International Reading Association (IRA) members are committed to improving literacy instruction and learning for all students. Two current initiatives, Response to Intervention (RTI) and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts (ELA; National Governors Association & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), have the potential to positively influence progress toward this goal. Both the legislation authorizing RTI and the professionals involved in its implementation have argued that RTI is both an alternative approach to identifying students as learning disabled and a strategy for reducing the number of students who develop serious learning difficulties.

Most states have adopted multitiered approaches to RTI that emphasize effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the regular classroom, as this first “tier” of instruction/intervention is expected to address the needs of 80% to 85% of...
students. Because the CCSS will direct the content of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment in ELA for students in at least the 45+ states that have adopted them, they will most certainly have a significant impact on instruction and intervention within an RTI approach to teaching and learning. This column explores the implications of the CCSS-ELA for RTI in the areas of literacy and language.

Background
The CCSS, like most academic content standards, are designed to provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn. They are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. The concept of college and career readiness is a driving force behind the CCSS. College and Career Readiness (CCR) standards for the end of 12th grade were developed first. These CCR standards then served as the basis for the development of the kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) standards, which are intended to function as learning progressions that lead to achievement of the CCR standards.

The CCSS-ELA provide an integrated view of literacy and language, highlighting the areas within the ELA—reading, writing, speaking/listening, and language. For K–5, the reading and writing strands are further delineated by text type—literature and informational. The grade 6–12 standards are first organized by ELA and subject matter to distinguish which standards are the responsibility of the ELA teacher and which are to be addressed by subject area teachers. Within the ELA portion of the grade 6–12 standards, the organization is similar to that of the K–5 standards (i.e., all four areas of the language arts, with reading and writing broken down by literature and informational). In contrast, the subject area sections address only reading and writing, and these areas are broken down according to history/social studies and science/technical subjects.

RTI is focused on determining whether students are responding to instruction and intervention in a manner that indicates they are gaining the knowledge and skills characteristic of mature, effective readers. The CCSS-ELA document describes mature, effective readers in the form of a “vision” of what it means to be literate in the 21st century (p. 3) and a “portrait” of what students who are college and career ready in ELA “look like” (p. 7). The vision statement emphasizes that students who meet the ELA standards “readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex” texts, and “habitually perform the critical reading necessary to pick carefully through the staggering amount of information available today.” Furthermore, “they actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens world views.”

The portrait of students who meet the Standards includes several attributes commonly identified as good habits in the areas of ELA—attributes such as (a) demonstrating independence; (b) building strong content knowledge; (c) responding to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline; (d) comprehending as well as critiquing; (e) valuing evidence; (f) using technology and digital media; and (g) understanding other perspectives and cultures. In short, the emphasis on college and career readiness in the CCSS-ELA raises the bar for what students are expected to

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know and be able to do at every level of K–12 schooling. This is most evident in terms of more attention to higher order skills, increased content knowledge, and ability to engage with complex texts.

Implications of CCSS-ELA for RTI

As described in other Reading Teacher columns on RTI (e.g., Johnston, 2010), the IRA RTI Principles (IRA, 2010), and other publications (e.g., Lipson & Wixson, 2010), there is no one single approach to RTI. Before the CCSS-ELA, there were no common content standards against which to evaluate the content of RTI curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Given the rapid pace at which the CCSS are being implemented in adopting states, now is a good time to consider the implications for RTI.

Definition of Success

The CCSS redefine success in terms of the knowledge and skills deemed necessary for college and career readiness rather than mastery of the school-like tasks that comprise current measures of achievement. This change has important implications for RTI with regard to what constitutes successful instruction or intervention. The success of instruction/intervention will now need to be judged in relation to how students’ learning helps them move toward acquiring the knowledge and skills needed for college and career readiness. Examining the meaning of success within this larger context is likely to reveal that some of the instruction/intervention that has heretofore been determined successful may no longer be considered sufficient.

Definition of Reading/Literacy

The integrated view of ELA presented by the CCSS contrasts sharply with the heavy emphasis that has been placed on reading in recent years, almost to the exclusion of other areas of the language arts and other subject areas in the K–12 curriculum. When reading is part of an integrated model, the emphasis changes dramatically from the “big 5,” which have dominated curriculum and instruction for the last decade or more—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Within the CCSS-ELA, phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency are addressed primarily in the “foundational skills” addendum to the K–5 standards. Vocabulary is highlighted in the language strand, and comprehension is emphasized throughout the CCSS-ELA.

Add to this the emphasis on reading and writing in the disciplines in grades 6–12, and there is likely to be a major shift from an overemphasis on decoding to increased attention to comprehension of and learning with and from oral and written language. This shift will apply to both core instruction and more targeted intervention for students struggling in the areas of the ELA.

Assessment

The CCSS-ELA definition of success and perspective on literacy and language have significant implications for the types of assessment that dominate many approaches to RTI. As discussed in a previous column (Wixson & Valencia, 2011), RTI assessment often rests on gathering data for screening and progress monitoring using measures that focus heavily on fluency. Given the CCSS conceptualization of ELA, an emphasis on fluency will barely scratch the surface of either the areas of assessment or the types of measures needed.

Two multistate consortia, Partnership for Assessment for Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), are developing new state assessments for the CCSS. If these assessments do a credible job of capturing the content of the CCSS, many existing measures will not be effective predictors of reading achievement as defined by the CCSS-ELA.

The materials available from PARCC and SBAC at the time of this writing show clearly that ELA assessments will cover a wider range of knowledge and skills using a variety of measures—including performance assessments. For example, the Model Content Frameworks for ELA/Literacy released by PARCC (2011) indicate that the assessments under development by this consortium are intended to focus on comprehending complex texts, analyzing sources in writing, conducting and reporting on research, and speaking and listening. Similarly, the draft of the Five Major Claims for the SBAC Assessments of CCSS-ELA (SBAC, 2011) reflects the increase in both the breadth and depth of knowledge and skills to be assessed.
According to these claims, students are expected to do the following:

- Read closely and critically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts
- Produce effective writing for a range of purposes and audiences
- Employ effective speaking and listening skills for a range of purposes and audiences
- Engage appropriately in collaborative and independent inquiry to investigate/research topics, pose questions, and gather and present information
- Use oral and written language skillfully across a range of literacy tasks.

Instruction

There is little doubt that there will be a greater need for integrated instruction to address the CCSS-ELA emphasis on higher order skills, increased content knowledge, and ability to engage with complex texts. For example, the PARCC consortium has released Model Content Frameworks for ELA/Literacy (PARCC, 2011), which consist of four instructional modules per grade level (grades 3–8 and high school). These modules are designed to both reflect key elements of the CCSS-ELA and support the development of the assessments.

As such, each module is structured so that students read complex texts and analyze, research, write, and speak about a variety of these texts throughout the four-module sequence. This includes the use of grade band-level complex text (leveled texts that are below grade band level in complexity cannot be a substitute, because the standards indicate that students should be reading grade band-level complex text) and the use of informational text in elementary school and literary nonfiction in secondary ELA classes, along with building expertise and experience regarding a topic or concept.

The proposed modules begin with grade 3, but it is clear that students will need a different type of beginning reading instruction to be prepared for the type of integrated instruction just described. Beginning reading instruction will need to help students gain control of early reading skills as quickly as possible and prepare them for the integrated instruction expected in upper grade levels.

These goals are embodied in an approach such as the research-based Interactive Strategies Approach (Scanlon, Anderson, & Sweeney, 2010), which teaches children, including those who are struggling with language and literacy, to use what they have learned independently and flexibly. This type of early literacy instruction is essential if students are to succeed with the more challenging texts and tasks that lay ahead.

Higher expectations are likely to result in even greater variability in student performance and increased need for differentiated approaches characterized by RTI. The Model Content Frameworks make it clear that to succeed on the PARCC assessments, students need to have opportunities for independent reading of a wide range of materials on a variety of topics. Such independent reading must include texts at the reading level of students as well as texts with complexity levels that will challenge and motivate them.

Although the PARCC Draft Model Content Frameworks released in
August 2011 stated that “some students will need additional scaffolding and coordinated interventions designed to accelerate their development toward the independent reading of grade-level complex texts” (p. 6), no such statement appears in the final version of the Model Content Frameworks, released in November 2011. We believe that this will be essential for successful implementation of the CCSS-ELA, and that schools will need to provide a much wider array of learning opportunities for students identified as struggling than is available in many approaches to RTI.

Looking Ahead
IRA members are uniquely positioned to provide leadership in the complex policy arena of RTI and CCSS. The RTI Guidelines adopted by IRA lay out the elements for a successful approach—one that is systemic and preventative. Helping students to be successful early on means that they are likely to spend more time in the core classroom, where they will experience the rigorous and exciting curriculum envisioned by CCSS-ELA.

Our approaches to prevention, however, are unlikely to succeed if they are too narrow. They need to address the entire range of knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the curricula, instructional approaches, and assessments emerging from implementation of the CCSS-ELA. Further, effective early intervention/prevention is critical if we do not want to strand a whole segment of our student population, isolating them from the demanding and important curriculum promoted by CCSS-ELA.

REFERENCES