

Data-Based Individualization and Rural Schools | Strategies for Successful Implementation

As of 2019, nearly 20% of all public school students were served in rural schools nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Although definitions of rurality vary by state, rural schools are often geographically remote and generally enroll fewer students than their suburban and urban counterparts.

All school settings—urban, suburban, and rural—present a mix of challenges and strengths. Rural schools, in particular, often face data-based individualization (DBI) implementation barriers, including difficulty filling teaching positions, limited access to trained interventionists, and a lack of resources and evidence-based interventions. At the same time, rural schools can have important advantages. Rural schools often have smaller, more tightly knit teams and more streamlined bureaucratic structures that lend themselves to efficient communication and decision making. In addition, class sizes in rural schools are often small, which can enable educators to glean deeper knowledge of student needs and deliver increasingly personalized instruction (Hott et al., 2021; Kearney et al., 2025; Weiss et al., 2023).

To better understand rural schools' needs regarding the implementation of DBI, and to develop strategies for working with educators in rural schools, the National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII) held listening sessions with educators and leaders from rural districts in summer and fall 2024. This document presents strategies shared by participants during these listening sessions as well as NCII's technical assistance (TA) provided to rural schools. While these strategies are designed to support DBI implementation in rural schools, they can also enhance DBI implementation in a variety of settings.

Data-Based Individualization

DBI is a research-based process for individualizing and intensifying interventions through the systematic use of assessment data, validated interventions, and research-based adaptation strategies.

Seek Out and Prioritize Time for Implementation

Finding time to provide intensive intervention and analyze data can be a challenge. Participants recommended maximizing staff time for DBI implementation by using the following strategies:

- Provide a common intervention/enrichment time for all students within a grade level.
- Stagger intervention blocks for grade levels or grade bands to ensure that interventionists have time to serve each grade level.
- Provide cross-grade-level interventions to students with similar instructional needs.
- Use a 4-day instructional week to allow for a focus on data analysis on the fifth day.
- Think flexibly when planning and scheduling intervention time (see [Strategies for Scheduling: How to Find Time to Intensify and Individualize Intervention](#)).



"And so when you look at [the master schedule] and you see the blues within each grade level, those are our intervention times. It's not the only time that we're providing intervention, but that's our very targeted intervention ... whether you're the interventionist or you're the general education teacher it's everybody's responsibility."

—Special education coordinator

Build in Dedicated Professional Learning Time

The effectiveness of DBI relies on educators who understand the DBI process and know how to use effective assessment and instructional practices. To address the challenge of finding professional learning time, participants shared the following strategies:

- Use virtual, asynchronous professional learning options (e.g., [NCII Online Learning Modules](#)).
- Leverage regional support staff, educator preparation programs (if available), and TA centers.
- Partner with nearby districts to provide joint professional learning.
- Build professional learning time into the master schedule (e.g., a 4-day instructional week with time reserved on Fridays for professional learning).



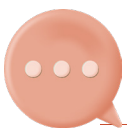
“And so how do we utilize that fifth day when teachers are not directly in front of students to leverage for professional development? ... Friday is a professional development day ... And we are driving down into those intervention data.”

—Educational leadership faculty

Use Available Resources to Support Intervention Acquisition and Delivery

The effective implementation of DBI requires validated intervention programs, which are often enhanced by high-quality instructional practices. In settings where resources are limited, we encourage the use of freely available materials and strategies. Participants recommended the following strategies for acquiring and delivering interventions:

- Use free resources when available.
 - [Literacy Sample Lessons to Support Intensifying Intervention](#)
 - [Mathematics Sample Lessons to Support Intensifying Intervention](#)
 - [Early Identification System \(EIS\) Intervention Hub](#)
- Adapt existing programs with evidence-based practices (e.g., increasing opportunities to respond and provide feedback, and enhancing explicitness).
 - [Assessment of Use of Opportunities to Respond](#)
 - [Self-Paced Features of Explicit Instruction Course](#)
- Seek funding from a variety of sources, including local funders and businesses.



“I’ve used modules from NCII and AIR, but also our local regional professional development centers. So, I get to use both of these centers for special education and instructional purposes. Free of charge, typically.”

—Special education cooperative director



“And so we have partnered with a local hospital who comes in and provides counseling services, and they are here all day. They go to our professional development days. They go to any staff meeting or anything that we have, so that they kind of become a part of the culture.”

—Special education director

References

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