



Topical Journal



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this edition on the **Utah Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (UMTSS)**.

This journal will define and discuss an educational model being used here in Utah to meet the needs of all students called the Utah Multi-Tiered System of Supports (UMTSS). It is important to note that Utah previously had a similar model called Response to Intervention (RTI). Although Utah now officially calls this process the Utah Multi-Tiered System of Supports, some districts and individuals may still be referring to this model as RTI. For the purposes of this journal however we will be referring to it exclusively as MTSS, UMTSS or **Utah Multi-Tiered System of Supports**.

We encourage families, students, schools, parent/teacher organizations and other stakeholder groups to become better informed about the issues around the Utah Multi-Tiered System of Supports. We believe that informed conversations at schools will improve outcomes for students as we work together.

Electronic copies of this journal, fact sheets, and materials on related topics are available on or through the Utah Parent Center's website at www.utahparentcenter.org.

This topical journal is part of a series published by the Utah Parent Center (UPC). It is our hope that this information will be a valuable resource for both parents and professionals. Thank you to the individuals who have authored articles or given permission to include previously published work.

**Read on to learn all about
UMTSS including
what it is, how it is used, and
how it may benefit your child!**

230 West 200 South
Suite 1101
Salt Lake City, UT 84101
801.272.1051
1.800.468.1160
info@utahparentcenter.org
www.utahparentcenter.org

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MTSS –

A Parent Guide to Multi-Tiered System of Supports

What is UMTSS?

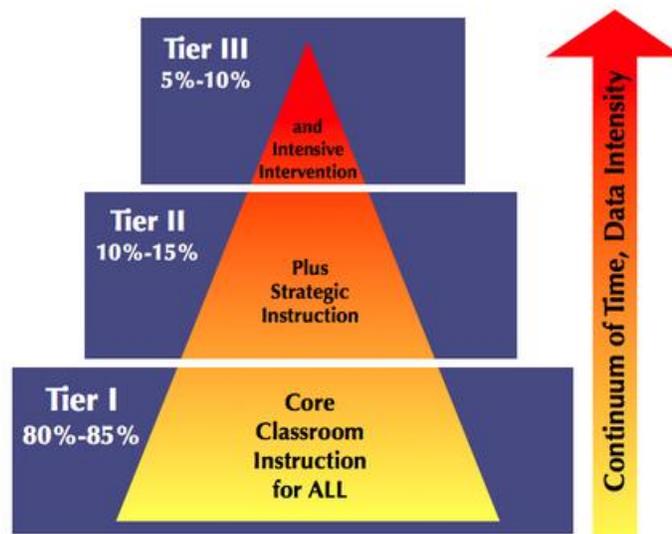
UMTSS is the Utah Multi-Tiered System of Supports – Utah’s multi-step process of providing instruction and support to promote the academic and behavioral success of all children. Individual children’s progress is monitored and results are used to make decisions about further instruction and intervention.

UMTSS is most commonly used in addressing reading, math and behavior, but it can also be used in other areas including bullying. The UMTSS process is flexible and designed by school districts to meet the needs of their students.

What is the UMTSS Model?

The UMTSS model typically has three tiers. Each tier provides differing levels of support based on the needs of each student. The tiers include things like academics or behavior and can even include things like bullying prevention.

Below is a visual which represents this model.



Academics

- In Tier I, all students receive high quality curriculum and instruction in the general education classroom. The teacher assists all students.

- In Tier II, the school provides supplemental instructional support, usually in small groups, to students who need support in addition to what they are receiving from the general curriculum.
- In Tier III, intense instructional support is provided to students with the greatest needs, with frequent progress monitoring.

Behavior

- In Tier I, all students are explicitly taught positive behavioral expectations. All teachers use a consistent approach to discipline.
- In Tier II, the school provides supplemental targeted behavioral skills interventions usually in small groups.
- In Tier III, student centered planning is used to develop customized interventions with frequent progress monitoring.

What are the key components to any UMTSS process?

A key component to the UMTSS process is that all children receive high quality curriculum and instruction in the general education classroom (Tier I).

Another component of the UMTSS is that the school conducts universal screenings.

Universal screenings review the progress of all students. These screenings are typically given three times per year. Universal screenings help schools identify students who may need more support or other types of instruction.

As a result of universal screening, students may be identified as needing supplemental instruction (a Tier II level of support) in addition to the high quality instruction they are receiving in Tier I. Research based interventions are used to support students in the area of need. **Research based interventions are teaching strategies or methods that have been proven to be effective in helping children become more successful with academics or behavior.** There are many kinds of interventions and instruction that can happen in the classroom, outside the classroom or in small groups.

Another key component to the MTSS process is progress monitoring. **Progress monitoring is a way for teachers to take a snapshot of how children are doing on a specific skill.** It shows how well the intervention is working. It includes observations, tests, and other formal and informal assessments. Progress monitoring helps determine whether an intervention is successful or needs to be adjusted.

When the child meets the goals developed by the school, the intervention is no longer needed and the child continues to receive support in the general education classroom. When progress monitoring shows that a child is not responding to the intervention another approach or intervention may be tried. However, when a higher level of support is needed, children are given individualized instruction which further focuses on supporting the skills they need to be successful learners (Tier III).

The school should develop formal guidelines that detail how long a child will receive a particular intervention and how they will determine whether the intervention is helping the child.

What if I think my child needs special education services?

If at any time parents believe their child has a disability/exceptionality and needs special education services, they have a right to request an evaluation for these services. In addition to the information gathered from assessments and interventions during the UMTSS process, other forms of evaluation must occur to determine if a child is eligible to receive special education services. Parents must give prior written consent before this evaluation is conducted.

Request a formal evaluation for special education services if you suspect your child has a disability/exceptionality and needs these services.

For more information about special education services, your rights in the process, and how UMTSS may be used to inform the process please contact the Utah Parent Center at 801.272.1051 or Toll-Free at 1.800.468.1160.

What questions can parents ask to learn more about how UMTSS works in their child's school?

- What curriculum is being taught in my child's classroom?
- What are the targeted interventions that my child's school is using if he/she is struggling in the classroom?
- What are the formal guidelines my child's school is using for progress monitoring?
- How will I be informed of the progress my child is making?
- What happens if an intervention is not working?

Parents play a critical role in supporting what their children are learning in school. Research shows that the more parents are involved in student learning, the higher the student achievement.

There are many ways parents can support what their child is doing in school. Here are a few:

- ✓ *Communicate with your child's teacher*
- ✓ *Monitor and assist with homework assignments*
- ✓ *Ask for regular monitoring reports*
- ✓ *Share your child's successes*
- ✓ *Learn more about the curricula and interventions being used in your child's school*
- ✓ *Attend parent/teacher conferences and other school meetings about your child*
- ✓ *Make reading an everyday habit at home*



UMTSS-A Parent's Perspective

By Michelle Murphey

Mother of two and Parent Consultant at the Utah Parent Center

As a mother of 2 boys, ages 12 and 4, I know firsthand the importance of a quality education for children. Like most parents, I want my children to view school as a positive place where they can learn and feel successful. I know that school is more than just a place to go. It is an environment for learning in which we help to mold children to become successful adults and lead us towards our future. Sadly, however, not everyone views school in this same way. For children who struggle academically or behaviorally, school can be a place of challenge and in some cases even a place for failure. Fortunately, with new innovations such as the implementation of the Utah Multi-Tiered System of Supports (UMTSS) we are taking another step toward ensuring that we truly don't leave any child behind when it comes to education. Join me as I tell you my story about how UMTSS has helped me feel hopeful moving forward in education with my own child and others.

My story started out over 12 years ago when my oldest son was born. Having a child is one of the most amazing things you can do, but it is also one of the scariest. As a young mother I knew right away that something was different with my child, but I did not know why. Luckily, within months, I was able to connect with early intervention services in my local area. They did an assessment and found that my child was indeed developing differently and that he needed



immediate services to address some developmental delays. Although I was concerned at what was causing the delays, I was also happy that he was getting the help he needed. Over the next 3 years he received many services including speech, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and social skills assistance. Around this same time I also had some private testing done which identified that he was very gifted, but likely also had Asperger syndrome as well as an anxiety disorder.

By preschool my son had made vast improvements, but still needed some help, especially in the social emotional area.

Academically he was doing really well, though, and was actually ahead of grade level in many academic areas. Behaviorally, however, he struggled, and we wondered if he would need special education support moving into school. At this time he was re-evaluated for special education services. They looked at both his

behavioral and academic progress. I remember the eligibility meeting well, as it was a very bitter sweet moment. The academic data showed that he was above grade level in almost all of his academic areas. The intervention he had gotten early on had helped, and he no longer needed special education support in these areas.

With behavior however, it was a little different. The tests showed some issues and delays with social emotional skills, but they were not bad enough at the time to qualify him for services. I understood that the team was following procedures and laws, but I could not help feeling bitter and a little angry. It seemed they were telling me "There is a problem, but it is not yet bad enough for us to help." It felt very much, from my perspective, like we might just be waiting for him to fail. I wanted his problems to be addressed early, and, like most parents, I was

uncomfortable with the thought that he might not have the help he needed. I have to say that the team was very kind and listened to my concerns. They promised to carefully monitor him, and they also told me about Section 504 accommodations, should they be needed. I signed the papers but still had a bad feeling that we might be setting him up to fail.



Around this same time I also started a new job as a Parent Consultant at the Utah Parent Center. In this job I started talking to other parents who had children with special needs. I was surprised to meet many parents who, just like me, had a child that did not qualify for special education but also who were not doing great in regular education. It seemed there were kids falling through the cracks-- kids who were not having their needs met. I also saw and experienced a big divide in schools between regular education and special education. Special education was in charge of fixing all the kids that had issues. If they did not qualify for special education, then no one really knew what to do. I saw the heartache that parents just like me experienced when their child was the one falling through the cracks. It seemed like an impossible problem. What would or even could change to fix this fragmented system?

Well, the good news was that change was coming. In 2004 IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) was reauthorized by Congress, and this reauthorization included something different. It introduced schools to a concept that had been around for a while but was not always utilized called Response to Intervention or RTI. RTI is the concept that we should help children at the lowest level possible giving them various levels of support based on need. It involved three different levels or tiers of support and involved both general education and special education teachers. The concept of RTI is truly revolutionary, because it

helps schools understand that when a child is struggling it is the job of both regular education and special education to help. I saw a difference personally as I approached my child's teachers about interventions and accommodations. They seemed more understanding and willing to help and even came up with some of the ideas!

I've been to multiple trainings on RTI, and I truly believe it is a wonderful concept, but it's not without its problems. One problem is that most districts were using RTI mostly for academics. There are many children, however, just like mine who would benefit from both academic and behavioral tiers of support. Some schools in Utah were able to successfully implement RTI, while other districts needed additional support. Utah did not, however, really have the capacity to provide that support, and so some schools were not able to successfully implement RTI. Still, I felt hopeful that we were moving in the right direction for kids like mine.

Fast forward to the present day, and we have something even better coming down the pipeline. Utah was awarded a grant to use a new model called Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS). With this grant comes the chance for 9 districts throughout the state to receive coaching, training and even some funding to help implement an MTSS model. This is very exciting to me as a parent, as it addresses two of the big issues I saw as a parent with RTI. First, it includes both academic and behavioral supports! Having these rolled into one model will help streamline things, and just makes more sense. Kids like mine will really benefit from having access to behavioral supports in the general education setting. The second benefit is that schools and districts will be getting support and training to make this happen. Change is always hard, but with this support, we have a much better chance of getting MTSS to become a statewide model.



MTSS works by, first, providing universal screenings for all children. These screenings look for signs of struggle. Students identified as needing support in either academics or with behavior will then be given targeted interventions based

on individual needs, and their response to previous interventions. Data is very important in this process, as it will help schools make data based decisions rather than just guessing what a student needs. Any student who struggles regardless of his or her label or disability will be able to get help. This means that ALL children can benefit from UMTSS. General education and special education can work together to put in place research based interventions. Schools will continually be looking at student data to identify new students that need help as well as to evaluate the effect of current interventions.

Some parents have asked questions about UMTSS like, "How will this affect Special Education"? The good news is that special education will still be there for the kids who need it. Parents and educators will still be able to request an evaluation for special education, if needed, at any time during the UMTSS process. Under UMTSS it may even be possible for a child to be receiving IEP services and also be getting some tiered supports in the general education setting. The bottom line is that UMTSS will benefit ALL children. I believe that this process will also greatly improve communication between all educators and will create a feeling that it is everyone's job to help educate a child.

Looking forward, I feel hopeful as a parent. Of course I know it won't be perfect, but I am excited to see the progress. I hope fewer parents have to feel that their children are falling through the cracks as I once did. My hope is that UMTSS will be a great new start for education in Utah and will be a helpful model for years to come. The journey is just beginning but I look forward to it with my own children and for the children of the families that I work with.



Asperger Strengths- Strategies to Make Classroom Life Better for Everyone

By Melisa Genaux, M.Ed.



In almost all arenas of human interaction, our perspectives change as our knowledge base expands. As the general public becomes more educated about Asperger Syndrome (AS), what were once thought of as “challenges” related to the diagnosis are now commonly considered strengths.

One feature routinely associated with Asperger Syndrome (AS) is an intense focus on a topic of interest, sometimes to the exclusion of most or all other interests. While this can appear to tilt toward the obsessive in nature, the net effect is that a person with this level of ardent attention can spend long periods of time researching and analyzing information related to a specific endeavor. This may come in handy in, say, the fields of medicine, engineering, astronomy, physics, information technology, math, history, psychology, writing, or really, any other vocation. The ability to concentrate without being diverted by other less compelling pursuits is the ability to devote oneself to pure and undiluted study. When supported with training, discipline, and routine, this is a skill to be sought after in our distraction saturated world.

Educators wield vast power to parley this ability and other strengths of students with Asperger Syndrome into tools for relationships, college, jobs, and numerous other life activities. We can begin with the intention of creating a school environment for kids with AS that is (1) less anxiety ridden, and thus less aversive, and (2) more structured for channeling interests and energies toward productive ends.

The following strategies will help to create this type of classroom environment. They are simple to implement, yet often yield quick and significant results.

Avert arguments with delayed discussion (“discuss later” option)

This strategy helps to get kids “un-stuck,” or to stop perseverating on an issue after a disagreement.

The student or the entire class is provided with a process for *scheduling* a discussion with the teacher when there is a disagreement, and the conversation is postponed. The teacher sets aside a brief fixed period (e.g., the last ten minutes of the school day, or the ten minutes immediately following the end of the school day) so that students may schedule appointments for problem solving. This assures kids that they will be heard and, as a result, often decreases anxiety. The discussion periods are limited to a few minutes, and the discussion is structured with scripted questions. The process is taught ahead of time and involves the following three steps for students:

1. Write name and appointment time on appointment card and place it in a designated container; cross out the time slot on a posted discussion schedule to indicate that the slot is filled.
2. Meet with the teacher at the allocated time.
3. Calmly discuss the issue and think of alternative solutions if the problem arises again.

Teach a skill for handling changes in routine (and to prepare students for changes ahead of time, whenever possible)

Rehearsing this skill for a few minutes each day when the student is calm will help to establish the steps to follow when unexpected changes occur.

Provide written or picture schedules for the school day and for specific activities

Develop an individual student schedule to be kept at the student’s desk or in a folder. Teach the student to check it at regular intervals and to cross off or remove completed activities. Revise the schedule ahead of time for any anticipated changes in routine.

**Younger kids
(include pictures or icons on chart)**

Older kids

1. Stop
2. Take a deep breath
3. Count to 5 to self
4. Look around (what are others doing?)
5. Say “OK”
6. Follow the direction

1. Stop 
2. Take a deep breath 
3. Count to 5 
4. Say “OK” 
5. Follow the direction 

Rethink the requirements for written work; re-evaluate what is needed for a student to demonstrate mastery of a concept

This study will change your mind about handwriting forever!
Important neurological research related to motor function in students with ASD
<http://brain.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/awp088>

- **Decrease requirements for written work production**
- **Establish a flexible approach to the amount of homework required (are there *alternative* methods of practice?)**
- **Allow keyboarding for completing assignments whenever possible**

Conduct a brief sensory inventory with parent and student

Ask parents and students if there are any identified sensory issues that cause anxiety or are an impediment to school function.

Sample questions:

- Is the student sensitive to noise (hallways, lunchroom, class choral responding, overhead projector fan, etc.)?
- Is the student sensitive to bright lights or fluorescent lights?
- Is the student adversely affected by strong smells (glue, paint, cleaning supplies, etc.)?

Include other questions as discussion warrants.

Establish time and place rules for topics of interest

This helps kids to self-regulate discussion of preferred topics, so that they take place at appropriate times and are channeled into productive work. For example, a student may discuss the topic during lunch, after school, with designated school or community mentors, at school club meetings, while working on specific projects, etc. The student may not discuss the topic during teacher instruction or independent seatwork time. This also helps to decrease the rate of classroom disruption and subsequent negative consequences.

Teach *exceptions* to the rules as *part* of the rules

Include common exceptions within the framework of classroom rules to minimize confusion about classroom procedures and to decrease 'rules-policing' behaviors.

Class Rules (and sample exceptions)

1. **Follow teacher directions**
2. **Stay in your seat**
 - **Exception(s):** *Students may leave seat to get a drink or sharpen pencil without asking, during independent seatwork periods*
3. **Raise your hand to talk**
 - **Exception(s):** *Students may answer without raising hands when teacher gives a signal for the whole class to respond*
4. **Keep hands, feet, and objects to self**
5. **Do your work; stay focused on task or teacher**



Teach social skills with an approved curriculum

Provide social skills training as a means to replace inappropriate behavior and to promote pro-social behaviors in the areas of classroom skills, friendship-building skills, coping skills, conversations skills, job skills, etc.

Recommended social skills curricula with author names:

- *Skillstreaming* – 3 age levels (Arnold Goldstein)
- *Superheroes Social Skills: A Multimedia Program* (Jenson, Bowen, Clark, Block, Gabrielson, Hood, Springer, Radley)
- *Navigating the Social World* (Jeanette McAfee)
- *Social Skills Training; Social Skills Picture Book* (elementary and secondary levels); *Preparing for Life* (Jed Baker)
- *Social Stories* (Carol Gray)

Author: *Melisa Genaux*, staff trainer and consultant, and the author of *Asperger Strength: How to Best Help Kids with Asperger Syndrome to Thrive*
www.aspergerstrength.com



Videos about MTSS/RTI

*Want to learn more about MTSS?
Try watching one of these short and informative videos!*



Click here to view the videos:

http://rtinetwork.org/professional/videos/podcasts?utm_source=newsletter_april_17_2014&utm_medium=email&utm_content=title&utm_campaign=rtiactionupdate



The ABC's of RTI in Middle School

This article uses the term RTI or Response to Intervention in place of the term MTSS. Please remember that we call this process UMTSS in Utah and the principles discussed also apply to UMTSS. Enjoy the article!

What is RTI?

RTI is a framework that schools may choose to use for both academics and behavior. It is not a specific, class, test, or instructional program. An increasing number of middle, high, and elementary schools are now using this framework for reading, math, and other subject areas. These schools are finding that it is helping students succeed because it provides a structure to help schools organize intervention supports and instruction to meet all students' needs. When a school implements RTI, it is for everyone in the school. The purpose of RTI is to make sure that every student in the school receives instruction that leads to success. School staff members make sure that resources are available to provide students with immediate instructional support when they need it.

In an RTI framework, assessment is closely linked to instruction. Teachers and staff use results from brief, valid assessments to help them choose the best materials and instruction for each student. Teachers also use assessments to find out how students are doing and to check on their progress throughout the year. They want to know whether a student is doing well, falling behind, or at risk for falling behind. To help struggling students or those who have been identified as being at risk for academic difficulty, teachers will use the frequently collected data to determine the most appropriate instruction for them that will provide the level of support needed to help them achieve.

When students receive this extra support, school staff check their progress frequently to make sure they are improving. Teachers will change the instruction in some way to facilitate future progress for students who are not succeeding. For example, there may be a change in instructional intensity, with a student receiving longer periods of support or more frequent support.

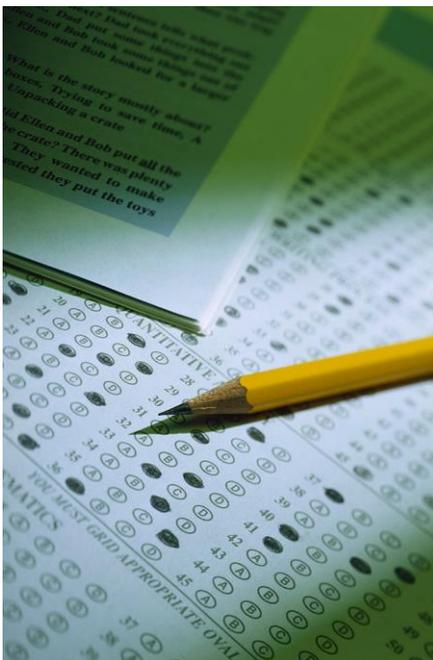
Most middle schools that use an MTSS framework focus on students who need help with reading and/or math. Some schools are branching out, and many now focus on other academic areas such as language arts and writing. Because reading is the most common subject area where MTSS is implemented, most examples in this document involve reading.

The application of the MTSS framework for the prevention of behavior issues is known as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, or PBIS. You may hear about this program in your child's school. Like MTSS, PBIS uses interventions, ongoing assessment, and data-based decision making to promote positive behavior at school and provide support to students who have persistent needs. When a school has implemented PBIS effectively, most students behave appropriately, but some will need help. By gathering information from results of ongoing assessment, school staff members can determine just how much support a student needs to be able to demonstrate appropriate behavior. For more information about PBIS, visit

Essential Component # 1

Screening: Finding Out How Students Are Doing

To find out whether a student is at risk for academic difficulty, schools conduct a “universal” or “school-wide” screening of all students. Typically, a screening assessment is brief and given to all students at the beginning of the school year. Schools often screen students again in the middle of the school year and again at the end. Some students who seem to be doing well at the first of the year may struggle later. Thus, screening periodically throughout the year can help school staff remain aware of, and responsive to, student needs.



It is not unusual for schools to find that many students need some sort of extra help. If staff is unsure if a student really needs extra help, they might administer a few more assessments just to make sure. By identifying students who need extra help early in the year, staff can begin providing supports in a timely fashion.

Students who need extra help can be identified in a number of ways. For example, schools often rely on the results of the state-level spring reading assessment to get an idea of which students might need help with reading the following fall. Some schools want to gather more information. To do this, they administer fall reading assessments in addition to using state assessment scores. One type of reading screening assessment for middle school students checks to see how well students understand what they read. If students have a good understanding of what they read, we say that they have good *reading comprehension*.

Another type of screening assessment measures how fluently students are able to read a paragraph or story that has been developed for this type of assessment. *Fluency* is the ability to read quickly, accurately, and with expression. The teacher checks to see how many correct words the student reads out loud in one minute. The number of correct words read in a minute is the student’s oral reading fluency rate. The ability to read with fluency generally indicates good overall reading skill and good reading comprehension.

In middle schools, teachers and staff typically begin with the assumption that their students know the basics of reading. Thus, reading comprehension is often checked first. If staff finds that students do not adequately understand what they are reading, they will next assess the more basic reading skills such as fluency or word recognition.

Schools that screen in the area of math might use tests that include basic math facts for younger students, but will include more advanced math concepts such as problem solving for older students.

Screening At Lincoln Middle School

Gemma is in sixth grade. Her scores on the end-of-year fifth grade state assessment showed that she was not reading at grade level. Lincoln Middle School has seen these scores and knows that Gemma and the others not reading at grade level might be at risk for academic problems in middle school and for challenges in the future. In September, staff at the middle school gave Gemma a screening assessment that provided an indicator of her reading comprehension level, or how well she was able to understand what she is reading. Gemma's teacher used the screening test manual to find out that incoming sixth graders are expected to have a score of at least 20. Gemma's score was only 14. Gemma's teachers were concerned about Gemma's difficulty with reading comprehension and concerned that she would be at a disadvantage in her middle school classes. Given her fifth grade state assessment and fall screening performance, her teachers agreed that Gemma would benefit from extra help with reading.

Questions to Ask About Screening

- *How does the school find out whether students need extra help in reading or math? Or with behavior?*
- *What are my child's scores from the state assessment? Were these scores communicated to the middle school? (e.g., from the elementary school to the middle school?)*
- *What are my child's scores from other screening assessments?*
- *On the basis of these scores, is my child at risk for poor learning outcomes?*

TIP: *You may want to keep a record of your child's scores so that you can compare them with scores on future tests.*

Essential Component # 2

Progress Monitoring: Checking On Student Progress

If a student's scores on the screening measure(s) are low, school staff may monitor that student's progress closely for a short time to see whether he or she is truly at risk for poor learning outcomes. After checking this student's progress for several weeks and seeing that he or she is profiting from general education instruction, teachers might conclude that this student is not truly at risk. Monitoring students' progress ensures that students who need additional support receive it.

Consider a student who does poorly on the screening assessment and continues to do poorly when progress is checked. This student is likely experiencing academic difficulty in general education, even though the teachers are implementing quality instruction. In this case, a school staff member might give the child a diagnostic assessment to better understand what supplemental instruction will help address areas of difficulty. This extra

instruction is often referred to as secondary and tertiary prevention. Secondary instruction provides the student with small group instruction that is in addition to instruction in the general education classroom. At this more intense secondary level, school staff members ideally help about 15 percent of the students in the school. Tertiary instruction is also in addition to general education instruction, but will likely involve a smaller group of students with longer and more frequent instructional sessions than the secondary prevention instruction. The tertiary level, which uses the most intense level of instruction, should serve about 5 percent of the school's students.

Before secondary instruction begins, teachers will set a goal for this student. They want this student not only to progress but to progress at a rate that will put the student back on track and in line with his or her peers at the end of the school year. To accomplish this, the student's rate of progress will need to be increased over the current rate. This is why it is so important to receive the right kind of support. School staff members closely monitor the progress of students receiving instruction at the secondary and tertiary levels to find out whether the extra support and instruction are making a difference. School staff also wants to make sure the child's rate of progress will make it possible for the student to reach his or her goal.



To get an idea of a child's rate of progress, the student may be given a brief assessment as often as once a week. The teacher records the score for that week as a data point on a graph. After several weeks, the teacher and student will be able to tell whether a line that represents the test scores is going up (indicating that progress is being made) or going straight or down (indicating that little or no progress is being made). Staff uses progress monitoring data to determine whether the instruction is working, and to make decisions about instruction. Schools have found that students benefit from being closely involved in the monitoring, tracking, and graphing of their progress. You will see examples of student graphs in the next section.

Progress Monitoring At Lincoln Middle School

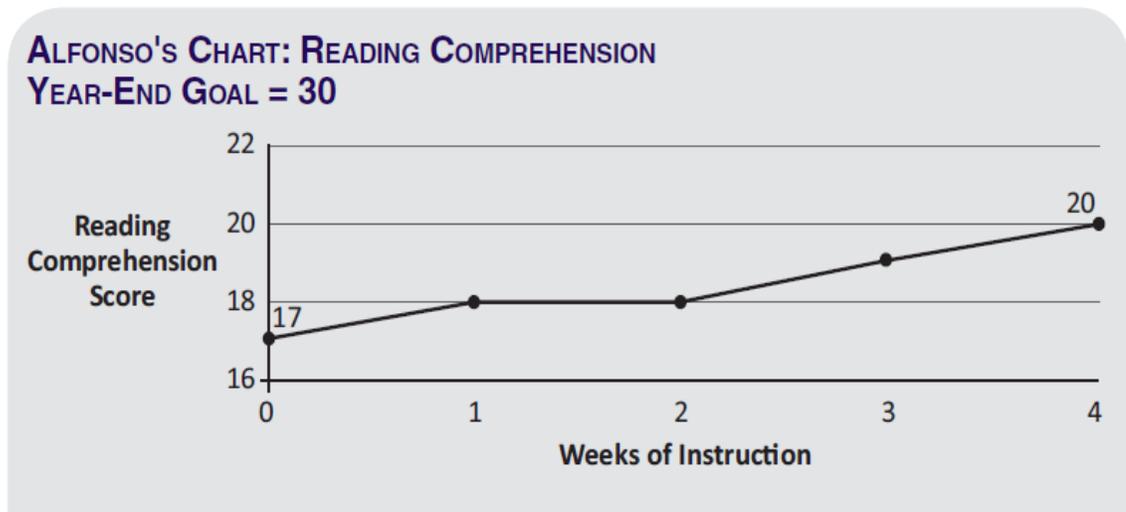
Alfonso and Violet are in sixth grade. The results of the fall screening assessments for reading showed they both are having difficulty with reading. Three times each week, their teacher provides additional instruction (secondary level instruction) to Alfonso and Violet and several others having similar reading problems. Their teacher uses methods and materials that have been shown by research to help students improve their reading skills. The teacher wants to be sure that this extra instruction is helping these students, so he spends several minutes at least once each week checking their progress.

The teacher has Alfonso and Violet mark their own graphs to show their scores on reading comprehension assessments. At the beginning of the year, Alfonso's score was 17. The year-end goal or benchmark for this assessment is 30. After four weeks of extra instruction, his score was 20. This is considered good

progress, and the teacher believes he is using the right kind of instruction for Alfonso and that Alfonso will reach the year-end goal of 30. Alfonso's graph shows his weekly increase in scores.

Violet's graph, however, shows that she has made very little progress. She also had a score of 17 at the beginning of the year. Her reading comprehension score only increased to 18 after four weeks of extra instruction. At this rate Violet is unlikely to reach the year-end goal of 30. Her teacher and other school staff members decide that another kind of instruction should be used to help Violet.

Alfonso and Violet enjoy working with their teacher and sharing in the responsibility of marking their graphs and checking their progress. Students who learn to enter data on their graphs and check their progress become more personally involved with the challenge of improving, and take pride in seeing their improvements. You can see an example of one of the charts below.



Questions to Ask About Progress Monitoring

- *In what areas is my child's progress being monitored? Reading? Math? Behavior?*
- *What types of assessments does the school use to track progress monitoring data?*
- *Do students take part in the tracking process?*
- *Are students aware of their goals?*
- *How often does my child's teacher monitor my child's progress?*
- *Does the school have a graph that shows the results of the progress monitoring for my child?*
- *At what point will the teacher make a change if my child is not progressing?*

TIP: You can ask for a copy of the progress monitoring information on a regular basis so that you can follow your child's progress.

Essential Component # 3

Preventing Failure: Using A School-Wide Multi-Level System

If a student's screening scores indicate lower-than-expected achievement, he or she may need extra time with a teacher or skilled staff member in addition to instruction in the general education classroom. MTSS uses a multi-level system of instruction that should help each student get the right level of instruction. The primary level is the general curriculum (for example, English, math, social studies) provided to all students. Ideally, about 80 percent of the students should be doing well and receiving primary instruction alone. Beyond the primary level of instruction are the secondary and tertiary levels, each with increasing levels of intensity.

In this document, we use the term *levels* to talk about the varying intensities of instruction. However, many schools, districts, and states use the term tiers instead of *levels* of instruction when they describe the stages of increasingly intense instruction.

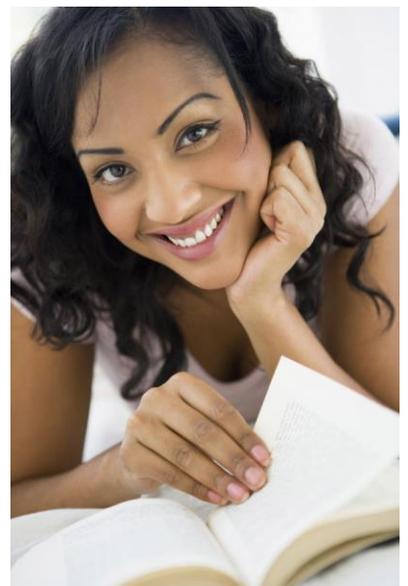
School staff members typically increase intensity in one or more ways—by increasing the instructional time, duration, and/or frequency of the instructional sessions; changing the instructor or interventionist; or decreasing the size of the group.

Changing intensity and nature of instruction may mean changes to:

- Instructional time: minutes per session
- Duration: number of weeks for intervention
- Frequency: number of sessions per day or week
- Intervention: degree of structure and detail of the lesson
- Interventionist: skill and experience of the instructor
- Group size: number of students

For example, with fewer students in a group, an individual student has more opportunities to respond, and the teacher has more opportunities to give immediate and appropriate feedback to that student and to assess what kind of specific help may be best. A change in the choice of intervention can also make a difference. Some interventions are intended to be more comprehensive and intensive than others.

Parents may frequently hear school staff members talk about research-based curricula and evidence-based interventions. Both are important parts of the MTSS multi-level system. Within an MTSS framework, classroom teachers always try to use research-based curricula and evidence-based interventions. *Research-based curricula* include components that have a research basis, but where specific materials have not been evaluated. An *evidence-based intervention* is an instructional tool or program that has been researched



extensively using strict methods and has been shown to help students succeed. Students typically receive evidence-based interventions when they receive secondary and tertiary level instruction.

Primary Level of Prevention

Ideally, all students receive primary level instruction in their core subject classrooms with their subject area teachers. General education classes (for example, math, language arts, and social studies) might last about 45–50 minutes each day. When a screening assessment shows that a student may have academic problems, the student often receives extra help from the classroom teacher. If after a brief period of time the student has made little or no progress, the teacher will consult with other staff members at the school. Together they might decide that the best way to help this student would be to give the student a more intense level of instruction, in addition to the core class.

Questions to Ask About the Primary Level of Prevention

- *For how many minutes each day is my child participating in primary level reading instruction? In math instruction?*
- *What are my child's specific strengths and weaknesses in reading? In math? In behavior?*
- *How will I be involved in the decision making process if school staff consider providing my child with secondary level instruction?*
- *For how many minutes each day is my child receiving extra help at the primary level for reading or math?*



Secondary Level of Prevention

Instruction at the secondary level usually involves small-group instruction and is in addition to instruction at the primary level. In some middle schools, students remain in core classrooms and receive additional instruction from co-teachers or interventionists. In other middle schools, secondary level instruction is scheduled during a flexible period that all students are enrolled in (often called an *enrichment period*). In some other schools, secondary level instruction replaces an elective, such as art, music, or foreign language study. Regardless of the approach to scheduling, secondary interventions should occur in addition to core instruction in reading and math.

Secondary level interventions are provided with an increased level of intensity, and include careful monitoring and graphing of student progress. If good progress is being made at the secondary level, this more intense instruction may no longer be necessary. If secondary level instruction is discontinued, the core classroom teacher will need to continue paying close attention to the student's progress to make sure that the gains are maintained and progress remains steady.

When a student is not successful at the secondary level, the core classroom teacher may meet with the parents and other school staff to decide what is best for the student and plan for the next steps. Sometimes it is best for the student to continue with the secondary level of intervention but with a change in the session length, frequency, or group size (for example). At other times, it is best to have the student receive tertiary level instruction, or consider whether a disability is suspected.

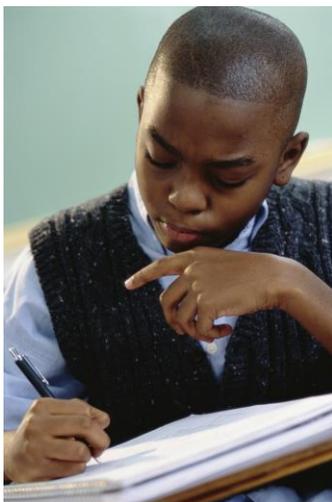
Questions to Ask About the Secondary Level of Prevention

- *How is instruction at the secondary level different from the primary level?*
- *Is the content at the secondary aligned with the content at the primary level?*
- *When does my child receive secondary level instruction?*
- *What, if any, class is my child missing when he/she receives secondary level instruction?*
- *How are decisions made? Will I be involved in those decisions?*
- *When would I get a progress report or be informed about decisions made?*
- *On what basis should my child be considered for a special education evaluation?*

Tertiary Level of Prevention

The intensity of services is again increased at the tertiary level. The teacher typically works with only one to three students at a time. Instruction is tailored specifically to the needs of each student. The length of each instructional session may also be increased at this level. In addition, instruction may occur more frequently—perhaps every day of the week. Services at the tertiary level vary in location and duration because instruction at this level is tailored to the individual student’s specific needs.

At this level, progress is again monitored frequently and graphed to ensure the student is making meaningful progress, and to help the teacher decide whether changes in instruction are needed. Progress monitoring tells us whether the student is meeting his or



her established goal. Just as at the secondary level, school staff, parents, and the student all benefit from up-to-date progress data. When the student is successful at the tertiary level, school staff and the parents decide the best way to maintain success: whether to continue the intense instruction or have the child receive less intense instruction at either the secondary or primary level.

Information from the MTSS process in general and a student’s progress during tertiary instruction can be very helpful in determining whether the student has a learning disability and should be eligible for special education services. At all instructional levels, the MTSS process provides high quality instruction that has been shown to benefit most students. When a student demonstrates low achievement and slow

growth despite receiving high quality instruction at increasingly intense instructional levels, it may be due to a learning disability. Special education may be considered.

Although many schools use MTSS to monitor students, or as part of the special education eligibility process, MTSS may never be used to delay or deny a referral to special education. It is also helpful for parents to understand that they have a legal right to ask that the school evaluate their child to determine whether he or she is eligible for special education services. (See text boxes below.) If you suspect your child has a disability, you can write a letter to the school or school district at any time to request an evaluation.

You can request that the school or district conduct a special assessment at *any* time, regardless of where your child is in the MTSS process. Teachers also can refer a child for special education assessment. All you need to do is to write a very simple letter. Give one copy to the school or district and keep one copy for your records. Here is an example:

[Date]

Dear _____ [name of principal or superintendent],

Please evaluate my child, [your child's name, his/her grade, and school name], to see whether [he/she] qualifies for special education and related services. Thank you.

[Your Name]

When you give this letter to the school or district, school officials are legally required to respond in writing to your request. As part of the response, school or district staff may want to meet with you and explain the procedures, goals, and timelines for the individual evaluations. They also will want to listen to your reasons for requesting the evaluation.

It is important to remember that although RTI is not a substitute for special education services, information gained from RTI practices can be used as part of a special education evaluation.

Important Note for Parents

States and local school districts must find and evaluate all children with disabilities living in a state that are or may be in need of special education and related services. This is called "child find." As stated in a memorandum from OSEP, "It is critical that this identification occur in a timely manner and that no procedure or practices result in delaying or denying this identification."

IDEA regulations² allow parents to request an initial evaluation to see if their child is eligible for special education and related services at any time. This request is usually made to the local school district. The district has two choices of response. It may agree that the child needs to be evaluated and seek the parent's written permission to do so. Or, if the

district does not suspect that the child has a disability, it may deny the request for the initial evaluation. When a district denies this request, it must do so in a written notice to the parents explaining why it is refusing the request and the reason for the decision. The written notice should explain how the parent can challenge the district's decision not to evaluate the child. Participation or lack of participation in RTI may **not** be the reason for denying or delaying an initial evaluation.

Questions to Ask About the Tertiary Level of Prevention

- *What interventions is my child receiving? For what subjects? For behavior?*
- *When does my child receive tertiary level instruction?*
- *What, if any, class is my child missing when he/she receives tertiary level instruction?*
- *How will I be involved in decisions about the possibility of my child receiving tertiary level instruction?*
- *On what basis would my child be referred for a special education evaluation?*

Finding Time for Secondary and Tertiary Level Instruction

Scheduling time for instruction at the secondary and tertiary levels is one of the most important and challenging tasks for a middle school. Schools frequently use built-in flexible time for secondary and tertiary level instruction. These flexible times include study halls, lunch breaks, electives, enrichment periods, and universal intervention periods. In some cases, a secondary or tertiary level reading (or math) class is considered an elective and may replace another class such as physical education, foreign language, or choir.

Some schools have added extra minutes to their school day to allow them to provide secondary and tertiary level interventions to students, while other schools schedule time outside regular hours—after school, before school, on Saturday, during an intersession, or during summer school.

The Multi-Level System at Lincoln Middle School

Liam is in sixth grade at Lincoln Middle School. Mr. Fenton is his math teacher. At the beginning of the school year, Mr. Fenton gave all the students in Liam's class an assessment to see how well they did with math. Liam's scores on this assessment and on his prior state assessment showed that he would need extra help in math. Mr. Fenton then gave Liam a diagnostic assessment to determine where Liam was struggling. After this assessment, Mr. Fenton concluded that Liam would benefit from extra help with math concepts at the secondary prevention level.

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- *What interventions is my child receiving? For what subjects? For behavior?*
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Finding Time for Secondary and Tertiary Level Instruction

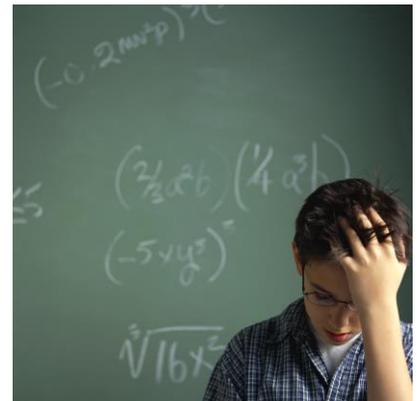
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For the secondary level of instruction, Ms. Woods, a math specialist, worked with Liam and five other students 45 minutes each day, three days a week. They worked in a small room adjacent to the library. For this instruction, Ms. Woods chose a math program known for successfully helping middle-school students with difficulties in math concepts. This instruction was in addition to the math instruction Liam received at the primary level in the general education math class. Ms. Woods and Mr. Fenton frequently met and made plans together to ensure Liam’s progress. After six weeks of secondary level instruction, Ms. Woods could see that Liam continued to make very little progress.



At this point, Ms. Woods, along with Mr. Fenton, Liam’s parents, and other school staff members met and decided Liam would benefit from instruction at the tertiary level. They began another math intervention and monitored his progress. Using a new intervention at the tertiary level, a math specialist worked with Liam on an individual basis for 40–50 minutes every day in a small room next to the office.

After two weeks, Liam's scores on the progress monitoring assessments began to increase by nearly one point each week, indicating good progress. Liam continued to receive tertiary intervention. Mr. Fenton, the math specialist, and other staff were confident that Liam would likely reach his math goal at the end of the year.

Essential Component # 4

Data-Based Decision Making: Deciding What Works

School staff members look carefully at the information from the screening and progress monitoring measures. They use the information to evaluate overall achievement of students in the school and make decisions about instruction. Using the assessment scores, teachers and school staff members can decide which students might benefit from secondary level instruction and which students might need tertiary instruction. Progress monitoring results tell teachers and staff a lot about how well a certain type of instruction is working. If the student is not making progress, the school staff is likely to decide that either another type of instruction or more intense instruction is needed. Schools usually use set guidelines, or decision rules, to help them determine when to change instruction or provide a student with another level of prevention.

Data-Based Decision Making At Lincoln Middle School

Back at Lincoln Middle School, the progress monitoring team is meeting to make decisions about the best instruction for several students whose progress is in question. To make sound decisions about each student, every member of the progress monitoring team has a copy of information, or data, about that student. Progress monitoring graphs are included in the information.

Laura, a sixth grader, is one of the students the team is concerned about. She is receiving reading instruction in a small group at the secondary level in addition to primary level instruction. A reading specialist works with this group three days a week, 20 minutes a day, to improve the students' reading comprehension. Laura's progress is monitored frequently with an assessment that evaluates her reading comprehension. Laura's reading teacher has given a copy of Laura's progress monitoring graph to each member of the team. From the chart, they can tell that if Laura continues at her current rate of progress, her reading comprehension score on the year-end assessment will only be 24. The year-end or benchmark goal for a sixth grader is a score of 30. The graph is an important piece of data on which the team can base its decisions about Laura.



School staff members want Laura to reach her goal. With her present instruction, she seems to be making only slight progress. It

is not enough. After a thoughtful discussion about Laura, and based on the team's decision rules for evaluating progress, the team decides to have Laura continue with the same instruction at the secondary level but at a greater intensity. Laura will receive extra help for 45 minutes each day rather than 20 minutes a day, three days a week. This will significantly increase the time Laura receives extra support and instruction.

As it turned out, this was a good decision. After several weeks with this more intense schedule, Laura's rate of progress increased and her graph showed that it was likely she would meet her goal.

Questions to ask about Data-Based Decision Making

- *How will the parent be involved in the decision?*
- *How will decisions be followed up on and communicated to parents?*

Other Important Aspects of MTSS

Instruction That Works

An important part of MTSS is the use of appropriate interventions for students who need extra help. The term *intervention* means a specific type of instruction that is used to help with a specific type of problem. Schools need to ensure that the interventions they use are of high quality and have been shown by research to be effective (research based). For example, a person who has a knee injury may have to do a set of specific exercises prescribed by a physical therapist. The injured person wants to feel sure that the exercises have been used many times before and have been shown to work well. In the same way, teachers must use teaching methods and materials that have been successful. Schools using an RTI framework use high quality interventions that rigorous scientific research has shown work well with students who need extra help.

School Staff Working Together

One of the many positive results of implementing RTI practices is that school staff members experience an increased level of collaboration, or working together, to support students. The principal, the general education teachers, the special education teachers, the reading specialists, the school psychologists, and other staff members share responsibility for helping each student succeed.



Fidelity: Using Instruction and Materials the Right Way

Fidelity of *implementation* is using instruction or materials in the way they were designed to be used. When teachers in schools use proven methods and materials, it is important that they use them the right way. The “best way” to use a resource is established when the intervention is created or researched. This could involve a specific sequence of activities, timing, or frequency, for example. It is important that educators use the materials in the manner suggested by the researchers or designers. This helps teachers identify the reason(s) students are or are not making progress and maximizes the chance for success.

For example, think of recipes for cakes and cookies. The recipes include not only the ingredients needed but also instructions about how to use the ingredients in the right way. “Tried and true” recipes for cakes have been developed and tested by baking experts who know the recipes work well when the directions are followed. For example, when making a cake it is important to follow the instructions to alternate the addition of dry and liquid ingredients. Following these instructions results in a cake that is light in texture. Not following the instructions is likely to result in a cake that is dense and bread-like. Just like recipes, materials and methods in the classroom work best if used in exactly the way developers designed them to be used.



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Disclaimer: The ABCs of RTI contains information from other public and private organizations that may be useful to the reader. These materials are merely examples of resources that may be available. Inclusion of this information does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any products or services offered or views expressed. The publication also contains links to websites created and maintained by outside organizations, provided for the reader's convenience. The Department is not responsible for the accuracy of this information.

Matching Interventions with Problem Behaviors

By Glenn Dyke

The most challenging group of students within a school setting represents 5- 7% of a school's population. These students exhibit chronic disruptive or dangerous behavior across both home and school settings. As a means for coping, adults often become optimistic in thinking the student will grow out of these behaviors only to discover they are quite stable over time. The reality is that these students will require a more systematic, intensive and precision oriented approach to assessment and intervention. The earlier these students are identified and their needs are systematically addressed, the better the outcome.

Earlier in the year, I had the opportunity to visit with a team of teachers and a third grade student named Kyle. When I first met Kyle, he was climbing onto filing cabinets and pulling down ceiling tiles. For the last two years, he has been in and out of treatment facilities due to his aggressive behavior at home and at school. At school, Kyle's aggressive behavior was usually directed toward staff in the form of hitting, kicking, spitting, throwing objects and running from school. Needless to say, the team needed an individualized Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) that matched the intensity of the positive instructional interventions to the frequency and intensity of the problem behavior.

Prerequisites for Behavior Intervention Plans

In order to develop an effective BIP for Kyle, the school team conducted a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) on the problem behavior. Through the FBA process, the team discovered that there were specific triggers for problem behavior as well as times of the day when the problem behavior was more likely to occur. They learned that anytime that Kyle was asked to complete a task that required a high demand for writing, he would put his head down on the table. Staff would redirect him back to work and Kyle would further resist by throwing his materials or spitting. For safety concerns, staff would remove him to another classroom. During this time, Kyle's behavior escalated to hitting, kicking and running from school. The team hypothesized that Kyle's aggressive behavior allowed him to escape the academic writing tasks and the school setting. Equipped with this information, the team developed an individualized behavior plan that involved the systematic and intensive instruction of replacement behaviors and a differential reinforcement schedule that matched the frequency and intensity of the problem behavior.

The team identified two replacement behaviors that they wanted Kyle to use rather than becoming frustrated and aggressive to escape and avoid writing tasks. The purpose of the replacement behavior is to serve the same purpose as the

problem behavior. The two replacement behaviors they identified for Kyle were asking for help or asking for a break in Mr. O'Neil's classroom. Since Kyle engaged in a variety of problem behaviors to escape from writing tasks, asking for help or going to Mr. O'Neil's classroom were better alternatives. The frequency and intensity of teaching and reinforcing replacement behaviors should match the severity of the problem behavior.

The goal here is for the student to become fluent with the new skill so that it replaces the need to engage in the problem behavior. Kyle began receiving daily social skills instruction and frequent teaching interactions for recognizing when he is frustrated, asking for help, and requesting to go to Mr. O'Neil's classroom. Staff began teaching Kyle these new skills by providing multiple practice opportunities throughout the day during a neutral time. During the second week of intervention, practice opportunities occurred during writing tasks. 100% of practice opportunities were reinforced by providing additional assistance or allowing him to go to Mr. O'Neil's classroom. In addition, he also earned 1 minute for each occurrence of a replacement behavior instead of engaging in problem behavior. Later in the day, Kyle could trade his minutes for playing time on an IPAD.

Matching the intensity of the intervention to the frequency and intensity of the problem behavior also requires the utilization of various differential reinforcement strategies and schedules of reinforcement. There are a variety of differential reinforcement strategies. For Kyle, the team wanted to reduce the frustration of the writing tasks while at the same time gradually increasing the amount of his independent writing. The team decided to implement a differential reinforcement



of high rates (DRH) strategy for increasing independent work during writing tasks. To implement the DRH, the team looked at his baseline data for the prior week and determined that one word per sentence would be a good initial criterion. Since he was not completing any work in the first place, one word per sentence would represent significant progress. Staff began transcribing one sentence at a time leaving the last word

of the sentence and punctuation mark for Kyle to complete. Once Kyle completed the sentence, he was able to bank 1 minute of time that could be used to play on the IPAD at a later time.

Staff repeated this process for each additional sentence until the assignment was complete. The following week, staff increased the criteria to two words per sentence. Over time, staff systematically faded the amount of support and increased the criterion by leaving additional words within each sentence blank. If Kyle became frustrated, help was available or he could request a brief break in Mr. O'Neil's classroom.



Prior to the intervention, Kyle was completing 0% of his assignments, the classroom was missing 7 ceiling tiles and he was spending an average of 90 minutes a day hitting, kicking, spitting and running from staff. I recently had a chance to visit with Kyle's teachers about his progress. As a result of the plan put into place by his teachers, and at the time of writing this article there are 0 new missing ceiling tiles and it's been 2 months since Kyle had an incident of physical aggression. He requests to go to Mr. O'Neil's class for a break about 2 times a week for approximately 15 minutes in duration. He completes 78% of his writing assignments independently and asks for help when he gets frustrated.

In an attempt to address challenging behavior, students like Kyle are often exposed to high levels of punishment. As a result, many of these students become immune to the effects of punishment and prefer to engage in additional problem behavior to be sent home or they run from school. In order to adequately address challenging behavior, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on the role of teaching alternative behaviors and utilizing a variety of reinforcement strategies. This article mentions a few of the critical components of an effective behavior intervention plan. Additional critical components should also be taken into consideration, such as extinction procedures, staff training, monitoring intervention fidelity, progress monitoring, interagency and parent collaboration, and a crisis/emergency plan.

For additional information refer to the following links:

FBA: <http://www.updc.org/behavior/>

BIP: <http://www.updc.org/behavior/>

Differential Reinforcement:

<http://www.iseesam.com/teachall/text/behavior/LRBI.htm>

Schedules of Reinforcement:

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/sars/DOCS/resources/lrbi07-09.aspx>

Tier 3 Behavioral Interventions:

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/sars/DOCS/resources/lrbi07-09.aspx>

This article written by Glenn Dyke is reprinted with permission from the UPDC March 2013 Special Educator Magazine on MTSS. For original article go to <http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14005>

MTSS in Utah

Exciting things are on the horizon for Utah as we begin to implement Utah's multi-tiered system of support or MTSS model. We thought it would be helpful however to explain where this model came from, why Utah is using it, Utah's critical components and how parents can work with their schools to get started with UMTSS.

Where did UMTSS Come From?

MTSS is not a new idea and has been around for years. Several states including Kansas and Florida have already been using this model and have helped demonstrate that MTSS is an effective and viable model. Several years ago Utah decided to apply for a grant to begin to expand and implement a MTSS model here in Utah. The grant is called "State Professional Development Improvement Grant" or SPDIG for short, and Utah was lucky enough to be awarded these funds. The grant will continue for 5 years up until September of 2017. After that, the hope is that districts will have successfully implemented the MTSS framework and will be able to then continue with MTSS even after the funding has ended.

After the grant was received, it was time to decide which districts would be able to participate. All Utah districts were invited to apply, and ultimately we ended up with 11 districts who are participating. Currently the 11 districts participating are Granite, Ogden, Salt Lake District, Murray, Canyons, Tooele, Summit Academy Charter school, Beaver, Iron, Washington and San Juan. These participating districts will receive support and training on the essential components of MTSS here in Utah as well as some funding to help them with district implementation.

Utah's MTSS Framework



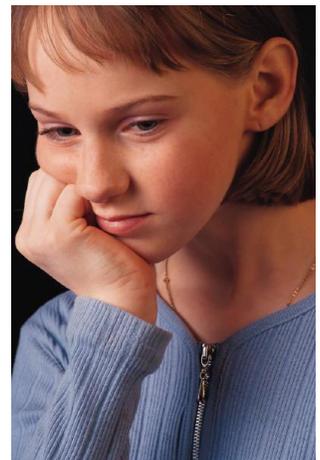
Other states that have pioneered MTSS prior to us, have found it helpful to have a statewide framework on how MTSS should look. Utah has decided to follow suit and also offer a framework of critical components to be used when implementing a MTSS system. This framework is designed to help sustain implementation of evidence-based practices using a data-informed, problem-solving model within a multi-tiered delivery system. UMTSS addresses the academic and behavioral needs of ALL students. Improved academic and behavioral outcomes are achieved through the integration of data, practices and systems. The framework includes the following critical components:

1. Leadership, Effective Teaming, and Problem Solving
2. Communication, Political Support, and Parent Engagement
3. Alignment of Policies, Procedures, and Resources across Classroom, School, District, and State Levels
4. Evidence-Based Professional Development with Ongoing Coaching and Technical Assistance
5. An Evaluation Process that Monitors both Fidelity of Implementation and Student Outcomes
6. Effective Core Instruction, Continuum of Increasingly Intense Evidence-Based Interventions, and Data-Informed Decision-Making (Core, Supplemental, and Intensive)
7. Instructionally-Relevant Assessments that are Reliable and Valid, and have Multiple Purposes (Universal Screening, Diagnostics, and Progress Monitoring)

Districts participating in SPDIG grant will receive training and support in implementing the critical components within their districts. Although the critical components will be consistent statewide, individual districts will each have a unique way they are implementing these critical components. At the UPC we have seen several districts who are implementing the critical components. It has been exciting to see how different districts are taking these components and applying them to their district in a way that works for them. If you have questions about how your district is implementing these components, talk to your school administration to find out more.

Does My Child Need UMTSS?

The great thing about UMTSS is that it is for any child who is struggling either academically or behaviorally. Some of our students may have a diagnosed disability such as ADHD or Autism, and some may just be struggling in school due to other reasons. UMTSS does not require that a child has to have a disability. Any child that is struggling could access interventions through UMTSS. Warning signs that your child may need more help includes things like low grades, low test scores, being below grade level academically, behavior struggles, social issues and school anxiety.



How to Get Started With UMTSS

As with many new things, UMTSS is still a work in progress in many districts. Districts are just now developing a plan to help support the UMTSS framework and setting up processes within their districts to support this process. There will be a learning curve with UMTSS just

like there is for other new things. You can increase your success however by talking to the right people. You can always start with your child's teacher, but don't be discouraged if you ask a teacher and he/she is not sure what you are talking about! In many districts, school psychologists or social workers are good people to talk to about UMTSS interventions. Often they have extra training on topics such as UMTSS and may have more of a background on how to get a plan started. If none of those people can help you, than try setting of a meeting with your school principal to discuss your concerns and your child's needs for intervention. Remember that some districts may call UMTSS interventions different things including terms like "RTI" or "school intervention plans". It does not matter what it is called, as long as the school is making efforts to help your child be more successful.

Collecting Data

It is recommended that before creating a UMTSS plan, schools first gather data about a child so they understand the needs that child has. Data collected may include things like parent input, test scores, grades, teacher feedback and observations. This data should be used to determine the needs of the child and what kinds of interventions may be helpful.



Writing a Plan

After data has been collected and the needs have been determined, it is time to write a plan. Writing an intervention plan should include school staff as well as parents. Schools should suggest interventions that are evidence based. This means that there should be some research indicating that a given intervention works in a positive way to help children succeed. Schools have access of various resources to help them determine if an intervention is evidence based.

Best practice is that the team put the plan in writing. This way everyone is clear on what should be happening. There are no set rules on how an intervention plan should look, so be prepared that plans may look different depending on the district. Parents can help with this process by bringing any ideas they may have to the attention of the school.

Implementing the plan

After you and the school create an intervention plan, it is time to start implementing it. One important thing to remember is that it will take a little bit of time to see if a given intervention is working. On average an intervention may need to be implemented for 3-6 weeks before you will know if it is helping. In order to determine if an intervention is working, schools should be doing progress monitoring. Progress monitoring can include

things like formal and informal tests, observations, behavior data or other tracking tools. Progress monitoring is a vital piece of the process because it helps you know if your student is responding to the interventions.

What it if does not work?

If after trying an intervention data shows that it is not working, schools can adjust the interventions by trying something different or by increasing the intensity of an intervention. Sometimes an intervention is not the right fit for a student, so another type of intervention may need to be tried. Other times students need more intense interventions to help them be successful. Either way, the key is to keep data so that data based decision making can always take place. Keep in mind that as a parent you always have the right to request testing for Special Education at any point during the UMTSS process. If you feel that your child's challenges are caused by a disability and that your child might require Special Education services, than a formal evaluation may be warranted.



One of the best things you can do during the UMTSS process is to communicate often with the school. Let educators know what you are seeing with your child. Ask for some updates from the school on how your child is responding to interventions and also if there is anything you can do to help! Interventions will always be more successful when you have schools, parents and students all invested in helping the child succeed.

Final Thoughts

UMTSS is wonderful opportunity for Utah to meet the needs of a wider variety of students and to address student needs early on. It will take time to integrate UMTSS into an already complex educational system, but we are well on our way. Both parents and schools should be excited about the positive impact UMTSS can make for our students. This is an exciting time as parents and schools work together in a new way to help all students learn and progress.

Granite District: Building a Solid MTSSS Foundation



By

Andrea T. Miller, LCSW, Granite School District

In 2012-2013, Granite School District combined the models of RTI and PBIS currently being implemented at the district and school levels by adopting a national model of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). This change fits well with the goals set forth by the GSD Board of Education to: 1) increase student achievement and 2) enhance community engagement. MTSS also reflects Granite District's Superintendent Martin Bates' vision that schools "individualize, customize and personalize" our students' educational experiences to meet their needs to ensure that all "students will leave Granite School District, prepared for college, career and life in the 21st century world."

To build the awareness of MTSS throughout the district and to accomplish these goals, the district has prioritized extensive professional development for school administrators and their staffs. District directors and specialists from nearly every district department participate in the cross-departmental design of monthly professional development modules. District directors then facilitate delivery of the learning modules to building administrators in the MTSS meetings. The intent is to train school administrators as instructional leaders who then facilitate professional development modules with their faculties. The topics below describe the professional learning the district has provided to date:

- Introduction to MTSS
- Common Vocabulary
- Using Data to Inform Instruction
- Implementation of MTSS
- MTSS and SSAP (SIP)
- Formative Assessments
- Social Emotional Learning
- Differentiation



As the district directors work with the administrators to increase the awareness of MTSS, Integrated Supports Coaches (systems coaches) support school teams in building the teaming infrastructure needed to implement MTSS within their schools. District departments and school teams have studied the PLC model through the book, *Learning by Doing* (2010, Dufour, Dufour, Eaker) to develop foundational knowledge and common understanding of Professional Learning Community (PLC) practices and foundations. The use of norms, agendas, roles/ responsibilities, consensus, and data-driven problem solving are promoted and implemented system-wide to enhance team collaboration and productivity.

Although team membership may overlap for MTSS teams, Leadership teams and Student Support Teams (SST), the purpose and tasks of the teams change as the focus of the teams' work changes across Tiers 1-3 from school-wide needs to more individualized student needs. It is strongly urged that administrators, grade level representatives, and specialists in reading, mathematics, and behavior be a part of this team to increase collaboration and communication. Broad school representation on the team increases the knowledge base for problem solving and targeted intervention strategies. GSD recognizes the need for grade level or department collaboration. Time is allocated for teachers to work collaboratively in PLCs and make student learning decisions based on data.

To facilitate consistent intervention support, the district provides a clear Student Support process with accompanying data collection forms to guide school teams through the MTSS process. As needed, coaches support grade level and department teams through this process in preparation for meeting with the Student Support Team. A flow chart and accompanying documents assist SSTs in tracking interventions and monitoring the progress students achieve from year-to-year. These data are also shared with parents at regular intervals at SST meetings.

Granite School District is moving the MTSS process forward by digitizing a workflow system to ensure that all intervention information and support is efficiently documented and cumulatively added to a student's electronic file. Our goal is to ensure student support through graduation so that our students can demonstrate that they are "prepared for college, career, and life in the 21st century world."

This article written by, Andrea T. Miller is reprinted with permission from the UPDC March 2013 Special Educator Magazine on MTSS. For original article go to [HTTP://ESSENTIALEDUCATOR.ORG/?P=14029](http://essentialeducator.org/?p=14029)

MTSS in Utah

GLOSSARY – MULTI TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Accommodations: Accommodations are practices and procedures in the areas of presentation, response, setting, and timing/scheduling that provide equitable access during instruction and assessments for students with disabilities/Section 504/English Language Learners (ELL). Accommodations are intended to reduce or even eliminate the effects of a student’s disability; they do not reduce learning expectations. Accommodations provide access to buildings, curriculum, and assessments.

Alignment: The process of matching instruction and materials to the Utah State Core Curriculum.

Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP): A written plan for changing a student’s behavior, including target behavior, strategies for teaching replacement behavior, reinforcers, and a schedule for review of intervention effectiveness data. A BIP can be part of the IEP.

Collaboration: A systematic process of cooperation between two or more people with shared goals and perceived outcomes occurring in a climate of trust.

Collaborative team: A group of two or more people with shared goals and perceived outcomes who meet on a scheduled or as-need basis and fill a specific function or purpose. Collaborative teams can be formed both at the district and school levels. School-based teams are developed and sustained as determined by need and are accessible to any administrator or teacher concerned with the educational needs of students.

Differentiated instruction: The matching of instruction with the different needs of learners in a given classroom by modifying delivery, time, content, process, product, and the learning environment. One or more of these elements can be modified to provide differentiation.

English Language Learners (ELLs): English Language Learners (ELLs) are students whose first language is not English and who are in the process of learning English.

Evaluation: Summarizing assessment results, then making decisions based on these results.

Explicit instruction: Instruction that is clear, overt, and visible.

Extended school year services: Special education and related services that:

- a. Are provided to a student with a disability:
 - (1) Beyond the normal school year of the LEA;
 - (2) In accordance with the student's IEP;
 - (3) At no cost to the parents of the student, and
- b. Meet the standards of the Utah State Office of Education (USOE).

Fidelity: A teacher demonstrates that instructional programs, strategies, and materials are implemented with intensity and accuracy, and consistently delivered as they have been designed and validated, as directed in teacher's guides available from publishers.

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FUBA): A systematic process of identifying problem behaviors and the events that (a) reliably predict occurrence and nonoccurrence of those behaviors, and (b) maintain the behaviors across time.

IDEA: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004. IDEA governs the provision of special education. This Act strengthens academic expectations and accountability for the nation's 5.8 million children with disabilities and bridges the gap that has too often existed between what children with disabilities learn and what is required in regular curriculum.

Instructional intervention: Explicit and systematic instruction delivered by highly skilled teachers tailored to meet the identified needs of students who are struggling.

Intense intervention: Explicit and systematic instruction delivered by highly skilled teacher specialists. This instruction is targeted and tailored to meet the needs of struggling readers in small groups or one on one, with increased opportunities for practice and teacher feedback.

Literacy coach: A coach who provides ongoing, consistent support for classroom implementation and the instructional components of literacy. A literacy coach supports teachers in their daily work to instruct all readers, but particularly struggling readers.

Modifications (assessments): Changes in the test or assessment conditions that fundamentally alter the test score interpretation and comparability. Providing a student with a modification during a state accountability assessment constitutes a test irregularity because it invalidates the student's test score.

MTSS: A multi-step process of providing instruction and support to promote the academic and behavioral success of all children. Individual children's progress is monitored and results are used to make decisions about further instruction and intervention. MTSS is most

commonly used in addressing reading, math and behavior, but it can also be used in other areas including bullying. The MTSS process is flexible and designed by school districts to meet the needs of their students.

Multisensory: Simultaneously engaging the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities.

Reading Specialist: Reading specialists provide expert classroom instruction and assessment particularly for struggling students. They may also provide literacy leadership within the school in addressing the needs of all readers.

Scaffolding: Support given to assist students in learning a skill through explicit instruction, modeling, questioning, feedback, etc., to ensure student performance. Scaffolding should gradually be withdrawn as students become more independent of teacher support.

Scientifically based: Based on empirical research that applies rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain Reading Research (SBRR) valid knowledge. This research:

- * Employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment.
- * Has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective and scientific review.
- * Involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn.
- * Relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations.
- * Can be generalized.

Section 504: A student may be eligible for accommodations under Section 504 if the student has a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more of the student's major life activities that affect education.

Skill: Something a student knows how to do expertly and automatically.

Special education: Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability, including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and instruction in physical education. The term includes speech-language pathology services and may include other related services, travel training, and applied technology education, if they meet the definition of special education.

Strategy: The conscious use of a specific method.

Supplemental intervention: An addition to Tier 1 classroom instruction targeted to meet specific needs of students in one or more of the five critical elements of reading instruction.

Supplemental materials: Materials that are aligned with and support the core instructional program.

Systematic instruction: A carefully planned sequence for targeted instruction.

Team members (IEP): At least one regular educator of the student, special education teacher, LEA representative, special education student when appropriate, and person to interpret data, as well as others as needed.

Targeted: Focused instruction on an identified skill.

Tutoring: Additional practice for struggling students provided by trained individuals. Tutoring does not serve as an intervention. USOE-published tutoring programs include:

- * STAR tutoring program
- * Cross-age tutoring program
- * Parent STAR tutoring program
- * STAR advanced tutoring program

Utah Core Curriculum: The curriculum adopted by the Utah Board of Education that is required for all students.



UMTSS Utah Conference!

*Join Utah educators and parents for a conference all about
MTSS! To learn more and register, please visit:*

<http://www.umsconference.org/>

MTSS/RTI Resources

- ★ **Video about MTSS and Bullying:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cN0wjS6p_-I
- ★ **Information about MTSS being used in Kansas:** <http://kansasmtss.org/resources.html>
- ★ **Video about MTSS and bullying:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cN0wjS6p_-I
- ★ **Family Guide For Positive Behavior Supports:**
http://familyengagement.weebly.com/uploads/3/6/4/3/3643411/a_family_guide_to_swpbs.pdf
- ★ **Myths and Facts about MTSS:** <http://www.florida-rti.org/educatorResources/myths/index.htm>
- ★ **Information and resources on RTI:** <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn>
- ★ **Another site with information and resources on RTI:** <http://www.rti4success.org/>



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Our Mission: To help parents help their children, youth, and young adults with all disabilities to live included and productive lives as members of the community.

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