



# Lexington Public Schools

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## Our Schools

### Rethinking Instruction in Our Schools

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There are three main questions that frame our work with children in the Lexington Public Schools. These questions, the foundation of professional learning communities, help to focus teacher and administrator efforts on the following essential questions:

1. What do we want students to learn?
2. How will we know they are learning?
3. What are we going to do if they don't learn it?

Our state curriculum frameworks and our Lexington Public Schools' curriculum benchmarks (available on line at <http://lps.lexingtonma.org/curriculum.html>) provide the answers to question number one. Our curriculum reviews and the work of our curriculum departments, in conjunction with our office of Curriculum and Instruction, monitor each area to ensure that we are focused on the most essential knowledge for our students in all schools. Harder to understand, and the focus of today's "Our Schools" article, are questions two and three. How do we know if a student has learned what we have taught? And, what do we do to ensure that every student learns?

Although these seem like simple questions, even ten years ago, our focus was not so much on what a student was learning, but on what a teacher was teaching. This simple shift in words is actually a complex change in what we know we need to do to prepare students for their adult life. In the old model, a teacher taught, and a student learned (or didn't). The responsibility for the learning was on the learner. Now it's the job of the teacher and the school to take steps when students have not learned the curriculum.

In Lexington, we are in the process of developing tiered intervention models that will ensure that each student receives appropriate initial high quality instruction and will provide systematic intervention responses for students that have difficulty learning content material. High quality instruction and intervention refer to the use of core instruction and interventions that have been demonstrated through scientific research to produce results in student learning.

Often called Response to Intervention (RTI), this systemic model ensures that at each level, teachers are monitoring student progress on initial instruction, and identifying students who are not proficient, and that the school is providing increasing intensity of support for students who do not appear to be learning

the material at a commensurate level with their peers. Rather than seeing classroom teachers, reading and math specialists, and special educators as separate professionals working in isolation, RTI strategically coordinates efforts to provide a continuum of support from early intervention in the classroom to sophisticated use of alternative programs at the intensive intervention level. Working together, teachers assess, monitor, and intervene based on an individual student's learning and response to interventions.

It is easiest to understand this model in the context of a particular subject area. For a child learning to read, for example, this model includes quality first instruction and RE-TEACHING at tier one. Universal screening or assessment of the entire group of children at the grade level with a common assessment tool happens three times a year, allowing teachers to identify the students who are struggling after good re-teaching. At tier two, the student receives in-class support from a reading specialist in a small group (tier 2A), and weekly or bi-weekly assessment to monitor progress. After 8-10 weeks the teacher and reading specialist look at the child's progress and the interventions. If the child is back on track and on grade level, the child gets less support. If the child is making good progress with the support, the support stays in place. If the child is not making progress quickly enough, the intervention is examined and the service to the child may change (tier 2B).

These changes can happen in several different ways to make the intervention more intense and targeted. The group size may decrease. The number of times a week a child sees the specialist may increase. The type of intervention may change. During the next 8 to 10 weeks, the student is monitored to ensure that he or she is "responding to the intervention." If the child's progress is not beginning to "catch up" to that of his/her peers, a more intensive intervention may be tried. Once the possibilities for intensifying the intervention are exhausted in regular education, a child may be referred to the evaluation process for special education.

The RTI model monitors all students for learning during initial instruction and then provides support for those students who struggle. Because an entire system, school, and grade level are using the same model, all students are followed and the most needy students (typically 20% of the general classroom) receive additional support from a reading specialist, and the most needy students (1-5%) receive intensive support from a special educator. This model allows teachers to link assessment to intervention. Teachers can identify learning difficulties, provide high quality instruction, and respond with appropriate levels of intervention without waiting until a student has failed and a referral to special education becomes inevitable.

We are excited to be fine-tuning systematic interventions at all levels in order to ensure that all of our students LEARN.