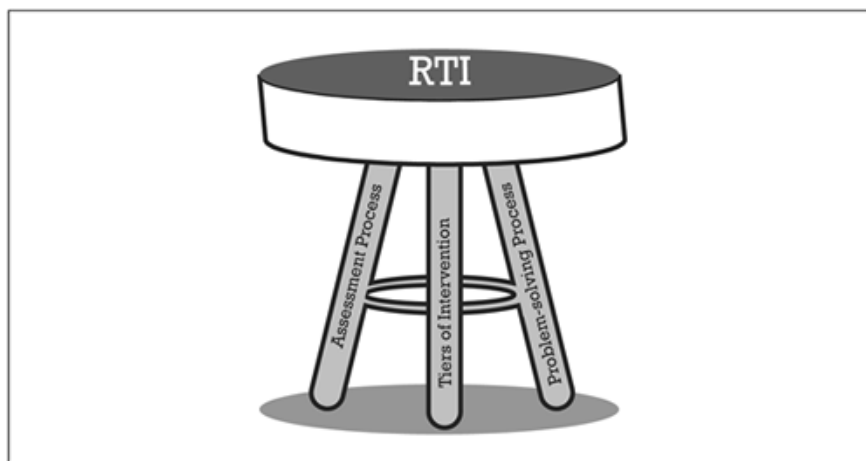


What Is Multi-Tiered Systems of Support//Response To Intervention and Why Should We Care?

"I am at my wits' end. Jerry is having a tough time with reading even though he is more than capable of doing the work. In fact, I have four students who are in the same boat. I call their parents, but these kids still won't do the work. It's obvious they don't get much help at home. Why weren't they tested earlier? If I refer them now, they won't qualify for anything. I guess there's nothing to be done."

Wouldn't it be more satisfying for this teacher to have a menu of solid instructional options from which to choose rather than rely on a referral process that she suspects will go nowhere? Wouldn't the school system work more efficiently if all teachers had a problem-solving framework to help them quickly respond to students' needs without clogging up the system with needless testing and inappropriate placements? Wouldn't developing an action plan at the first signs of trouble be more productive than spending time blaming other teachers or parents? A well-implemented Response to Intervention (MTSS/RTI) plan addresses these issues and much more.

The Three Basics of a Quality MTSS/RTI Plan



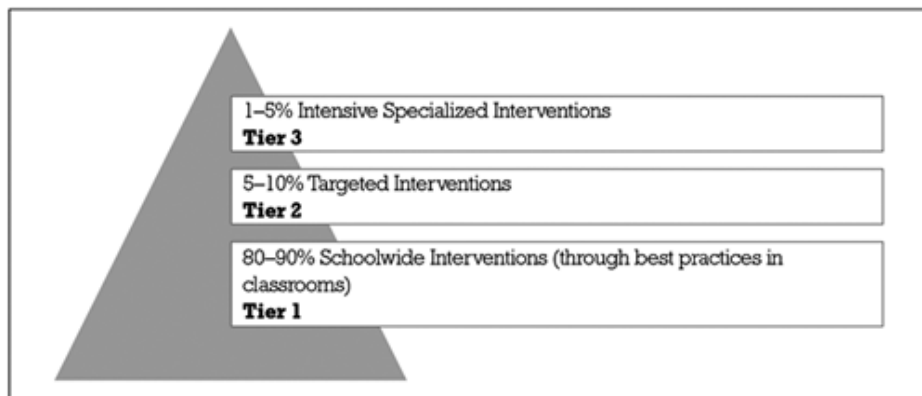
ASSESSMENT

1. Universal screening data help pinpoint high-priority areas of concern. What should we keep and what needs to be dropped or updated? Which students are in danger of falling through the cracks if we do not intervene quickly?
2. Diagnostic assessments refine the universal screening data by identifying the root causes for gaps between expected outcomes and actual performance.
3. Progress monitoring provides continuous feedback about how successfully the selected intervention is promoting student growth and closing achievement gaps. It also helps determine when a change in strategy is required.

TIERS OF INTERVENTION

- Tier 1 provides research-based classroom instructional strategies powerful enough to enable 80–90 percent of students to be successful without further intervention.
- Tier 2 provides interventions of moderate intensity that supplement Tier 1 strategies and are provided for groups of three to six students. Five to 10 percent of students may need assistance at this level.
- Tier 3 provides intense interventions provided for groups of one to three students. Like Tier 2, this level is also a supplement to Tier 1, not a replacement for it. One to 5 percent of students generally need assistance at this level.

Figure 1.2. Three-Tiered Pyramid of Interventions



PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS

This component uses data from the assessment cycle to prescribe, monitor, and adjust intervention plans. Think of it as the support system that makes the assessment and intervention legs of the stool functional and efficient.

MTSS/RTI: What It Is and What It Isn't

MTSS/RTI is a systematic way of connecting instructional components that are already in place. It integrates assessment data and resources efficiently to provide more support options for every type of learner.

MTSS/RTI *does*

- Develop a systematic way of identifying student strengths and weaknesses.
- Reduce the time students wait to receive necessary instruction and intervention.
- Require schools to ensure that underachievement is not due to a lack of appropriate instruction.
- Require close monitoring and documentation of student responses to research-based instruction in general education classrooms, so schools are less likely to label students too quickly.
- Require that general and special education classrooms share responsibilities to ensure that all students can receive additional support using a seamless instructional system.
- Require the use of research-validated practices in core classroom instruction and supplemental intervention services.

MTSS/RTI *does not*

- Apply only to students who qualify for special education.
- Allow students to wallow in failure until they meet a qualification score.
- Focus more on compliance to forms and procedures than on student results. It does promote procedures that get the right services to the right students at the first signs of trouble.
- Ignore the bias of assessment instruments that over-identify students who lack prior knowledge due to environmental and cultural differences that are easily misinterpreted as a learning disability.
- Simply refer, test, and label students when they underperform in general education classrooms without proving that the problem is not the fault of the curriculum or the instruction.

The Two Models of MTSS/RTI (A combination of the two intervention models works best.)

There are two models for implementing MTSS/RTI: the standard protocol model and the problem-solving model. Both have the same basic requirements:

- Assess all students with a universal screener.
- Diagnose reasons for any problems flagged by the screener.
- Select research-based interventions for the specific problems identified.
- Implement the selected plans and monitor them for positive effects.
- Adjust intervention plans in response to the progress monitoring and diagnostic data collected.

The protocol model

The protocol model prescribes a very specific intervention for all students who exhibit similar problems and fall below an established districtwide benchmark. This intervention is based on scientifically validated research and is the only intervention plan used to solve the identified problem. The staff implementing this intervention is carefully trained and regularly monitored.

The advantages of the protocol model are

- More efficient staff training that focuses on only one research-based intervention plan for a given problem area.
- A highly standardized program that allows easy fidelity monitoring.
- A predetermined intervention that reduces team meeting time.

The disadvantages of the protocol model are

- The limitations of only one approach, which may not accommodate the needs of every learner.
- A potentially weak buy-in from staff charged with implementing a plan they have had no hand in developing or selecting.
- Limited staff training on a variety of research-based approaches.

The problem-solving model

The problem-solving model relies on a team of experts who customize intervention plans to suit individual learners' needs. Team members must be trained to analyze the strengths and needs of learners and the teachers who instruct those learners. This careful analysis, performed before an action plan is created, prevents the loss of precious time caused by implementing the wrong interventions. Team members draw from a broad array of research-validated interventions and assessment tools.

The advantages of the problem-solving model are

- Customized plans that are appropriate for both learners and educators.
- A flexible model that can be adapted to individual students' needs.
- A potentially strong buy-in from those who implement the plan, resulting from their direct input.

The disadvantages of the problem-solving model are

- The requirement that team members possess a high level of expertise in many areas.
- More time-consuming training and intervention design.
- The difficulties in monitoring such a fluid process.

What MTSS/RTI Looks Like When Done Well

Shared roles and responsibilities

Randy, a middle school intervention specialist, asked, "Why do general education teachers need to be involved with MTSS/RTI training and implementation? I always thought MTSS/RTI was just a new way to determine eligibility for students with disabilities. Isn't that the job of the psychologists and special education teachers?"

This is the first time special education legislation has as much impact on general education as on special education. In most schools, the new procedures for eligibility are a small part of the MTSS/RTI plan. MTSS/RTI is intended to deliver a wider variety of general education options before the words *special education* are even uttered. Only when Tier 1 interventions fail to close learning gaps do more intensive services—including English as a Second Language, gifted education, remedial classes, and tutoring—come into play. These services are supplementary to interventions begun and maintained by general educators. The goal of MTSS/RTI is to prevent problems for all students; as a consequence, major shifts in roles and responsibilities are often necessary at all levels.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) now requires that students both with and without disabilities are provided with proactive, supplemental support as soon as a teacher detects a potential difficulty. Regulations regarding early intervention services (EIS) permit schools to use up to 15 percent of the district IDEIA Part B funds to develop and implement EIS.

IDEIA requires that all students be provided with supplemental support as soon as a difficulty is detected.

This prevents the biased referral and assessment of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Many students who could have succeeded with far less intensive services such as special education, were mislabeled. Even though "rule outs," such as cultural background, socioeconomic circumstances, and lack of appropriate instruction, are built into the law, these safeguards were generally ignored in an effort to provide assistance to struggling children. As a result, a disproportionate

Curriculum EDS 710/716

number of African Americans, English language learners, and children from disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances were identified as disabled. The MTSS/RTI process, however, decreases misidentification by providing options that are less intensive than special education.

MTSS/RTI Changes Our Thinking

The following dialogue between two teachers addresses some common concerns and thoughts about how MTSS/RTI impacts the school improvement effort.

Renee: Let me see if I understand this. MTSS/RTI is a new type of prereferral to determine eligibility for special education services, right?

Matt: Yes and no. Eligibility is a small part of the MTSS/RTI process. A primary purpose is to increase options within general education without going through the hassle of a formal referral. You may refer students later if the interventions don't work, but no time is wasted in the meantime. MTSS/RTI strives for immediate support for students.

Renee: That sounds like it could delay students with legitimate disabilities from receiving services.

Matt: MTSS/RTI cannot deny or delay a formal evaluation for special education. At any point in an MTSS/RTI process, IDEIA 2004 allows parents to request a formal evaluation to determine eligibility. However, we won't wait for the test results to start helping students. Do you remember when we used to refer a student and then wait months only to find out that he didn't qualify for anything? How frustrating was that? Now we can provide interventions while we evaluate the need for a multifaceted evaluation. MTSS/RTI is less about labeling and more about getting appropriate services to students as quickly as possible. Generally speaking, referrals, once made, don't require as much time because data collection has already begun through the MTSS/RTI process.

Renee: MTSS/RTI sounds like another set of hoops for special education teachers to jump through.

Matt: MTSS/RTI requires general, remedial, gifted, and special educators to collaborate as they plan, deliver, monitor, and adjust interventions within the general education setting first. If everyone involved doesn't plan and work together, then the system will likely fail.

Renee: Well, good luck with that. This sounds like a lot to put on already full plates. Where are we going to find the time and resources to do all of this?

Matt: We already have several of the MTSS/RTI components in place. We just haven't called it MTSS/RTI. We have aligned our curriculum and chipped away at differentiated instruction for years. We practically eliminated tracking and replaced it with flexible grouping. Kids with IEPs have higher expectations and are learning with their nondisabled peers more than ever before. All of this is part of the MTSS/RTI infrastructure. However, identifying more time to plan together is a must, and there are some big assessment changes we will still need to tackle.

Renee: Oh, great, more testing. When am I supposed to teach these kids?

Matt: You're absolutely right; we need to drop some of our more labor-intensive tests and replace them with quick progress monitoring probes. That will actually save instructional time and provide more useful and timely information.

Renee: That sounds way too reasonable to actually happen, but I hope it works out that way. You know, research-based instruction is the other scary piece. How will I know how to implement research-based interventions? Where do I find those ideas?

Matt: It used to be difficult, but there are a lot of materials and many Web sites now available. We need training. We also need fidelity monitoring to reassure teachers that they are implementing the plans in the most effective manner.

Renee: That sure beats crossing our fingers and hoping that we're doing the intervention correctly.

Matt: Our intervention teams will also use some new protocols to upgrade our services. Problem-solving teams will focus on student data to help teachers set specific learning targets before designing and adjusting interventions and services. We will no longer just admire the problems and label students. Problem solving will also be more collaborative as we coordinate the efforts of the student, his or her family, and a variety of faculty members.

MTSS/RTI in Practice

The sequence of MTSS/RTI in Practice in the classroom

1. Use a diagnostic process to identify problems.
2. Clear, specific, and measurable goals guide implementation.
3. Teachers develop action plans shown to be effective by research.

Curriculum EDS 710/716

4. Teachers carefully and frequently monitor individual student progress.
5. Teachers and administrators evaluate the adequacy of the MTSS/RTI plan and make adjustments based upon this evaluation.

monthly basis. This helped to coordinate the process and share the multitiered intervention plans across the district.

MTSS/RTI at the grade and classroom levels

Based upon class data and district benchmarks, individual teachers designed classroom goals that were the foundation upon which achievement of all other goals rested.

Let's visit Mrs. Wood's 5th grade classroom to see how this plays out. As Mrs. Wood focused on math, the two areas of MTSS/RTI concern for 5th grade were math fluency and the application of math concepts. Class results from the universal screener on math fluency showed that

- Nine students rated poorly (0–8 digits correct per 2.5 minutes).
- Seven students rated close to goal (9–15 digits correct per 2.5 minutes).
- Eight students rated proficiently (16 or more digits correct per 2.5 minutes).

The universal screening data on the application of math concepts showed that

- Thirteen students rated poorly (0–5 blanks correct per 5 minutes).
- Six students rated close to goal (6–11 blanks correct per 5 minutes).
- Five students rated proficiently (12 or more blanks correct per 5 minutes).

Based upon these results, Mrs. Wood set a class growth goal to increase computation accuracy by an average of one digit each week and increase by .4 blanks correct per week for concepts for the following seven weeks. She prepared a graph to illustrate the current class average and where students would be in seven weeks if they worked together to meet this new goal. Her students were encouraged by the challenge and immediately decided that they needed a plan.

Students brainstormed strategies, and Mrs. Wood recorded their ideas on the board, pointing out that many of their ideas were also studied by universities and had made a big difference for most students. Mrs. Wood cautioned her students that they would only see a difference if they followed the strategies exactly as researchers designed them. The students decided to carefully monitor one another, and they invited the school principal to be their "second set of eyes"—to see if the research would really work for them. The class selected a peer practice strategy as the first intervention to be used for 18 minutes each day.

Mrs. Wood began by ensuring that every student understood the exact procedures for working with partners. Using different examples, she explained and modeled each segment of the peer practice strategy. Each student's folder contained a step-by-step set of directions and two sets of specially selected math flashcards with answers to the problems on the back. Mrs. Wood constantly walked around the room to watch and give feedback to students as they practiced together. She did not skimp on the amount of time spent teaching or reviewing the procedures because she understood that great ideas poorly implemented tend to cause problems that sacrifice precious instruction time.

Summary

MTSS/RTI is not a program you can buy. It is not a pathway to special education. It is a method of organizing and coordinating school resources to create a more efficient range of options that serve all students in danger of not reaching their potential.

The spotlight on student learning is intended to create a culture of early intervention, thus putting to rest the old "wait-to-fail" model that delayed appropriate services. Early support is available to all learners, whether they are in a general education, special education, gifted, ESL, or another specialized environment. All students have access to a growing menu of options made possible by the coordination of resources and services.