

## Partnering with Families in an RTI Framework

February 9, 2011 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

### **About this Talk**

Join the Colorado Department of Education team during our next RTI Talk as they answer your questions about developing family-school partnerships based on shared responsibility and shared ownership of student challenges and successes. They will also offer tips and examples of materials they developed to nurture the collaborative process through information sharing, problem solving, and the celebration of student successes.

### **Transcript**



**Maureen O'Brien**

How do you support parental involvement with schools when it pertains to students with autism?



**Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

The Colorado RI framework is for all students, including those who may be identified as having autism or other disabilities or diagnoses. All the Rtl practices apply, including family-school partnering. Rtl and the IEP process have numerous similarities and common components. In both, families and educators share data, decide upon assessment needs, define measurable goals, report progress, and focus on a student's educational outcomes. With tiered partnering, there is flexibility in time and support as needed for families, staff, and students to coordinate learning between home and school. With this in mind, the state, through the State Personnel Development Grant, has begun to work with specific school districts to develop model classrooms for students with autism utilizing the Rtl framework. This has involved the creation of partnerships with the families involved with these programs. This is the first year of this work and we hope to have more information coming for guidance in this area.



**Jean Ramirez**

How are you working with building positive family partnerships when working on behavior within the RTI process? Anything that has worked that was a surprise to your team?



**Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) provides training and technical assistance to schools and districts throughout the state. The [Colorado Rtl framework](#) addresses both academics and behavior, as they are often interrelated and it is important to consider both aspects when focusing on student success. PBIS or positive behavior supports are a component of Rtl throughout the tiers. In the Colorado framework, there are six components of Rtl, which were developed from reviewing research and gathering stakeholder input. These are as follows: 1) Leadership; 2) Curriculum and

- A** Instruction; 3) School Climate and Culture; 4) Problem-Solving/Consultation; 5) Assessment/Progress Monitoring; and 6) Family and Community Engagement.

As a result, families and relevant community resource representatives are considered "on the team and at the table" as equal partners. They are to be aware and have understanding of universal behavioral expectations and positive supports for all students, both school-wide and in the classroom. If a student might need more individual intervention or support to learn successfully at school, family members would participate in the Rtl problem-solving process by sharing data from home, jointly establishing measurable goals, mutually designing coordinated interventions, monitoring progress, and adapting interventions as needed, based on data.

Developing pro-social and effective behavioral skills, like all learning, requires practice and generalization. This occurs most efficiently when there is home-school coordination and communication. The student experiences continuous reinforcement and support from the most important adults in his world - at home and school. And if community resources are involved, they can be aligning their work as well, focusing on student school success.

However, coordinating academic and behavioral interventions between home and school can be new for all - school staff, family members, students, and community resources. It is often a shift in thinking, skills, and time. In order to support schools and families in tiered Rtl partnering, the CDE team has developed some adaptable, practical tools applying research-based principles, many with family input. These will be mentioned, where applicable, in answering questions during this Talk and can be found as individual components of the [Rtl Family & Community Partnering: "On the Team and At the Table" Toolkit](#). Tools will only be mentioned on one occasion, but may be relevant to several of the questions.

Tools that might be helpful in working with behavior (and with academics too!) in Rtl: Sample Rtl Intervention Plan with Home-School Coordination and Communication; School-Home-School Notes: Description and Sample; and Conjoint Behavioral Consultation: Description and Sample.

**Q** **Ron Mueller**

What have you found to be the most effective avenues to communicate with families about RTI?

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

In our work with schools and stakeholders, we always try to listen to what seems to work best in the field and pass on to others. Families and practitioners have developed creative and exciting options, using multiple venues. Our framework stresses the importance of two-way communication, doing ?what works,? and ?out of meeting? conversations, honoring partners? time within the context of positive relationships, focusing on students.

Thinking about the tiers can be helpful ? what specific communication venues might work best

**A** universally and which for smaller groups or individuals. We suggest that schools always ask for confirmation, feedback, and then follow-up if they have not heard from a family, emphasizing the importance of their ideas and involvement. We are fortunate to live in a world with texting, email, voice mail, speakerphone, Internet options, and websites. Rtl process participants have shared that it has been important to consider team members, including families, as always having a place ?at the table,? even if they can?t be physically present. Their voices can be heard in decision-making and data can be shared creatively and frequently with efficient communication systems ? before, during, and after meetings from remote locations.

Tools that might support home-school communication about Rtl: Sample Principal Home Letter/Newsletter Article and Two-Way Communication: A Teacher?s Practical Points.

These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q** *Lucila Beaton*

What are some ways we can rebuild relationships with parents that have had numerous past negative experiences with school personnel?

**A** *Colorado Department of Education RTI Team*

Unfortunately, this happens too often and tends to then be ongoing for the length of a student's school career. The specific circumstances of a situation would determine possible action, but the Rtl family-school partnering framework might offer some possible opportunities.

First, a Colorado Rtl component is to reach out and include all families, and tell families about their importance. Second, there is the allocation of resources to address specific needs and individual concerns in tiered partnering. School mental health professionals or other family supports can sometimes provide strategic interventions such as conflict resolution or peer connections. Third, if there are specific student academic or behavioral concerns at the targeted/intensive level, the Rtl problem-solving team process provides a structure for focusing on student success by sharing data, interventions, and coordinated home-school support. This can provide distance and relief from personal past experiences. In Rtl, there is an ongoing commitment to ?not giving up? because it is about student success.

A tool that might be applicable to rebuilding (and building) relationships with families: Questions for Families, Educators, and Community Resources to Ask About the Problem-Solving Process.

These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q** *Lucila Beaton*

How do we have other members of our team buy into the process when they have negative assumptions about families?

**A** *Colorado Department of Education RTI Team*

This is a common challenge in schools. Thanks for asking this question. We will respond from the research and our experiences in the field. First, it is important to acknowledge that educators are on a continuum of beliefs, knowledge, skills, and confidence relating to family-school partnering. Many educators are not aware of the research supporting the importance of family participation in academic and social, emotional, behavioral learning. Also, often there are no explicit system expectations for their responsibilities in communication and teaming with families. And all this is also true for families!

We have found it effective to share, and then discuss, the legal and research rationale for a shift from "traditional parent involvement" to "family partnering" which includes the following: families and schools sharing responsibility for school success versus it being only the school; ongoing two-way communication through multiple venues versus one-way, formal meetings; and structured volunteering at school for a few families versus supporting learning at home and school for all families. Also, it is important for educators to know that the research suggests that all families want to support their children's education, but are often unsure and hesitant about their role. It is the educator's responsibility to invite families and encourage their participation.

In our experience, the following strategies have been helpful to families and staff in shifting their perceptions and behaviors: openly discussing challenges and solutions, identifying partnering "job descriptions" for educators and families, and sharing stories about what works in building relationships. We recommend that there be joint family-educator trainings and discussions, so that knowledge and language are shared.

Tools that might be helpful for team members who have negative assumptions about families: Activities Slides with Notes; Sample RtI Partnering Job Descriptions; Partnering Stories from the Field; Building Trusting Family-Teacher Partnerships; and Challenges and Solutions.

These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q** *Stacy Kalamaros Skalski*

Policy often identifies that families are integral to the RTI process but when parents are asked about this, they commonly will say that they still feel like "observers" or "outsiders" vs. "teammates" with school personnel. What are the best strategies that you recommend for helping

**Q** families really feel, believe, and know that they are part of the decision making team?

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

This is a commonly reported occurrence. It is interesting that in the Rtl framework, which also includes general and special education teachers working together as partners for the first time, educators can report these feelings as well. Operating with the belief that forms and concrete, written words can support new behaviors, our team has worked to develop "hands-on" materials. Examples are a phone script to help educators explain the problem-solving process and a home information form for families to more easily organize and share their knowledge. One school shared a story with us about a family who reported using the form every year with every one of their children to prepare for teacher conferences and in structuring their ongoing home-school communication.

Providing information about Rtl for all families, with genuine partnering language and identified responsibilities is helpful, as is offering options for how participation in the Rtl process at all tiers can occur. A designated liaison for questions and ongoing support is a suggestion. If available, providing information in a video or alternative media form provides optional learning opportunities. Colorado has developed a video that describes the family's importance - [Meeting the Needs of All Students](#).

Tools that might be applicable in helping families to feel part of the decision-making team: Sample Problem-Solving Family Invitation Phone Script; Sample Problem-Solving Process Referral with Family Input, Student Strengths, Community Resources; Sample Problem-Solving Meeting Invitation; and Sample Problem-Solving Process Home Information.

These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q** **Stacy Kalamaros Skalski**  
What outcomes have you seen as a result of your intentional efforts to engage families as partners in the RTI process?

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

At this point in our work, the outcome we have measured is the effectiveness of our trainings - with specific feedback from participants. We ask about how useful the materials and information are to families and educators in shifting to Rtl family-school partnering. Evaluation measures tap specific resource applicability and how the knowledge will be implemented into practice. Results have been favorable, with specific needs for further support identified. We are using this data in continually revising our work. We are trying to integrate our information into existing conferences and training venues so as to reach broader audiences more consistently.

**Q** *Stacy Kalamaros Skalski*

What professional development have you implemented for school professionals to help them become better at engaging families as partners and responding to their needs?

**A** *Colorado Department of Education RTI Team*

We have developed our Rtl family-school partnering training and resources for the joint education of families and professionals, so that there is shared knowledge and language. Based on feedback, we have implemented multiple strategies for sharing the information including: regional ?training of trainer? presentations, information in other trainings such as those on behavior strategies or academic achievement, online posting of all materials, and conference presentations. We are developing an online course that will be available to all stakeholders, including family members and community organizations. A key concept in our trainings is encouraging educators and families to seek ways to integrate Rtl family-school partnering meaningfully into exiting infrastructures such as teams, committees, procedures, publications, and communication processes.

Tools that might be applicable to implementing family-school partnering professional development: Essential Rtl Partnering Slides with Notes; FAQs; and Rtl Partnering Survey and Needs Assessment.

These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q** *Amanda*

How do you motivate an unmotivated child, especially when the school doesn't have any ideas to help the parents? Parents are working with motivation at home, but the school is not.

**A** *Colorado Department of Education RTI Team*

Motivation can be a broad and difficult issue, often with multiple hypotheses and differing perceptions between home and school. In an Rtl problem-solving process, there is a prioritization of concerns by team members, based on shared data. If motivation is identified as the concern, it is important for the team, which includes families and professionals, to establish a measurable target, identify a research-based intervention(s), monitor progress, and evaluate/respond to effectiveness data. Reviewing visual data, coordinating the intervention at home and school, and ensuring the student knows that adults are partnering in working to support his success can all be powerful in the teaming work.

A tool that might be applicable to home-school teaming: Planning Team Feedback.

These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q Cheryl Endres**

Since starting early is best, what engagement strategies would work to develop family-school partnerships and RTI for high-risk preschool classrooms in elementary buildings, given some cultural and socialized barriers (education is the work of the school, parents have had bad personal experiences with school)?

**A Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

It is exciting to develop an understanding of the Rtl framework, including family-school partnering, with families of young children. Specific information can be shared, with clear expectations. Surveying families to prioritize their needs; reaching out to every family through community resources and other families; and creating an accepting, welcoming, learning environment are proven practices. As Rtl uses data-based decision-making, supporting families in working with their students and regularly sharing their data/observations can begin a life-long learning experience. Family members can ?re-experience? school by feeling welcomed and participatory. Individual support, through tiered partnering, can be offered as needed. Planning strategically and evaluating efforts allows for ongoing responsiveness in successfully engaging every family.

Tools that might be applicable to developing family-school partnerships in an Rtl early, given barriers: Sample Stakeholder Back-to-School Slides; Tiered Planning Templates; and Sample Completed Templates.

These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q Dr. Gloria Miller**

I have 2 Questions: 1-What can be done (or what is already being done) to ensure that this content is a required aspect of core preservice teacher education and administrator preparation programs across the state? 2a- How do Colorado school districts currently evaluate the performance of teachers/staff/principals in regards to effectiveness in partnering with families? 2b-.... should this evaluation be a reciprocal process where the staff/ educators also provide their impressions of family participation in partnering at their school?

**A Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

1. This is an important issue at the national level as previous studies have shown that higher education institutions believe in preparing educators to partner with families, but that there is significant lack of offered courses and preparation experiences. Many educators and program faculty report minimal training and exposure to partnering knowledge and skill development. In Colorado, there is a current study being designed to explore pre-service family-school partnering learning opportunities and what resources/support might be helpful to increase meaningful training.

**A** 2a. This is a local district and/or school decision in Colorado. It would seem important to include family-school partnering as a performance standard because meaningful family participation in schools has been shown to improve student outcomes, teacher effectiveness and satisfaction, and administrator competence, among numerous other benefits.

2b. This is an interesting idea as in true partnerships there is mutual feedback between partners. Because ongoing, mutual family-school partnering is new to so many families and schools, it might be important to develop a publicized definition, invite shared responsibility, and state clear, expected, roles and responsibilities before assessing participation by all stakeholders. We also find that in systems that are working well, this is not a formal ?evaluation? but more of a continuous reflection on practice. Taking the time to ask how things are going along the way tends to allow for a stronger partnership.

**Q** **Kathleen McLane**

Has family partnering proved effective in implementing RTI at the secondary level?

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

This is an important question, targeting family-school partnering and Rtl implementation in the secondary school - both challenges in the field. We have not yet collected specific data on partnering effectiveness per se and this ideally would be multi-faceted, examining student outcomes, student and adult behaviors, and fidelity of implementation. Our team, in developing its training and resource materials, tapped the research that has examined family-school partnering at the secondary level in general, and applied this work to the Rtl framework.

The research highlights the importance of effective home-school collaboration at the secondary level, but also identifies differences from early school years. Specifically, these include: the importance of students' partnering participation and need for adult guidance as they develop more independence; families' need for encouragement and education as many may feel insecure with upper level curricula and post-secondary options; teachers' need for explicit training as most see students for a short time each day and are often not told working with families is an expected responsibility; and if a student struggles, families report being worried, scared, angry, and/or hopeless. We have tried to create a specific focus on the importance of families partnering in secondary Rtl, as they bring unique data and history, which adds crucial information for effective problem solving. We also stress the importance of students as team participants, engaging in personal goal-setting and self-monitoring.

In order to support secondary educators and families in partnering throughout the Rtl process, [Colorado has created a video highlighting the important implementation components.](#)

A tool that might be applicable to implementing Rtl partnering in secondary schools: Secondary Schools' Fact Sheet.



**A** These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q** **David Grapka**

Does your district provide assistive technology to all students who require it as well as those non-identified struggling learners who could benefit? If so, then what do parents perceive the role of assistive technology to be?

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

Because we are a team at the Colorado State Department of Education, we are not able to respond for a specific district on this issue. The Colorado Rtl framework includes all students, which encompasses those who have identified disabilities and/or who might need assistive technology to be successful learners. In an Rtl process, which includes ongoing monitoring and data-based decision-making, there would most likely be teamed home-school assessment of assistive technology effectiveness. There would be specific, established outcomes, with adaptations made based on data if needed and as were available. In an ideal situation, this would be provided based on need and not label.

**Q** **Robert Evans**

What are some good strategies for building family-school partnerships (specifically with the families of ELL learners) during parent-teacher conferences? What are good questions to ask the parents that will lead to more involvement? What are bad questions that might alienate parents?

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

Our Rtl framework does not specifically address parent-teacher conferences, but we will respond within the family-school partnering context. Optimally, if there is ongoing, two-way communication and cultural sharing between home and school, parent-teacher conferences can be viewed as just extensions of established relationships. It is difficult to have meaningful sharing of responsibility for a student's education in two meetings a year. With an open invitation to share learning information between home and school and daily/weekly exchanges by email, voice mail, or student sharing, teachers and families can know much about each other and their students."

Interpreters, cultural liaisons, and translated materials can be very important in working with ELL families. Inviting families to share their cultural beliefs and understandings about education and likewise, sharing the school and classroom culture, supports the student who lives in both worlds. Again, focusing on the student helps bridge cultural and linguistic differences. More time and creativity in communication is often needed, especially if there are academic or behavioral concerns being addressed through the Rtl process. Home visits can be a valid and effective option.

- A** A tool that might be applicable to supporting ELL families in the tiered Rtl partnering process: Sample Sociocultural Interview/Interpreter Information.

These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q** **Mindy Clay**

How do we provide incentive to the parent to follow through? There are so many who want to help but do not have the resources to make it work.

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

There are often families who want to follow through but need resources, encouragement, and opportunities to share about their student and family culture. Because supporting learning at home is often new for families who may be unsure of their skills or roles, it is helpful to provide ongoing follow-up and two-way communication venues.

In the Colorado Rtl framework it is suggested that there be a home-school liaison who can support both staff and families in working together. This person can be the classroom teacher or a specialist or a school mental health professional, depending on how a building or team allocates resources.

If the student needs targeted/intensive interventions, the family is participating in the problem-solving process with the team and identifying the coordination and communication regarding a prescribed intervention. Our materials suggest asking the family what can work for them, what resources and support they need, and how is best to communicate reciprocally. Relationships are important; tiered partnering recognizes that sometimes time and individual conversations are needed to develop trust and understanding.

Since this direct, coordinated learning between home and school in Rtl is often new for staff and families, the Colorado Department of Education has developed two videos which demonstrate the Rtl problem-solving, data-based decision-making process with partnering educators and families, after having worked at the universal level. There is an [academic example](#) and a [behavioral example](#).

Tools that might be applicable in supporting parent follow-through in an Rtl framework: Sample Teacher Letter; Sample Family Sharing Sheet; and Sample Partners in Learning Pledge.

These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q Tess Kerzner**

We are a not-for-profit agency that works with children with special needs. We use the concept of the WRAP approach for person-centered family-driven care that seems to be quite effective. Our facilitators work towards making sure that all providers, school personnel, and parents are all working together and are on the same page. We do this by having team meetings where everyone participates. The facilitator and parent oversees the process and ensures that everyone is on board with working towards the success of the child and family. Most parents we find are intimidated by school officials, and they do not feel they know enough about school law or the IEP process or other agencies that can help with the success of the child and family. Having an agency/advocate/facilitator to assist in empowering the parent, engaging the parent with the school, sharing of information from doctors and providers of care, and understanding community supports has been very helpful to bridge the barriers and gaps that parents face. This includes transportation issues, medical/medication issues, communication issues between providers and schools, and addressing behavioral and school concerns so that there is a common thread of implementation of all interventions offered by the school, providers, and parents. The goal of WRAP would be to move families from inactivity to advocacy for their child's and family's needs. How does RTI address the total needs of the family and to insure that everyone is working together and how do you empower the parent? How do you work with the other agencies and providers that are stakeholders of the child's success too? Is it just about the school and parent?

**A Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

It sounds as though you have an effective partnering system in place. We appreciate thinking about how an RTI framework might be integrated successfully in such a system. In the Colorado RTI framework, the universal message is that families, schools, and community resources are partnering throughout the tiers and that RTI includes all students. Feedback from the field has been that community resource representatives benefit from the same training and support in learning about RTI as families and educators.

This month we are offering a stakeholder training and targeting those organizations that work with our families and schools. The RTI vocabulary, use of shared data in decision-making, setting measurable targets, and ongoing monitoring are often new for community personnel. Having all relevant information as soon as possible, from all involved parties in a student's life, contributes to efficient and effective intervention planning. Similarly, when all interventionists and families are coordinating their work, opportunities for student practice and generalization occur more readily. In our framework, we suggest an RTI liaison who supports partnering between all parties. This might involve shifting responsibilities among staff and/or allocating resources for students, families needing more support.

Research has shown that school-age students spend 70% of their waking hours outside of school, a fact that clearly points to the importance of collaboration. The Harvard Family Research Project (<http://www.hfrp.org/>) provides many articles and resources relating to complementary learning for students.

- A** Tools that might be applicable to working with other agencies and providers in the RtI framework, in addition to families: Sample Principal Community Letter and RtI Family & Community Partnering Reminder Cards (English and Spanish)

These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

- Q** **Kristin Moran**  
What have been some successes in strengthening family partnerships for online schools?

- A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**  
This is an area of ongoing need. Online schools have been a new way of doing business and this has required out-of-the-box thinking in terms of developing relationships for success. The state has worked with staff from online schools around the concepts of RtI and implementation ideas. This has been limited and much more is required.

- Q** **sharon willeford**  
How does one involve a parent when abuse/neglect is suspected?

- A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**  
If abuse or neglect is suspected, the legal procedure for a state must be followed, which would most likely involve reporting to human services or law enforcement agency personnel who then investigate the concern. This can happen in any situation and should always be handled carefully and appropriately.

In the Colorado RtI framework, family-school partnering is focused on student success. The family members are full and equal team participants. If appropriate, community resource representatives may be part of the problem-solving process in RtI.

- Q** **Murray Bourne**  
Is there an optimum level of RTI jargon to share with families?

- A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**  
Thank you for asking this question. ?RtI jargon? is an important topic for families, educators, and community resources; everyone is learning new concepts and terms. In Colorado, we tried to listen to stakeholders about what terms were most basic and needed clarification so that there would be shared definitions for all. Because RtI in individual buildings may use alternative terms for the

**A** essential concepts, it is important to adapt definitions accordingly. In the CDE sample brochure, which we suggest providing (or a similar document) to all families, we call the jargon "Essential RtI Vocabulary" and define the following terms: family-school partnerships, problem-solving team, multi-tiered intervention model, data-driven decision making, focused assessments, problem-solving process, and progress monitoring. Helpful terminology and concept descriptions have been developed by the National Center for Learning Disabilities (see resources on the [RTI Action Network Web site](#)) and the [National Association of School Psychologists](#).

In addition to RtI terms, we felt suggesting a "partnering vocabulary" would also support families, schools, and community resources working together for student success within the RtI framework. This includes such words as "we", "our", "us" and such phrases as "What are we EACH doing?" or "What is best for OUR student?" Or "How will WE know it is working?"

Finally, one of our favorite training quotations, a Chinese proverb, might be applicable here: Tell me, I forget; Show me, I remember; Involve me, I understand. When family members and educators are working together, focusing on their shared student's success, both learn the meaning of RtI concepts and practices as they apply them through the process.

**Q** **Ann Jackson**  
How to engage "reluctant" parents?

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**  
As stated, parents are usually reluctant for a reason. Exploring different ways of engaging families has been a good approach. Many systems have had to analyze their own data around when parents are willing to come to school and for what types of activities. This information can inform how to get them there more often and how to include them in solutions for their children. Sometimes this has required going into the community for meetings or to the family's home. Once trust is established, the partnership can evolve from there. There is not one answer to this question, but rather multiple answers depending on the variables.

**Q** **Cynthia Moore**  
What do you do when parents know what to do to help their kids, say they are doing it (like reading together at night), but the kids tell you they are not?

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**  
This is a difficult situation and can be uncomfortable for all parties. In an RtI framework, there is a focus on supporting the student's success through data-based decision-making. With ongoing, agreed-upon follow-up in a partnering structure, a natural accountability tends to occur for families and educators. Simple data collection measures at home that are shared during ongoing

**A** progress-monitoring exchanges can be helpful. Asking families what will work, offering choices, giving permission to ask questions and to engage in honest discussion about an unworkable strategy can all support the partnering process. Focusing on the student's progress and outcomes allows adults to overcome their feelings of inadequacy or failure.

**Q** **Cynthia Baranowski**

Many of our parents have had little school themselves. What are some ways we can bolster their confidence to use simple engagement strategies at home? The underlying issue seems to be that they are not sure the child is responding correctly.

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

It is helpful to ask this question, as you did, about ways to "bolster confidence" in family members. Many times parents have had negative experiences themselves, struggle financially, are uncomfortable about or unable to come to school, and feel unsure about how to support their child's learning. We have found it helpful to think about family-school partnering in tiers, as in the RtI framework. There is the understanding that some families (and staff, students) will benefit from more specific support and encouragement in learning to partner between home and school. This understanding allows for effective allocation of resources with more individual practices such as home visits, daily communication, individual outreach, and community resource linkages being provided to families who might need such supports to feel confident in working with their students at home.

Asking families what they need, going into the community, and linking families to other families can all be effective strategies. We consistently share the importance of research results, highlighting that simple, daily home strategies can improve achievement - such as frequent communication about school, encouraging student learning, and providing homework structure.

The [Patrick O'Hearn School video](#) is one we describe in our trainings. It shows how teachers at the universal level can create welcoming invitations for all families. The video is one of numerous resources on the [Futures in School Psychology Task Force on Family School Partnerships Web site](#).

A tool that might be applicable to supporting all families, even those who may be unsure, hesitant, or distant: Tiered RtI Family and Community Partnering Checklist.

These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q** **Brenda Cox**

Does a school have to do an evaluation if I have asked for one? They only want to do RTI. I get

**Q** conflicting answers from different people.

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

This is common and crucial question. A recent communication from the Office of Special Education, Memo: A Response to Intervention (RtI) Process Cannot Be Used to Delay-Deny an Evaluation for Eligibility Under the Individuals Act (IDEA), addresses this concern. It can be accessed at the [National Center on Response-to-Intervention](#).

In 2008, Colorado became one of the states, which requires RtI as one of the mandated criteria used in identifying specific learning disabilities. The state incorporated the explicit language from the Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities, Final Rule, 71 Federal Regulations 300.307 300.311, which requires documentation that the a student's parents be provided data-based documentation of repeated assessments, information on state policy regarding amount and nature of performance data, strategies for increasing the child's rate of learning, and the right to request an evaluation, among other specific requirements. In Colorado, if a parent or educator suspects a specific learning disability and the decision is made to proceed with a special education evaluation, RtI data are a mandated component of the disability decision-making.

Often this question is asked because we have all had to figure out how to get the needs of our children/students met within an educational system that did not get them covered. Depending on our role, we are used to asking for traditional ways of getting those needs met. When RtI is implemented well and good family partnerships are in place, we find that these questions do not come up because families have been there every step of the way and have been part of any intervention. They are fully aware of progress and are part of the decision-making. When families are not included in this way, there is more confusion about interventions and when a formal evaluation should occur. Ideally, all intervention progress monitoring data should inform this decision.

The [Colorado Guidelines for Identifying Students with Specific Learning Disabilities](#) describes how families participate in the decision-making around special education evaluation and partner in designing eligibility "full and individual" assessment.

We have found the video clip, [What is the Role of Parents in an RtI Model?](#) as helpful for educators and families to understand the optimal shared partnership in referring for a special education evaluation within an RtI framework.

Tools that might be applicable to understanding the relationship of RtI to special education evaluation: Helping Families Understand the Special Education Process Within RtI and IEP Partnering Within an RtI Model.

These tools may be found in the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q** *Marcia Collins*

How would the initial process look like if someone would attempt using this program? For example, I have had activities such as Snuggle and Read Day with parents Prek-Kindergarten. Would you recommend extending these activities or starting partnering with families in a RTI framework at this level?

**A** *Colorado Department of Education RTI Team*

These activities sound helpful and important at the universal level. We might suggest such strategies as ensuring all families are participating, even if there are several different times; tapping of community resources; or various venues offered, such as breakfast, when working parents bring children into childcare. And perhaps the reading activities can be continued throughout the year, with families sharing simple data collection such as number of books read. Following up with families to see how the activities are working, with opportunities for ongoing two-way communication helps support the practices. This paves the way if concerns arise about progress - there are relationships already in place to problem-solve around interventions.

**Q** *Marcia Collins*

What free resources are available to implement a program such as this?

**A** *Colorado Department of Education RTI Team*

All the tools and web-based materials to which we refer in answering these questions are available at no charge online. Please also refer to the [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#).

**Q** *Marcia Collins*

Who is involved in implementing this partnering with families? Can we partner with programs such as PTO?

**A** *Colorado Department of Education RTI Team*

Parent-teacher groups are vital, integral organizations in many school communities. Tapping parent leaders can create valuable and multi-faceted resources. At the universal level, everyone is involved in partnering. The PTO often serves as a core "advisory group" to reach out to other families and review procedures, communication, websites etc. for "family friendly" language. This may involve a shift to more "learning-focused" activities for such organizations as in many schools they tend to provide traditional funding and volunteer support. In our trainings, we have asked participants what might be a role for the PTA/PTO. Some of the descriptors are as follows: "Reach out to all families"; "Support tiered partnering practices"; "Provide family expertise and



**A** 'parent-to-parent' support"; "Provide family education opportunities"; and "Create a 'family center' in the school."

The National PTA is focused on partnering for student success and the [organization's recently revised Standards](#) have provided important national guidance.

**Q** *Micah Rayner*

We enjoy adequate turn-out for events for many of our families...but low turn-out for our demographics of low income and ESL. What strategies do you use to gain their specific participation?

**A** *Colorado Department of Education RTI Team*

RtI is data-based decision-making, including what types of events within a school community are more likely to be successful. We would suggest schools and districts explore collecting data about what kinds of events might be of interest and or of possible availability to families who may have culture or language differences.

Examples might be offering childcare, food, including students, and providing smaller venues. Another ?out-of-the box? possibility might be family-school events in the community where families can host and share their neighborhoods with school staff.

**Q** *Patrice Linehan*

Thank you to our friends in CO for hosting today's "Talk"!! Can you talk about any work you have done to align multiple initiatives in your state/district? How are you tackling the need to shape a common vision and message about your RTI system? I am here with a team of parent leaders in Alexandria, VA. They support parents of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, and students who are receiving Title I and Special Education services. One of the difficulties we are running into as we try to develop common messages to the community is that there are so many initiatives underway in our district. We appreciate your thoughts on this and thanks for your great leadership in CO!

**A** *Colorado Department of Education RTI Team*

We have worked hard at the state level to create a Community of Practice (CoP) model around implementation of RtI that includes the family-school partnering component. This work is cross-departmental and involves our Language, Culture, and Equity Unit, which has a family community liaison. It directly ties into the work around a Unified Improvement Plan (UIP), which includes all districts in the state. Each district in the state must submit such a plan and the philosophical underpinnings of RtI are inherent in this process. Title programs are also included in this CoP and in the development of the district and school UIPs. Thank you Patrice for your

**A** leadership!

**Q** **Gene Collins**

How can RTI survive when parents have the right to demand full evaluations without waiting in Virginia?

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

RtI and special education evaluations are not mutually exclusive. Evaluations should include a body of evidence gathered throughout the RtI process, which also includes data from home. Ideally, a seamless RtI process includes families from the beginning, including work with the classroom teacher. Among the core issues, when conflicts occur, is that the parents have not been included throughout the process. The ongoing, two-way communication and partnership have not occurred.

There is no confusion between special education and the RtI process if families have been "on the team and at the table" throughout the tiers. Conflict is minimized, or non-existent, with the focus on student learning. The RtI framework is for all students and continues if the child is identified as having a disability.

**Q** **Ade Oyemola**

Have you found any specific links that have been helpful for parents to become familiar with the RtI framework?

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

In Colorado, we have created all our RtI materials and resources to be jointly shared between families, educators, and community resources. We have included all these links in this Talk. The [RTI Action Network](#) and [NCLD](#) have helpful family resources. All these links are provided in Additional Resources below.

**Q** **LGShort**

What measurement tools will you use to evaluate the effectiveness of family-school partnership/involvement as it relates to problem solving and student academic and behavioral achievement?

**A** **Colorado Department of Education RTI Team**

Colorado has developed and is currently field testing a set of RtI Fidelity of Implementation tools. These clearly address family and community partnerships as one of the components, allowing systems to evaluate RtI partnering effectiveness from the classroom to building to district levels. These will be available by summer, 2011, on the CDE website, with guiding documents. There also

**A** partnering action-planning, surveys, and evaluations in the Toolkit, which is listed in Additional Resources below.

That concludes our RTI Talk for today. Thanks to everyone for the thoughtful questions and thanks to our experts, the Colorado Department of Education team, for their time today.

**Please also take a few moments at the completion of this event to give us your feedback by taking our [survey!](#)**

**Related Reading from RTINetwork.org:**

- [Schools, Families, and Response to Intervention](#) by Amy Reschly
- [A Parent Leader's Perspective on Response to Intervention](#) by Debra Jennings
- [Engaging Families in Early Childhood Education](#) by the University of North Carolina's FPG Child Development Institute

**Additional Resources:**

- [NCLD's Parent Advocacy Brief: A Parent's? Guide to Response-to-Intervention](#)
- [Colorado Department of Education Family and Community Engagement Toolkit](#)
- [Colorado Department of Education Guidelines for Identifying Students with Specific Learning Disabilities](#)
- [Colorado Department of Education's RtI Framework](#), with Videos, Tools, Manual
- [Family Involvement Network of Educators \(FINE\)/Harvard Family Research Project](#)
- Jenkins, T. (2007). When a child struggles in school. Charleston, SC: Advantage.