

Time is on Your Side

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Essential Learning Systems (ELS) in

We at CEI learn in lots of ways, but one of our most valuable sources of information is from the facilitators in our labs and from their principals and other administrators. In just the past few years, we have seen several schools experimenting with adding time in the *ELS* lab for as many students as possible. We are, of course, very aware of the volumes of research on the importance of time on task (see our research paper), but we just did not know if doubling or tripling the time that a student spends in the lab in one day would incrementally improve their gains. It does! We have learned that from many of our schools! Four examples:

1. An alternative school with middle and high school students, including many in special education, gained, on average, more than two years in reading comprehension in only eight weeks. The school had 90-minute blocks, and the assistant principal in charge of the implementation visited the lab every single day to make sure that the implementation was done with fidelity and that the facilitator and the students saw how important it was to her that they do well.
2. A child with cerebral palsy who was repeating kindergarten still could not read. A two-hour-per-day *ELS* assignment during summer school moved her from being unable to identify letters in the alphabet to being a confident reader and earning promotion to the first grade.
3. A sophomore second-language student, knowing not one word of English progressed 8.4 years in reading comprehension in less than one school year. He came in as early as 5:30 a.m. to put in extra time in the lab, beyond the period he was assigned each day.
4. A middle school identified every potential failure in grade 8 and assigned each of those students to the lab at least one period per day, and then as much more time as possible every time there was an opportunity. Every child except one with disabilities and new to the school passed the state assessment that spring and earned promotion to high school.

We want to make sure that everyone sees what we are learning about increased engaged time, how our *ELS* sequences are designed, and the increasing intensity from Tier I to Tier II to Tier III of RtI implementation are all about the same thing! Students who struggle need more time and appropriate interventions if they are to accelerate their learning. The standard 45 minutes per day that we recommend may be enough for some students, but it may not be enough for many, especially if they are learning-disabled and/or if they are multiple years behind. Second-language learners need far more than 45 minutes per day to learn English fluently, so *ELS* is a perfect supplement for them.

CEI strongly recommends that elementary schools use *ELS* for all kindergarten students in Tier I, the *Letter Recognition* module can be used both to screen for students who need more intense intervention, as well as for Tier I supplemental instruction. *ELS* lessons can be the word study component of a balanced literacy program since they include phonemic awareness, phonics/spelling, vocabulary development, and fluency in decoding. This strategy, using continuous progress monitoring and the school's other assessment data from such tests as *TPRI* and *DiBELS*, will provide the school with the information they need to decide who needs Tier II and/or Tier III interventions even at this level.

Since *ELS* is totally individualized, the Tier II intervention can continue to be *ELS*, but with the additional 30 or 45 minutes of time required under RtI. The additional time is important, not only to develop the necessary skills and knowledge and move them into long-term memory, but also to accelerate learning so that the student can return to Tier I as quickly as possible.

Again, for Tier III, *ELS* can continue to be the intervention because it is therapeutic, because it is individualized, and because students will benefit from yet another 30-45 minutes of time each day on the program.

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an Rtl Implementation

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Using *ELS* for all three tiers will save the school thousands and thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours of time since teachers will need to learn only one program and how to interpret the reports from that one program. Consistency is also of great importance for struggling learners. A frequent shift from one program to another from the Tier I classroom program to a series of other interventions is confusing, wastes student time, and may slow down, if not prevent, learning. A shift would be unnecessary as long as the student is responding positively. The additional time would simply accelerate learning and provide adequate practice and repetition so that true mastery occurs.

The *ELS* sequences are invaluable to an Rtl team because student strengths and weaknesses have to be assessed in order for the lab facilitator to know which of the sequences is appropriate for each individual child. The instruction has to be challenging enough to move the student forward and keep him or her interested, but not so challenging that the child is frustrated and becomes de-motivated.

When the sequences were developed many years ago, they were designed according to feedback from our lab teachers and from the observations of CEI's teacher staff. They saw that some students could complete lessons in just one 45-minute session (see Gold A, B, and D sequences). These are the so-called average lab students, and those sequences would likely be the ones most appropriate for most of the students in classes above the kindergarten level.



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Other sequences were developed for students who would be overwhelmed by the pace of the Gold sequences. For example, it takes two to three 45-minute sessions for students in Red. If a student requires a Red sequence, then that is an indicator that he or she is probably in need of a Tier II intervention. Through Rtl, the student has about 90 minutes a day for *ELS* instead of 45 minutes, so he or she can learn the same material that the Gold sequence children are learning — just in a longer period of time.

Some students need even more time. The Gray and White sequences were designed for those students, and those lessons require as many as six to nine 45-minute sessions. Students needing these sequences should be in Tier III since they need the extra time of another 45 minutes or so to do the work that the Gold students cover in one session and the Red students cover in 2-3 sessions.

Why would these students require so much more time? The research says that the average person can learn a new vocabulary word in 8-15 repetitions. Students who are learning disabled may

require 100 or more repetitions to learn the same word. This example is just one of many that could be given to explain why some of the *ELS* sequences have so much more practice time in them than others.

The consequence of not adding additional time for the more challenged students is similar to waiting until later grades to start an intervention. The material that is taught at each level of *ELS* is the same for all students, regardless of sequence. Level I is Level I. But if some students can do a lesson in one day's session, and another student needs more, then the achievement gap will grow over time, not narrow. The only way to narrow the gap is to add the necessary time for the slower student to stay on course. Rtl requires the school to evaluate whether a student is learning at the same level and same pace as peers in deciding when he or she should exit an intervention. A child who truly struggles to learn can stay on pace **if** he or she is given the extra time needed each day to master the material and to move it into long-term memory for fast and accurate recall.



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CEI encourages each of our schools and all potential schools to examine their practice in light of these research findings and in examination of the spirit of the Rtl law — to intervene as early as possible so that children get what they need at the earliest possible moment. Virtually every school needs to serve many more students than the ones they currently serve if they are to avoid the disaster of waiting too long to address the problem. And even the children in the current labs may require more than one session per day to catch up.

CEI is working on yet another *ELS* enhancement to make our daily and periodic progress reports more compliant with Rtl requirements. Sometime next year lab facilitators will be able to print and share with teacher teams and administrators new reports that feature more specific progress data.

We continue to improve our service/support program since its major reason for existing is to provide schools with the help they need to implement our programs for the best possible results. That is what "implementation with fidelity" means. (See article in Winter 2007-08 *SHARE*, "Blueprint for Achievement: Implementation Integrity's Role in Intervention Success.")

Because we care deeply about every child's success and because we recognize that schools never have the money they need to do what they recognize needs to be done, CEI created the subscription pricing option to make new labs and stations more affordable. We also discount the cost of additional rooms and stations to existing clients.

According to *Education Week* ("Quality Counts," 2009), the average annual cost to educate a public school student in 2006 was \$9,963. Therefore, the cost of an additional lab is offset by preventing just one grade-level retention. Preventing several retentions will pay the other costs of running your lab and for additional stations and labs. Call your Solutions Analyst for pricing, or call us at 888.511.4194, and we will immediately fax to you a price proposal. We are also available for consultation to help you think through your Rtl implementation.