



LDA POSITION STATEMENT ON RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

The Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) is a not for profit organization chartered in 1964, to advance the education and general welfare of individuals with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). LDA is dedicated to a vision whereby learning disabilities are universally understood and effectively addressed. The membership of LDA includes persons with SLD, their families and concerned professionals. Historically, LDA has been predominantly funded by membership dues, annual conference fees and private donations.

Response to Intervention (RTI) has far reaching implications for children with SLD and it is imperative that LDA responds to this initiative, supporting those components of RTI which can benefit individuals with Specific Learning Disabilities and identifying other components that are not in their best interest.

LDA welcomes ideas, research and practices for improving instruction and services for individuals with Specific Learning Disabilities. As new initiatives are introduced, LDA must be vigilant to assure that they are of benefit to children and youth with SLD. It is in this spirit that this position statement is written.

The 2004 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), [Sec.602(30)] defines Specific Learning Disabilities as:

(A); "IN GENERAL – specific learning disability means a disorder in 1 or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.

(B); DISORDERS INCLUDED – Such term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia.

(C); DISORDERS NOT INCLUDED – Such term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, or mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage."

The Response to Intervention Process

The purpose of RTI is that of a prevention model to limit or prevent academic failure for students who are having difficulty learning by providing "scientific research-based interventions" to bring students up to grade level achievement. Although there is no single RTI model, the many variations that are emerging use a two-to-five tiered model. Each tier provides increasingly individualized instruction, continuous monitoring of progress to calculate gains, and criteria for changing interventions and/or tiers through a team decision-making process. In general, the tiers would include:

Tier I – high quality instruction and behavioral supports provided in general education classrooms.

Tier II – small group instruction - intensive specialized interventions provided with consistency by highly trained teachers.

In Tier III – more individualized intervention and/or referral for special education.

Another purpose of RTI is to serve as part of a comprehensive evaluation for SLD. Local Education Agencies must use the eligibility criteria developed by their State. States must permit, and may require, using RTI as a part of eligibility criteria.

LDA supports the promise of RTI as an early intervention process initiated by general education to ensure that, at the first sign of school problems, students will receive academic supports including:

- Early, high-quality, scientific research-based interventions
- Continuous monitoring of student performance and progress during interventions
- Use of response data to change the intensity or type of subsequent interventions
- Parents and families informed and involved in team decision making throughout the intervention process

It is essential that parents be aware of their right to send a written referral to the school system requesting their child receive a comprehensive evaluation for identification/eligibility for special education services, at any time during the RTI process.

LDA supports RTI as one component of a comprehensive determination of eligibility, specifically:

- LDA supports the appropriate implementation of the first two tiers of RTI for the purpose of ensuring that the children eventually identified as SLD participated in programs providing effective instruction. Such practices should help reduce so-called false positives (identification of children who seem disabled but who in fact, have not received appropriate instruction).

LDA recognizes the difficulties in the effective implementation of RTI as a system wide initiative and has serious concerns about:

- availability of “scientific research-based interventions” for all ages and all academic domains. There is much scientific evidence to help educators teach early reading skills (e.g., phonological awareness and beginning decoding skills), but much less research-based knowledge about how to teach reading comprehension. There is even less research-based information available to guide instruction in math, spelling, and writing and in the content areas of science and social studies.
- appropriate training of general education personnel who will be responsible for implementing RTI
- implementation of RTI in middle school and high school
- awareness of the need for consistency in the design of RTI models across local school agencies
- availability of controlled studies regarding the use of RTI in SLD determination

LDA does not support the use of an RTI process as the sole means of determination for SLD for these reasons:

- The use of RTI methodology should not be construed as the only, or as the most important, means of SLD identification. Practitioners in some states already use RTI in this manner resulting in low-achievement as a definition of SLD and labeling of students with SLD as having a “non-categorical” disability. This discourages the use of multi-disciplinary evaluation teams and the use of cognitive, language, and perceptual tests. In effect this subverts many years of clinical practice and empirical research on learning disabilities.
- Learning disabilities must not be equated with low achievement alone. The RTI low achievement criterion may exclude some high-ability students with SLD from special education despite the fact that IDEA regulations (Sec 300.301) state: “FAPE (free appropriate public education) is available to any individual child with a disability who needs special education and related services even though the child has not failed or been retained in a course or grade and is advancing from grade to grade.”

When conducting an evaluation of children suspected of having Specific Learning Disabilities, LDA supports the safeguards provided by IDEA 2004 and emphasizes the following:

- Specific Learning Disabilities are not synonymous with difficulty in learning how to read or with low achievement. To differentiate SLD from low achievement, the LEA shall “use technically sound instruments that may assess the relative contribution of cognitive factors...” [Sec. 614(b)(2)(C)] as part of the comprehensive individual evaluation required by IDEA to isolate the exclusion factors. Cognitive measures provide information about the student’s intra-individual differences, as well as diagnostic data necessary in developing appropriate individualized intervention strategies.
- Use of evaluation techniques that permit consideration of “a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, State approved grade level standards or intellectual development.” 300.309(a)(2)(ii)
- A single measure or assessment may not be used as the sole criterion for determining whether a child is a child with a disability and for determining an appropriate education program for the child.
- According to IDEA, data from an RTI process may be used as part of the evaluation procedures; the ability/achievement discrepancy model may be used as part of the evaluation, but is not required.
- Assessments and other evaluation materials must be valid and reliable without racial or cultural bias.

Specific Learning Disabilities are neurologically-based, intrinsic to the individual and are characterized by intra-individual differences, including cognitive variations that affect learning and require specialized instruction, accommodations, modifications and other supports. LDA calls attention to the potentially devastating, lifelong effects of this disorder and the necessity for accurate timely diagnosis and prescriptive individualized instruction.

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