

Foreword

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As I read *Implementing Response to Intervention: A Principal's Guide*, I could not help but remember the dozens of meetings I attended in my years as an elementary school principal. At the time I took the job, I knew very little about beginning reading instruction or special education. I had been a media specialist up to that point. But I did know the importance of learning to read and loving to read and was always deeply concerned about the students in our school who were failing to thrive in reading, particularly those in kindergarten and first grade. The teachers, whether classroom, special education, or reading, had a number of pat answers when we sat around the table to talk about how we could better meet the needs of these students: "They're just not ready yet. They aren't developmentally able to handle the demands of an academic curriculum. They're late bloomers." I would press the issue about getting some intensive help for a child immediately, and eyes would roll. Surely I knew that we had to wait until we could document a discrepancy between a student's ability and his or her achievement. Meanwhile, that child became frustrated, the parents were upset, and our hands were tied waiting for Matthew, Erica, and John to "bloom." "How will we know when this child is ready?" I asked. "Will he suddenly start reading spontaneously?" The teachers were not certain that I understood the intricacies of early childhood education or special education. Oh, I understood them, all right. It just didn't make sense to me that when children were having difficulty keeping up in kindergarten we had to put them aside and carefully watch for signs of blooming before we could teach them to read.

I am thrilled to be writing a foreword for Susan Hall's book for principals. This straightforward guide to implementing RTI is a little late for me to use with Matthew, Erica, and John. However, the timing is perfect for practitioners who are seeking research-based ways to make the gift of reading

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available to all students, not just to those who are “ready.” I am passionate about raising reading achievement at any grade level but also realistic enough to recognize that every primary grade in which a child does not attain crucial reading benchmarks translates into 2–3 years of catch-up time in middle and high school. This is a book about giving the gift of reading to more than 95% of your students. In the meantime, reading achievement in your school and district will go up every year thereafter.

As Hall is quick to point out, RTI is not a special education initiative but an approach to revolutionizing reading instruction in your school or district. Students who are successful in acquiring grade-appropriate reading skills in the primary grades will enter third and fourth grade prepared to read to learn. They will no longer have to struggle with learning to read for years on end, potentially giving up in desperation and eventually dropping out of school.

There will be educators who resist RTI. Even though we know all we need to know to prevent reading failure in all but a very small percentage of students, it’s how we feel about the fact that we haven’t done it thus far that matters most. Some educators feel guilty and find it hard to admit failing the children who have passed through their classrooms. Others are fearful that they will not be able to teach them all to read. But it’s time for principals and teachers in every school to forget the past, confess their fears, and then roll up their sleeves and begin to teach them all to read. I can speak from experience: There is nothing more invigorating and inspiring than to see a student who was deemed developmentally delayed or a late bloomer unlock the code and begin to read independently.

Will your teachers be challenged? Of course! Will some of them resist? Inevitably. But whose school is it? You will find all the nuts and bolts of RTI in the pages ahead. Hall provides a fascinating case study so you can see RTI in action and then takes your hand and leads you through implementation step by step. If you know almost nothing about RTI, this book provides a superb orientation. If you know a little about RTI, you will be an expert by the time you finish the book.