DORIS McMILLON
Can RTI enhance young children’s development and what are the challenges? I’m DORIS McMILLON. Please join me for the RTI National Online Forum “Implementing Response to Intervention in Early Childhood Settings.”

(music) Announcer: This RTI National Online Forum is presented by the RTI Action Network, a program of the National Center for Learning Disabilities. Funding is provided by the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation. (music ends)

DORIS McMILLON
Hello, everyone. I’m DORIS McMILLON and welcome to the RTI National Online Forum. Today we’re going to talk with four top experts about implementing RTI, or Response to Intervention, in early childhood settings. Joining me we have Dr. JIM LESKO. He is the director of early development and learning resources for the Delaware Department of Education in Dover, Delaware. Dr. Lydia Carlis is director of education at AppleTree Institute and AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School in Washington, DC. Dr. VIRGINIA BUYSSE, senior scientist at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina. And Dr. Charlie Greenwood. He is the professor of applied behavioral science at the University of Kansas. He also serves as co-principal investigator for the Center for RTI in Early Childhood. I’d also like to welcome our studio audience and those who are joining us online. Now later on in the show we’re going to take questions here in the studio and we’ll answer a few that we’ve received by email, so I’d like to say thank you all for joining us.

And let’s, to get our program started, Virginia I’d like to try to cover the basics of RTI with you. We’re going to get into more specifics later on, but for now what are the key features of early childhood RTI model?

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
Well, Doris, RTI is essentially a framework that can help practitioners link assessment to instruction. So if you take that basic definition, there are a couple of key components.

The first is the assessment component. And within RTI there is a particular type of assessment that’s used and it’s called “formative assessment.” It’s called formative because the assessment relies on information that’s gathered on children’s behavior and skills, and it’s used to inform instructional decisions.

The other component is the instructional component, of course, and that consists of the sort of core instruction that all children receive in the form of a core curriculum and intentional teaching but layered on top of that are the tiered interventions and supports that some children need.

And a third component are the supports for making data-based decisions, and so there are a couple of ideas around that concept, and one is that there needs to be a mechanism by which parents and teachers and specialists can collaborate and work together to solve problems. And in
addition, they need some criteria for how to make decisions—benchmarks about what are the key domains of learning for children at this age so that they can understand what goals should be accomplished. Also some criteria for determining which children might need some additional supports based on assessments.

**DORIS MCMILLON**

All right. Thank you so much. Jim, let me move to you. How is RTI different in early childhood than in the K through 12 settings?

**JIM LESKO**

Well, Doris there are several differences I think that need to be considered.

The first would be, and it’s a major issue, is funding. Within the K to 12 system, there are some more firm funding resources that are available. IDEA makes some specific resources available through their comprehensive early intervening services component of that, whereas below kindergarten it’s much more difficult to identify funding and it’s often necessary for districts and programs to be very creative around that process.

The second component would be around the competencies and resources that are available to programs below kindergarten. We’re often dealing with a very different population of practitioners, some that come into the setting with less knowledge than what we might find in a K to 12 system.

I guess the third component would be the settings. In the K to 12 system we have school buildings, we have classrooms. Below kindergarten, we’re looking at pre-school programs, child-care centers, daycare, family childcare. So there are some distinct differences across settings.

**DORIS MCMILLON**

Okay. Thank you, Jim. Charlie, we hear a lot about evidence-based practice in education today. What’s the evidence-based practice in an early childhood setting?

**CHARLES GREENWOOD**

I think there are two aspects to that that I’d like to tell folks.

One is that the practices that are being used, selected and used in those settings are based on evidence supporting their efficacy and the fact that they produce superior results compared to other options that might be out there.

The second component is using locally collected data, as Virginia said, locally collected data by the teachers as part of the decision-making as regards what level of intervention support that the children should receive. So those two aspects, I think, are the main features.

**DORIS MCMILLON**

Okay, thank you. And Lydia, why do early childhood programs and our children need RTI? That’s my first question, and I’m going to follow up with another.
LYDIA CARLIS
If you look just at reading, at the research on reading, 5 to 10% of children who come to kindergarten ready need intervening services after. But 65 to 70% of children who come to kindergarten and they are not prepared for kindergarten need intervening services throughout their school career.

DORIS MCMILLON
Okay. And we’re kind of looking for some context here. Don’t all young children develop skills at different rates?

LYDIA CARLIS
People definitely develop skills at different rates, but there are developmental guidelines for what we know children should be able to do at different ages and as a social justice issue we really want to ensure that it’s not certain children who are not ready and prepared. And right now we see through data across the nation that African American students and children who are English language learners are disproportionately represented in special education and other areas where they’re not getting the services that they need early on so Response to Intervention in early childhood can support them.

DORIS MCMILLON
So it’s not to say that they are special, they have special education needs. They’re just not getting all the resources.

LYDIA CARLIS
They have not received the supports that they need early on to mitigate some of those deficits.

DORIS MCMILLON
Okay. Virginia, what do you see are the biggest misconceptions that people have about RTI in early childhood settings?

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
I think the most potentially harmful one that I’ve run into is the idea that RTI in early childhood, and particularly in pre-K, is going to replace existing referral and evaluation systems to determine whether or not children are eligible for special education. There are some provisions within IDEA for how this could work with older, school-age students, but there are no specific provisions or guidelines for how RTI could be used for this purpose with younger children. And so this is, in my view, a dangerous practice. It is one that is particularly relevant to Head Start programs right now, and that’s a problem and a misconception, and in some ways is giving RTI a bad name, in my opinion.

DORIS MCMILLON
How do you fix that?

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
I think one thing is we need policies. We need specific policies to address this issue head-on so that we can debunk some of these urban myths that are out there, quite honestly.

**DORIS McMILLON**
All right. Tell us, if you would, how RTI really works and I understand that it rests on a foundation of high quality instruction, but how do you define what’s high quality Tier 1 instruction?

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
So you gave me the easy question, right?

**DORIS McMILLON**
Sure!

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
The answer to that could fill a textbook, quite honestly. What do we mean by high quality.

But fortunately we’ve got national organizations that have really focused their efforts on that question and they have developed some quality frameworks. So they essentially, organizations like the National Association for the Education for Young Children, the Division for Early Childhood, Head Start have defined program standards and personnel standards that essentially tell us what early learning environments should look like. The qualifications of the staff in those programs. The teaching practices. Health and safety factors, and so forth. So we have good definitions of that.

In addition, states are working on this, too. They’re creating their own quality accountability systems and they’re doing it through this mechanism called “quality rating improvement systems.” I think Jim was telling you earlier that about 25 states now have these quality rating improvement systems that essentially allow them to set standards for what quality looks like and to measure it and to evaluate, and they’re actually rewarding programs on the basis of meeting these standards.

Now with respect to RTI, I think we look for a few key components to be in place. At a minimum we’re looking to see that programs actually have a comprehensive core curriculum and that they’re using it. In addition, we want to see some intentional teaching going on. In other words, they’re not just putting that curriculum on the shelf. They are using it. Children are having opportunities to learn language and literacy and mathematics concepts, and before we start trying to understand which children need additional supports, let’s make sure that the foundation is there.

**DORIS McMILLON**
Right. Absolutely. Now beyond the core….did you want to comment, Jim? Okay. Beyond the core instruction, a tiered system of intervention is also available for children who need additional support, so tell us about those tiers.

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
Well the tiers are really just a way to help a practitioner organize the assessment and intervention practices at each level, and so typically there are three tiers, and that first tier is the foundation of an RTI system and it addresses both the assessment component as well as the instructional component. As I mentioned, that foundation is having a core curriculum and teaching it.

The assessment component is called universal screening, typically at Tier 1, and it really is about gathering information on every single child periodically throughout the school year so that you have a sense of where children are in terms of meeting basic learning goals. And you can use that information to determine which children might need additional supports.

As you move up the tiers, you start to focus on some children. So whereas Tier 1 focused on all children, Tier 2 focuses on some children who might need some additional supports and the assessment component as well focuses on some of those children to gather additional information to determine their responsiveness to the interventions that you provide.

**DORIS MCMILLON**

So by the end of the year, they’ve gone through this assessment. How should they be looking at the end of the year?

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**

Hopefully we have benchmarks. In many states and programs we have something called early learning guidelines or standards that essentially tell us what children should know and be able to do. I’m not sure we’ve done a great job in early childhood of saying at what point in the year they should know these things, but at a minimum we know that by the end of pre-school before children enter kindergarten what key skills they should know and be able to do.

**DORIS MCMILLON**

Lydia, how do you identify the children who need those supplemental interventions?

**LYDIA CARLIS**

As Charlie and Virginia were just saying, we start with the data. So we assess children in the domains that the standards address to understand where children are at the beginning of the year and how far they have to go to get to those benchmarks by the end of the year. Then the classroom teacher hopefully with some support can use those data to make informed decisions about the high quality Tier 1 instruction that he or she is providing to all children in the classroom and then using that on-going data that is collected throughout the year to see which children, and so the children who are not responding at the same rate as their peers would be the students who the teachers would provide additional support to.

**DORIS MCMILLON**

Okay. Charlie, what are the most useful tools for gathering the RTI data?

**CHARLES GREENWOOD**

The most useful tools are those that can reveal short-term growth and progress and mastery. And by short-term I mean on the scale of weekly, monthly, or quarterly. And things kind of vary, but the idea here is that teachers have a rich source of information on a short-term basis that allows
them to make the decisions that were just described—either to move a child to a more intensive level of service or, in the best of circumstances, to move them from a higher tier down to a lower tier because the instruction has been helpful and moved them along.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Are there different types of data used for different purposes?

**CHARLES GREENWOOD**
Always I guess that is a possibility, but in RTI the data supports two main functions and two main goals. One is the screening that typically, that screening could be in the first of the year and in many cases it may be done quarterly in the year, and the universal screening is done to identify children that would possibly benefit from a higher or an intensity of service. The second purpose is progress monitoring and Virginia mentioned that. Progress monitoring again is for children who are receiving a higher tier of service — how are they doing? And that data on progress lets us know that they’re on trajectory or on a path that will get them to the goals that we have set for them by a particular point in time.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Lydia, let me come back to you. What’s been your experience with this?

**LYDIA CARLIS**
With using data to form instruction? At AppleTree, we’ve been able to support a few different schools in implementing Response to Intervention and we have been able to start with baseline data. We use norm-referenced assessments so starting out with standardized assessments so that we can compare students against their national peers and not just locally, but we also use curriculum-based assessments so that we know how children are performing against the curriculum that we’re teaching. So we can take those data, use them with teachers to help map the standardized assessments against the standards for instruction so the teachers can make meaning of those data and then begin to implement high quality instruction in the classrooms.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Jim, let me come to you. For schools that are new to using the data this way, where do they begin?

**JIM LESKO**
I think it’s critical to take some time to assess the capacity and the capabilities of the individuals that are collecting the data. Most practitioners when they go through their pre-service or in-service training programs typically don’t have coursework that involves taking data, analyzing data, going through problem-solving process. So our recommendation, our experiences have been that you need to take some time first to put together some good professional development opportunities showing teachers that data is not a scary thing, that data is an easy process to take. Often teachers I think feel overwhelmed around, “Oh, I have to take so much data,” and we were talking previously that it’s most helpful to begin with teachers, to target say one area of behavior or a child’s performance, and teach them how to collect the data. Show them, help them to develop some forms to collect that data. And then after it’s done, working with their colleagues
to do some brainstorming on problems like so we have all this information—what is it really saying and how can I then use that information for instructional planning purposes.

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
Can I add to what Jim said? I just want to build on what Jim has just said, because I think it’s so important. When we’ve had collaborative problem-solving meetings that consist of teachers who are trying to implement RTI, and we bring in the data that essentially are the results of the information the teachers themselves have gathered, they get so excited about that. It’s the first time that they have actually seen assessment that they’ve been involved in used for a specific purpose that is completely relevant to them. And so sitting in the room, watching teachers pour over their data and seeing that you can actually look and find children who are performing better than others, some are performing at the top end, some in the middle, and then you have those who are performing at the bottom, and teachers are very interested in trying to address the needs of those students and using the data that they’ve gathered to figure out which students could best benefit from the instruction that they’re going to provide them, it’s wonderful to observe that.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
It’s like having a really clear road map.

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
Exactly.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
And how to follow it.

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
Exactly.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Great. Let me address this question to you all. How is all the student data collected and then analyzed, and then what can early childhood programs do to streamline the data analysis process and so if we could, we’d get several examples from different programs. Lydia, let me start with you.

**LYDIA CARLIS**
At AppleTree, the data are collected in different ways each year as we learn our mistakes from the previous year. But what we settled on recently is having data entered directly into forms that teachers can use immediately. So when the data are entered they immediate color-code and the teachers know if their child is performing high, mid, or low, and at the bottom of the page the teacher can see what is their class median score, what is the meaning. Of course we have to do some professional development at the beginning to explain what that means, but they get the colors (laughter) so they can sort and make instructional groupings right away so they don’t have to wait for us to turn around data to them and give them a report. They can just start right away making instructional decisions as soon as the data are entered.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Okay, Charlie.

**CHARLES GREENWOOD**
I’d like to follow up. The processes that allow for teachers to quickly get access to their results is critical to RTI’s success because if the data is collected and it’s put in a filing cabinet somewhere, then it’s not operating at all and what we want it to do is inform the teachers about how they’re doing and help them with their planning and help them with their understanding of where their children are and what their next needs are.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Exactly. Virginia, any follow up on that?

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
I think teachers are busy. They have a lot of children in their care. And the last thing we want to do is to burden them with yet another task. So one of the things we have done is to use technology. So we’re not asking teachers to use pencil, paper, forms of assessment. We give them hand-held devices which they love using and it’s easy to take that, upload it to a Web-based assessment system, it prints out reports and I think if this is going to work, it’s got to be efficient, it’s got to be easy, and it’s got to give teachers access to information pretty quickly.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
That’s immediate gratification, isn’t it?

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
Yes.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Charlie, what are the benefits of using data to make instructional decisions?

**CHARLES GREENWOOD**
My opinion is that it helps teachers align their intervention, the intensity of intervention, the Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3, with the child’s needs. That alignment and that shifting of that alignment during the school year, for example, is critical to the progress of the children.

Some other benefits, I mentioned earlier, is the support for planning. Program directors, if they consolidate the data, they can see how many children they are serving in Tier 2 and Tier 3 and they can make strategic decisions about resources they might need for that, what professional development is needed, whether there is need for more Tier 2 intervention training, and that again allows for program improvement in a faster and more dynamic way than traditionally.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Absolutely. Lydia, how do programs share this information with the parents? And then what is the family’s role in the RTI process?

**LYDIA CARLIS**
Schools should be striving from the very beginning when parents are enrolling, informing them about Response to Intervention, about what that looks like at their school. In their parent handbook they should have information about the RTI process and the referral process and going over that in parent handbook meetings, back to school night, the parents should be getting information on a consistent basis about the performance of their children so that they’re not finding out when there is a problem that there is a problem. When they get the information about how their child is performing, at the same time they should be getting information about what the teacher’s going to do about it and then maybe how they could help at home. Using information from the parents is very helpful, so what’s the child’s interest? What are the strengths that the parent sees at home and how can the teacher incorporate that information to meet the needs of the child in the classroom.

DORIS MCMILLON
As I look around the table I see heads nodding. Would you all like to weigh in? Jim?

JIM LESKO
I think it’s important also to involve the family because we need to take the perspective that intervention doesn’t only happen during the six or eight hours, two hours or eight hours that the child’s in care or in education, that the most effective way to support intervention is to see it generalized throughout the course of the child’s day. So children typically just don’t experience a weakness during literacy time and that isn’t the only time that you can provide some intervention, but the parent can do that during reading a story as well when the child is home. So there’s lots of opportunities and we should take advantage of that.

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
I have maybe a slightly different perspective on this. I actually think this is an area where the early childhood field needs to do a lot more work.

DORIS MCMILLON
How so?

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
I think we are all espousing the same beliefs around the importance of involving families as partners. I think we need to basically operationalize that, and to put it into practice more. I think in the area of RTI it’s really important, but the field is just at such an early stage in figuring this out in terms of the practices and programs that we haven’t quite gotten there yet, if you will, about how do we explain this to families. We’re still trying to explain it to ourselves. We haven’t come up with good ways of explaining what RTI is and also involving them, engaging them in the whole process of making decisions and collaborating and so forth. So I think it’s an area where we need more work.

DORIS MCMILLON
Charlie?

CHARLES GREENWOOD
I agree but I think we also have some very good evidence supporting parent involvement in these interventions. Particularly at Tier 2 and Tier 3, or Tier 3 particularly, where there’s a highly individualized program at that level and to have a home component at that same intervention being carried out for supporting the child’s language development, for example, and teaching the parent some strategies about embedding instruction in routines and things that early childhood, early intervention people really understand is an asset that we have for that.

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**

But Charlie, I think we have to be a little bit careful here because sometimes I have heard people say, “Oh, do we need a tiered approach in homes, in home settings? Should families be implementing tiers?” And I think we just have to be a little bit careful. I think this whole notion of organizing instruction assessment by level of intensity is one that was developed primarily for center-based or school-based kinds of programs. And it’s not something that should sort of take over home settings. So I just want us to be a little bit careful about the kind of, that boundary.

**CHARLES GREENWOOD**

I understand.

**DORIS MCMILLON**

Let’s come back to the interventions and Lydia, what I want to ask you is how are they chosen for each child?

**LYDIA CARLIS**

Again, taking into consideration the child’s interests and strengths, so when you implement a strength-based assessment you’re starting with what the child is good at already and building the skills, the deficits, from that strength. Part of choosing the intervention is going to be where the child’s strengths and weakness is. Part of it is going to be logistics. What time does the teacher have throughout his or her school day to actually implement the intervention and which times, I’m back to student interest, you know in early childhood, children are going to love recess – or at any age, maybe-- so the teacher might not want to pull the child for an extra intervention during recess. So thinking about the child’s preferences and choices and tailoring the intervention so that it meets all of those needs.

**DORIS MCMILLON**

Which kind of was my question: How are the interventions delivered during the school day, and we cannot skip recess?

**LYDIA CARLIS**

So they’re implemented to the maximum extent so that they can feel like a natural part of the child’s school day. The child might not know that they’re getting an intervention. They might think they’re playing an extra game with the teacher, getting some more one-on-one time, or small-group time to play a fun game. And the purpose of the game for the teacher is intentional instruction to teach a skill before the child is actually building that social, emotional connection with the teacher in addition to helping them learn and be successful in the classroom.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Virginia, if you would, give us an example of a real school where you’ve seen the implementation work well.

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
We’ve worked in several different schools in Michigan and North Carolina and we’re currently in Miami/Dade County in Florida and I think in all of those cases we’re seeing it work. I think it’s all predicated on sound, professional development as Jim already alluded to. And on-going support. It’s not enough to go to one or two workshops on RTI and you’re set to go. You need to have on-going support as teachers implement this in their classrooms. We provide support through coaches coming into the classroom, through opportunities for teachers to come together on a regular basis to problem-solve, to talk about what’s working, what’s not working. And if you provide those kinds of supports and the resources, it generally works just fine.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Lydia, can you give us an example?

**LYDIA CARLIS**
Sure. At AppleTree and the schools that we’ve supported, AppleTree Early Learning, and some other schools in the District of Columbia, where we see the most success is where there’s buy-in and accountability from the principal on down so that the professional development is aligned with the accountability measures and the training and support is very much embedded in the classroom on a day-to-day basis so the teachers are getting that coaching and they’re able to look at the data and if they have questions there’s someone who they can go to to ask about that.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Okay. Let’s move now into RTI implementation and planning and Jim, I want to come back to you. If a school is just getting started with RTI, where should they begin?

**JIM LESKO**
There are a couple of steps, I think, that would be beneficial for a program.

The first, and we’ve alluded to this a little bit, is to spend some time looking at what their basic curriculum and their instructional practices are. I think one of the critical variables that we’ve uncovered is that in many cases, especially below kindergarten, the curriculum that programs are using tend to be somewhat eclectic, to say it best. And so I think an important component that Virginia mentioned is No. 1 is the curriculum linked and aligned to the state’s early learning guidelines? Because good early learning guidelines are aligned to the K to 12 grade level expectations. So is the curriculum that’s being implemented directly aligned to that so that we know that the instruction that’s occurring for those children is meeting their instructional needs.

And I think the second thing would be to look at the teachers’ interaction styles. Is intentional teaching happening in those classrooms so that we know that those students are getting the type of instructional practices that we know will help them develop and learn the skills that they need.

And I think the second major element is again, and I’ve said this before, is to look at the competencies and capacities of the practitioners who are actually going to be implementing both instruction and intervention. When you get below kindergarten you begin to deal with a very
diverse population of practitioners. If you go into child-care centers in some states, you’re dealing with individuals who have high school diplomas. If you’re looking at state pre-kindergarten programs, you may have teachers with bachelors and masters degrees. So you have to take a step back and first look at what are the competencies that these staff have and then develop a strong professional development model to ensure that all of those practitioners have the skills they need to be successful.

DORIS MCMILLON
That was almost going to be my next question and you just answered it. Okay. Who should be on the leadership team and what are their roles?

JIM LESKO
I think there are a couple of key people that need to be involved.

The first is an administrator who has a knowledge of the funding mechanisms that can help to support the process because there are several constraints, especially from the federal perspective, on what can be used and what cannot be used for RTI below kindergarten. So you need someone who has that background knowledge and can be creative in abraiding funding to support the process.

The second, and Lydia alluded to it, is the principal or the director of the center. They need to be knowledgeable about what their expectations are going to be for the teachers in those classrooms. RTI is also not just an instructional model, it’s a classroom management rubric so to speak. There’s lots of intricacies that teachers need to be able to make in adjusting their curriculum and their routine to be able to implement those sorts of things. So I think it’s critical that the principal be there because often as a part of RTI the teacher has to get pulled out of the room to do problem solving and brainstorming and directors sometimes have a problem with releasing people out of the room. It’s natural because then there’s no one to watch or take care of the kids.

Also having the specialist who may be responsible for providing some of the intervention because, again, this process needs to work into their schedule, and they’re the ones that are knowledgeable about the types of interventions or curriculums that need to be used.

And then I always like to involve some teachers because teachers understand what the implications and demands are on their particular schedules and they provide invaluable advice. We implemented this process in an inner city child care center in Wilmington, Delaware, and it was really important for the teacher cause she kept bringing back to us, “You want me to do this but tell me when I’m supposed to get this done during the course of my day.” So we also had to work together with this particular teacher and be creative in helping her figure out how she could fit this into the routine of the day because she was by herself with 20 children.

DORIS MCMILLON
And feeling a bit overwhelmed.

JIM LESKO
And feeling a bit overwhelmed, absolutely.

DORIS MCMILLON
But it worked.

JIM LESKO
It worked. She was actually, she often, I think Virginia alluded to, was amazed. Once she took the data actually and looked at it to see the progress that children were making because a teacher with 20 children is so busy through the course of the day they often can’t take the time to step back and see the progress that’s being made in the classroom unless they’re doing on-going assessment or unless they’re using data and having some outside people come in and help them figure out, “Yes, you are making some progress.” And she was delighted to see the success of some of the interventions that were happening.

DORIS MCMILLON
Great. Charlie, let me come to you. Broadly speaking, what are the differences in these processes when you’re looking at early childhood programs as opposed to K through 12?

CHARLES GREENWOOD
Good point. Many of them are the same. I would follow Jim’s lead on what he just said about starting with an analysis of the Tier 1 curriculum in K through 12. That has to be done. The measurement piece has to be put in place. And that’s a good place to start and get things rolling.

Some of the differences, however, in K-12 I guess the concept, let me come back to early childhood, the concept of intentional teaching is relatively new to some sectors of early childhood. And K-12 intentional teaching is what teachers do. They teach reading, they’re intending to teach and they are being directed about it. In some sectors of early childhood, this is a new concept and there’s a long tradition of child-directed instruction rather than teacher-directed, so there’s some issues to settle out there in programs to address that issue.

There are a few other issues. I mean most of the teachers are trained at a higher level of certification and years in the university and credentialed in some ways, so those challenges aren’t quite as great. The other issues, again, the administrative support and the funding background and the commitment of the district to the program are really similar processes that have to be put in place as well as the heavy support for implementation.

DORIS MCMILLON
Okay. Lydia, how does RTI affect the teachers’ roles and what they do in their classrooms?

LYDIA CARLIS
RTI is work. But the way that it affects teachers is by making them better, more targeted at what they’re doing, and thereby more effective. And when teachers feel effective, then they’re able to do more with their students. So teachers initially have some trepidation because there’s more focus on them collecting data and them looking at what they can do to support the child, as opposed to a traditional, perhaps mindset of thinking about what’s wrong with this child. It’s more about what can we do in our environment to ensure that we’re meeting the needs of the
children. So that initial shift means a lot more work and focus, but in the end because they’re making targeted decisions based on data, they can be more efficient and effective.

**DORIS MCMILLON**

Jim, what sort of professional development would you say is most helpful in the early stages of implementing RTI?

**JIM LESKO**

I think helping teachers understand, and I mentioned this before, what it is they need to look at. It was interesting, the conversation before, about the necessity to assess several times throughout the year. When children first come into the classroom, we always typically assess them to see what it is that they know. But we must remember the concept that as they progress through the year, the expectation that they learn more is always there but sometimes some children are not catching up in January with what everybody else is learning. They may have been at a good place in September, but not necessarily at a good place in January. So it’s helping teachers I think understand good child development.

Intentional teaching is a very critical skill, as well, for teachers. Again, that is not necessarily a concept that teachers get as a part of their pre-service or in-service training, and I think it’s a somewhat new phenomenon in terms of the concept perspective of that process so I think that’s another critical skill.

Then collaborating and problem solving is another skill that we typically don’t generate or nurture as a part of our pre-service and in-service training program. So working with teachers and practitioners to help them work together with their colleagues because teachers don’t need to feel that they need to do this by themselves.

**DORIS MCMILLON**

Exactly.

**JIM LESKO**

They need to feel it’s necessary to work with others.

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**

I’d like to add to that. We promote an evidence-based practice approach to professional development and that means you don’t focus on general knowledge. You focus on skills. The actual practices. And so we start with a dilemma in making this relevant and real to teachers and their dilemma is they want to make sure that every child learns and succeeds in school. But they may not know exactly how to accomplish that. And we move toward defining a practice, looking at the research evidence base for that practice, and demonstrating it. Actually giving them opportunities to see what it looks like, to try it out, to give them corrective feedback when they actually try to deliver it. And so it’s an evidence-based approach that helps teachers acquire the actual practices that we want to see them implement in their own classrooms.

**DORIS MCMILLON**

For example, what particular practice?
VIRGINIA BUYSSE
The assessment in intervention and instructional practices around RTI. Those are the practices that define RTI so we bring those practices and the curricula and the assessment tools right into the professional development. It’s not something that is abstract. It’s concrete. We teach them, in professional development, the actual assessment tools are the ones that they’re practicing. They’re the ones that they’re going to be using when they get back to their classrooms.

DORIS MCMILLON
Right. Charlie.

CHARLES GREENWOOD
And then we actually do some measurement and assessment of fidelity of implementation. It’s actually a look at, Okay, we’ve trained—is it there? That’s another aspect we probably won’t talk too much about, but that’s another part of RTI is implementation to a level of fidelity so we know that the practice is in place.

DORIS MCMILLON
Okay. Jim, let me come back to you. What role does the state and the district support play in the successful adoption of RTI in early childhood settings?

JIM LESKO
Probably the biggest component would be the availability of fiscal resources. As I mentioned before, IDEA allows us districts and the state to utilize federal funding for Response to Intervention for kindergarten and above, and they’ve been pretty explicit in saying that those funds are not to be used below kindergarten, so it requires districts and the state to work collaboratively to figure out what other fiscal resources could the state or local district bring to bear to support those sorts of practices. And some examples would be Title I funds could be made available, states that offer state pre-kindergarten programs, those funds could be utilized because those environments become available for children to be in. Local school district funding certainly has flexibility. What we’ve come to understand is that there’s greater flexibility in state and local funding to support RTI practices, and federal funds tend to be a bit more restrictive in that process. So funding is one particular component to that.

The other is allowing the practice to happen, and actually supporting that practice. Working with the principals and directors of centers to say you need to support your teachers coming out of the room. You need to support individuals from outside your center coming into your center to support your staff. So there are two distinct: fiscal and then personnel resources.

DORIS MCMILLON
So what does good rollout of RTI look like?

JIM LESKO
I think a good process would be to first, to step back again to see what are the capacities and competencies of your particular program. What do your staff look like? What are their capabilities to be able to implement that practice? Do you have good Tier 1 instruction
occurring, and spending some time first taking a look at are all of your teachers and staff have
good backgrounds and curriculum expectations that you have, and then to begin to look at what
are the individual practitioner’s capacities to do the sorts of interventions that we’ve talked
about. Do they have the capability to take data? Do they have the capability to problem solve?
Do they have the capability to have other adults come in their room and to guide them and to
catch them, and the ability to do that?

Along with that would be is the system itself set up to provide the coaching and specialized
supports that teachers are going to need, because we should not have the expectation that a
classroom teacher is a be-all and can do it all by themselves. That they do need that outside
support and so we need to make sure that as we prepare that process to occur that all those steps
are in place so that the teacher’s not left hanging by themselves with an expectation that they
can’t fulfill.

DORIS MCMILLON
I’m sure they’re glad to have some support there. You want to weigh in on that?

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
Jim, we always tell teachers this is not a decision that teachers can make on their own. Teachers
cannot on their own decide “I want to implement RTI tomorrow in my classroom.” This is a
program-level decision and so those kinds of supports that Jim was talking about have to be in
place. Somebody has to decide what are the assessment tools we’re going to use, what are the
interventions we’re going to use, and these are not decided individually by teachers. These are
program-level decisions that need to be made to support teachers.

DORIS MCMILLON
Charlie.

CHARLES GREENWOOD
I would like to just add to that that RTI implementation is a process that you can’t expect to be
completely finished in one year. It’s an orderly process of establishing components we’ve
discussed, seeing how they’re doing, making new planning, and forming goals about what the
next step along the RTI path is about. So it’s a several-year at least full rollout.

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
But people don’t want to hear that, Charlie.

DORIS MCMILLON
Charlie, take it back. (laughter)

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
No, they don’t want to hear it’s going to take you a year or longer. I fully agree with you, but I
think they’re disappointed because once they decide to get on board it’s like “Let’s do it. Let’s
do it this fall.” It might be July when they’re saying that.

CHARLES GREENWOOD
Right, and then they’ll know that after they’re in it for a while that they can’t do it entirely in that way. In fact, it might be harmful because too many things going on tends to make the program look not functional.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Lydia, what was the challenge about the rollout at AppleTree?

**LYDIA CARLIS**
We’re still rolling it out (laughter). We are continuing to improve our program, but I think the initial challenge was that our teachers did not come in with the background of interventionist. So we were having to train them as they had these children that they needed to serve how to do that, so that could be frustrating at times because they want an immediate, quick fix and they want the expert to come in and save the day.

And really showing teachers that they can be the experts on their children with the support, with the on-going professional development through coaching and the didactic workshops that are related to the coaching that’s going to happen in the classroom.

So initially it was teachers being used to having someone come in and fix it for them, and now we were really focusing on them supporting the students and having the data, using the data, implementing with fidelity—all of those things were foreign. So through a whole lot of professional development, a lot of in-class coaching, and a lot of pep talks…

**DORIS MCMILLON**
They were empowered.

**LYDIA CARLIS**
They were empowered.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Jim, what should well-intentioned but poorly funded programs do about RTI?

**JIM LESKO**
I think that they need to feel that they can’t accomplish it all if they don’t have the funding to be able to do that. And my recommendation in those particular situations is for them to largely focus on their Tier 1 curriculum practices. Make them as good as possible with the staff that they need. Bring enough professional development support in there for their staff to be able to do that. And perhaps with limited funds, making sure that the curriculum that they’re using has some evidence that it’s effective and not try to use an eclectic approach but to be much more intentioned on what they do. And then seek outside support to bring in the interventions that may be necessary for them to be able to do that.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
CHARLES GREENWOOD
I just have the answer. I think for me RTI offers the opportunity for early childhood to reach out to a greater level of effectiveness with the children compared to what they’re doing already and continuing to do the same things in the same ways that we’ve been doing doesn’t offer us this opportunity. So yes there are costs, and yes there’s work to do and there’s challenges, but I think it does offer us that opportunity.

DORIS MCMILLON
Lydia.

LYDIA CARLIS
I think programs should adopt it because we know that early intervention can work. We know that it can work to diminish the number of children who are overrepresented in special education. We know that it can work to support children financially into the future with jobs, with college readiness, with college completion. So really starting at this age is critical again as a social and justice issue going back to my opening discussion.

DORIS MCMILLON
Virginia?

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
I think it’s the big idea in education right now. It’s the big idea in K-12, and it’s a new big idea in early childhood, but I think the reason it’s such a big idea is because we need to customize education for children to meet the diverse needs of the children in education, children who are dual(?) age learners, children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, children with learning difficulties, this is a way to customize and address the needs of children who differ in the way they learn.

DORIS MCMILLON
Why are we expecting all children to learn the same way when all children are different? Just a question. (laughter)

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
Children learn in different ways, but we can set expectations, high expectations for every child to succeed. And that’s, I think, what we aim to do.

DORIS MCMILLON
Okay. Jim.

JIM LESKO
Your comments an interesting one because I think that we’ve all often have had the perspective that the way curriculums are structured that all children do learn the same way because that’s the way curriculums are developed and often implemented by teachers. So I like to think of RTI as more of a response to instruction rather than a response to intervention. So what we’re doing is we’re helping teachers to learn how to differentiate and individualize instruction based on how individual children perform and develop. So it’s a different perspective to take, but it offers a
valuable one because I think that’s where we see the greatest change in development when
teachers individualize what they do with children.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Well, I want to thank you all so very much. What we’re going to do now is we’re going to take
some questions from our studio audience and some others that we’ve received by email, so why
don’t we have that first question, please. Thank you.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER**
I’d like to know what research-based Tier 2 and 3 interventions are you aware of that support
child development in pre-K?

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Lydia?

**LYDIA CARLIS**
There are not very many evidence-based programs for early childhood, but there are a few high
quality instructional, intentional instruction programs that are out, and I would advise teachers to
think about using the instructional programs that are most helpful for their students’ needs. So
when they collect the data and when they look at where their children are, really focusing on this
is where my child is, and this particular component of this program is what I’m going to use. So
I wouldn’t say adopt a program as this is the end-all, be-all that’s going to work for all children.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
How would you all, how do you all feel about that?

**CHARLES GREENWOOD**
I think that’s a very good point because it speaks to the two aspects of evidence-based practice
that I mentioned earlier, and that is this answer follows up that teachers should, if they’re
collecting their own local data and making decisions on practices and their effectiveness within
their program, they are in a position over a period of time and use of those practices to decide if
this is a good one or not.

The other side of it is we have a lot of work to do with having better information about standard
Tier 2 and Tier 3 practices and some of the work in our center, we’re developing that evidence.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Okay, let’s take an email. It says “When teachers are resistant to change, how do you get buy-in
for an RTI initiative?” Lydia.

**LYDIA CARLIS**
First I think it comes from the leadership, the team. It should involve teachers and parents and
the district leaders and the principals. So having that team make a decision, their Response to
Intervention is the school’s program so that when you run up against that resistance initially the
standard response is “How can we help you to do it better?”, not do you have to do it or not. I
think if you can stop that right away, they will get a little bit of the resistance to go away.
And then you have to provide the support and the training so that you’re not just throwing teachers out there and expecting them to do a good job.

So I think first making a decision that this is what we’re going to do, training the teachers on what it is, and then providing that on-going support so that they can do it well.

And Virginia talked earlier about how once teachers see the data, they’re so rewarded. That is truly its own reward. When the teacher can see the work and the effort that he or she has put into this individual child or this group of children has resulted in that line going up, up, up, that makes the big difference and that is the buy-in.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Okay. Let’s take another question from our audience. Please go ahead.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER**
How would fidelity of implementation be assured for interventions in an early childhood center?

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Jim, you want to take that?

**JIM LESKO**
Sure. I think what you need to do is look at the expectations from the curriculum itself. What is it that you expect as part of the outcome? So you’re actually using a combination of what the curriculum expectations are as well as, and I mentioned this before, what are the early learning guidelines that we want children to accomplish at the end. And consistently tie in to make sure using perhaps teaching rubrics, classroom observations on an on-going basis, as well as using what was mentioned before, some of the progress monitoring and screening tools, integrating those different components together to consistently make sure that children are making the progress that they need to make throughout the course of the year and not just waiting, using a (unclear) approach, waiting until May to make a determination if children have been making the progress that you wanted them to do, but do that on an on-going basis. Because if you make a determination that some children or groups of children are not where they need to be, that’s going to give you the information to say that perhaps you need to change some of your instructional curricular practices so that you’re moving everybody as best along the same path.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Did you want to add something, Charlie?

**CHARLES GREENWOOD**
I would just add that using some of the members of the building or program support team as kind of implementer observers and helping colleagues implement to the goals and standards that have been set is another helpful aspect.

**JIM LESKO**
One of the tools that we’ve used with our teachers, we’ve taken our early learning guidelines from the state and we’ve developed a weekly and monthly rubrics for the teachers to assess have they been planning activities that directly affect or link to the expectations that we have for children at the end of the year. So are they planning activities that incorporate colors? Are they planning activities that incorporate dialogic reading practices? So they monitor and self-check themselves as well as having others cause we want teachers to be able to develop some of those independent skills on their own.

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
May I just add one thing? We actually, the approach we take is we standardize the Tier 2 interventions. Once we figure out what particular skills teachers need to focus on with a particular group, we give teachers a structured set of lessons and so that helps ensure that everybody’s implementing the same intervention. You’re not getting as many different interventions as you have teachers.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Let’s take another question from our audience. Thank you.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER**
Hello. Are there any states or local sites presently using RTI for pre-school successfully?

**DORIS MCMILLON**
That sounds like a Charlie question.

**CHARLES GREENWOOD**
We’ve been at our center impressed with the folks in Illinois, for example. They seem to have a rather extensive rollout of RTI in early childhood centers there. So that’s one good example.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Thank you. Let’s take an email question. It says, “Head Start has a federal requirement to service children with an IEP. If school districts are using Response to Intervention and finding fewer children eligible for special education and therefore fewer children with IEPs, they will not meet their federal requirement. Any suggestions on how to handle this?” Jim?

**JIM LESKO**
(laughter) I think perhaps that’s somewhat of a misnomer I would say.

First of all, Response to Intervention is not, especially below kindergarten, should not be seen as an eligibility determination process. It’s a way to focus particular instruction for children who need additional development and support. So I don’t think that the RTI process is necessarily deterring some children with disabilities from being identified.

And I think that there are other practices, in my opinion, that programs like Head Start need to do to identify children who are already in their community and they have a disability who would benefit from bringing in that Head Start program. I don’t think programs should be waiting to
take in a group of 20-plus children and hoping that a couple of those children are going to wind up being identified and then feeling bad because the RTI process prevented that.

What we’re trying to do is to actually find strategies and implement interventions to reduce the number of children who are mis-identified as potentially eligible for special education.

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
Jim, I’ve actually heard people say things like, “Children have to go through all the tiers before I can refer them for further evaluation,” which is completely untrue.

**JIM LESKO**
Right.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
I’ve got the Amen Corner over here. (laughter) Let’s take another question from our audience.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER**
I’d like to ask the panel to discuss how RTI principles might be applicable to short-term and non-classroom settings such as daycare and respite centers with individuals, children or adults, whose cognitive levels are in the pre-K range.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Charlie?

**CHARLES GREENWOOD**
Yeah, that’s a very good question. I think there’s a lot of room for thought and trying out the approaches with that population.

One example, a closely related example, is the work of myself and colleagues in the early childhood, or in the early Head Start programs, so birth to three, so a much younger population of at-risk children in early Head Start, and we’ve developed indicators of growth and development, RTI measures for that population, and we just published a randomized trial showing that home visitors using those strategies of RTI working with parents in the home to implement a language promoting intervention in the home was significantly valuable. So how that would play out in the other settings that you mentioned, I think the principles give you a direction and you need to think something about measurement and what Tier 1 is about.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Okay. Let’s take another question. We have an email question. This one says, “Can you suggest any specific state or federal funding sources available to support RTI implementation?” That sounds like a Jim question.

**JIM LESKO**
I mentioned a couple of opportunities before. Title I is certainly an interesting vehicle. While I mentioned before that often federal funding tends to be somewhat restricted, Title I it tends to be a program that offers a bit more flexibility and I think can be structured such that they’re great.
environments for a variety of children, especially in schools, for instance, that are Title I or district-wide Title I programs which would allow any child to benefit from being a part of that process.

Many, many, many states now are involved in offering state pre-kindergarten or universal pre-K. Washington, DC, has a universal pre-K program and again, where you have state and local funding there tends to be much more flexibility in how you utilize those particular dollars to be able to support children who need those resources.

DORIS MCMILLON
Let’s take another question from our audience. Thank you so much.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
Hello. I’d like to ask the panel if you have any suggestions on helping students make the transition to kindergarten so that the kindergarten teachers do not start the RTI process all over again.

DORIS MCMILLON
All right.

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
I’ll take a stab at it.

DORIS MCMILLON
Oh, good.

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
I think this is another frontier for us. We have not yet gone there. I think it is an important future direction is that we need to think about how this could actually promote smooth transitions to kindergarten. It will involve transferring data and sharing data and getting permissions to do that and we’re not there yet but I have, I share the concern that teachers might be starting from scratch, re-inventing the wheel, beginning to gather information to figure out which children need additional supports when there is an entire year perhaps of experience with that particular child and that we’re right now, we don’t have the good mechanisms in place to share that information.

DORIS MCMILLON
Lydia.

LYDIA CARLIS
At a school level what we try to do is empower parents to understand the power of them taking their student’s data with them to their kindergarten teacher, and then we’re putting it in the student’s record when they leave our schools. But the parent is the person who’s going to enroll that child at the next location so until we can get a universal data system or something like that that’s district or national, I’m just having the parent know that that’s an important thing to do and
that they have the expectation that that next teacher would look at those data and use that when they’re starting to instruct their child.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Charlie?

**CHARLES GREENWOOD**
Yeah, so another important aspect of alignment in the early childhood programs is to also, in addition to state standards, to look at what are the expectations for children in kindergarten and how are we earlier promoting those and getting them on the right path.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Let’s take another email question. “When should a child in a pre-school setting be referred for a comprehensive evaluation to determine if there is a disability?”, and I’m just going to throw that out.

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
At any point where there’s a question or a concern raised by a parent or a teacher, right then and there. There’s no waiting. There are no tiers to go through. That would be my answer.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Charlie?

**CHARLES GREENWOOD**
Yes. I agree.

**LYDIA CARLIS**
I would say yes. I would say that the system should train teachers on how to make those determinations so that every child who comes to you who might not…let me put it a different way. In our programs we can get children who come in and 85% of them may look like they should get a diagnosis based on their baseline test scores, so are we referring 85% of our children? We could, but we also could teach teachers about how developmentally this might be within a range so we could try instruction first and intervention in the classroom. We shouldn’t deter them if they really have a strong concern, but we should also provide some training beforehand so that children aren’t again over-identified.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Okay. Let’s take another question from our audience.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER**
Hi. Can you tell us more about ways parents are encouraged to be involved with RTI in early childhood and why is it important?

**JIM LESKO**
I’ll start off by saying that one of the practices we tried to put in place with the centers that we work with is to give parents a questionnaire to, right off the bat, try to get a good handle on what
the background has been and the experiences of that child before they came to the site where they’re currently at. Because you can have, many times children have been in a situation where they’ve not been in care or they’ve been involved in a setting that has been less than supportive in that child’s development so to give you some background to understand where that child is coming from as they enter into that particular setting and site and where you’re starting the referral process.

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
This is an area that worries me a little bit, to be honest. Because we’re operating outside of any kind of procedural safeguards in terms of how to, we have those safeguards with an IDEA for children who are served within special education, but in the absence of policies and guidance we just, I worry a little bit about how programs will go about creating ways of involving families without any kind of safeguards for how information will be shared, how families will be involved. I think it’s an area where we need to really focus our efforts if we’re going to implement RTI. I think it’s absolutely crucial that families be involved as full partners.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Lydia, did you want to comment?

**LYDIA CARLIS**
Quickly. I just want to say that at our schools we try to involve parents from the very beginning with those questionnaires but then also if a Tier 2 plan seems to be needed, inviting the parent to the meeting for that, inviting the parent to the progress monitoring meetings that occur at least bi-weekly so that they can come in and see how their child is progressing. But also informing the parent up front; if at any time you are concerned about your child then you do have the right to request assessments and not making parents think that they do have to go through this process, but that this process is meant to see what the teacher can do in the classroom to support their child and then trying to involve and support them at home as well. So trying to have some carry-over between what’s happening in the school and what’s happening at home.

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
And I have to say, Lydia, that it sounds great that you’re doing that and you’re being careful, but those rights are not specified within RTI for pre-K. They are within IDEA. And so not all programs may be as responsible as yours. So that’s why I worry.

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Okay. Let’s take another question from our audience. Thank you so much.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER**
What type of training would early childhood specialists require in order to properly implement RTI?

**DORIS MCMILLON**
Virginia?

**VIRGINIA BUYSSE**
I think we hit on this a little bit earlier when we talked about professional development and I talked about evidence-based practice approach.

I think that you have to have prior to professional development there has to be some strategic planning and some decisions made about who are we targeting? Is this a system-wide effort? Are we focusing on a particular age group? Four year olds, or three to fives, or infants and toddlers? And then there are a whole host of questions and decisions that go along with that in terms of the assessments that are appropriate for different age groups and tools. Then once those decisions are made, then those get folded into the professional development. They become the content of the professional development. So there’s a lot of decisions, planning that lead up to effective professional development, in my view.

DORIS MCMILLON
Okay. Let’s take another question from our audience. Oh, I’m sorry. I’ll tell you what. Why don’t we do an email instead. All right. “There are some programs where teachers have advanced degrees and where there is more money to spend on supplies.” You like that, don’t you Jim? (laughter) “How would this system work in places that do not have access to those resources?”

JIM LESKO
In some cases I think that we need to be cautious around that and I think I talked about this a bit before. Where those resources are not there, I think we need to be careful about making expectations that cannot be delivered in particular situations. So where you have a poorly resourced center that concentrate on one or two items, again I would focus on the curriculum and have that particular site then look outside their own facility to see what supports might be made available from say perhaps a local school district, perhaps there’s a university within some location that can come in and provide some support.

Also look to states. Most states now have a professional development process supporting young children and practitioners, and perhaps trying to tap into the state’s resources around professional development using their child care development fund and the focus on quality instruction and utilizing some of those. So again I think we can’t expect all centers to be everything to everybody and needing to be cautious about, and being realistic about, what the capacities of the particular sites are.

DORIS MCMILLON
Lydia’s been shaking her head, and then I’ll come back to you, Virginia.

LYDIA CARLIS
I was agreeing with Jim that if you have a particularly under-resourced center really focusing on high quality Tier 1 is going to be the best approach because it’s going to support the majority of your students if you’re doing that well with fidelity.

But another thing that programs might try to do if they were in that situation is to form collaboratives with similar-sized programs that have the same types of problems and then pool
their money and do some professional development with each other or go through the other resources that Jim alluded to already.

DORIS MCMILLON  
Virginia?

VIRGINIA BUYSSE  
Just wanted to mention that if a pre-K program or classroom is in a setting where they have access to people who are implementing RTI for older children, we have found that involving members of those teams in the process of figuring out what this looks like for younger children has been really helpful. They often don’t have the background in working with younger children, but they really, really, really know RTI and can help early childhood folks figure it out.

DORIS MCMILLON  
Let’s go back to our audience and take another question. Thank you so much for asking.

AUDIENCE MEMBER  
Hi. I was wondering if RTI can successfully be implemented in an early childhood classroom where the teaching philosophy is play-based learning?

DORIS MCMILLON  
Lydia?

LYDIA CARLIS  
I would say yes if a teacher is focused on intentional teaching during the play. So you can have a play-based learning approach where the teacher is focused on targeting and facilitating that play to target the needs of children. So if the teacher is collecting data, using that data to even set up the play environment, so what are the activities that are available to the children to play within the classroom is something that a teacher could maneuver and manipulate in RTI system.

CHARLES GREENWOOD  
And it would be looking in the same way, looking to see what activities in play would most support the goal of the RTI, the target and the learning outcomes.

VIRGINIA BUYSSE  
And I would just add that our expectations of what children can learn at this age are changing. What’s considered developmentally appropriate at this age is changing and it now includes the fact that we understand that children can learn things like letter names and they can differentiate letter sounds and we didn’t think that five or ten years ago. So it’s just expanding our notions of what’s appropriate for this age group.

DORIS MCMILLON  
And they sure are learning technology, aren’t they?

VIRGINIA BUYSSE  
And they are.
DORIS MCMILLON
Okay. What I’d like to do is say thank you and I’d like to get a final thought from each of you. What should people remember about implementing RTI in early childhood settings? Charlie, let me start with you.

CHARLES GREENWOOD
What should they remember? Well, I think they need a grounding in the components and the background that we’ve discussed today. They should remember that. They should remember some of the issues about how this is different than traditional practice. And also the fact that it’s going to take some effort and resources to achieve it, but remember if we do the same thing in the same way, we don’t make progress.

DORIS MCMILLON
Okay. Lydia.

LYDIA CARLIS
I think that people should remember that beginning with high quality Tier 1 is the foundation for a successful Response to Intervention program and that they should not try to layer on interventions onto a low-quality program, so really starting with meeting the needs of the most children they can through their everyday experiences in the classroom.

DORIS MCMILLON
Jim?

JIM LESKO
I would go back to and repeat a statement I made earlier which is I like to think of RTI as Response to Instruction. And that what we’re doing is establishing a set of practices for practitioners to better intentionalize instruction for children and better intentionalized instruction will result in children developing along the paths that they should.

DORIS MCMILLON
And Virginia.

VIRGINIA BUYSSE
I think there’s a lot of fear out there, quite honestly, because of a few examples of bad practice. And so I would say think about RTI as just a way of improving teaching and trying to help teachers be more intentional, more systematic, and address the needs of every single child in their classroom.

DORIS MCMILLON
Well I want to say thank you all so much for joining us, as well as our audience. And thank you for joining us for this RTI National Online Forum. For more information about RTI, please visit us on the Web at www.RTINetwork.org. And again, thank you so much for being with us. Take care.
(music) Announcer: This RTI National Online Forum is presented by the RTI Action Network, a program of the National Center for Learning Disabilities. Funding is provided by the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation.

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