



CORE FUNCTION	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Dimension A	Instructional Excellence and Alignment - Student support services	The school implements a tiered instructional system that allows teachers to deliver evidence-based instruction aligned with the individual needs of students across all tiers. (5117)

The evidence suggests that the locus of control in a multi-tiered system of support is on classroom instruction. Schools must ensure that each of its teachers is faithfully implementing effective teaching practices and aligning them to the same standards and skills as their peers teaching other tiers of intervention. With a focus on student response to instructional practices, as opposed to student deficits or failures, then schools improve the success rates of struggling students and the accuracy of identifying students who truly have disabilities.

**Questions:** Does the department of education provide a systemwide explanation of a tiered instructional system and what each tier entails? How does the principal plan to have difficult conversations around instructional quality and necessary changes? What plans and structures are in place to ensure alignment of instructional strategies and approaches? What sources of training and professional development are available for teachers who may be struggling themselves? Do teachers have an understanding of the 3 tiers of instruction and how to progress through the tiers? Is there a systematic testing provided for all students to determine if higher levels of instruction (tier 2 or tier 3) are needed? Is it consistent across all the grades and classes in the school?

*How does a tiered system of academic supports impact instruction for all students?*

Tiered supports are typically depicted in a pyramid – with the universal interventions forming the base and the select group of students needing the most support at the peak. This figure illustrates that Tier 1 interventions are provided to 100 percent of the population, “supplemental interventions” service 10-15 percent of students, and “intensive interventions” are provided to approximately 3-5 percent of students (Dulaney et al., 2013). While this graphic is helpful for understanding the distribution of services, it assumes a separation between groups of students and service providers. There is also a misconception that Tier 3 is exclusively for students with identified special needs, but this is not always the case (Prewett et al., 2012). A multi-tiered system of supports actually strives to better align those groups into a school-wide academic model (Dulaney et al., 2013).

This system also establishes the general education classroom as a reference point for student performance (Ardoin et al., 2005). The first step to intervention is to identify students who need supports and attempt to provide them within the general education setting, such as peer tutoring or small group instruction (Chard, 2012; Prewett et al., 2012). Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) write that for students who are identified as needing additional services, it is their responsiveness to the general education curriculum that is monitored and used as a determinant of tier placement. The second and third tiers of support must be viewed as supplemental to, not in lieu of, the instruction of the general education classroom (Gamm et al., 2012).

*Why is quality instruction such a critical factor?*

Chard (2012) highlights that a student’s success in a higher tier is largely dependent on the quality of services provided in Tier 1; consequently, the effectiveness of instruction is a primary focus when implementing a tiered system. Previous poor instruction can be the cause of student learning difficulties, often leading to misidentification for special education



services. The Kansas MTSS Guide (2013) notes:

Even outstanding supplemental and intensive interventions cannot serve to support students who are failing because of issues within the core curriculum. The issues with core instruction and curriculum should be addressed prior to focusing on new or additional interventions. (p. 7)

Hoover and Love (2011) note that educators must learn to distinguish between issues with the overall curriculum or the specific teaching practices within classrooms to determine which needs adjustment to better meet the needs of students. The strategies that they do employ must be based on evidence of effectiveness, and the curricular materials and design that they choose must be rooted in research (Duffy, n.d.; Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009; Hoover & Love, 2011; Kansas MTSS, 2013). Knowing which strategies and materials to use and how to adjust them when they are not meeting student needs, as well as ensuring that implementation is consistently high across classrooms, are crucial for the success of MTSS (Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009). Gamm (2012) refers to this as a problem-solving process of matching appropriate instructional resources to student needs.

The alignment of resources and practices with other providers is therefore a critical point of emphasis in a tiered system. Without this alignment, struggling students can sometimes receive different instructional approaches from their teachers in each tier, potentially causing more confusion and less progress for the students (Chard, 2012). Special educators and general educators must collaborate to understand and coordinate the instruction occurring within the other tiers to maximize their effectiveness for students (Hoover & Love, 2011).

*How do tiered interventions provide more equitable and effective services for students?*

Dulaney et al. (2013) cite the guide for the Kansas model of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to explain the model's focus on instruction. The guide states:

The MTSS framework is broader than response to intervention or problem solving alone. It establishes a system intentionally focusing on leadership, professional development, and empowering culture within the context of assessment, curriculum, and instruction. (p. 32)

Because of their critical influence on student performance, this model seeks to frame student performance in terms of classroom practices, as opposed to student ability. Hoover and Love (2011) write that, "An in-depth understanding of the key components of an RTI model focuses the attention of educators on quality-of-instruction issues, rather than on learner deficits" (p. 44). This stands in sharp contrast to a common approach to student intervention, in which students must be referred for services based on low performance or challenges (Powers et al., 2008). As Powers et al. (2008), note, this requires "a focus on determining eligibility rather than identifying and monitoring instructional interventions" (p. 43). By choosing to focus on student responses to teachers' instructional practices, individual student deficits are only considered as factors for individualizing instructional interventions to meet their needs (Duffy, n.d.; Ardoin et al., 2005; Fuchs and Fuchs, 2006).

In this way, tiered interventions are simply means of intensifying and tailoring instruction to support students with additional needs. They should not, as often is the case, become representations of groups of students or specific educational programs (Gamm et al., 2012). The higher tiers of supports simply adapt the educational services being provided – students might have additional time, meet more frequently, or work in smaller groups of students as they receive more intensive supports (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). It is therefore important to intensify and customize interventions before changing or discontinuing them for students who are not demonstrating progress (Prewett et al., 2012; Kansas MTSS, 2013). When students' academic achievement does not improve after these iterations, then a referral to special education may be appropriate (Powers et al., 2008; Hoover & Love, 2011; Gamm, et al., 2012).

As a result, schools that have faithfully implemented the MTSS process have seen reductions in the disproportionality of special education referrals. Students from racial and linguistic minority groups were less likely to be referred to special education programs when their progress was monitored and their interventions were tailored (Powers et al., 2008). The process allowed teachers to better determine if a student's academic challenges were due to other factors than a learning disability, such as motivation, cultural norms, or linguistic barriers (Ardoin et al., 2005; Hoover & Love, 2011;



Gamm et al., 2012; Prewett et al., 2012). This process also allows students who do have a diagnosed learning disability to receive the appropriate special education services earlier in their academic careers and prevent patterns of failure and struggle (Chard, 2012; Gamm et al., 2012).

#### *How do teachers establish tiered instruction?*

For every lesson, all students should be given the opportunity to receive the content. The teacher may provide whole class direct instruction. This is tier 1 level instruction. Beyond tier 1, teachers must have knowledge and skills to adapt materials and methods of teaching to meet the specific needs of each student.

As a part of tier 1 instruction, teachers are encouraged to differentiate their lesson based on the learning needs of the students in front of them. Teachers may use instructional modes to differentiate the instruction—pulling some students into a teacher-directed small group to reteach parts of the lesson that formative assessments indicated the students did not grasp, or the teacher may assign groupings of students based on elements of the lesson that need to be reinforced. These groupings may be homogenous with all the students within the group needing reinforcement of a particular concept or they may be heterogeneous with students learning from one another (stronger students taking the lead, but all students having a role in the group; (Rogers, 1996; Tomlinson, 1995, 2003).

Several studies have shown that when teachers use a differentiated instruction approach to teaching, it can be a positive influence on students. Research conducted by Vygotsky, Csikszentmihalyi, Sternberg, Torff, and Grigorenko (in Tomlinson, 2000) shows that students are more successful in school if students are taught with a teaching approach that is responsive to the level of readiness, interests, and learning profile of each student.

Carroll (2022, August) gives the following suggestions for creating a tiered lesson plan

1. Design and articulate the goals for the lesson. Specifically, educators state what they hope students will know, understand, and be able to do as a consequence of completing the lesson.
2. Decide how many tiers of instruction are most appropriate for the assembly of students.
3. Choose which parts of the lesson should be tiered.
4. Outline a standard lesson initiation point. In this step, instructors determine how they would teach the lesson if they were not going to teach with tiered levels.
5. Create tiered lessons, addressing the levels of each group of students. Each lesson tier should meet the goals articulated in step one and challenge each group of students appropriately.
6. Review the tiered lessons and activities to assure that they benefit all students and are considerate of their needs.
7. Closely evaluate the lessons and anticipate issues with carrying out the various tiers of instruction. Develop a plan for how to instruct each group and outline a way to bring students back to the entire class instruction following the tiered lesson.

The [MTSS Blueprint](#) explains the tiers as fluid:

Movement amongst the three tiers is fluid and is not determined or defined by specific designations, such as diagnosed disabilities. Rather, movement is supported by data from universal screeners, diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring, and how a student responds to one level of intervention. Any and all students should have access to supports when they need them. In addition, obtaining services at one point does not mean that students will always need that level of support. The MTSS process is not always linear, but rather oriented around problem solving. When data suggests that students require more or less intensive supports to aid either remediation or enrichment, they will move throughout the tiers based on that need.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2022) shares this:

When a child falls behind, MTSS is a powerful framework for questioning the quality of support a child has received, rather than assuming there is some sort of deficit within the child. MTSS calls for educators to consider what may have prevented a child from learning, including examining whether the child has had access to evidence-based, culturally responsive core instruction and differentiated support.



MTSS can disrupt patterns of bias because it asks the educational system to better serve a child who has fallen behind and address those factors to support student success (Sullivan & Proctor, 2016). Assessing students with a valid and reliable [screening assessment](#) provides one source of objective data to proactively assess risk and determine the specific skills requiring additional instruction to help get a child back on track toward grade level success. Additionally, gathering information about the type and [quality of instructional materials](#) with which the student has been taught can illuminate the source of current difficulties and inform instructional decisions.

And finally, Richards and Omdal (2007) give these words on tiered instruction:

The tiering of lessons allows required skills to be gained at a learning rate better matched to the students' instructional level. Tiered instruction is based on the existing skills and knowledge of the learners. Learner placement within a tiered level is based on a preassessment (formative assessment) score that measures the learners' background knowledge and the level of the required skills for the content application. Tiering supports learners with low skills and minimal prior knowledge in gaining meaningful academic growth. It provides learners with high skills and above-average background knowledge the opportunity to go beyond the basics and add depth, complexity, and universal connections to the content. (p. 429)

Free Resources: [Microsoft Word - DI\\_Mod1\\_Tiering\\_HO-Proofed.doc \(educationalimpact.com\)](#)

## NC MTSS CONNECTION:

NC Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) definition: NC MTSS is a school improvement framework which encompasses academic, behavioral, and social-emotional instruction and support. NC MTSS employs a systems approach using data-driven problem-solving to maximize growth for all. NC MTSS is built on a strong foundation of six critical components, which have been vetted through North Carolina practitioners and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. These six critical components are: leadership, building capacity, communication and collaboration, data evaluation, data-based problem solving, and a three-tiered instruction and intervention model. Indicator A4.01 focuses on the three-tiered instruction and intervention component.

Clearly defined Core support (sometimes referred to as Tier I) for academics, behavior, and social-emotional skills are essential in an MTSS. Core support can be defined through the lens of instruction, curriculum, environment and data-evaluation across all content and grade levels. This level of specificity allows all stakeholders to know and understand the expectations for Core and monitor implementation.

Within a MTSS, district and school teams are encouraged to implement a "system" of interventions that are well-defined, evidence-based, efficient, effective, and readily available to students that need them. Because some educational practices are broadly effective and can be generalized widely across contexts and populations, a standard treatment protocol approach to developing an intervention system results in effective and efficient intervention systems. With a standard treatment protocol approach interventions components are well specified and have been shown to work generally for large numbers of students. The well-defined procedures, materials and practices allow quick access for students in need.

Benefits of a standard-protocol approach include:

- More efficient use of resources, including time
- Reduces training and support needs for school staff
- Allows students more timely access to interventions
- More likely to result in implementation fidelity
- More likely to benefit the majority of students, if not all, in an intervention group
- Intervention to meet needs and match core
- Supported by rigorous evidence
- Replicable from teacher to teacher in order to maximize effectiveness and efficiency

[NC MTSS Implementation Guide](#)



## NC FEDERAL PROGRAMS CONNECTION:

North Carolina, pursuant to Section 1111 (1)(B)(i)(ii) of the Every Student Succeeds Act, requires schools identified as **Comprehensive Support and Improvement for Low Proficiency (CSI-LP)** under subsection (c)(4)(D)(i)(II), to develop a CSI –LP Plan. The school must prioritize and implement Indicator A4.01 annually. Additionally, the plan must include the active implementation of evidence-based interventions to address the school-wide low-proficiency rate. The evidence-based interventions must take into account the improvement necessary on such measures to make significant progress in improving student performance against long term goals. **For CSI-LP identified schools**, annual action steps for indicator A4.01 should be written using this format: *Within the 2023-24 school year, our CSI -LP school will implement the following evidenced-based intervention(s) (insert action) to increase overall student performance.* For additional information, visit the Comprehensive and Targeted School Support page on the Office of Federal Programs webpage.

North Carolina, pursuant to Section 1111 (2)(C)(i)(ii) of the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, requires schools identified as **Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI)**, to develop an ATSI Plan. The school must prioritize and implement Indicator A4.01 annually. Additionally, the plan must include the active implementation of evidence-based interventions to address the performance of identified underperforming student subgroups. The evidence-based interventions must take into account the improvement necessary on such measures to make significant progress in improving subgroup performance against long-term goals. **For ATSI-identified schools**, annual action steps for indicator A4.01 should be written using this format: *Within the 2023-24 school year, our ATSI school will implement the following evidenced-based intervention(s) (insert action) to increase overall performance of (insert identified subgroup).* For additional information, visit the Comprehensive and Targeted School Support page on the Office of Federal Programs webpage.

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