

# Results-Driven Accountability and Intensive Intervention: Using Multitiered Systems of Support to Improve Outcomes for Students With Disabilities

## Webinar Q&A

**Question:** What research-based interventions are available to support struggling students across grade levels and tiers?

**Answer:** Although the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) and National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII) do not recommend any specific interventions, NCII has developed a series of academic and behavior intervention and assessment tools charts that evaluate the scientific rigor of commercially available tools and interventions that can be used as part of a multitiered system of support (MTSS) framework. NCII has developed four tools charts as follows:

- Academic Intervention tools chart:  
<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/instructional-intervention-tools>
- Behavioral Intervention tools chart:  
<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/behavioral-intervention-chart>
- Academic Progress Monitoring tools chart:  
<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/progress-monitoring>
- Behavioral Progress Monitoring tools chart:  
<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/behavioral-progress-monitoring-tools>

All of the tools and interventions have been reviewed by a technical review committee (TRC) of experts in the field. The TRC independently established a set of criteria for evaluating the scientific rigor of studies and assessments demonstrating the efficacy of instructional intervention programs or assessments. The TRC rated each submitted study against these criteria but did not compare it with other studies on the chart. The presence of a particular program on the chart does not constitute endorsement and should not be viewed as a recommendation from either the TRC or NCII.

The tools charts provide a consumer review type of report for understanding the evidence. The charts can be filtered by grade level (elementary and middle school) and subject area (mathematics, reading, writing) to identify tools related to a specific content area. Although some subject areas, such as writing, have fewer tools and interventions than others, in large part because of the lack of available evidence-based tools and interventions, new resources are added

on an annual basis through an open call for tools. In addition to rating information, the charts provide information about implementation requirements, including training, cost, appropriate grade levels, and more. There is variability across the items on the tools chart, so clicking on the title of the tool or intervention to review the implementation requirements and ensure that they match your needs is important.

Although many intervention programs are generally effective, we know that interventions are not universally effective and that students performing at the lowest 3 percent to 5 percent typically require something more intensive and individualized in order to make adequate progress. Rather than recommend specific intervention programs, NCII suggests that teachers start with an intervention program and then intensify the program by making adaptations on the basis of student data by using the data-based individualization (DBI) process. [Click here to learn more about the DBI process.](#)

**Question:** How do we encourage buy-in for evidence-based practice (EBP) from teachers and parents who are well intentioned but advocate for services that are not evidence based?

**Answer:** Ensuring that staff and families recognize the importance of EBPs can be challenging, but it is important to gather and develop this buy-in in order to see implementation become a reality. An evidence-based intervention is an intervention for which data from scientific, rigorous research studies have demonstrated or empirically validated the efficacy of the intervention. Applying findings from experimental studies, single-case studies, or strong quasi-experimental studies, an evidence-based intervention improves student learning beyond what is expected without that intervention. Although there is no easy answer for this question, one strategy that you might want to use is allowing the data to make the case for a change in approach or practice. If you can look at your data while using the practice that does not have an evidence base and see a lack of response or progress, well-intentioned staff and parents may be more likely to recognize the need to change that approach or practice. Similarly, if you see growth after a practice that has an evidence base has been implemented, staff are more likely to see the benefits of the practice.

Sometimes starting with small wins allows you to help your staff and families to acknowledge the importance of the practice. Helping staff and parents to understand why we would select an EBP also might help them to recognize the importance of using EBPs. Using an analogy related to other fields such as the medical field may help them recognize that the use of an EBP allows us to have a level of confidence that the practice we are using is effective.

**Question:** How can we judge different levels of evidence? What do we do if no EBPs are available?

**Answer:** Across subject areas and grade levels, we recognize that varying levels of evidence exist and that a particular practice may have preceded research. Although we ideally would have the practices with strong levels of evidence for all domains, we know that that is not a reality and that we cannot wait for the research to catch up with practice. In thinking about the evidence behind the practices we use, we have to be attuned to the quality of the research that we have available to us. We may have a practice that has shown large effects through a study, but if a quality approach was not used for the study we cannot be confident in those findings. Because of the importance of the study design and approach, on the NCII Academic Intervention and

Behavioral Intervention tools charts there is a review of both the effects for the studies included and the quality of those studies. Therefore, studies listed that have low study quality ratings provide us with less confidence that the effects that the study uncovered will be replicated when we put that practice into place. To understand the varying quality of study designs and factors that may influence levels of evidence, the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform Center has developed some guidance for looking at EBP across varying levels. This guide is available at <http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Evidence-Based-Practices-guide.pdf>. The IDEA and Research for Inclusive Settings Center also has released a series of training modules focused on EBP that may be helpful in thinking about levels of evidence. You can find the three modules on the IDEA and Research for Inclusive Settings Center website.

- [Evidence-Based Practices \(Part 1\): Identifying and Selecting a Practice or Program](#)
- [Evidence-Based Practices \(Part 2\): Implementing a Practice or Program with Fidelity](#)
- [Evidence-Based Practices \(Part 3\): Evaluating Learner Outcomes and Fidelity](#)

Lastly, this will be an area on which the Knowledge Utilization team within the NCSI will focus efforts and provide guidance. As materials are developed, they will be shared through the NCSI website, presentations, and other outreach.

**Question:** What is MTSS, and how does it serve the needs of all students across general and special education?

**Answer:** MTSS is a prevention framework that seeks to address individual students' academic and behavior needs through the organization of building-level resources within intervention tiers of varying intensity. MTSS (also sometimes referred to as *response to intervention* [RTI] and *positive behavioral interventions and supports* [PBIS]) allows for early identification of students who are at risk of poor learning or behavioral outcomes or who are in need of enrichment opportunities. The increasingly intense tiers (Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3) represent a continuum of structural supports that students progress through as they are identified as nonresponsive to previous levels of support.

The essential components of an MTSS framework, including a multilevel system for preventing school failure, screening, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making, offer support for all students throughout the school system. An effective MTSS framework requires high-quality core instruction that is aligned with state achievement standards, which ensures that students' unresponsiveness to the primary prevention level (Tier 1) is not due to ineffective classroom instruction. Within effective, high-quality core-level instruction, the small number of students who are deemed unresponsive are advanced to the secondary level at which they receive additional supports in greater intensity. This increased intensity can manifest itself in the form of additional instructional time or a learning environment with smaller groups. Students who continue to demonstrate unresponsiveness proceed to a tertiary tier of further increased intensity. Data are recorded continuously to evaluate responsiveness to the new program. Screening tools can be used to monitor the effectiveness of levels of instruction and further identify students who are not responding to their current level of instruction. However, if a high proportion of students are failing within the primary level of instruction, the effectiveness of that instruction needs to be addressed rather than providing more intensive services.

For additional information about MTSS and RTI, visit the Center on RTI at American Institutes for Research website at <http://www.rti4success.org/>. The center's series of self-paced learning modules (<http://www.rti4success.org/rti-implementer-series-self-paced-learning-modules>) includes information on the key components of an RTI or MTSS framework. Additional resources including webinars, training modules, short Ask-the-Expert videos, and other resources.

**Question:** What is DBI, and how is DBI different from Tier 3 Interventions? How is DBI aligned with and different from MTSS and PBIS?

**Answer:** DBI is a research-based process for individualizing and intensifying interventions through the systematic use of assessment data, validated interventions, and research-based adaptation strategies to support students with severe and persistent learning and behavioral needs. DBI is NCII's approach to intensive intervention. DBI provides an explicit process that uses data to determine when and how to provide more intensive intervention for the subset of students who are not served by a standard intervention approach and need something more—something adapted and individualized to their unique needs. DBI can be used to support (1) students with disabilities who are not making adequate progress toward their individualized education program (IEP) goals, (2) students who present with very low academic achievement or high-intensity or high-frequency behavior problems, and (3) students nonresponsive to secondary (or Tier 2) intervention delivered with fidelity. Within multilevel systems of supports such as RTI or PBIS, intensive intervention is the most intensive tier or level (Tier 3). As a result, DBI may be incorporated within a larger MTSS or PBIS framework, representing the most intensive level or tier. Through an exploratory study focused on five high-performing districts, NCII found that intensive intervention is most likely to be facilitated when implemented as a component of an MTSS (see <http://www.intensiveintervention.org/content/implementation-examples-field> to view the full report and findings).

The systems require educators to use individualized progress goals to drive instruction delivered by a school's most highly trained staff. Staff record academic and behavioral progress for continuous progress monitoring, using this data to determine and redetermine progress goals on the Tier 3 level. Instruction can be delivered in varying intensity, manifesting itself in smaller learning groups, higher frequency of lessons, or greater duration of instructional time. The DBI process starts with a strong, validated, evidence-based secondary intervention program (this may be the Tier 2 program within an MTSS or PBIS framework), implemented with greater intensity (e.g., smaller group size, higher frequency of lessons, or greater duration of instructional time). Similar to MTSS and PBIS, DBI incorporates progress monitoring to assess a student's performance, to quantify his or her rate of improvement or responsiveness to the intervention, to adjust the student's instructional program to make it more effective and suited to the student's needs, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. If the student is nonresponsive to the intervention, additional diagnostic assessment is used to determine the nature of intervention change that is needed and inform how the intervention may be adapted to meet the individual student's needs better. Using multiple data sources, the team develops an individualized intervention plan for the student on the basis of multiple data sources and continues monitoring progress, with adaptations occurring as needed to ensure adequate progress.

As Chris Riley-Tillman discussed in the webinar, sites working with NCII were selected with the understanding that they had strong Tier 1 and Tier 2 in place both within their RTI or MTSS and their PBIS frameworks. When NCII began working in these schools, we recognized that the level of implementation of the earlier tiers varied across sites. Although DBI often is built on tiered systems, with strong universal (Tier 1) and secondary (Tier 2) interventions serving as precursors to individualization, the center also recognized that if we waited for Tier 1 and Tier 2 to be perfect, the group of students with the most intensive needs, or those at Tier 3, would continue to struggle. Therefore, NCII's work and the DBI process have provided a framework for supporting these students without waiting for the perfect implementation of Tier 1 and Tier 2 or the remainder of the MTSS or PBIS framework.

For additional information, view the following:

- Data Based Individualization: A Framework for Intensive Intervention:  
<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/resource/data-based-individualization-framework-intensive-intervention>
- DBI Training Series:  
<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/content/dbi-training-series>
- Dr. Russell Gersten's Ask-the-Expert video: Does my school have to be implementing RTI or PBIS in order to implement intensive interventions?  
<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/video-resource/does-my-school-have-be-implementing-rti-or-pbis-order-implement-intensive>

**Question:** What are the different State-identified Measurable Result (SiMR) topics?

**Answer:** States have chosen SiMRs on a variety of topics, with the largest number of states addressing reading, mathematics, and graduation. Please see slide 7 for specific information on individual states and their focus.

**Question:** Are there any indications about how the states will monitor and gather information for their State Systemic Improvement Plans? Is there anyplace I can go for further information?

**Answer:** Work on State Systemic Improvement Plan and SiMR evaluation is ongoing. The website for the NCSI will be a good place to find more information ([www.ncsi.wested.org](http://www.ncsi.wested.org)). NCSI technical assistance facilitators will work with states to support the development and implementation of the evaluation.

**Question:** Can you highlight or provide examples of IEP goal development using curriculum-based measurement (CBM) data and aligned to Common Core State Standards?

**Answer:** The NCII website includes a progress monitoring module, which may help address IEP goal development and the use of CBM data. The module can be found at the following link, and slides 77–81 may be especially helpful: <http://www.intensiveintervention.org/content/dbi-training-series>.



In addition, NCII provides a series of examples of how you might provide standards-based instruction for students receiving various levels of intervention. These examples are offered at the following link in both mathematics and reading:

<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/illustration-standards-relevant-instruction-across-levels-tiered-system>.

**Question:** Do you recommend any materials to use to help develop transition IEPs?

**Answer:** The Office of Special Education Programs new National Technical Assistance Center on Transition may be a good resource for materials addressing transition IEPs and student data. The website is currently in development, so check back regularly for additional information and resources at <http://www.transitionta.org/>. In addition, previously funded Office of Special Education Programs technical assistance centers, including the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (<http://nsttac.org/>), the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (<http://www.ndpc-sd.org/>), and the National Post-School Outcomes Center (<http://www.psocenter.org/>), may be helpful resources.

**Question:** Do you find success in including students in need of intensive intervention in the general population rather than a self-contained special education classroom? Are intensive interventions only for students with disabilities, or are students with disabilities served outside of intensive intervention? What is the best way to address service delivery and MTSS for students receiving special education?

**Answer:** DBI can be used to support (1) students with disabilities who are not making adequate progress toward their IEP goals, (2) students who present with very low academic achievement or high-intensity or high-frequency behavior problems, and (3) students nonresponsive to secondary (Tier 2) intervention delivered with fidelity. Although we do not recommend specifically where the intervention should take place, we suggest that interventions are delivered by a highly skilled interventionist, special education teacher, or general education teacher.

Often, educators and stakeholders have difficulty with balancing the pressures of making sure students with disabilities have access to the general education grade-level curriculum as well as curriculum and instruction at their instructional grade level. In her presentation at the Center for Exceptional Children conference, Dr. Lynn Fuchs addressed this issue by providing recommendations regarding access to general education classrooms and out-of-grade-level instruction. Those recommendations can be found in the Strand 1 presentation here:

<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/resource/cec-strand-how-can-we-make-intensive-intervention-happen-considerations-knowledge>.

**Question:** Should students moving from Tier 2 to Tier 3 receive more intervention time and support? How can you find time in the schedule for additional intervention time?

**Answer:** Students with intensive needs often require much more practice, as many as 10 to 30 times, in order to grasp concepts fully (Gersten et al., 2009). Increasing the amount of time a student spends in an intervention allows more instruction to occur, provides more practice with feedback (because the teacher is present), and increases students' engaged learning time, all of

which can help to accelerate student learning. In order to achieve the greatest results, increasing the time should, in most cases, be combined with changes to content and method of delivery.

To achieve the amount of practice needed for students with more intensive needs, evidence suggests that students may benefit from 60 to 120 minutes of intervention per day. This length of time may make scheduling intervention time difficult. However, staff may consider breaking this time into more than one session during the day. For example, students might receive intervention for 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the afternoon, rather than a single 40-minute session (Gersten et al., 2009; Vaughn, Wanzek, Murray, & Roberts, 2012). Breaking interventions up into multiple sessions per day can help to address scheduling challenges, facilitate preteaching and reinforcement of new concepts, and support young students who are likely to have shorter attention spans and less stamina than older students (Vaughn et al., 2012). The use of entry or exit routines also can provide independent or peer-mediated practice opportunities for students (e.g., mathematics facts practice, letter writing, and paired oral reading) that minimize unengaged waiting time and allow multiple small groups to run at once. Entry and exit routines that offer students opportunities to practice skills may allow interventionists to manage multiple overlapping small groups. In addition, incorporating these routines may reduce the amount of time students spend waiting and increase engagement.

Unfortunately, finding time for students to participate in needed interventions can be challenging, and there is no single approach or easy fix. Planning schedules prior to the school year that incorporate time for interventions, using time before or after school, or using elective periods have all been used by schools to ensure students have access to the interventions that they need. Additional information about schedules and ways elementary, middle, and high schools have thought about scheduling is available on the Center on RTI at American Institutes for Research website.

- Elementary School Scheduling Webinar:  
<http://www.rti4success.org/video/rti-implementation-developing-effective-schedules-elementary-level>
- Middle School Scheduling Brief:
- <http://www.rti4success.org/resource/rti-scheduling-processes-middle-school>
- High School Tiered Interventions Initiative document on lessons learned:  
<http://www.rti4success.org/resource/tiered-interventions-high-schools-using-preliminary-lessons-learned-guide-ongoing>

For more information, see the following:

- Gersten, R., Compton, D., Connor, C. M., Dimino, J., Santoro, L., Linan-Thompson, S., & Tilly, W. D. (2009). Assisting students struggling with reading: Response to Intervention (RtI) and multi-tier intervention for reading in the primary grades. A practice guide (NCEE 2009-4045). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=3>

- Vaughn, S., Wanzek, J., Murray, C. S., & Roberts, G. (2012). Intensive interventions for students struggling in reading and mathematics: A practice guide. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction. Retrieved from <http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Intensive%20Interventions%20for%20Students%20Struggling%20in%20Reading%20%26%20Math.pdf>

**Question:** How does MTSS address racial and ethnic disproportionality?

**Answer:** Disproportionality, or the over- and underrepresentation of racial and language minorities in special education, is an extension of the achievement gap in that we typically see high numbers of students of color, students from low-income families, and English language learners in certain disability categories. In addition, we see low numbers of these same groups when we look at indicators that are linked to academic success, including gifted and talented programs, high school graduation, college enrollment, and rates of proficiency on state achievement tests. MTSS, with a focus on improving student outcomes, provides an opportunity to change how we think about disproportionality. The use of tiered interventions becomes an alternative to a quick or unnecessary referral for special education evaluation. Assessments and data-based decision making within an MTSS framework offer ways for districts and schools to review data for subgroups of students, including special education referrals and identification, as well as opportunities for early identification and interventions that can address student need prior to referral for special education. Tiered instructional interventions that are evidence based and culturally responsive ensure that the MTSS framework gives students supports that are appropriate for their learning or behavioral needs. All of the resulting data on students' response to instruction or to intervention then become useful data that can help identify students who need additional support from special education. In this way, we reduce the number of students who are identified inappropriately for special education and reserve that level of support for students who need it most.

Additional information about disproportionality and MTSS can be found through the following resources from the Center on RTI at American Institutes for Research:

- Does RTI have the potential to reduce disproportionality in Special Education? <http://www.rti4success.org/video/does-rti-have-potential-reduce-disproportionality-special-education>
- What effect do behavioral strategies have on disproportionate representation in special education? <http://www.rti4success.org/video/what-effect-do-behavioral-strategies-have-disproportionate-representation-special-education>
- RTI and Disproportionate Representation: An Annotated Bibliography <http://www.rti4success.org/resource/rti-and-disproportionate-representation-annotated-bibliography>

**Question:** What are some best practices to hold teachers accountable for implementing interventions with fidelity? How do you increase treatment integrity?



**Answer:** Fidelity can be measured through self-report data, observations, or logs and lesson plans. Some interventions may include checklists or observational tools that can support monitoring of fidelity. Although using these tools cannot ensure teachers will implement with fidelity, their use may provide a snapshot of treatment integrity and the fidelity of implementation. In the training module, *Using Fidelity to Enhance Program Implementation Within an RTI Framework*, you can learn more about different methods for measuring fidelity and examples of different tools that can be used. The module is available at <http://www.rti4success.org/resource/using-fidelity-enhance-program-implementation-within-rti-framework>. Additional videos discussing fidelity of implementation are available at <http://www.rti4success.org/video/monitoring-fidelity-rti> and <http://www.intensiveintervention.org/video-resource/how-do-we-promote-fidelity-implementation-intensive-supports-will-endure-over-time>.

NCII is in the process of developing additional fidelity tools to support monitoring implementation fidelity for teachers. These will be posted on the NCII website when completed.

**Question:** What are the appropriate data to maintain in our records for students in the MTSS process, particularly students in more advanced tiers? Do you have any suggested forms or evidence that districts can use to document the supports and interventions?

**Answer:** As mentioned in the webinar, collecting and graphing progress monitoring data and developing individualized plans for students within intensive intervention or advanced tiers with an MTSS framework are essential. In addition to progress monitoring data, other data sources, such as diagnostic data, input from family members or other staff members, classwork, observations, and behavioral data, also will be incorporated into the data collection and review process in order to provide context and identify areas in which students are struggling and to adapt interventions to meet their individual needs. NCII has developed a series of data meeting tools to support teams in thinking about the types of information and data sources that they may want to bring to different meetings, how a data meeting may be structured, the different roles and responsibilities that are important to have within the data meeting process, and a template to develop a plan for an individual student's needs. This series of meeting documents is available at <http://www.intensiveintervention.org/tools-support-intensive-intervention-data-meetings>. The tools are divided into three sections: premeeting, initial meeting, and progress monitoring meetings.

- The premeeting documents are intended to support teams as they develop a holistic sense of the student, including relevant background information, current performance, current supports, prior intervention efforts, and other relevant data.
- The initial meeting documents are intended to support teams as they analyze data and design intensive intervention plans for students.
- The progress monitoring meeting documents are intended to support teams as they review student progress monitoring data after the initial intervention plan has been put in place and determine whether the student is making progress at an acceptable rate or whether adaptations to the intervention plan are necessary.

Within the set of tools, guidance for meeting facilitation and participation, along with a sample agenda and note-taking template, are available. These documents are intended as examples, and

many have been posted in Word format so that you can adapt them to meet the needs of your school's team. Additional handouts also are available to assist with the development of individualized intervention planning.

**Question:** Is progress monitoring the only way to collect data to inform this process? Are there other ways to monitor student progress? How do we find high-quality progress monitoring tools?

**Answer:** There are a number of tools with evidence that are reviewed on the NCII Academic Progress Monitoring tools chart <http://www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/progress-monitoring>. Although there are other ways to monitor progress for students receiving intensive intervention, we find that having evidence-based progress monitoring tools that allow student data to be graphed is essential.

**Question:** How can occupational therapists be engaged and involved within an MTSS framework?

**Answer:** Occupational therapists can play an important role in collaborating with teachers and other school staff to support the implementation of tiered intervention programs such as MTSS and PBIS. They may provide crucial information in understanding the analysis of a student's data within a data meeting or in helping to implement the intervention or supports to be carried out within the classroom. The American Occupational Therapy Association has developed a collection of RTI resources (e.g., consumer brochure, practice advisory, frequently asked questions) to advocate for and articulate the occupational therapy role within an mtss system. . You can find these resources on the website at <http://www.aota.org/practice/children-youth/school-based/rti.aspx>.

**Question:** Is there a difference between student study teams and the student meetings that were described in the webinar?

**Answer:** The relationship between student study teams and student meetings depends on how these types of meetings are implemented within your school or district. Although the structure between the two meetings may be similar and the meeting tools available from NCII (<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/tools-support-intensive-intervention-data-meetings>) may be helpful, we often see that student study team meetings occur before students are in intervention, and the student meetings that were discussed within the DBI process in the webinar are designed to support students and teams before, during, and after intervention.