

**Response to Intervention for English Learners:**

**A Framework for School Counselors**

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### **Abstract**

Response to intervention (RTI) is a process used to identify academic, behavioral, and/or social-emotional supports for students with school related concerns. School counselors often serve on this team as supporters, interveners, advocates, and facilitators. English learners present unique language, access and identification challenges to RTI. This article presents a framework for school counselors to utilize during their advocacy for English learners in the instructional RTI process. The model outlines relevant stakeholders, parent/guardian supports, interpreter guidelines, and pertinent academic resources needed to advocate for English learners in the instructional RTI process.

*Keywords:* school counselors, English learners (ELs), response to intervention (RTI), ESOL teachers, stakeholders

## **Response to Intervention for English Learners: A Framework for School Counselors**

The number of students in U.S. public schools whose first language is not English has risen steadily over the last ten years from 4.3 million students which comprises 9.1% of public school students to 4.6 million students comprising 9.4% of public school students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The U.S. Department of Education ([DOE], 2016b) refers to those students as English learners (ELs). Generally, ELs consist of students who speak languages other than English at home and receive instructional support services, such as “English as a second language (ESL), bilingual education, or language immersion programs” (Trainor, Murray, & Kim, 2016, p. 147). ELs are a heterogeneous group with diverse linguistic, cultural, academic, developmental, and familial backgrounds as well as different strengths and challenges (More, Spies, Morgan & Baker, 2016). Public schools struggle to provide the appropriate instructional support for the rising, diverse population of ELs. Consequently, this population of students continues to demonstrate persistent academic disparities (Elfers, Lucero, Stritikus, & Knapp, 2013).

Examples of challenges faced by ELs include decreased access to appropriate and/or rigorous curricula, lower high school completion and college-going rates, and higher rates of exclusionary discipline than their English-native speaking peers (Belser, Shillingford, & Joe, 2016; Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollack, 2017; DOE, 2016a). Paradoxically, ELs encounter both higher and lower risks of referral to special education services within public schools (Sullivan, 2011). Researchers identify deficits in language proficiency as the primary culprit in the rates of identification (Linan-Thompson, 2010).

Educators must ascertain if ELs' academic challenges are due to language acquisition, complications in the learning process, or some combination (Klingner, 2015).

Regardless of the assumptions, school systems under-identify ELs for learning disabilities in early grades, but overidentify ELs beginning in fifth grade. This pattern persists through ELs' high school education (Garcia & Ortiz, 2008; Hernandez Finch, 2012). This paradox illuminates a unique challenge in appropriate special education referrals for ELs.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2008 encouraged the use of response to intervention (RTI) to improve educational outcomes and mitigate disparities for minoritized groups (Belser et al., 2016; Cramer, 2015; Patrikakou, Ockerman, & Hollenbeck, 2016). Many school districts have adopted the RTI framework to promote more equitable outcomes by providing evidence-based, data-driven strategies for assessment, screening, and progress monitoring for struggling students (Cramer, 2015). The RTI model offers the possibility of early identification and interventions for struggling learners through continuous progress monitoring in a multi-tiered framework (Artiles, Bal, King Thorius, 2010; Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Burns, Jacob, & Wagner, 2008; Ziomek-Daigle, Goodman-Scott, Cavin, & Donahue, 2016). In addition, the RTI framework offers student support "before they experience significant failure" (Montalvo, Combes, & Kea, 2014, p. 204) while minimizing subjectivity in the process (Brown & Doolittle, 2008).

School counselors have been involved in the RTI process as interveners, supporters, facilitators, and advocates (Ockerman, Mason, & Hollenbeck, 2012;

American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2014). Despite this involvement, school counselors lack confidence using data to make decisions, involving parents, and collaborating with other stakeholders during the RTI process (Ockerman, Patrikakou & Hollenbeck, 2015). The purpose of this article is to provide a framework for school counselors to effectively advocate for ELs in the instructional RTI process.

### **Instructional Response to Intervention (RTI)**

RTI implementation may look different in individual schools or districts, but most of the models involve a three- or four-tiered framework (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Montalvo et al., 2014; Ockerman et al., 2012). The more popular model of RTI uses the three-tiered framework (Klingner et al., 2005; Ockerman et al., 2012). Broadly, Tier 1 consists of high quality, research-based instruction or interventions with concurrent progress monitoring in the general education milieu. All students receive Tier 1 supports via whole class instruction, intervention and academic monitoring (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Tier 2 involves the provision of more intensive instruction, small group intervention, and/or support for students who fail to make adequate progress on the assessments and benchmarks administered in Tier 1 (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). This support may consist of small group instruction or tutorial support provided in the general education setting. Finally, if students fail to respond to the intensive support provided in Tier 2, they move to Tier 3 where they receive more individualized intervention with increased frequency, a referral for special education evaluation, or placement into special education (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Klingner et al., 2005; Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Montalvo et al., 2014; Sanford, Esparza

Brown, & Turner, 2012). School counselors are often involved in the instructional RTI process and engage in diverse roles.

### **School Counselor Roles in RTI**

Ockerman et al. (2012) described school counselors as both supporters and interveners within the RTI process. The authors proposed that as *supporters*, school counselors actively participate on RTI teams and share their unique counseling perspectives within the process. As supporters, school counselors attend meetings, share relevant social-emotional, academic or background information about students, help monitor student progress at each tier and recommend interventions based on student data (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016).

As *interveners*, school counselors utilize their distinctive counseling, coordinating, advocacy, and data analysis skill set to assist students in the RTI process (Ockerman et al., 2012). Counselors analyze data for progress monitoring and consult or collaborate with teachers and other staff to develop and implement interventions (Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Carroll, 2011). As advocates, school counselors identify barriers to student success and act in an ethical manner to remove those barriers (ASCA, 2012; ASCA, 2016; Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). In the RTI process, school counselors advocate through consultation and collaboration (Lewis et al., 2002). Counselors may consult with various stakeholders to identify and secure appropriate resources for students in the RTI process (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). Additionally, school counselors may collaborate or partner with others to develop resources that remove academic barriers such as mentoring or tutoring (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). In addition to intervener and supporter roles, Ziomek-Daigle, Goodman-

Scott, Cavin and Donohue (2016) explained that school counselors may also act as *facilitators* in the RTI process. In this role, school counselors lead or oversee RTI activities.

Ryan, Kaffenberger, and Carroll (2011) described the specific activities school counselors took part in to develop and implement a RTI program. As supporter, a school counselor attended RTI meetings and made recommendations (Ryan et al., 2011). As intervener, the school counselor assisted with data analysis. At Tier 1, the counselor reviewed universal screening and teacher feedback data to make classroom placement decisions and determine which students needed further intervention (Ryan et al., 2011). The school counselor also provided a classroom intervention at Tier 1 to all students. As facilitator, the school counselor helped develop the RTI program. The counselor presented information to administration, staff and students to educate and gain support for RTI. Additionally, the counselor developed forms and shared best practices for the RTI process at the school (Ryan et al., 2011). Each of these actions represent the diverse aspects of school counselor involvement in RTI.

Ockerman et al. (2015) found that while counselors are involved in several roles within the RTI process such as case management and intervention implementation, their confidence engaging in other RTI activities varied. After surveying Illinois school counselors about their experiences with RTI, Ockerman et al. (2015) found that school counselors lacked confidence in their ability to increase parent involvement, engage in collaborative practices, and use data to make decisions regarding their services to students. These findings suggest that school counselors are involved in the RTI

process, but require additional training and information regarding data and the unique needs of diverse students in RTI such as ELs.

### **English Learners and Instructional Support**

Currently, ELs represent nearly eight percent of the national population of students with disabilities (National Center on Educational Outcomes [NCEO], 2011). Yet, identifying ELs for special education services pose unique challenges due to lack of theory, misunderstandings about the normal course of language and literacy development for ELs, and the myriad factors that contribute or dissuade that development (Wagner, Francis, & Morris, 2005). Several major challenges are present when making decisions about learning disabilities for ELs including inaccurate knowledge of language acquisition processes, identification procedures, limited awareness of student learning histories, and knowledge of current research-based support for ELs in academic content area classrooms (Klingner, 2015).

### **Second Language Acquisition**

According to Klingner (2015), the most often made error in placing ELs into special education is related to an incorrect identification of what can be considered normal or standard language acquisition as a learning or language disability. Chu and Flores (2011) noted that differentiating between students with learning disabilities (LD) and students whose academic challenges are specifically related to second language acquisition processes is problematic due to similarities in learning characteristics of these two student groups. Klingner (2015) illustrated similarities between LD and language acquisition that can be very helpful in understanding the central overlap between these two general categories. Essentially, the presentation of difficulty for LD

students and ELs is similar (i.e., difficulty following directions, learning sound-symbol correspondence, and retelling a story in sequence), but the reasons behind the difficulty are different (i.e., remembering multiple step directions in a second language is difficult, orthographic norms vary in languages, some sounds do not exist in some languages making them difficult to create for ELs) (Klingner, 2015). Additionally, foundational understanding of the difference between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), which can take up to seven years to acquire, is essential to understanding the language and academic progress of ELs (Cummins, 2000).

### **Identification Procedures**

EL identification assessment procedures include home language surveys, English to speakers of other language (ESOL) program placement screeners, yearly language proficiency assessments, classroom academic assessments, as well as state-mandated yearly assessments. Teachers of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) standards, the professional organization for teachers of English to speakers of other languages, proposed draft of TESOL standards for P-12 teacher education programs include understanding how these assessments are used for making informed decisions and recommending additional learning supports (TESOL, 2017). Assessment of ELs are complicated by programmatic and individual learner variables such as home language literacy, academic language exposure, prior educational experiences, and effective, continuous language support (Gottlieb, 2006). As noted previously, ELs are simultaneously at risk for higher and lower rates of referral to special education in public school due to deficits in language proficiency (Sullivan, 2011; Linan-Thompson, 2010).

Thus, RTI is recommended to ensure equitable, appropriate evaluations of ELs when determining potential LDs (Garcia & Ortiz, 2008). Chu & Flores (2011) highlight three key challenges in the assessment process for ELs with LDs: the language of assessment (English or native language), accommodations in assessment (such as extended time, reduction of linguistic complexity), and family involvement (as decision makers; receiving and giving information) in the assessment process.

### **Student Learning Histories**

Involving families in the assessment process for ELs with LDs is essential to gain a holistic picture of the student's academic abilities; it is also a legal imperative based on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) and Improvement Act of 2008 (Chu & Flores, 2011). Parents provide valuable information including student's prior education, native language literacy levels, and other observed behaviors. Developing a relationship with parents is a key prerequisite to establishing trust in the relationship (Chu & Flores, 2011).

### **Effective Classroom Instruction**

Ensuring that ELs have received an adequate opportunity to learn (Klingner, 2015) is central to using the RTI process to determine if special education services are needed. Since decisions regarding program implementation are left to state and local educational agencies, one aspect of ensuring an equitable learning environment for ELs is ESOL program model choice and proper, effective implementation of the program model. ESOL program models, other than bilingual education, place most of the responsibility for high-quality academic instruction for ELs on the content area classroom teacher, yet little research has been done to establish what this high-quality

instruction looks like (Samson & Collins, 2012). Levine, Lukens, and Smallwood (2013) offer these key elements of effective instruction for ELs: (a) focus on academic language, literacy, and vocabulary; (b) purposefully link background knowledge and culture to learning; (c) increase comprehensible input and provide opportunities for rich academic interaction; and (d) create opportunities to use higher order thinking as well as learning strategies. Using these elements as a baseline for adequate instruction in the classroom can assist school counselors and other team members with decision making in the RTI process.

### **Key Stakeholders for ELs in RTI**

Several stakeholders (e.g., ESOL teachers, parents/guardians, school counselors, and trained interpreters) are vital to the RTI process for ELs based on their ability to provide fundamental resources, information, and access to RTI activities (Chu & Flores, 2011; Cook, 2015; Lopez, 2000; Steen & Noguera, 2010, TESOL, 2017). ESOL teachers are trained to facilitate the dialogue in relation to possible issues or concerns regarding language or learning challenges (TESOL, 2017). ESOL teachers also understand EL identification procedures and explain language assessment data. Therefore, it is imperative that ESOL teachers attend RTI meetings as school counselors may not be experienced sufficiently to function as the sole advocate for ELs academically during RTI meetings (Cook, 2015). Parents and guardians of ELs provide another valuable voice to the RTI process. Parent knowledge of student background and experiences provide pertinent information during the RTI process (Chu & Flores, 2011). School counselors intervene and advocate by assuring that parents and guardians are present in the meetings and that they have an active role in the decision-

making process (ASCA, 2012). To meet parent communication needs, interpreters may be required. Appropriate interpreters are key stakeholders in the RTI process for ELs. (Lopez, 2000; Paone, Malott, & Maddux, 2010). Lopez (2000) found that interpreters helped educators gain background information about EL schooling experiences and provided a line of communication for parents learning during instructional consultation. As advocates, school counselors screen professional interpreters to ensure they have received appropriate training and demonstrate cultural awareness (Paone et al., 2010).

### **Framework for School Counselors**

The purpose of this article is to provide a framework for school counselors to effectively advocate for ELs in the RTI process. School counselors are uniquely skilled in the areas of leadership, collaboration, consultation, and advocacy (ASCA, 2012). Additionally, school counselors serve as interveners, supporters, advocates, and facilitators in RTI activities and are therefore in position to work toward more equitable outcomes for ELs the RTI process. The proposed framework may guide school counselors as they take part in the RTI process for ELs. This framework encompasses four steps including (a) stakeholder advocacy, (b) educate parental stakeholders, (c) coordinate interpreter services, and (d) utilize academic EL Resources. School counselors who use the framework can amplify the voices of key stakeholders and foster communication, collaboration, and understanding among RTI team members.

#### **Step One: Stakeholder Advocacy**

Stakeholder involvement is crucial to the RTI process. Key stakeholders who should be involved in the RTI process for ELs include ESOL teachers, parents/guardians, and a trained interpreter due to their abilities to provide support in

the areas of academic and language needs (ASCA, 2012; Cook, 2015; Steen & Noguera, 2010). These stakeholders also provide relevant history and expertise to the process (ASCA, 2012; Cook, 2015; Olguin & Keim, 2009; TESOL, 2017). School counselors value the role of all stakeholders and ensure that key stakeholders are represented and have voice in RTI activities. As interveners, school counselors may ask ESOL teachers to share information about language acquisition or culturally responsive classroom strategies while developing individual, small group, or school wide interventions (Chu & Flores, 2011). As supporters, school counselors may invite parents/guardians to share relevant student history information. These perspectives would be included to develop interventions for students or connect them to other services.

In circumstances where key stakeholders are unable to participate in the RTI process, school counselors would intervene using consultation or collaboration. For example, if ESOL teachers are unable to attend RTI meetings, school counselors can consult with them prior to the meeting and bring their perspectives into the RTI process. Relatedly, parents/guardians of ELs often rely on interpreters to share their perspectives during RTI. As interveners and advocates, school counselors recognize the critical need to seek appropriately trained interpreters to adequately serve students and their families (ASCA, 2012; Paone et al., 2010). School counselors would ensure that trained interpreters are a part of the RTI process. If sufficiently trained interpreters are unavailable, school counselors would collaborate with district or community partners to secure these services. School counselors advocate for key stakeholder involvement throughout the RTI process.

## **Step Two: Educate Parental Stakeholders**

The RTI Process is complex (Byrd, 2011) on its own, and parents of ELs are often at a disadvantage due to differences in language and schools' lack of awareness or consideration for ensuring information access in a language parents can understand. Panferov (2010) found that parents of ELs spent as much as 90% of their days using their native tongue, despite parent attempts to learn English via classes and programs. Additionally, parents of ELs also may be unfamiliar with U.S. school culture due to different school experiences and expectations (Gonzalez et al., 2013; Panferov, 2010). EL parents best navigate school culture when schools provide parents two-way communication and explicit guidance regarding expectations and home supports (Panferov, 2010). As advocates, school counselors and RTI leadership should provide training to parents about RTI, their role, and its processes. Familiarizing the parents of ELs about RTI early on may help them feel more comfortable with the process and the school stakeholders involved (Byrd, 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2011; Ockerman et al., 2012). Further, as students move into different tiers, this early information may help RTI teams spend more time devising plans for student progress and less time discerning procedures.

**Assess parent knowledge of RTI.** RTI leaders should collect and examine data regarding English Learner parent participation and knowledge about the RTI process (Byrd, 2011). As interveners, school counselors may collect information about RTI related issues such as parent attendance at meetings, the number of interpreters available, interpreter training and meeting length (ASCA, 2012; Byrd, 2011; Ockerman et al., 2012). School counselors can conduct individual interviews with a small sample of

parents of ELs about their knowledge and concerns regarding RTI (Byrd, 2011; Panferov, 2010). A RTI needs or knowledge assessment can also be completed by a larger parent sample (ASCA, 2012). This data could help RTI leaders develop specific and measurable goals related to RTI for ELs (Byrd, 2011).

**Parent RTI training.** Enlightening parents of ELs about RTI would require intentional training and as advocates, interveners, and facilitators. School counselors are in position to lead in this endeavor (ASCA, 2012; Ockerman et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle, 2016). School counselors can help plan, conduct and coordinate open houses for parents of ELs (Byrd, 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2010) where parents would receive an overview of information about the RTI process such as RTI terminology, interventions, and supports that could be implemented in the home setting (Byrd, 2011; Walker et al., 2010). Interpreters should participate in the events, affording an opportunity for connection with families. Parents can also connect with parent buddies who answer additional questions about school and the RTI process. Events should be offered at times amenable with parent work schedules (Byrd, 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2010). Child care should also be considered. Further, personal invitations such as phone calls or visits, could be coordinated for parents of ELs in the RTI process who have not been involved or who would benefit from additional information (Byrd, 2011; Panferov, 2010; Walker et al., 2010).

**Multimodal RTI information.** To familiarize parents with the RTI process, it is important that parents receive ongoing information. As facilitators, interveners and advocates in the RTI process, school counselors should develop and share multimodal communication and media with parents of ELs (Ockerman et al., 2012; Panferov, 2010;

Ryan et al., 2011; Ziomek-Daigle, 2016). School counselors can develop a regular RTI bulletin (Byrd, 2011; Panferov, 2010; Walker et al., 2010). These communications might include RTI terminology, tips about meetings, brief information about interpreters and key RTI personnel, and reminders about home learning supports (Byrd, 2011; Panferov, 2010; Walker et al., 2010). In collaboration with other RTI leaders, school counselors might also create media such as videos about the RTI process or demonstrations of interventions in the home language. Efforts taken to acquaint parents with RTI early on could make them more aware of RTI activities before entering Tier 2 and Tier 3. Further, these actions might equip guardians with the information needed to best advocate for their children.

**Parent support groups.** At Tier 2 and Tier 3, students need additional academic or behavioral intervention (Klingner et al., 2005; Ockerman et al., 2012). Parents are also invited to meetings to provide input, history, and potentially permission for evaluation (Klingner et al., 2005; Ockerman et al., 2012). These decisions are complex and can be steeped in emotion due to differing knowledge, needs, and expectations (Byrd, 2011). As students receive more academic intervention at Tier 2 and Tier 3, parents may also benefit from more individualized aid through a parent support group (Byrd, 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2013). As interveners and advocates in RTI, school counselors can use their group counseling skill set to conduct the group (ASCA, 2012; Ockerman et al., 2012). This group can include EL parents, who are a part of the RTI process, and provide a forum to discuss experiences and concerns regarding RTI. Learning about RTI and receiving support at each tier is important for parents. Clear communication at all stages of RTI is also imperative.

### **Step Three: Coordinate Interpreter Services**

School counselors and other RTI team members should utilize a trained interpreter in the RTI process for the parents of ELs (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2002). An interpreter provides a bridge for communication during meetings between team members and affords parents access to meetings (Lopez, 2000); however, interpreters would influence the pacing of meetings and potentially the RTI process (Lopez, 2000; NASP, 2002; Paone & Malott, 2008). When identifying interpreters, ideally an individual with interpretation and RTI training would be used, but school counselors could provide training to interpreters as needed (ASCA, 2012; Paone & Malott, 2008). As advocates, school counselors can collaborate with school or community stakeholders to identify, develop, or provide training for interpreters. Team members should also consider how comfortable a parent or guardian may be sharing private or sensitive information through an interpreter (Lopez, 2000). Parents or guardians should be informed that interpreters will be a part of the meeting (Lopez, 2000; Paone & Malott, 2008). School counselors can solicit and address any concerns parents may have regarding interpretation, comfort and confidentiality in the RTI process.

**Extended meetings.** Interpretation may add or extend the time needed to complete RTI meetings for ELs (Lopez, 2000). RTI Team members should be informed about the impact interpreters can have on the pacing and process of meetings. As facilitators and advocates, expectations for extended meetings should be discussed and planned for accordingly (Lopez, 2000; Ockerman et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle, 2016). RTI meeting appointments could be scheduled before school, after school, or planned

for twice the standard meeting length to account for interpretation. Teams could also allocate days during the month or school quarter for extended RTI meetings. If scheduling conflicts do not permit all team members' presence at extended meetings, school counselors should schedule time with guardians and interpreters before and/or after the meeting to explain RTI, establish rapport, and answer additional questions. This added time may also further rapport building and trust with the counselor. For any meeting to be successful, specific actions should be taken with interpreters before, during, and after (Lopez, 2000; NASP, 2002; Paone & Malott, 2008; Paone et al., 2010) a meeting.

**Interpreter briefing.** Before RTI meetings, it is important for interpreters to be briefed (Lopez, 2000; NASP, 2002, Paone et al., 2010). As facilitators of the RTI process, school counselors can conduct the briefing (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). As advocates, school counselors can promote the need for the briefings with other RTI leaders (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2011). During the briefing, the purpose of the RTI meeting, participant roles and meeting expectations would be explained (NASP, 2002; Paone & Malott, 2008). The documents used during the meeting would also be provided to the interpreter, along with an opportunity to answer questions. If RTI documents have not been translated, they can be shared with the interpreter for review and potential translation (NASP, 2002). The briefing should also include a discussion about seating arrangements during the meeting (Lopez, 2000; NASP, 2002; Paone & Malott, 2008). The interpreter would sit in a location that allows direct communication between parents and team members (Lopez, 2003; Paone & Mallott, 2008). Finally, as an advocate or facilitator, during the briefing, the expectation that no linguistic

alterations would occur during the meeting should be stated by the school counselor (Lopez, 2000; NASP, 2002; Ockerman et al., 2012; Paone & Malott, 2008; Paone et al., 2010; Ziomek-Daigle, 2016).

**RTI meeting and follow-up.** As facilitators or supporters in the RTI process, school counselors participate in meetings and can remind all team members of the purpose (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle, 2016). Counselors also collaborate with diverse school stakeholders and can contribute to establishing rapport with all team members (ASCA, 2012). The interpreter should introduce the parent or guardian to all team members and names and titles should be shared (NASP, 2002; Paone & Malott, 2008). All team members should share their name and title. Team members should also be reminded to use short sentences, refrain from using slang, limit jargon, and speak directly to one another throughout the meeting (Lopez, 2000; Byrd, 2011; Paone et al., 2010). After the RTI meeting, school counselors should debrief with the interpreter. The counselor and interpreter can discuss the outcomes of the meeting and address any issues or concerns about the interpretation services. Further, any cross-cultural concerns that arose during the meeting should be shared (Lopez, 2000; NASP, 2002; Paone & Malott, 2008; Paone et al., 2010).

#### **Step Four: Utilize Instructional EL Resources**

As facilitators and interveners in the RTI process, school counselors analyze data to help make decisions about students (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2011). To ensure a successful outcome in the RTI process, a battery of resources that shed light on the instructional progress of ELs are available. As interveners, facilitators, and advocates school counselors can spend time gathering these necessary tools from

various stakeholders to increase the effectiveness of meetings and interventions (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle, 2012). Basic data collected from language placement and proficiency tests (i.e., WIDA Screener, ACCESS for ELs) can provide relevant information about EL listening, speaking, reading, writing, and overall language acquisition (Levine et al., 2013). These data can illuminate key areas of strength/growth and aid in understanding potential causes for academic struggle. For example, an EL might have come into the school system in the first grade with a score of 1.2 (Level 1; entry level) on a placement screener. At third grade, he or she may have progressed to Level 3 or 4 (developing; expanding) and have a composite score of 4.2. According to the CAN DO Descriptors (WIDA, 2012) *finding details to support the main idea* is a reasonable expectation in general for a level 4.2. However, without examining the proficiency scores disaggregated by language domain, vital information can be missed. Composite scores are averages. A student at composite level 4.2 could easily have a strength in one domain (such as listening or speaking), receive a 6 in that domain, and still be struggling with reading comprehension (scoring in the 1-2 range).

In addition to quantitative data, observational and anecdotal data from teachers and parents may help provide a realistic picture of the student's performance expectations. The student's language and learning history should also be gathered at this point (Chu & Flores, 2011). It is helpful to know the student's literacy level in his or her native language, literacy activities at home, prior learning experiences and previous learning challenges. Gathering this data before a RTI meeting will assist the committee in synthesizing the provided information with available data.

CAN DO Descriptors (WIDA, 2012) are a succinct way to determine reasonable academic expectations at each level of language proficiency and within each language domain. These expectations are meant as a guide for classroom teachers as they plan lessons and assessments in conjunction with providing culturally relevant classroom instruction. Knowing what can be reasonably expected at various levels of proficiency can help teachers identify the potential challenges their students will have with the lesson. This knowledge can also be used in the RTI process to develop goals and interventions for ELs under discussion.

### **Implications for Practice, Training, and Research**

The framework provided in this article can assist school counselors involved in the RTI process for ELs. Students classified as EL face educational obstacles (Belser et al., 2016; Carter et al., 2017; Linan-Thompson, 2010). To effectively serve ELs in the RTI process, school counselors must seek allies with a focus on the specific concerns of ELs. Important allies include ESOL teachers, parents/guardians, and interpreters (Byrd, 2011; Cook, 2015; Lopez, 2000). School counselors may need to connect allies to the process. Collecting data about ESOL teacher, parent, and interpreter access to the process may be beneficial. School counselors may also use data to develop or coordinate programs to inform and educate school stakeholders about RTI and the needs of ELs.

To better understand the needs of ELs and to advocate effectively, school counselors may benefit from professional development about EL identification procedures, language acquisition, and appropriate interpretation (Chu & Flores, 2011; Paone et al., 2010). Additionally, counselor educators can incorporate these topics and

RTI with English learner experiential activities into counselor training programs (Burnham, Mantero, & Hooper, 2009). These opportunities may increase school counselor and counselor-in-training self-efficacy to engage in activities that meet the needs of ELs and their families (Tuttle, Johnson, Schmitt, & Todd, 2017).

Future research opportunities with this model include the utilization and outcomes of the framework within various grade levels (e.g., elementary, middle, and high schools), perceptions of school counselors and ESOL teachers implementing the model, and outcomes based on the use of appropriate interpreters to support parental involvement in the RTI process. Furthermore, research seeking the experiences of school counselors and/or school counseling graduate students utilizing the recommended model and the impact on their self-efficacy to work with ELs students and parents may be beneficial.

### **Summary**

Despite the efforts of educators, ELs encounter both higher and lower risks of referral to special education services within public schools (Sullivan, 2011). This article outlined four steps school counselors can take to promote equity and access for ELs during the RTI process: (a) stakeholder advocacy, (b) educate parental stakeholders, (c) coordinate interpreter services, and (d) utilize instructional EL resources. As advocates, interveners, supporters, and facilitators school counselors can ensure that key stakeholders are included in the RTI process to foster informed decisions.

Additionally, school counselors can teach EL parents about RTI and create support and trust throughout the process. School counselors can use their collaboration skills to solicit and train well qualified interpreters that provide comprehensive communication

support to EL families. Finally, school counselors can advocate by ensuring that data from instructional EL resources are used to inform intervention. School counselors who use the framework can promote more equitable outcomes and experiences for ELs in RTI.

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