and North Carolina was preparing one at the time of data collection. The technical assistance resources available online for each Southeast Region state are listed in table 7.

Mississippi and North Carolina have forms to guide implementation at each tier, though they do not require their use (see, for example, Mississippi Department of Education nd-c; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction n.d.-c). State education agency lead staff in North Carolina characterized the state pilot partly as an opportunity to try out and improve state procedures and supporting forms. Similarly, in disseminating general information about its initiative, Georgia expects local education agencies and schools to “make it their own,” according to state education agency lead staff.

Local technical assistance includes both state and local efforts. A staff member at Morgan County

High School in Georgia said the school obtains information from state and regional education agency web sites, while also helping develop a video series on the Pyramid of Interventions that will go to middle and high schools across the state. The Ocean Springs School District in Mississippi successfully applied for a grant from the state education agency to have Response to Intervention consultants visit their district and critique local implementation.

*Facilitating factors.* Experts argue that the many parts of Response to Intervention must be well orchestrated in order to work. Fuchs and Deschler (2007) have identified guiding implementation features that together may allow educators enough time to understand and accommodate the new principles and practices of Response to Intervention, including:

- Major, sustained investments in professional development offering teachers several skills.

TABLE 7

**Technical assistance resources available online from the Southeast Region state education agencies**

State	Resources
Alabama	In planning and development
Florida	Florida pilot information: <a href="http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/floridaproject/faq.html">http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/floridaproject/faq.html</a> Information on Response to Intervention for local education agencies and schools: <a href="http://www.floridarti.UniversityofSouthFlorida.edu/resources/index.html">http://www.floridarti.UniversityofSouthFlorida.edu/resources/index.html</a> Response to Intervention technical assistance paper: <a href="http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/y2006-8.pdf">http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/y2006-8.pdf</a> Self-study questions for local education agencies on determining eligibility for special education: Requirements for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities Eligibility Determinations in the Interim Prior to State Board of Education Rule Revision 6A.603018, Florida Administrative Code: <a href="http://www.fldoe.org/ese/">http://www.fldoe.org/ese/</a>
Georgia	Information about Georgia’s School Keys, including the Pyramid of Interventions, and its three-part “Keys to Quality” documents: <a href="http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school.aspx">http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school.aspx</a>
Mississippi	Answers to frequently asked questions about Mississippi’s Three-Tier Model: <a href="http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad1/programs/tst/faqst.doc">http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad1/programs/tst/faqst.doc</a> Teacher support team manual: <a href="http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad1/programs/tst/TSTrework6.doc">http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad1/programs/tst/TSTrework6.doc</a>
North Carolina	North Carolina’s Problem-Solving Graphics, sample forms, and training materials for local education agencies: <a href="http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/development/learning/responsiveness/psmgraphics">http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/development/learning/responsiveness/psmgraphics</a> Parents’ guide: <a href="http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/ec/development/learning/responsiveness/guide.pdf">http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/ec/development/learning/responsiveness/guide.pdf</a>
South Carolina	Frequently asked questions document: <a href="http://ed.sc.gov/agency/offices/ec/documents/FAQreEIS.doc">http://ed.sc.gov/agency/offices/ec/documents/FAQreEIS.doc</a>

Source: Web site searches following methodological procedures of state policy scans.

- Committed, involved administrators setting expectations for effective implementation, providing resources, and ensuring fidelity.
- District support to hire teachers who embrace Response to Intervention and who have the needed skills.
- Teaching and auxiliary staff (such as school psychologists) who are willing to have their roles redefined to fit Response to Intervention.
- Sufficient time for staff to understand and incorporate Response to Intervention into their instruction framework.
- Decisions about adoption reflecting the thoughts and beliefs of grassroots practitioners.

Staff in all five state and three local education agencies were asked about conditions that facilitate implementation, challenges or barriers to it, and any advice they might have for state and local education agencies interested in Response to Intervention. The facilitating factors were administrator involvement, local flexibility, sufficient introduction time, collaboration, starting small, parent involvement, ongoing professional development, and evidence-based interventions.

Lead staff at Georgia's, Mississippi's, and North Carolina's state education agencies emphasized local administrator involvement. As Mississippi staff explained:

*I think everybody has been in pretty strong agreement that it [Response to Intervention] doesn't work unless there is support at the district level and that it helps if, best of all, if it's the superintendent. . . . I think everybody has agreed that that is a big key to any successes that they've had because that helps set attitudes for lower level staff[,] but it also means that the resources that are needed are made available, reprioritized, or whatever needs to happen.*

Administrator involvement is built into Florida's pilot, with both district and school leadership teams required of participating local education agencies

(Florida Department of Education and University of South Florida n.d.). Local education agency staff uniformly confirmed the key role of administrators in implementation. The principal's role was characterized by one local respondent as crucial, the deciding factor in the success of the initiative. Another emphasized the superintendent setting the tone:

*You have to have full support from the top down, all the way from your superintendents down to your teachers. If you do not have that full support, Response to Intervention will not work effectively within the district. And I think it's important for districts to know that when they introduce this.*

Two local education agencies considered administrator involvement critical in professional development. Mississippi and North Carolina encourage both school and district participation in Response to Intervention training. Lead staff from both state education agencies affirmed the cohesiveness of training teams that include administrators, who thus feel supported and are made more comfortable with the process.

In all three districts studied, local education agency lead staff discussed local flexibility. They said that school staff appreciated being able to mold a model and its components to their environment, in order (as one local respondent said) "to continue to offer schools the opportunity to do their job."

Local education agency lead staff in Mississippi said that besides administrative support in schools and districts, state education agency support can also help implementation. The staff explained that their district benefits not only from state

**Local education agency staff uniformly confirmed the key role of administrators in implementation**

**Lead staff in all three districts highlighted the benefits of involving parents in a tiered intervention**

education agency backing but also from a “supportive state network,” including the Gulf Coast Education Initiative Consortium, the Mississippi Association of School Administrators, and the Mississippi Association of School

Superintendents; each has provided training and workshops on Response to Intervention.

Another important factor in Response to Intervention implementation can be allowing sufficient time for step-by-step introduction. In North Carolina local education agency lead staff underscored the need to “stay the course.” A state education agency lead staff member in Mississippi contended that schools need three years to adopt and implement Response to Intervention. He described the “phased approach” of a district that began implementation in elementary schools three years ago, hired two intervention specialists the next year, and in 2007 started to expand the model to middle schools.

Interviewees from three state education agencies mentioned collaboration among program areas at the state agency as a key facilitator for Response to Intervention. Such collaboration, according to interviewees, can involve aligning language across departments to avoid conflicting messages and misperceptions in the field. State education agency lead staff in Florida and North Carolina asserted that communication with schools should be framed carefully to educate teachers in a way that is purposeful and sensitive to the fact that they are already doing a great deal to help their students. School staff in North Carolina emphasized the importance of collaborating locally, with a motivated lead team. An administrator advised:

*I think you’ve got to pick the team. Nobody is going to agree 100 percent of the time. But you’ve got to have a team that’s going to be cohesive, that’s going to move this initiative forward. And to me, that’s the most critical thing, because they’re going to spend a lot of time together.*

Local education agency lead staff in Mississippi and North Carolina reported starting small when planning Response to Intervention initiatives at the district level. For example, Burke County in North Carolina started with a pilot in the two schools that were the most interested in the approach. After a year additional elementary schools were trained, and they could learn from the example and experience of the two lead schools. The district expects the remaining elementary schools to be trained and begin implementing Response to Intervention next year.

Lead staff in all three districts highlighted the benefits of involving parents in a tiered intervention. The respondents indicated that although parent involvement can be challenging, schools can facilitate it by incorporating opportunities for it into implementation procedures.

State education agency lead staff in Georgia stated that ongoing professional learning opportunities were key to making staff comfortable in their new roles. State education agency lead staff in Mississippi suggested that the districts succeeding with Response to Intervention are those using evidence-based models and interventions.

**Challenges.** Interviewees drew attention to six challenges for implementing Response to Intervention: funding, lack of information, complexity of the approach, secondary-school implementation, common language across departments, and the need to prepare teachers adequately.

Flexible IDEA funding can be considered insufficient to pay for implementing Response to Intervention. Florida and Mississippi state education agency lead staff mentioned funding as a challenge. Florida staff maintained that Response to Intervention is very “resource intensive” and that funding is a barrier when substantial state resources are unavailable:

*We can talk in general about blending funds to support Response to Intervention, IDEA 2004 with Title 1. But we can’t even get there if people are still trying to understand it; no*

*[departments] will be willing to pull out their wallets. No one is really comfortable talking about where the funding will go in the future.*

State education agency lead staff in Alabama and Florida discussed the difficulties caused by a general lack of information on Response to Intervention and varying degrees of familiarity with the approach among stakeholders. The respondents noted that a shared basic understanding of Response to Intervention is crucial.

State education agency lead staff in Georgia and Mississippi saw the complexity of Response to Intervention as a challenge. Schools face changes in their system, roles, and paperwork. Georgia state education agency lead staff explained that at the district level, “Everybody’s responsible for so many things,” and suggested that one school department lead the initiative to keep things organized. Mississippi state education agency lead staff observed that some schools opting to change data tracking systems (for example, from a paper-based to a computer-based system) might have to endure a trial-and-error period before identifying a program that suits them.

Implementing Response to Intervention in secondary schools was named as a challenge by state education agency lead staff in Georgia and Mississippi. In Georgia staff explained that using benchmark assessments and differentiated instruction requires a shift in thinking for many middle and high school teachers and that many lack the skills and experience to use tiered interventions.

North Carolina state education agency lead staff mentioned the lack of a common language as a possible cause of misperceptions about Response to Intervention. General education staff might not see the approach—or the increased number of children needing supplementary instruction under it—as within their purview.

Local education agency lead staff in two of the three districts studied described challenges to preparing teachers for Response to Intervention. One

respondent described the challenge of encouraging rather than overwhelming teachers with model components and their guidelines. Also discussed was the importance of training teachers on establishing appropriate student goals. Having specific, measurable goals was called helpful in interpreting data and in enabling teachers to decide next steps for students confidently.

*Technical assistance needs.* When asked about technical assistance needs, the five state education agency lead staff interviewed mentioned three sorts: topics needing more information, technical assistance and information needed on particular issues, and practical guidance and working tools.

**Five state education agency lead staff mentioned needing more information, technical assistance, and practical guidance and working tools**

Although each respondent mentioned the likely benefits of information about other states’ experiences, each identified different topics for such information (unless otherwise noted, each topic was mentioned by one interviewee):

- The flexibility that state policies allowed for local education agency interpretation.
- How states developed their initiatives.
- Funding options and budgeting processes.
- Changing roles under Response to Intervention.
- Examples of challenges and how they were addressed.

Respondents also mentioned the need for technical assistance and information on complex issues and challenges (unless otherwise noted, each topic was mentioned by one interviewee):

- Ensuring fidelity and day-to-day consistency in implementation and in monitoring of student progress (mentioned by two states).

- Supporting schools to work more with behavioral interventions.
- Implementation in secondary schools.

And Alabama state education agency lead staff asserted a need for state education agencies to distribute practical, working tools to planning

teams. Specific requests included (each topic was mentioned by one interviewee):

- A basic planning tool for implementation.
- Practical articles reporting on real-world experiences.
- Examples of quality mathematics programs.

**APPENDIX A  
STUDY METHODOLOGY**

This report uses a descriptive study design with two data collection strategies: a scan of state policies, procedures, and program descriptions related to Response to Intervention, and interviews with state and local key informants. Data were collected between April and November 2007. Analyses comprised qualitative and quantitative approaches, with the quantitative limited to frequency counts. The researchers also conducted a member check with key informants, who had an opportunity to review the material in the report about their state, district, or school for accuracy and to provide feedback.

The distribution of data collection strategies for each Southeast Region state appears in table A1.

The data sources, data collection, and analysis for each research question are shown in table A2.

**Response to Intervention background and literature search**

The Response to Intervention background literature review provided a conceptual and analytical framework for the study on issues of state planning and implementation. Planning for the topics and content of the literature review involved the study team and two outside experts, a disabilities specialist and a Response to Intervention

TABLE A1  
**Data collection strategies by study method and state**

State	Policy/program scan	State key informant interviews	Local, district, or school key informant interviews
Alabama	✓	✓	
Florida	✓	✓	
Georgia	✓	✓	✓
Mississippi	✓	✓	✓
North Carolina	✓	✓	✓
South Carolina	✓	Not available	

*Note:* The Response to Intervention background materials search strategy was not specific to the six Southeast Region states.  
*Source:* Researchers' summary of data collection activities.

TABLE A2  
**Data sources, data collection, and analysis for each research question**

Research question	Data sources and data collection	Analysis
1. What do the six states report about their specific interest in Response to Intervention, about state planning and development for it, and about policy development for it (and related areas)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State policies and procedures.</li> <li>• State guidelines and documents.</li> <li>• Program descriptions obtained through web site searches.</li> <li>• Structured discussions with state education leaders with responsibilities in this area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive summaries of findings from:</li> <li>• Documents obtained and reviewed from six states.</li> <li>• Structured discussions with key informants from five of six states.</li> </ul>
2. How are the six states considering or implementing Response to Intervention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured discussions with state, district, and school key informants, selected based on predetermined criteria.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analytic description of state key informant interviews, state policy scans, and key characteristics of three local implementation efforts in the Southeast Region.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Project research design and study plan.

specialist. The study team reviewed material produced by national organizations and experts (National Association of State Directors of Special Education 2005; Sacramento County Office of Education 2006) and met several times with the two outside experts. Collectively they produced an outline for the review—a framework for presenting information that the researchers expected would be most useful for the intended audience of the report (education administrators, primarily at the state level, but also in districts and schools). The outline had three main headings:

- Background and potential purposes of Response to Intervention.
- Response to Intervention and the state context.
- Response to Intervention model design and implementation.

The final report included material primarily from the second and third topic areas, those most relevant to the study. Since published empirical studies on Response to Intervention in state contexts were very limited at the time of the review, the researchers relied primarily on opinion pieces, and program descriptions for that material.

The search procedures had two stages. The first was searching several databases, including Academic Search, PsycINFO, ERIC, Education Full Texts, and Education Abstracts, using these keywords:

- Response (and responsiveness) to intervention.
- Response (and responsiveness) to instruction.
- Intervention-based assessment.
- Problem-solving model.
- Standard protocol approach/model.
- Progress monitoring.
- Tiered instructional model.
- Special education identification.
- Early intervention.
- Overidentification.
- Disproportionality.

To identify implementation studies, these keywords were combined with:

- Implementation.
- Empirical.
- Outcomes.
- Field study.
- Evaluation.

Several additional resources were suggested for inclusion by experts and reviewers. In addition, the researchers directly searched the web sites of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education and the National Research Council on Learning Disabilities for information, descriptions, and statements about Response to Intervention.

The second stage was reviewing materials and information for relevance to the study topic and organizing them into the following analytic categories:

- Historical foundations and background of Response to Intervention, including recent legislation.
- State context for planning and implementing Response to Intervention.
- Fundamental elements and characteristics of Response to Intervention.
- District and school implementation of Response to Intervention.

Narrative descriptions were developed to summarize the material in each category, including methodological details from research studies. Information reviewed also informed the development of key informant and policy scan protocols by providing categories of information to obtain.

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#### State policy and program context scan

The scan produced an overview of the status of Southeast Region state policies and programs pertaining to Response to Intervention. It focused on three areas of state activity:

- State policy, regulations, and guidelines.
- State-provided or state-sanctioned technical assistance, resources, and programming.
- State-provided or state-sanctioned professional development.

The scans were also used to identify state personnel as possible key informants (for example, individuals listed on state web sites as contacts or leaders for Response to Intervention in the state).

Three sources were used to obtain information about state Response to Intervention activities:

- State education agency websites.
- State performance plans for the Office of Special Education Programs.
- Additional web sites and sources identified online through Google.

Keywords used to search for related information on state education agency web sites included:

- Tiered intervention.
- Tiered instruction.
- Multi tier intervention.
- Multitiered intervention.
- Response to intervention.
- Responsiveness to intervention.
- Response to Intervention.
- Three-tier.
- Progress monitoring.
- Overidentification.
- Disproportionality.
- Curriculum-based measurement.
- Learning disabilities + Response to Intervention.
- Early intervention + Response to Intervention.
- Special education eligibility + Response to Intervention.

Once state-specific terminology was found, it was used for further searching. Where no information

was found on state education agency web sites, the web sites of state education agency departments of special education were scanned for mentions of Response to Intervention. The researchers reviewed each state performance plan for reference to Response to Intervention or related initiatives. Finally, a Google search was conducted using [the name of each state] + Response to Intervention [or other state-specific terms].

Information from the scan was summarized to address six Response to Intervention–related topics, so far as each proved relevant to each state:

- Policy, regulations, and guidelines.
- Distribution of roles and responsibilities among state agencies and offices.
- Involvement of outside organizations and related initiatives.
- Characteristics of the state Response to Intervention model and its components, including its purpose.
- Status and extent of state implementation.
- Technical assistance and professional development efforts.

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### State key informant interviews

*Overview and purpose.* State key informant discussions were conducted to:

- Gather information about the experiences and challenges states have encountered regarding Response to Intervention, including how state staff have facilitated Response to Intervention within their state.
- Learn about the current status of and future plans for state Response to Intervention policies, regulations, and guidelines; the state Response to Intervention model; state-level infrastructure for Response to Intervention

(such as how state departments are involved and work together); and programmatic and implementation approaches (such as professional development and technical assistance) related to Response to Intervention.

- Identify districts or schools to use as case examples for the study through state staff nomination based on criteria provided.
- Confirm the information obtained through state policy scans about state Response to Intervention efforts.

The interview protocol—developed with Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic, which conducted a parallel study—was semistructured and allowed flexibility in question order and in tailoring questions to states (see appendix B for the complete protocol). The protocol was piloted with a state education agency representative from a state outside the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic Regions—a state in the Appalachia Region.

#### *Key informant selection and interview procedures.*

The researchers identified state key informants with:

- Some state education agency leadership responsibilities for planning and implementing Response to Intervention.
- Much knowledge about Response to Intervention adoption and implementation in the state.
- The willingness and ability to answer protocol questions.

These criteria typically yielded key informants with senior positions in state departments of special education, curriculum and instruction, or school improvement (such as bureau director, program manager, associate state superintendent—though position titles were not criteria).

To apply the criteria in identifying state key informants, the researchers worked through policy

analysts for the Southeast Regional Educational Laboratory in each state. The analysts asked state education agency leaders, such as assistant superintendents or directors of special education, to nominate key informants based on the criteria. The researchers specifically asked for nominations of the most appropriate key informants in case more than one met the criteria. The researchers also noted contacts for each state's Response to Intervention initiative whose names appeared on state education agency web sites and shared them with the policy analysts, who confirmed whether they met the criteria. From two to six prospective key informants were identified for each state. The researchers contacted the most appropriate. Only if that person was not reached after more than one attempt, or was unavailable to participate in an interview, did researchers contact the next key informant on the list.

Key informants were contacted systematically and uniformly. First, an email describing the study and purpose of the discussion was sent. Follow-up telephone calls were made to confirm that the nominees met the criteria and to invite them to participate. In some cases those initially contacted recommended other state education agency representatives as more suitable, and the researchers contacted those others.

After agreeing to participate, interviews were scheduled and the researchers explained that participation was voluntary and confidential. Seven respondents participated in the state key informant interviews, representing all six Southeast Region states except South Carolina. For two states, Alabama and Georgia, two key informants participated to cover all the question areas. In both cases state staff indicated that no single key informant could respond to all the questions. The two key informants identified in South Carolina were contacted but not able to participate.<sup>4</sup>

Key informant interviews, lasting about an hour each, were tape recorded with the permission of respondents and fully transcribed. For one key informant, who preferred not to be tape recorded,

detailed notes were taken by each researcher. At the beginnings of the interviews key informants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and confidential, and told that although their state would be identified in the report, individuals representing it would not be cited. Two or three staff members from Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast conducted each interview, one taking the lead, the rest taking notes and asking follow-up questions to clarify or add specificity to responses.

Interviews were kept under one hour to accommodate the busy schedules of key informants, making it impossible at times to cover each question and all subquestions in detail. In addition, the protocol was tailored to the status of Response to Intervention in each state. For example, questions about a state's Response to Intervention implementation experience and technical assistance support structures were generally not relevant for states early in the planning stage.

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### Local key informant interviews

*Overview and purpose.* District and school key informant discussions gathered information about experiences with and challenges to adopting Response to Intervention locally, including local approaches, academic areas targeted, adaptations of state education agency models or materials, operation of key components in practice, distribution of implementation responsibilities, reliance on state education agency technical assistance and professional development, and implementation status, planning, and lessons learned. These data were not intended to represent the diversity of local experience, but to provide a few examples for the implementation of structures and processes developed at the state level. The district and school key informant interview protocol, again developed in collaboration with Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic, was semistructured and allowed tailoring questions to local contexts (see appendix C for the complete protocol).

*Key informant selection and interview procedures.* Local key informants were selected who, according

to state education agency key informants, had leadership roles in highly experienced school or district Response to Intervention initiatives. Since many Response to Intervention initiatives are just beginning, effectiveness of local implementation was not a criterion. State education agency key informants were asked during interviews to identify one or two districts or schools that met the criterion, and to name leaders of those efforts. The original project proposal stipulated that three districts would be selected, but initial reviews of the literature, as well as policy and program scans, indicated that Response to Intervention adoption and implementation can be primarily at the school level with little district involvement or facilitation; so, the researchers revised their selection process to allow state education agency key informants to nominate either districts or schools. State education agency key informants from four states nominated three schools and six school districts. To provide both state representation and local education agency diversity, the researchers selected one high school, one elementary school, and one district, each from a different state.

Representatives nominated by state education agency key informants were contacted systematically. An email describing the study and purpose of the discussion was sent, followed by a telephone call to request participation, explain the topics to be covered, and schedule the interview. At this time potential key informants were told that their participation was voluntary and confidential and that their districts or schools would be identified, but their names and job titles would not. Two of the three key informants—one representing an elementary school and one a district office—elected to involve additional staff in their interviews, to cover all question areas and adequately represent their local initiatives. One school leader wanted district representatives to participate, and one district representative wanted a school leader to participate. (In one case a replacement was made in the initial group because of a scheduling conflict.) Two key informant interviews were therefore group interviews, involving representatives of Pecan Park Elementary and the Ocean Springs

School District in Mississippi ( $n = 2$ ), and Mull Elementary School and the Burke County School District in North Carolina ( $n = 5$ ). An individual interview was conducted with a representative of Morgan County High School in Georgia ( $n = 1$ ).

Local key informant interviews, lasting about an hour, were tape recorded with all informants agreeing. At the beginning of the interviews key informants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and confidential and that their districts or schools would be identified in the report, but their names and job titles would not. Two to three Southeast Regional Educational Laboratory staff conducted each interview, one taking the lead and the rest taking notes and asking follow-up questions.

Again, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast staff decided that interviews should be contained to an hour to accommodate the busy schedules of key informants, and the one-hour length made it impossible at times to cover every interview question in detail. Nevertheless, key questions in each protocol section (such as for implementation status and planning, infrastructure at the local level for Response to Intervention, professional development, technical assistance, and resources) were asked of all key informants. Follow-up questions were asked when responses lacked specificity.

### Data analysis

The researchers combined data analysis for the state key informant interviews and the state policy and program context scans, since both were sources for answering the research questions about state Response to Intervention planning and policy development and about state-level implementation (including key characteristics of each state's model). The analysis generally privileged interview data (over material exclusively from online searching), since the researchers assumed that they were the most up to date.<sup>5</sup>

To answer the research questions, the researchers classified state data into 10 topics:

- Purpose in adopting Response to Intervention.
- Background and relationship of Response to Intervention to other initiatives.
- State education agency involvement.
- Resources.
- Policy development.
- State model and approach.
- Professional development.
- Technical assistance.
- Facilitators.
- Challenges and lessons learned about planning and implementation.

These topics were initially identified from the review of background materials and literature and from consultations with two experts, a disabilities specialist and an Response to Intervention specialist.

Data in the interview transcripts and policy scan writeups for each topic were compiled into a chart for each state. Data on particular topics were then compared across states to identify common themes, distinctions, and overall patterns. In addition, simple counts were made of quantifiable data. To ensure valid and reliable data compilation, two research team members worked together, one initially indexing and extracting data on topics for a particular state into the chart, and the other reviewing the compilation. Inconsistencies between the two researchers were resolved through discussion and review of the data.

Local data were analyzed using the same topics as state data. The district and school cases examined were intended to illustrate local implementation in different states and school settings. The researchers looked across the three key informant

interviews for each topic (such as purpose in adopting Response to Intervention, intervention selection, progress monitoring, and lessons learned) as they applied to the local rather than the state level, and they analyzed these data for common themes and distinctions.

### Study limitations and strengths

Study limitations concern the study design, types of data collection, and nonresponse. The study design reflected the need to conduct a descriptive study in a short time. The approved study methodology allowed for interviews with fairly few state and local education agency staff. A larger, more diverse pool of state and local education agency interviewees would likely have yielded deeper, more variable information. The state education agency key informants interviewed might not have been fully knowledgeable about all aspects of Response to Intervention in their states. For example, while these key informants were generally knowledgeable about professional development for Response to Intervention, they were not in all cases directing that professional development and thus could give only limited details about it. And the small number of respondents limits external validity. For state education agencies findings from one respondent (Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina) or from two (Alabama, Georgia) might not be generalizable to other state education agency staff. For local education agencies interviews with staff representing only three local contexts cannot be generalized to other local education agencies in the Southeast Region that are implementing Response to Intervention.

About 20 questions were covered in each one-hour interview, somewhat limiting the exploration of each question. Repeated interviews over time might have made it possible to more fully document changes in how Response to Intervention was planned and implemented.

Another limitation was the lack of interview data from South Carolina. A policy and program context scan was completed for South Carolina,

but the researchers could not supplement that with information from a state key informant about state Response to Intervention planning, policy development, and implementation. The findings thus offer an incomplete picture of Response to Intervention in South Carolina and the Southeast Region.

Since the interview data from state and local education agency key informants are entirely self-reported, the data might be biased for recall and social desirability. For example, state education agency staff might not have recalled all the relevant policies or guidelines in place or all the relevant information sources that state staff have accessed. Key informants might also have been inclined to emphasize positive state or local education agency experiences, with less attention to any specific challenges that might raise sensitive issues.

The data sources for the state policy and program context scans—state education agency web sites, state performance plans for the Office of Special Education Programs, and other web sites—might not have included complete or up-to-date information about state Response to Intervention activities. Response to Intervention initiatives in the Southeast Region states are evolving, and web sites and print documents might not reflect recent developments. This limitation was partly offset, however, by interviews with state education agency key informants, which (as much as possible) validated information from the scans.

An important strength of this study is that it (with the parallel study by Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic) is the first attempt to describe the status, characteristics, and implementation of Response to Intervention at the state education agency level across several states. The review of background materials and literature revealed a lack of empirical work on how state education agencies have adopted, planned, and implemented Response to Intervention or other multitiered interventions. The study thus could be useful to state education agency staff introducing Response to

Intervention. Some key informants expressed their eagerness to obtain information from the study.

Despite the absence of key informant interview data from South Carolina, the study response rate

was good, with five of six state education agencies and all three local education agencies giving interviews. In addition, all key informants participated in the member check of their interview data and state policy and program context scans.

## APPENDIX B

### STATE KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Start with introductions and brief description of overall project.

The purpose of this interview is to gather information about the status of Response to Intervention (RtI) in your state. Through our initial research, we have examined the information available online about RtI/tiered interventions in [state] and would like to ensure that the policy and program materials we have are accurate and up-to-date. We also would like to hear details from you about your state's model or approach, state infrastructure, and any future plans (e.g., current or planned professional development and/or technical assistance related to RtI). In addition, we are interested in hearing about your state's experiences with implementation and any outcomes and/or lessons learned. And as discussed earlier, we will also request the names of a couple of districts/schools in your state that best meet the criteria for inclusion in our study.

We are collaborating with the Mid-Atlantic REL/ Southeast REL, and the report that ultimately gets developed from this conversation will reflect the current thinking and approaches to RtI in 11 states and the District of Columbia. Our aim is that the report share each state's experiences and lessons learned, and also begins a process of identifying needs that states have related to RtI that the REL could assist with in the future.

The discussion today is voluntary and confidential. Although your state will be identified in our reports, your name and your title will not be used. If there is any particular "background" information that you wish to share but do not want associated with your specific state in the report, please let us know during the interview. We would like to tape record our discussion with you if that is okay with you. The discussion would be recorded solely for the purposes of ensuring data collection accuracy. We will destroy the tape once a transcript has been finalized. If you prefer that we not use a tape-recorder, we will not use one. The interview will take

approximately 60 minutes. If, at any point, you feel that you are unable to answer a question or would like to refer us to someone else for specific information, feel free to let us know.

#### I. RtI model/approach

1. What were the main reasons/motivating factors for your state in considering adopting RtI?
  - What priority outcomes are targeted as a function of RtI implementation, for example:
    - Reduction in learning disability (LD) identification; reduction in disproportionality of minority students for special education classification;
    - Academic achievement gains and/or behavior improvement among specific subgroups of students;
    - School-wide intervention and/or a new service delivery system for struggling learners?
2. Please describe your state's approach to RtI or multi-tiered intervention approaches. (Note: If state is in the planning stage, ask to describe the state's vision).
  - 2a. How many tiers does your state's RtI model have? Does the model vary for each grade (if details on the tiered RtI model are available in print form, please ask for copies)?
    - Has your state adopted or is your state adopting or modifying a specific model/approach to meet its own needs? If so, how was the model adopted?
  - 2b. Why did your state choose this specific model?
  - 2c. Are there specific interventions (for reading, math or any other content area in which RtI is being implemented) that are being used or

recommended in your state? (Note: This question may be better answered by local education agency level staff. If the state education agency interviewee doesn't know the answer, ask whether he/she can nominate another person who may be able to provide the answer).

2d. Briefly describe how your state defines or operationalizes key components or elements (e.g., progress monitoring, criteria for student movement among tiers) of RtI.

- Instructional options (standard protocol vs. problem solving).
- Progress monitoring method and frequency of data collection.
- Who will provide the intervention at each tier (general education teacher, special education teacher, reading specialist, etc)?
- Where the interventions are provided.
- Criteria for moving students between tiers.

3. Please describe your state's RtI implementation plan. If your state is planning to scale up RtI, what are the plans to accomplish scaling up?

- What personnel and/or other resources does your state anticipate needing to allocate to scale up?
- In what subject areas (e.g., reading, math) and grades are RtI being implemented?
- Describe the details of any initial pilot project.
- What are the plans/general timelines of scaling up/expansion to other schools/districts?

4. Roughly how many districts and/or schools in your state are using an RtI approach? What types of districts/schools are these?

- Generally, how far along is this implementation?

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## II. Context of RtI implementation

5. We would like to hear about how your state's approach is used for both determining eligibility for special education *and* for addressing the needs of struggling learners who may not have a disability.

5a. First, please describe if (and if so how) your state's approach to RtI is used to determine LD or special education eligibility.

- Total replacement of IQ-Achievement Discrepancy Model with RtI? Or Dual Discrepancy model?
- At what tier/stage are special education assessments given and determinations made?

5b. If your state is using RtI for the purpose of LD determination/special education eligibility, how did your state address some of the legal issues related to special education identification?

- The point and frequency of parental notice.
- Need for parental consent.
- Starting point of due process for special education.
- Aligning eligibility criteria across districts.

5c. Now, please describe if and if so how your state's approach to RtI is used to address the learning needs of struggling learners who may not have a disability.

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## III. Infrastructure at state level for RtI or other multitiered approaches

*Written policies, regulations, procedures, and/or guidelines that support/guide RtI development and*

*implementation within the state, including at the district and school levels*

6. Please describe RtI-related policies, regulations and/or guidelines in your state. For instance, did the state modify regulations to implement RtI? If so, what is the status of such revisions?
  - How would you describe the overall approach of these (e.g., highly prescriptive)?
  - What is the extent of your state's role in district and/or school-level implementation?
7. What plans, if any, does your state have to develop and/or refine policies, regulations, procedures, or guidelines related to use of RtI?

*Involvement of state-level departments and systems integration*

8. Which departments and/or program areas (e.g., special education, general education) at the state level are involved in RtI? In what ways?
  - What are these departments' or program areas' relative roles and responsibilities in RtI efforts within the state? Who/which program areas are responsible, and how are they responsible for organizing and coordinating RtI at state and local levels?
    - What/where is the locus of decision-making and leadership regarding RtI (i.e., between/among departments) at the state level? Who is leading the effort?
    - How do departments work together on RtI? Challenges?

*Resources*

9. What sources of funds does your state use to support the RtI implementation including professional development (PD)?

- Possible source of funds includes Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Title I, Title V, State grants for innovation etc.

10. What informational sources have you relied on?

- Possible sources include national organizations such as Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), state-level consultation, access to experts, etc.

*External partnerships*

11. Does your state have any partners such as a university research team, contractors, consultants, or other groups or individuals that have been involved in state-level RtI planning or implementation?

- What is the extent of their involvement (e.g., selection of models, interventions); name of the institution and person/researcher?

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IV. Provision of professional development and technical assistance

*Professional development provided by or sanctioned by the state*

12. Does your state provide professional development that specifically addresses the issues related to RTI implementation?
  - Who is conducting the PD? (e.g., state education agencies, local education agencies, or outsourcing it?)
  - Who receives the PD? (e.g., school psychologist, general education teachers, special education teachers, educational diagnosticians, administrators)
  - What materials have been developed for PD?

- What are the intended outcomes of the PD?
  - Cost and duration of PD; resource for funding PD?
13. How, if at all, have the state department program areas or departments worked with teacher preparation programs within the state to prepare teaching personnel in an RtI approach? How about the programs for other related service providers?

*Other technical assistance provided or sanctioned by the state*

14. Briefly describe technical assistance (e.g., on-site planning assistance; provision of materials) provided to district and/or school-level staff.
- What are the intended outcomes of this technical assistance?

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V. Identification of districts or schools for the next step

15. Our study also involves documenting RtI experiences of districts and schools. We are interested in districts and/or schools that have a relatively high experience level (relative to other districts or schools) with RtI implementation. These would not necessarily be districts/schools that are the most successful with RtI, but rather the most experienced. Could you please provide the name of a couple of districts/schools with the most RtI experience and that would likely be willing to participate in our study.

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VI. Outcomes and lessons learned about implementation

16. Are data on impacts related to RtI collected and reported? If so, what do the data show (e.g. whether rates of identification or referrals

for special education vary after implementing RtI; academic achievement of struggling learners may be improving?)

17. What conditions appear to support or facilitate RtI implementation? (If RtI is in the planning stages, what conditions do you anticipate will be necessary for successful implementation?)
- Significant investment/attention to provide PD; district/school level administrators that are engaged and promoting RtI?
  - Willingness of teachers and related service staff to take on new roles?
18. What are the challenges and barriers to RtI implementation?

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VII. Concluding questions

19. Is there any advice you'd like to share with other states that are considering implementing RtI?
20. What if any needs does your state have for technical assistance, research or evaluation related to RtI that the REL could assist with?
21. Can we contact you in the future if we have additional questions or for clarification?

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VIII. Wrap-up

Thank you very much for your helpful information. At a minimum, we'd like to check in with you prior to publishing the report to ensure the information is accurate. This will entail sending a write-up of your state that will be close to the final version. We'll ask you to read over the document and help us address general inaccuracies and/or concerns.

## APPENDIX C

### LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY AND SCHOOL KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Start with introductions and brief description of overall project.

The purpose of this interview with you is to gather information about the status and implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI) or other multi-tiered approach in your district/school. We have already spoken with \_\_\_\_\_ in your state to learn about the context of RtI from the perspective of state-level staff. Note: If the interviewee was identified by state-level staff, please make this clear, as follows: \_\_\_\_\_ identified you as representing a district/school that has substantial experience, relative to other districts/schools with RtI.

Specifically, we'd like to speak with you regarding your district's/school's overall approach to RtI, how RtI is organized within your district/school, implementation experiences, and lessons learned.

We are collecting information about state-, district-, and school-level experiences with RtI from the six Southeast Region states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina and South Carolina. We will produce a brief report of this information. Our aim is that the report highlights the experiences, lessons learned, and technical assistance needs of states, districts and schools within the Southeast Region states. Thus, we believe this interview with you will help the REL identify needs of local education staff that the REL could assist with in the future. We will be glad to share the brief report of our findings with you and your colleagues.

The discussion today is voluntary and confidential. Although your district/school will be identified in our report, your name and your title will not be used. If there is any particular "background" information about your district/school that you wish to share but do not want included in the report please let us know during the interview. We would like to tape record our discussion with you

if that is okay with you. The discussion would be recorded solely for the purposes of ensuring data collection accuracy. We will destroy the tape once a transcript has been finalized. If you prefer that we not use a tape-recorder, we will not use one. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. If, at any point, you feel that you are unable to answer a question or would like to refer us to someone else for specific information, feel free to let us know.

#### I. RtI model/approach and impacts

##### *Overall RtI approach*

1. Why was your school/district interested in implementing RtI?
2. How has the state influenced your district's/school's approach and implementation of RtI?

Probes:

- Adaptations of state RtI model (e.g., tier structure, student performance monitoring, intervention selection)
- State policies, guidelines or procedures?
- Direct guidance or technical assistance to your district/school provided by state staff?
- Professional development provided by or sponsored by the state?

##### *Program-level and student-level impacts*

3. What types of program-level impacts is your local education agency (LEA)/school hoping to achieve with RtI (e.g., reduction in referrals to special education? reductions in disproportionality of minority students? greater integration of general and special education programs?)
4. Has your LEA/school had the opportunity to assess changes in student academic

achievement that might be related to RtI? If so, what do these look like?

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## II. District and/or school-level implementation

### *Current implementation experiences/plans for scaling up*

5. Please describe your district's/school's RtI implementation experience:

Probes:

- Process for deciding on interventions to use in each tier;
- Monitoring fidelity of intervention implementation;
- Monitoring student performance and progress;
- Roles of different types of district and/or school staff;
- Involvement of parents.

6. Is your LEA/school planning to scale up with RtI? If so, what are the plans to accomplish scale up?

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## III. Infrastructure at local-level for RtI

### *Written guidelines, procedures, or policies that support/guide RtI development and implementation within the district or school*

7. Are there specific guidelines or procedures your LEA/school has in place related to use of RtI? Does your district/school use specific, standard forms that reflect guidelines or procedures?

8. How would you describe the overall approach of your district's/school's guidelines and procedures? For example, what parts or components of RtI are required of schools/staff and on which parts is flexibility permitted?

### *Involvement of district/school-level departments, program areas, and systems integration*

9. What staff at the school and LEA have been involved in implementing RtI?
10. Could you please describe the roles that different school-level staff have relative to RtI? For example, which types of staff are involved in providing services within the different tiers? How specifically are general education teachers, special education teachers, and remedial education staff involved? How are school psychologists involved?
11. How have staff roles changed over time, if at all?
12. Does your LEA/school have external partners such as a local university, nonprofit organization, consultants, or other groups or individuals that are involved in your LEA/school work on RtI? Please describe.

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## IV. Professional development, technical assistance, and resources

13. Is there professional development (PD) on RtI that is provided to district and school staff? Please briefly describe the PD.

Probes:

- Who provides (e.g., state to district and schools, district to schools)?
  - What is the focus of the PD?
  - To which types of staff (e.g., teachers, principals, related service staff, especially school psychologists) is it provided?
14. Have you received any technical assistance (such as on-site planning assistance) from the state? Please briefly describe.
  15. What sources of funds has your district/school used to support RtI?

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## V. Lessons learned

16. In your district's/school's experience, what would you say has been most important to facilitating the adoption and implementation of RtI (e.g., significant investment/attention to provide PD; district/school level administrators that are engaged and promote RtI; willingness of teachers and related service staff to take on new roles)?
17. What would you say have been/are the main challenges your LEA/school has dealt with? And how has your LEA/school addressed these?

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## VI. Concluding questions

18. Is there any advice you'd like to share with other districts/schools that are considering implementing RtI?

19. What if any needs does your district/school have for technical assistance, research or evaluation related to RtI that our REL might be able to assist with?
20. Can we contact you in the future if we have additional questions or for clarification?

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## VII. Wrap-up

Thank you very much for your helpful information. At a minimum, we'd like to check in with you prior to publishing the report to ensure the information is accurate. This will entail sending a brief write-up of your district/school that will be close to a final version. We'll ask you to read over the specific parts of the document and help us ensure that the information is accurate.

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## APPENDIX D

### DISCUSSIONS OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION IN THE LITERATURE

The researchers developed the conceptual and analytical framework for this study by reviewing background materials and literature on Response to Intervention, including scholarly articles, research studies, and issue briefs and policy statements produced by national education organizations involved in Response to Intervention.

The review focused on issues pertinent to state-level planning and implementation. In addition, the key informant and policy scan protocols pointed the researchers toward other categories of information. The review was not intended as an examination of the effectiveness of Response to Intervention.

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#### Possible reasons for state interest in Response to Intervention

State planning for Response to Intervention entails determining the purposes of the approach. One potential purpose is to emphasize early intervention for students with academic difficulties before they enter a cycle of failure. Intervening earlier might significantly reduce the number of students needing comprehensive assessments and special education (Council for Exceptional Children n.d.; Kame'enui 2007) and might reduce the number requiring costly remedial services over a longer time.

Response to Intervention can also be part of identifying students who have learning disabilities and who are eligible for special education services. It can be used for this purpose instead of or in addition to the IQ achievement discrepancy approach, which the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 no longer allows states to require of local education agencies (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities 2005).<sup>6</sup> Some advocate Response to Intervention as offering a more promising way to account for students' cultural and linguistic differences when designing interventions, reducing the disproportionate

identification of minority students for special education (National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems 2005).

It has also been suggested that Response to Intervention be used to integrate data-driven accountability and research-based interventions—both required by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001—into instruction decisionmaking and practices, improving achievement for all students (including struggling learners and those who might eventually be identified for special education; see National Association of State Directors of Education 2005).

Response to Intervention is fairly new, and there is little evidence so far about its efficacy on a large scale. There has been little empirical reporting of challenges to implementing the approach across a district or state, and little information about how such challenges might be overcome.

Critics of Response to Intervention fear that its complexity will make it difficult to implement and will undermine its potential benefits (Samuels 2008). Response to Intervention has also been criticized based on how schools and education systems work. Learning disability identification is affected by school-specific factors such as the perceived roles of school practitioners, availability of services and resources, and prevailing school culture (Mellard, Desler, and Barth 2004). The critics contend that there has been insufficient effort to understand how these school factors shape the implementation of Response to Intervention. Gerber (2005) has also called the neglect of institutional and teacher variables in current formulations of Response to Intervention a possible “fatal flaw,” arguing that there has been insufficient attention to the cost and extent of the structural and systemic changes that the approach requires.

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#### Possible ways for state agencies to become involved in Response to Intervention

The oft-noted separation between general and special education in schools can also appear in state

education agencies. State general education staff typically focus on NCLB requirements; special education staff focus on IDEA due process and on providing services in the least restrictive environment (National Association of State Directors of Special Education 2007). Although the issue has not been studied empirically, Response to Intervention might make general and special education systems better integrated and more efficient—in decisionmaking, in the roles and responsibilities of state agency departments, and in coordination within and across agencies (Marston et al. 2003).

Strategies that have been reported to promote state-level consensus and support for Response to Intervention include education about the approach, partnerships with related initiatives, statewide belief and practice surveys, and research on the impact of state Response to Intervention initiatives (Batsche et al. 2007).

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#### State Response to Intervention policy development and resources

State agencies adopting Response to Intervention can use policies and guidelines to shape the approach at both state and local levels. Policy recommendations by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2005) point out that state education agencies decide which aspects of Response to Intervention will be centralized and standardized across the state and which will be determined by local education agencies or schools. A state agency might, for example, prescribe explicit definitions of tiers, yet allow local districts and schools flexibility in selecting and implementing interventions. Or a state agency might define both the tiers and the interventions permitted for each. Statewide or state-coordinated adoption entails state education agencies' providing some guidance and oversight to local education agencies and schools (Marston et al. 2003).

Kratochwill, Clements, and Kalymon (2007) note the importance of professional development for local school staff in adopting Response to Intervention. Principals, general education teachers,

special education teachers, and psychologists must take new roles and responsibilities in developing the system, conducting student assessments, collaborating to identify and solve learning problems, and delivering and monitoring interventions (Batsche, Kavale, and Kovaleski 2006; National Association of State Directors of Special Education 2007).

Though Response to Intervention requires added staff time and resources, policy recommendations and opinion pieces claim that it saves money in other areas—for example, by reducing special education assessments. As an integrated service delivery model, Response to Intervention is credited with yielding cost-effective education results for all students, an issue paramount to meeting NCLB demand for adequate yearly progress (Grimes and Kurns 2003).

Still, despite provisions in IDEA for using up to 15 percent of Part B funds for early intervening services—such as Response to Intervention—there are concerns that those resources are not enough to pay for a change as large as that of adopting Response to Intervention (Mastropieri and Scruggs 2005). The re-authorization of the NCLB Act may include more funding for Response to Intervention, but present federal funding structures and state education finance formulas tend to create and sustain fragmentation between general and special education—while Response to Intervention likely requires a blended funding approach (National Association of State Directors of Special Education 2007).

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#### Two Response to Intervention models: problem-solving and standard protocol

Experts generally identify two Response to Intervention models: problem-solving and standard protocol. Variations and hybrids are based on these two (Fuchs and Fuchs 2007; Hollenbeck 2007; Ikeda et al. 2007). Although no empirical studies directly contrast the two approaches, Christ, Burns, and Ysseldyke (2005) contend that they fundamentally differ in degree of

individualization and the depth of the problem analysis that each calls for before selecting, designing, and implementing an intervention.

The problem-solving model evolved from the school problem-solving team approach (Graner, Faggella-Luby, and Fritschmann 2005). Canter (2004) defines the model as a systemic approach that assesses student strengths and weaknesses, identifies evidence-based instructional interventions, and evaluates the effectiveness of interventions implemented with students. Experts have characterized the model as inductive, relying on groups of teachers and specialists to design and monitor interventions for individual students identified as academically challenged (Fuchs and Fuchs 2007).

In contrast to the problem-solving model's inductive and individualized approach, the standard protocol model uses schoolwide or classwide screening (or both) to identify student learning problems. It also relies on specific, predetermined instructional techniques and resources that improve student achievement. The standard protocol model is characterized as having standard intervention processes and fixed instructional content, with students receiving supplemental instruction time and reduced instructional group size commensurate with their academic problems (Graner, Faggella-Luby, and Fritschmann 2005). Two of the standard protocol model's advantages over the problem-solving model are that it is easier to train practitioners in the standard protocol, and that the standard protocol lets more students be accommodated with scientifically proven treatment protocols (Fuchs et al. 2003).

Some researchers are trying to merge the problem-solving and standard protocol models (Hollenbeck 2007). Vaughn and Fuchs (2003), for example, have designed a Response to Intervention model with a problem-solving emphasis in the early tiers, high accountability standards across general education, and standard interventions to address particular student learning problems.

Iowa's Heartland Area Education Agency (AEA) problem-solving model, initiated in 1988, has

evolved from allowing local education agencies as much flexibility as possible—within the parameters of its problem-solving model's design principles—to incorporating more standardized protocols and commercially available interventions (Grimes and Kurns 2003; Jankowski 2003). The change in the Heartland model shifts it toward a schoolwide and classwide approach to identifying learning problems. Interventions are still matched to individual need, but problem solving on a schoolwide basis (rather than an individual basis) makes the initiation of problem solving less dependent on teacher referral. Data on the performance of all students are used to determine which students need further attention and to identify effective, efficient instructional procedures (Grimes and Kurns 2003).

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#### Response to Intervention tier design, movement through tiers, and intervention selection

A basic feature of any Response to Intervention model is a system of at least three tiers, with intensified resources and support at each successive tier. The number of tiers can vary, but current models favor three (Compton et al. 2006; Davis, Lindo, and Compton 2007; Marston 2005). After 13 years with the problem-solving model, for example, Heartland AEA in Iowa is shifting from four to three tiers to better coordinate group and individualized problem solving and to further integrate general and special education (Tilly 2003).

In the first tier all students are in general education, with data collected to identify those at risk for academic problems. Tier 1 screening generally includes consideration of whether learning problems result from weakness in core education as opposed to student performance. Students identified as below established performance benchmarks are referred to tier 2.

In tier 2 students identified as performing below expectations receive small group, intensive interventions either inside or outside the general education classroom. Students who do not respond to tier 2 interventions enter tier 3, which provides

more intensive and individualized instruction. In most Response to Intervention models the lack of response to tier 3 results in referral for a special education evaluation under IDEA 2004; although there is variation in whether special education services are part of the tiered system (Bradley, Danielson, and Doolittle 2007).

Still to be determined empirically are the ideal length of interventions for struggling students and the best criteria for moving through the tiers—including both exit criteria for students who respond to interventions and criteria to refer students for special education eligibility determination. Expert recommendations for the length of tier 2 interventions range from 8–12 weeks (Bradley, Danielson, and Doolittle 2007) to up to 20 weeks (Vaughn and Roberts 2007). Although empirical evidence on the best criteria for moving through tiers is scarce, Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, and Hickman (2003) found in a pre-post study that it is possible to identify distinct cohorts of students requiring added support at intervals of 10, 20, and 30 weeks, with students who do not meet exit criteria after 30 weeks warranting special education eligibility determination.

General education teachers typically implement tier 1. Tier 2 and tier 3 interventions involve a wider variety of school personnel, including general education teachers, special educators, reading specialists, and trained tutors or paraprofessionals (Vaughn and Roberts 2007). Evidence on the effectiveness of paraprofessionals in remedial interventions is limited. But Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, and Hickman (2003) found positive results in a pre-post study of paraprofessionals working with 45 2nd graders on reading. They also found that success appeared to depend on providing extensive training before the intervention and on coaching and support during.

Consistent with IDEA and the NCLB Act, Response to Intervention incorporates research-based interventions. Yet here many issues remain unresolved. Kratochwill, Celements, and Kalymon (2007) contend that few interventions have been

rigorously tested in ways that allow generalizing their effects to Response to Intervention implementation in education settings. They add that since several interventions are used in a single Response to Intervention system, the interventions need to be studied in conjunction. And experts on Response to Intervention point out that intervention fidelity checks are needed to reliably evaluate student responsiveness—even for interventions with scientifically validated effectiveness (Fuchs et al. 2007).

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### Monitoring student performance with Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention models generally use both the level and rate of skill acquisition to evaluate student performance (Christ and Hintze 2007). Based on both a program description of Iowa's Response to Intervention model (Grimes and Kurns 2003) and a quasi-experimental study of Response to Intervention in five elementary schools (VanDerHeyden, Witt, and Gilbertson 2007), experts count curriculum-based measures, benchmark tests, and commercially available assessments among the options for screening and progress-monitoring instruments. Although some advocate one-time screenings in tier 1—with students who score below a cutpoint or performance benchmark referred directly for tier 2 intervention (Fuchs and Deschler 2007)—Compton et al. (2006) found this could produce many false positives. In a longitudinal pre-post study examining the movement of more than 200 students in 16 schools through the tiers of a Response to Intervention system, they found that some students who tested poorly on the screening day nonetheless progressed at rates comparable to those of their classmates.

To improve screening accuracy in determining which students should move to the next tier, Fuchs and Fuchs (1998) suggest using a “dual discrepancy” approach that considers both performance and rates of learning growth. Students who are discrepant in both achievement and skills growth are determined to be at risk for reading disabilities and should therefore receive supplemental

instruction. Preliminary evidence on the validity of a dual discrepancy approach used with curriculum-based measurement is promising (McMaster et al. 2005; Speece and Case 2001). Speece and Case's (2001) quasi-experimental study of the validity of the dual discrepancy approach found that single-point screening was a less sensitive and less accurate indicator of reading problems.

Dual discrepancy approaches, however, still face the issue of determining appropriate criteria or score cut-points to identify struggling learners. In a pre-post study Burns and Senesac (2005) compared different operational definitions of dual discrepancy. Their findings suggest that differences in percentile group scores more accurately differentiate students needing supplemental instruction than standard deviation performance differences.

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#### Unresolved questions about Response to Intervention: subject areas and school levels

As overviews of expert opinion focusing on unresolved issues with Response to Intervention consistently note, most implementation has been used only with early elementary school children at risk for reading problems. Evidence on the applicability of Response to Intervention in the upper grades or for subjects other than reading in the primary grades is very limited (Fuchs and Deshler 2007; Mastropieri and Scruggs 2005). Evidence from experimental and quasi-experimental studies on the validity of the approach for struggling readers is promising (Compton et al. 2006; McMaster et al. 2005; Speece and Case 2001; Torgesen et al. 1999; Vaughn et al. 2003).

But there are considerably fewer studies of other subjects and grade-level applications. One exception is an experimental study by Fuchs, Fuchs, and Prentice (2004) that provides suggestive evidence about how reading and mathematics interventions might intersect—finding that although math deficits explained variance in responsiveness to mathematics computation more than reading deficits, students at risk in both reading and

mathematics were more challenged than any other group in learning the conceptual underpinnings of mathematics.

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#### Implementing Response to Intervention

Information on state and districtwide experiences with Response to Intervention is beginning to appear (Jimerson, Burns, and VanderHeyden 2007). Experts recommend a phased introduction over several years, allowing educators and administrators time to accommodate new practices (Fuchs and Deschler 2007). A phased approach, starting with a few schools, has been reported in accounts of large-scale implementation (Marston, Lau, and Muyskens 2007; Marston et al. 2003; Telzrow, McNamara, and Hollinger 2000; VanDerHeyden, Witt, and Gilbertson 2007).

Some researchers report changes over time in district and state Response to Intervention models and procedures. Both Iowa's Heartland AEA problem-solving model and Pennsylvania's instructional support team model have evolved to include more schoolwide, rather than individually based, problem-solving—a change leading to more small-group interventions (Grimes and Kurns 2003; Kovaleski and Glew 2006). Both jurisdictions also report increased use of a standard set of interventions as the systems matured (a change from relying primarily on teams that customized interventions for individual students).

Researchers have advocated procedures to ensure faithful implementation (Noell and Gansle 2006). But several large-scale adoptions of Response to Intervention have developed procedures for judging implementation of the system as a whole, not just the fidelity of individual interventions (Grimes and Kurns 2003; Kovaleski et al. 1999). Generally, experts in the field characterize research on Response to Intervention as shifting toward more consideration of the overall system and away from focusing on the effectiveness of a particular instructional strategy or its viability for determining at-risk status (Witt and VanDerHeyden 2007; Compton et al. 2006). So far, however,

little research on Response to Intervention has been designed to match the specific conditions of school, district, or statewide implementation, including the delivery of interventions by school-based practitioners (Ardoin et al. 2005).

A few field studies have examined large-scale state or district implementation. VanDerHeyden, Witt, and Gilbertson (2007) studied the implementation of a Response to Intervention system as it was rolled out to all five elementary schools in an Arizona district over a three-year period. They found that an education system and practitioners can adjust to the changes required by Response to Intervention—at least with a well articulated model, substantial training, and ongoing coaching. With intensive training of teachers and school psychologists, ongoing coaching, and integrity checklists, school-based practitioners were able to implement Response to Intervention procedures at a high level of fidelity. But another study—of Ohio’s statewide initiative—found substantial inconsistencies in the extent to which school-based teams implemented different parts of the process and concluded that on the whole fidelity fell short (Telzrow, McNamara, and Hollinger 2000).

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### Large-scale implementation studies of Response to Intervention

Field studies of states and districts offer some evidence that Response to Intervention benefits both education systems and students, at least with high levels of implementation fidelity. Differences in the extent of implementation have been found to affect student outcomes. In a quasi-experimental study of Pennsylvania’s tiered intervention using a matched comparison group, Kovaleski et al. (1999) found statistically significant differences in student outcomes between schools with high Response to Intervention implementation and those with low implementation. Indeed, low implementation produced results very similar to those from comparison group schools.

A possible effect of Response to Intervention that has been considered in field studies of

implementation is fewer students referred for special education eligibility determination. Evidence from referral rate changes over time (Marston et al. 2003; VanDerHeyden, Witt, and Gilbertson 2007) and statewide quasi-experimental studies (Kovaleski and Glew 2006; McNamara and Hollinger 2003) showed that in the early years of implementation Response to Intervention appeared to cause little or no reduction in referral rates (although in one case the reduction in referrals over the comparison case was statistically significant; see McNamara and Hollinger 2003). The same evidence uniformly showed that Response to Intervention did not increase the number of students referred to special education.

There was some evidence that more students referred for special education determination under Response to Intervention procedures were ultimately found to qualify for services—and therefore to have been appropriately referred. The evidence included both trend data (VanDerHeyden, Witt, and Gilbertson 2007) and statistically significant differences in qualification rates (McNamara and Hollinger 2003). A related outcome examined in field studies of Response to Intervention implementation is the disproportionate placement of students from minority subgroups in special education. Evidence in this area of study remains limited and inconclusive. VanDerHeyden, Witt, and Gilbertson (2007) compared the percentage of students from minority subgroups evaluated at baseline and after the introduction of the tiered intervention in five schools and found no disproportionate placement in either condition. Minneapolis trend data—based on a small sample—showed declines in disproportionality for Black students but not for American Indian students (Marston et al. 2003).

Some field studies have examined the influence of Response to Intervention on student academic performance. Trend data reported by Grimes and Kurns (2003) for several schools and districts in Iowa showed improvements in student performance since the Response to Intervention model was introduced, but because of the study design

alternative explanations cannot be ruled out. A quasi-experimental study of Pennsylvania's statewide Response to Intervention initiative provides more solid evidence that large-scale implementation can increase student learning. In the study Marston et al. (2003) found significantly better outcomes for students on measures

of task comprehension, task completion, and time-on-task than for students at comparison schools. This result was true only for schools that implemented Response to Intervention to a high degree; schools implementing it to a lesser degree did not differ from comparison schools on the measures listed.

## APPENDIX E

### SUMMARY OF SOUTHEAST REGION STATE RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION ACTIVITIES

TABLE E1

**Status of state Response to Intervention initiatives**

State	Status
Alabama	Developing an initiative.
Florida	The Florida state education agency partnered with the University of South Florida to create Florida's Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project (PS/Response to Intervention), a project announced on February 7, 2007. In fall 2007 Florida began a pilot site initiative, with training for school-based teams in 8 districts and including 38 schools across Florida. Each district has identified comparison schools for a randomized controlled trial research investigation that is part of the initiative. PS/Response to Intervention project schools were awarded minigrants to be pilot sites.
Georgia	<p>To help all students meet high standards, the Georgia state education agency developed a conceptual framework, the Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions. The pyramid includes four tiers of student interventions and provides a framework for instruction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tier 1: Standards-based classroom learning.</li> <li>• Tier 2: Needs-based learning.</li> <li>• Tier 3: Student support team learning.</li> <li>• Tier 4: Specially designed learning.</li> </ul> <p>Designed to be used at the elementary and secondary school levels, the pyramid includes student support teams in tier 3 interventions. Such teams are mandated at all Georgia public schools as a result of the 1982 Marshall v. Georgia court case (concerning the disproportionate placement of Black students in special education).</p>
Mississippi	In January 2005 the Mississippi State Board of Education (SBE) adopted SBE Policy 4300 (revised May 18, 2007), authorizing the state education agency to require an instructional model with three tiers and designed to meet the needs of every student. A key feature of Mississippi's Three-Tier Model is the teacher support team, created by the state legislature in 1988 as part of Chapter 20 Remedial Education to determine instructional services for students. The Three-Tier Model is being implemented statewide.
North Carolina	Beginning in 2001 a North Carolina state task force began to study ways to better identify and evaluate services for children with disabilities. The task force recommended Response to Intervention based on its use in other states and its allowance under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. In late 2005 the state education agency associate superintendent for Curriculum and School Reform Services and the director of the Exceptional Children Division successfully petitioned for a waiver from the State Board of Education related to special education identification procedures in order to conduct a Response to Intervention pilot using a problem-solving model in 10 schools within 5 local education agencies. Based on the evaluation of the pilot, the Exceptional Children Division will recommend changes in the "Procedures Governing Programs and Services of Children with Disabilities" and advise school systems about how to identify and evaluate students with disabilities.
South Carolina	State Response to Intervention planning is in progress. South Carolina's State Performance Plan (2005) describes a tiered intervention approach being initiated and required of districts determined to disproportionately represent students from minority subgroups in special education through inappropriate identification. Elements of a Response to Intervention approach are also in the state's plans for addressing performance by students with disabilities on statewide assessments. After a pilot year South Carolina plans to phase in, over six years, a related statewide program to use curriculum-based measurement for progress monitoring in both general and special education.

Source: Florida Department of Education and University of South Florida n.d.; Georgia Department of Education n.d.-b, n.d.-c; Mississippi Department of Education 2007, n.d.-d; North Carolina State Board of Education 2005a; South Carolina Department of Education 2007.

TABLE E2

**State education agency department roles and responsibilities in Response to Intervention**

State	Roles and responsibilities
Alabama	Adopting Response to Intervention began with the Department of Special Education Services; yet the state education agency plans to have the Classroom Improvement Section—within general education—lead the initiative. Roles of other departments are to be determined.
Florida	The Problem Solving/Response to Intervention project is a partnership led by the University of South Florida and Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services within the Florida Department of Education.
Georgia	The pyramid initiative is led by three state education agency departments: the Office of Standards, Instruction, and Assessment; the Division of Special Education Services and Support; and the Office of Education Support and Improvement.
Mississippi	The Mississippi Department of Education three-tier model initiative is led by the Office of Academic Education, which contains the Office of Curriculum and Instruction, the Office of Reading and Early Childhood, the Office of Student Assessment, and the Office of Special Education.
North Carolina	In the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction the Specific Learning Disabilities program of the Exceptional Children Division is leading Response to Intervention.
South Carolina	No information reported.

Source: Alabama key informant interview; Florida key informant interview; Georgia key informant interview; Mississippi Department of Education n.d.-e; North Carolina State Board of Education n.d.-a.

TABLE E3

**State Response to Intervention policies**

State	Policies
Alabama	Not yet determined.
Florida	<p>During the 2006 legislative session changes were made to Florida House Bill 7087 to require progress monitoring as part of assessment and remediation for reading and mathematics. A letter to district superintendents stated:</p> <p>“A student who is not meeting the school district or state requirements for proficiency in reading and mathematics shall be covered by one of the following plans to target instruction and identify ways to improve his or her academic achievement: 1) A federally required student plan such as an individual education plan (IEP); 2) A schoolwide system of progress monitoring for all students; or 3) An individualized progress monitoring plan” (Florida Department of Education 2006).</p> <p>The state is revising the State Board of Education Rule to include criteria for using Response to Intervention. Local education agencies have been instructed to continue using the discrepancy model (according to current legislation) to determine eligibility for special education services.</p>
Georgia	The Student Achievement Pyramid of Intervention is a conceptual framework and graphic organizer for Georgia’s tiered intervention. The rules of the State Board of Education on special education are being revised to align them with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act regulations. An implementation guide under development will provide school districts with specific guidance on the new rules and serve as a framework for training and technical assistance in fiscal year 2008.
Mississippi	Mississippi’s Three-Tier Model is required of state schools. The policy specifies the three tiers, the use of progress monitoring, the role of the model, characteristics of interventions, and guidance about intervention length and intensity. Also provided are additional criteria by which a student can be automatically referred to Tier III. The Three-Tier Model is also incorporated into Mississippi’s draft special education policy (March 2006).
North Carolina	The North Carolina State Board Policies on Services for Children with Disabilities have been recently revised to conform with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, including incorporation of the North Carolina Response to Intervention model. Policies concern evaluations and procedures for emotional disability and specific learning disabilities for students who are and are not involved in the state Response to Intervention pilot. North Carolina’s Procedures Governing Programs and Services of Children with Disabilities (10-2004), now under review, will include instructional interventions for all disability categories.
South Carolina	No evidence.

Source: Alabama key informant interview; Florida Department of Education and University of South Florida n.d.; Georgia Department of Education n.d.-d; Mississippi Department of Education 2007; North Carolina State Board of Education 2007 and North Carolina Department of Public Instruction 2007.

TABLE E4

**Features of state Response to Intervention models**

State	Model features
Alabama	Not yet determined.
Florida	<p>Problem Solving/Response to Intervention operates within a systematic problem-solving model in which a multidisciplinary team makes instruction decisions about student progress. Four sequential problem-solving steps are completed in all situations, whether addressing large groups (districtwide or schoolwide), smaller groups (grade-level or classroom), or individual children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem identification.</li> <li>• Problem analysis.</li> <li>• Intervention design and implementation.</li> <li>• Response to intervention.</li> </ul> <p>The model is applied through a multitiered approach, with interventions increasingly intense based on student response. Three tiers of interventions for struggling students are based on degrees of need. The first tier (universal) is the core curriculum and general education program, with evidence-based practices. The second tier (supplemental), which is available after demonstrating that the core curriculum results in success for most students, adds instruction to the core curriculum to support students who continue to struggle. Small-group interventions are delivered with strategies known to be effective for such learners. The third tier (intensive) offers individualized, long-term interventions to students who have not responded to interventions delivered with a high degree of fidelity at the first and second tiers.</p>
Georgia	<p>The Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions supports ongoing progress monitoring and increasingly intensive interventions to help all students succeed. The pyramid is a conceptual framework with four tiers of instruction to address students' individual needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tier 1: standards-based classroom learning. Effective instruction for all students in all classrooms, based on the Georgia Performance Standards.</li> <li>• Tier 2: needs-based instruction and learning; standard intervention protocols. Adds to Tier 1 preplanned interventions for students identified through progress monitoring evaluation data (who must meet the definition of double-dose instruction in the area of need). Possible Tier 2 interventions include the Early Intervention Program, Reading First Supplemental Intervention, After School Tutorials, and Peer Tutoring.</li> <li>• Tier 3: Student support team driven instruction and learning. An additional layer of analysis and interventions where the team (including teachers, other school personnel, and parents) meet to discuss systematic strategies individualized to students who still lack instruction experiences to meet their needs. Examples of activities include individualized tutoring, mentoring, and developing a behavior or learning contract.</li> <li>• Tier 4: specially designed instruction and learning. Developed specifically for students who meet eligibility criteria for special program placement. This can include adapted content, methodology, or instructional delivery, such as the Gifted Education Program and English language learner programs.</li> </ul>

(CONTINUED)

TABLE E4 (CONTINUED)

**Features of state Response to Intervention models**

State	Model features
Mississippi	<p data-bbox="381 327 1458 361">State Board of Education Policy 4300 describes the state model as consisting of three tiers:</p> <ul data-bbox="381 369 1458 478" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="381 369 1458 403">• Tier 1: Quality classroom instruction based on the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks.</li> <li data-bbox="381 411 1458 445">• Tier 2: Focused supplemental instruction.</li> <li data-bbox="381 453 1458 487">• Tier 3: Intensive interventions designed to meet the individual needs of students.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="381 495 1458 688">Teachers are required to use progress monitoring, which the policy defines as an ongoing process with one or more of the following: informal classroom assessment, benchmark assessment instruments, or large-scale assessments. The policy also requires every school to have a teacher support team, which is defined as the problem-solving unit responsible for interventions developed at Tier 3. Teacher support team membership requires the chairperson to be the principal or principal's designee, while stipulating that the designee may not be someone whose primary responsibility is special education. Additional characteristics of the state's model are:</p> <ul data-bbox="381 697 1458 1165" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="381 697 1458 764">• Delivery personnel: for Tier 1, teachers; for Tier 2 and Tier 3, determined by the school (can be a classroom teacher, reading specialist, or external interventionist).</li> <li data-bbox="381 772 1458 831">• Setting: for Tier 1, the general classroom; for Tier 2 and 3, determined by the school and can be within or outside class.</li> <li data-bbox="381 840 1458 873">• Forms: available from the state web site, but their use is not mandated.</li> <li data-bbox="381 882 1458 1058">• Movement across tiers: a dynamic process with students entering and exiting as needed. Tier 3 is prescribed as 18 weeks; the teacher support team must conduct a documented review at 6 and 12 weeks of the intervention and a final review at week 16. Data are entered into the Mississippi Student Information System. Despite the 18-week rule, if an intervention is not working, it should be discontinued and another tried. If progress is indicated, the decision to continue or to modify the intervention can be made within the 18-week period.</li> <li data-bbox="381 1066 1458 1165">• Parent notification: the Mississippi state education agency recommends that parents be informed of a district's three-tier process, stressing the intent to help students succeed in general education. It additionally recommends notifying parents when a student is referred to the teacher support team, apprising them of the intervention plan, and inviting them to progress monitoring meetings.</li> </ul>

(CONTINUED)

TABLE E4 (CONTINUED)

**Features of state Response to Intervention models**

State	Model features
North Carolina	<p>In the North Carolina Responsiveness to Instruction/Problem-Solving Model a student's difficulties are analyzed to provide a foundation for planned, systematic interventions that are then monitored and evaluated to determine effectiveness. The end result could be special education placement, but only after systematic data-based decisionmaking has clearly demonstrated eligibility and need. The model has four levels: Level 1 (including consultation between teachers and parents), Level 2 (including consultation with other school-based resources), Level 3 (including consultation with extended problem-solving team), and Level 4 (including Individualized Education Program consideration). There is no set length for each level, and all student concerns must go through each possible level of problem solving; effectiveness is the criterion for deciding whether to continue an intervention or make a new plan. Forms are available to support associated activities at each tier.</p> <p>The school assistance team, a key component of the North Carolina Response to Intervention/Problem-Solving Model, links to previously implemented state initiatives that guide to teachers in working with students with exceptionalities. At Level 2 teams of teachers and other school personnel become involved. The assistance teams consist of parents, the primary teacher, other teachers in the school, and local support staff (such as the guidance counselor). Central administrative staff, or the student, may participate—but only informally and as needed.</p> <p>The model's specification is increasingly detailed for each ensuing level. For example, the model specifies indicators for when educators should consider moving a student from Level 2 to Level 3, including red flags. Level 4—where special education entitlement is considered—includes due process and IDEA 2004 protections. Parents may, however, request a full and individual evaluation to determine special education entitlement for their child at any time during the process. Each level has a specific case coordinator: at Level 1, most typically the classroom teacher; at Level 2, a school staff member designated by the principal or designee; at Level 3, typically a school psychologist or curriculum specialist; at Level 4, typically the staff member coordinating Level 3 services. Functional assessments, part of the model, include curriculum-based measurement and progress monitoring. North Carolina has developed state and local education agency proficiency norms for reading, writing, and mathematics.</p>
South Carolina	<p>A three-tiered problem-solving model is described in the South Carolina State Performance Plan (2005).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tier 1 is the core curriculum, with universal screening to help leadership teams identify gaps in the core curriculum.</li> <li>• Tier 2, supplemental instruction for students who do not respond, follows functional diagnostic assessments to determine specific skill deficits.</li> <li>• Tier 3 is intensive instruction for students who do not adequately respond to Tier 2.</li> </ul> <p>Additional components are evidence-based interventions and practices and the involvement by district and school leadership teams among other personnel. Membership on leadership teams is not specified.</p>

Source: Alabama key informant interview; Florida Department of Education and University of South Florida n.d.; Georgia Department of Education n.d.-a; Mississippi Department of Education n.d.-f; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction n.d.-a and North Carolina State Board of Education n.d.-c, n.d.-d; South Carolina Department of Education 2007.

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1. “Response to Intervention” is the term used most often in the literature and is the term used primarily in this report.
2. Throughout the report the term “department” is used to refer to a state education agency department, bureau, office, or division.
3. This document was produced by the Burke County local education agency but is being disseminated on the state education agency web site.
4. An interview was scheduled with one South Carolina representative, but the key informant could not keep the appointment. Roughly 10 calls and email requests were made over the next month to reschedule, but the staff were too busy.
5. It was not an aim of the study to compare the content of each source of state data on Response to Intervention. However, state education agency websites and other documents generally provided little information about state planning and varied in their detail about a state’s Response to Intervention model, approach, and implementation status.
6. The President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education advocated eliminating IQ tests from identification, to shift emphasis from eligibility toward providing interventions (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services 2002). A related concern is that IQ achievement discrepancy procedures might be biased in their application to racial/ethnic minorities (Fletcher et al. 2002).

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