Preface

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

This book is a principal's guide about how to implement Response to Intervention (RTI) to improve student reading outcomes in elementary and middle schools. RTI is a set of processes for organizing decision making for data-driven instructional practices. It is an approach whereby schools intervene first and refer students to special education only after multiple tiers of intensive help are provided and the student has responded insufficiently to intervention instruction. In addition to a set of processes and practices that are embedded in the daily life in a school, it is a paradigm, or way of thinking, about how to help students achieve reading success.

RTI can apply to other subjects and grade levels. The term describes an approach to using data to analyze how a student responds when an intervention is provided. This book focuses on the use of RTI in reading in kindergarten through middle school, with a special focus on kindergarten through third grade. Although RTI can be applied to math difficulties or high school reading difficulties, the amount and quality of research in the field of early reading provide a unique opportunity to apply the RTI approach with foundational knowledge about effective instructional practices. The body of research about the strategies and instructional practices that are most effective provides an amazing clarity about what works in teaching students how to read.

The other reason RTI is particularly well suited to early reading is the growth in well-researched early literacy screening instruments. The process of RTI depends on the effectiveness of the assessment tool in identifying which students are at risk and which are candidates for improvements through intervention instruction. Similarly, the process depends on periodically administering alternative forms of the screening instrument to determine whether the intervention instruction is helping. In early reading, these assessments are readily available and are efficient and effective.

PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

I have dedicated more than 10 years of my career to helping schools, districts, and state departments of education implement early identification and intervention practices in reading. Before it was called RTI and before the Reading First initiative was launched in 2002, many researchers in the field of reading were encouraging schools to screen students and intervene early. These researchers were reporting encouraging findings that with early help, reading difficulties could be averted for many students.

Over the past several years I've observed many principals who believe RTI is the right thing to do and feel that a prevention model is intuitively appealing. What's not to like about it? The body of research about its effectiveness is indisputable. Yet many schools haven't launched an RTI initiative yet. What often stands in the way of implementation is a clear vision of what RTI looks like in practice. This book is a compilation of ideas and strategies about how to implement an early reading initiative, derived from my experiences consulting with hundreds of schools over the past 10 years. This book contains my recommendations about how to implement RTI. However, there are many ways to organize and implement and no single right way.

The focus of this book is on implementing RTI, not on convincing the reader that RTI is the right thing to do. I assume that most administrators who pick up this book are looking for information about how to do it. There are excellent publications on the research findings that support RTI, but an exhaustive publication of the research findings supporting RTI is not the purpose here.

WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

The subtitle of the book is "A Principal's Guide" because the target audience is administrators at the building and district level. Although the book is not just for principals and is useful for an entire staff as an overview as they plan their implementation of RTI, the goal is to reach principals first because their leadership of RTI is critical. It's not a comprehensive manual on how to analyze student data and place students in groups. My previous book, *I've DIBEL'd, Now What?* includes more information on that topic.

Ten years ago, when I began trying to help schools implement early intervention initiatives, I naively believed that even if the principal wasn't committed to early intervention, helping a few good teacher leaders would be enough to get this done. Although it's not impossible to achieve success when the principal is not committed to leading this initiative, it is tough.

The most effective implementations occur in schools where the following factors are present:

- The principal is committed to systemically solving reading problems before it's too late and plays a significant leadership and participatory role.
- There is a motivation to make a change. There can be many reasons, including low test scores, loss of Title I funding, a large special education population, or the desire to implement it before the state or district requires you to do so. The closer the reason is to student needs, the easier it is to motivate teachers.
- At least one teacher has an adequate foundational knowledge about how to teach struggling readers and can advise the principal and coach the teachers. This person may already hold the position or be appointed to a new role with a title such as *reading coach, RTI coordinator,* or *RTI coach.*

There are many things that make it easier to implement. However, these three things top my list of essentials for success.

One other reason this book was written for principals is because of what happens to talented teachers and reading coaches when the principal is not on board and, desperate to help students, they inadvertently overstep their roles. One of the most difficult things to observe is a school where all the ingredients for a successful change are there except for one: The principal is not an instructional leader of this process. Without this leadership, the initiative is less likely to succeed. At this type of school there is typically a capable reading coach who is working hard and has enormous potential to help teachers, yet a few resistant teachers are derailing the initiative, and the principal is not addressing this disruptive behavior. The role of a reading coach, or peer teacher leader, is hard enough as it is.

Resistant teachers often question the validity of the assessment tool, claim that change isn't needed, deny the appropriateness of the instructional philosophy or strategies, or wonder aloud about how they will find the time to do all this work. Questioning and professional dialogue are a healthy part of any change process. However, there is a difference between appropriate professional learning and unprofessional behavior that misdirects frustration or anger at a peer. Too often when the principal doesn't handle the resistant teachers, it becomes a personalized battle between colleagues. It's the principal's role to get the resisters on board. Colleagues cannot and should not be expected to handle these problems with their peers when they don't have the supervisory authority to insist on implementation.

WHY THIS BOOK IS NEEDED

This book is different from existing publications. Whereas many books on RTI are too focused on special education and the related regulations, *Implementing Response to Intervention* takes a broader approach. There is indeed a strong relationship between RTI and special education, and with Title I as well. However, it is imperative that a principal position RTI as a general education initiative. Failure to do so makes it too easy for general education teachers to brush it off as something the special education teachers are responsible for doing.

Another difference in this book is that it provides for principals more practical tips about how to get started. This book provides advice on how to implement RTI in stages and what to tackle in the first year. It includes information about how to use data in meetings and how to design a year-long professional development plan to get your staff accustomed to using data to inform instructional decisions.

OVERVIEW

The scope of this book is about getting RTI launched in a school, with a particular emphasis on the first year. The book opens with a fictionalized case study of Lincoln Elementary School, which has already implemented RTI. Studying Lincoln Elementary's implementation provides a robust picture of the process in action and sets the context for the applied chapters that follow.

Chapter 1, "Why Implement RTI?" describes the forces that have led RTI to emerge so powerfully in reading. It includes background information on the inclusion of RTI in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disability Education Act and the relationship of RTI to other reading initiatives and services such as Reading First and special education.

Chapter 2, "Setting the Stage for RTI," is helpful for planning your school's implementation. The chapter begins with what principals need to do before launching RTI. This includes ways to motivate your staff to want to implement this initiative and ideas for your communication plan. Advice is included about how to implement in stages and limit what you take on the first year. Also, important information is provided about designing your assessment plan so that you are ready with an assessment calendar, a data management system, and a plan about who will give the assessments.

Chapter 3, "Delivering Intervention Instruction," is about establishing your school's delivery system to offer tiers of instruction to meet the needs

of all students. There are a variety of ways to organize groups, and models are provided. Information is included about who teaches the groups, when it happens, and where intervention groups meet. Alternative processes are presented for making decisions to move students into groups and between groups.

Chapter 4, "Using Progress Monitoring Data," contains information about why progress monitoring is an integral part of RTI, how to determine which skills to monitor, and how to graph a student's rate of progress. Also covered in this chapter is how RTI schools use data in many types of meetings, including grade-level team meetings, principal meetings with individual teachers, and meetings with parents.

Chapter 5, "Effective Models of Professional Development," outlines how to design a professional development plan to get RTI started. A description of a sustained, job-embedded professional development model is included. A professional development plan should include workshops, grade-level meetings, and one-on-one coaching and conferencing with teachers. A plan is explored that includes providing professional development in strands for administrators, RTI coordinators and reading coaches, and teachers.

Chapter 6, "What the Future Holds for RTI," examines the implications of RTI today and how it may affect upper grade levels and other curricula in the coming years.