

## Powerful Parents

October 26, 2011 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

### About this Talk

THE TALK IS CONCLUDED.

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Parents play a powerful role in RTI and successful implementation projects engage parents early and often. Join Mendy Gomez and John Carruth in this special RTI Talk as they respond to your questions and discuss the key role parents play in RTI implementation from the parent and educator perspectives. Don't miss this opportunity to learn more about the power of parents in RTI and the numerous ways schools and families may work together within a multi-tiered model!

### Transcript



**Sally S.**

What are three things you want every parent to remember going into a meeting with their child's school? Three things for each teacher/administrator should remember when preparing to meet a parent?



**Mendy Gomez**

As a parent, I want these three things:

1. For the school team to remember this is my child...not just a statistical number. Treat him the same way he is expected to treat you...with respect.
2. That every child can learn and be successful, no matter the limitations.
3. That every child is unique and has strengths and weaknesses.



**Alan Toomey**

My child's school said they were going to send me a written intervention plan to help my child's progress. What should I expect? What questions should I ask when I see it?



**John Carruth**

- Data that demonstrates where your child is currently functioning.
- What is the expected time frame for the plan -What is the expected growth rate - ie. how will the plan be assessed (concretely). How will you know that the plan is successful

- A**
- Frequency and duration of the intervention
  - Who is responsible for implementing the plan
  - How will the plan be communicated to your child?

This is not a comprehensive list, but is a good starting point. It comprises the foundational pieces we expect our staff to communicate to parents.

**Q** *David Rogers.*

I'm a parent with attention issues and I am preparing for my first meeting with my son's IEP team. Is it okay for me to bring a friend to take notes during the meeting? I am not great at paying attention and taking notes.

**A** *John Carruth*

Yes, this is very acceptable, especially if you make your reasons and intentions known to the school team prior to the meeting. The school team may also have some ideas and suggestions to aid you in participating in the meeting and understanding what will be occurring during the meeting.

**Q** *Kathryn Smith Ripper*

Vail, Arizona schools have reduced the identification of learning disabilities by 50%. Learning disabilities don't disappear into thin air despite (presumably) being addressed early and appropriately through schools. How does the Vail staff educate families about the existence of their children's learning disabilities when the schools are not necessarily processing toward formal diagnosis or identification anymore?

**A** *John Carruth*

As a practitioner and former special education teacher, one of the things I most appreciate about the RTI process is that it first assumes competency of a child versus assuming that there is something wrong or that there is a disability.

To look at this another way, RTI assumes that the system is the cause of the learning problem unless there is evidence that supports that the general education instruction is healthy (Tier 1) One of the foundational concepts of RTI is that it rules out educational disadvantage. Many times, that educational disadvantage can be traced to ineffective general education instruction. In a healthy system, the majority of students should demonstrate academic competency.

That is now the case in Vail as 80% to 95% of ALL students demonstrating competency on our statewide assessments. However, this wasn't always the case. About 10 years ago, 50% of our students (or in the case of math 20%) were mastering the required learning standards on our state assessment. Over time, that meant that over half of our students were progressing to the next grade with huge gaps in their learning. After several years of this, students appeared to be learning

**A** disabled when in fact they were ?system casualties? of ineffective general education instruction.

Worse, those that were referred for special education evaluation were often the kids who somehow stood out to teachers (ie. they looked different or acted out) and were looking like they had a learning disability. Relatedly, referrals were inconsistent (some teachers referred often and some rarely) and not based on data.

Now, we are able to work with few students who are demonstrating true learning difficulties ? and dial in the instruction that they need to progress academically.

**Q** **Marcia Collins**  
How do we get parents involved?

**A** **John Carruth**  
Much like the RTI process for academics, I think it is important to look at parent involvement in general first - ie. how welcoming is your school environment? What messages does the signage convey? Is the principal easily accessible? Teachers? Is the front office staff easy to reach and warm, welcoming and friendly to parents?

If these foundational pieces are in place, then I think it is a matter of demonstrating your concern and interest in their child along with being flexible in time for meetings, and modes and means of communication to meet a parent's particular needs.

**A** **Mendy Gomez**  
Review how your school engages parents and your community. Include them in decision making, keep them informed about what is happening within your school environment, make sure lines of communication are open. Make sure parents are treated with respect, ask parents how they can help.

Many times parents are just waiting to be asked. Involve parents in all aspect of the school environment (i.e. athletic events, academic events, social events.)

**Q** **Murray Bourne**  
How might the parent of a high school junior or senior best work in collaboration with her child's school in the Rtl process?

**A** **Mendy Gomez**  
Make sure your child is involved in the process. As a junior or senior in high school, they should be able to advocate for themselves. They should be able to tell the academic team what is working and not working for them. Your role should be supportive.

Allow your child to take the lead. Having them learn to effectively self-advocate can help them

**A** when they move onto college or in their chosen career field.

**Q** **Peter Hudson**

Do either of you have any tips for how a parent can "agree to disagree" on certain parts of a conversation with my child's teacher/school team about their approach to instruction within the RTI tiers without escalating the conversation to an uncomfortable place? I need help with the line between being heard and being too forceful in my tone.

**A** **Mendy Gomez**

First, I think it is perfectly acceptable to "agree to disagree." Why is it not ok to take the conversation to an uncomfortable place, if you feel that your child is not being supported adequately? You are their advocate. But advocate effectively - do it respectfully.

When I am preparing for my son's IEP meeting, I always review my 4-point plan. These points help me to stay on track and focused on my meeting, as well as remove some of the emotion involved in these meetings.

Mendy's 4-point plan:

1. Strong Leadership - does the school support and effectively manage RTI? If the answer is no, then how do I, as a parent, work with the school to effectively manage the RTI process for my child?
2. Practical Management - understand controlled and uncontrolled situations. Many times schools want to help, but are prevented from doing so because of lack of funding or regulations.
3. Collaboration - how can I work with the system, yet still have my child be supported?
4. Focus on the Primary Goal - Before the meeting, focus on the primary goal of the meeting. What is it? How can you effectively work with the school team to accomplish that goal?

**A** **John Carruth**

John: My belief is that we are entering into a long-term relationship with a student and their family ? something that is going to last well beyond one grade, one teacher or one school. Like any long-term relationship, communication, mutual respect and common interests are key factors to success. As educators, we fundamentally are interested in working towards the best learning outcomes for students. Where it sometimes gets dicey is around what comprises learning outcomes. To overcome this, we need to keep listening, talking and working together. I also am quick to remember that any long-term relationship is going to experience disagreement and hardship. Someone once told me that, being "right" is like getting the "booby prize". While I may be right, it may be all I get. I've had the good fortune to be in a healthy marriage for 20 years and I must say, this is still a work in progress for me!

**Q** **Micah**

We are thinking of offering evening or morning interactive meetings with a goal of learning more

**Q** about our math series and curriculum. Any tips on getting the parents in the seats?

**A** **Mendy Gomez**

Serve them coffee and doughnuts for a.m. and a spaghetti dinner for p.m!

Kidding aside, try and find strong parents within your school environment -- the PTA Mom, Sports Mom, Room Mom. Those parents that you see at school every day. Have those parents help you market the meetings. Then advertise using social media, school websites for parents, Facebook pages, e-mail blasts to parents, send home flyers, reminder calls, give away small inexpensive prizes -- make it fun and enjoyable.

Look at it this way, what would make you give up a few hours in the morning or evening to learn about math?

**Q** **Kenra**

How do you show parents they are true partners?

**A** **Mendy Gomez**

Effective, respectful communication. Keep the parents informed on how their child is doing in the classroom. Return phone calls and e-mails promptly. Set up face-to-face meetings, if there are concerns. Call parents and tell them about something positive you noticed since your last conversation rather than always calling with something negative to report. A little customer service goes a long way.

**Q** **Kim Riley**

What role might the district administrator play in encouraging parental input for RTI?

**A** **John Carruth**

Great questions Kim! I'm a practitioner at heart and my background includes several years as a special education teacher and building administrator. That said, I strongly believe that for an RTI initiative to be successful, it must be fully understood and led by district level administration.

Without this understanding and support, individual sites won't get the ongoing support and training they need to be successful. This is really no different than any other initiative led by a school district-including parental involvement.

If encouraging parental involvement in all activities is a foundational value of the district, then involving parents specifically in something like RTI becomes the expected norm and much easier to implement.

**Q Naaltai**

It seems every curriculum, intervention, and methodology is claiming to be "research-based." How does a parent (or anyone else for that matter) distinguish between the ones based on real research and the ones in name only?

**A John Carruth**

Research-based? seems to be the current buzz phrase. Parents and professionals can look to the educational literature to determine whether something is truly research-based.

The key is looking at studies or lines of research that undergo a stringent peer-review process. There are some resources that can assist with this because they publish only studies that meet these criteria. For example, [EBSCOHost](#) is a research tool that allows one to plug in search criteria to look up studies on particular topics.

Another resource available online is the [What Works Clearinghouse](#)? which provides information on research-based practices. Another example is the [Doing What Works](#)? site sponsored by the US Dept. of Education. Once you check out a few of these sites, there will be ample references to other sites and information about research-based best practices.

**Q Kendra**

What is the best way to approach parents when there is an issue with learning?

**A Mendy Gomez**

Honest and respectful dialogue. Most of the time parents usually have some idea that there is an issue with their child. Many parents just don't know how to take the first steps. Having open, honest and respectful dialogue helps set the groundwork for RTI management, for both the parent and the schools.

**Q Deb**

If the RTI process is not under IDEA rules and regulations, how does a parent ensure that the strategies are being implemented appropriately at each tier? And how can I be a part of the process?

**A John Carruth**

First of all, develop a collaborative relationship with your child's teacher and those who will be involved in implementing individual interventions. Communicate regularly, even if it means a quick check-in?

Discuss how evidence of intervention treatment integrity? (or implementation fidelity) will be determined and shared. Also determine what progress monitoring data will be collected during intervention and with what frequency, and how student progress will be shared with the student,

**A** the parent, and school staff.

It is also important to discuss next steps that will occur when sufficient progress monitoring data have been collected to determine the effectiveness of a particular intervention or set of interventions.

**Q** **Reggie Curran**

Does a family learning culture - their conversations, expectations, etc.- help children succeed academically? Do you know of any studies that illustrate this concept?

**A** **John Carruth**

Yes! Students learn an immense amount through ?incidental learning?, and breadth and depth of knowledge is an important component of students? academic success. For example, in reading, something commonly referred to as ?prior knowledge? is critical to student comprehension.

There are many studies over time that support this. I?d suggest checking out a search engine such as [EBSCOHost](#) that provides access to a large number of peer-reviewed journals and articles, and allows for searches of specific topics.

**Q** **Kyle Holland**

What types of on-going communication do you recommend in Tier 2 intervention classes? And, how often should this communication occur?

**A** **John Carruth**

On-going communication during Tier 2 is important, and regular progress monitoring is critical. The frequency of the communication (as well as the progress monitoring) may be somewhat dependent upon the nature of the intervention, but weekly or bi-monthly is a good starting point.

Communication methods can be agreed upon by parents and school staff and might include phone conversations, written information, or e-mail. The communication about progress should be as specific and concrete as possible so that it?s clear whether the Tier 2 intervention being implemented is effective.

**Q** **Kris Solomita**

How can I tell if my child has a learning disability or just needs to spend more time studying for tests?

**A** **John Carruth**

One of the keys to this is looking at whether a child has a skill problem or a performance problem, sometimes referred to as the ?Can?t Do/Won?t Do? question. In other words, does a child have the



- A** needed academic skills to be successful but is not motivated to perform well, or are they trying hard but don't have the necessary academic skills to successfully complete the task.

Using an RTI process can be extremely helpful in making this determination. Also, I would suggest that both parents and educators look at all sources of student data over time to see whether any patterns stand out. Sometimes this can direct the team to a solution.

**A** **Mendy Gomez**

From a parents point of view, I think the new "Parent Guide to Response to Intervention (RTI)" has some great tips on identifying if your child is having difficulty academically. See [www.rtinetwork.org](http://www.rtinetwork.org). Page 4 of the resource guide has some great tips.

If any of these fit your child's situation, call your child's school and speak with the school counselor, psychologist or teacher to see if testing is needed to identify a learning disability.

**Q** **Cheryil**

What is the most effective way I can advocate for my child during the RTI process?

**A** **Mendy Gomez**

Keep lines of communication open with both your child and your child's academic team. Make sure you involve your child in the process whenever possible. Keep in mind teamwork - you, your child and your child's academic team.

**Q** **Kendra**

What is the best way to explain RTI to parents?

**A** **Mendy Gomez**

Effective RTI management helps parents to take a look at their child's learning and prevent deficiencies in his/her education. RTI data allows parents and educators to look and see where a child struggles academically and socially.

By being able to identify the area(s) in which a child struggles, parents and educators can work together to create a program for that child's academic success.

**Q** **Deborah Lynam**

What can a parent do when we feel that the interventions are pre-determined by tier instead of by the needs of the student? What can a parent do when the district refuses to evaluate for a learning disability until the student has completed all tiers?

**A** **John Carruth**

Interventions may be "pre-determined" for a particular reason relative to the RTI model being used



**A** in your school district.

For example, in Vail we use a protocol-based standardized reading intervention that is akin to an antibiotic in that has been shown to have a powerful positive effect for most students. We work very hard to implement this intervention consistently and correctly (every day using a routine process) and do checks on the fidelity of the implementation. Because the real purpose of the intervention is to determine whether the student responds, it is considered as much (if not more) an assessment than an intervention. It is not designed to fix or cure the student's reading difficulties. If the student's response is flat or poor---based on data---additional assessment data are gathered through the MET process.

We consider the RTI component of assessment a necessary precursor to "evaluating for a learning disability". We do not want to consider the student as disabled until and unless we have ruled out the the problem(s) may be due to educational disadvantage. We use data--not only our RTI data but also other district and state assessments--to accurately determine which students may need to be considered for special education as students with a learning disability. Back before we in Vail implemented an RTI model and used data to determine which students needed a comprehensive special education evaluation, students were tested based on teacher and parent referrals.

Back then, our "hit rate" was approximately 50%. Flip a coin. Now our hit rate on students who are tested is approximately 95-98% when we look for a discrepancy between ability and achievement for students who show no or a poor response to intervention.

**Q** **Kim Riley**

How might school principals encourage and support the increased role of parents in the implementation of RTI? Should he/she lead the initiative? In what ways?

**A** **Mendy Gomez**

Principals should take the lead in encouraging and supporting the role of parents in the implementation of RTI. Many times parents look to the school for direction. Principals can help parents with communication, concerns about their child's academic progress, and help to build the groundwork for effective advocacy and communication between the parent and the school site.

**A** **John Carruth**

Yes, school principals can be powerful leaders in supporting RTI in general and in the role of parents. School principals are the heart and soul of their building and have a huge influence on their staff and parents. A big part of that encouragement and support comes in the form of the language that he/she defines, uses and encourages (tiers, "our" students, data-based decision making.)

Relatedly, communication in an RTI model is critical, and principals can help determine concrete ways for their staff and parents to communicate systematically and effectively about the process and during the process. Also, they can provide venues for educating both parents and their staff on

**A** the philosophy of RTI, its purpose, and the "nuts and bolts" of how the model works in their building. This could come in the form of an informational session all the way to talking one-to-one with a parent who has concerns.

**Related Resources from RTINetwork.org:**

- [Schools, Families, and Response to Intervention](#) by Amy Reschly
- [A Parent Leader's Perspective on Response to Intervention](#) by Debra Jennings
- [Debra Jennings Video: Engaging Families in Early Childhood Education](#)

**Additional Resources:**

- [NCLD's Parent Advocacy Brief: A Parent's Guide to Response-to-Intervention](#)