

How to Use the RISS RTI Needs Assessments

Why Use RTI Needs Assessments?

Needs assessments are tools for planning, and all planning, no matter how complex, has three steps: 1) understand where you want to be (the vision, the ultimate goal, the ideal situation); 2) see where you are now in relation to where you want to be; and 3) identify what you need to do to bridge the gap between the two.

Completing and discussing the needs assessments provides schools and districts with a clear picture of the current situation. That information reveals everything it might be possible to do to bridge the gap between what is currently being done and what ultimately could be done, which can be overwhelming when schools and districts are at the beginning of designing a new approach. Analyzing the needs assessment results helps narrow the immediate next steps to the most crucial for success over the long term. RISS uses its needs assessments to identify the highest priorities for immediate short-term action so a solid foundation is built for the future.

Three RISS RTI Needs Assessments

The RISS needs assessments describe how RTI looks when fully implemented at classroom, school, and district levels. Each assessment is a specific description of the full implementation at that level. The needs assessments were developed simultaneously across all three levels and then separated into three assessments, one for each level. A guiding idea for this work was identifying how RTI works at the classroom level, how the school supports what happens in the classroom and provides additional support for teachers and students outside the classroom, and what the district does to support both school and classroom-level RTI systems. (See <http://www.mainesupportnetwork.org/riss/docs/RISS-needs-assessment-description.pdf> for a complete description and references.)

Prior Information about RTI

Ideally, both the classroom-level assessment and the school-level assessment require some prior knowledge of RTI before completion. RISS used several workshop designs to introduce RTI to teachers before the assessments were completed – both one-hour introductory sessions and longer, two-three hour sessions. However, we found that the assessments themselves were the best teachers about how RTI works when fully implemented.

Classroom-Level RTI Assessment

RISS designed this needs assessment to explore individual teacher's classroom practices. This assessment is completed individually by each teacher, and RISS administered it using Survey Monkey and as a paper survey. Each item is an indicator of full RTI implementation at the classroom level, and includes practices necessary for 80% of students to reach grade-level benchmarks in their regular classrooms, and classroom-level interventions at Tier II (small groups of students) and Tier III (individual students). The assessment first asks teachers how frequently specific activities are part of their practice, and then asks for agreement/disagreement with a series of statements about Tiers I, II, and III.

The first version of this assessment asked individual teachers to rate the frequency “teachers in this school” included specific activities in their practice. Teachers repeatedly commented they did not know what most teachers in the school do regarding many items, so the assessment was revised to explore each teacher’s individual practices. As RISS staff worked more closely with teachers, it became apparent that some additional preference and opinion items would be helpful.

RISS administered this assessment at the beginning of the project, and will do so again at the end of this school year. One of the project’s four objectives is to embed a continuous improvement cycle into the development and implementation of RTI in a majority of project schools. Schools used the classroom-level RTI assessment and the school RTI assessment to identify priorities and create RTI action plans. Using the classroom-level assessment after plans have been implemented is a great way to evaluate progress and identify the next steps.

School-Level RTI Assessment

The school-level assessment works WITH the classroom-level assessment to help the RTI Leadership Team identify priorities for RTI design. This assessment has two parts. The items in Part I describe the ideal conditions in a school in which 80% of students reach grade-level benchmarks in their regular classrooms. Part II describes the ideal conditions in a school with up to 20% of students receiving increasingly more intensive support at Tiers II and III both in and out of their regular classrooms.

The RISS school-level assessment is designed to be used by the school’s RTI Leadership Team. This team can be an existing school group or a new group created solely to design and implement RTI. Because reaching the 80% Tier I RTI goal is the primary mission of all schools, RISS recommends this group have prominence in the school and be strongly supported or led by the principal. In some RISS project schools, the school’s existing Leadership Team assumed responsibility for RTI planning and coordination. In other schools, existing teacher leaders formed the RTI Leadership Team, or the school’s Literacy Team was given this responsibility.

Using the School-Level Assessment

RISS project schools completed the school-level assessment in a number of ways. Choices about the completion process depend on existing school collaborative and leadership structures:

1. ***No school leadership team exists and collaboration among teachers is relatively new in the building.***

Option 1: RISS separated the school assessment into six segments and created a carousel. Individuals in each small group completed the segment individually first and then strove for group agreement on where the school fell for each indicator in that segment. Be prepared for disagreement and minority reports as well as a very clear picture of where teachers perceive the school to be in regard to RTI and their responsibility for it. The next step is to either: 1) create an RTI Leadership Team led by the principal to review the results; or 2) create a School Leadership Team led by the principal to function as the RTI Leadership Team to review the results.

Option 2: Each teacher completes the school-level assessment individually and the results are compiled for each item. The next step is to either: 1) create an RTI Leadership Team led by the principal to review the results; or 2) create a School Leadership Team led by the principal to function as the RTI Leadership Team to review the results.

2. **Grade-level teams are in place and functioning well.** Each grade level team completes the school-level assessment as a group during a regular meeting. The next step is to either: 1) create an RTI Leadership Team led by the principal to review the results; or 2) create a School Leadership Team led by the principal to function as the RTI Leadership Team to review the results.

3. **The school's existing Leadership Team is composed of grade-level leaders and functions well as the planning group for the school.** The School Leadership Team completes the school-level assessment and then seeks feedback on findings and priorities at a regular staff meeting.

Using the Needs Assessment Data

RISS adapted Wellman and Lipton's (2004) data driven dialogue process to help RTI Leadership Teams analyze classroom and school-level assessment data. This collaborative process was chosen because it can be used to analyze any data – including student achievement data:

Phase I: Predict & Ground	Phase 2: Observe	Phase III: Infer/Question
<p><i>Surfacing expectations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why are we doing this? ▪ What questions do we have? ▪ What do we predict we'll see in the data? 	<p><i>Analyzing the data</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What factual observations can we make about the data? ▪ What patterns or trends do we see? 	<p><i>Generating theory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What inferences, explanations, and conclusions might we draw? ▪ What additional data do we need? ▪ What are some solutions we might explore as a result of our conclusions?

The three phases of the process became an organizer/worksheet to analyze the classroom-level assessment data and then the school-level needs assessment data:

Analyzing Needs Assessment Data

1. <u>Statements/Observations</u>	2. <u>Patterns/Themes</u>
3. <u>Possible Causes</u>	4. <u>Priority Needs</u>

RISS found this data analysis step helped schools feel less overwhelmed by the complexity of RTI, enabling them to identify the top short-term priorities for RTI planning. (See the RISS school and district RTI planning frameworks at <http://www.mainesupportnetwork.org/riss/tools.html>.)