

# Chapter 2:

# Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

In this chapter you will -

- learn the three parts of the MTSS process
- learn about progress monitoring and data collection
- understand the role of parents in the process
- learn that parents can request a special education evaluation at any point in the intervention process

## What is MTSS?

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a framework schools use to ensure all students have the supports they need to be successful. Through MTSS, school teams identify students in need of additional academic, social/emotional, or behavioral support, as well as students who may need special education through a school-wide screening process.

Under MTSS, students receive support in the form of interventions. An intervention is a specific type of instruction or guidance that is used to help with a particular type of problem. A teacher will intervene with a solution in the form of an activity, academic programming, or a strategy that is matched to a student's needs. Student progress is monitored often to check the effectiveness of the intervention. The data collected on a student's progress is used to shape instruction or identify specific aids/strategies to help the student reach desired outcomes. Use of an 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: a three-tiered model of school supports, a problem-solving method for decision-making, and the use of data to inform interventions.

One of the most common uses of MTSS, however, is to figure out why a student is not doing well in school and what program or strategy would help the student to succeed.

### Worth a Look

MTSS has a broader scope than the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework. RTI focuses on how children respond to interventions, while the MTSS framework includes academic, social and emotional, and behavioral supports. For more information about MTSS, visit <https://ilmtss.net/online-learning/profile/family-series>

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### Three-Tiered Model of School Supports

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In an MTSS framework, resources are determined by a student's needs. This framework is usually shown as a three-tiered model (see Figure 1) that uses more and more intense instruction and interventions. The level of intensity of instruction and interventions is determined by how a student responds to the instruction.

As the diagram on page 10 shows, 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. Schools need to make sure that the materials and instructional practices they use are of high quality and have been shown by evidence to be effective. Evidence-based interventions are teaching strategies or methods that have been proven to be effective in helping children learn. Another important issue related to high quality instruction and interventions is the practice of using the materials faithfully 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.

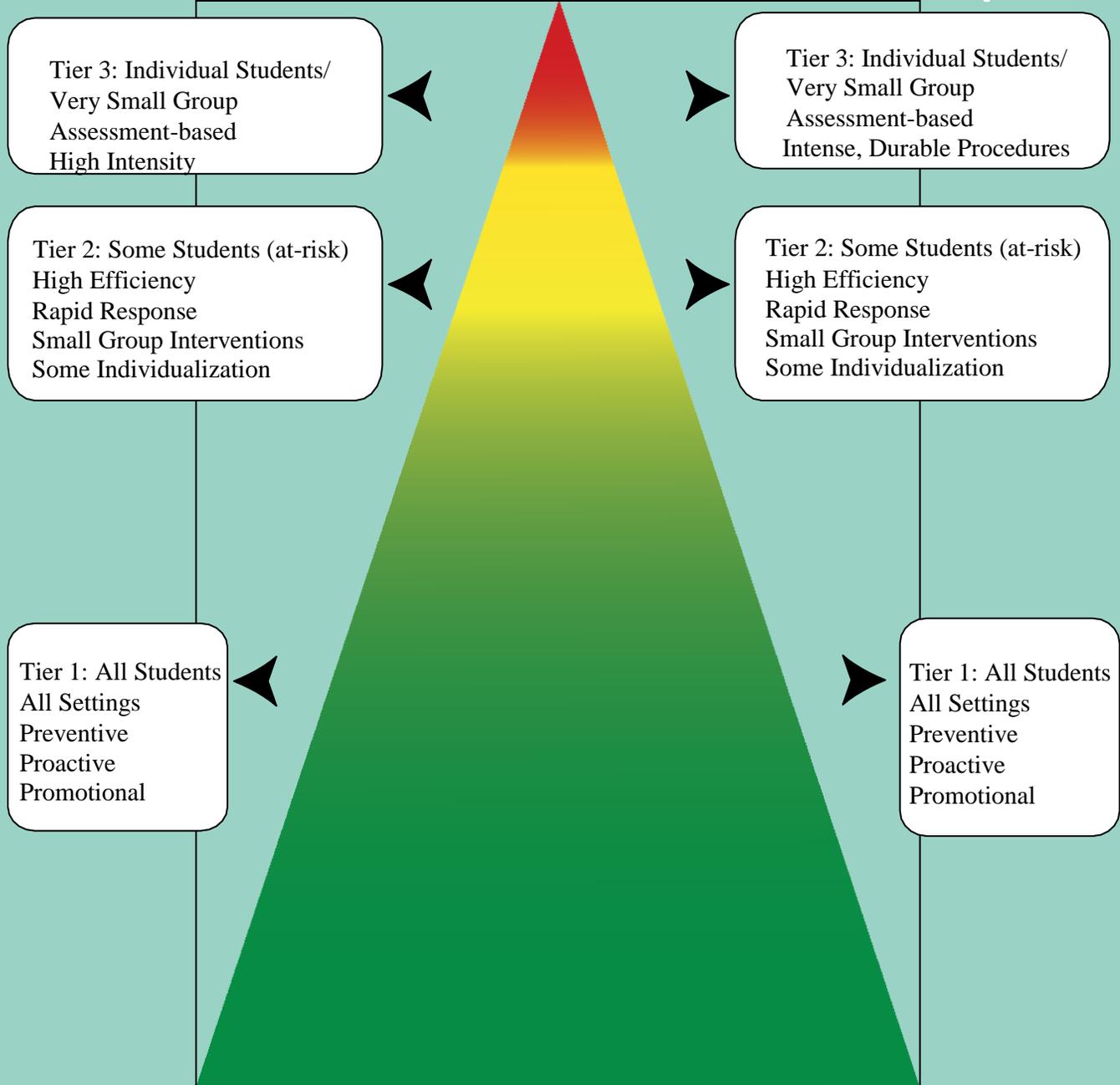
Schools use a universal or school-wide screening to identify students who are at risk for learning problems with core instruction and materials. When a screening test shows that a student is at risk for a learning problem, the student may receive extra help in the general education classroom with the general education teacher. The school begins a step-by-step teaching process and uses frequent assessments to collect data to determine if the teaching techniques are helping the student. If, after a brief period of time, the student does not show enough progress, the teacher will consult with other staff members at the school. Together the team might decide that the best way to help a student who has not progressed in the core instruction, even with extra help, is to use Tier 2 interventions.

Tier 2 interventions are provided with an increased level of intensity *in addition to core instruction* for small groups of students who show some risk of not meeting grade level standards. 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 each student. The teacher can more easily guide a student along the right course. Tier 2 interventions usually involve additional practice and skill building. There are many different kinds of interventions and instruction that can happen in the classroom, outside the classroom, or in small groups.

# Three-Tiered Model of School Supports

## Academic Systems

## Behavioral Systems



Continuum of School-wide Instructional and  
Positive Behavioral Support

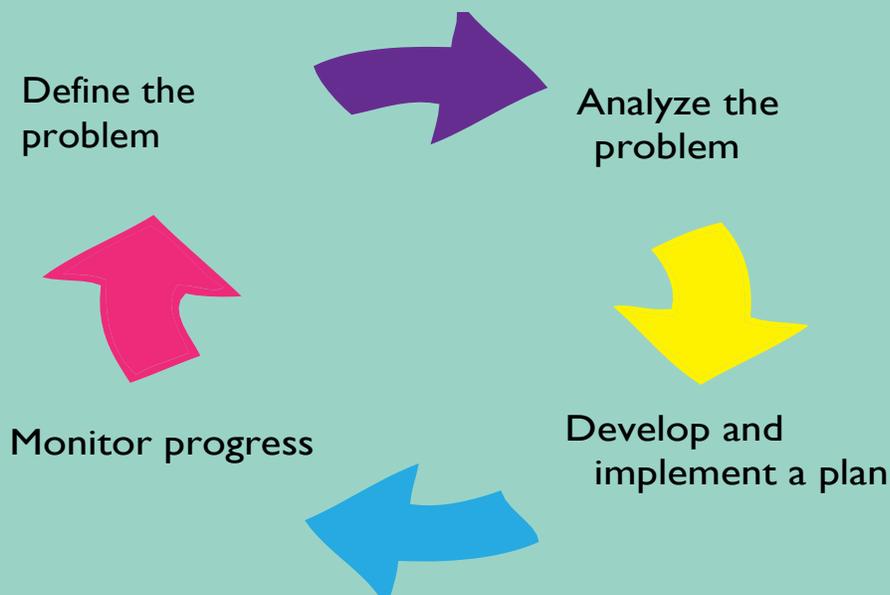
Tier 3 interventions are an even higher level of intensity than Tier 2 interventions and are also provided *in addition to core instruction*. Tier 3 interventions are typically provided to an individual student or perhaps two to three students at one time by a staff member. Interventions are tailored specifically to meet the needs of each student. Students may move fluidly from tier to tier as a result of their response to their interventions.

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### The Problem-Solving Method of Decision-Making

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It is important to note that the decisions school staff make about a student's interventions are based on a standard problem-solving model which involves the following steps:



#### *The Steps of Problem Solving*

Adapted from *Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation* (Batsche, et al. 2005).

- » **Define the problem:** Determine the gap or difference between what the student is expected to do and what the student is actually doing.
- » **Analyze the problem:** Use information collected from a variety of sources, such as school work, tests, parents' input, etc. to determine why the student may be having problems with learning.

» **Develop and implement a plan:**

- Set a goal that describes the expected improvement in the student's learning.
- Choose the intervention(s) specific to the problem.
- Identify how the student's progress will be monitored. Carry out the interventions and check to make sure they are being done correctly.

» **Monitor Progress:** Collect and use student data to determine if the intervention plan is working or if changes are needed.

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### Use of Data to Inform Interventions

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All the steps in the problem-solving process require ongoing data collection and analysis. No decisions can be made about the type, intensity, or the success of an intervention without frequent monitoring of data to indicate the specifics of the problem, the appropriate interventions to be offered, and the outcomes of those interventions.

In an MTSS model, test materials or other tools used to collect data for screening should be in line with the district's instructional materials and practices. Progress monitoring tests should be similar across all three tiers. Additionally, all of the screening and progress monitoring tools should be evidence-based. The information collected from the screening and progress-monitoring materials are used to help the team answer the following questions about a student's learning:

- Is the student making progress?
- Are the current interventions helping the student in the identified problem area?
- Is the student making enough progress to close the gap in the identified area?
- If the interventions are discontinued, will the student continue to make progress? If not, can the

current interventions be continued with general education resources?

### MTSS for Other Interventions

MTSS is also used to respond to other factors that may impact a student's ability to make anticipated academic progress such as certain behaviors that can negatively impact student success. MTSS has also been found to be a useful way for schools to deal with a student who is absent from school too often. Students who miss, on average, two school days a month are on track to be identified as chronically absent since chronic absenteeism in most states, including Illinois, is defined as missing 10 percent of school days for any reason.

All students in a school receive Tier 1 interventions about behavioral expectations and attendance requirements from their teachers through classroom guidance, assemblies, school-wide supports and/or reward systems, and any corresponding policy guides or classroom notices. When behavior, attendance, or any other problem arises that affects a student's work at school, MTSS is used to solve the problem.

A teacher may consult with other staff members to define what a student's problem is when the student appears to be having trouble with behavior or is absent from school too often. The problem will be analyzed through a review of data related to the behavior or school attendance. Tier 2 interventions will be provided with goals that relate specifically to the student's difficulty meeting behavior or attendance standards and will feature appropriate plans to meet those goals.

Just as with most academic interventions, Tier 3 interventions will be provided on an individualized basis. At Tier 3, interventions for behavior will most often involve a Behavioral Intervention Plan (see Chapter 9). Tier 3 interventions for chronic absences will involve a high degree of interaction between school staff and the family to find a solution with lasting benefit for the student.

#### Worth a Look

Public Act 100-0156 was signed into law in June 2017 and amended the Illinois School Code with the addition of 105 ILCS 5/26-18 which defines chronic absence and mandates that schools provide supports to chronically absent students and their families through MTSS.

## The Role of Parents in an MTSS Process

Parents are important partners in all aspects of their child's education. In an MTSS process, school teams are expected to involve parents from the beginning. Concerns about a student experiencing academic, attendance, and/or behavioral difficulties are presented by the child's teacher to a building-level team. The building team consists of school staff who review available student information and collect additional information from the parents to gain a better understanding of the student's needs. As the process continues, parents should be active members of the team and participate in the problem-solving process.

If your child is identified as being at risk for learning, behavioral, or attendance difficulties, to be involved you can -

- » Attend team meetings. Remember, you are the expert regarding your child!
- » Ask what interventions are being used for academic, attendance, and/or behavioral problems.
- » When possible, use the same strategies or interventions at home.
- » Ask the school what formal guidelines they are using for progress monitoring.
- » Ask your school to provide you with regular progress monitoring reports.
- » Praise your child for any progress or general improvement in the area(s) of concern. When possible, make suggestions for strategies or interventions based on what you know works well at home.
- » Always ask questions when things are not clear!

It is also important to note that if you believe that your child is in need of special education services, you have the legal right to ask that the school evaluate your child to determine whether he or she is eligible to receive special education services. *You can ask the school to evaluate your child at any time, regardless of where your child is at in the MTSS process.*

## English Learners in MTSS

If your child is an English learner who struggles academically, sometimes it is difficult to distinguish language acquisition from a disability. When in doubt, it would be prudent to inquire about the MTSS process. The process should include consideration for cultural differences and linguistic patterns present in your child's dominant language. The process should start with assessing your child's dominant language literacy skills, followed by establishing similarities and differences between that language and English. This knowledge should then be used to design all three tiers of MTSS interventions.

## Resources

ISBE supports MTSS development for schools and districts through the Illinois MTSS Network. Please visit the following sites:

<https://ilmtss.net/>

[ilmtss.net/file/17/IL%20MTSSN%20Brochure.pdf](https://ilmtss.net/file/17/IL%20MTSSN%20Brochure.pdf)

In addition, we also recommend the following items for further information on MTSS.

**MTSS: What You Need to Know** at Understood.org (Learning and Attention Issues)

<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/mtss-what-you-need-to-know>