The School Counselor’s Role in Response to Intervention (RTI)
Missouri School Counselor Association Position Paper

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Response to Intervention (RTI) is an educational system that has gained traction over the past few years. The framework for RTI is based upon the public health model of tiered intervention with its roots in special education: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004 describes RTI as “a process based on a child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention.” On the other hand, RTI has evolved into an integral part of general education as we become more adept at defining student outcomes and assessing progress. Understanding RTI’s purpose and dynamics will help “frame thinking” as the comprehensive school counseling program is created to support the student development and instructional efforts operating within the school.

Rationale:

The RTI Action Network website succinctly states that “Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tiered approach to help struggling learners. Students' progress is closely monitored at each stage of intervention to determine the need for further research-based instruction and/or intervention in general education, in special education, or both.” RTI involves regularly assessing proficiency in a skill, determining which students are behind, providing additional support for those students below benchmark, and then adjusting the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student’s responsiveness. Delivering scientifically based interventions with integrity, while frequently monitoring how the student responds, and provides an invaluable database of important information about the need to change or sustain the intervention. Program Essential Elements include: High Quality Classroom Instruction, Tiered Instruction and Intervention, and Ongoing Student Assessment and Family Involvement. RTI holds the promise of ensuring that all children have access to high quality instruction and that struggling learners are identified, supported, and served early and effectively. Adopting an RTI model is about adopting best professional practice, as well as insisting that we do what is best and necessary for all students.

The familiar triangle below depicts the 3-tiered model of RTI... While 100% students will receive Tier 1 counseling services only, approximately 80% of students will master the objective in response to effective instruction or intervention. As a result about 15% of students will need additional support or different strategies to master the objective, while the final 5% will need more intensive, personalized interventions to be successful.

In simplistic terms, this is the basic premise on which RTI is constructed. This generalization obviously has a multitude of variables, including the percentages of student success and is not intended to be a specific rule. One elementary building using RTI began by assessing student reading levels. Much to their surprise, over 40% of their students needed Tier 3 interventions! It was obvious this universal, tier one, instruction was not effective. Needless to say that revelation completely altered their thinking and efforts.

The Missouri School Counselor Association believes Missouri’s Comprehensive School Counseling Program naturally frames itself in this RTI model.

Tier One consists of universal programming for all students based on the School Counseling Grade Level
Expectations (GLE) and includes the School Counseling Curriculum and Individual Planning. In the broader context of school, this can include all programs and efforts that address the social/emotional academic and career developmental needs of all students. Intuitively, Tier 1 is the key. The effectiveness of lower tier initiatives, directly impacts the need for upper tier interventions.

**Tier Two** consists of targeted interventions designed to support students in need of additional assistance or strategies beyond Tier One. Tier Two support is provided through the Responsive Services component of the Comprehensive School Counseling Program and includes individual and group counseling, family conferences, and referrals to outside agencies. These services also include multiple school based interventions designed to help students personally achieve the goals established in the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling Program GLE’s. Evidence of Impact Projects typically are Tier 2 interventions as they apply specific interventions with a targeted group of students over a relatively short period of time. (Examples of Evidence of Impact Projects can be found on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website under School counseling tab (Evaluation Section.)

**Tier Three** consists of intensive interventions for students who have not yet positively responded to prior Interventions. Crisis management, coordination of district and community resources, referrals for intensive support, and intervention coordination are examples of specific Tier Three Responsive Services.

The RTI model is an extremely helpful way to systematically evaluate what the adults do to provide the appropriate support for every child’s learning. David P. Prasse, Ph.D. from Loyola University states that “RTI is a cornerstone of a problem-solving service delivery system.” Note the keywords, problem solving and system. Both are on-going. Evaluation of the school counseling program and interventions provides timely data to continually assess effectiveness and better support each student’s ability to succeed.

Providing definitive structures, programs, and practices to facilitate student success requires collaborative effort from every adult in every building. As the leader of a comprehensive school counseling program, it is essential that school counselors understand and champion the key school counseling program components that support the academic, career, and social/emotional development of each student. Using the RTI model of tiered intervention provides a solid framework to not only evaluate individual students but also to define, plan, and assess the effectiveness of your efforts while creating a shared mental model that is needed to effectively communicate and work with administrators and teachers. Together, we can!
Tiered Approach to Direct Student Services K-12

- Referral
- Crisis Intervention
- Consultation
- Short-term Individual Counseling
- Small Group Counseling
- Educational Activities
- Transition Activities
- Appraisal for Decision Making
- Classroom Units and Lessons with Developmental Standards

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