

# **Classworks: A Tool for Response to Intervention**

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## Overview

The following evaluation of Classworks was undertaken to review the integration of Classworks in a Response to Intervention student instructional model. It includes an historical view of educational reform and the emergence of the Response to Intervention model. Classworks is described from a global perspective as well as a site-based examination of its use as an intervention solution.

## Evaluator's Credentials

Dr. Cynthia C. Millikin, Ph.D. has served in the field of special education for over 30 years. She is currently the Assistant Director of Exceptional Student Services for a public school district in Colorado. Specializing in assistive technology, she has been a leader in the Response to Intervention process being implemented in her school system as well as school systems across the country. Dr. Millikin has published various books, contributed to the publication of a textbook, and has published in a peer-reviewed publication for the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Dr. Millikin is currently serving as managing editor of the ASHA's Division 12 publication, *Perspectives*.

## Introduction

Teaching children is increasingly a daunting challenge for educators. In addition to accountability for ensuring that all children learn state curriculum and are proficient at grade level expectations, there is a need to individualize instruction based on varying needs, provide differentiated instruction to reach all students, and motivate students to perform well on assessments. The key to learning is matching instruction to student need.

Instructional technology has the potential to help teachers do all this and more. With the right technology, all students can be engaged in relevant instruction, working independently on the skills they need, receiving constant feedback and progressing at their own pace. This frees the teacher to become a facilitator for all learning in the classroom, using data to make instructional decisions and time to focus attention where it can have the most impact.

## An Historical Perspective

Gone are the days where the teacher closes her door with the first morning bell and provides for the education of the students in her classroom in isolation. Education has become increasingly guided and directed by legislation and what was once a teacher's responsibility has become a group effort. Two laws have had particularly significant impact on the education of students in this country, i.e., the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142).

The ESEA was passed in 1965 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty and was closely followed by the famous Coleman Report of 1966. The ESEA authorized funds for professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and efforts to promote parental involvement. Through this legislation, Title I funds were made available to provide compensatory educational support for the poor; Title II funds provided library and other resources; and, Title III funds were provided to support innovative programs. ESEA funds also provided program support for the origination of what is today HeadStart, and supported other programs for bilingual education. When ESEA was passed in 1965, it was intended for the Act to remain in effect until 1970; however, it has continued to be reauthorized every 5 years since its original enactment and is currently known as the No Child Left Behind Act.

The historical legislation that has provided for educational entitlement rights to children with disabilities was commonly referred to as Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), when it was first enacted in 1975. This law provided strict guidelines and protections for the education of students with disabilities, including zero reject, nondiscriminatory classification, the requirement of individualized educational plans to be conducted in the least restrictive placements, and a mechanism of

procedural safeguards and system for participatory democracy so parents and students have vehicles to participate as part of the IEP team. As with ESEA, P.L. 94-142 has undergone continual reauthorizations since its first enactment. In 1990, the reauthorization of the law included a change in name to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), using “people first” language when referring to students with disabilities.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education wrote a blistering report on the state of education in this country. The report charged that “our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them” (<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>). The statistics they offered as indicators were alarming. They noted that 23 million American adults were functionally illiterate, with functional illiteracy among minority children potentially running as high as 40%. The Commission noted the impact of inadequate education on businesses and the military, reporting that business and military leaders had complained of the efforts and expense required in order to provide remediation to recent hires. The Navy reported to the Commission that “one-quarter of its recent recruits cannot read at the ninth grade level, the minimum needed simply to understand written safety instruction.” (<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>). America’s educational system became a focus for reform.

In 2001, President Bush signed the most recent reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. The term diverse learner has become the global terminology that is now being used to refer to children in classrooms who have unique learning needs. They may be students who have limited ability with the English language, children who are gifted and talented, or students with disabilities. Regardless of the differences, NCLB makes it clear that the goal is for EVERY child to make adequate yearly progress in school. Along with the focus to ensure progress for every child, NCLB legislates standards for high quality teachers, requires public accountability of results, emphasizes research-based teaching methods or evidence-based practice, and encourages flexibility and choices for parents of children who are disadvantaged.

In 2004, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was passed which basically aligned the tenets of IDEA with NCLB. As an added point of emphasis, the title of the Act was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), thus emphasizing the goal of improving student education and achievement. IDEIA provides specific guidelines for the instruction of students with disabilities and defines specially designed instruction as “adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction – (i) to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability; and, (ii) to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children”. IDEA 2004 also introduced a new term and concept to this country’s educational reform, Response to Intervention.

## Response to Intervention

In the context of IDEA 2004, Response to Intervention (RtI) provides an alternative process for identifying students with Specific Learning Disabilities rather than the traditional “wait to fail” discrepancy model. Under the traditional model, a discrepancy between a student’s cognitive ability and achievement was required before a student could be identified as having a specific learning disability (SLD). By the time the diagnosis of SLD was applied, a student was significantly behind his/her peers. The core principles of RtI do not support this traditional process but instead directs a proactive approach to a student’s needs. Student achievement is monitored for all students through a universal screening process and interventions are applied as soon as a student begins to fall behind the rest of his/her peers. The determination of a learning disability is made after monitoring a student’s initial response to instruction and then further responses to interventions. Interventions are applied within a multi-tiered model of service delivery.

In its broader sense, RtI represents the culmination of the educational reforms that have been converging on our schools over the past several decades. It drives a new partnership between all the players in our educational system and guides the pyramid of interventions that begins as soon as a student begins to fall behind his/her peers in the classroom. Key components to RtI include: a multi-tiered model of service delivery, an integrated data system for progress monitoring, a problem-solving process for the determination of students’ needs, and research-based interventions.

## Tiers of Interventions

Teachers use a teaching-learning cycle to deliver instruction, which involves an iterative process of teaching, monitoring, adjusting the instruction, and re-assessing the learning. RtI takes the teaching-learning cycle and applies a similar type of monitoring process at all levels, from the individual student, to the class, to the grade level, to the school, and to the district as a whole. It offers a consistent process by which a school district can monitor their students’ response to instruction and to the curriculum.

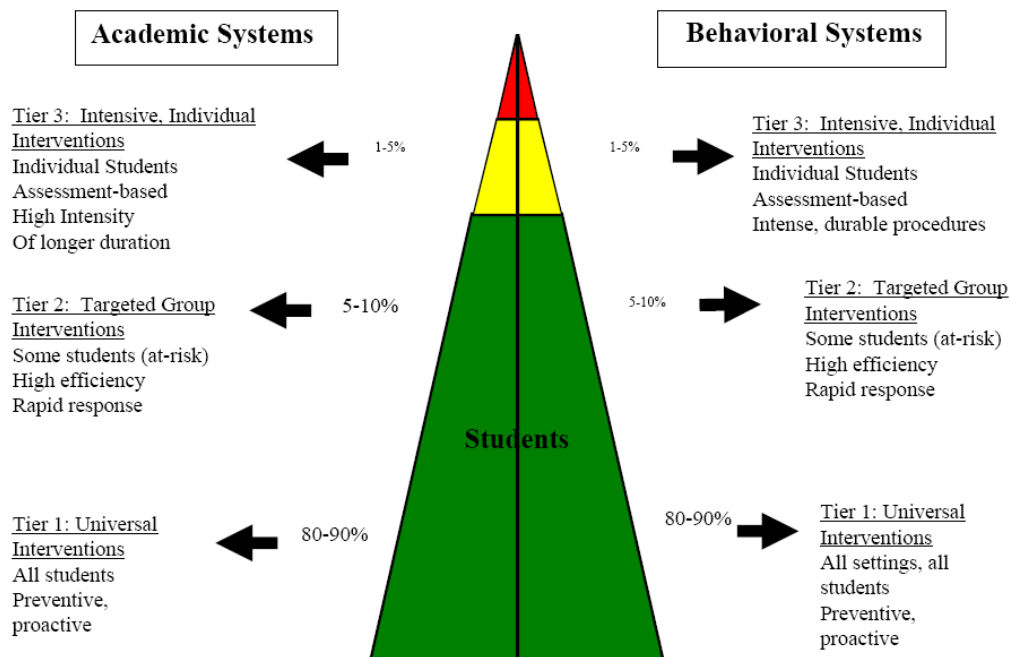
Most states have adopted a 3-tier model or a 4-tier model of service delivery, depicted as a pyramid of interventions. The tiers represent a progression of interventions from standard, classroom-based teaching and learning to targeted instruction with interventions to the uppermost tier in the process where intensive interventions and specialized instruction occur. At Tier 1, the focus is “good first instruction first”. What is meant by this expression is that we need to first ensure that the initial instruction is sound and delivered with fidelity, employing best practices in instruction. At this first level, the goal is for 80% of the classroom to demonstrate learning of the state’s standards at grade level. As RtI gets underway in many school districts across the country, the initial emphasis and foci is to shore up instructional practices in order to reach this response rate of 80% with basic classroom instruction. If 80% of a classroom is not on grade-level standards, the initial focus for the district is to seek instructional supports and additional learning options to improve the overall learning rate and response of the general

classroom. Key to this first tier of intervention is a process for universal screening where students' responses to instruction can be monitored.

For students who do not respond as expected to the initial instruction as compared to 80% of their peers, Tier II offers a mechanism for additional targeted interventions and further progress monitoring. Tier II is focused on accelerating student growth and learning. Using a problem-solving process based on the student's response to instruction in Tier I, skill areas that are not accomplished become the focus for intervention. Tier II represents an estimated 10-15% of the school population. The distinction between tiers is the level of intensity applied to the intervention efforts.

Tier III represents the near tip of the pyramid, representing approximately 5% of the student population who will require intensive interventions for learning. In states that have adopted four tier levels, the final tier level includes those students receiving intensive specialized instruction through special education at its most rigorous level of support. Students with disabilities exist across all levels of the tier system. As noted earlier, it is the intensity of the targeted interventions that determines the tier level. As the students' instructional support moves up the pyramid, the intensity and individualization of the instruction increases while the size of the instructional groups to which the student is assigned typically decreases.

### Three Tiered Model of School Supports



## Learning in the Classrooms of 2008

With this advent of RtI, instruction is becoming increasingly individualized, with the tenets of differentiated instruction and universal design for learning becoming commonplace. As noted in the introduction, gone are the days of teaching to the middle and ignoring the students who are the outliers. With the requirement of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for ALL students, teachers must remain focused on the progress and learning rates of all their students. When students do not respond as expected to the initial instruction, interventions need to be implemented to accelerate student learning. How is this accomplished within the current resources of a classroom?

Classrooms have become bustling learning communities, with students increasingly assuming greater responsibility for their own learning. Teachers have become the facilitators and managers for student learning. They seek tools that offer individualized, self-paced learning. They structure their classroom activities with centers for learning. When one walks into a classroom today, active engagement in the learning process is observed. Students may be working independently at their desks, working on computers with headphones, conferring with their teacher, or working in small groups. There may be several educators in the room, including the general educator, a special educator, or related services personnel from special education (e.g., speech/language pathologist), working together to develop standards-based concepts and skills. It is clear that the classrooms of today are learning communities.

### Classworks

As school systems across the country adopt their Response to Intervention plans for targeted student interventions, many are seeking tools that will provide focused instruction in specific skill areas. Companies that have dedicated their efforts to the support of education and student achievement are putting their programming talents toward the development of skill-based tools to support student learning. Curriculum Advantage, Inc. offers years of talent and educational experience to school districts and has developed a flexible, standards-based program that provides unique support options to teachers through their instructional software, Classworks.

Classworks is an integrated, software-based curricular program in the areas of English/Language Arts, Reading, Math, and Science that is aligned with state standards. Classworks integrates the use of 180 award-winning software programs in its presentation of learning materials to students. Students may interact on a skill using a game format in one context and another approach the next time. The program uses the latest in technology and provides a colorful, quick-paced approach for learning. Student engagement in the learning activities remains high.

Through its alignment with state standards and the import function of students' performance data on state testing, Classworks offers targeted and individualized interventions for students. When Curriculum Advantage, Inc. opens a new market area of the country for Classworks, they first conduct a great deal of in-depth research and

analyses of the software to that state's standards and the state testing results. Item analyses are conducted between the lesson activities in Classworks and state assessments. When student performance indicators are entered into its management system, Classworks identifies the targeted skills areas that are needed by that student. When a student logs into the system, the program is individualized to present those tasks and activities that are needed to improve that student's performance and achievement on the state's high stakes tests.

In its instructional design, Classworks employs the teaching/learning cycle to present new learning to students. Each skill area begins with a mini-lesson where a specific skill or concept is introduced. The student then engages in a variety of learning activities to demonstrate mastery of the skill. At the end of each mini-lesson, the student responds to a probe, or quick quiz, to evaluate mastery. If the student does not achieve mastery, a remediation phase is introduced that presents the learning concepts through another set of activities and skill-practice.

Classworks also includes a rich set of projects that provides real-life application of the learning. Small groups of students can work together to demonstrate synthesis of the skills through these projects and produce integrated products that incorporate the learning of the units that have been studied.

## A Pyramid of Interventions for Students

Classworks is a tool that can be used at each tier for student learning. At Tier One, Classworks is a curricular tool for instruction – in math, reading, language arts, and science. The research-based instruction is differentiated to address learning for all students. It provides a multisensory presentation of concepts for good, standards-based first instruction. Students are immersed in the concepts and engaged in a variety of activities that move the student from the introduction of the anticipatory set, through guided practice, then into the demonstration of learning in independent practice, followed by a synthesis of the learning in the creation of projects.

At Tier Two, Classworks creates customized learning paths for students that are individualized, based on the students' response to statewide testing and/or benchmark assessments. Students are engaged in activities that have shown a direct correlation to the specific learning in the state's standards and assessments. Skill practice is focused and designed to be in direct response to the students' demonstrated needs, and academic progress can be monitored by teachers or the academic support team.

The customization and individualization continues with Classworks at Tier III and Tier IV. In addition to the import of the individual student's performance data, the teacher has the ability to create customized design sets for the students, based on his/her knowledge of student needs and professional opinion on the skill areas that need continued focus and practice. Instructional decisions are informed by reports designed to indicate both mastery and progress. These lessons can be directly aligned to the students' IEPs.

The engaging nature of Classworks instruction, along with interactivity, feedback and varying instructional modalities, provides high interest for all students, while specifically having a positive impact on students at the higher tiers, affecting the behavioral aspect of the model as well.

## Buford Middle School, Buford, Georgia

Buford Middle School is located in the ever-expanding greater Atlanta metro area with a mix of small-town, suburban and urban populations. This diversity is met at the middle school by a staff committed to helping every child succeed. With a goal of ensuring that students explore new areas of learning to help develop interests, identify talents, and sharpen skills, students are challenged to excel in all aspects of their learning process.

When Buford Middle School was looking for a school-wide solution to support student learning, they reviewed a variety of computer-based tools. Ms. Rachel Adams, Principal, describes the resources of her school. Each grade level has a computer lab, with an average of 1 ½ computers per student. They decided on Classworks for a variety of reasons, including its alignment to state standards, its ability to focus on students' actual performance on the Georgia high-stakes test - the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCTs), the fact that they will no longer have to worry about their software remaining up-to-date with graphics and technology because Classworks is continually upgraded and, finally, the services and support provided by Curriculum Advantage, Inc.. Ms. Adams describes her relationship to the company representatives and their personal involvement with her and her school, "I see them. I talk to them. They are consistently checking on us. They know me by name. They know me by sight. The service has been critical."

Buford Middle School has incorporated the use of Classworks across all tiers for RtI. They have imported the students' data from the CRCT and structured the program to provide remedial support to the students based on each student's response to the state testing. At Tier I, Buford Middle School has each student work with Classworks three times a week for 45 minutes. They review the progress monitoring tools within Classworks at the end of each week to determine which students are responding to the instruction and which students may need further reinforcement.

At the Tier II level, students work with Classworks 4-5 times per week, with progress monitoring conducted twice a week. Buford Middle uses the reporting features of Classworks to monitor the student's progress with this more intense engagement with the learning materials.

Finally, at Tiers III and IV, teachers are able to prescribe the specific learning and programs they wish the students to perform. Progress monitoring is conducted through the program. The Classworks interaction, combined with the targeted and specialized instruction by the special educator creates a winning combination for student learning.

## Conclusion

For the last 30 years, our country has expended its efforts in establishing a system for learning that will ensure our children are competitive in the world market. The increased accountability and the collaboration of all groups in designing instructional systems will ensure adequate yearly progress for all students and serve to eliminate or reduce the high levels of illiteracy. As our efforts have gathered momentum, the field of technology has also continued to expand and improve. With the creativity inherent in digital technology, combined with the capability of today's computers, teachers now have powerful tools to employ while creating a community of learning in their classrooms. Classworks has taken the power of technology and combined its focus on state level standards to create a tool that spans the pyramid for instruction and interventions.

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