

Book Study

Prepared by the
Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) Project

Using RtI for School Improvement: Raising Every Student's Achievement Scores

Cara Shores & Kim Chester
(Corwin Press, 2009)

Book Description:

Combining a “big picture” approach with research-based strategies, *Using RTI for School Improvement* illustrates how RTI can transform schools into highly effective, motivating learning environments. The book includes practical suggestions for partnering with parents, guidelines for developing action plans, and a comprehensive vision and framework for implementing RTI.

Target Audience:

This book provides an overall picture for teams who are beginning to structure for MTSS. Questions specific to high schools, parents, and behavior are included with this guide, so teams may choose accordingly in their discussions.

Note: Throughout this book, you will see the term Response to Intervention or RtI. Since the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 the term Response-to-Intervention (RtI) has become a buzz word within education. RtI is built upon a broad research base resulting in multiple models with the common features of (1) multiple tiers of intervention service delivery, (2) problem solving method and (3) data collection/assessment to inform decisions at each tier of service delivery (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2006).

It is not uncommon to hear the term RtI and Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) used interchangeably. However, in many instances the meaning applied to RtI does not align with the principles and practices of a MTSS. The principles and practices of a MTSS are based upon what research has shown to be effective in **both** creating successful and sustainable **system change** as well as what is necessary in providing **the most effective instruction to all students**. The MTSS framework is designed to address the academic and behavioral needs of every student, regardless of whether the students are struggling or have advanced learning needs. In the most of simple terms, RtI is what happens in the triangle at the center of the MTSS trademark.

MTSS is the triangle PLUS everything else that builds and supports the system. That being said, there are enough “crossing over” points to make a book study based on an RtI model a worthwhile pursuit. For our purposes, we will be using the term MTSS in the questions to give the book a broader perspective.

National Association of State Directors of Special Education. (2006). *Response to intervention: Policy considerations and implications*. Alexandria: National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

Chapter 1: Creating a Vision and Framework

Overview

This chapter provides an overview and history of Response to Intervention. It explores models of implementation: standard protocol, problem-solving, and mixed. It also explores RTI beyond the elementary setting to middle school or junior high and high school and as it applies within behavior interventions.

Point to Ponder

Legitimate school improvement through MTSS is only effective if implemented in its entirety. MTSS cannot be simplified or used in parts.

Discussion Questions

1. No Child Left Behind contends there are significant gaps in academic performance between the general school population and subgroups of children. What subgroup in our school is performing below expectations?
2. Authors Shores and Chester declare schools must have a firm commitment to change, including rethinking job descriptions and reallocating resources that includes extensive training for teachers and administrators. Otherwise, success will be minimal. Is our school ready for this type of commitment? Is our school ready to rethink, reallocate and train? What might be the barriers?
3. Discuss the statement MTSS is a general education practice.
4. The Standard Protocol Model is portrayed on pages 7 and 8. Experts contend the advantages of this model of implementation are the ability to control variables, the use of research-based strategies, and a manageable number of strategies which increases fidelity. The disadvantage, however, is the reduced flexibility. While interventions are based on student need, they are not based on individual learning styles. It also calls for “considerable restructuring” and most of the research has been with K-3 reading. Is this model one our school should consider? How does this model fit into the Kansas MTSS model?
5. The Problem-Solving Model is illustrated on page 10. The advantage of this model is its flexibility with interventions, the increased focus on individual needs, the decision-making process of professionals, and the application to both behavioral and academic problems. It is challenging, however, to analyze all relevant data. Factors such as cultural differences and academic English acquisition can complicate determining the cause of a student’s difficulty. Caution should be taken to prevent disproportionate placement. This model also increases the challenge of fidelity and progress monitoring. Is this model one our school should consider? How does this fit into the Kansas MTSS model?

6. The Mixed Model provides the advantage of established interventions and appropriate interventions for students with different needs. This structure varies by school resources and instructional needs. Is this model one our school should consider? How does this fit into the Kansas MTSS model?

Discussion Specific to High School

7. Not all students who have difficulty will be identified and remediated in primary grades, especially as learning shifts from learning to read to reading to learn. In addition, the departmental structure and limited student contact in high schools results in no mechanism for identifying and supporting at-risk students. This creates the “ninth-grade bulge.” This is the phenomenon of a lower rate of promotion between ninth and tenth grades, the lowest rate between any other grades. Does our school have a freshman bulge? What might be contributing factors?
8. Respond to the authors’ statement “The concept of RTI implementation as a school improvement process is perhaps more important at the secondary level than in the earlier grades.”
9. When implementing RTI in the junior high and high school settings, the differences between the Standard Protocol Model and the Problem Solving Model are the direction they take in identifying and remediating student weaknesses. The Standard Protocol Model addresses student deficits in basic skills areas, specifically reading comprehension. The Problem Solving Model addresses weaknesses in actual content knowledge. Which approach is a better fit for our junior high or high school?
10. Content Literacy Continuum (CLC) is a basic skills structure and is outlined on page 21. It proposes five questions to consider about levels of literacy supports available to struggling students. The graphic depicting CLC is on page 22. This model requires a school climate change, scheduling changes, redefinition of roles and responsibilities, and thinking outside the box. Does the potential to address significant reading comprehension issues justify the investment in the process for our school?
11. A content-specific structure utilizes benchmark assessment tools. Students performing below benchmark receive extended learning time. Additional time in itself does not increase achievement. There must be small group instruction different from general curriculum that is based on student needs with progress monitoring. Does our school have this structure? Parts of this structure? Would a content-specific structure help our students?

Discussion Specific to Behavior

12. The Problem-Solving Model for behavioral interventions includes research-based interventions, progress monitoring, and fidelity of instruction. Tier I focuses on school-wide instruction that teaches expectations with positive and negative reinforcement. What does our school use as a Tier I behavior intervention? How do we know if it's working?
13. Tier I behavior interventions work for 80% of the students. A team analyzes student behavior to determine possible cause and intervention plan. Instructional decisions consider responsiveness to the strategy. Resource D on page 197 is one way to document behaviors. What does our school currently do for students who do not respond to general behavior interventions? Is it effective? How do we know? Would Resource D help?
14. Students with extreme behaviors need intensive assessment and interventions or Tier III. Interventions are specific to individual students. As problem behaviors diminish, interventions are phased out. A comprehensive plan provides flexible movement through tiers as students move through levels of support as behavior needs dictate. Does our school have any students needing Tier III interventions? Does our school have a structure to support these students? How do we know if it works? How do we know when a student needs a change in the level of support?

Discussion Specific to Parents

15. Communication is a key factor to making parent involvement more than a token effort. How does our school currently communicate with parents? Are parents truly a part of the team?

Chapter 2: Selecting and Implementing Ongoing Assessment

Overview

Assessment guides instruction. There are multiple forms of assessment at all tiers, including formative, summative, benchmark, and curriculum-based measurements. Goals and assessments must align to allow data to drive student-specific decisions.

Point to Ponder

Grades are a large-scale assessment that do not immediately increase student learning.

Discussion Questions

1. The authors write, “The very mention of the word ‘assessment’ conjures up negative emotions for teachers.” (pg 34) Describe the feeling you get when you think about assessment and data.
2. The authors refer to DuFour’s theory of DRIP which contends teachers are Data Rich and Information Poor. Without instructional relevance, assessment scores are useless and a waste of time. The key factor is the teacher’s response to the data. What data do we collect? How do we ensure assessment data is instructionally relevant? How do our teachers respond to data? Is our school data rich and information poor? How can we use data more effectively?
3. True impact on student learning comes from using data to provide specific feedback to teachers, parents, and students so they can make necessary instructional changes. Further, providing explicit feedback to students teaches students to self assess and regulate their own learning. What data do we share with students? How do we help students reflect on and improve their own learning?
4. Tier I assessments are commonly formative or summative. What is the difference? What formative and summative assessments does our school use?
5. Benchmark assessments are sometimes called universal screening tools. Benchmark assessments are used to determine mastery or to predict performance on future summative assessments. For maximum effectiveness, benchmark assessment data should drive instruction. What screeners does our school use? What is the purpose of the assessment? How is the data used to change instruction? How can we improve our benchmark assessments?
6. Progress monitoring assessments measure individual student progress and are a key component of Tier 2. What progress monitoring does our school have? What do we need? How do we collect and analyze progress monitoring data? How does the data drive instruction?

Discussion Specific to Behavior

7. To determine contributing factors to inappropriate behavior, it is imperative to systematically collect and analyze school-wide and individual student data. How does our school collect and analyze time of day, location in the school, and specific teacher or subject matter? How does our school systematically review and analyze both behavior and academic data?
8. Functional behavior assessments determine the cause or function of a behavior prior to developing intervention. Resource D on page 197 is a simple ABC behavioral assessment. How would this tool benefit our school? How could this tool be used effectively in our school?

Discussion Specific to Parents

9. Although it is not required for parents to give permission for assessments imbedded in the curriculum, they should be aware of administration and purpose. How does our school keep parents well-informed and involved in the assessment process?

Chapter 3: Determining Appropriate Research-Based Interventions

Overview

This chapter describes several research-based strategies across many grade levels and content areas. They are proven strategies that can be implemented during Tiers 2 and 3 effectively in a well-designed MTSS plan.

Point to Ponder

The art of teaching is becoming the science of teaching.

Discussion Questions

1. Shores and Chester cite research that “the most important factor affecting student achievement is the classroom teacher.” On a scale of one to ten with ten being absolute agreement, to what degree do you agree with that statement?
2. The book classifies interventions into four categories: 1. research-validated curriculum, 2. research-based supplemental materials, 3. research-based practices, and 4. research-based learning strategies. What does our school currently use that fits into each category? Are we lacking in any area? Do we have an abundance or overlap in any area? Is there anything we can streamline?
3. The authors explain that supplemental materials are often used for Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions. Materials should align with core curriculum and provide intensive instruction. What materials, software or strategies does our school currently have or use that would serve as a Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention?
4. Published programs may offer increased fidelity over less structured interventions (pg 59). How do our school’s interventions ensure fidelity? Published programs may be expensive and it may be difficult to purchase a program for every need. What programs does our school already own? What needs do they address? What additional needs do they not address?
5. Computer-assisted instruction (CAI) can address individual student needs by providing drill and practice, tutorials, and simulations. Student achievement improves most significantly when CAI is used as a supplement to direct instruction, not as a stand alone. What computer programs does our school use? How can it be better incorporated as supplemental, not independent of instruction?
6. “Targeted professional development is critical for successful school improvement.” (pg 62) A systematic staff development plan should provide training in small increments. Does our school have a plan to train and support teachers as we implement targeted strategies? How can we improve our professional development?

7. This chapter explores research-based instructional strategies. Have participants select one or more strategies from the list. Review the strategy for the purpose of sharing with the group.

Differentiated Instruction

- pre-instruction assessment (pg 67)
- flexible grouping (pg 67)
- practice and feedback (pg 67)
- tiered instruction (pg 68)
- anchor activities (pg 70)
- think-alouds (pg 70)
- graphic organizers (pg 71)

Math

- Concrete, Representational, Abstract (CRA) (pg 78)
- Schema-Based Instruction (pg 80)

General Content

- Identifying Similarities and Differences (pg 82)
 - Comparing (pg 83)
 - Classifying (pg 84)
 - Creating metaphors (pg 84)
 - Creating analogies (pg 84)

Summarizing Strategies

- Reciprocal teaching (pg 85)
- Predicting (pg 86)
- Clarifying (pg 86)
- Questioning (pg 86)
- Summarizing (pg 86)
- The rule-based strategy (pg 86)
- Summary frames (pg 87)

- Note-taking Strategies (pg 88)

Discussion Specific to Behavior

8. Unruly behaviors impede student learning. The preventive and positive approach to behavior is more effective than reactive and aversive. School-wide positive behavior supports focus on strategies to improve learning on three levels: Tier 1 (school-wide procedures), Tier 2 (classroom procedures) and Tier 3 (individual procedures). What proactive supports does our school have in place for the school, classrooms, and individuals? What policies or procedures do we practice that are reactive and aversive? How can our system improve positive behavior supports?

9. Effective classroom management has four critical components: “withitness,” smoothness and momentum during presentations, clear expectations, and variety and challenge during seatwork. A school-wide behavior plan is an advantage to classroom teachers because it creates consistency and support. Does my classroom have the critical components of effective management? Which areas could I improve? How? Does our school have a school-wide behavior plan that creates consistency and support.?
10. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) examines antecedents, behaviors, and consequences to determine the cause or function of problem behavior. Figure 3.2 on page 74 illustrates the ABC Scenario. Individually or as a group, select a behavior in our school and consider the ABC scenario.
11. The behavioral strategies presented are cognitive strategies because they require students to actively think about their behavior and problem solve. Discuss each cognitive strategy as it applies to behavior and/or academics.
 - Cognitive Strategy Instruction (CSI) (pg 76)
 - Strategic Instruction Model (pg 77)

Discussion Specific to Parents

12. Not only should parents know the strategies being implemented with their child across all tiers, they should also know the timeline of implementation. How does our school inform and involve parents as we implement instructional strategies?

Chapter 4: Providing Effective Instruction for All: Tier I

Overview

Tier 1 in the MTSS process is effective instruction for all students. This requires developing foundational beliefs among all staff members, strengthening core instruction and behavior management for all students, providing on-going training to faculty and staff in the identified areas of need.

Point to Ponder

Student failure is not an option. All students will achieve.

Discussion Questions

Suggestions for each of the four steps in the process: vision, instruction, behavior management, staff development

Step 1: Develop a Vision that Promotes MTSS

1. School culture plays a significant part in sustainability of reform. When change is imposed, however, those involved may not have the understanding, vision or buy-in essential to the program's success. Developing a communicative culture increases success. How can our school culture be characterized? How would we rate our understanding, vision and buy-in? How can we develop a communicative culture?
2. As teachers begin to use data to prescribe the next steps in teaching, there is no blame for student failure. What is the feeling associated with student data at our school? Do some feel blame? Is there an air of problem solving? How can our school culture be improved?
3. There are four areas essential for school reform: 1. district-level practices that encourage reform, 2. strong school leadership, 3. teacher buy-in, and 4. key teacher leadership. How do our school and district rate in these four areas?

District-Level Practices that Encourage Reform

4. Districts need a thorough action plan for MTSS development. Adequate resources are needed to provide extensive staff development specific to the MTSS process, strategies, progress monitoring, and data utilization. These should all be developed on a realistic timeline. Does our district have a methodical, deliberate plan? Does our district have a realistic vision for school improvement?
5. The school system must choose which model of RTI to implement: Standard Protocol Model, Problem-Solving Model or the mixed model. Which model best fits our school? Kansas MTSS supports the hybrid or mixed model. Does this fit our situation? Which model can we implement with fidelity?

6. MTSS models should not simply be copied. They should be school-specific. MTSS processes will vary widely between sites. It is impossible to simply duplicate programs from one to school to another. Have we seen an effective program? Do we know of a system that would work for us? How will it need to be modified to fit us?

Strong School Leadership, Teacher Buy-In, and Key Teacher Leadership

7. Principals are key to the success of MTSS. Effective leadership is committed to prevention-orientation practices. Principals must convey to the faculty that the process is worthwhile. Is the principal committed to the success of MTSS? Does the principal understand and value the process? What staff development might the principal need to gain the insight needed to be an effective leader for MTSS?
8. Involving teachers in the decision-making process develops ownership and teacher leadership. Ongoing support and training increase teacher commitment. How does our school involve teachers? How does our school support teacher leadership? Where are our teachers in the commitment process? How can we improve?

Step 2: Strengthen Instruction for All Students

9. MTSS has a goal of serving 80 percent of the students with the core instruction in Tier 1. If less than 80 percent of the students are successful in Tier 1, then core instruction is not high quality. How many of our students are successful in Tier 1? Do we need to examine the quality of core instruction?

Quality Standards-Based Curriculum

10. Marzano says the effective way to develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum is to choose the most essential components and teach them to deep levels of understanding. What “fluff” do we have in our curriculum? What is essential?
10. “Schools should analyze summative and benchmark assessment data to determine strengths and weaknesses in curriculum and instruction.” (pg 100) Use Resource E on page 201 and your school’s data to identify areas that need attention. Develop an action plan to address deficit areas of instruction. This may include change in materials, instructional practices, schedules, staff development, or personnel adjustments.

Classroom Environment

12. Students must have basic needs met before learning can occur. Good classroom weather refers to physical and emotional safety. How’s the weather in our school’s classrooms?

Formative Assessment

13. It is imperative that teachers understand not only how to administer formative assessments, but also how to use the information to adjust instruction for students who are at risk and for those who need enrichment. What training do we provide on formative assessments for teachers? Do we have flexible instructional groupings based on needs? How can we improve our support of teachers and instructional groups?

Backward Design

14. To use assessment to drive instruction, begin with the end result in mind. Backward Design is the process of designing final assessment as the first, rather than the last step in instructional planning. It focuses on desired results first. What is acceptable evidence of learning?

Differentiated Instruction

15. Differentiated instruction is developing a clear picture of where each student should be and how to get them there by providing a variety of avenues that allow all students to achieve at high levels. In differentiated instruction teachers adjust content to teach different levels of complexity. This means more than just placing students in groups. How can differentiated instruction be implemented in my classroom?

Example of Quality Tier 1 Instruction

16. The example of Tier 1 instruction on page 106 depicts a quality classroom. How does Mrs. Smith's class compare to mine? What elements can I incorporate in my class?

Discussion Specific to Behavior**Step 3: Develop Effective Behavior Management**

16. The direct link between academic achievement and student behavior is well established and widely accepted. Development of appropriate behavior management techniques should be included in evaluation and strengthening of Tier 1. The four components of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are listed on page 109. Which components does our school have in place? Which components do we need to strengthen?

Discussion Question**Step 4: Begin Staff Development**

18. All faculty should be trained in the fundamentals and specifics of RtI implementation. Training includes ongoing training in specific research-based strategies and extensive training in any concepts which are new. Which model best fits

our school-standard protocol, problem-solving, or a combination? What training does our staff need? How can we provide it? How can we provide ongoing support?

Discussion Specific to Parents

19. “What would happen if we argued that 80 percent of parents should be actively involved before we moved to more intense parent participation practices?” (pg 110)

Chapter 5: Establishing an Intervention Structure for At-Risk Students: Tier 2

Overview

This chapter outlines specific steps in the implementation of Tier 2 interventions. It discusses three models of implementation: Standard Protocol, Problem Solving, and Mixed.

Point to Ponder

In order for the MTSS process to be effective, schools should begin with a well-developed action plan and incorporate the process into the overall school improvement plan.

There will be students who fail to thrive in the general education classroom.

Discussion Questions

1. Providing early intervention in specific areas of instruction is considered the most beneficial characteristic of RTI. Early intervention has a double meaning. It can mean intervene during the early years or early in the year. When does our school intervene? How do we know when it's time to intervene?

Standard Protocol Model

2. Standard Protocol first identifies the most common deficit areas by searching for patterns of weakness in assessment data and then prioritizing. What did we find when we analyzed our assessment data for patterns or groups of students who have similar needs?
3. The Standard Protocol Model relies on standard interventions. It provides research-based interventions and fidelity. What research-based interventions match the needs of groups of students? What do we have? What would we need? What could we discontinue? How can we ensure fidelity?
4. Delivery plans in the standard protocol model can be innovative. Intervention time can be needs-based instruction, targeted assistance, before-school, after-school, zero period, or extended learning time. There are many creative options available. What scheduling fits our students?

Problem-Solving Model

5. Figure 5.1 on page 119 charts a comparison between the Standard Protocol Model and the Problem-Solving Model. Both models use research-based interventions and progress monitoring. The difference is the Problem-Solving Model establishes a team to make instructional decisions based on the needs of individual students and then develop an intervention plan. Do we currently have a student assistance team? Are they functioning in the Problem-Solving capacity? Do they receive the training necessary to be effective? What interventions are available for the team to select from? Who knows how to effectively implement each intervention?

Mixed Model

6. The Mixed Model, also referred to as the Hybrid Model, establishes all of the components for both models. This includes screening measures, progress monitoring, and demarcation of progress. The Mixed Model is set up to serve both small groups and individuals. Is this a model that would benefit our school? What parts are already in place? What pieces are missing? Generally speaking, how could the existing pieces be improved and how could the missing pieces be implemented?
7. Identifying a student as a non-responder after one assessment can produce a false positive. How does our system ensure reliable predictions of student performance? Do we use any of the strategies discussed on page 122?
8. Intensity of instruction includes amount of time per session, number of sessions per week, and the number of weeks. Manipulating the variables can increase or decrease intensity. How does our system control the variables of intervention intensity? How can our system be improved?
9. “Schools must also establish procedures for ensuring fidelity of instruction, defined as implementation of the strategy as it was intended by the researchers.” (pg 122) What procedures have we established to ensure fidelity? How can we use Resource C on page 195 to improve fidelity?
10. “Recommendations for the number of weeks for implementation of academic interventions vary widely, ranging from ten to twenty weeks and more.” (pg 122) How long do our interventions last? Is this sufficient? How do we know?
11. Schools must choose assessment tools for measuring student progress then decide how often the assessment tools will be administered. The frequency for progress monitor varies, but is generally between bi-weekly and weekly as it can be incorporated into the daily schedule. What is our assessment tool? How often is it administered? How do we incorporate assessments into the daily schedule? Resource B on page 189 illustrates a schedule incorporating needs-based instruction. How does this fit with our targeted assistance?

12. Data management is key to progress monitoring. Charts and graphs provide a picture of student progress. The dual-discrepancy method is a valid means of defining progress. This involves comparing the student's level of performance to a benchmark or goal. Graphing beginning and ending performance levels produces a slope that depicts improvement. This guides instruction and the next step in instruction. How do we manage and graph data? Can we track progress to the point that it guides instruction? How can we improve?
13. The authors understand that it is easy to become overwhelmed with the magnitude of planning for and implementing MTSS in Tiers 1 and 2. Sometimes schools launch into elaborate, ineffective plans that are quickly abandoned. It is better to have a well-developed master plan that drives school improvement. Development of one element naturally leads to the next. This encompasses instruction, assessment, scheduling, and allocation of resources to support the MTSS process. Are we overwhelmed? Have we identified the elements? Do we have a well-developed plan for change and overall school improvement? Do we have all of the elements? Can we streamline?

Discussion Specific to Behavior

14. Behavior interventions need to be closely monitored. Academic progress is generally reviewed and adjusted every ten weeks. Behavior interventions will probably need reviewed and adjusted every two to three weeks. How often do we monitor progress for behavior interventions? Is it sufficient?
15. Intensity of behavioral interventions is based on the type of strategy used. Depending on the intervention, tools such as behavior charts and tokens may be beneficial. Do we have school personnel who know how to use behavior interventions and their tools effectively? How can we develop interventions school-wide?

Discussion Specific to Parents

16. MTSS is a shift in how we have traditionally worked with struggling students. Parents need to understand that rejecting an intervention will not make the student's difficulty go away. Denying that a weakness exists is the worst thing a teacher or parent can do.

Examples of Tier 2 Processes

17. The authors provide a variety of examples using the Standard Protocol and Problem-Solving Models. Select a scenario relevant to your situation. Discuss the case study questions on the next two pages (19 and 20).

Primary School Standard Protocol Model
First grader Carrie has difficulty with reading

page 127

Elementary School Standard Protocol Model Fourth grader Terrence has difficulty with fractions and mixed numbers	page 129
Middle School Problem Solving Model Eighth grader Jamie has difficulty with reading	page 129
High School Basic Skills Structure Freshman Jiwon is an ESL student having difficulty with vocabulary	page 132
Kristin at Elementary School Behavior Problem-Solving Model Third grader Kristin has difficulty with behavior	page 133

Response to Intervention Case Study Discussion

1. What skill, content area, or behavior was targeted?
2. How was the target area identified?
3. What was the baseline data?
4. What was the end goal?
5. What was the learning goal?
6. What was the weekly progress goal?
7. How does this student compare to his or her peers?
8. What was done to ensure this was not a false positive?
9. Are there any contributing factors? What is the history of learning?
10. Who makes the instructional decisions?

11. What was the Tier 2 intervention? How and why was it selected? Is it research-based?

12. What was the intensity of intervention?

Time

Frequency

Duration

13. What was the total time of intervention? What was the student missing?

14. Who was the intervention instructor?

15. What assessment tool was used to monitor progress?

16. Review the student's progress data.

Carrie's ORF Data	Figure 5.3	Page 128
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Terrence's Math Data	Figure 5.4	Page 130
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Jamie's Maze Data Chart	Figure 5.5	Page 131
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Jiwon's Vocabulary Data	Figure 5.6	Page 133
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Kristin's Behavior Chart	Figure 5.7	Page 135
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a. Was the goal met?

b. Is the learning slope sufficient?

c. Is the intervention effective?

d. Is the intervention continued or discontinued? Why?

17. How did teachers communicate with each other?

18. How did teachers communicate with parents?

Chapter 6: Delivering Intensive Intervention to Non-Responders: Tier 3

Overview

Tier 3 instruction is an extension of Tier 2. It is more intense but takes into account diagnostic information generated by instruction and assessment. Tier 3 is often viewed as assessment for students for learning disabilities.

Point to Ponder

No parent dreams of having a child with a disability.

Discussion Questions

1. When a student makes insufficient progress in Tier 2, the MTSS pyramid offers Tier 3 which often leads to learning disabilities identification. Tier 3 is the most intensive intervention with individualized instruction. It is frequently provided through special education. Kansas MTSS maintains that Tier 3 is not always special education. Individualize instruction can be provided through general education, too. How do we identify non-responders to Tier 2? How do we provide individualized instruction in Tier 3? Is there a way to improve our transition from Tier 2 to Tier 3?

2. The IDEA definition of non-responder is:
The child does not make sufficient progress to meet age or State approved grade-level standards in one or more of the areas identified in paragraph (a) (1) of this section when using a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention....(page 140)

Determination of a non-responding student should be made on
(1) careful interpretation of the data
(2) consideration of the appropriateness of the interventions.

Is our system set up to identify non-responders? Do we provide careful interpretation of the data? Do we consider the appropriateness of the interventions? How long does it typically take us to determine a student is a non-responder? Is this an appropriate amount of time? What can we do to improve our process?

3. IDEA requires a multidisciplinary evaluation, but does not specify what exactly should be included in the evaluation or what role RTI should play in eligibility. How does our system consider the three critical issues under discussion?
 1. Should the multidisciplinary evaluation be a comprehensive battery of tests or should it simply seek to answer questions raised in the RTI process?
 2. Should significant discrepancy be eliminated from the eligibility criteria?
 3. Should the multidisciplinary evaluation distinguish between specific eligibility categories, such as LD or behavior disorder, or should the evaluation use non-categorical placement for students needing special education services?

4. Schools must determine if referral for special education evaluation takes place at the end of Tier 2, between Tiers 2 and 3, or as part of Tier 3. Wherever a school addresses evaluation, it is important to ensure that the child continues to receive intervention and progress monitoring during the evaluation. Interventions should not end while the school waits for evaluation results. (pg 144) Where do we place special education evaluation within the tiers of support? Is this the best place? Do we ensure that students continue to receive support while evaluation takes place?

Discussion Specific to Behavior

5. All students who are at risk of not meeting behavioral standards should have access to Tier 2 interventions. Documentation of responsiveness serves as pre-referral. RTI is a valid part of evaluation for behavioral eligibility determination, accompanied with behavior checklists, projective measures, observations, functional behavioral assessments, and/or cognitive assessments. How do we use RTI as part of the pre-referral process for possible behavioral disorders? How can our process be improved?
6. Tier 3 is the most intensive level of intervention. Tier 3 instruction utilizes information gleaned from non-responsiveness to previous instruction and evaluation. Tier 3 develops specific plans for addressing deficit areas. The authors included a quote that Tier 3 instructional support should be immediate, relentless, explicit and continuous. Does our special education program fit this description of Tier 3?
7. The discussion on restructuring special education includes lower student-teacher ratios, increased instructional time, intensive progress monitoring, reduced caseloads, and reduced paperwork.
8. Respond to these statements from page 147. How do they relate to our school?
 - One result of increased inclusion may be decreased intensive, skill-specific instruction
 - Skill-specific interventions should be in addition to, not instead of, general curriculum access.
 - Many traditional interrelated resource rooms experience the pitfall of large numbers of students working at different levels on different subjects.
9. Early intervention is key to MTSS. Students benefit most from intervention “at the first signs of learning problems.” Early intervention makes a significant impact on students at risk for reading failure. Early intervention may possibly eliminate reading disabilities in some children (pg 148). How does our school ensure early intervention? How can we improve our process for early intervention?
10. Targeted assistance schedule (Resource B on page 189-194) supports that the evaluation process should not delay a student’s access to intensive instruction. Some schools “front-load” special education services for kindergarteners and first graders. Do

our students receive intensive instruction while waiting for special education evaluation? Do we front-load special education services for young students? How can we improve our process?

Discussion Specific to High School

11. Early intervention in secondary school may include intensive intervention for freshmen. It may also include five year graduation programs. How does our school provide support for students at the earliest possibility? How can we improve our system?

Discussion Questions

12. The authors challenge that the impact of disabilities on educational performance changes and, therefore, there must be flexible movement into and out of Tier 3. They further contend that intensive instruction remediates learning deficits, leading to more appropriate placement in Tier 1 or 2 (pg 149). Do our students have opportunities to move between special education classes and general education tiers? How can we reorganize our process to provide more flexibility for special education students and still provide quality, appropriate education?
13. Frequent progress monitoring has positive effects, including Tier 3 intensive instruction and special education. Curriculum Based Measurement data determines present levels of performance. Progress monitoring data also guides goal writing, instruction, and anticipated student performance. Figure 6.1 on page 150 contains an example of a second grader's goal and objective. How does this example compare to how our school uses data to guide instruction? How can we improve our progress monitoring in Tier 3?
14. Respond to this statement found on page 151: "It is essential that educators use data for instructional decision making to improve student learning. This process makes the IEP a usable, effective planning document for instructing students with disabilities." Above this statement is an explanation of charting data. How does our school chart data? How does our school use data to write IEPs?
15. Special education teachers must have access to a variety of research-based interventions. The knowledge base required for providing highly specific instruction to variety of students is a monumental task. Training teachers and improving collaboration between general education and special education teachers can support special education teachers in this daunting task. How does our school ensure that special education teachers have and use research-based interventions? How can we increase that support?
16. Tier 3 is responsible for fidelity of instruction as are Tiers 1 and 2. A fidelity checklist, lesson plan review, administrator walk-throughs and peer observations are monitoring

techniques. How does our school ensure fidelity in Tier 3? How can we improve the process?

17. Research cited on pages 153 and 154 suggests that effective Tier 3 instruction is intensive in its focus and amount of interventions while providing access to and support in general education curriculum. Is our school meeting this criterion? Where are we stronger? Where are we weaker? What should we not change? What should we consider tweaking?
18. An example of quality Tier 3 instruction for a second grader is on pages 154-156. Compare this example to current practices.

Discussion Specific to Parents

19. “From beginning to the end, parents should be welcome members of the team.” How do we involve parents in Tiers 1, 2 and 3? Do we involve parents so they are comfortable with educational decisions?
20. Team members can easily focus on irrelevant or uncontrollable factors. What does our team do to ensure it spends its time and energy on the child and not on what is out of our power to control?

Chapter 7: Bringing It All Together: A Model for System Implementation

Overview

This chapter brings together all of the essential RTI components into a realistic implementation plan. It highlights features of system change and sustainability, including changes in roles and responsibilities, requirements for staff development, barriers to full implementation, and options for overcoming barriers.

Point to Ponder

One person or department in a school district or building cannot bring about this type of change on his or her own.

Discussion Questions

1. When Alexa Posny was director of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, she said, “RTI and EIS (early intervening services) are absolutely the future of education—not the future of special education, but of education.” The educational community has drifted from one fad to the next. Is our school approaching MTSS as a fad or true school improvement?
2. Sustainable reform must include readiness, initial implementation, system policies, and refinement. These are outlined in more detail on page 161. Does our school have all of the features required to sustain reform? What pieces are in place? What pieces are missing?
3. Implementing MTSS is not an easy process. The first step is to create readiness for change is through vision and buy-in. This takes time and building administration commitment. Who are the key stakeholders in our building? Who is on or should be on our district RTI leadership team? According to the RTI Needs Assessment, Resource E on page 201, what is our school’s current level of implementation? What are our priorities?
4. An action plan prioritizes long-term and short-term goals with a realistic time frame and identified barriers using needs assessment information and student data. Gradual phase-in with multi-year plans and pilot schools refines programs on a smaller scale to reduce future problems. Where is our school and district on our action plan? What is our plan for pilot schools and gradual phase-in?
5. Phase 1 of System Change is creating readiness through vision and buy-in. It is outlined in Figure 7.1 on page 165. The authors explain, “It is not enough to be told something will work. They must see the value for themselves and believe that it will work.” For some teachers MTSS is the natural next step. For others, MTSS is a foreign concept. Estimating, what percent of our teachers are already using formative assessments, benchmark assessments, and progress monitoring? What percent use data to drive

instruction? About what percent of our teachers practice differentiated instruction? How many use flexible grouping? In what instructional strategies have our teachers been trained? Reflecting on all of these components of readiness, where would our school rate on a scale of 1 to 10 in readiness for a system change?

Discussion Specific to High School

6. Standardized assessment tools are not readily available at the secondary level. It is difficult to deliver large amounts of content and incorporate data-based decision making in secondary classrooms. Secondary schools require significant preparation, support, and policy change. What are we doing to support secondary teachers in the change process? How can we strengthen our support of middle and high school teachers?
7. In addition to a lack of available standardized assessments for secondary schools, there are many unanswered questions critical to progress monitoring for older students. The authors identify insufficiencies in: standard definitions for operationalizing responsiveness, valid measures for progress monitoring, research on utilizing the process at the middle and high school levels, and agreed upon cut-point that indicates lack of responsiveness to secondary interventions and signals the presence of LD. How will our school deal with these areas of concern? Will our school develop our own cut-points? Will we develop placement criteria for LD? Although we know there is limited research, what is our plan to find and use what is available?

Discussion Questions

8. The core concepts of the problem-solving process are 1) benchmark assessment, 2) curriculum-based measurement, 3) progress monitoring, 4) research-based interventions, 5) differentiated instruction, 6) data-driven instruction, 7) positive behavior supports, and 8) cultural diversity. Ongoing staff development is essential to initial implementation as is redelivering information often. Which areas are our school's strongest? Which concepts are still areas needing additional staff development?
9. The quality of Tier 1 instruction is addressed in initial implementation. Eighty percent of the general education students should meet or exceed benchmarks through Tier 1 instruction. Do eighty percent of our students meet benchmark? According to the data, how is the quality of our Tier 1 instruction? What steps should we consider to improve Tier 1 instruction?
10. Reflecting on the Tier 1 data, where are our school's areas of weakness? What Tier 2 interventions would address these areas? What learning strategies or supplemental materials would address the students' needs? Who will deliver them? How will teachers be trained? What is the most significant need? Which intervention would impact the most students? How can these interventions and training be broken into manageable parts over a year or two?

11. Monitoring fidelity rules out lack of instruction as the cause of student success. What steps will we take to ensure fidelity?
12. Some schools address Tiers 1 and 2 concurrently to provide integration of services. Some schools find this approach overwhelming. Which approach is the best decision for our teachers and students?
13. Resource F provides a sample multi-year timeline for RTI implementation on pages 206-207. Using the blank action plan form on page 205, how does our school's action plan look? Figure 7.2 on page 170 may also be helpful.
14. When MTSS is effectively embedded in the school improvement framework, schools are transformed into highly effective arenas of learning. The multi tiered systems of support is viewed simply as "the way we do school." Is this where our school is headed? Are we prepared to take the steps to facilitate a transformation? Do we need to adjust retention policies, teacher evaluation, student grading procedures, the pre-referral procedures, or the roles and responsibilities for various staff members?
15. The role of the school psychologist may change dramatically to include 1) system design, 2) team collaboration, 3) serving students and consulting with teachers. How will the role of our psychologist change? Will there be a need for training? How might we make this happen?
16. MTSS is an ongoing evolution. It is a continual process of evaluation and refinement. Figure 7.3 on page 172 outlines Phase 3 of systems change. Our school will to continually assess our strengths and weaknesses. How can we provide the time and support needed? Student achievement data should drive the next steps of the process. How can we provide the data, time, training, and support to ensure that data drives the evolution of MTSS?
17. Overall, the technical language of RTI creates a barrier between general educators and special educators. In general, special education embraces RTI and reading teachers have access to RTI-based programs but, the lack of a common language and support for MTSS in other content areas creates a barrier. Without support through general education, MTSS cannot be effectively implemented. How will our school build a common language and create support across the content areas?

18. The national organization for directors of special education identified specific barriers to full RTI implementation. They included “lack of knowledge and skills for service providers at all levels, including families; lack of consistency and clarity in defining high-quality instruction; misaligned policies, including lack of alignment between NCLB and IDEA; conflicting beliefs and values between general education and special education professionals; and insufficient funding.” Further, the special education directors developed policy recommendations which are listed on page 176. Although these are national issues, which barriers and policy recommendations are applicable to our school? How can we use this information to our advantage?
19. There is a perception that there is conflict between the components of MTSS and AYP. The high-stakes state assessments dominate the decision-making process in education and there seems to be no room for MTSS. However, MTSS addresses the underlying issues that cause student failure. How does our school intermingle MTSS and AYP?
20. The authors point out that MTSS is not a quick fix. “Instead, it is a long-term solution.” The authors also contend, “The essential elements of Response to Intervention do not represent a buffet from which school can pick and choose.” Are we planning for a quick fix or a long-term solution? Are we systematically developing a thoughtful, longer-range plan?

Discussion Specific to Parents

21. The authors point out that a parent should not hear about the MTSS process for the first time when his or her child is identified as at risk. It is important to include parents at the early stages of implementation to broaden perspectives, clear up misconceptions, and help develop an effective program. It is also important to communicate with parents in all phases of Tier 2 implementation. When a student is identified as at risk, parents should be involved in reviewing data. Parents should help develop or at least have a clear understanding of Tier 2 interventions. How will our school inform and involve parents to build relations? How will we convince parents that we are not willing to let any child struggle?
22. What written materials do we need to explain our school’s MTSS process on the authors’ list of *Issues to Communicate With Parents* on page 177? How will our school provide parents of children identified as at risk with the information identified on the authors’ list *Issues to Address Within the Intervention Plan* on page 178? How will our school facilitate parental understanding of the seven terms and concepts the authors delineated on pages 178 and 179? How will we include the term and concepts of Multi Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)?