

## The Diamond Model: A Unique Elementary RTI Model That Meets the Needs of All Learners

Joanne Green, MEd<sup>1</sup>, Susan Matthews, MEd<sup>1</sup>, Emilie Carter, MEd<sup>1</sup>,  
John Fabrizio, MEd<sup>1</sup>, Jane Hoover, MEd<sup>1</sup>, and Naomi A. Schoenfeld, PhD<sup>2</sup>



### Keywords

response to intervention, three-tiered model, standards-based curriculum

Recent years have brought many changes to the ways in which schools in the United States address learning disabilities in their students. In an attempt to provide all students with appropriate reading instruction and to identify struggling students in a more timely manner, the 2004 revision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004) moved away from a discrepancy model of identification (Meyer, 2000; Peterson & Shinn, 2002) and adopted a modified approach known as *response to intervention* (RTI). Although not without its drawbacks (Kavale, Kauffman, Bachmeier, & LeFever, 2008), RTI does represent a shift away from more rigid systems of disability categorization, emphasizing instead differentiated instruction delivered with fidelity to a diverse student body—and as such, it has profound implications not only for students with learning disabilities but also for those with a variety of other learning needs as well. Since 2004, the RTI model has remained most commonly associated with reading (e.g.,

Legere & Conca, 2010) but has also been applied to mathematics education (Riccomini & Witzel, 2009), behavioral difficulties (Hawken, Vincent, & Schumann, 2008; Lane, 2007), and other areas of school achievement.

The National Center on Response to Intervention (2010) described four essential components of RTI: (a) a school-wide, multilevel instructional and behavioral system for preventing school failure, (b) screening, (c) progress monitoring, and (d) data-based decision making. The implementation of RTI in a school or program generally follows a fairly standard course, starting with a universal screening process to identify students who are most at risk for reading

<sup>1</sup>James Masticola Elementary School, Merrimack, NH, USA

<sup>2</sup>Rivier College, Nashua, NH, USA

### Corresponding Author:

Joanne Green, Masticola Elementary School, 7 School Street, Merrimack, NH 03054, USA

Email: joanne.green@merrimack.k12.nh.us

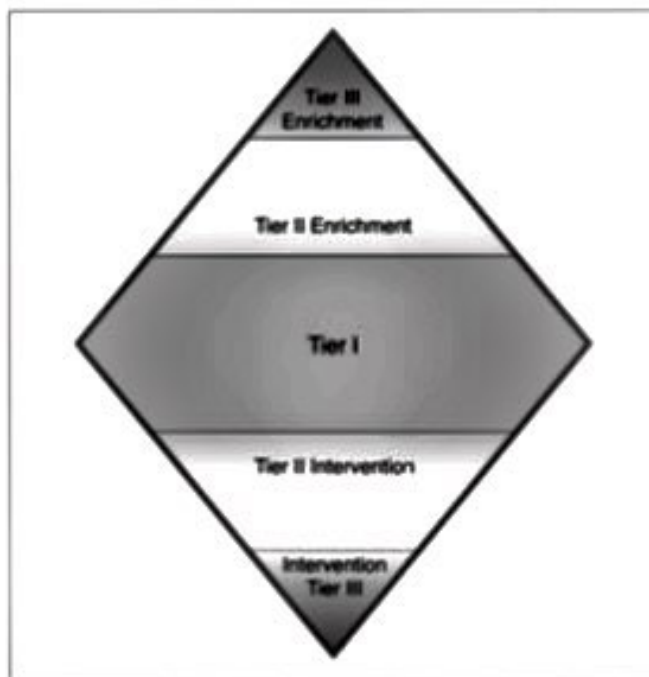
difficulty and continuing through the systematic creation of three ongoing tiers of support where students receive varying forms of reading instruction based on need. The resulting model is depicted as an inverted triangle, where the base of the triangle represents the core classroom curriculum (Tier 1), the central area represents supplemental or targeted interventions (Tier 2), and the tip of the triangle represents individually designed, intensive instruction for students for whom Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions have been inadequate to remediate their reading difficulties (Tier 3). According to McCook (2006), Tier 1 instruction should meet the needs of some 80% of learners, Tier 2 the needs of some 10% to 15%, and Tier 3 the remaining 5% to 10% of students. This article describes the effects RTI has had on a single school and its students in both general and special education through a unique elementary RTI design.

### Tackling the RTI Process

The school was an elementary public school located in the northeastern United States. In addition to the approximately 450 students, the school was also home to a district program for elementary-age students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The student body was 93% Caucasian, 4% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% Black, with 10% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

In 2007, prompted by the desire for our students to become more proficient readers, we prepared to establish our own RTI process. Having studied the triangle model, a plan was undertaken to make implementation more inclusive, rather than focusing on a single target population. An expanded model was envisioned that would (a) provide academic stimulation for high achievers, (b) allow a flexible intervention structure for those who struggled academically or behaviorally, and (c) permit students who exhibited more complex combinations of strengths and needs (e.g., those with learning disabilities or autism spectrum disorders) to remain academically engaged throughout the school day. To represent this idea, the traditional triangular depiction of RTI was mirrored into the shape of a diamond that represented not only learners who struggle but also those who exceed grade-level performance. We called our model "The Diamond Model—Where All Kids Shine."

Like all stepwise models, the *diamond model* consists of successive tiers that indicate both degree of students' need and the degree of intervention provided to them. However, rather than consisting of a single triangle representing interventions for students who are experiencing difficulties, it consists of two triangles merged into a diamond shape (see Figure 1). The first of these triangles represents the traditional RTI structure. The second triangle utilizes a similar approach to reflect enrichment opportunities provided to students who are ready for additional academic challenges. Together, these triangles represent the full diversity of students.



**Figure 1.** The diamond model. Two triangles of tiered interventions merge to create a single structure that serves all students.

Figure 2 lists some of the interventions, supports, and enrichment activities that are currently implemented within the diamond model structure. The proportion of students falling under each portion of the diamond varies according to the needs of a given year but generally falls within levels established in the research literature (e.g., McCook, 2006).

### Intervention Tiers

In this model, Intervention Tier 1 consists of a daily 90-minute block of differentiated literacy instruction. Students participate in guided reading groups, phonics instruction, word work, and other standards-based instruction and are screened three times a year to double-check their overall reading level. Formative and benchmark data from these screenings are examined by multidisciplinary teams in grade-level meetings, where team members coordinate plans for differentiated instruction and determine student placements in further intervention and/or enrichment groups based on individual need. Students who have been determined to need additional intervention continue to participate in the daily reading block but receive additional, Tier 2 targeted research-based intervention from the classroom teacher, Title I tutor, and/or special education team members. Progress monitoring is increased to at least twice a month. Students in Tier 3 intervention also continue to participate in the daily reading block but receive additional intensive and individualized literacy services that are delivered and monitored weekly by the special education team.

	Identification	Intervention / Resource
<b>Tier III Extension</b>	DIBELS (Very Low Risk), Gates – Stanines 8 & 9, Fountas & Pinnell BAS – Well Above Benchmark, B.L.I.N.G.	Gateway, High Fliers, Junior Great Books, Destination Imagination, Battle of the Books, Lunch Reading Groups, Library Press
<b>Tier II Extension</b>	DIBELS (Very Low Risk), Gates – Stanines 7 & 8, Fountas & Pinnell BAS – Above Benchmark, B.L.I.N.G.	Classroom Enrichment, Destination Imagination, Battle of the Books, Lunch Reading Groups, Library Press
<b>Tier I</b>	Professional Learning Teams (PLT), B.L.I.N.G.; Language Arts Coordinator, Speech & O.T. Consultations, Benchmark Screening for All Students, Fountas & Pinnell BAS, DIBELS, Gates, OLSAT, NECAP, Formative Assessments, Speech/Language and OT Screenings	Standards-Based Core Curriculum for All Students, 90 Minute Reading Block, Differentiated Instruction, Standards-Based Instruction Interventions & Extensions, Specialist Curriculum Integrated Activities (CIA), Special Education Co-Teaching, Speech/Language and OT Home Programs, Green Team
<b>Tier II Intervention</b>	Gates (40 NCE and Below) – Stanines 3 & 4, Fountas & Pinnell BAS – Below Benchmark, DIBELS (Some Risk) – Strategic, Professional Learning Teams (PLT), B.L.I.N.G.	Title I, Special Education Diagnostics, Summer Reading Program, Yellow Team, DIBELS Progress Monitoring (every 2 weeks), Read Naturally, Reading A-Z, Levelled Literacy Intervention (LLI), Wilson Foundations
<b>Tier III Intervention</b>	Gates (23 NCE and Below) – Stanines 1 & 2, Fountas & Pinnell BAS – Well Below Benchmark, DIBELS (At-Risk) – Intensive, Professional Learning Teams (PLT), B.L.I.N.G.	Special Education Evaluation, Extended School Year Services, Red Team, DIBELS Progress Monitoring (weekly), Read Naturally, Reading A-Z, Wilson Reading Program, Lindamood Bell, SRA Reading Mastery

Figure 2. Identification and intervention strategies in use at each tier of the diamond.

### Enrichment Tiers

In the diamond model, the upward triangle portion of the diamond depicts the enrichment tiers. Enrichment Tiers 2 and 3 consist of students who have scored highly on Tier 1 and/or Tier 2 assessments of performance, indicating their need to be academically challenged, to varying degrees, beyond the core curriculum.

School personnel work together to provide Tier 2 enrichment activities that appeal to a variety of students. One such activity, Battle of the Books, fosters team building,

appreciation of literature, and playful competition with a focus on academics in a yearlong reading event that culminates in teams of students answering questions about books they have read. In another activity, a group of young authors called Library Press meets with the librarian to discuss, edit, and self-publish their work so it may be showcased in the library for other students to borrow. An after-school program run by parent coaches, Destination Imagination, gives teams of students problem-solving activities to complete as well as opportunities to compete in problem-solving contests at the state and national levels. Guitar lessons are