



# The GROW RTI Framework:

INTEGRATING GROWTH MINDSET, SEL, AND STUDENT OWNERSHIP INTO INTERVENTION SYSTEMS

Elecia Lindenmier  
American College of Education

May 18, 2026

## Abstract



*Most Response to Intervention (RTI) systems today are heavy on academic data but light on the human side of learning. This article introduces the GROW RTI Framework (Ground, Reflect, Organize, Widen), a model developed to intentionally weave growth mindset, social-emotional learning (SEL), and student ownership into intervention blocks. By looking at modern research on bias, mental health, and motivation, this framework moves past the idea that we have to fix every “deficiency” before a student can grow. Instead, it focuses on building a “humanistic environment” where students feel in charge of their own progress (Bakar et al., 2025; Dweck, 2006).*

## Introduction

In my own classroom, I’ve seen how hard it is for students to leave their problems at the door. Whether it is a high schooler on a Monday who only had cheesesticks available to eat in the fridge all weekend or a student struggling with the stigma of a

negative label like, “the burnout” or “loner”, these outside demands are real and cause negative impacts on learning. We live in what researchers call a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) world (Lamlong et al., 2026). In this environment, a growth mindset is a survival skill. It is the belief that our talents are not set in stone but can grow and strengthen through effort and attempting new strategies (Turaga, 2025; Dweck, 2006). My goal with the GROW framework is to move RTI from something we do “to” students to something we build “with” them.

## Gaps in Research and Practice

While I still find value in Maslow’s Hierarchy and keep a visual of it in my classroom, current research warns us that using it as a strict “step-ladder” can be a roadblock to forward thinking (Remedios, 2025). We often assume a student is unable to learn if they are hungry or stressed, but many people pursue challenging goals even in “emergency conditions” (Remedios, 2025). I have witnessed this in my own classroom where students struggling from socioeconomic stressors have a drive unlike others to overcome their circumstances. I see a fire in them that is lacking in students from a more stable and secure homelife. The question is: How do educators use this fire to motivate students and guide them to success?

Current RTI practices often have three major gaps:

1. **The Integration Gap:** Many districts have RTI, SEL, and Growth Mindset, but they are often viewed as separate, disconnected concepts.
2. **The Bias Gap:** A great focus is set on fixing student behavior, but ignorance of how the system labels students as “underachiever” creates a bias. This leads to expectations for students to act a certain way and unintentionally results in harsher treatment (Romano, 2025).
3. **The Ownership Gap:** Student voice is “remarkably absent” in most assessment data (Li, 2026). Students are usually told their scores rather than being asked to reflect on them.

### **The GROW RTI Framework**

The GROW RTI framework is a four-stage process designed to help us look past the label and get to the root of student needs.

# The GROW RTI Framework

## **Ground:**

Start by building a foundation where students believe they can improve. This is not just about math or English Language Arts; it's a **Growth Mindset toward Mental Health (GMMH)**. We teach them that even their anxiety and stress are manageable (Buddington, 2025).

## **Reflect:**

Use tools to help students see themselves clearly. This includes the Johari-Window, where students identify what they know about themselves and what they may be hiding (Li, 2026).

## **Organize:**

Organize the adults and the systems. Incorporate slow and rational thinking to make sure adults are not just reacting to a student's disruption but looking for the cause, like hunger or fatigue (Romano, 2025).

## **Widen:**

Widen the support to families. Share "data stories" that focus on the student's effort and the strategies they are using, not just a letter grade.

## Implementation and Step-by-Step Process

### **Step 1: Grounding Through Teacher Learning**

Before we can help students, we have to check our own mindsets. Demonstrate growth mindset language in the classroom that celebrates "the power of yet" and reframes mistakes as "valuable learning opportunities" (Lamlong et al., 2026; Turaga, 2025).

### **Step 2: Reflective Assessment Tools:**

Use a reflection activity to promote self-realization where students write five statements about themselves. Because Children often see themselves more negatively than their peers do, we have classmates write "small hopes" or notes about strengths to help balance their self-view (Li, 2026).

### **Step 3: Neutralizing Routines for Bias**

To handle those high-stress moments when a student is disrupting class and to encourage student ownership, use the **STOP technique** (Romano, 2025):

- Stop and don't react immediately.
- Take a breath to regulate your own emotions.
- Observe your "knee-jerk" reaction (Are you just reacting to their "label"?).
- Proceed positively with what the student actually needs.

### **Step 4: Activities to Improve Mental Health (AMH)**

Integrate SEL through low-stakes wellness activities in the RTI schedule, such as affirmation walks or gratitude trees (Buddington, 2025). These behavioral markers are often better signs of progress rather than just a survey score.

## Limitations

Providing resources and snacks is not always enough to fix deep systemic issues. Teachers face time restrictions and multiple responsibilities (Lamlong et al., 2026). Also, some students may not be honest on self-reflections because they are hesitant to share personal struggles (Buddington, 2025).

## Conclusion

The GROW RTI Framework is my way of humanizing the intervention process. By combining the best parts of successful research-based theories with new research on mindfulness and mental health, I believe we can move from "fixing" students to helping them flourish. It is about realizing that while the "cheesesticks in the fridge" are a real barrier, we can still give students the competence and mindset to rise above challenges (Remedios, 2025).

## References

- Abu Bakar, A. H., Sukimi, M. F., & Abdul Mutalib, M. H. (2025). Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory in environmental sociology: systematic literature review on the U\use of a theory. *E-BANGI Journal*, 22(1), 453–464. <https://doi.org/10.17576/ebangi.2025.2201.36>
- Buddington, L. (2025). Growth mindset, resilience, college student retention and engagement in preventative mental health activities: A focus on vulnerable groups. *Journal of American College Health*, 73(10), 3985–3993. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2025.2464769>
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Lamlong, S., Sanrattana, W., & Phrasrivajiravati. (2026). Developing teachers to foster a growth mindset for students. *International Education Studies*, 19(1), 37–49.
- Li, K. Y. (2026). To assess students' self-awareness in moral education in China: classroom assessment tool design and use. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 35(2), 479–496. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10567879231202479>
- Remedios, R. (2025). Why are you still talking about Maslow? Spotting the academic charlatans in the Psychology of Education. *Psychology of Education Review*, 49(1), 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsper.2025.49.1.5>
- Romano, L. E. (2025). Moving the field forward in addressing educator biases related to intersectional oppressions through mindfulness training. *Behavioral Disorders*, 50(4), 226–239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01987429251335309>

Turaga, R. (2025). How to develop a growth mindset. *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*,  
19(4), 18–24. <https://doi.org/10.71329/IUPJSS/2025.19.4.18-24>