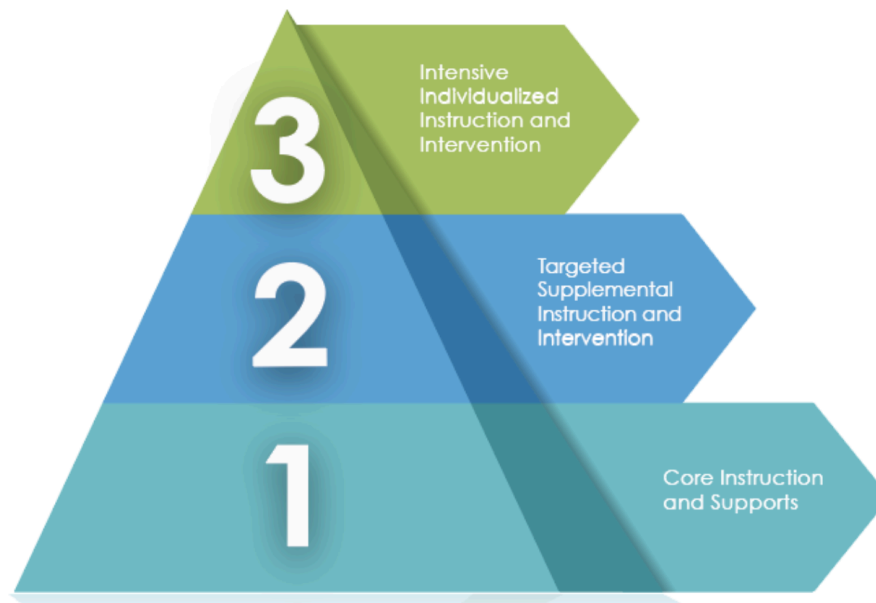


# What is a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)?

## *A Parent's Guide*



Park Ridge-Niles School District 64  
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## What is MTSS?

A Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a process designed to help schools focus on and provide high-quality instruction through research-based or evidence-based interventions and strategies to students who may be struggling academically, behaviorally or socially. An intervention or strategy is a specific type of instruction that is matched and used to help with a specific student need. Student progress is monitored often to check the effectiveness of the interventions. The data collected on a student's progress are used to shape instruction and make educational decisions. Use of the MTSS process can help avoid a "wait to fail" situation because students get help promptly within the general education environment.

MTSS has three important parts: 1) A tiered model of school supports, 2) Using a problem solving method for decision-making at each tier, and 3) Analyzing data to inform the instruction and intervention at each tier.

### Part 1: Multi-Tiered Model of School Supports

In the MTSS framework, appropriate resources are allocated in accordance with students' needs. This framework is usually shown as a multi-tiered model (see Figure 1) that involves more and more intense instruction and interventions across the tiers. The level of intensity of instruction and interventions a student receives is determined by how he or she responds to the instruction and/or intervention. District 64's MTSS model has three tiers.

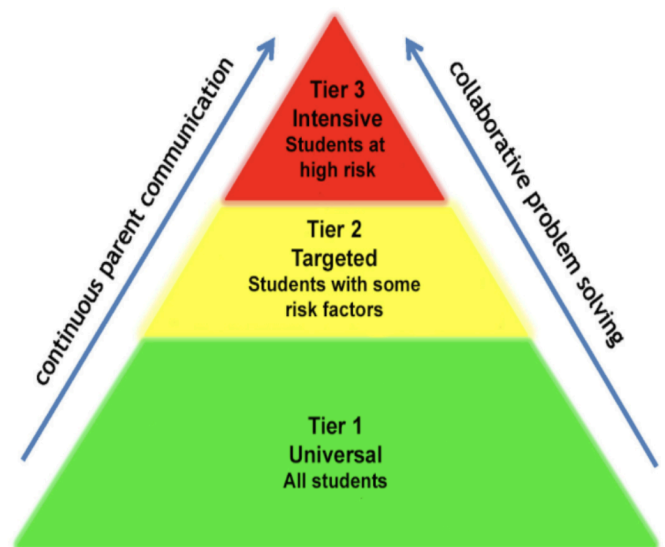
#### Tier 1

Tier 1 is the foundation. This is the instruction that all students receive in the general education

classroom with their general education teacher. It is called Tier 1 instruction or core instruction.

The materials and instructional practices D64 uses in Tier 1 are of high quality and are research or evidence-based and shown to be effective in student learning. Another important aspect related to high quality instruction and interventions is the fidelity of using the materials for their intended purpose. Instructional materials are designed and developed for a specific reason and it is important that the materials are used as they are intended.

**Figure 1**



At Tier 1, teachers *differentiate* instruction by proactively planning and implementing a variety of instructional methods matched to varying student skill needs within the classroom. Schools use a universal or school-wide screening of all students to identify students who may need more than high-quality core instruction at Tier 1. When screening results show that a student may need more support, the general education teacher may need

to make adjustments to instruction and/or the classroom environment. Such adjustments may be sufficient to address the student's learning needs. In some cases, the school team might also decide that the best way to help a student who has not progressed sufficiently in the core instruction, even when the teacher differentiates instruction and uses other strategies to enhance student learning, is to provide supplemental interventions at Tier 2.

### Tier 2

At Tier 2, supplemental interventions or strategies are provided with an increased level of intensity *in addition to core instruction* for small groups of students or individuals who show some risk of not meeting grade level academic, behavioral or social standards. This service can be delivered through an interventionist or student services provider (SW, OT, SLP, etc) in collaboration with the general education teacher. With fewer students in a group, an individual student has more opportunities to respond, and the interventionist, student service provider, and teacher have more opportunities to give immediate and appropriate feedback to each student. Tier 2 interventions usually involve additional practice and skill building. There are many different kinds of interventions, strategies and instruction that can happen in the classroom or outside the classroom in small groups.

### Tier 3

At Tier 3, interventions are provided at a higher level of intensity in comparison to Tier 2 and are also provided *in addition to core instruction*. Tier 3 interventions are typically provided to a small group or to an individual student by an interventionist or student services provider with collaboration occurring with the general education teacher. Interventions and strategies are tailored specifically to meet the needs of

each student.

### Summary

Students may move fluidly among the Tiers as a result of their response to the interventions and strategies they receive. For example, if data show progress, a student can move from Tier I to Tier II and back to Tier I within a relatively short period of time. It is also important that students receive the types and levels of interventions and strategies they need when they need them. Accordingly, movement across the tiers is not necessarily sequential. For example, a student with significant gaps in performance may immediately require intensive Tier 3 interventions and would, therefore, not receive Tier 2 interventions prior to Tier 3.

## **Part 2: The Problem Solving Method of Decision-Making**

In MTSS, the problem solving method is used to match instructional resources to educational needs. The problem solving method is used at all three tiers: for all students (Tier 1), for groups of students or individuals (Tier 2), and for individual or small groups of students (Tier 3). Problem solving typically consists of four steps, as shown in Figure 2 and discussed below.

*Step 1. Identify the problem:* Determine the gap or difference between the expectation and what is actually occurring in terms of student performance. Problems may be defined using school-wide, small group, or individual student data.

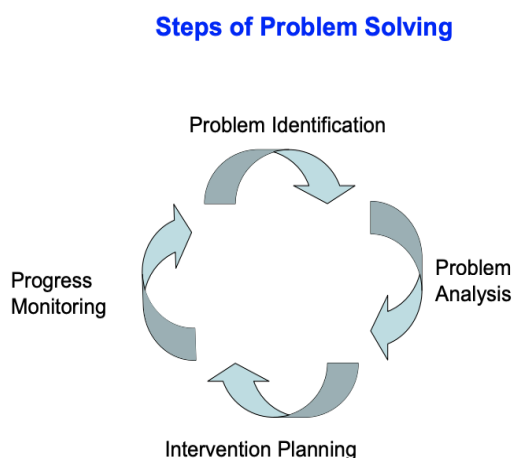
*Step 2. Analyze the problem:* Use information collected from a variety of sources, such as universal screening, progress monitoring, student work, parents' input, etc., to determine why the academic, behavioral or social problem(s) may be occurring.

*Step 3. Develop and implement a plan:*

- Set a goal that describes the expected improvement in the academic, behavioral or social area,
- Select the instruction, intervention(s), and/or strategies that will address the problem,
- Identify how progress will be monitored, and
- Carry out the instructional changes, interventions and/or strategies and check to make sure they are being done correctly (with fidelity).

*Step 4. Monitor student progress:* Collect and use school-wide, small group, and individual student data to determine if the plan is working or if changes are needed.

**Figure 2**



### ***Problem Solving for All Students (Tier 1)***

At Tier 1, universal screening data are used to determine if the core curriculum is effective. Grade level teams consider how many students are meeting benchmarks and grade level standards. If the majority of students are not meeting benchmarks, changes and/or improvements in core curriculum and instruction occur immediately. Universal screening data are also used to make instructional changes to better meet student skill needs and to identify students who may need more support or differentiated instruction. In D64, students receive Tier 1 interventions or strategies minimally for 6-8 weeks.

### ***Problem Solving for Groups of Students (Tier 2)***

Universal screening results are used to identify groups of students who have some risk of not meeting grade level standards and who have common needs. A data review team is involved in the problem solving process at Tier 2 and can be used for a group of students to identify research or evidence-based interventions or strategies that are proven to address the specific skill need(s) of the group. In D64, students receive Tier 2 interventions or strategies minimally for 12-16 weeks.

### ***Problem Solving for Smaller Groups and/or Individual Students (Tier 3)***

Universal screening and/or progress monitoring data may show that some students have large gaps in skills. At this level, the problem solving process is completed by an individual problem-solving team (IPST) which involves the examination of data for smaller groups of students and/or individual students who have more intense skill needs. As with Tier 2,

research or evidence-based interventions and strategies can be provided to address the needs of multiple students, while some students may have specific skill needs that require individualization. In D64, students receive a Tier 3 intervention or strategy minimally for 6-8 weeks.

### **Part 3: Using Data to Inform Instruction**

In the MTSS model, as interventions and strategies get more intense, student progress is monitored more often. Knowing if student performance is improving helps guide educational planning.

At Tier 1, academic data are collected as often as three times during the school year and are used for screening and benchmarking of all students in important areas such as reading and math. This means that schools use the information to measure where all students are performing compared to grade level benchmarks and how much progress the students are making. The data also help schools determine if their core instructional practices are effective for most students. Additionally, in Tier 1, teachers monitor the behavioral and social skills of students and compare to typical development.

At Tier 2, data are collected monthly to determine whether the extra instruction, interventions and/or strategies are making a difference and whether a change in instruction, intervention and/or strategy is needed.

At Tier 3, data are collected for the same reasons as Tier 2 but are collected more often (e.g., weekly) so that decisions and changes to the student's instruction can be made sooner.

In the MTSS model, tools used for universal

screening are in line with the district's instructional materials and practices. Progress monitoring tools, however, may vary across tiers. Additionally, all of the screening and progress monitoring tools are research or evidence-based.

The information collected through universal screening and progress monitoring is used to help the team answer the following questions about the student's skills:

- Is the student making progress?
- Are the current interventions/strategies helping the student learn in the identified problem area?
- Is the student making enough progress to close the gap in the identified area?
- If the interventions/strategies are no longer provided, is the student able to continue to make progress? If not, can the current interventions/strategies be continued with only general education resources?

### **The Role of Parents in the MTSS Process**

Parents are important partners in all aspects of their child's education. D64 involves parents from the beginning of the process. If a student is having academic, behavioral or social difficulties, the classroom teacher is often the first person to share information with the child's parents and how instruction will be differentiated at Tier 1. At Tier 2, the teacher will meet with a Data Review Team to present concerns about the student's school performance. The Data Review Team typically consists of school staff who review available student information, collect additional information to gain a better understanding of the student's needs, and design a learning plan. The parent can expect regular communication as

well as progress-monitoring reports from the Interventionist and the teacher.

If a student progresses to Tier 3 and requires individualized interventions, parents are active members of the Problem-Solving Team that develops the individual intervention plan and participates in the problem-solving process. At this tier, parents also continue to receive progress monitoring reports from the Interventionist and the teacher.

If your child is identified as being at risk for learning, behavioral or social difficulties, you can be involved by:

- Communicating regularly with your child's teacher.
- Asking what interventions, matched to your child's needs, are being used to address academic, behavioral, or social concerns.
- When possible, using the same strategies or interventions at home.
- Asking the school about the formal guidelines they are using for progress monitoring.
- Asking the school to provide you with regular progress monitoring reports.
- If your child is getting more individualized Tier 3 interventions, attending meetings of the Individualized problem-solving team. Remember, you are the expert regarding your child!
- Praising your child for any progress or general improvement in the area(s) of concern.

- When possible, making suggestions for strategies or interventions based on what you know works well at home.
- Always asking questions when things are not clear!

### **MTSS and Special Education**

When a student is participating in the MTSS process, data showing that the student has a significant skill deficit and is making insufficient progress, even when provided with intense, research or evidence-based interventions or strategies, could lead the school team to suspect that the student has a disability that may require special education services. Another possible consideration is the student's need to receive ongoing, additional, and substantial specialized supports and services in order to participate and make progress in the general education curriculum.

To determine special education eligibility, existing data collected during the MTSS process will be used as an important source of evaluation information. The school team, which includes a student's parents, will determine if these data are sufficient to determine eligibility or if additional evaluation data are needed. During this process, the interventions the student has been receiving continues to be provided.

If you have any questions regarding the MTSS process, please contact your child's building administrator.

## **Additional Resources**

[Illinois MTSS Network](#)

[Midwest PBIS Network](#)

[MTSS and the use of Fastbridge Assessments](#)

[Part 226.130 of the Illinois Administrative Code](#)

[Every Student Succeeds Act](#)

[Office of Special Education Programs](#)