

## SECTION 3: MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORTS FOR LITERACY



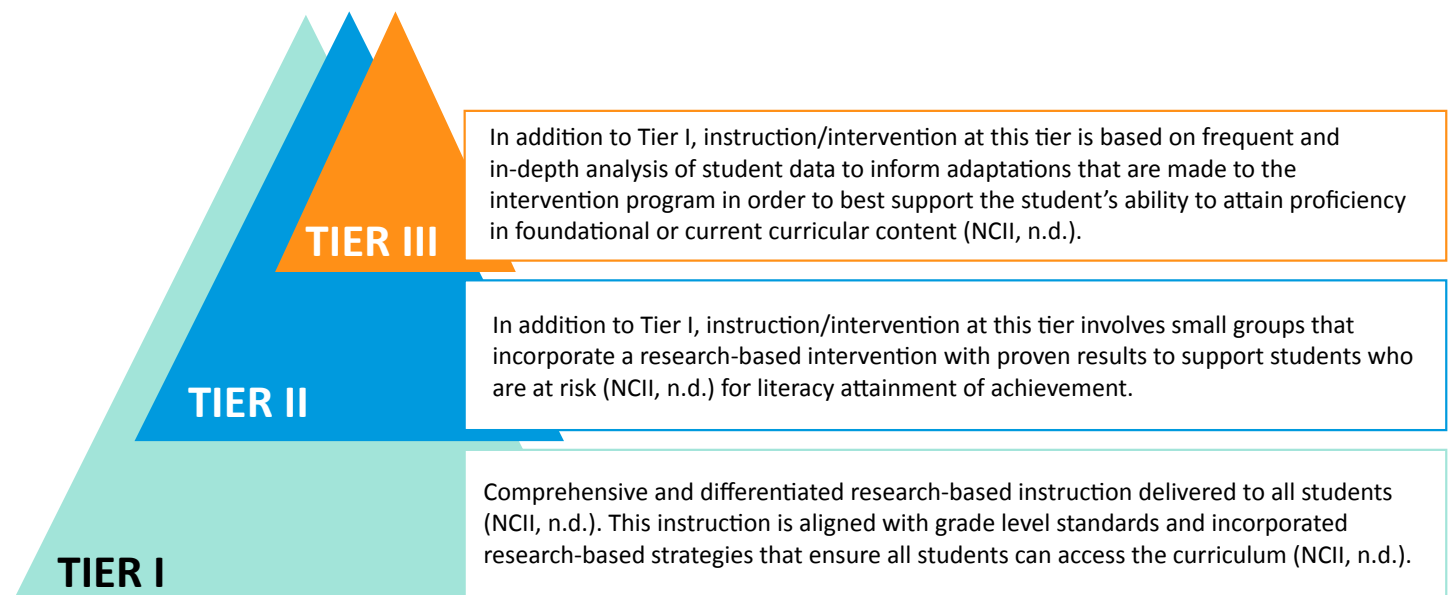
### WHAT IS A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT?

A multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) is a preventative, data-driven continuum of evidence-based practices that is designed to meet the academic, behavioral and social-emotional needs of all students. MTSS is best practice for ensuring that all students have equitable opportunities to access the curriculum and perform proficiently on grade-level standards while fostering productive partnerships between schools, families and the broader community. Response to Intervention (RtI) is the MTSS for academics. This tiered continuum of instruction and intervention requires high-quality instruction, evidence-based practices and research-based curricula and materials. This continuum also includes enrichment opportunities across all grade levels.

Within an MTSS framework, literacy instruction at all tiers requires a research-based curriculum and differentiated instruction across all domains of literacy.

- *Tier I*, comprehensive research-based instruction is delivered to all students aligned with grade-level standards. Regardless of additional supports needed, all students require Tier I instruction.
- *Tier II* instruction can be implemented in addition to the Tier I core instruction to any student not meeting benchmarks. Tier II includes strategic support through a research-based intervention that supplements core instruction and may cover all domains of literacy.
- *Tier III* is the most intensive level of intervention and is tailored to individualized student needs. Interventions at Tier III should be focused on the specific domain of literacy in which the student is not meeting with success.

The difference between tiers is based on data-driven factors including, student performance results. The data should inform the selection or adoption of a tool, strategy or program to address student outcomes. The decision of what to use at each tier is not a “one size fits all” approach, the MTSS framework encourages the use of a data-driven instruction cycle. The MTSS framework aligns to Literacy Guiding Principle 3.



## TIERED INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION

Decision-making regarding instruction and intervention tiers is made based on data obtained about students' strengths and needs. These data are collected through universal screening, formative assessments, curriculum-based assessments and regular progress monitoring of literacy. Teams are encouraged to collect multiple data points regarding a student's ability over time. School-based personnel and families work together to identify and define student literacy needs, generate solutions through strategic data-based academic planning and evaluate individual students' RtI.

While a robust MTSS process that provides universal support and tiered intervention and support as a best practice, it cannot supplant evaluation requirements and timelines in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) issued a [memorandum](#) in 2011 clarifying that interventions cannot be used to delay or deny an evaluation under IDEA.

## LITERACY ASSESSMENTS AND INSTRUCTION WITHIN MTSS

**GOAL 1:** *To plan and deliver instruction that is based on evidence, on students' needs and the CCSS*

**GOAL 2:** *Improve literacy achievement through analysis of a variety of assessment data*

An MTSS framework requires high-quality instruction and a valid and reliable system of assessments and progress monitoring. Both instruction and assessment work in tandem to guide instructional practices. A high-quality literacy core curriculum is the essential starting point for an effective MTSS in alignment with [Literacy Guiding principle 2 is ASSESSMENT](#): High-quality literacy instruction must be accompanied by a comprehensive, standards-aligned formative and summative assessment system that is accessible to all learners, including students with disabilities and English learners. With Tier 1 being focused on building a strong literacy foundation, students need instruction and programming supported by evidence and aligned with the CCSS. All core curriculum materials should be research-based for the target population of learners, including subgroups. With this in place, a system of assessments enables continuous improvement and targeted support. The data-driven instruction cycle that MTSS requires assessment, analysis and action. Assessments should include all domains of literacy and should be aligned with the core curriculum. Analysis of these assessment data will indicate needs for action, including instructional changes, focus on the achievement of certain subgroups, and can serve as indicators of individual students needing additional support through intervention. For more information about Assessment, see the [Assessment and Progress Monitoring](#) section of the CLP.

### Assessments which support MTSS

While universal screeners are not the sole source for identifying student needs, MTSS cannot function as intended without them (Gersten, Dimino, & Haymond, 2011). No single assessment should be the access point for students to enter intervention; however, universal screeners allow us to quickly check the progress of all students and compare students' progress. Students in pre-K through third grade should be administered a universal screening one to three times yearly, depending on the LEA policy. These assessments must demonstrate reliability and validity for predicting general outcomes for literacy. Data from universal screeners is analyzed to predict students at risk for poor learning outcomes in literacy. Trends across universal screeners and additional data points also serve as indicators for needed adjustments to instructional practices and gaps in the curriculum. All students are also progress-monitored regularly. One of the goals in a tiered intervention system is for students to get the support they require as soon as possible to access the core curriculum at Tier I. Because there are several months between universal screening, curriculum-based assessments and systematic progress monitoring is also required for early identification. Teachers must consistently monitor students' progress at scheduled intervals and be able to respond appropriately when students are not achieving grade-level proficiency. Students receiving support through interventions are progress-monitored more frequently, which in most instances is weekly.

**A High-Quality MTSS Assessment System Includes The Following:**

Screening Tools	Evidence indicates that the <a href="#">screening tools</a> are reliable, correlations between the instruments and valued outcomes are strong, predictions of risk status are accurate and staff is able to articulate the supporting evidence.
Universal Screening	All of the following conditions are met: (1) screening is conducted for all students (i.e., is universal); (2) procedures are in place to ensure implementation accuracy (i.e., all students are tested, scores are accurate, cut points/decisions are accurate); and (3) a process to screen all students occurs more than once per year (e.g., fall, winter, spring).
Data Points to Assess Risk	Screening data are used in concert with at least two other data sources (e.g., classroom performance, performance on state assessments, diagnostic assessment data, short-term progress monitoring, common assessments) to verify decisions about whether a student is or is not at risk.
Progress Monitoring Tools	Selected progress-monitoring tools meet all the following criteria: (1) have sufficient number of alternate forms of equal and controlled difficulty to allow for progress monitoring at recommended intervals based on intervention level; (2) specify minimum acceptable growth; (3) provide benchmarks for minimum acceptable end-of-year performance; and (4) reliability and validity information for the performance-level score is available and staff is able to articulate the supporting evidence.
Progress Monitoring Process	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) progress monitoring occurs at least monthly for students receiving secondary-level intervention and at least weekly for students receiving intensive intervention; and (2) procedures are in place to ensure implementation accuracy (i.e., appropriate students are tested, scores are accurate, decision-making rules are applied consistently).
Decision-making process	The mechanism for making decisions about the participation of students in the instruction/intervention levels meets all of the following criteria: The process (1) is data-driven and based on validated methods; (2) involves a broad base of stakeholders; and (3) is operationalized with clear, established decision rules (e.g., movement between levels or tiers, determination of appropriate instruction or interventions).
Data System	A data system is in place that meets all the following conditions: (1) the system allows users to document and access individual student-level data (including screening and progress-monitoring data) and instructional decisions; (2) data are entered in a timely manner; (3) data can be represented graphically; and (4) there is a process for setting/evaluating goals.

(Center on Response to Intervention, 2014)

## INTERVENTION

### **GOAL 1:** *Improve quality and delivery of instruction across tiers*

Intervention is instruction that supplements and intensifies classroom instruction. Practice opportunities or additional assignments are not considered interventions. Interventions must be evidence- or researched-based and should be normed for the target population. While Tier I and II interventions may address a variety of literacy domains, Tier III interventions are more intensive and are adapted to address the individual needs of students. Increased intensity of interventions can be “increased duration or frequency, change in interventionist, decreased group size, change in instructional delivery and change in type of intervention all based on student data” (AIR, 2014). All tiers of intervention require that students have full access to the curriculum. Interventions should address the general education curriculum in an appropriate manner for students.

To identify students for interventions, screening data are used with other data sources including but not limited to performance on other assessments and classroom work samples. Data also help in identifying the interventions that are appropriate for individual students. The intervention must target the specific areas of literacy the student has demonstrated a need in and not be generally assigned.

Resources supported by the US Department of Education for identifying appropriate literacy interventions:

- [National Center for Intensive Intervention](#)
- [What Works Clearinghouse](#)

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

### **GOAL 1:** *Establish organizational structures necessary to operationalize a unified MTSS system*

### **GOAL 2:** *Maximize the use of personnel, parents and external stakeholders to support literacy instruction*

For the MTSS framework to be implemented with fidelity while meeting the needs of all students, schools must consider the following necessary components:

- School leadership proactively supports the MTSS framework and makes decisions that support it (e.g., allocating resources for staffing, professional development, scheduling)
- School-based professional development is structured for reflection and continuous improvement utilizing information from ongoing student and schoolwide data
- School schedules are supportive of multiple levels of intervention with opportunities for students needing intervention to receive them without missing core instruction
- Instruction, assessment and intervention are culturally and linguistically relevant
- Parents/guardians are engaged in the intervention process from the onset and there are systems in place for communicating with parents/guardians at reliable and regular intervals on their student’s progress with Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions and ways they can support outside of school as possible
- The MTSS team is representative of all key stakeholders and there is a clearly defined process to guide decision making. This team includes but is not limited to the general education teacher, special education teacher, instructional coach, interventionist, counselor, parents, related service providers, student support coordinator, paraprofessionals, school-based mentor, school volunteers, community mentor, community service providers, LEA specialists and student
- Interventions are research based and the intensity and duration of interventions are continually assessed and monitored
- Staffing for interventions are with well-trained instructors who work closely with classroom teachers

MTSS begins with a robust, rigorous curriculum and well-trained teachers utilizing effective assessment, instruction and differentiation practices with fidelity. It is important that all stakeholders understand that the focus of the MTSS framework is not to limit access to the core curriculum but to enable all students to succeed academically through access to the general education curriculum while addressing any gaps in foundational knowledge and skills, rather than at the exclusion of access to the core curriculum. In order for this to occur, schools must consider not only the effectiveness of their Tier I instruction, but also the systems, staffing, scheduling and professional development needs for effective intervention systems and practices.