

Using Secondary Intervention to Set the Foundation for Effective Intensive Intervention

Webinar Transcript

Slide 1: Hello, and welcome to the webinar, “Using Secondary Intervention to Set the Foundation for Effective Intensive Intervention.” This webinar is presented by the National Center on Intensive Intervention. My name is Laura Magnuson, and I’ll be hosting today’s webinar. I am a technical assistance provider for the Center and work to help schools and districts build their capacity to implement intensive interventions in their schools. So, let’s get started with today’s webinar. The goal of today’s session is to explain the purpose and rationale for secondary interventions, as part of a larger multi-tiered system of support, and to discuss the value of secondary intervention in laying the groundwork for effective intensive intervention.

Slide 2: Today we’ll begin with a brief introduction, and then discuss the purpose and rationale for secondary interventions within a tiered system of support, such as RTI or PBIS. We’ll discuss elements that should be in place for secondary interventions to function effectively, including the evidence base and implementation fidelity. Lastly, we’ll end with some resources for schools looking to strengthen or further systematize their secondary interventions to set the foundation for being able to implement intensive intervention.

Slide 3: To introduce this session we’ll answer the question, “what are secondary interventions?”

Slide 4: Secondary interventions are standardized, evidence-based interventions designed for at-risk students. They are sometimes scripted, and involve detailed lesson components and a specific scope and sequence.

In this module, we refer to these programs as “secondary interventions.” However, you may also have heard the terms Tier 2 intervention, strategic intervention, or remedial curriculum. Some common examples of secondary intervention programs include “Wilson Just Words” for reading, “Check-in/Check-out” for behavior, and “Corrective Math” for mathematics.

Slide 5: The mission of NCII is to deliver intensive intervention to students with the most severe and persistent learning and/or behavioral needs. NCII’s approach for delivering intensive intervention is grounded in the data-based individualization (or DBI) process.

This graphic illustrates the Data-Based Individualization process for delivering intensive interventions. I’ll highlight the ways in which secondary interventions play a key role in this process. Before a team decides that a student requires intensive intervention in a certain content area, the team should consider whether or not the student has received a secondary intervention program with consistency and fidelity.

The DBI process begins when data show that a student is making insufficient progress in response to a secondary intervention program that is evidence-based and delivered with fidelity. The first step in this process is to implement the intervention with greater intensity (e.g., smaller

group size, more time), and to progress monitor frequently. If the student continues to be non-responsive, diagnostic data are collected and analyzed to identify the specific skill deficits that need to be targeted. The results of the diagnostic assessment, in combination with the teacher's analysis of what features of the intervention need to be modified to better support the student, help staff determine how to individualize the secondary intervention program to meet the individual student's unique needs. Upon implementing the intervention adaptation, the teacher continues to progress monitor at regular intervals to help determine whether additional changes to the individualized intervention are required to support adequate student response.

As you can see, secondary interventions play a significant role in the DBI process. A student's responsiveness to secondary intervention determines whether or not intensive intervention is needed. The secondary intervention program is also the platform or starting point for intensive intervention that is intensified and/or adapted to meet a student's unique needs.

Slide 6: So, what is the purpose of secondary interventions, and how do they relate to intensive intervention?

Slide 7: In the next few slides we will take a look at the focus, instruction, setting, and assessments specific to each level of instruction, and consider the role secondary interventions play in this context.

The tiers represented by in triangle are fluid and directly affect one another. For instance, if a school's core or primary level of instruction is not sufficiently meeting student needs, then a higher percentage of students will be insufficiently responsive to core instruction and will require secondary interventions. Keep in mind the interconnected nature of these tiers as we review characteristics of each tier of support.

Slide 8: First, we are going to talk about the primary tier in more detail. Primary prevention (also referred to as Tier 1 or core instruction) is high-quality core instruction that meets the needs of most students. You'll see that the focus is on all students. The instruction is typically a district curriculum and should include instructional practices that are research based, and be aligned with state or district standards. The setting for primary prevention is the general education classroom. For assessments, all students receive screening and progress monitoring assessments, as well as outcome measures or summative assessments on occasion.

Note that the focus of the primary tier is for ALL students, including those with disabilities, learning differences, or language barriers. You can increase access for all students through differentiated instruction, linguistically and culturally responsive practices, and the use of accommodations or modifications.

This may involve teacher-directed instruction combined with mixed instructional groupings, team teaching, peer tutoring, learning centers, and accommodations to ensure that all students have access to the instructional program. As I've mentioned, providing this differentiation and accommodations is NOT the same as providing more intensive interventions to students with learning disabilities, and is part of the core instruction that is required for all students.

Slide 9: We will now move on to discuss the secondary tier. Interventions at the secondary tier address the learning or behavioral challenges of most at-risk students. These are for students who have been identified through screening as at risk for poor learning outcomes. The instruction is

targeted, evidence-based, and supplemental to core instruction. These interventions are delivered to small groups and also occur in either the general education classroom or another general education setting, such as an intervention block. The types of assessments used in the secondary tier are the same as the primary tier, but progress monitoring occurs with greater frequency to measure student responsiveness to the secondary intervention.

Slide 10: Lastly, we'll discuss the intensive tier, also referred to as Tier 3 or tertiary intervention. Intervention at the intensive level meets the needs of students who have not responded to primary or secondary interventions, or students who present with very low performance levels. Note that this is typically only 3-5% of the student population. Instruction at this level is individualized, and can be delivered to a small group or individual. Instruction should be more intensive than the secondary tier, and the adaptations that are made to intensify instruction should be based on student data. Intensive intervention can occur in either the general or special education setting, and involves the same types of assessments as secondary. However, at the intensive tier, progress monitoring should occur with greater frequency (once a week is recommended) and diagnostic assessments may also be needed more frequently to determine which instructional adaptations may be needed.

Slide 11: Now I'll point out some of the main distinctions between secondary and intensive intervention, as these are often the most challenging distinctions for teams to make. You'll notice that the main distinction between the two is that secondary intervention components are generally standardized, while intensive intervention components are more individualized. While the instruction of secondary interventions follows a standardized evidence-based program as it was designed, instruction at the intensive level involves adapting that standardized program based on student data, to meet the unique needs of the student.

At the intensive level, intervention is typically made more intensive by increasing the frequency and/or duration of instruction and/or decreasing the group size to meet student needs. While monitoring progress at least once a month is generally sufficient for the secondary level, at the intensive level progress monitoring data should be collected weekly. Lastly, you'll note that the population served by secondary interventions is students who have been identified as at-risk in a particular content area. This is typically about 15-20% of the student population. The population served by intensive interventions is students with significant and persistent learning and/or behavioral needs, which is typically only 3-5% of the student population.

Slide 12: Why are secondary interventions so important? By providing secondary interventions in academics and behavior to students who are flagged as "at-risk", schools are able to effectively meet the needs of the majority of these students and begin to close the performance gap that may exist between them and their grade level peers.

Because secondary interventions are standardized and are often scripted and include resources, they provide a means for schools to meet the needs of at-risk students and allow resources (including teachers' time) to be used more efficiently. Effective secondary intervention programs provide teams with a more accurate picture of which students require intensive intervention. Additionally, data collected on a student's response to an evidence-based secondary intervention program may be used as part of the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) identification process in your district or state, in accordance with state law.

Slide 13: Secondary interventions have important implications for a school’s ability to deliver effective instruction and support at each tier. This graphic illustrates a potential strain that could be caused by poor implementation of secondary interventions. Poorly implemented secondary interventions can lead to more students requiring intensive intervention. Intensive interventions are designed to provide a great deal of individualization and are meant for only 3-5% of the total student population. Attempting to deliver intensive interventions to more than 3-5% of the student population places a strain on resources and on efficiency, and can lead to teachers feeling burnt-out. As we discuss the elements of secondary interventions, I will emphasize ways in which schools can make their secondary interventions more efficient and effective.

Slide 14: Now we’ll discuss some key elements of secondary interventions.

Slide 15: Secondary interventions should be evidence-based, and also conducted with fidelity.

Slide 16: First let’s take a look at what it means for a secondary intervention to be evidence-based.

Slide 17: So what does it mean for an intervention to be evidence-based? To better explain this, I’ll provide a quick comparison between the different levels of evidence that are recommended across tiers. NCII recommends different evidence standards for different tiers.

On the left side of your screen, you’ll see the research-based curricula. This is recommended for the primary prevention level, or core instruction, across subjects. This means that the components have been researched and found to be generally effective, although the curriculum materials have not been rigorously evaluated as a package.

On the right side of your screen you’ll see evidence-based intervention. Evidence-based interventions are recommended for secondary and intensive levels of prevention. These materials are evaluated using rigorous research design, and there is evidence of positive effects for students who received the intervention. This means that programs used as secondary interventions have been rigorously evaluated as a whole, and that the specific intervention program was found to have positive effects for students receiving the intervention program.

At the intensive level, evidence-based interventions are used as a platform or starting point, and then adapted based on student data to meet unique student needs.

Slide 18: This graphic illustrates an example of what a school’s reading instruction may look like at each tier. As you’ll see, the evidence standards for the instruction vary by tier. At the primary level, reading instruction consists of research-based curricula. This means that the core curriculums are not evidence-based as a whole, but typically include research-based strategies and practices such as explicit instruction or partner reading.

At the secondary level, interventions should be evidence-based interventions, researched as a whole for their effect on student learning outcomes.

Finally, at the intensive level, a school should use an adapted evidence-based intervention. Adaptations should be based on data to meet the unique needs of that student. Perhaps this means that a student is receiving a secondary intervention but with a greater frequency or with qualitative adaptations in the way instruction is delivered.

Slide 19: In order to ensure that a secondary intervention program is evidence-based, teams should convene to review the existing research on that particular program. You can focus your efforts by looking at these areas when examining the evidence base:

First, consider the type of information and source from which you are gathering this information. Is the information coming from the intervention vendor, or a reputable website? Also ask yourself, what type of evidence is available? Did the study involve experimental design, where the intervention group was compared to an equivalent control group?

Next, consider the population. For which populations has the program been researched and found effective? Is the sample described? Is the population similar to or representative of your student population? Are there different effects for different population groups?

It is important to consider whether or not the desired outcomes assessed in a study are relevant to the outcomes you hope to achieve with an intervention.

Finally, consider the effects. Were the effects of the study large enough to be meaningful? Consider established guidelines for effect sizes when reviewing evidence on effectiveness. Sites including NCII's Interventions Tools Chart, the What Works Clearinghouse, and the Best Evidence Encyclopedia all offer guidance when interpreting effect sizes.

Slide 20: Perhaps in your school or district, pre-packaged evidence-based intervention programs aren't available.

NCII recommends that schools use evidence-based intervention programs when available, and consider augmenting current offerings if feasible. If evidence-based interventions aren't available, consider using remediation materials that came with your core program materials, expert recommendations, or standards-aligned materials.

Most importantly, always collect data to determine whether most students are profiting from the instruction you're providing. If the data reveal that most students are not profiting from your instruction, you will need to refine your instruction until you find that most students are profiting.

Slide 21: Now let's discuss what it means to deliver secondary interventions with fidelity.

Slide 22: Fidelity refers to how closely prescribed procedures are followed, and in the context of schools, the degree to which teachers implement programs the way they were intended by the program developers. It also relates to the quality of the implementation. This means that teachers are implementing the intervention with consistency and accuracy, and are sticking to the instructional plan with integrity.

Slide 23: Why is fidelity important? If teachers aren't consistent and accurate in delivering secondary interventions, they aren't able to confidently explain a student's lack of response to an intervention. Did the student make insufficient progress because they require more intensive intervention? Or did the student make insufficient progress because the secondary intervention wasn't delivered with fidelity? Without practicing consistency and integrity in intervention delivery, we can't link, or attribute, student outcomes to the instruction provided. Fidelity allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of the secondary intervention and tells us when a student may require a more intensive level of intervention.

Furthermore, studies have concluded that positive student outcomes are particularly dependent on aspects of fidelity within the framework of a tiered support system. One of these aspects is fidelity of implementation at the classroom or teacher level.

Slide 24: This graphic provides one example of a way to think about fidelity, and includes the elements of adherence, exposure, quality of delivery, program specificity, and student engagement. Schools should have procedures in place to monitor the fidelity of their implementation of secondary interventions. While these don't have to be formal, it is important to consider whether or not they're implementing programs the way that they intended. In the midst of all of the responsibilities of educators, small checks can make a big difference in keeping services for students on track.

When we discuss adherence we are focused on how well we stick to the plan/curriculum/assessment, or implementing the plan/curriculum/assessment as it was intended to be implemented based on research. For a secondary intervention, this may mean how well teachers implement all pieces of an intervention, in the way they were intended to be implemented. This doesn't necessarily mean that teachers should follow a script word for word, but that covering certain content with appropriate pacing and relevant language and techniques are important.

Duration/Exposure refers to how often a student receives an intervention and how long an intervention lasts. When thinking about fidelity we are considering whether the exposure/duration being used with a student matches the recommendation by the author/publisher of the curriculum.

In the case of secondary interventions, developers and researchers typically specify the required exposure/duration that is needed for the intervention to be effective for most students. If the intervention developer calls for the intervention 3 days a week for 45 minutes each day, is the student receiving this dosage?

Not only is it important to adhere to the plan/curriculum/assessment, but it is also important to look at the quality of delivery. This refers to how well the intervention, assessment, or instruction is delivered. For example, do you use good teaching practices? Quality instructional delivery also means that teachers are engaged in what they're teaching, and animated in their delivery, not simply reading from a script. Providing teachers with constructive feedback on their instructional delivery is one way to improve the quality of delivery for secondary interventions.

Another component is program specificity, or how well the intervention is defined and how different it is from other interventions. Having clearly defined interventions/assessments allows teachers to more easily adhere to the program as defined. Is the intervention a good match for the student's needs? Or does every low reader get the same intervention?

Just as quality of delivery is important, it is important to also focus on student engagement, or how engaged and involved the students are in the intervention or activity. Following a prescribed program alone is often not enough. Consider whether or not competing behaviors make it difficult for students to take part in the intervention as designed. During the delivery of secondary interventions, teachers may need to use behavior management strategies to manage student behaviors, including providing choice, adding elements of competition, and providing frequent opportunities to respond.

Slide 25: Now we'll take some time to discuss challenges and barriers that may affect the implementation of secondary interventions in schools.

Slide 26: Most evidence-based interventions are developed and tested in a research setting, without the extraneous factors that affect implementation in schools. While implementing evidence-based interventions with all aspects of fidelity may be ideal, as we know, there are many challenges and barriers that make such implementation a challenge. It is natural for teachers and administrators to face these challenges in intervention planning and delivery.

In framing our discussion of next steps schools can take to improve secondary intervention implementation, I want to stress that it is more important to “get it started” than to “get it perfect.”

Because there are so many challenges that can affect the implementation of quality secondary interventions, it is important to prioritize areas for improvement that are realistic and manageable. Now I’ll discuss some possible activities or next steps that your school can take to begin fine-tuning your implementation of secondary interventions.

Slide 27: We’ll now discuss a couple of activities and resources that can be used by school and/or district teams to improve the implementation of effective secondary intervention programs.

Slide 28: If your school is not sure about the evidence base of interventions that are currently being used, or if you are in need of additional evidence-based interventions, this activity provides suggestions for reviewing the evidence base of secondary interventions.

If your school/district is looking for evidence-based interventions, we recommend that schools assemble a team, review data from multiple sources to determine intervention needs, and then identify the school’s priority areas. This will help to narrow your search to interventions that will be most impactful for your school.

Slide 29: The NCII Tools Charts, What Works Clearinghouse, and Best Evidence Encyclopedia all include reviews and ratings of the evidence behind secondary interventions, as well as descriptions of secondary interventions.

Slide 30: Teams can use this chart to organize and guide their review process of different interventions.

Slide 31: If your school/district is experiencing challenges related to fidelity and want to improve systems for fidelity, the activity “Conducting a Fidelity Inventory” may be helpful.

This activity encourages teams to re-visit implementation requirements for a particular intervention program, compare the requirements to their current implementation, and then make a plan for improvement.

Slide 32: Here is a completed example of a team’s fidelity inventory for the Leveled Literacy Intervention from Fountas and Pinnel. Note that there are three columns to fill in. First, the team filled in how they are currently implementing the intervention. Next, the team researched the implementation requirements from the intervention manual or website. Upon comparing their current implementation and implementation with fidelity, the team identified steps for improvement.

Please note that this specific intervention program is being used for illustrative purposes only, as NCII does not endorse specific products.

Slide 33: If your district does not currently have a menu of interventions in each content area, we recommend gathering a team to compile a district intervention menu. The menu displayed above was created by Richland School District in Washington State, and provides an example of what a district intervention menu may look like. The school's website can be found at the link at the top of the slide.

Slide 34: In summary, implementing effective secondary interventions is crucial for schools to establish a foundation for intensive intervention. When secondary interventions are evidence-based and are implemented with fidelity, schools are able to meet the needs of most at-risk students and obtain a clearer sense of which students require intensive intervention. Furthermore, the way secondary interventions are implemented has important implications on identification of students. IDEA regulations for identifying students with specific learning disabilities no longer require the use of the discrepancy model, and allow for the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention. With this in mind, it's crucial for schools to have effective systems for evidence-based secondary interventions in place, as a child's responsiveness to these interventions has a large impact on their identification and future services.

Slide 36: This concludes our webinar for today, and if you have any questions or comments you can contact the email address on the screen and you can also go to our website, www.intensiveintervention.org, to see additional webinars and a question and answer document related to this webinar. Thank you!