



***The earlier, the better.***

*When students display risk for learning disabilities or academic and behavioral difficulties, identification models must enable educators to intervene as early as possible. Students who do not respond as expected to these early interventions should then, if appropriate, receive more intensive remedial interventions.*

***RTI models integrate prevention and remediation.***



**TEXAS CENTER  
for  
LEARNING  
DISABILITIES**

For more information on the Texas Center for Learning Disabilities (TCLD), please see our Web site at [www.texasldcenter.org](http://www.texasldcenter.org).

The Web site provides more detailed information about our research, presentations and papers by TCLD staff members, videos of effective instruction, and an online library containing useful resources related to response to intervention (RTI).

Investigating the  
Classification,  
Early Intervention,  
and  
Remediation of  
Learning Disabilities



The Texas Center for Learning Disabilities (TCLD) conducts research that leads to a more comprehensive understanding of:

- The classification of learning disabilities (LD)
- Intervention at different levels and intensities for children with reading problems
- The nature of LD, including the neural correlates of reading disabilities in young children and adolescents

Through rigorous methodology, the TCLD is critically evaluating a response to intervention (RTI) framework as a potential classification model of LD.

Integrating cognitive, neural, and instructional components of RTI models, this multidisciplinary research will provide educators with information about effectively intervening with young students with a range of reading difficulties, including students with LD and those at risk for LD.

In addition, the TCLD is developing screening and diagnostic procedures for identifying struggling readers in middle school.

Research sites include the University of Houston, The University of Texas at Austin, and The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.

Our current research takes the form of four projects to be conducted over 5 years.

## Project I—Classification

**Led by:** David Francis (Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics at the University of Houston) and Jack Fletcher (University of Houston)

**Focus:** Alternative models, using a response to intervention (RTI) framework, for identifying students as “learning disabled”

**Research:** A series of studies over a 5-year period will examine RTI as a framework for making reliable and valid decisions about the instructional needs of students and for delivering appropriate levels of intervention in response to those needs. A particular focus will be developing reliable and efficient tools for measuring student progress and for identifying the subset of students whose educational outcomes will benefit from alternative instructional settings, such as special education.

## Project II—Early Intervention

**Led by:** Carolyn Denton (Children’s Learning Institute at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston) and Jack Fletcher (University of Houston)

**Focus:** The effect of moderately intense levels of early instructional intervention (using an RTI model) on reading achievement

**Research:** Based on the results of early screening, students identified as being at risk will receive increasingly intense levels of reading instruction as a means of preventing the development of reading difficulties. Their progress will be regularly monitored, and their reading outcomes will be compared with those of students not identified as being at risk.

## Project III—Remediation

**Led by:** Sharon Vaughn (The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk at The University of Texas at Austin)

**Focus:** The effect of interventions of differing intensity on the reading achievement of middle school struggling readers

**Research:** Like Project II, Project III focuses on effective instruction; however, this project addresses the instructional needs of older students, in grades 6–8, with a history of reading difficulties.

## Project IV—Magnetic Source Imaging (MSI)

**Led by:** Andrew Papanicolaou (Center for Clinical Neurosciences, a part of the Children’s Learning Institute, The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston)

**Focus:** The neural correlates of reading in children at risk for reading problems or who display reading disabilities

**Research:** Working with students from Projects II and III, Project IV will compare the brain activation patterns of students who fail to respond well to intense reading interventions to those of students who are typically developing readers. Differences in the brain activation profiles of these two groups may help us understand the neural mechanisms underlying inadequate response to instruction as well as the LD classifications determined through Project I.

*Four recent consensus reports<sup>1</sup> conclude that improving the identification and treatment of students with learning disabilities (LD) is central to reform in both general education and special education.*

### Issues with LD classification that recent reports highlight:

- **Inadequate instruction.** Many students identified for special education may not have received adequate reading instruction in the general education classroom, suggesting that the number of individuals identified with LD may be inflated. Improving reading instruction in general education may reduce this number.
- **Inconsistent identification.** Current regulations for the identification of LD in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) lack a research base. This lack of research impedes progress in the implementation of effective instructional approaches for students with disabilities. Thus, the need for research on alternative models for the identification and treatment of LD is clear.

<sup>1</sup> Council report on minority overrepresentation in special education (Donovan & Cross, 2002); “Rethinking Special Education” by the Fordham Foundation and the Progressive Policy Institute (Finn, Rotherham, & Hoksans, 2001); “Learning Disabilities Summit” by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002); “President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education” (2002).