SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

South Carolina Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework and Guidance Document

Pursuant to Section 59-33-520 as amended by Act 213 of 2018

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Contents

SECTION ONE: The Legislative Mandate 4
1.1 Act 213 4
1.2 Act 114 6
SECTION TWO: MTSS in South Carolina 9
2.1 Introduction 9
2.2 Profile of the South Carolina Graduate 10
2.3 Mission, Vision, and Beliefs 10
2.4 MTSS and Early Learning 11
2.5 MTSS and Read to Succeed 12
2.6 MTSS and Mathematics 13
SECTION THREE: South Carolina's MTSS Framework 14
3.1 Building a Multi-Tiered System of Supports 14
3.2 Using Universal Screening Data to Make Educational Decisions at the School Level 15
SECTION FOUR: Six Critical Components 21
4.1 Leadership 21
4.2 Capacity and Infrastructure for Implementation 24
4.2.1 Instructional Coaching 25
4.2.2 Scheduling Considerations 26
4.3 Communication and Collaboration 29
4.4 Data-Based Problem Solving 30
4.5 Three-Tiered Model 33
4.6 Data Evaluation 52
4.6.1 Types of Assessments 52
4.6.2 Evaluating Assessments, Curriculum, and Intervention 55
CREDITS 59
REFERENCES 60
Appendix A: Federal and State Legislative Mandates 73
Act 213 73
Act 114 77
Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) 93

ESSA 95
State Board of Education Regulation 95
Appendix B: MTSS and Early Learning 96
Appendix C: MTSS and Read to Succeed 98
Appendix D: Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Self-Assessment 99
Appendix E: Sample MTSS Leadership Teams Planning Chart 102
Appendix F: Leadership Roles and Responsibilities 104
Appendix G: Scheduling Considerations for District and School Leaders 111
Appendix H: Sample Data Meeting Minutes Form 116
Appendix I: Include Support for Communication and Collaboration 117
Appendix J: MTSS and Multilingual Learners (MLs) 118
Appendix K: MTSS and Special Education 124

SECTION ONE: The Legislative Mandate

In South Carolina (SC), successful student outcomes are the goal of all we do. A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) provides a framework for providing strong core instruction and delivering early intervention for every student in need of support in order to attain or maintain grade-level performance. This is accomplished by effectively utilizing best instructional practices within an evidence-based instructional model and requires an ongoing, systematic process of using student data to guide instructional and intervention decisions.

Two legislative mandates seek to improve student outcomes in SC. Act 213 requires Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to use a universal screening process to identify students who may be at risk of experiencing academic or other difficulties and implement appropriate instruction and evidence-based intervention for these students. Act 114, otherwise known as the Read to Succeed Act, addresses interventions and supports that are provided to improve core instruction and student outcomes. MTSS is not a special education initiative; rather, it prompts schools to use a data-based problem-solving model to create a strong core instructional foundation and provide support to all students to meet their academic and behavioral needs.

1.1 Act 213

Act 213 (2018) serves as a foundational legislative framework aimed at supporting students through the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). It requires the use of universal screeners to identify students who may be at risk of academic difficulties, particularly in reading, including dyslexia, and mandates evidence-based interventions for these students.

Key Provisions of Act 213:

- **Universal Screening**: Districts must implement approved universal screening tools to assess all students in kindergarten and first grade for reading difficulties, including dyslexia. These screenings are critical for early identification of students who may require additional support.
- **Tiered Interventions**: Following the screening process, schools are required to apply a tiered system of evidence-based interventions through the MTSS framework to support students at risk. Interventions must be tailored to individual student needs and monitored regularly to ensure effectiveness.
- **Data-Based Decision Making**: Act 213 emphasizes the importance of using student data to drive instructional decisions and interventions. Schools must engage in a problem-solving process to continually adjust supports based on progress monitoring results.
- **Professional Development**: The law mandates ongoing professional development for educators to ensure they are equipped to administer universal screeners,

interpret the results, and implement appropriate interventions for students demonstrating academic difficulties.

This act ensures a strong alignment between MTSS and the legal framework for universal screening and early intervention, promoting better student outcomes through a systematic, data-driven approach.

For the full legislative text and detailed legal provisions of Act 213, see **Appendix A.**

Section 59-33-520

A. (1) The State Department of Education shall establish and provide training and support for a statewide MTSS framework that must contain a common data-based problem-solving model, on-going student assessment, and a layered continuum of supports using evidence-based practices. As part of the assessment, a universal screening process must be used to identify students who may be at risk of experiencing difficulties in reading, math, or writing and who may also be at risk of experiencing difficulties in social-emotional development.
   (2) Beginning with the 2019-2020 school year, to the extent funding is provided or that approved screening tools are available at no cost, a local school district shall use the universal screening process to screen each student who is in the district who is in kindergarten through first grade three times each school year and as needed in second grade as outlined in the district's universal screening procedures, and any other student as required by the department, for reading difficulties, including dyslexia, and the need for intervention.
   (3) In addition to screening required by this subsection, screening also may be requested for a student by his parent or guardian, teacher, counselor, or school psychologist.
B. The district, following the universal screening procedures it conducted, shall convene a school-based team to analyze screening data and progress monitoring data to assist teachers in planning and implementing appropriate instruction and evidence-based interventions for all students who, based on the screening, are at risk of experiencing academic difficulties, including those students who exhibit the characteristics of dyslexia, as provided by the department. Guidance may include suggestions of tiered interventions, dyslexia-specific interventions, academic and social emotional behavioral supports, and supplemental technology as appropriate for the student's access to assistive technology.
C. If the RTI process conducted by the district indicates that a student is at risk for experiencing academic difficulties, including dyslexia, the district shall:
   1. Notify the parent or legal guardian of the student;
   2. Provide the parent or legal guardian of the student with information and resource materials so they may assist and support learning for their child;
   3. Provide the student with tiered, evidence-based interventions as defined in Section 59-33-510; and

4. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and the student's progress.

Section 59-33-530
The department shall provide appropriate professional development training and resources for all educators in the area of MTSS and the identification of, and evidence-based intervention methods for, students who are at risk of experiencing academic difficulties, including students with dyslexia.

1.2 Act 114

Act 114, also known as the Read to Succeed Act, amended and revised the previous version of the legislation (Act 284, June 2014). Ratified in March 2024, Act 114 aims to ensure literacy proficiency by the third grade through systemic interventions and supports within the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework.

Key requirements related to MTSS include:

- **Universal Reading Screenings**: Districts are mandated to administer a universal reading screener three times each school year to identify students who are not meeting grade-level proficiency.
- **Individualized Reading Plans**: For students demonstrating literacy deficiencies, schools must develop individualized reading plans that outline specific actions to support their progress, and inform parents or guardians in writing.
- **Targeted Literacy Support**: Teachers must provide scientifically based reading instruction and, if necessary, supplemental interventions from highly qualified educators to ensure all students can comprehend increasingly complex grade-level texts.

MTSS Integration: The act emphasizes the use of data-driven decision-making through the MTSS framework, aligning literacy interventions with tiered supports to ensure that all students receive the assistance they need to achieve reading proficiency. This systematic approach connects classroom instruction, targeted intervention, and progress monitoring to promote student success in literacy.

For the full text of Act 114, including detailed legislative requirements, see **Appendix A**.

Section 59-155-110
The South Carolina Department of Education shall implement a comprehensive, systemic approach to reading which will ensure:
(1) classroom teachers use scientifically based reading instruction in prekindergarten through grade five, to include oral language, phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; administer and interpret valid and reliable assessments;

analyze data to inform reading instruction; and provide scientifically based interventions as needed so that all students develop proficiency with literacy skills and comprehension;
(2) each district, in consultation with classroom teachers, periodically reassess curriculum and instructional materials for alignment with foundational literacy skills and exclusion of materials that employ the three-cueing system model of reading, visual memory as the primary basis for teaching word recognition, or the three-cueing system model of reading based on meaning, structure and syntax, and visual cues;
(3) each student who cannot yet comprehend grade-level text is identified and served as early as possible and at all stages of his or her educational process;
(4) each student receives targeted, effective, comprehensive support from the classroom teacher and, if needed, supplemental support from a reading interventionist so that ultimately all students can comprehend grade-level texts;
(5) after each administration of a universal reading screener or formative assessment as defined in this chapter, each student and his parent or guardian are informed in writing of:
(a) the student's reading proficiency needs, progress, and ability to comprehend grade-level texts;
(b) specific actions the classroom teacher and other reading professionals have taken and will take to help the student comprehend texts; and
(c) specific actions that the parent or guardian can take to help the student comprehend grade-level texts;
(6) classroom teachers receive pre-service and in-service coursework based in the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills;
(7) all students develop reading and writing proficiency to prepare them to graduate and to succeed in their career and post-secondary education;
(8) each school district publishes annually a comprehensive scientifically based reading plan that includes intervention options available to students and funding for these services; and
(9) all programs focused on early childhood literacy development promote parental involvement in children's literacy and development of foundational literacy skills.

Section 59-155-155

(D) In order to determine student progression in reading, a district shall administer a universal reading screener three times per school year with the first administration occurring within the first forty-five days of school, the second administration occurring at the midpoint of the school year, and the third administration occurring by the end of the school year. Within fifteen days of each administration, the district shall notify the parent or guardian regarding the performance of their student and whether the student may be considered for retention. For each student demonstrating literacy deficiencies and not meeting grade-level proficiencies based on the data received from the administration of the universal reading screeners, the district shall create an individualized reading plan and include a copy in the notification to the parent or guardian.

Section 59-155-160

(A) Beginning with the 2024-2025 School Year, a student must be retained in the third grade if the student fails to demonstrate reading proficiency at the end of the third grade as indicated by scoring Does Not Meet Expectations or at the lowest achievement level on the state summative reading assessment. A student may be exempt for good cause from the mandatory retention but shall continue to receive instructional support and services and reading intervention appropriate for their age and reading level. Good cause exemptions include students:
(1) with limited English proficiency and less than two years of instruction in English as a Second Language program;
(2) with disabilities whose Individualized Education Program indicates the use of alternative assessments or alternative reading interventions and students with disabilities whose Individualized Education Program or Section 504 Plan reflects that the student has received intensive remediation in reading for more than two years but still does not substantially demonstrate reading proficiency;
(3) who successfully participate in a summer reading camp at the conclusion of third grade and demonstrate reading proficiency by achieving Approaches Expectations, or at least a level above the lowest level, on the state summative reading assessment;
(4) who demonstrate third grade reading proficiency by scoring the equivalent of Approaches Expectations, or the level above the lowest level, on the statewide summative assessment or a norm-referenced alternative assessment approved by the board for use in summer reading camps; or
(5) who have received two years of reading intervention and were previously retained.

Other state and federal legislative mandates may be found in **Appendix A**.

SECTION TWO: MTSS in South Carolina

2.1 Introduction

The *South Carolina Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework and Guidance Document* serves as the core reference document for statewide MTSS implementation. The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) is committed to providing this statewide framework and guidance to assist districts and schools with developing and implementing successful systems to support all students.

MTSS recognizes the connections between academics and behavior and addresses both areas simultaneously. This approach enables educators and support professionals to use data to drive their instruction and interventions while promoting student growth. However, MTSS is not just about tiered instruction and interventions. It is founded on six components that are essential for students and educators to succeed. These components must work in tandem to provide a seamless system of support for all students.

The six components of the South Carolina MTSS framework are:

- Leadership
- Capacity and Infrastructure for Implementation
- Communication and Collaboration
- Data-Based Problem Solving
- Three-Tiered Instructional/Intervention Model
- Data Evaluation

The *South Carolina MTSS Framework and Guidance Document* defines MTSS in SC, provides an overview of the six components of MTSS, and guides the implementation of MTSS in districts and schools. When districts and schools organize their systems around the six components and utilize evidence-based practices, educators, families, and students succeed. All students can access quality curriculum, effective instruction and intervention, and behavioral support needed to meet grade-level standards. Educators have data systems that allow them to frequently measure the performance of students to guide instructional and intervention practices. Leaders and teachers receive relevant and timely professional learning along with the instructional tools they need to address the needs of learners. Finally, the MTSS framework supports a shared responsibility between educators and parents to support students in their educational journeys.

In addition, SC Act 213 requires using an MTSS framework to identify students at risk for reading difficulties, including dyslexia. For more information about dyslexia, see the *South Carolina Dyslexia Handbook*.

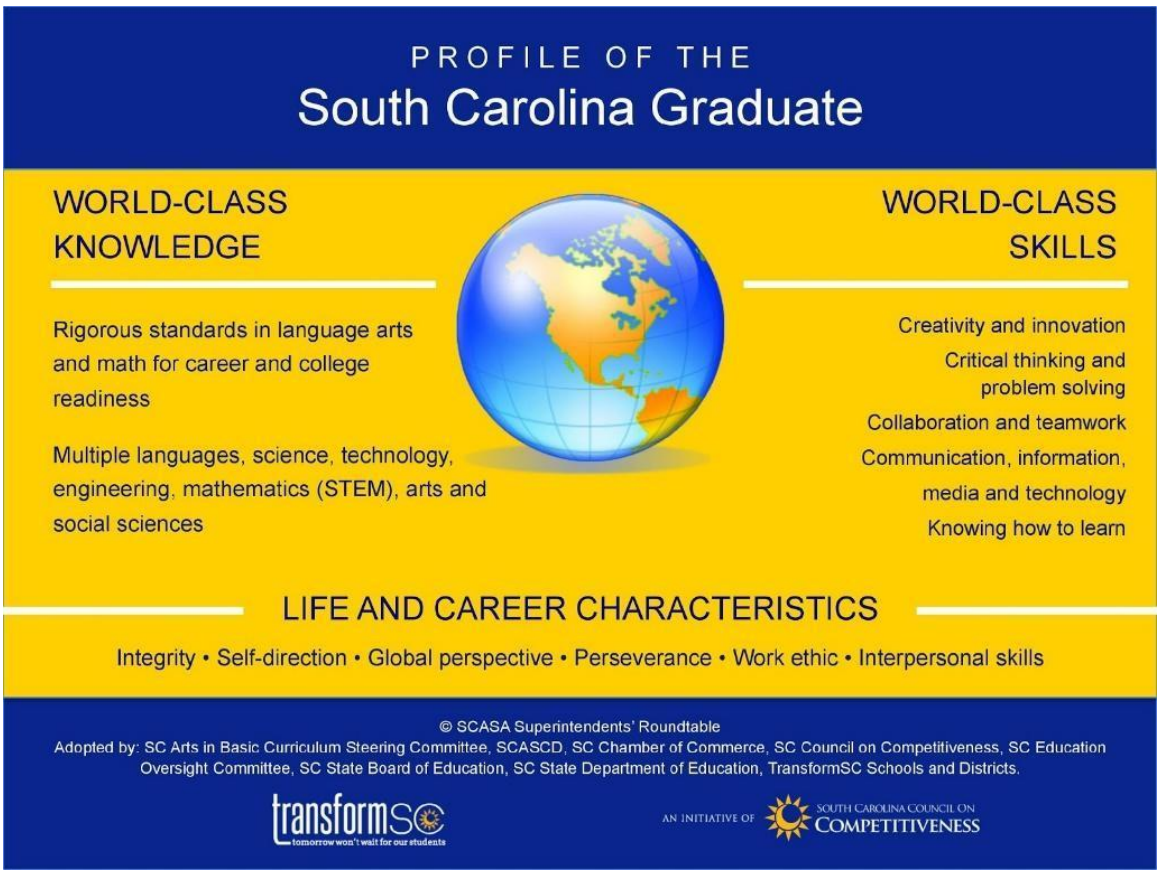
When evidence-based practices within the MTSS framework are successfully

implemented, student achievement will increase over time. Section 59-33-540 of Act 213 directs the SCDE to compile information regarding MTSS annually. Information on *MTSS State Reporting* can be found on the SCDE website. These reports summarize overall progress and share information regarding goals based on this collective data.

2.2 Profile of the South Carolina Graduate

State Superintendent Ellen Weaver, and the SCDE, desire for all students to graduate prepared for success in college, career, and citizenship. SCDE will work to accomplish this vision through state-level leadership and collaboration, as well as school and district support, to operationalize the most effective teaching and learning strategies to help make the *Profile of the South Carolina Graduate* a reality for every student in our state.

Figure 1. *Profile of the South Carolina Graduate*



Note. Source: South Carolina Department of Education. (2017). *Profile of the South Carolina Graduate.*

2.3 Mission, Vision, and Beliefs

Mission

South Carolina LEAs will use the MTSS Framework to ensure all students receive high-quality instruction and graduate prepared for success in college, career, and citizenship.

Vision

Every South Carolina local educational agency and state-operated program will implement and sustain all components of MTSS for continuous improvement to ensure that all students will achieve the *Profile of the South Carolina Graduate*.

Belief Statements

- We believe working in partnership with parents, families, and communities maximizes students' mastery of world-class knowledge, skills, and characteristics outlined in the *Profile of the South Carolina Graduate*.
- We believe high-quality differentiated instruction encompassing academic and behavioral supports is the key to student success.
- We believe we can effectively teach all students.
- We believe that implementing evidence-based instruction and interventions benefits all students.
- We believe that using multiple sources of data and monitoring student progress will inform instruction and will improve educational policies and practices.

2.4 MTSS and Early Learning

Children's experiences before entering school matter. Research shows that children who experience nurturing relationships with supportive caregivers and high-quality education are more successful in school and later in their lives. "Increasing understanding and use of vocabulary, use of more complex sentence structures, and combining thoughts into discourse and narratives can all augment the quality and quantity of children's oral language, which develops best in socially responsive and interactive settings" (Paulson, 2021). Possible interventions for early learners should consider both play and conversation. This is supported by research demonstrating that play is so powerful it can be used as an intervention to close gaps for children between the ages of 3 to 6 (Parker & Thomsen, 2019). Because the areas of the brain that we use for reading are the same as the areas for oral language, early intervention programs aiming to close the achievement gap should focus on increasing children's conversational turn-taking to capitalize on the early neural plasticity underlying cognitive development (Deckner, et al., 2006).

South Carolina supports high-quality early childhood education via the *Child Early Reading and Development Education Program* (CERDEP). CERDEP is a state-funded, full-day pre-k program for four-year-old children in poverty. All CERDEP classrooms are led by a certified teacher using a high-quality, comprehensive curriculum that addresses both academic and behavioral skills. The South Carolina Early Childhood Multi-tiered Systems of Support (SC EC-MTSS) uses the *Pyramid Model* to ensure school readiness for students from birth through age five.

South Carolina requires that schools assess all 4K students in language and literacy within the first 45 days of school and during the last 45 days. Districts are required to assess students using state approved assessment tools. The state-approved assessments have components that can be used as progress monitoring tools for students who are not at benchmark. It is highly recommended that 4K teachers also administer the readiness assessments at mid-year to assess all children's progress; however, children who are receiving intensified or additional support in Tiers II and III need more frequent progress monitoring (SWIFT Education Center, 2017). A description of how each of the approved assessments may be utilized for progress monitoring and other information on SC EC-MTSS and early learning may be found in Appendix B.

See **Appendix B** for more information on *MTSS and Early Learning*.

2.5 MTSS and Read to Succeed

Read to Succeed legislation outlines a systemic approach to reading and writing to ensure that each student receives targeted, effective, scientifically based literacy support from a classroom teacher in all content areas. If needed, a highly effective educator provides supplemental support, so all students ultimately read and comprehend increasingly complex grade-level text.

Guidance from Act 114 includes a mandate for districts to administer a universal reading screener three times per school year. According to the US Department of Education (2017):

> Universal screening is a critical first step in identifying students who are at risk for experiencing reading difficulties and who might need more time in instruction or different instruction altogether. Screening is conducted to identify or predict students who may be at risk for poor learning outcomes. Universal screening assessments are typically brief and conducted with all students from a grade level. They are followed by additional testing or short-term progress monitoring to corroborate students' risk status. Universal screening can be used for all academic subjects and for social and behavior assessment.

For each student demonstrating literacy deficiencies and not meeting grade-level proficiency based on the data received from the administration of the universal reading screeners, the district shall create an individualized reading plan and include a copy in the notification to the parent or guardian.

An intervention decision tree can be used to visually represent predetermined factors for identifying students in need of additional support. Model resources are included below:

- *K-5 Intervention Decision Tree.* A sample K-5 intervention tree to help determine a learning path based on literacy universal screening data (SCDE, 2023).
- *K-5 Literacy Intervention Student Learning Pathway.* A sample planning tool to organize an instructional plan based on data (SCDE, 2023).

See **Appendix C** for more information on *MTSS and Read to Succeed*.

2.6 MTSS and Mathematics

High-quality core mathematics instruction, Tier I, is fundamental to student success in mathematics. Research shows that early math skills are a key predictor of later academic success. Math is cumulative – so if students do not grasp earlier concepts, math gets increasingly difficult. Access to high-quality instruction and intervention can change trajectories of student outcomes across a school year. Therefore, high-quality mathematics instruction in schools is essential to alleviate many students' difficulties with mathematics.

When preparing a Tier I lesson, a student's ability to grasp mathematical ideas in the regular classroom setting is highly dependent upon their overall developmental levels and their ability to perform necessary auxiliary skills (e.g. math vocabulary, reading comprehension). Teachers should utilize best practices in teaching math so that they will reach as many students as possible during classroom instruction. The IRIS Center (2024) lists the following evidence-based strategies that can be used to teach mathematics at the Tier I Core Instruction level.

Table 1: *Evidence-Based Strategies for Teaching Mathematics*

Evidence-Based Practice	Definition
Explicit, systematic instruction	This strategy involves teaching a specific skill or concept in a highly structured and carefully sequenced manner.
Visual representations	This strategy involves creating an accurate representation of the mathematical quantities and relationships described in the problem, sometimes referred to as *schematic representation* or *schematic diagram*.
Schema instruction	This strategy involves teaching students the underlying structure, or *schema*, of word problems and giving them a method for solving that problem type.
Metacognitive strategies	These strategies enable students to become aware of *how* they think when solving mathematics problems. More specifically, metacognitive strategies help students learn to plan, monitor, and modify their mathematical problem-solving approach.

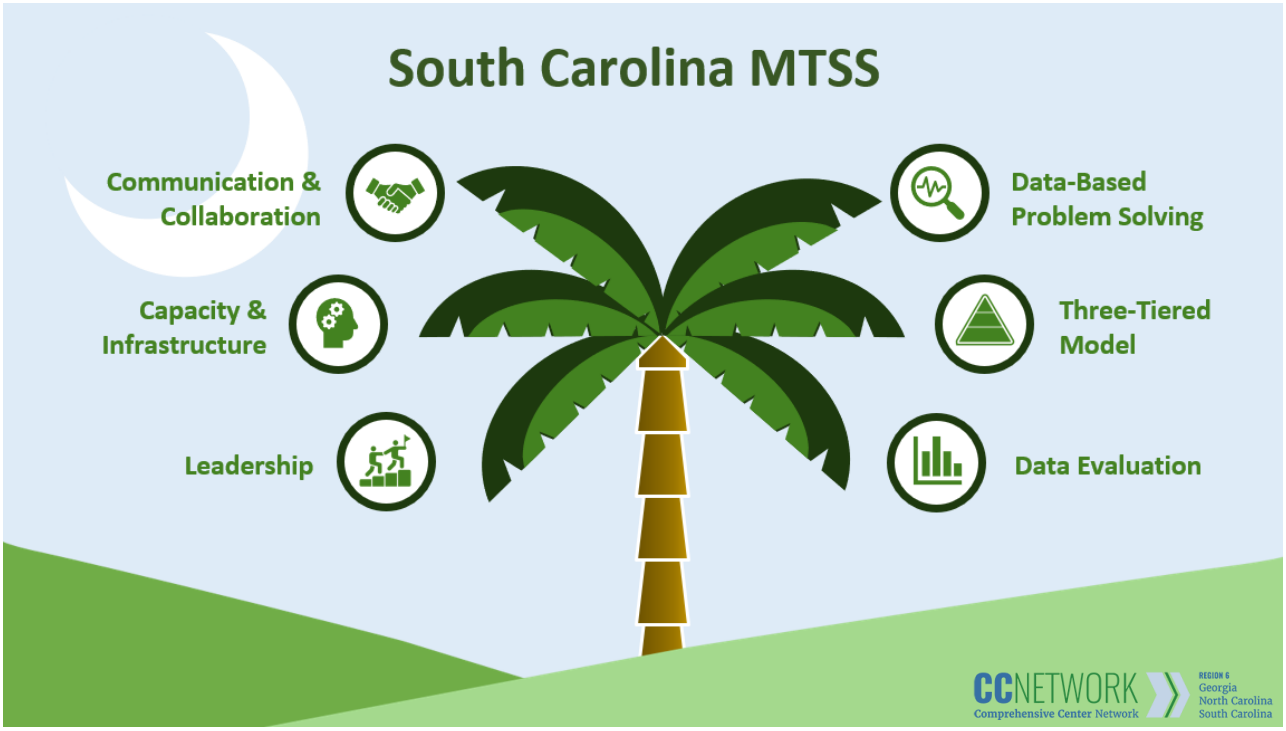
Note. Source: IRIS Center. (2018). *What is RtI for Mathematics?*

SECTION THREE: South Carolina's MTSS Framework

The goal of MTSS is to prevent students from struggling by providing strong core instruction and delivering early intervention for every student needing support to attain, maintain, or exceed grade-level performance. Effectively utilizing an evidence-based instructional model requires an ongoing, systematic process of using student data to guide instructional and intervention decisions. The goal is to ensure that all students reach their full potential.

A framework is a particular set of ideas or beliefs intended to support or guide an organization's overall structure. The SCDE recognizes that in order to improve student outcomes, educational organizations must develop well-organized and intentional systems to meet the needs of *all* students. Schools are not factories; rather, they are organizations charged with preparing students for their future endeavors as citizens of South Carolina and the world. The South Carolina Framework encourages implementing the six components of MTSS simultaneously in order to support all stakeholders in transforming compartmentalized practices into an organized and intentional system of supports.

Figure 2. *South Carolina MTSS Framework*



Note. Source: Region 6 Comprehensive Center. (2024).

3.1 Building a Multi-Tiered System of Supports

MTSS is an organized, collective, system in which all parts of a school work together to accomplish a common outcome. If one part is faulty or moving in a different direction, the

entire system will suffer. For that reason, schools should begin the journey of the MTSS journey by reflecting on current practices. The following steps will guide the process.

1. Reflect on the current implementation of MTSS at the school level in each of the six components of MTSS using the *MTSS Self-Assessment*.
2. Develop an action plan for implementation based on the results of the self-reflection.
3. Monitor the progress of the action plan.
4. Make adjustments/refinements as needed.
5. Reflect on the current implementation of MTSS at the school level in each of the six components of MTSS at the end of the year to measure the growth of the school's implementation.

See **Appendix D** for a copy of the *MTSS Self-Assessment*.

3.2 Using Universal Screening Data to Make Educational Decisions at the School Level

All decisions regarding MTSS, the systematic functioning of the school, should be based on data.

School leadership teams should:

1) Administer the universal screener.
2) Examine the data at the school level.
    a) Are 80% of the students meeting the benchmark?
        - **If Yes**, plan intervention for the students who need it using data-driven decision making.
        - **If No**, focus on improving Tier I universal core instruction.
    b) Identify school trends using Data-Based Problem Solving. Seek to answer questions such as:
        - Instruction
            - Is the instruction evidence-based, explicit, and intense enough?
            - Who does the data suggest may need additional instruction and/or intervention?
            - What does the data suggest about the effectiveness of the instructional delivery?
        - Curriculum
            - Does the curriculum match the students' need(s)? Do they have the prerequisite skills to access it?
            - Is the curriculum being differentiated to meet the needs of all learners?

    - What does the data suggest about the effectiveness of the school-wide curriculum?
- Environment
    - Does the environment support learning in a positive, proactive way?
    - How is the environment impacting learning?
- Learner
    - Are there gaps in grade-level performance? What does the data suggest about the performance of subgroups (i.e. students from major racial and ethnic groups, economically-disadvantaged students, children with disabilities, MLs, gifted students, and underachieving students)?
    - Do the instruction, curriculum, and environment consider learners' characteristics?

One tool that can assist schools in identifying possible causes for data trends is the *RIOT/ICEL Matrix* (AIR, 2023). This matrix helps schools work efficiently and quickly to decide what relevant information to collect on student academic performance and behavior and how to organize that information to identify probable reasons why the student is not experiencing academic or behavioral success.

3.2.1 Universal Screening, Defined

Universal screening is used for the following purposes:

- to indicate whether the Tier I or core instructional model is effective;
- to identify students in need of differentiated instruction and/or intervention as early as possible;
- to identify each student's level of proficiency and progress in target areas and use this information to adjust instructional models or intervention delivery; and
- to assist in goal setting for students, teachers, grade levels, schools, and districts.

MTSS includes assessing every student using universal screeners in order to identify those who are and are not reaching grade-level benchmarks or are at risk for poor outcomes due to behavioral, attendance, or other challenges. Academic universal screening assessments are brief and standardized. Universal reading screeners predict later reading success and are crucial for the early prevention of reading difficulties. Attendance and discipline referral data can be used to screen for students who need support with school attendance or behavior.

As a system, universal screening is a school-wide assessment or review process conducted at regular intervals (e.g. fall, winter, spring) by trained school personnel. It is used to identify each student's level of risk at a single point in time. The rationale for screening three times a year is to ensure students stay on the trajectory for success and

give educators time to respond to students' needs earlier and more accurately. Universal screening tools help to identify students in need of a closer look to understand why they may be experiencing difficulties. Once the problem is identified, the appropriate instruction/intervention can be matched to the student's needs to provide him/her with more opportunities for success. Progress monitoring should occur to see if the instruction/intervention needs to be adjusted.

3.2.2 Universal Screening in Elementary Grades

Universal Screening measures should be:

- **Reliable**: Tests are constructed to obtain consistent results; administration and scoring is standardized to increase reliability.
- **Valid**: Universal screening should have high predictive validity: it should accurately predict which students are likely to fail to obtain grade level expectations without interventions.
- **Easy to administer, score, and interpret so that results are obtained quickly**: Since the purpose of screening is to determine which students warrant further investigation and to provide responsive instruction, screening tools must provide results quickly so that additional assessment to diagnose academic strengths and needs can proceed in a timely manner.
- **Triangulated with data from other sources**: Sources could include teacher observations, school-level assessments, and district-level assessments.

The district and/or school intervention teams determine which academic and behavior areas to measure and select appropriate screening tools that meet the criteria described above. It is essential that districts/schools train qualified educators in the administration, interpretation, and use of universal screening tools.

Act 213 directed a state-level Learning Disorders Task Force to develop a list of approved universal screeners for K-1 students. The selected universal screeners for literacy contain the following core components:

Table 2: *Universal Screening Components for Literacy*

Grade	Skill
Kindergarten	**Phonological Awareness:** • Word Awareness • Rhyming and Alliteration • Syllables • Phonemic Awareness **Alphabetic Principle** (letters represent sounds, which form words) • Letter Sounds • Alphabet Knowledge **Listening Comprehension**

	Vocabulary Development
First Grade	**Phonological Awareness:** • Word Awareness • Rhyming and Alliteration • Syllables • Phonemic Awareness **Alphabetic Principle** (letters represent sounds, which form words) • Letter Sounds • Alphabet Knowledge **Phonics** **Fluency** (high frequency words) **Fluency** (with connected texts) **Vocabulary** **Comprehension**
Second Grade	**Phonics** **Fluency** with connected text **Vocabulary** **Comprehension**

Note. Fluency instruction may be taught in kindergarten when appropriate. Source: Adapted from Gersten, R., Compton, D., Connor, C.M., Dimino, J., Santoro, L., Linan-Thompson, S., & Tilly, W.D. (2008). *Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades*.

3.2.3 Universal Screening in Secondary Grades

In secondary grades, an Early Warning System (EWS) is an evidence-based universal screening tool to help identify students who are off track and at risk of dropping out of school before graduation. "Early warning systems use individual student data to generate indicators of on-track status for graduation, including attendance, behavior, and course performance" (Frazelle & Nagel, 2015). A given school or district will need to select the most appropriate indicators and thresholds to identify at-risk students based on the student population and the school or district's goals. Suggested indicators and thresholds for attendance, behavior, and academic achievement are shown below.

Table 3. *Suggested EWS Indicators and Thresholds for Attendance and Behavior, Quarterly*

Status	Attendance: Days Absent	Behavior: Office Referrals	Behavior: Suspensions
Off Track (Tier III)	9+	2+	1+
Sliding (Tier II)	5-8	1	0
On Track (Tier I)	4 or fewer	0	0

Note. Source: Adapted from Frazelle, S. & Nagel, A. (2015). *A Practitioner's Guide to Implementing Early Warning Systems*.

Table 4. *Suggested EWS Indicators and Thresholds for Attendance and Behavior, Full Year*

Status	Attendance: Days Absent	Behavior: Office Referrals	Behavior: Suspensions
Off Track (Tier III)	36+	6+	2+
Sliding (Tier II)	19-35	3-5	0-1
On Track (Tier I)	18 or fewer	0-2	0-1

Note. Source: Adapted from Frazelle, S. & Nagel, A. (2015). *A Practitioner's Guide to Implementing Early Warning Systems*.

Table 5. *Suggested Early Warning System Indicators and Thresholds for Course Performance*

Status	Elementary Grades K-5	Math and English Grades 6-8	Core Courses Grades 9-12
On Track (Tier I)	Report card grade of E, S, or A, B, or C	Report card grade of A, B, or C	Report card grade of A, B, or C
Sliding (Tier II)	Report card grade of N or D	Report card grade of D	Report card grade of D
Off Track (Tier III)	Report card grade of U or F	Report card grade of F	Report card grade of F

Note. Source: Adapted from Mississippi Department of Education. (2016). *Mississippi Early Warning System Guidance Document*.

Additional resources for implementing Early Warning Systems:

- *A Practitioner's Guide to Implementing Early Warning Systems*. This guide describes and provides examples of early warning system implementation strategies in use across the country (Frazelle & Nagel, 2015).
- *Indicators and Interventions: A Practical Manual for Early Warning Systems*. This guidebook represents the collective wisdom of experienced facilitators from the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Education who have worked with scores of schools to help them successfully implement, operate, and sustain Early Warning Systems (Balfanz et al., 2019).
- *Early Warning Indicators: An Introduction*. This document outlines an IES study to develop a set of locally tailored early warning indicators for students at different grade levels in various school districts and examine the accuracy of the indicators for predicting failure to graduate on time (IES, 2016).

- *District Guide for Creating Indicators for Early Warning Systems*. This guide is intended primarily for school districts that have experience with early warning systems and are interested in refining or expanding their own early warning indicators (Li, Scala, Gerdeman, & Blumenthal, 2016).
- *Mississippi Early Warning System Guidance Document*. This guidance document was created to help Mississippi schools develop an Early Warning System to identify students in need of assistance to reach graduation (MDE, 2016).

3.2.4 Limitations of Universal Screeners

It is important that the limitations of universal screening data are well understood by school and district teams in order to determine appropriate use of these data. Most universal screening tools are not intended to be diagnostic, nor are they constructed to reflect curricula or detect slight changes in performance. Universal screening is merely the first step in determining who is likely to need additional assistance to reach grade level performance expectations and who may be at risk of dropping out of school. No one piece of data should ever determine a student's intervention support. Schools and districts should triangulate data to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the whole child. By conducting universal screening in fall, winter, and spring, the team should be able to determine the following:

- approximate rates of growth from fall to winter, winter to spring, and fall to spring for individual students, classes, and grade levels;
- which students may need further assessment or support; and
- general progress toward goals for teachers, grade levels, schools, and districts.

Data gathered from universal screening should be depicted in graph and/or narrative forms that are easily interpreted by the following:

- teachers for classroom and student performance;
- principals for classroom, grade, and school performance;
- district MTSS leadership team members for district performance; and
- parents for individual student performance.

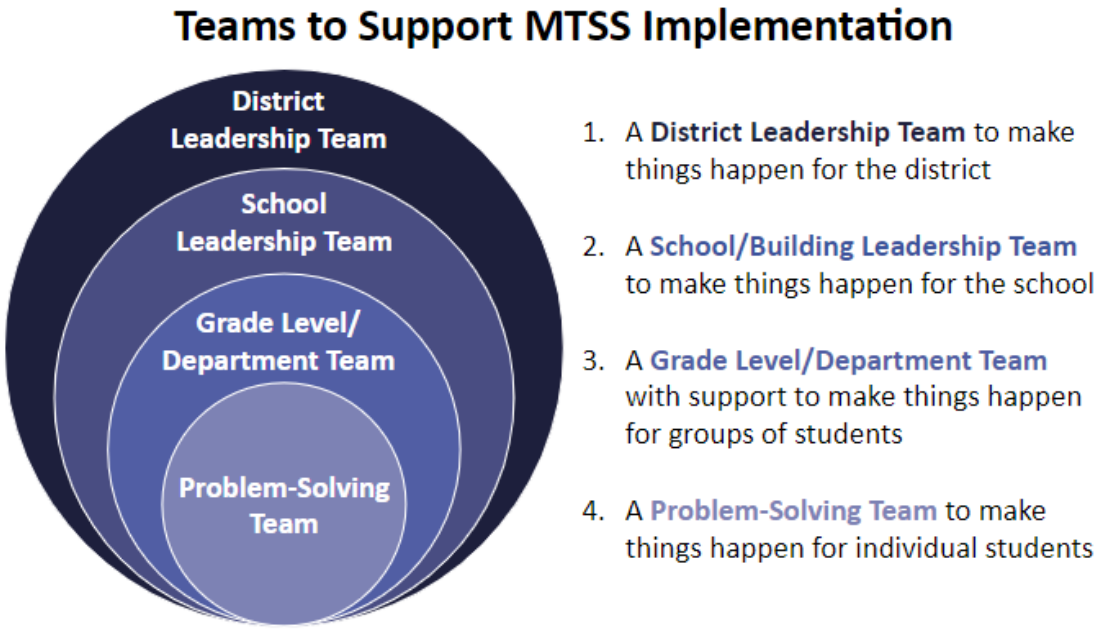
SECTION FOUR: Six Critical Components

The six components of MTSS are presented in this document individually, but they work together to provide the framework for a multi-tiered system of supports. All are important and all are interrelated. For instance, *Data-Based Problem Solving* informs the instruction/intervention selected for the *Three-Tiered Model*. Problem solving occurs thanks to the hard work of *Leadership* and effective *Communication and Collaboration* among educators and between educators and families. Tiered instruction/intervention is informed by intentional efforts to *Build the Capacity* of educators. *Data Evaluation* provides a structure for schools to be sure implementation is on track and efforts are producing the desired outcomes. Planning by *Leadership* ensures that the *Infrastructure* is in place to support the *Three-Tiered Model* and *Data-Based Problem Solving* sessions. As you explore the following sections, keep in mind that the six components are not intended to be implemented in sequence.

4.1 Leadership

Leadership for MTSS exists at both the district and school levels. For implementation to be successful, it is critical to establish MTSS support teams at each level of the system. The function of these teams is to ensure effective implementation across all levels of the system, including state, district, school, classroom, and individual student outcomes. Initially, the MTSS team creates a common vision and common language in order to clarify purpose and desired outcomes. System support needs are determined through a data-based problem solving and decision-making process utilizing school-level progress data. Leadership teams engage in ongoing review and evaluation of progress data to determine how to best allocate funding and available resources, including evidence-based professional development for educators. The figure below represents the flow of leadership from the state level to schools and parents.

Figure 3. *Teams to Support MTSS Implementation*



Note. Source: Adapted from Miller, D. & Radford, P. (2019). MTSS 101: Understanding our current MTSS reality. Presented at the 2019 MTSS Innovations Conference.

When planning for teams, considerations must be made to determine who is on each team, how often these teams will meet, how minutes will be recorded for these meetings, and other aspects of team function.

See **Appendix E** for a *Sample MTSS Leadership Teams Planning Chart*.

The following sections outline the roles and responsibilities of MTSS teams and individuals at the state, district, and school level. These lists are not exhaustive.

4.1.1 Leadership Roles and Responsibilities: State Leadership

- Organize, coordinate, and co-facilitate the work of state and regional MTSS support.
- Develop and support regional coaching capacity including selection, professional development, evaluation and coaching of coaches (i.e., create a professional learning network to provide support for MTSS).
- Guide state and district problem-solving processes through data-based decision making.
- Support districts in establishing a communication plan aligned with MTSS goals and support districts in identifying fidelity tools to ensure the quality of the framework.
- Deepen personal knowledge of MTSS data systems, practices, and implementation research.
- Develop a plan for continuous learning to support MTSS.

- Provide technical assistance and support to districts and classroom teachers in administering universal reading screeners and understanding the results so teachers are able to provide appropriate, scientifically based interventions.
- Annually report, on a grade-level basis, data received from districts and approved universal reading screeners

4.1.2 Leadership Roles and Responsibilities: District Level

- Build partnerships with stakeholders to collaborate, communicate, and share resources that will result in all students reaching grade-level proficiency in reading, math, and writing.
- Establish clear policies and procedures for the administration of assessments, granting access to existing data sources, and the use of data.
- Utilize data that is relevant, real time, accessible and usable (e.g, dashboards, platforms).
- Analyze each school's needs to determine support needed from the district level.
- Ensure the selection of evidence-based Tier I practices for instruction, curriculum, and the environment.
- Support a common understanding that intervention should be matched to students' needs based on data, with goals and expected outcomes shared by all stakeholders.
- Ensure the selection of evidence-based interventions and progress-monitoring tools.
- Identify fiscal resources and determine budget allocations in support of high-quality instruction.
- Encourage and advocate for the use of and access to appropriate technology in support of instruction provided by educators.
- Provide guidance, technical assistance, and professional learning opportunities to build an understanding of screening assessments and their use, progress monitoring, and using data to inform instruction.
- Collect and analyze data from screening assessments and progress monitoring assessments and use this data to guide implementation at all levels.
- Report data to SCDE as indicated in Section 59-33-540 of Act 213.

4.1.3 Leadership Roles and Responsibilities: School Level

- Create and support a common vision and practice for core instruction and intervention.

- Allocate designated periods of time for all stakeholders to collaborate, communicate, and share resources that will result in meeting the needs of ALL students, including groups of students and individual students.
- Align and allocate school level resources to support student progress.
- Encourage the use of and access to appropriate technology in support of instruction provided by educators.
- Define and maintain high expectations for students and staff.
- Facilitate a positive school climate and culture.
- Design a schoolwide professional development plan for implementation and technical assistance and support.
- Facilitate professional learning communities that focus on assessment and instruction by building a toolkit of interventions that are available to all personnel.
- Identify and support a school intervention team.
- Strengthen and build relationship and communication channels with parents and families and community partners.
- Provide additional support in foundational literacy skills for students in kindergarten through second grade who are not demonstrating reading proficiency.
- Provide interventions for all students who are not demonstrating grade-level proficiency.

See **Appendix F** for a sample leadership rubric and a complete list of roles and responsibilities for other school and district stakeholders.

Leadership Action Steps for School Teams:

- As a team, review the leadership team's role in successfully implementing MTSS.
- Establish procedures and decision rules for the problem-solving process at the school, grade, and individual student levels.
- Ensure adequate materials and resources to implement instruction and intervention across the tiers.

4.2 Capacity and Infrastructure for Implementation

District-wide and school-wide capacity and infrastructure are required to successfully implement and sustain MTSS. Building the capacity of many members of the district/school supports the sustainability of successful practices, even in the absence of or change in district or school leaders. Capacity and infrastructure planning must be intentional, relevant, and evaluated for effectiveness (SWIFT Education Center, 2017).

4.2.1 Instructional Coaching

Through research and evidence-based studies, coaching has been widely accepted as an effective
method for improving educator practice and, as a result, learner outcomes in both general education and special education. Evidence shows that how and where a coaching program begins contributes to its sustainability and efficacy. If an evidence-based coaching model is introduced using Implementation Science and executed with fidelity, coaching will allow more students to meet the requirements of the Profile of a South Carolina Graduate.

The goal of coaching is to improve educator practice, with a particular emphasis on using evidence-based practices to improve learner outcomes. Coaches provide quality professional development for educators and leaders, support infrastructure and systems change, and address the needs of districts.

A coach is an accessible professional developer who collaborates with teachers and administrators to create a culture of reflection and development and exemplifies pedagogies of best practice. Theory, demonstration, practice, and coaching all have various impacts on educator behavior. An estimated 95% of teachers who receive ongoing support and guidance through coaching implement new practices in the classroom, as seen in Figure 4.

It is critical that coaching focuses on improving student outcomes. School leadership teams, including coaches, should analyze data to determine the focus of support. Coaches should offer support in a differentiated manner to help teachers improve student outcomes for all students. REL Southeast's Self-Study Guide for Evidence-Based Coaching for Literacy: PreK–Grade 12 is a tool intended to help administrators, teacher leaders, and coaches determine which components of literacy coaching to prioritize based on the data collected (Lee & Smith, 2021). It is important to protect the role of a coach as a supporter and a model of evidence-based practice. Coaches should not be evaluators. The table below shares the results of Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers' findings that while teachers' knowledge and skill acquisition can occur through theory, demonstration, practice, and coaching, only practice and coaching lead to transferring learning to the classroom (2002). Practice has a 5% transfer. Coaching has a 95% transfer.

Table 6. *Percent of Participants Achieving Specific Outcomes by PD Component*

Components	Knowledge	Skill	Transfer
Study of Theory	10%	5%	0%
Demonstration	30%	20%	0%
Practice	60%	60%	5%
Coaching	95%	95%	95%

Note. Source: Adapted from Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development (3rd ed.)*.

4.2.2 Scheduling Considerations

Scheduling is a critical step in building the infrastructure for MTSS within a district and/or school. Master schedules must afford adequate time for core instruction and intervention (SWIFT Education Center, 2017). Schedules must also include adequate time for leadership teams to collaborate, dedicated planning and data analysis time for educators, and professional learning time to support capacity building among those supporting students. Schedules will be unique based on the many decisions made by school leadership teams. Think of the items that must be included before constructing your schedule. It is helpful to review sample schedules from schools similar to yours to see what might work in your school's context.

Consider key questions when evaluating your schedule:

- Does it follow content area time guidelines (e.g., at least 90 minutes daily in reading)?
- Is there sufficient time to provide the appropriate intensity of supplemental interventions?
- Does the schedule allow for uninterrupted team time and ample time for data collection and analysis? (AIR, 2022)

Table 7. *High school schedule with seven classes and 54-minute lunch and intervention period*

Period	Regular Schedule	Activity Schedule	Early Release Schedule
1	8:35 – 9:23	8:35 – 9:14	8:35 – 9:12
2	9:28 – 10:16	9:19 – 9:58	9:17 – 9:54
3	10:21 – 11:09	10:03 – 10:42	9:59 – 10:36
4	11:14 – 12:02	10:47 – 11:26	10:41 – 11:18
Anchor Hour	**12:02 – 12:56**	**11:26 – 12:23**	**11:18 – 12:14**
Office Hours A	12:02 – 12:26	11:26 – 11:53	11:18 – 11:44
Office Hours B	12:32 – 12:56	11:56 – 12:23	11:48 – 12:14
5	12:56 – 1:44	12:23 – 1:02	12:14 – 12:51
6	1:49 – 2:37	1:07 – 1:46	12:56 – 1:33
7	2:42 – 3:30	1:51 – 2:30	1:38 – 2:15

Note. Source: Durrance, S. (2023). *Implementing MTSS in Secondary Schools: Challenges and Strategies*.

Table 8. *High school block schedule with four lunches and WIN intervention/enrichment block*

A Block	7:27-8:45 (78 minutes)
WIN Block	8:49-9:20 (31 minutes)
B Block	9:24 – 10:42 (78 minutes)
C Block	10:46-12:28 (78 minutes + 24 min for rotating lunch)
D Block	12:32 - 1:50 pm (78 minutes)

Note. Source: Durrance, S. (2023). *Implementing MTSS in Secondary Schools: Challenges and Strategies*.

See **Appendix G** for additional scheduling considerations and resources.

4.2.3 Data Meeting Minutes Form

The SCDE recommends that all school and district data teams adopt a data analysis protocol form to ensure meetings are focused on student needs (AIR 2024). One option is the Team Initiated Problem Solving (TIPS) meeting minutes template (Todd, Newton, Horner, Algozzine, & Algozzine, 2015). A recording form like this is useful for keeping the conversation focused on problem solving. Meeting minutes serve as documentation and guidance for decisions made during problem-solving and/or coordination/planning team meetings. Forms should include prompts to guide and record relevant, accurate, and succinct information across predetermined areas, such as current data, problem solving, action planning, evaluation, and housekeeping items.

See **Appendix H** for a sample data meeting minutes form.

4.2.4 Policies, Procedures, and Protocols

MTSS is a system where all stakeholders are working together towards common goals. When teams work together to accomplish tasks, it is important to have the same vision in terms of outcomes. Policies, procedures, and protocols guide stakeholders to reach desired outcomes.

In MTSS, establishing clear protocols for using screening and other data to identify students in need of Tier II or Tier III intervention ensures that students are identified in similar ways across classrooms and schools. Likewise, a school or district should establish protocols for intervention and progress monitoring that outline expectations for frequency and duration to ensure that staff have a baseline of best practices. Not all policies or procedures need protocols, but protocols can help teams stay focused and support consistent outcomes. Teams can locate established protocols, such as the *MTSS Resource: Review Protocol* developed by the Massachusetts Department of Education (n.d.), or record their own.

4.2.5 Resource Mapping

Resource mapping is a dynamic and strategic process that promotes the efficient and effective use of resources within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). It involves systematically identifying, organizing, and communicating the resources available to school or district teams and demonstrates how the resources interconnect and contribute to the overall system of supports. This mapping should occur by grade level and/or department. It is important to identify quality, evidence-based resources (i.e. curriculum sets, interventions, technologies, etc.) within the school. Then, they should be organized in a way that allows for intensification of instruction. Schools can use a resource map template to help them inventory and organize their resources, teams, and supports. (FLPS/RtI, *n.d.*)

Schools should ask the following questions:

- What resources and supports are available?
- How can we access these resources? Who manages these resources?
- Who is trained to implement these supports?

Table 9: *Sample Resource Map for MTSS Tiered Support*

	Tier I	**Tier II (+ Tier I)**	**Tier III (+ Tiers I & II)**
Curriculum/ Interventions	core program	evidence-based interventions	evidence-based interventions
Instructional Resources/Routines	Instruction Hub; effective practices	predictable structure	predictable structure
Assessments/ Progress Monitoring	universal screeners; core unit assessments; SCDE Interim Assessments	progress monitoring tool	progress monitoring tool
Professional Development Offered	VirtualSC PD; Instruction Hub PD	progress monitoring resources	SCDE Student Support
Protocols/ Procedures	report cards; family newsletters	Comprehensive Intervention Plan Template	Intensive Intervention Meeting Facilitator's Guide

Capacity and Infrastructure Action Steps for School Teams:

- As a team, review how MTSS provides access and support in using data to prioritize professional development and shape the school's infrastructure.
- Develop a clear model of coaching to support classroom teachers.
- Encourage the use of daily school schedules that provide job-embedded opportunities for collaboration, data-based problem-solving, and decision making in settings, such as:
    - Leadership Team Meetings,
    - Professional Learning Community Meetings,
    - Department Content Meetings, and
    - Grade Level Meetings.
    - Map resources in order to efficiently meet the needs of students.

4.3 Communication and Collaboration

It is essential to use a formal process to ensure that ongoing communication and collaboration occur. Districts may choose to use a variety of collaborative models, such as the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model, along with a clear communication protocol to support the optimization of time and effort and support rich and meaningful discussion that leads to improved practice and outcomes for students. When choosing which communication tool to use, you should consider what the audience needs to know, how the audience will use the information, and the best way to communicate the information to that audience (Lammert, Heinemeier, & Fiore, 2017).

Schools should ensure frequent and clear communication with families about MTSS (AIR, 2022). When students receive intervention, their families should be involved in the planning of supports and frequently updated on the students' progress. The need for and delivery of additional support should not be a surprise to families.

MTSS leadership teams should engage all stakeholders (i.e. staff, community partners, families) in opportunities to provide input on how to implement MTSS. Once established, the MTSS infrastructure should be used to support district and school goals for the purposes of:

- Monitoring performance using well-defined data elements that are aligned with district and school professional development efforts and coherent in nature; and
- Aligning school level goals with larger district goals as and all required state plans (i.e. District Strategic Plans, School Renewal Plans, Reading Plans, etc.) (SCDE, 2024).

Most importantly, consider what you hope to accomplish through each communication and collaboration channel with stakeholders. This is not a means of simply sharing information with an audience. It is a reciprocal process. Two-way communication should include *feedback*. In two-way communication, ideas are negotiated. Both sender and receiver listen to each other, gather information, and are willing to make changes to work together. Their intent is to negotiate a mutually satisfactory outcome.

See **Appendix I** for an example of Communication Plan Outline.

Communication and Collaboration Action Steps for School Teams:

- As a team, review current communication methods and collaboration opportunities with various stakeholders.
- Develop communication protocols for consensus, sharing data, infrastructure, and engaging families
- Create a plan to periodically review communication protocols

4.4 Data-Based Problem Solving

Solving the challenges associated with improving outcomes for students and practices for educators should be done utilizing a data-based problem-solving process. This approach will ensure that MTSS Leadership Teams clearly identify problems, account for context, apply specific and targeted solutions, and use data to determine both success and failure. Data-based problem-solving helps districts and schools determine the focus and intensity of instruction and interventions needed to achieve the desired student outcomes. “By providing a strong problem-solving process with ongoing progress monitoring for assessing the success of research-based interventions at the different tiered levels, more students will have the opportunity to be successful both academically and behaviorally” (MDCPS, 2013-2014).

Four-Step Problem Solving Process

One method of conducting data-based problem solving is using *The Four-Step Problem Solving Process*. (MDCPS, 2013-2014) This is a structured way for MTSS teams to formally review student outcomes by defining a problem, analyzing data to determine why the problem exists, implement a plan to close the identified gap, and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan. The process may be used at the student level, class level, grade level, school level, or district level to identify problems and their causes and implement a plan to address them.

Figure 4: *Four-Step Problem-Solving Process*

Note. Source: Florida PBIS. (2016). *Foundations for Implementation: Problem-Solving Model*.

What is the problem?

The first step in the process is defining the problem and identifying the goal. MTSS teams should use data to determine where they are (current level of performance) and where they want to be (desired level of performance). Keep in mind that academic goals should be aligned to the *South Carolina College- and Career-Ready Standards*. The gap should then be measured to determine the needed growth (Elliott, 2024).

Why is it occurring?

Step two involves analyzing the problem using data to determine why there is a difference between the expected and current levels of performance. Teams should generate possible reasons (hypotheses) why students are not attaining the goal. The RIOT/ICEL Matrix can help schools identify probable reasons why student groups or individual students are not experiencing academic or behavioral success. (AIR, 2023). Hypotheses are typically generated across four domains: **I**nstruction**, C**urriculum**, E**nvironment**,** and **L**earner (ICEL). Methods of data collection include: ***R****eviewing* existing records/data, ***I****nterviewing*

individuals (student, educators, family, care providers) with specific knowledge of the situation being addressed, ***O****bservation* of contexts (classroom, school, home, community) in which the desired skill(s) is expected to occur, and ***T****esting* to identify related learner characteristics. Thorough analysis should leave teams with a clearer understanding of why the problem is occurring (Elliott, 2024).

What are we going to do about it?

Step three involves the development of an intervention plan. This plan should aim to move students from the current level of performance to the desired level of performance in a systematic and explicit way. Teams should consider the hypothesis from step two in order to address the cause of the gap. To ensure a strong plan, teams must include the following critical components outlined by Elliott (2024):

- The instruction/interventions are ***evidence-based*** and linked to the validated hypotheses about why the goal is not being attained.
- The action plan has ***sufficiency (***delivered in sufficient amounts) ***and fidelity*** (delivered in the way intended by individuals qualified to deliver the instruction).
- The plan reflects the ***integration*** of instruction, interventions and learning supports addressing all of the student(s)' areas of need and tying results back to success when engaged in Tier 1 instruction.
- The individuals implementing the plan have sufficient ***support*** (e.g., time, data, peer/coaching) to implement the plan as intended.

Is it working?

Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan by using data gathered at agreed upon intervals. Progress monitoring should directly assess the targeted skill(s) or behavior(s). Based on data, the team should determine if the intervention plan is working. If not, how will the instruction/intervention plan be adjusted to better support progress?

The effectiveness of the instruction/intervention design and implementation must be evaluated to make decisions regarding continuation, intensification, fading, or redesign of those instructional strategies. Progress monitoring data are used to make a determination of whether the effectiveness of the instruction/intervention is *positive, questionable*, or *poor* (Elliott, 2024).

If the response is *positive*, options are to:

- Continue intervention with current goal
- Continue intervention with goal increased
- Fade intervention to determine if student(s) have acquired functional independence.

If the response is *questionable*, teams need to first ask, "Was intervention implemented as intended?"

- If *no*, employ strategies to increase implementation integrity (IRIS, 2018).
- If *yes*, increase intensity of current intervention for a short period of time and assess impact. If the rate improves, continue. If the rate does not improve, return to step one of the problem-solving cycle (AIR 2019).

If response is *poor*, teams need to first ask, "Was intervention implemented as intended?

- If *no*, employ strategies to increase implementation integrity (IRIS, 2018).
- If *yes*, ask:
    - Is intervention aligned with the verified hypothesis? (Revisit Step 3: Plan)
    - Are there other hypotheses to consider? (Revisit Step 2: Analyze)
    - Was the problem identified correctly? (Revisit Step 1: Define)

Data-Based Problem Solving Action Steps for School Teams:

- As a team, review the consistency of using data to make instructional decisions for individual students, grade levels, content areas, and the school as a whole.
- Utilize a decision-making process that is data-driven and seeks to ensure that district resources reach the appropriate students (or schools) at the appropriate levels to accelerate the performance of all students to achieve and/or exceed proficiency.
- Ensure access to universal data sources (i.e. universal screening, diagnostic data, attendance, discipline, etc.) to support common language, common understanding, and common assessment of student outcomes.
- Conduct formal data reviews frequently (quarterly at a minimum) to progress monitor system implementation, student outcomes, and teacher practice.

4.5 Three-Tiered Model

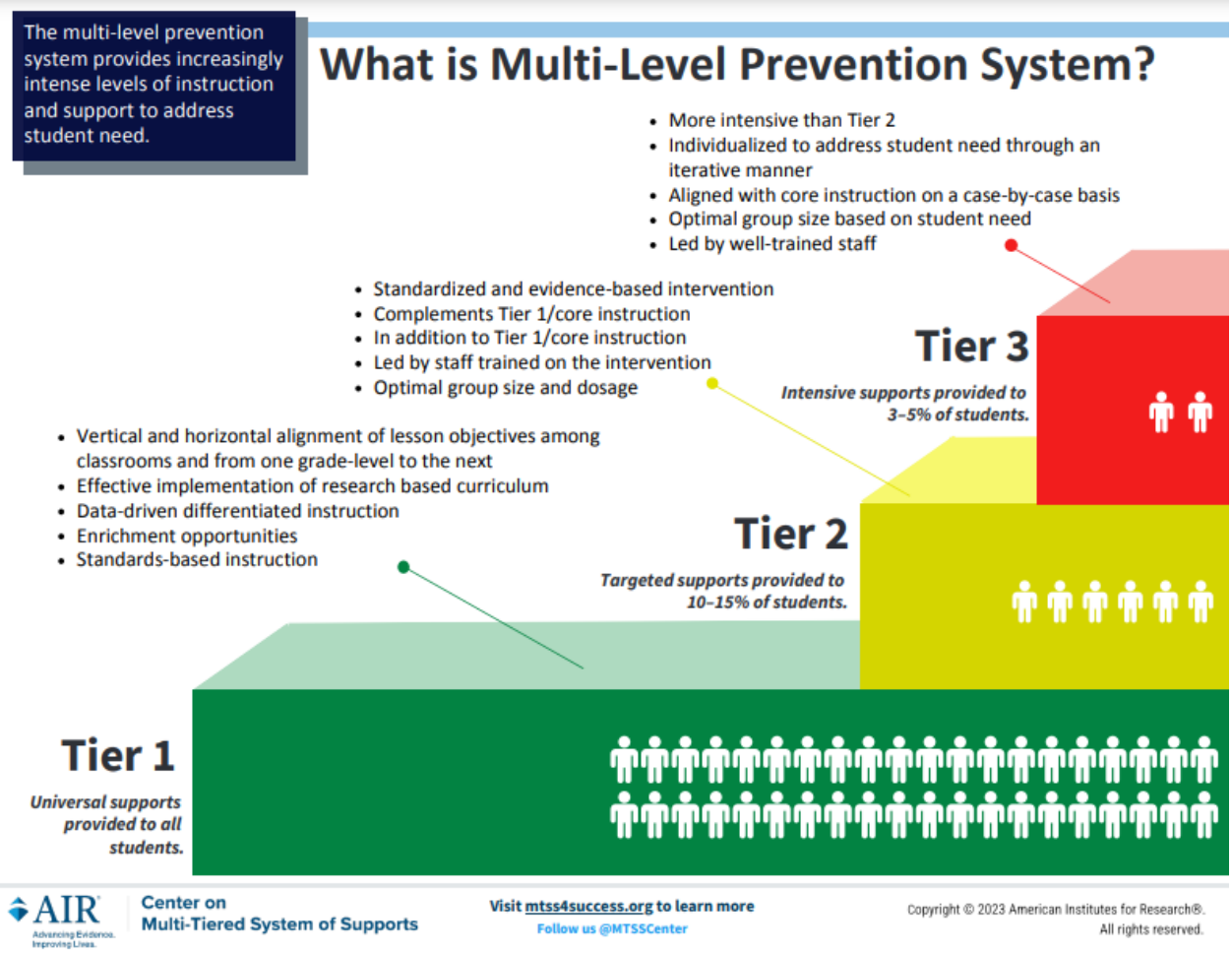
Supports are tiered. Students are not.

Within MTSS, all students receive Tier I universal core instruction as the foundation of learning. Tier I for behavior and other non-academic areas consists of establishing a positive school climate (AIR 2024), communicating expectations, and teaching students the skills needed to fulfill those expectations, often through a model like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS, 2024). Supplemental support is then provided to students at risk of not reaching grade-level proficiency based on their

performance on screening assessments and other data or at risk of developing unwanted behaviors.

This first layer of additional support, Tier II, occurs *in addition to* (not in place of) core instruction, ideally occurs in groups of no more than five students, and focuses primarily on providing increased opportunities to support children's acquisition of identified skills (Baker, Fien, & Baker, 2010; Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007). When Tier II is insufficient to meet a student's needs, they receive Tier III interventions. Compared to Tier II, Tier III is more intense, is provided at a higher frequency, and is individualized to meet each student's needs. Figure 6 compares characteristics of the three tiers.

Figure 5: *Multi-Level Prevention System*



Note. Source: American Institute for Research. (2023). *What is Multi-Level Prevention System?*

All students may receive support in any tier according to their academic and behavioral needs. It is possible for a student to receive Tier II or Tier III support for one academic area and not another. Similarly, a student may receive additional support for behavioral needs but not in academics. The level of support students receive is not permanent and should change as indicated by progress monitoring data. A student with a disability or with other identified special considerations may also receive tiered supports based on their individual needs.

The common vision of success for all students begins with a positive school climate and high-quality classroom instruction delivered by an effective educator (SchoolSafety.gov, 2023). High-quality, scientifically based instruction means engaging students in grade-level learning, scaffolding instruction for those needing additional support, and meeting the diverse needs of all students. Good instruction is creative and motivating, yet is carefully crafted with the culture, interests, and abilities of the students in mind. It is flexible and individually challenging for gifted students and for those who learn at a slower

pace. School staff have strong, positive relationships with students and their families. Classroom expectations and routines are aligned with those of the school as a whole and are co-developed by teachers and students.

Decisions regarding interventions should be based on multiple points of valid and reliable data collected by the classroom teacher and others. As school leaders and educators plan interventions, consideration and coordination among all who support the student must be considered. Decision trees can be established to visually represent predetermined factors to identify students in need of additional support.

Tiered instruction is multifaceted and includes:

- A process that involves universal screening and progress monitoring to target instruction and provide intensified interventions, as needed, to meet the needs of all students.
- Targeted assistance and differentiated instruction at each Tier that supports student achievement and accelerates progress.
- Delivery by highly qualified, expert, certified teachers.
- Evidence-based Tier I instruction in academics and social and behavioral skills that is delivered to all students as part of the high-quality core classroom experience.
- Evidence-based Tier II interventions that are data informed, targeted instruction to support the core instruction, and delivered in small group or one-on-one settings inside of the general education classroom.
- Tier III interventions that are data-informed, intensified in time and frequency from Tier II interventions, targeted based on need, and delivered in a very small group or one-on-one from an effective educator who is skilled in implementing and monitoring interventions.

4.5.1 Tier I: Universal Core Instruction

MTSS is a systems-change approach to support a focus on strong, scientifically based, universal core instruction that promotes a high-quality education system where all students can succeed. Tier I instruction refers to high-quality core instruction provided to all students. In Tier I, teachers provide evidence-based, differentiated instruction with fidelity. Within a positive school climate, each classroom has clear and consistent behavioral expectations, and all students know them. Tier I instruction is expected to meet the needs of 80–90 percent of students in reaching grade-level proficiency and meeting behavioral expectations.

If a significant number of students are not successful in the core instructional model, all variables (e.g. attendance, class size, behavior observations, instructional fidelity, professional learning opportunities, and curricular choices) should be examined to determine how to strengthen Tier I instruction. Tier I instruction must be critically

evaluated using universal screening data and strengthened so that the vast majority of students succeed. Universal screening at regular intervals documents the progress of all students and helps guide instruction. Educators who understand and use instructional best practices review and analyze the screening data to craft a plan to meet student needs. Powerful classroom instruction requires that effective teachers differentiate instruction, based on data, in order to meet the needs of all students. In relation to reading instruction, the *SC Literacy Competencies* exist to define what teachers should know and be able to do in order to ensure that all students comprehend grade-level texts (SCDE, 2024).

A key feature of high-quality classrooms is high quality instruction. A high quality classroom provides explicit and systematic instruction based on established grade-level standards and behavioral expectations (Archer & Hughes, 2011). These standards and expectations should be taught systematically using a logical progression from simple to complex skills. A variety of evidence-based strategies should be used to meet the needs of all students in relation to academics, behavior, and overall well-being. Often these strategies use real-world examples of the concepts presented. Teachers use high-leverage practices in order to intentionally match strategies to students' needs (TWRL, 2024). Furthermore, instruction considers what students already know while challenging them to learn more. It also considers how students engage with work and the ways in which they are successful in demonstrating their knowledge. High-quality classroom teachers use a variety of experiences and provide multiple ways of learning concepts to ensure the success of all students. These experiences can be supported by collaborating with knowledgeable professionals outside of the classroom. Finally, high-quality classrooms create an environment that is conducive to learning and values students' behavioral and academic needs and overall well-being (IRIS Center, 2012; 2021).

In addition, these classrooms:

- devote significant time to reading and writing;
- provide targeted instruction in skills and strategies;
- demonstrate flexible grouping strategies, including small group and individualized instruction; and
- attend to the changing needs of students with focus and intensity.

Tier I is the foundation of a tiered instructional delivery model and refers to the universal instruction provided to all students in the school. The development and support of Tier I strategies are critical to a functioning MTSS system. To implement MTSS with fidelity, school staff must critically evaluate and improve implementation of Tier I instructional and behavior programs so that the vast majority of students are successful.

4.5.2 Predictable Classroom Structures

In addition to teachers who provide explicit instruction in skills and strategies, students need a consistent, predictable learning environment, including large blocks of uninterrupted time for daily rituals, routines and academic structures (Neuman & Roskos, 2012; Duke & Block, 2012; Morrow, 2010). The classroom environment should support instructional formats, including flexible groupings, learning partners, and one-to-one interaction with others. It is imperative that all learning environments (child-care centers, preschools, K–12 schools) create safe and nurturing places with a classroom climate characterized by rigor, inquiry, and a sense of community (IRIS Center, 2012; 2021). Having clear procedures and routines helps students know what to expect each day in the classroom, leaving them free to focus on learning (Hegwood, 2024).

4.5.3 Differentiation

High-quality classrooms feature flexible grouping strategies and differentiated instruction. Effective teachers plan for the variability of learners, addressing possible barriers to learning prior to instruction (IRIS Center, 2010). The most important feature of high-quality classrooms is that teachers have deep knowledge and understanding of the content they teach, as well as positive behavior supports. Teachers draw from this strong knowledge base to meet the needs of all learners.

South Carolina recognizes our student population's diverse cultural and linguistic differences and needs. To meet these diverse needs, instruction must be data-informed, explicit, and systematic. Differentiation must occur in Tier I, guided by data from assessments such as universal screenings. Differentiation can include re-teaching through different modalities and/or materials, new or multiple demonstrations, peer teaching and conferencing, and/or think-alouds tailored to support students. Differentiation may also occur through the complexity of academic tasks. Small group instruction is a structure that offers opportunities scaffold students as they move towards independence with their learning (IRIS Center, 2006). Small group differentiation of Tier I content is still considered Tier I.

Differentiation should provide scaffolding for students needing re-teaching. It should also include enrichment for students who demonstrate proficiency with grade-level standards. As stated in the *SC Gifted and Talented Guidelines* (2018):

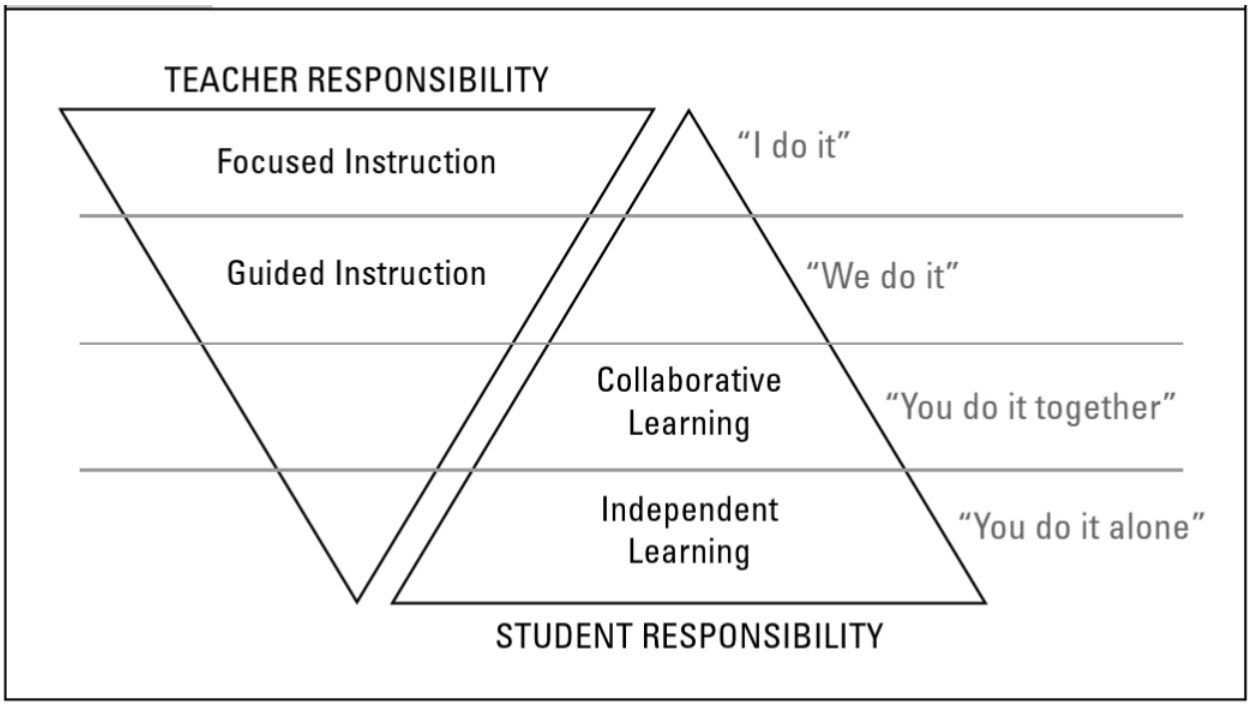
> To accommodate the needs of gifted and talented students in the general education classroom, curriculum and instruction must be flexible in aspects such as pace, depth, complexity, and novelty. This is accomplished by considering the varied readiness levels, interests, passions, and learning styles of the students, and using effective differentiation practices to meet the individual needs of students. All students – even those who demonstrate mastery of the curriculum – are expected to learn and grow.

4.5.4 Gradual Release of Responsibility

The gradual release of responsibility, which gradually shifts the cognitive load from teacher to students, has been documented as an effective approach for improving literacy achievement (Fisher & Frey, 2007) and reading comprehension. The gradual release of responsibility provides teachers with an instructional framework for moving from demonstration to understanding to application. The gradual release of responsibility ensures that students are supported in their acquisition of the skills and strategies necessary for success (Fisher & Frey, 2007). Gradual release is effective for all content areas and for teaching positive behavior skills.

Figure 69 shows the gradual release of responsibility model created by Fisher and Frey.

Figure 6: *Fisher and Frey Gradual Release of Responsibility Model*



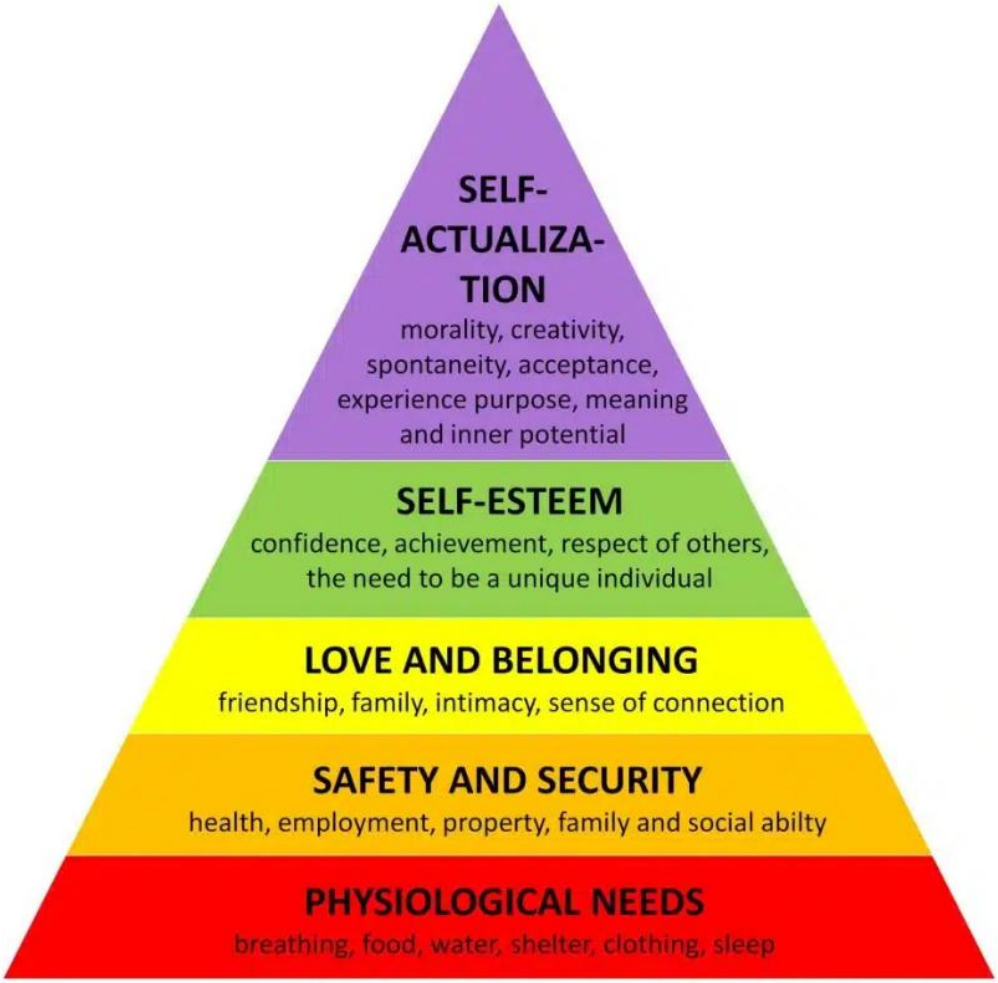
Note. Source: Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2008). *Better learning through structured teaching: A framework for the gradual release of responsibility*.

4.5.5 Student Wellness

Student learning is the outcome educators strive for, but learning cannot take place if students' foundational wellness needs are not met. A hungry or exhausted student cannot focus on academic pursuits, and a student who feels unsafe and connected at school is unprepared for learning. As educators, we must support students and/or connect them to supports to help them meet their basic needs. Education institutions cannot separate student wellness from academics. The widely accepted hierarchy of needs developed by Abraham Maslow is shown in Figure 7 (Capes, 2024).

It is important to be preventative in Tier I to support students' needs. Considerations such as frequent breaks, avoiding power struggles, intentional seating, music, lighting, etc., can minimize or eliminate stressful situations for students. Explanations of these Tier I interventions can be found at PBISWorld.com. A strengths-based approach to teaching and learning promotes an environment where students see their value and worth instead of focusing on negative characteristics and helps keep students engaged (Napolitan, 2024).

Figure 7: *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*



Note. Source: Capes, K. (2024). *Understanding Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Education*.

Many students need support in learning skills such as self-awareness, managing positive relationships with peers and adults, and making responsible decisions. These skills and others drive behavior and impact school climate. Schools can implement programs that explicitly teach the non-academic skills that are necessary for students to be successful. Teachers can help by explicitly teaching students self-management skills such as organization and stress management.

All behavior serves a purpose or function. Behaviors are typically an attempt to access or avoid something. Educators should use the problem-solving process to figure out why negative behaviors are present and make a plan to help the student experience success. Strategies from sources like the National Center on Intensive Intervention can support educators as they work to improve student behavior (AIR, 2024).

Keeping students engaged is one way to prevent behaviors that are not conducive to learning. To do that, educators must understand different types of engagement so they can assess why students might be disengaged and respond accordingly. Three types are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: *Engagement Domains*

Behavioral Engagement	Linked directly to participation	Demonstrated through actions or outcomes like completing tasks, attendance
Cognitive Engagement	Linked to investment or interest	Demonstrated through intellectual conversations, enjoying deep thinking, and reading to find deeper meaning
Social Engagement	Linked to emotions and commitment	Demonstrated through enthusiasm, optimism, and confidence in school and related activities

Note. Source: Shurley, B. (2022). *Top 10 Student Engagement Practices For Tier 1 in MTSS*.

It is also important to recognize that some behaviors are a result of personal adversity. "Science tells us that some children develop resilience, or the ability to overcome serious hardship, while others do not" (Center on the Developing Child, 2015). Two key factors that make it more likely that children will become resilient and "experience positive outcomes in the face of significant adversity" are a supportive, stable relationship with at least one adult and a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control over what happens in their lives. Educators play an important role as supportive adults who have regular interactions with their students. They have the ability to foster students' sense of self-efficacy through the way they frame the learning process and by offering students opportunities to demonstrate mastery multiple times and in different ways. They can also support students' perceived control by offering choices in the classroom, such as different options for satisfactorily completing an assignment.

Schools must problem solve to determine the best way to support students and/or connect children to support leading to positive outcomes. Student wellness is foundational to learning. If basic needs are not addressed, students are not equipped to maintain positive behaviors and learn.

4.5.6 Attendance

Students must be present in school for learning to occur. While schools cannot control all attendance concerns, they can create conditions that promote regular school attendance. Absenteeism has many potential causes and cannot be solved by one person. Teams must work with stakeholders to establish foundational expectations for schools, identify barriers to attendance, and design interventions to address absenteeism (Attendance Works, 2018). Schools cannot wait until chronic absence occurs to take action.

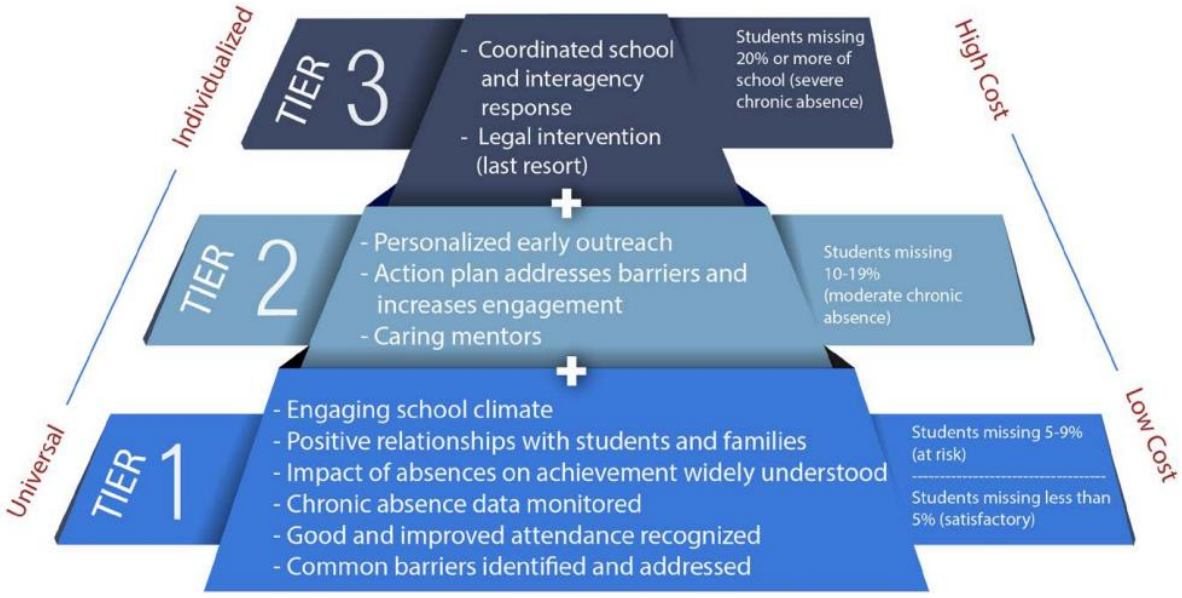
Prevention and intervention strategies can be organized by tiers to support student attendance. A schoolwide system of tiered interventions should be thoughtfully developed based on a school's particular context and resources (Erbstein, 2023). Tier I strategies are

universal (for all students and families). These strategies should focus on developing a safe and inviting school/classroom environment, clear communication of attendance policies, positive rewards, and relationship building to promote a sense of belonging. Attendance should be monitored and supported from the first day of school. Sickness often causes school absences. Schools can partner with the school nurse and community health care workers to provide messages and/or handouts to promote good health (Attendance Works, 2018).

If a student misses 10% or more of a school year (18 days out of 180-day school year), Tier II interventions should be implemented. Problem solving teams must try to determine why students are absent in order to select the most effective interventions. Tools such as *Understanding the Root Causes for Student Absenteeism* can assist teams in discovering root causes (Attendance Works, 2019). Tier II interventions could include establishing mentors, small group supports, or strategies such as *Check-in/Check-out* (Anderson, Dickey, Horner, Scott, Sugai, & Todd, 2008). Additional intervention ideas can be found on the SCDE Office of Student Support webpage.

If a student missed 20% of the previous school year or is on track to miss 20% of the current school year, Tier III interventions should be implemented. These intensive interventions could include individualized learning and success plans, housing stability supports, etc. As part of the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act, districts and schools are required to report to the South Carolina Department of Education the number of students who are chronically absent each year (SCDE, 2024).

Figure 8: *Chronic Absence and MTSS*



Note. Source: Graczyk, P. A., Leong, C., Lofton Jr., R., & Waltemeyer, M. G. (2018). *Integrating Chronic Absenteeism into MTSS*.

Additional resources to support attendance:

- *Chronic Absenteeism.* SCDE webpage clarifying attendance definitions and offering resources to combat chronic absenteeism (SCDE, 2024).
- *Attendance Every Day!* Brochure for parents to explain attendance facts and tips to help students achieve regular attendance (SCDE, 2024).
- *National Student, Attendance, Engagement, and Success Center.* This website provides a compilation of research, reports, and evidence-based practices focused on the topics below to guide faculty and administrators towards strategies and approaches that may work best for their schools and districts.
- *The Relationship Between School Attendance and Health.* This policy brief takes a close look at the reasons behind chronic absenteeism, its adverse impact on health and life outcomes, and potential solutions (RWJF, 2016).
- *Chronic Absenteeism: A Key Indicator of Student Success.* This policy brief by the Education Commission of the States provides information for policymakers and state education leaders on the research, key issues and policy options available to address chronic absenteeism and improve attendance (Rafa, A., 2017).
- *Chronic Absence: 3 Tiers of Intervention.* This website offers an explanation of tiered interventions for attendance support (Attendance Works, 2018).

4.5.7 Tier II: Targeted Intervention

Even very effective Tier I programs will not meet the needs of every student in a school. Tier II comprises research- and evidence-based small-group interventions for students not meeting grade-level academic and/or behavior expectations. Tier II supports are generally offered to students who are about one level below grade level. In a school with strong core instruction that meets the needs of the student population, approximately 15 percent of students will need Tier II intervention. Tier II interventions go beyond the differentiation and support that occur in Tier I. Tier II academic support is provided in addition to the core instructional time all students receive, can occur within the classroom, and is most often provided as an additional 30 minutes of direct, targeted academic instruction several times per week. Tier II behavioral interventions (Center on PBIS, 2024) may include support in self-management and/or group social skills instruction. The Connecticut PBIS State Education Resource Center describes a variety of possible Tier II interventions (*n.d.*) for behavior and offers supporting resources.

When selecting Tier II interventions, be sure academic materials are aligned with the Tier I core curriculum and behavioral interventions are aligned with the school's expectations for student behavior. The goal of Tier II intervention is to close identified gaps and bring students back to grade level. Regardless of the model or approach used, intervention should be provided by an effective educator.

Effective intervention systems take time to plan and implement and need to be done with a sense of urgency. The earlier schools identify students for intervening services, the greater students' progress toward grade level success will be. Hallmarks of Tier II include increased collaboration among parents, interventionists, classroom teachers, instructional leaders, and other stakeholders, as well as more frequent progress monitoring (at least monthly) to support teachers in making data-based adjustments to instruction in response to student needs. MTSS teams have multiple decisions to make regarding Tier II. It is important to determine how many students are at risk for poor learning outcomes. These decision-making procedures should be recorded by the team and used to determine who will receive Tier II support. See the Center on MTSS at the American Institutes of Research's *Tier 2 Identification Procedures* (AIR, 2022). Keep in mind that an unmanageable number of students in need of Tier II support is an indicator that Tier I instruction is not effective. If this occurs, changes should be made to Tier I instruction based on data.

Table 11: *Sample Risk-Identification Tool*

Student	**Primary Data:** *Valid Screening Tool*	**Secondary:** *Ex: Common Class Assessment*	**Additional Data:** *Ex. State Assessment*	**Risk-Status Determination**
Ex. Conner	Yes	No	Yes	At-risk
Ex. Jenny	No	Yes	No	Not At-risk

Note. Source: Adapted from American Institutes for Research. (2022). *Tier 2 Identification Procedures*.

Once it is determined that students need Tier II support, groups of students with similar needs should be formed to efficiently provide interventions (IRIS, 2006). Each group should target a common specific skill based on data. For example, if three students in a class of 20 are not meeting benchmarks in phonemic awareness, the teacher might pull those students into a small group while other students are working on independent activities and provide additional direct, explicit, and systematic instruction targeting phonemic awareness. A middle school mathematics teacher could identify a small group of students who need additional instruction on graphing lines based on their most recent classroom assessment scores and provide this instruction while other students complete independent practice problems. Check-In/Check-Out could be initiated with a group of high school students who need behavioral or attendance support.

The effectiveness of Tier II interventions should be monitored using an instrument that measures the targeted skill. Intervention should be adjusted as needed to ensure that students are making progress toward grade-level goals.

Resources exist to help districts and schools identify effective Tier II interventions. Some of those resources are:

- *What Works Clearinghouse: Intervention Reports*. What Works Clearinghouse offers an array of reports summarizing the evidence base behind over 600 intervention programs and strategies.
- *Evidence for ESSA*. This website provides clear and authoritative information on programs that meet the ESSA evidence standards and enables educators and communities to select effective educational tools to improve student success.
- *EdReports*. EdReports provides free reports to help districts and schools evaluate instructional materials because high-quality content matters to teachers, to kids, and to our collective future.
- *Tier II Interventions: Matching Students to Tier II Interventions and Ensuring Active Ingredients are Implemented*. This is an informative PowerPoint with ideas on matching students and interventions in Tier II (Cook, 2016).
- *Tier 2: Intervention Toolbox: Response to Intervention: Behavior*. This resource is a booklet of possible strategies for behavior interventions (Connecticut PBIS, *n.d.*).
- *Tiers of Intervention to Reduce Chronic Absence*. This handout can help a school or district think about alignment between its strategies and level of student need. It includes ideas for strategies to improve attendance (Attendance Works, 2015).

4.5.8 Progress Monitoring

According to the Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports at AIR (2024):

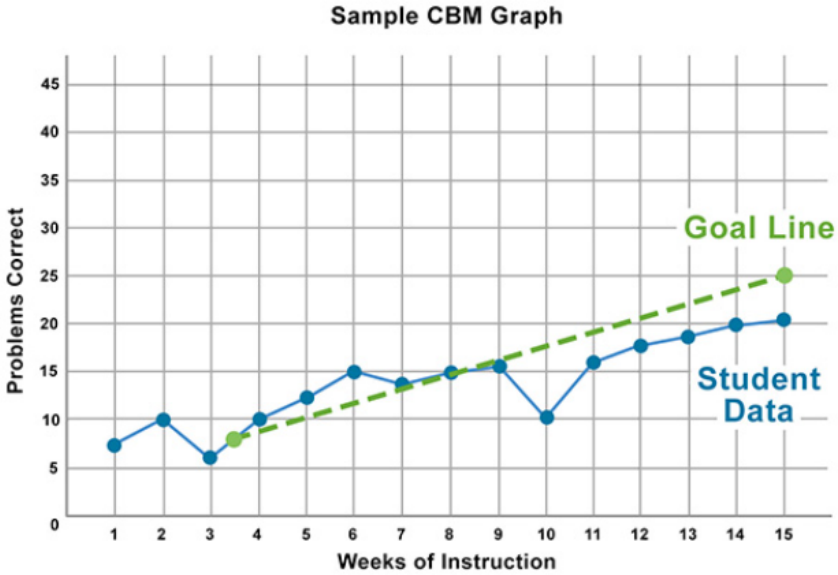
> Progress monitoring is the ongoing, frequent collection and use of formal data in order to (1) assess students' performance, (2) quantify a student's rate of improvement or responsiveness to instruction or intervention, and (3) evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and intervention using valid and reliable measures. Educators use measures that are appropriate for the student's grade and/or skill level.

Progress monitoring measures student growth toward a long-term goal, often using curriculum-based measurement (CBMs) (IRIS Center, 2024). While screening should always occur at grade level, progress monitoring measures that are too difficult for the student's skill level may not be sensitive enough to show growth in learning over time, which could lead to inappropriate instructional decisions. Therefore, it is important to ensure that progress monitoring occurs at the student's instructional level (NCII, 2023).Selecting the target skill or behavior before choosing a progress monitoring tool ensures that the tool will measure student progress on the actual skills and behaviors of interest. Graphing progress monitoring data allows you to visualize the student's progress over time, set goals, and make data-driven instructional decisions.

Key features of a progress monitoring graph include a baseline, a goal, a trend line, and a phase line, as shown in Figure 9.. You can design a data collection tool for your school, or

you can use existing resources such as the *Student Progress Monitoring Tool for Data Collection and Graphing* (Kearns, 2016).

Figure 9: *Sample Graph to Represent Data Collection*



Note. Source: IRIS Center. (2024). How can teachers determine whether students are making appropriate progress?

4.5.9 Tier III: Intensified Intervention

When progress monitoring indicates a student is not responding to Tier II interventions that have been implemented with fidelity, Tier III provides evidence-based, small-group or individualized, intensive intervention. Approximately five percent of students may need Tier III intervention in addition to Tier I and/or Tier II instruction/intervention. Collaboration and support among professionals increase in Tier III to reflect the level of services needed by students. The interventionist and the classroom teacher(s) must frequently and regularly collaborate regarding the student's specific instruction so that a system of supports exists for the student in the general education classroom environment.

Tier III academic support is provided in addition to the core instructional time all students receive. Students may be pulled out of the classroom for Tier III intervention, which is provided more frequently and for more time than Tier II intervention. Tier III behavior interventions require investigating the reasons behind a particular students' behaviors and problem-solving to identify ways to address those reasons. A behavior support plan is often created for the student (Clouse & Kelley, 2017). Regardless of the model or approach used, interventions are provided by an effective educator.

Additional Resources/Supports for Implementers:

- *Florida Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports Project: Tier 3*. This webpage describes what Tier 3 behavior supports look like at the district, school, and individual levels. It also provides a variety of resources to support educators with Tier 3 behavior interventions (Florida PBIS, 2016).
- National Center on Intensive Intervention at American Institutes for Research
    - *Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity.* A chart explaining how interventions can be intensified by dimensions (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Malone, 2017).
    - *Intensification Strategy Checklist.* This checklist supports the intensification of interventions (AIR, 2019).
    - *Data Teaming Tools.* These resources include facilitator and participant guides, sample agendas, tools for analyzing data, and note-taking templates. Although these tools were designed for use within the DBI process, they can be adapted and expanded to support data meetings across the tiers of a multi-tiered system of supports (AIR, 2024).
    - *Behavior Support for Intensive Interventions.* This course includes 8 modules related to behavioral supports for intensive interventions. It is expected that participants will have access to a classroom and support from a coach, mentor, professional learning community (PLC) leader, instructional leader, and/or course instructor (AIR, 2024).
    - *Intensive Intervention in Mathematics Course Content.* This course includes 8 modules related to supports for intensive interventions in mathematics. It is expected that participants will have access to a classroom and support from a coach, mentor, professional learning community (PLC) leader, instructional leader, and/or course instructor (AIR, 2024).
    - *Intensive Intervention in Reading Course Content.* This course includes 8 modules related to supports for intensive interventions in reading. It is expected that participants will have access to a classroom and support from a coach, mentor, professional learning community (PLC) leader, instructional leader, and/or course instructor (AIR, 2024).

4.5.10 MTSS and Multilingual Learners (MLs)

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), recognizes the unique instructional needs of Multilingual Learners (MLs). Core language instruction has been mandated through the federal judicial system and is monitored by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). The SCDE realizes that identified MLs have differing needs based on their success in learning academic English.

Once students enter a core content area class, they may need English Language Development (ELD) and other types of support that must be included in everyday

classroom instruction. For MLs, these may consist of accommodations to the instructional activities, tasks, and assessments. As MLs attain fluency in English, however, fewer accommodations and direct ML services may be necessary. MLs at lower levels of proficiency and/or with an educational background of limited or interrupted instruction may require additional support, accommodations or modifications, and/or multiple classes of support in the beginning.

Multilingual Learner Program (MLP) services are **not intervention services**; they are direct instructional services for MLs, also considered part of their Tier I instruction and supplemental to the general curriculum. Therefore, MLP services and accommodations should be treated with the same importance as any other core instruction. All MLs with an English proficiency level of '1.0-6.0' or 'A1-A3,' as well as monitored students (M1-M4), if determined by the Multilingual Learner Program Team (MLPT), must have an Individualized Language Acquisition Plan (ILAP) that specifies language accommodations on file, reviewed, and signed by team members.

The ILAP is a legally binding document similar in importance to an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan. The Supreme Court case Lau v. Nichols (1974) and subsequent legislation from the Equal Education Opportunity Act (1974) obligate school districts to provide MLs with meaningful and equal access to the curriculum. ILAPs contain pertinent information about each ML and the specific accommodations to meet their needs. All teachers who serve the student must follow the specifications outlined in the ILAP.

The number of MLs in South Carolina districts and schools varies widely throughout the state, and services for these students are also quite variable. In addition, those identified as MLs include students with different individual needs. MLPTs should be formed to support decisions for MTSS. MLPTs include stakeholders invested in the ML's education. This team may include guardians, content teachers, Multilingual Learner Program Specialist (MLPS)/teacher, administrators, counselors, speech-language pathologists (SLP), special education teachers, school psychologists, and students.

See **Appendix J** for more information on *MTSS and Multilingual Learners (MLs)*.

4.5.11 MTSS and Special Education

MTSS is not a special education initiative, but rather a framework for providing high-quality instruction delivered by a highly effective educator who understands and is able to implement instruction to support academics and behavior for all students. A well-implemented, research-based screening process ensures earlier, more relevant, help for students not meeting grade-level benchmarks and provides critical information about student instructional needs in order to provide effective interventions within the general education classroom. Interventions implemented with fidelity and with increasing intensity

to match student needs can provide the support most students need in order to be successful in the general education environment.

Occasionally schools may find that a student requires urgent support at a level that cannot be met in the general education classroom. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), "The use of RTI strategies cannot be used to delay or deny the provision of a full and individual evaluation, pursuant to 34 CFR §§300.304-300.311, to a child suspected of having a disability under 34 CFR §300.8." This means that when there is a clear suspicion of a disability, the student is not required to receive intervention prior to receiving a full and individual evaluation for suspicion of a disability.

If students are participating in an intervention and making sufficient progress, the problem-solving team can continue the current intervention or intensify the intervention. If students are not making sufficient progress despite appropriate Tier III interventions implemented with fidelity, the team will want to consider referring the student for evaluation if needed. If a referral is warranted, the team should follow the district procedures for evaluation. Intervention can occur during the evaluation process and data can be used.

SCDE's Office of Special Education Services (OSES) sponsors additional support through SC TEAMS. SC TEAMS is a network of four Technical Assistance Providers (TAP) working together toward the common goal of making evidence-based resources readily available to anyone in South Carolina who needs them. The websites for each TAP are listed below:

- Academic Alliance of South Carolina (AASC). AASC supports educators in improving both academic and functional outcomes for students with disabilities. They utilize implementation science to support schools and districts to implement, sustain, and scale up evidence-based practices.
- Behavior Alliance of South Carolina (BASC). BASC is a technical assistance organization based within Clemson University, funded by the South Carolina Department of Education's Office of Special Education Services. They partner with state and local educational agencies to cultivate effective community-driven systems and practices so all students can experience a sense of belonging and engage successfully in school.
- South Carolina Partnerships for Inclusion (SCPI). SCPI is an early childhood technical assistance (TA) center focused on increasing inclusive opportunities and school readiness for preschool children with disabilities. This technical assistance center supports the South Carolina Department of Education's Office of Special Education Services (OSES) to increase the local capacity of districts and schools to support the implementation & scaling up of evidence-based practices to improve outcomes for children ages three to twenty-one with disabilities in the state.
- Transition Alliance of South Carolina (TASC). TASC fosters collaboration between state partners and local school districts to promote positive post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities.

See **Appendix K** for more information on *MTSS and Special Education*.

Three-Tiered Model Action Steps for School Teams:

- As a team, review how tiered instruction protocols are determined, disseminated, and followed within your school.
- Ensure that Tier I practices (i.e. core instruction, universal behavior expectations, etc.) are meeting the needs of at least 80% of the student population. If universal screening suggests otherwise, make adjustments to core practices.
- Ensure that Tier II and Tier III interventions are evidence-based, focused on targeted skills, and implemented based on student data.
- Ensure that evidence-based progress monitoring tools are aligned to evidence-based interventions.

4.6 Data Evaluation

Districts and schools should continuously examine and refine their assessment, instruction, and intervention systems in order to demonstrate a steady increase in the number of students meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations as determined by state assessments. Students must be able to transfer knowledge and skills throughout the day to demonstrate true proficiency in the work with which they are asked to engage across content areas and contexts.

4.6.1 Types of Assessments

Assessment is vital to high-quality instruction. For assessment to support the Three-Tiered Model of instruction, educators must understand the types of assessments and their unique purposes. Formative assessments occur throughout the learning process. They are intended to periodically assess understanding to alter instruction, as needed, along the way. Summative assessments, however, measure what has been learned at the end of a lesson or unit. "One way in which the two are commonly distinguished is that formative is considered assessment *for* learning while summative is considered assessment *of* learning. Of course, not all assessments fall into the strict categories of formative or summative; interim and benchmark assessments, for example, help educators monitor student progress along the way" (Prescott, 2022).

Several types of assessments are commonly used throughout the tiers of MTSS. Each has a distinct purpose, but all play a role in identifying what students need and matching those needs with appropriate instruction, intervention, and/or acceleration. Table 12 provides a quick overview of each type of assessment.

Table 12: *Types of Assessments*

Assessment Type	Description

Universal Screeners
 	
(SCDE Approved List)
	• Purpose:
	  ○ Identify students who are at, above, or below benchmark
	  ○ Identify students who may need additional support or further diagnostic testing
	  ○ Monitor the adequacy of core instruction
	  ○ Benchmarks are used to predict later success
	• Characteristics:
	  ○ Brief and quick to score
	  ○ Standardized
	• Who: All students
	• When: Three times per year

Benchmark (Interim) Assessments
 	
(SCDE Approved List)
	• Purpose:
	  ○ Measure student achievement in terms of learning specified content
	  ○ Predict performance on summative assessments
	• Characteristics: Aligned to SCCCR Standards
	• Who: All students
	• When: Regular intervals (specified times during learning sequence)

Diagnostic Assessments	• Purpose:
	  ○ Dive deeply into one area
	  ○ Pinpoint deficit skills and facilitate grouping for instructional support (intervention)
	• Characteristics:
	  ○ More extensive than a universal screener
	  ○ Skills are from simplest to more complex (ex. short vowel, long vowel, vowel teams, r-controlled vowels)
	  ○ Take more time to administer
	• Who: Students who did not score at benchmark on a universal screener
	• When: As needed for informing instructional support

Progress Monitoring	• Purpose:
	  ○ Answers the questions: Did it work? How do we know? Can we move to the next skill?
	  ○ Used to plan support instruction
	  ○ Make sure students are progressing in a specific skill
	• Characteristics:
	  ○ Requires a cycle of teaching, testing, regrouping, teaching, assessing….
	  ○ Should only measure the skill for which support was provided
	  ○ Often given by the same teacher/individual who offers the intervention/support
	  ○ Many schools use the same assessment for progress monitoring as they do for a universal screener, which is acceptable if that screener measures the skill that is being supported
	• Who: Students receiving intervention
	• When: In between benchmarks and/or adjustments to intervention

Outcome Assessments	• Purpose:
	  ○ Gives ability to compare schools and districts across a state
	  ○ Provides limited data on student strengths and weaknesses
	• Characteristics
	  ○ Usually state mandated and aligned to standards
	  ○ Norm referenced and standardized
	  ○ Summative; not useful for making instructional adjustments
	• Who: All students in certain grades, as determined by the state
	• When: Once per year in late spring

Note. Source: Adapted from South Carolina Department of Education. (2016). *Response to Intervention Guide*.

4.6.2 Evaluating Assessments, Curriculum, and Intervention

School data, including assessment data, should serve as the catalyst for improvement. Data should drive instructional decisions, and the purchase of resources targeted to meet students' needs. If skill deficits are noted, consider if the school's selected curriculum/intervention resources address these skills. How can professional development support areas for growth? When evaluating educational outcomes, leadership teams should consider whether commonly used practices are effective (Waack, 2018). Questions to consider within each tier can be found in Table 13.

Table 13: *Sample Questions for Reviewing the Effectiveness of MTSS*

Tiers of Support	Evaluation Questions for Consideration
Tier I	• Is our core programming working for most students? • Do staff have the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively use data and support students? • What are the strengths and areas of improvement of our current MTSS Implementation?
Tier II	• To what extent are we under- or over-identifying students for intervention? • Are most students benefiting from the Tier II intervention system? • How can we improve our implementation of Tier II interventions and supports?
Tier III	• To what extent are students under- or over-identified for Tier III or referred for special education evaluation? • Are most students benefiting from intensive intervention at Tier III? • How can we improve the integration of data and intervention at Tier III?

Note. Source: Bailey, T. R., Colpo, A., & Foley, A. (2020). *Assessment Practices Within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports*.

4.6.3 Implementation Science and MTSS

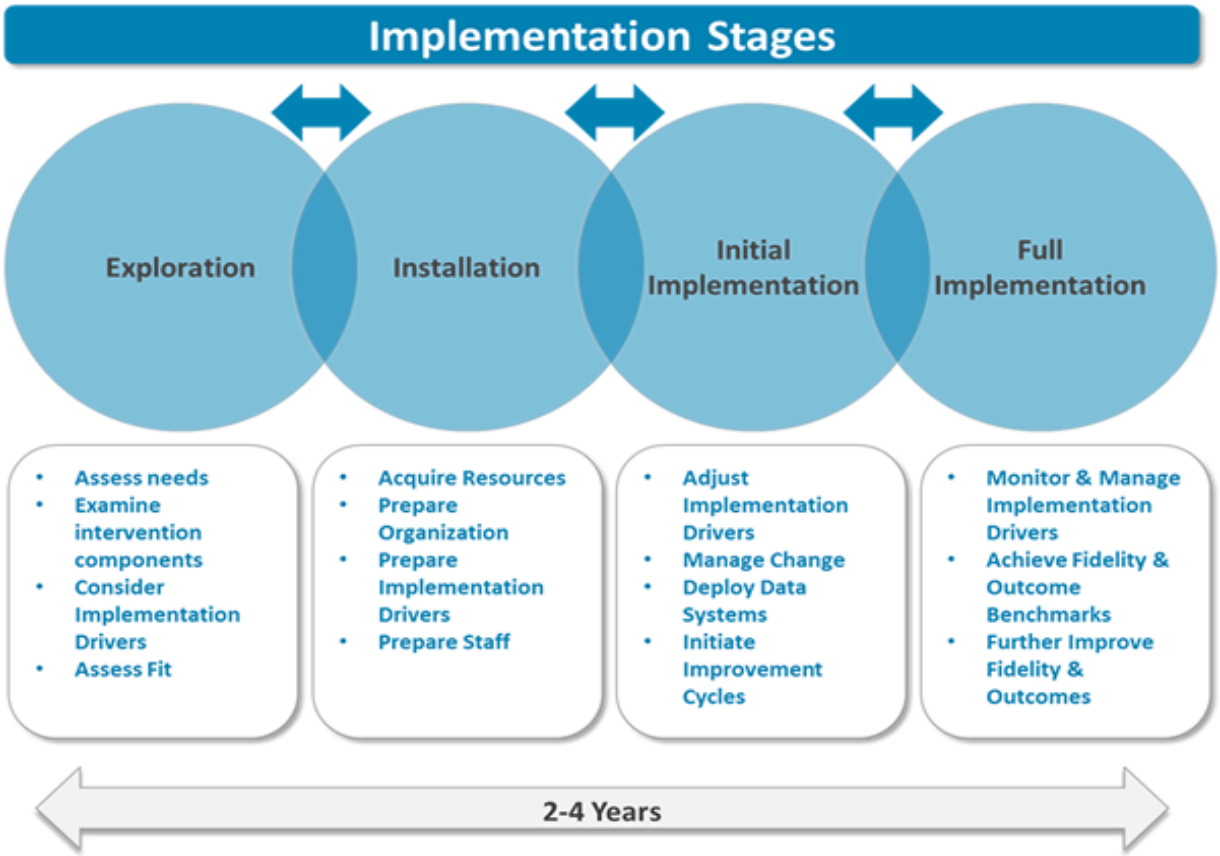
Implementation Science Overview

Existing infrastructures for implementing systems change within educational entities are varied. This makes it necessary to implement a coaching framework to improve educational and behavioral outcomes for students. Research supports using Implementation Science as the framework for systems change. It is difficult to establish and sustain changes to the point of integration into daily work unless there is external

support for change at the practice level, organization level, and system level (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Aladjem & Borman, 2006; Nord & Tucker, 1987; Schofield, 2004).

Implementation Science is defined as the "methods or techniques used to enhance the adoption, implementation, and sustainability" of a program or practice (Eccles & Mittman, 2006). The goal is to "integrate research and practice experience in ways that improve the outcomes of those being served" (NIRN, 2019). Implementation occurs in four crucial stages: Exploration, Installation, Initial Implementation, and Full Implementation. The stages will not be effective if they are implemented in isolation. Use of an implementation stages planning tool can help guide schools and districts as they examine their implementation status for MTSS (NIRN, 2020).

Figure 10: *Stages of Implementation*



Note. Source: NIRN. (2023). *Implementation Stages Overview (Module 4).*

Exploration

During the *Exploration Stage* of MTSS implementation, a designated internal implementation team assesses readiness: the extent to which a school or district has the capacity and commitment to implement MTSS (Fixsen et al., 2013). Often, teams use a readiness assessment rubric to brainstorm and identify possible roadblocks during the Installation and Implementation phases. If an organization is not ready for implementation, the Implementation Team is accountable for helping create readiness by identifying and

addressing barriers. Making the time for Exploration ultimately saves time and money (Romney, 2014) and improves the chances for success (Saldana, Chamberlain, Wang, & Brown, 2011; Slavin, Madden, Chamberlain, & Cheung, 2010).

Installation

The function of the *Installation Stage* is to acquire or repurpose the resources needed to implement an MTSS framework. Some steps that may occur during this stage are: selecting staff, identifying sources for training and coaching, providing initial training for staff, finding or establishing evaluation (fidelity) tools, locating the space necessary for implementation, and assuring access to materials and equipment (Fixsen et al. 2005; Saldana et al., 2012). During the *Exploration Stage*, Implementation Teams help organizations recognize the need for these resources, and during the *Installation Stage*, Implementation Teams help organizations secure the needed resources to do the work ahead and prepare staff for the new practices.

Initial Implementation

Initial Implementation is when the work of the *Exploration* and *Installation* phases combine and the team initiates the actions they identified. During this stage, stakeholders are attempting to use their newly learned skills around MTSS. The *Initial Implementation Stage* is the most fragile stage, where the challenge of old habits and mindsets collides with the implementation of new practices, which may also result in challenging the mindset of participants.

Full Implementation

An educational entity has *Full Implementation* once the MTSS framework becomes integrated into educator, organizational, and leadership practices, as well as policies and procedures. MTSS falls under *Full Implementation* when at least 50 percent of participants are utilizing the framework with fidelity, as measured by fidelity tools.

Implementation site leaders and staff, together with the community, should be aware that their school or district's needs may change over time. The functional components of the MTSS framework can and should be adjusted to meet the changing needs of schools and districts in a process of continuous improvement. Doing so requires ongoing support from leadership and continued educator development.

4.6.4 Fidelity of MTSS Implementation

Developing an Action Plan

Quality implementation of MTSS is associated with the increased likelihood that instruction and interventions will lead to successful student outcomes. Thus, it is important for schools to monitor not only student outcomes, but also *how* assessments, instruction, interventions, and data-based problem-solving are put into place (i.e., the fidelity with which these elements are implemented). Successful implementation is influenced by many factors within and around the school system, including professional development, administrative support, data systems, and staff member perceptions. Self-

reflection should focus on the necessary actions and activities to successfully implement and sustain the critical elements of MTSS with fidelity. The critical elements of MTSS focus on include:

- Curriculum standards;
- Assessments used to inform instruction;
- Multiple tiers of instruction and intervention; and
- Data-based problem-solving used to make decisions.

To promote a common understanding, staff members are urged to discuss how the elements of MTSS relate to components of their school's system for educating all students. MTSS should not be thought of as a separate initiative or program that must be implemented. Rather, MTSS provides a framework for integrating academic and behavioral supports and should be part of the school's plan for continuous improvement. Other initiatives, such as implementation of educational policies and regulations, new assessment systems, or new instructional strategies, also should be considered in the context of how they fit within MTSS.

Data Evaluation Action Steps for School Teams:

- As a team, review the clarity and adherence to data collection methods and use within MTSS.
- Use assessment data to improve Tier I core instruction and identify students at-risk of poor outcomes.
- Monitor *how* assessments, instruction, interventions, and data-based problem-solving are put into place

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Appendix A: Federal and State Legislative Mandates

Act 213

Screenings, interventions, training, reporting, task force

SECTION 1. Chapter 33, Title 59 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

"Article 5

Dyslexia Screenings

Section 59-33-510. As used in this section:

(1) 'Evidence-based reading instruction' means reading, writing, and spelling instruction that employs direct instruction of systematic and cumulative content, with the sequence beginning with the easiest and most basic elements, and progressing methodically to more difficult material. Each step also must be based on steps already learned. Components of evidence-based reading instruction include instruction targeting phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
(2) 'Dyslexia-specific intervention' means evidence-based, specialized reading, writing, and spelling instruction that is multisensory in nature, equipping students to simultaneously use multiple senses, such as vision, hearing, touch, and movement. Dyslexia-specific intervention requires greater intensity, such as smaller groups, increased frequency of instruction, and individualized progression through steps, than typical evidence-based reading instruction.
(3) 'Multi-tiered system of supports' or 'MTSS' means an evidence-based model of schooling that uses data-based problem solving to integrate academic and behavioral instruction and intervention. The integrated academic and behavioral supports are delivered to students at varying intensities by means of multiple tiers based on student need. Need-driven decision making seeks to ensure that district resources reach the appropriate students at their schools at the appropriate levels to accelerate the performance of all students to fulfill the profile of the South Carolina Graduate.
(4) 'Response to Intervention' or 'RTI' means the process of providing high-quality instruction and intervention matched to student needs using learning rate over time and level of performance to make important instructional decisions. To ensure efficient use of resources, schools begin with the identification of trends and patterns using schoolwide data and grade level data. Students who need instructional intervention beyond what is provided universally for positive behavior or academic content areas are provided with targeted, supplemental interventions delivered individually or in small groups at increasing levels of intensity. RTI is a process that is driven by the use of a problem-solving model and is used for the

purpose of revealing what works best for groups of students and individual students, regardless of placement.

(5) 'Tiered instruction' means instruction and intervention provided with increasing intensity in response to student needs. This instruction is typically provided in an RTI process depicted as a three-tier model. Data is collected at each tier and is used to measure the efficacy of the instruction and intervention so that meaningful decisions may be made about how instruction and intervention should be maintained and layered. Tier 1 is the foundation and consists of scientific, research-based core instructional and behavioral methodologies, practices, and supports designed for all students in the general curriculum. Tier 2 consists of supplemental, targeted instruction and interventions that are provided in addition to and in alignment with effective core instruction and behavioral supports to groups of targeted students who need additional instructional support, behavioral support, or both. Tier 3 consists of intensive instructional or behavioral interventions provided in addition to and in alignment with effective core instruction with the goal of increasing an individual student's rate of progress. Tier 3 interventions are developed for individual students using a problem-solving process. Students receiving Tier 3 level supports may or may not be eligible for specially designed instruction and related services in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act.

(6) 'Problem-solving model' means a problem-solving method used to match instructional resources to educational need. The problem-solving model uses data to define the problem, establish performance goals, develop intervention plans, monitor progress, and evaluate outcomes.

(7) 'Universal screening process (USP)' means the process a district employs to screen all students who may be experiencing academic and/or social-emotional difficulties. The screening tools and the process must be based on approval and guidelines provided by the department, which must include screening tools that must be administered at no cost to the district.

Section 59-33-520.

(A)

(1) (1)The State Department of Education shall establish and provide training and support for a statewide MTSS framework that must contain a common data-based problem-solving model, on-going student assessment, and a layered continuum of supports using evidence-based practices. As part of the assessment, a universal screening process must be used to identify students who may be at risk of experiencing academic difficulties in reading, math, or writing, and who also may be at risk of experiencing difficulties in social-emotional development.

(2) Beginning with the 2019-2020 School Year, to the extent funding is provided or that approved screening tools are available at no cost, a local school district shall use the universal screening process to screen each student in the district who is in kindergarten through first grade three times each school year and as needed in second grade as outlined in the district's universal screening procedures, and any

other student as required by the department, for reading difficulties, including dyslexia, and the need for intervention.

(3) In addition to screening required by this subsection, screening also may be requested for a student by his parent or guardian, teacher, counselor, or school psychologist.

(B) The district, following the universal screening procedures it conducted, shall convene a school-based team to analyze screening data and progress monitoring data to assist teachers in planning and implementing appropriate instruction and evidence-based interventions for all students who, based on the screening, are at risk of experiencing academic difficulties, including those students who exhibit the characteristics of dyslexia, as provided by the department. Guidance may include suggestions of tiered interventions, dyslexia-specific interventions, academic and social-emotional supports, and supplemental technology as appropriate for the student's access to assistive technology.

(C) If the RTI process conducted by the district indicates that a student is at risk for experiencing academic difficulties, including dyslexia, the district shall:

(1) notify the parent or legal guardian of the student;

(2) provide the parent or legal guardian of the student with information and resource material so that they may assist and support learning for their child;

(3) provide the student with tiered, evidence-based intervention as defined in Section 59-33-510; and

(4) monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and the student's progress.

Section 59-33-530. The department shall provide appropriate professional development training and resources for all educators in the area of MTSS and the identification of, and evidence-based intervention methods for, students who are at risk of experiencing academic difficulties, including students with dyslexia.

Section 59-33-540.

The State Board of Education shall create a reporting template and guidelines for districts and charter schools to complete the template. School districts and charter school authorizers shall complete the template and provide the compiled results to the department annually by June thirtieth, commencing June 30, 2020. The department shall provide the compiled information to the State Board of Education, State Superintendent of Education, and the Chairs of the House Education and Public Works Committee and Senate Education Committee by July thirty-first of each year commencing July 31, 2020. The template must include the following:

(1) identification of the screening tool used;

(2) the type and amount of professional development specifically applicable to reading difficulties including, but not limited to, dyslexia and other related disorders that are provided to faculty and staff;

(3) the number of students screened and the number who were identified as having reading difficulties including, but not limited to, dyslexia and who required intervention, and the interventions employed by the school; and
(4) longitudinal data reported by grade that separately identifies academic growth for students who are identified as having reading difficulties including, but not limited to, dyslexia and provided intervention services, and students who do not receive services. Individual students must not be identified.

Section 59-33-550.

(A) There is created a Learning Disorders Task Force for the purpose of working with the department in matters relating to reading disorders to include, but not be limited to, dyslexia. The State Superintendent of Education shall convene the first meeting at which time a chair shall be elected by the task force. The task force is composed of nine members as follows:
(1) an education specialist in school psychology appointed by the State Superintendent of Education, for a term of three years;
(2) a representative from the South Carolina branch of the International Dyslexia Association, appointed by the president of the association for a term of three years;
(3) a special education teacher with an understanding of reading difficulties including, but not limited to, dyslexia, appointed by the State Superintendent of Education for a term of three years;
(4) a primary school teacher, appointed by the State Superintendent of Education for a term of three years;
(5) a middle school teacher, appointed by the State Superintendent of Education for a term of three years;
(6) a high school teacher, appointed by the State Superintendent of Education for a term of three years;
(7) a parent of a child with dyslexia, appointed by the State Superintendent of Education for a term of three years;
(8) a certified school speech pathologist, appointed by the State Superintendent of Education for a term of three years; and
(9) a member in good standing of the South Carolina Optometric Physicians Association, appointed by that association's board of directors for a term of three years.

(B) Initially, the members representing subsection (A)(1), (3), (5), (7), and (9) shall serve terms of five years or until their successors are appointed and qualified. At the end of the first appointment term for these members, new appointments shall serve terms of three years or until their successors are appointed and qualified. All appointments must be provided to the State Superintendent of Education by July 1, 2018. The terms of the members shall commence July 1, 2018.

(C) A vacancy must be filled in the same manner of the original appointment for the unexpired portion of the term. A member may be appointed to successive terms.

(D) The members of the task force shall serve without compensation, mileage, per diem, or subsistence allowances.

(E) The task force shall meet at least quarterly. A quorum consists of a majority of the membership of the task force.

(F) The task force shall coordinate with the department and the South Carolina branch of the International Dyslexia Association in the identification of universal screening tools to be used pursuant to Section 59-33-520, and collaborate with the department in the creation of the reporting guidelines required by Section 59-33-540."

Time effective

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon approval of the Governor.

Ratified the 14th day of May, 2018.

Approved the 18th day of May, 2018.

Act 114

SECTION 1. Section 59-155-110 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 59-155-110. The South Carolina Department of Education shall implement a comprehensive, systemic approach to reading which will ensure:

(1) classroom teachers use scientifically based reading instruction in prekindergarten through grade five, to include oral language, phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; administer and interpret valid and reliable assessments; analyze data to inform reading instruction; and provide scientifically based interventions as needed so that all students develop proficiency with literacy skills and comprehension;

(2) each district, in consultation with classroom teachers, periodically reassess curriculum and instructional materials for alignment with foundational literacy skills and exclusion of materials that employ the three-cueing system model of reading, visual memory as the primary basis for teaching word recognition, or the three-cueing system model of reading based on meaning, structure and syntax, and visual cues;

(3) each student who cannot yet comprehend grade-level text is identified and served as early as possible and at all stages of his or her educational process;

(4) each student receives targeted, effective, comprehensive support from the classroom teacher and, if needed, supplemental support from a reading interventionist so that ultimately all students can comprehend grade-level texts;

(5) after each administration of a universal reading screener or formative assessment as defined in this chapter, each student and his parent or guardian are informed in writing of:
    (a) the student's reading proficiency needs, progress, and ability to comprehend grade-level texts;
    (b) specific actions the classroom teacher and other reading professionals have taken and will take to help the student comprehend texts; and
    (c) specific actions that the parent or guardian can take to help the student comprehend grade-level texts;
(6) classroom teachers receive pre-service and in-service coursework based in the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills;
(7) all students develop reading and writing proficiency to prepare them to graduate and to succeed in their career and post-secondary education;
(8) each school district publishes annually a comprehensive scientifically based reading plan that includes intervention options available to students and funding for these services; and
(9) all programs focused on early childhood literacy development promote parental involvement in children's literacy and development of foundational literacy skills.

Definitions

SECTION 2. Section 59-155-120 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 59-155-120. As used in this chapter:
(1) "Board" means the State Board of Education.
(2) "Department" means the State Department of Education.
(3) "Foundational literacy skills" means phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension and excludes models based on meaning, structure, syntax, and visual cues.
(4) "Formative assessment" means nationally normed formative assessments approved by the board and aligned with state standards used during the school year to analyze general strengths and weaknesses in learning and instruction, to include reading comprehension, of students individually as to adapt instruction, make decisions about appropriate intervention services, and inform placement and instructional planning for the next grade level.
(5) "Literacy" means the mastery of foundational literacy skills and the use of those skills to comprehend texts and write proficiently to meet grade-level English/Language Arts standards.
(6) "Readiness assessment" means an assessment used to analyze students' competency in prekindergarten or kindergarten.
(7) "Reading interventions" means individual or group assistance in the classroom and supplemental support based on curricular and instructional decisions made by classroom teachers who have proven effectiveness in teaching reading and a

literacy endorsement or reading/literacy coaches who meet the minimum qualifications established in guidelines published by the department.

(8) "Reading proficiency" means the ability of students to meet state reading standards in kindergarten through grade five, demonstrated by readiness, formative, or summative assessments.

(9) "Reading proficiency skills" means the ability to understand how written language works at the word, sentence, paragraph, and text level and mastery of the skills, strategies, and oral and written language needed to comprehend grade-level texts.

(10) "Science of reading" means the comprehensive body of scientific research on how proficient reading develops, why some students have difficulty learning to read, and the scientifically based approaches to effectively, explicitly, and systematically teach students to read, including foundational literacy skills. The science of reading also addresses the developmental stages of reading, effective instructional strategies, the identification and support of diverse learners to include those with reading difficulties such as dyslexia, and the application of these research findings in an educational setting to ensure effective reading instruction and literacy develops for all students.

(11) "Scientifically based" means reading instruction, interventions, programs, and other reading services provided to students that are aligned with the science of reading. These approaches and methods must be grounded in systematic and objective research conforming to established scientific principles.

(12) "Substantially fails to demonstrate third grade reading proficiency" means a student who does not demonstrate reading proficiency at the end of the third grade as indicated by scoring Does Not Meet Expectations or at the lowest achievement level on the statewide summative reading assessment.

(13) "Summative assessment" means state-approved assessments administered in grades three through eight and any statewide assessment used in grades nine through twelve to determine student mastery of grade-level or content standards.

(14) "Summer reading camp" means an educational program offered by each local school district or consortia of school districts for students who are unable to comprehend grade-level texts and who qualify for mandatory retention.

(15) "Third grade reading proficiency" means the ability to read grade-level texts by the end of a student's third grade year as demonstrated by scoring Meets or Exceeds Expectations as a result of state-approved summative reading assessments administered to third grade students, or through other assessments as noted in this chapter and adopted by the board.

(16) "Universal reading screener" means a nationally normed formative assessment used to screen and monitor the progress of students in foundational literacy skills to identify or predict students at risk of not meeting grade-level proficiency and determine effectiveness of instruction and intervention. All universal reading screeners must be aligned with state standards to English/Language Arts, meet the criteria of a nationally normed formative assessment, and be recommended by the department and approved by the board.

Guidance and support

SECTION 3. Section 59-155-130 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 59-155-130.
(A)The department shall guide and support districts and collaborate with educator preparation programs to increase reading proficiency through the following functions including, but not limited to:

(1) providing professional development to teachers, school principals, and other administrative staff based in the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills;
(2) working collaboratively with institutions of higher learning offering courses in reading and writing for initial certification in early childhood, elementary, and special education, and accredited master's degrees in reading/literacy to design coursework leading to a literacy teacher endorsement by the State;
(3) providing coaching for already certified reading/literacy coaches and literacy teachers based in the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills;
(4) developing information and resources that school districts can use to provide workshops for parents about how they can support their children as readers and writers;
(5) assisting school districts in the development and implementation of their district reading proficiency plans as provided for in Section 59-155-140;
(6) annually reviewing and approving the reading proficiency plan of each district;
(7) monitoring and reporting to the board the yearly success rate of summer reading camps. Districts must provide the department with data to include the:
    (a) number of students enrolled in camps;
    (b) number of students by grade level who successfully complete the camps;
    (c) number of third graders promoted to fourth grade;
    (d) number of third graders retained;
    (e) total expenditures to operate the camps to include source of funds and in-kind donations;
    (f) number of third graders promoted using a good cause exemption as provided in this chapter;
    (g) number of first and second graders who are projected to score Does Not Meet and Approaches Expectations or at the lowest levels of the statewide summative reading assessment; and
(8) providing an annual report to the General Assembly regarding the implementation of the South Carolina Read to Succeed Act to include the state's and district's progress toward ensuring at least ninety-five percent of all students are reading at grade level.

(B) Districts failing to provide reports on summer reading camps pursuant to Section 59-155-130 are ineligible to receive state funding for summer reading camps for the

following fiscal year; however, districts must continue to operate summer reading camps as defined in this act.

Components

SECTION 4. Section 59-155-140 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 59-155-140.

(A) (1) The department, with approval by the board, shall develop, implement, evaluate, and continuously refine a comprehensive state plan to improve reading achievement in public schools. The State Reading Proficiency Plan must be approved by the board annually, and must include, but not be limited to, sections addressing the following components:

(a) reading process;
(b) professional development to increase teacher reading expertise;
(c) professional development to increase reading expertise and literacy leadership of principals and assistant principals;
(d) reading instruction;
(e) reading assessment;
(f) support for struggling readers;
(g) early childhood interventions;
(h) family support of literacy development;
(i) district guidance and support for reading proficiency;
(j) state guidance and support for reading proficiency;
(k) accountability; and
(l) urgency to improve reading proficiency.

(2) The state plan must be based on research and evidence-based practices, aligned to the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills, and applied to the conditions prevailing in reading/literacy education in this State, with special emphasis on addressing instructional and institutional deficiencies. The plan must present and explain the scientifically based rationale for state-level actions to be taken. The plan must be updated annually and incorporate a state reading proficiency progress report.

(3) The state plan must include specific details and explanations for all substantial uses of state, local, and federal funds promoting reading/literacy and best judgment estimates of the cost of scientifically based, thoroughly analyzed proposals for initiation, expansion, or modification of major funding programs addressing reading and writing. Analyses of funding requirements must be prepared by the department for incorporation into the plan.

(B) (1) Each district must prepare a comprehensive annual reading proficiency plan for prekindergarten through fifth grade.

(2) Each district reading proficiency plan shall:

(a) document how reading and writing assessment and instruction for all PK-5 students are aligned to the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills;
(b) document scientifically based interventions being provided to students who have failed to demonstrate grade-level reading proficiency;
(c) include a system for helping parents understand how they can support the student as a reader at home;
(d) provide for the monitoring of reading achievement and growth at the classroom, school, and district levels with decisions about intervention based on all available data; and
(e) explain how the district will provide teacher training based in the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills from an approved list provided by the department.

(3) (a) The department shall develop the format for the plan and the deadline for districts to submit their plans for approval. A district that does not submit a plan or whose plan is not approved shall not receive any state funds for reading until it submits a plan that is approved. All district reading plans must be reviewed and approved by the department. The department shall provide written comments to each district on its plan and to all districts on common issues raised in prior or newly submitted district reading plans.
(b) The department shall monitor the district and school plans and use their findings to inform the training and support the office provides to districts and schools.
(c) The department may direct a district that is persistently unable to prepare an acceptable PK-12 reading proficiency plan or to help all students comprehend grade-level texts to enter into a multidistrict or contractual arrangement to develop an effective intervention plan.

(C) Each school serving students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade must prepare, submit to the district, and post on its website prior to the start of each year an implementation plan aligned with the district reading proficiency plan to enable the district to monitor and support implementation at the school level. The school plan must be a component of the school's strategic plan required by Section 59-18-1310. A school implementation plan shall be sufficiently detailed to provide practical guidance for classroom teachers. Proposed strategies for assessment, instruction, and other activities specified in the school plan must be sufficient to provide to classroom teachers and other instructional staff helpful guidance that can be related to the critical reading and writing needs of students in the school. In consultation with the School Improvement Council, each school must include in its implementation plan the training and support that will be provided to parents as needed to maximize their promotion of reading and writing by students at home and in the community.

(D) The department shall identify schools serving students in sixth through eighth grade with fifty percent or more of its students scoring at the lowest achievement level on the statewide summative assessment. Each year identified, the school shall prepare, submit to the district, and post on its website prior to the start of the school year a school implementation plan aligned with the district's reading proficiency plan to enable the district to monitor and support implementation at the school level. The school implementation plan shall be sufficiently detailed to provide classroom teachers and instructional staff with strategies based in the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills for assessments, instruction, and other activities related to the critical reading and writing needs of students. In consultation with the School Improvement Council, the implementation plan shall include training and supports provided to parents as needed to maximize the promotion of reading and writing by students at home and in the community.

Assessment administration

SECTION 5. Section 59-155-150 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 59-155-150.

(A) The State Superintendent of Education shall ensure every student entering publicly funded prekindergarten and kindergarten will be administered a board-approved readiness assessment within the first forty-five days of school. The approved assessments of academic readiness must be aligned with first and second grade standards for English/language arts and mathematics. The purpose of the assessment is to provide teachers and parents or guardians with information to address the readiness needs of each student by identifying early language and literacy development, physical well-being, and cognitive development to inform and assist appropriate instruction for each child. The results of the assessment and the developmental intervention strategies recommended to address the child's identified needs must be provided, in writing, to the parent or guardian. Reading instructional strategies and developmental activities for children whose oral language skills are assessed to be below the norm of their peers in the State must be aligned with the district's reading proficiency plan for addressing the readiness needs of each student. The results of each assessment with the date of when the assessment was administered must be reported to the department.

(B) A district superintendent or charter school authorizer may submit a request to the department to waive the minimum one hundred eighty-day school attendance requirement for kindergarten and South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (CERDEP) students for the purpose of scheduling readiness assessments. Upon approval of the waiver request, the approved school may allow kindergarten and CERDEP students to be administered the assessments during a shortened school day within the first five days of the academic year.

Universal reading screeners

SECTION 6. Chapter 155, Title 59 of the S.C. Code is amended by adding:

Section 59-155-155.

(A) Beginning with the 2025-2026 School Year, the board shall approve no more than five reliable and valid universal reading screeners for selection and use by districts for kindergarten through fifth grade and shall use the same process as required by Section 59-18-310 to ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments and to periodically reevaluate approved instruments. All districts shall use one of the approved universal reading screeners.

(B) Each approved universal reading screener must:

(1) provide screening and diagnostic capabilities for monitoring student progress in reading;

(2) measure, at minimum, foundational literacy skills;

(3) identify students who have a reading deficiency, including identifying students with characteristics of dyslexia; and

(4) meet the criteria of a nationally normed formative assessment.

(C) In determining which instrument to approve, the board shall consider the following factors:

(1) the time required to conduct the assessments with the intention of minimizing the impact on instructional time;

(2) the level of integration of assessment results with instructional supports offered to teachers and students;

(3) the timeliness in reporting assessment results to teachers, administrators, and parents; and

(4) the recommendation of the department.

(D) In order to determine student progression in reading, a district shall administer a universal reading screener three times per school year with the first administration occurring within the first forty-five days of school, the second administration occurring at the midpoint of the school year, and the third administration occurring by the end of the school year. Within fifteen days of each administration, the district shall notify the parent or guardian regarding the performance of their student and whether the student may be considered for retention. For each student demonstrating literacy deficiencies and not meeting grade-level proficiencies based on the data received from the administration of the universal reading screeners, the district shall create an individualized reading plan and include a copy in the notification to the parent or guardian.

(E) The department shall:

(1) provide technical assistance and support to districts and classroom teachers in administering universal reading screeners and in understanding the results so teachers are able to provide appropriate, scientifically based interventions;

(2) require districts and approved universal reading screeners to annually submit data as requested by the department for purposes of determining whether the screening instruments are accurately identifying students in need;

(3) reimburse districts for the cost of the universal reading screener upon receipt of the data as requested by the department as funding allows;
(4) annually report, on a grade-level basis, data received from districts and approved universal reading screeners; and
(5) implement an online reporting system to monitor the effectiveness of universal reading screeners which must:

(a) track, screen, and monitor the reading progress of students in kindergarten through third grade toward reading proficiency;
(b) create a consistent statewide reporting mechanism to identify students with a reading deficiency to include students with characteristics of dyslexia; and
(c) be used to receive the annual reporting requirements pursuant to Section 59-33-540.

(F) Administration of a universal reading screener may be replaced with an alternative assessment and progress monitoring tool for students who qualify for an alternative assessment based on a cognitive disability in kindergarten through third grade.

Mandatory retention

SECTION 7. Section 59-155-160 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 59-155-160.

(A) Beginning with the 2024-2025 School Year, a student must be retained in the third grade if the student fails to demonstrate reading proficiency at the end of the third grade as indicated by scoring Does Not Meet Expectations or at the lowest achievement level on the state summative reading assessment. A student may be exempt for good cause from the mandatory retention but shall continue to receive instructional support and services and reading intervention appropriate for their age and reading level. Good cause exemptions include students:
(1) with limited English proficiency and less than two years of instruction in English as a Second Language program;
(2) with disabilities whose Individualized Education Program indicates the use of alternative assessments or alternative reading interventions and students with disabilities whose Individualized Education Program or Section 504 Plan reflects that the student has received intensive remediation in reading for more than two years but still does not substantially demonstrate reading proficiency;
(3) who successfully participate in a summer reading camp at the conclusion of third grade and demonstrate reading proficiency by achieving Approaches Expectations, or at least a level above the lowest level, on the state summative reading assessment;
(4) who demonstrate third grade reading proficiency by scoring the equivalent of Approaches Expectations, or the level above the lowest level, on the statewide summative assessment or a norm-referenced alternative assessment approved by the board for use in summer reading camps; or

(5) who have received two years of reading intervention and were previously retained.

(B) The superintendent of the local district may determine whether a student in the district may be exempt from the mandatory retention by taking all of the following steps:

(1) The teacher of a student eligible for retention must submit to the principal documentation on the proposed exemption and evidence that promotion of the student is appropriate based on the student's academic record. This evidence must be limited to the student's Individualized Education Program, performance on the statewide summative assessment, or performance on an alternative assessment.

(2) The principal must review the documentation and determine whether the student should be promoted. If the principal determines the student should be promoted, the principal must submit a written recommendation for promotion, to include an individualized reading plan providing additional supports to be offered to the student to ensure reading proficiency is achieved, to the district superintendent for final determination.

(3) The district superintendent's acceptance or rejection of the recommendation, as well as the individualized reading plan provided by the principal, must be in writing and a copy must be provided to the parent or guardian of the child.

(4) A parent or legal guardian may appeal the decision to retain a student to the district superintendent if there is a compelling reason why the student should not be retained. A parent or legal guardian must appeal, in writing, within two weeks after the notification of retention. The letter must be addressed to the district superintendent and specify the reasons why the student should not be retained. The district superintendent shall render a decision in writing to the parent or legal guardian and the principal.

(C) Prior to the decision for a student to be retained, if the student is not demonstrating third grade reading proficiency by the end of the second grading period of the third grade:

(1) (a) his parent or guardian timely must be notified, in writing, that the student is being considered for retention and a conference with the parent or guardian must be held prior to a determination regarding retention is made, and conferences must be documented;

(b) within two weeks following the parent/teacher conference, copies of the conference form must be provided to the principal, parent or guardian, teacher and other school personnel who are working with the child on literacy, and summary statements must be sent to parents or legal guardians who do not attend the conference; and

(c) following the parent/teacher retention conference, the principal, classroom teacher, and other school personnel who are working with the child on literacy must review the recommendation for retention and provide suggestions for supplemental instruction.

(2) The parent or guardian may designate another person as an education advocate also to act on their behalf to receive notification

and to assume the responsibility of promoting the reading success of the child. The parent or guardian of a retained student must be offered supplemental tutoring for the retained student in scientifically based services outside the instructional day.

(D) Retained students must be provided intensive instructional services and support, including a minimum of ninety minutes of daily reading instruction, supplemental foundational literacy skill instruction, and other strategies grounded in the science of reading prescribed by the district. These strategies may include, but are not limited to, instruction directly focused on improving the student's individual foundational literacy skills through small group instruction, reduced teacher-student ratios, more frequent student progress monitoring, high dose low ratio tutoring or mentoring as prescribed by the department, transition classes containing students in multiple grade spans, and extended school day, week, or year reading support. The delivery of additional supports and interventions shall not result in a student losing access to regular instruction in subject areas identified in the defined program for grades K-5 as established by the board. The school must report to the department on the progress of students in the class at the end of the school year and at other times as required by the department based on the reading progression monitoring requirements of these students.

(E) (1) For students in kindergarten through second grade who are not demonstrating reading proficiency, additional support in foundational literacy skills shall be provided. These interventions must be based in the science of reading, be at least thirty minutes daily, and be in addition to the minimum of ninety minutes of daily reading and writing instruction provided to all students in kindergarten through second grade. The delivery of additional supports and interventions shall not result in a student losing access to regular instruction in subject areas identified in the defined program for grades K-5 as established by the board. The district must continue to provide intensive interventions until the student is meeting grade-level reading proficiency.

(2) To ensure early interventions, districts are encouraged to retain students in kindergarten through second grade who are not demonstrating grade-level reading proficiency. In making retention decisions, districts shall seek recommendations from the student's teacher(s) and principal.

(F) For students in grades four and above who are not demonstrating reading proficiency shall be provided additional reading interventions which may include services from a reading interventionist in the classroom or supplementally by teachers with a literacy teacher endorsement or reading/literacy coaches. This supplemental support will be provided during the school day and, as appropriate, before or after school, as documented in the district reading plan, and may include high dose low ratio tutoring or mentoring as prescribed by the department, or in summer reading camps.

(G) Students eligible for retention pursuant to this section shall enroll in a summer reading camp provided by their district or a summer reading camp consortium to which their districts belong prior to being retained the following school year.

Summer reading camps must be at least the equivalent of ninety-six hours of instruction. The camps must be taught by compensated teachers who have at least a literacy endorsement or who have documented and demonstrated substantial success in helping students achieve proficiency of grade-level reading standards. The department shall assist districts that cannot find qualified teachers to work in the summer camps. Districts may choose to contract for the services of qualified instructors or collaborate with one or more districts to provide a summer reading camp. Schools and districts are encouraged to partner with county or school libraries, institutions of higher learning, community organizations, faith-based institutions, businesses, pediatric and family practice medical personnel, and other groups to provide volunteers, mentors, tutors, space, or other support to assist with the provision of the summer reading camps. A parent or guardian of a student who does not demonstrate reading proficiency for his grade level shall make the final decision regarding the student's participation in the summer reading camp.

(H) A district shall include in the summer reading camps first and second grade students who are not exhibiting grade-level reading proficiency. This shall be implemented beginning with the 2025-2026 School Year by including first grade students not exhibiting grade-level reading proficiency and beginning with the 2026-2027 School Year by including second grade students not demonstrating grade-level reading proficiency. Students at any other grade who are not exhibiting reading proficiency may be included in summer reading camps at the discretion of the district. Districts may charge fees for these students to attend the summer reading camps based on a sliding scale pursuant to Section 59-19-90, except where a child is found to be reading below grade level in the first through third grade and does not meet the good cause exemption.

Literacy skills training for educators

SECTION 8. Section 59-155-170 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 59-155-170.

(A) The department shall establish a set of essential competencies describing what certified teachers in early childhood, elementary, middle and secondary levels, and special education must know and be able to do so that all students can comprehend grade-level texts. These competencies, developed collaboratively with the faculty of higher education institutions and based on the science of reading, must then be incorporated into the coursework required by Section 59-155-180. The department shall provide professional development courses to ensure that educators have access to multiple avenues of receiving endorsements.

(B) (1) The department shall deliver professional development that has demonstrated success in establishing deep knowledge of foundational literacy skills grounded in the science of reading and promoting student reading achievement. Each district shall participate in the implementation of this foundational literacy skills training

with the goal of statewide implementation to include all kindergarten through third grade teachers certified in early childhood, elementary, or special education, and elementary administrators. This training shall be offered at no cost to the district or teacher.
(2) Successful completion of this training shall satisfy the requirements of the literacy endorsement provided for in Section 59-155-180.

Literacy coaches

SECTION 9. Section 59-155-180(C) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

(C) (1) To ensure that practicing professionals possess the knowledge and skills necessary to assist all children in becoming proficient readers, multiple pathways are needed for developing this capacity.
(2) A reading/literacy coach shall be employed in each elementary school. Reading coaches shall serve as job-embedded, stable resources for professional development throughout schools in order to generate improvement in reading and literacy instruction and student achievement. Reading coaches shall support and provide initial and ongoing professional development to teachers based on an analysis of student assessment and the provision of differentiated instruction and intensive intervention. The reading coach shall:
(a) model effective instructional strategies for teachers by working weekly with students in whole, and small groups, or individually;
(b) facilitate study groups;
(c) train teachers in data analysis and using data to differentiate instruction;
(d) coaching and mentoring colleagues;
(e) work with teachers to ensure that scientifically based reading programs are implemented with fidelity;
(f) work with all teachers (including content area and elective areas) at the school they serve, and help prioritize time for those teachers, activities, and roles that will have the greatest impact on student achievement, namely coaching and mentoring in the classrooms; and
(g) help lead and support reading leadership teams.
(3) The reading coach must not be assigned a regular classroom teaching assignment, must not perform administrative functions that deter from the flow of improving reading instruction and reading performance of students and must not devote a significant portion of his or her time to administering or coordinating assessments. The department must publish guidelines that define the minimum qualifications for a reading coach. Districts must provide to the department information on the name and qualifications of reading coaches funded by the state appropriations.
(4) The board is authorized to approve guidelines on an annual basis for professional development, coursework, certification, and endorsement

requirements for teachers of early childhood and elementary education, including special education teachers, interventionists, reading specialists, and administrators, whose responsibilities, either directly or indirectly, substantially relate to reading and literacy instruction, support, or interventions as provided in this section. The guidelines approved by the board shall also include the issuance of appropriate credit to individuals who have completed a department-approved intensive and prolonged professional development program. Local school districts, working with the department, shall offer the required professional development, coursework, certification, and endorsements at no charge to teachers. In-service hours earned through professional development must be used for renewal of teaching certificates in all subject areas.

(5) Beginning September 1, 2026, early childhood, elementary, and special education teacher candidates seeking their initial certification in South Carolina must earn a passing score on a rigorous test of scientifically based reading instruction and intervention and data-based decision making principles as approved by the board. The objective of this item is to ensure that teacher candidates understand the foundations of reading and are prepared to teach reading to all students.

(6) The board shall approve guidelines and procedures to allow in-service teachers the option of utilizing the test in item (5) to exempt requirements established by the board pursuant to item (4). As part of this process, the board shall set a minimum cut score for an in-service teacher to achieve to take advantage of this provision. A teacher's score on this assessment may not be used for evaluation purposes. Contingent upon funding by the General Assembly, this test shall be provided at no cost to the teacher.

(7) Teachers, administrators, and other certified faculty and staff are exempt from having to earn the literacy endorsement to maintain certification only if they are not educating or serving students in a school or other educational setting. The literacy endorsement must be earned before an individual who was previously exempt pursuant to this item returns to a position where they educate or otherwise serve students.

(8) Annually by August first, the department shall publish guidelines and procedures used in evaluating all courses offered to teachers, including virtual courses and professional development, leading to the literacy endorsement. The department shall publish the approved courses and professional development leading to the literacy endorsement no later than January first, annually.

(9) Prior to August 1, 2026, and continuing every five years thereafter, the department will conduct an evaluation of approved courses used for compliance of this section. The evaluation should include survey data from prior course participants. The department shall remove any courses receiving an unsatisfactory evaluation from the list of approved courses and professional development under this section.

Reading and writing habits and skills development

SECTION 10. Section 59-155-200 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 59-155-200. The department and each school district must plan for and act decisively to engage the families of students as full participating partners in promoting the reading habits and skills development of their children. With support from the department, districts and individual schools shall provide families with information about how children progress as readers and writers and how they can support this progress.

Standards, practices, and procedures for program implementation

SECTION 11. Section 59-155-210 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 59-155-210. The department shall translate the statutory requirements for reading and writing specified in this chapter into guidance for districts, boards, and other organizations as appropriate. In this effort, they shall solicit the advice of education stakeholders who have a deep understanding of the science of reading, as well as school boards, administrators, and others who play key roles in facilitating support for and implementation of effective reading instruction.

Education Improvement Act assessment requirements

SECTION 12. Section 59-18-310(D) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

(D) (1) Beginning with the 2025-2026 School Year, the State Board of Education shall create a statewide adoption list of no more than five nationally normed formative assessments for use in kindergarten through eighth grade aligned with the state content standards in English/language arts and mathematics that satisfies professional measurement standards in accordance with criteria jointly determined by the Education Oversight Committee and the State Department of Education. The formative assessments must provide diagnostic information in a timely manner to all school districts for each student during the course of the school year. Subject to appropriations by the General Assembly for the assessments, local districts must be allocated resources to select and administer formative assessments from the statewide adoption list to use to improve student performance in accordance with district improvement plans.

(2) Districts shall ensure all students in kindergarten through eighth grade are assessed using a state-approved, nationally normed formative assessment tool during the fall, winter, and spring each year. School districts shall provide all formative assessment data and scores by grade level and school to the department from the prior school year. The department is directed to compile the information received and submit a comprehensive report regarding performance on the formative assessments to the General Assembly by June 1, annually. Any school

district failing to provide this data to the department shall have ten percent of their State Aid to Classroom funding withheld until the data is provided.
(3) The state-approved, nationally normed formative assessments shall be periodically reevaluated pursuant to a timeline established by the department not to exceed four years.

Time effective

SECTION 13. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

Ratified the 7th day of March, 2024.

Approved the 11th day of March, 2024.

Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA)

The IDEA does not use the terminology multi-tiered system of support, but there are requirements within the law aligned with the practices within the framework.

Requirements in the IDEA

Before a student can be identified as a student with disabilities, regardless of the category, the team must rule out that the disability is not due to a lack of any of the following:

- the appropriate instruction including the essential components of reading as defined in ESEA before the enactment of the Event Student Succeeds Act in 2015. The essential components are phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency including oral reading skills, vocabulary development, and comprehension strategies,
- lack of appropriate instruction and math, and/or
- limited English proficiency (34 C.F.R.§300.306(b)(1))

In addition, there are additional requirements when determining if a student is eligible as a student with specific learning disabilities. To ensure the underachievement of the student is not due to a lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math, the team, as part of the evaluation process, must consider the following:

- data that demonstrate that the child was provided instruction delivered by qualified personnel, and
- data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting formal assessment of student progress, and this must be provided to the student's parents (34 C.F.R.§ 300.309 (b))

Response to Intervention Process within the MTSS Process

The response to intervention process utilizes data-based problem solving along with the selection of tiered interventions to support students who are struggling to learn. This process within the MTSS framework would provide evidence of appropriate instruction during the evaluation process. Providing appropriate instruction would include an evidence-based tier-one curriculum along with interventions for students who may need more support to learn. The use of a problem-solving approach with the tiered systems of interventions will provide teams with the data needed if the student is being considered as a student with a disability. When a student is being provided with appropriate Tier I instruction and intervention, the team will want to compare that student's rate of growth with those of their peers. If the student's rate of growth is discrepant from their peers, this may be an indicator that the student has a disability. This data can be used in the evaluation process to support that underachievement is not due to a lack of instruction.

Reminder:

If at any point in time anyone suspects a student is a student with a disability who needs specialized instruction, a referral must be made to consider an evaluation for eligibility (34 C.F.R.§300.111).

ESSA

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
ESSA is the latest reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act and was approved by the U.S. Congress in December 2015. This law provides significant federal support for programs to serve students in K–12 and replaces the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. In summary, the law addresses the following:

- Limits the power of the federal government to set education policy for states;
- Increases state flexibility to design accountability systems, interventions, and student supports;
- Increases state and local flexibility in the use of federal funds;
- Requires the use of evidence-based interventions, strategies, and practices for all schools in improvement status; and
- Maintains annual assessments for grades 3–8 and high school.

State Board of Education Regulation

State Board of Education Regulation 43-267
This regulation includes the program goals, requirements, and professional development for grades K-3.

State Board of Education Regulation 43-268
This regulation includes the program goals, requirements, and professional development for grades 4-12.

Appendix B: MTSS and Early Learning

Monitoring Student Progress

High-quality early childhood classrooms are the first line of intervention to prevent academic, emotional, and social delays. SC EC-MTSS recognizes the connection between academics and self-regulation and addresses both areas simultaneously. The goal of SC EC-MTSS is to identify strengths and learning gaps in order to deliver early and effective support for every student who struggles to attain or maintain age-appropriate performance. This goal is met by effectively utilizing best instructional practices within an evidence-based instructional model. An ongoing, systematic process of using student data to document progress is used to guide instructional support decisions.

What is SC EC-MTSS (The Pyramid Model)?

The Pyramid Model is a framework designed to promote emotional and social competence in young children and prevent challenging behaviors. It provides a structured approach for educators, caregivers, and parents to create nurturing environments that support children's development across three tiers:

- *Universal Promotion (Tier I)*: This tier focuses on promoting positive social development for all children through supportive environments, relationships, and teaching practices. It includes strategies like creating predictable routines, teaching social skills, and providing emotional support.
- *Targeted Supports (Tier II)*: This tier provides additional support to children who may need more targeted interventions. It involves strategies such as small-group interventions, social skills training, and specific behavior plans tailored to individual needs.
- *Intensive Individualized Interventions (Tier III)*: This tier is for children who require intensive support due to persistent challenging behaviors. It involves developing individualized behavior plans, collaborating with families and specialists, and closely monitoring progress.

The Pyramid Model emphasizes building positive relationships, teaching social skills, and creating supportive environments to enhance children's emotional and social competence. It is widely used in early childhood education settings to foster a positive climate where all children can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically. The model is supported by research and evidence-based practices aimed at promoting healthy development and preventing the escalation of behavioral challenges.

Why is SC EC-MTSS (The Pyramid Model) important for South Carolina Early Learning Students?

The Pyramid Model is important for South Carolina Early Learning students primarily because it provides a framework for promoting emotional and social competence and preventing challenging behaviors. Here are some key reasons it is valuable:

- *Promotes Positive Behaviors*: The Pyramid Model helps educators and caregivers create nurturing environments that encourage positive social interactions and behaviors among young children. This is crucial for their development and readiness for school.
- *Early Intervention*: By identifying and addressing behavioral challenges early on, the Pyramid Model supports early intervention efforts. This can prevent more serious behavioral issues from developing later in life.
- *Supports Inclusive Practices*: It promotes inclusive practices by ensuring that all children, including those with disabilities or behavioral challenges, receive the support they need to thrive in early learning settings.
- *Builds Strong Relationships*: The model emphasizes building strong relationships between educators, caregivers, and children. These relationships form the foundation for effective learning and development.
- *Educator Training and Support*: It provides educators with training and resources to implement evidence-based practices that enhance social-emotional learning and reduce disruptive behaviors in classrooms.
- *Parental Involvement*: The Pyramid Model encourages collaboration with parents and families, empowering them to support their children's social-emotional development both at home and in educational settings.

In essence, the Pyramid Model serves as a comprehensive approach to fostering a positive early learning environment where every child can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically. Its structured framework and evidence-based strategies contribute significantly to the overall development and well-being of young learners in South Carolina and beyond.

Appendix C: MTSS and Read to Succeed

In 2014, the South Carolina General Assembly passed Act 284, which established the Read to Succeed Act. This Act put in place a comprehensive system of support that addresses literacy performance to ensure students reach grade level proficiency by the third grade. To support the literacy needs of students, Act 114 of the 2023-24 legislative session amends South Carolina's Read to Succeed Act to focus primarily on reading for students in kindergarten through grade 5 and to require that reading instruction, interventions, resources, programs, and other reading services be based on evidence-based practices aligned to the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills (Act 114, Section 59-155-140 (A)(2). Instructional approaches and methods must be grounded in systematic and objective research conforming to established scientific principles. The South Carolina Literacy Competencies exist to define what educators should know and be able to do in order to ensure that all students comprehend grade-level texts. As amended, the R2S Act establishes requirements for the preparation and ongoing professional development, certification, and endorsement requirements of educators whose work directly or indirectly provides literacy instruction, supports, and interventions to students.

Act 114 also recommits efforts in the education system to a third-grade reading guarantee for all students. Students not reading at grade level must be provided with in-class and supplemental reading interventions in addition to the minimum of ninety minutes of daily reading instruction. Interventions must be grounded in the science of reading. Retained students must be provided intensive instructional services and support, including a minimum of ninety minutes of daily reading instruction, supplemental foundational literacy skill instruction, and other strategies grounded in the science of reading prescribed by the district. These strategies may include, but are not limited to, instruction directly focused on improving the student's individual foundational literacy skills through small group instruction, reduced teacher-student ratios, more frequent student progress monitoring, high-dose, low-ratio tutoring or mentoring as prescribed by the department, transition classes containing students in multiple grade spans, and extended school day, week, or year reading support.

Appendix D: Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Self-Assessment

This self-assessment is designed to help schools assess the systems and structures in place to foster an effective MTSS. This tool may be used to generate ideas, identify gaps, and create short-term and long-term goals for continuous improvement of a school's MTSS process. By regularly assessing practice, schools can make informed decisions and refine their MTSS approach over time.

After reflecting on the bulleted items for each component, list evidence to support what is occurring in your school. Come to consensus on strengths and areas for growth related to each component.

Leadership

- The MTSS leadership team consists of key members to ensure varied expertise and perspectives are represented for consensus.
- Decisions and actions made by the MTSS leadership team are made based on data and proactively support MTSS' essential components.
- The roles and responsibilities of the leadership team are intentional and support evidence-based core instruction and interventions. (See Appendix F: Leadership Roles and Responsibilities)

Sources of Evidence:

Strengths:

Areas for Growth:

Capacity and Infrastructure

- The school leadership team provides adequate time in the schedule for planning, implementing, and evaluating reading interventions.
- All grade-level teachers have been trained in, and feel confident around, evidence-based instruction aligned with the reading science.
- All grade-level teachers have been trained in, and feel confident in, using High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM).
- All educators have access to coaching resources to drive improved reading outcomes.
- Data on the use of problem-solving skills and application are to inform continuous improvement of professional development and coaching efforts.

Sources of Evidence

Strengths:

Areas for Growth:

Communication and Collaboration

- Staff are provided data on MTSS implementation fidelity.
- Staff are provided aggregated data at the student level to ensure improved student learning.
- Staff are frequently provided with data regarding implementation fidelity and student outcomes.
- Staff actively engage all stakeholders in opportunities to provide input on how to implement MTSS to negotiate a mutually satisfactory outcome.
- Staff ensures there is frequent and clear communication with families.

Sources of Evidence:

Strengths:

Areas for Growth:

Data-Based Problem Solving

- Data-based problem solving occurs across all content areas, grade levels, and tiers.
- The gap between expected and current outcomes is identified relative to academic, behavioral, emotional, and life skills goals and is used to identify the appropriate level (tier) of instruction/intervention.
- Specific instructional/intervention plans consistently are developed based on verified reasons students are not meeting expectations.

Sources of Evidence:

Strengths:

Areas for Growth:

Three-Tiered Model

- All tiered instruction is provided in a manner that is accessible for all students.
- All students receive support in any tier according to their academic and behavioral needs.

- The level of support students receive is not permanent and changes as indicated by progress monitoring data.

Sources of Evidence:

Strengths:

Areas for Growth:

Data Evaluation

- The MTSS Leadership Team uses student data and implementation data to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction.
- The MTSS Leadership Team makes decisions regarding sustaining current implementation plan or planning for strengthening instruction based on evaluation data.

Sources of Evidence:

Strengths:

Areas for Growth:

Next Steps

- Prioritize your next steps related to your areas for growth.
- What steps can you take immediately?
- What could be accomplished within the next 30 days?
- What could be accomplished within the next 60 days?
- What could be accomplished within the next 90 days?

Appendix E: Sample MTSS Leadership Teams Planning Chart

	District Team	School/Building Team	Grade Level/ Department Team	Problem Solving Team
Team Members	- Superintendent - Special Ed. Admin. - Curriculum & Instruction - Special Programs (Title I, ML, etc.) - Principals - Related Services - Gen. Ed. Teachers - Special Ed. Teachers - Parents - Technology - Other	- Principal - Interventionist(s) - Instructional Coach - Grade Level/Department Chairs - Special Programs Staff (Title I, ML, etc.) - Related Services (Psychologist, Speech, etc.) - Gen. Ed. Teachers - Special Ed. Teachers - Parents - Other	- All members of the grade level or department - An administrator *(Meetings to be facilitated by teachers, not administrators)*	- Administrator - Guidance Counselor or MTSS Lead - General Education Teacher(s) - Parent - Instructional Coach - Any educator working with the student, as appropriate (Speech and Language, Resource, Interventionist, related arts teacher) - Other
Frequency/ Duration of Meeting	Dedicated portion of leadership meeting	Dedicated portion of leadership meeting	Weekly or monthly? Common planning or after school? For how long?	Must be planned for in order to avoid disruption to instruction
Recording Form/ Protocol	Root Cause Analysis	TIPS Recording Form	Four-step Problem Solving	Literacy Intervention Student Learning Pathway
Data to be Analyzed	*District*	*School* Protocol for Examining Data	*Groups of students*	*Individual students*

			- ATLAS Looking at Data Protocol - Looking for Patterns in Student Work	- MTSS Decision Tree - About Learning from Student Work
	District Team	**School/Building Team**	**Grade Level/ Department Team**	**Problem Solving Team**
Data Sources	- State Assessment Schedule - District Assessment Calendar - SC Ready - Report Card Data - Kids Count Data - EOC Annual Report (with linked dashboards)	- District/School Assessment Calendar - SC Ready - Report Card Data - Kids Count Data - Universal Screener Data - Formative (Interim) Assessment Data	- District/School Assessment Calendar - Universal Screener Data - Formative (Interim) Assessment Data - Benchmarks/ Common Assessment Data	Formal and informal student data
Professional Development	The Courage to Lead: 10 Bold Moves for Transformational Change	- SC Standards - Innovation Station - Virtual SC PD	- K-3 LETRS - 2023 ELA Standards PD - Math Standards PD - SC Academic Standards for Health and Safety Education - Virtual SC PD	Problem Solving Series

Appendix F: Leadership Roles and Responsibilities

The district or school must gain the commitment of many people, including parents and families, classroom teachers, reading coaches, and administrators, to support MTSS. Leadership, instruction, curricular resources, universal screening, and professional learning opportunities must be identified and assessed and may require adjustments or modifications. Commitment and support from everyone in the educational system, especially district and school leadership, will determine whether MTSS is successful and sustained.

The rubric below might be used by districts and schools to assess where they are in the process of intervention planning and implementation.

Use the rating scale to indicate the current status of your district or school's intervention system.
0—Systems are inconsistent; students are not making adequate progress.
1—Systems are in some schools or classrooms, but this process is not clearly developed or fully implemented.
2—Systems are started; some important elements of the process are in place but needs some continued work.
3—Systems are working well, students are showing consistent progress, and district and schools are using innovative ideas to support staff, students, and families.

District Leadership	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**
Communicate a clear, common vision and belief for MTSS which expresses a movement from compliance to commitment to implementation, as well as awareness and support for the resources needed to successfully implement an MTSS framework.				
Support a common understanding that providing intervention is a process rather than a resource, with goals and expected outcomes shared by all stakeholders.				
Support opportunities for all stakeholders to have time to collaborate, communicate, and share resources that will result in all students reaching grade-level proficiency in academic skills and age-appropriate behaviors.				
Identify tools and data to use as part of monitoring implementation of MTSS.				
Provide guidance, technical assistance, and professional learning opportunities to build an understanding of screening assessments and their use, progress monitoring, and using data to inform instruction.				

District Leadership	0	1	2	3
Collect data from screening assessments and progress-monitoring tools and use these data to guide implementation at all levels.				
Identify fiscal resources and determine budget allocations in support of high-quality instruction.				
Encourage and advocate for the use of and access to appropriate technology in support of instruction provided by educators.				
Provide professional learning opportunities for district and school leadership teams.				
Build partnerships and collaborate with stakeholders.				
Guide the reporting of data to the State Department of Education.				
Guide and support schools as they partner with families and communities.				

School Leadership	0	1	2	3
Create and support a common vision and practice for MTSS that expresses a movement from compliance to commitment to implementation, as well as support for the resources needed to successfully implement an MTSS framework.				
Provide opportunities for all stakeholders to have time to collaborate, communicate, and share resources that will result in all students reaching grade-level proficiency in academic skills and age-appropriate behaviors.				
Align and allocate school-level resources to support student progress.				
Encourage the use of and access to appropriate technology in support of instruction provided by educators.				
Define and maintain high expectations for all students and staff.				
Facilitate a positive school climate and culture.				
Facilitate professional learning communities that are focused on assessment and instruction, building a toolkit of interventions that are available to all personnel.				
Identify and support the school intervention team.				

School Leadership	0	1	2	3
Strengthen and build relationships and communication channels with parents and families and community partners.				

School Intervention Teams	0	1	2	3
Analyze academic and/or behavioral data to identify students that are not reaching grade-level proficiency and may be in need of interventions.				
Develop and monitor student intervention plans.				
Support the fidelity of intervention services based on determined data points by using universal-screening and progress-monitoring tools.				
Assist in the determination of students identified as needing intensive interventions.				
Monitor the connections between classroom instruction and other interventions.				
Establish, review, and update processes that support intervention including resources, scheduling of uninterrupted instructional time, and professional learning opportunities that support assessment and instruction.				
Communicate student progress toward meeting grade-level standards to all stakeholders.				
Utilize related-service providers such as speech pathologists, occupational therapists, and school psychologists, when appropriate, to meet the needs of individual students.				

Reading Coaches	0	1	2	3
Support classroom teachers in the administration of formative assessments and other universal-screening and progress-monitoring tools.				
Support the analysis of data to identify interventions and adjust instruction.				
Communicate and collaborate with those educators providing interventions to ensure student progress toward meeting grade-level proficiency.				

Reading Coaches	0	1	2	3
Coordinate and provide ongoing, job-embedded, professional learning opportunities.				
Participate in ongoing professional learning opportunities.				

Reading Interventionist	0	1	2	3
Provide expert literacy instruction as a result of being a highly effective, specially trained educator.				
Work collaboratively with other educators to monitor and support readers not reaching grade-level proficiency.				
Collaborate closely with classroom teachers co-planning and co-teaching to support assessment, progress monitoring, individualized instruction, and the use of data to inform instruction.				
Participate in ongoing professional learning opportunities and document ways this impacts Tier III instruction.				
Focus on instruction and assessment of students rather than being assigned administrative duties.				
Provide support to parents and families as part of the intervention process.				

Classroom Teachers	0	1	2	3
Understand that high-quality classroom instruction is the foundation of MTSS.				
Provide high-quality instruction, including reading and writing development.				
Analyze and interpret data in order to develop and deliver appropriate instruction and supplemental interventions.				
Communicate and collaborate with those educators providing interventions to ensure student progress toward meeting grade-level proficiency and behavior goals.				
Participate as a member of the School Intervention Team.				
Utilize classroom structures that support the needs of all learners.				

Special Education Teachers	0	1	2	3
Understand that high-quality classroom instruction is the foundation for all students.				
Work collaboratively with other educators to monitor and support students not reaching grade-level proficiency.				
Share expertise and collaborate with classroom teachers to support assessment, progress monitoring, individualized instruction, and the use of date to inform instruction.				
Analyze and interpret data in order to develop and deliver appropriate instruction and supplemental interventions.				
Participate as a member of the School Intervention Team.				

Guidance Counselors	0	1	2	3
Provide all students with a standards-based school counseling core curriculum to address universal academic, career, and social emotional development.				
Analyze academic, career, and social emotional development data to identify struggling students.				
Identify and collaborate on research-based intervention strategies implemented by school staff.				
Evaluate academic and behavioral progress after interventions, and revise interventions as appropriate.				
Refer to school and community services as appropriate.				
Collaborate with administrators, other school professionals, community agencies, and families in the design and implementation of MTSS.				
Deliver individual and small group counseling (including direct instruction in social skills).				

School Psychologists	0	1	2	3
Help teams use data to inform the selection and implementation of interventions to meet specific student needs.				

School Psychologists	0	1	2	3
Coordinate and help school and district leaders interpret data collected within MTSS. Help with the effective, coordinated use of data that informs instruction, student and school outcomes, and school accountability.				
Collaborate with staff to provide school-wide instruction in anti-bullying strategies, self-advocacy, conflict resolution, stress management, problem solving, and other areas that promote social skills and mental and behavioral health.				
Collaborate with teachers and school leaders to implement universal, targeted, and intensive academic and behavioral support programs using evidence-based practices.				

Speech/Language Pathologists	0	1	2	3
Participate in problem-solving teams with classroom teachers to assist with identifying and outlining potential solutions.				
Collaborate with classroom teachers to provide strategies to support language-based skills.				
Consult with classroom teachers, and provide support to students, parents, and families as part of MTSS.				
Provide professional consultation and development in the language areas for literacy to include phonological awareness, vocabulary, morphology, sentence structure (syntax), pragmatics, and narrative development.				

Paraprofessionals	0	1	2	3
Provide support to highly effective teachers to enable them to provide high quality instruction and supplemental and intensive interventions for students.				
Provide classroom support so that release time can be provided for classroom teachers and grade-level teams to collaborate.				

Family and Community Partners	0	1	2	3
Support learning opportunities outside of the school day.				
Partner with districts and schools to support increasing the volume of reading outside the school day.				

Family and Community Partners	0	1	2	3
Participate in school and district events.				
Provide financial and human resources in support of learning.				

Appendix G: Scheduling Considerations for District and School Leaders

Below are sample master schedules that include dedicated time for intervention and enrichment.

Figure 11 reflects the Centers Approach, in which there is a long block of time for core ELA instruction that includes the Intervention/enrichment period. Services are provided by the most qualified personnel, including the classroom teacher and other school personnel within the classroom. This model has the advantage of 1) eliminating the time for students to move to other spaces and 2) providing the potential for greater collaboration amongst classroom teachers and specialists (MDESE, *n.d.*).

Figure 11. *Sample Elementary School Schedule: Centers Approach*

STUDENTS								
45 Minute Blocks	8:30-9:15	9:15-10:00	10:00-10:45	10:45-11:30	11:30-12:15	12:15-1:00	1:00-1:45	1:45-2:30
K	Integrated Core Instruction - ELA		I/E	Lunch/ Recess	Integrated Core Instruction Math		Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI
1	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		Recess/ Lunch	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Integrated Core Instruction Math	
2	Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		I/E	Integrated Core Instruction SCI	Recess/ Lunch	Integrated Core Instruction Math	
3	Integrated Core Instruction Math		Integrated Core Instruction: ELA		I/E	Lunch/ Recess	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Specials Educator Planning/ Team
4	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Integrated Core Instruction - Math		Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Lunch/ Recess	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		I/E
5	Integrated Core Instruction Math		Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Recess/ Lunch	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction ELA	
EDUCATORS								
Specials	Gr. 2		Gr. 5	Gr. 4		Gr. 1	K	Gr. 3
Specialists	Gr. 1		K	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 5		Gr. 4
Content Educators	Planning Gr. 2		Planning Gr. 5	Planning Gr. 4		Planning Gr. 1	Planning Gr. K	Planning Gr. 3
Lunch				K, 1	4, 5, Specials	2, 3	Specialists	

Note. I/E=Intervention/Enrichment. Source: *Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.* (*n.d.*) *MTSS Quick Reference Guide: Scheduling within a Tiered System of Support: Elementary School.*

Figure 12 reflects a Re-Grouping Approach, with two 90-minute blocks of time dedicated to ELA/Literacy and mathematics. Intervention and enrichment activities are provided during an additional 45-minute block. All students in each grade level are combined intervention and enrichment, allowing for a greater variety of groupings. The students move to different locations around the school and receive intervention or enrichment services from the most qualified school personnel, including their classroom teachers (MDESE, *n.d.*).

Figure 12. *Sample Elementary Schedule: Re-Grouping Approach*

STUDENTS								
45 Minute Blocks	8:30-9:15	9:15-10:00	10:00-10:45	10:45-11:30	11:30-12:15	12:15-1:00	1:00-1:45	1:45-2:30
K	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		I/E	Recess/ Lunch	Integrated Core Instruction Math		Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI
1	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Lunch/ Recess	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction Math	
2	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	I/E	Lunch/ Recess	Integrated Core Instruction Math		Specials Educator Planning/ Team
3	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Specials/ Educator Planning/ Team	Recess / Lunch	Integrated Core Instruction Math		I/E
4	Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Lunch/ Recess	Integrated Core Instruction Math	
5	Specials Educator Planning	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Recess / Lunch	Integrated Core Instruction Math	
EDUCATORS								
Specials	Gr. 5		Gr. 1	Gr. 3	Gr. 4		K	Gr. 2
Specialists	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	K	Gr. 2		Gr. 1	As needed in classrooms or with individual/ small groups of students	Gr. 3
Lunch				K, 1	2, 3, Specialists	4, 5, Specials		

Note. I/E=Intervention/Enrichment. Source: *Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.* (*n.d.*) *MTSS Quick Reference Guide: Scheduling within a Tiered System of Support: Elementary School.*

Figure 13: *Sample middle school (grades 5-8) schedule with recess and WIN block*

Period	Length	Time	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Period 1	50 min	8:08 - 8:58	CORE	CORE	IA	CORE
Period 2	50 min	8:58 - 9:48	CORE	CORE	CORE	IA
Period 3	50 min	9:48 - 10:38	IA	IA	CORE	CORE
Period 4/Lunch	77 min	10:38 - 11:55	Recess (10:38 -10:50)	Recess (10:38 -10:50)	WIN (50 min) (10:38 - 11:28)	WIN (50 min) (10:38 - 11:28)
			Lunch (10:50 - 11:15)	Lunch (10:50 - 11:15)		
			Win (40 min) (11:15 - 11:55)	Win (40 min) (11:15 - 11:55)	Lunch (11:28 - 11:55)	Lunch (11:28 - 11:55)
Period 5	50 min	11:55 - 12:45	CORE	CORE	IA	IA
Period 6	50 min	12:45 - 1:35	CORE	IA	CORE	CORE
Period 7	50 min	1:35 - 2:25	IA	CORE	CORE	CORE

Note. Source: Durrance, S. (2023). Implementing MTSS in Secondary Schools: Challenges and Strategies.

Figure 14. *Sample High school schedule with four class blocks and 50-minute lunch and intervention block*

Teacher Arrival	7:40
1st Block	8:30 – 9:53
2nd Block	10:00 – 11:23
Half-Time/Lunch	1st Half: 11:25 – 11:50
Half-Time/Lunch	2nd Half: 11:50 – 12:15
3rd Block	12:22 – 1:45
4th Block	1:52 – 3:15
Teacher Departure	3:30

Note. Source: Adapted from Durrance, S. (2023). Implementing MTSS in Secondary Schools: Challenges and Strategies.

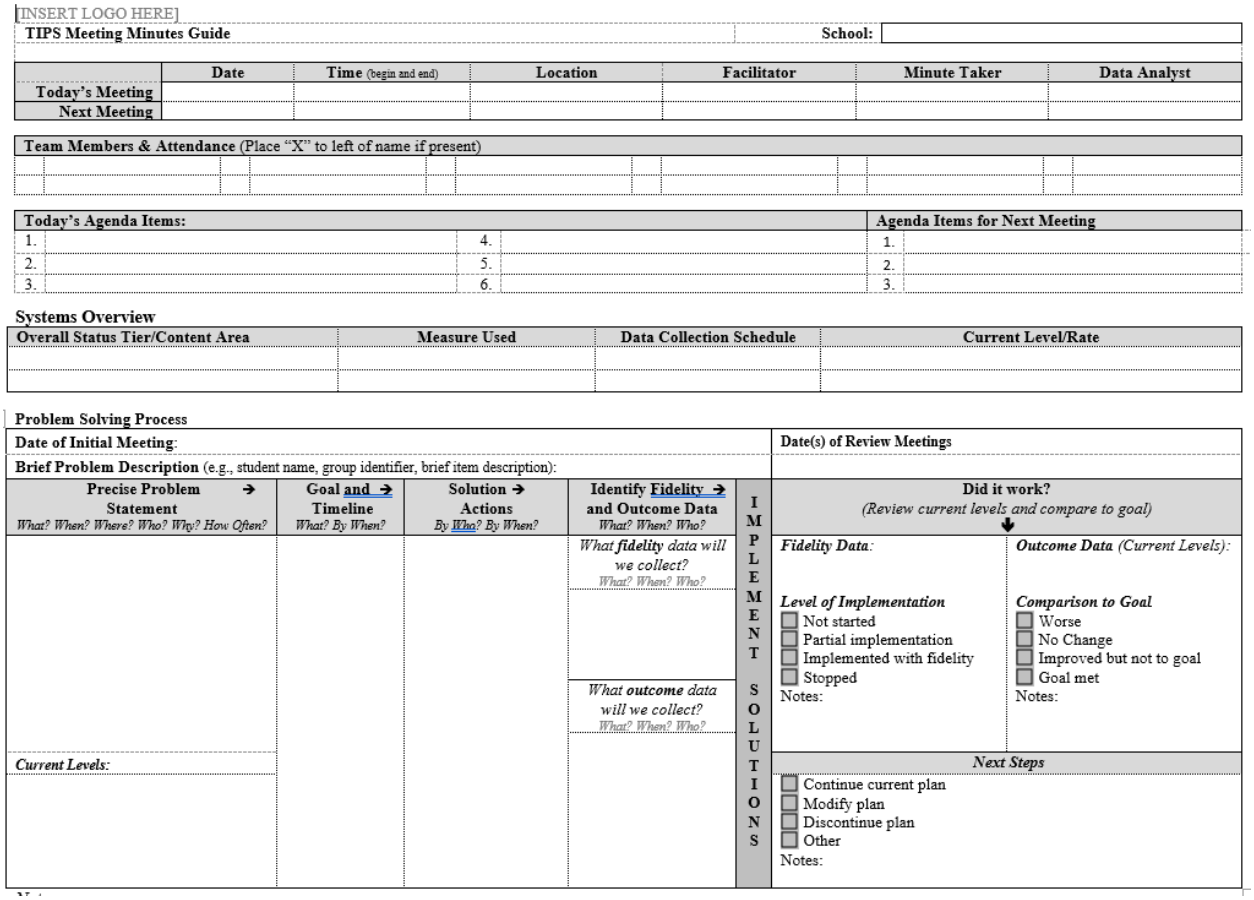
The SCDE recommends that students identified as needing additional instructional support receive multiple sessions per week consisting of 30 minutes of Tier II and/or Tier III intervention time per session. This is in addition to the 90–minute block of high-quality core instruction provided for all students.

This *Master Scheduling Tool* can help create a schedule that includes intervention time (SWIFT Education Center, 2017).

Appendix H: Sample Data Meeting Minutes Form

The SCDE recommends that all school and district data teams adopt a data analysis protocol and form to ensure meetings are focused on student needs. One option is the Team Initiated Problem Solving (TIPS) meeting minutes template (sample below).

Figure 15. *Sample of TIPS Meeting Minutes Template*



[INSERT LOGO HERE]

TIPS Meeting Minutes Guide | **School:**

	Date	Time (begin and end)	Location	Facilitator	Minute Taker	Data Analyst
Today's Meeting						
Next Meeting						

Team Members & Attendance (Place "X" to left of name if present)

Today's Agenda Items:				Agenda Items for Next Meeting	
1.		4.		1.	
2.		5.		2.	
3.		6.		3.	

Systems Overview

Overall Status Tier/Content Area	Measure Used	Data Collection Schedule	Current Level/Rate

Problem Solving Process

Date of Initial Meeting:

Brief Problem Description (e.g., student name, group identifier, brief item description):

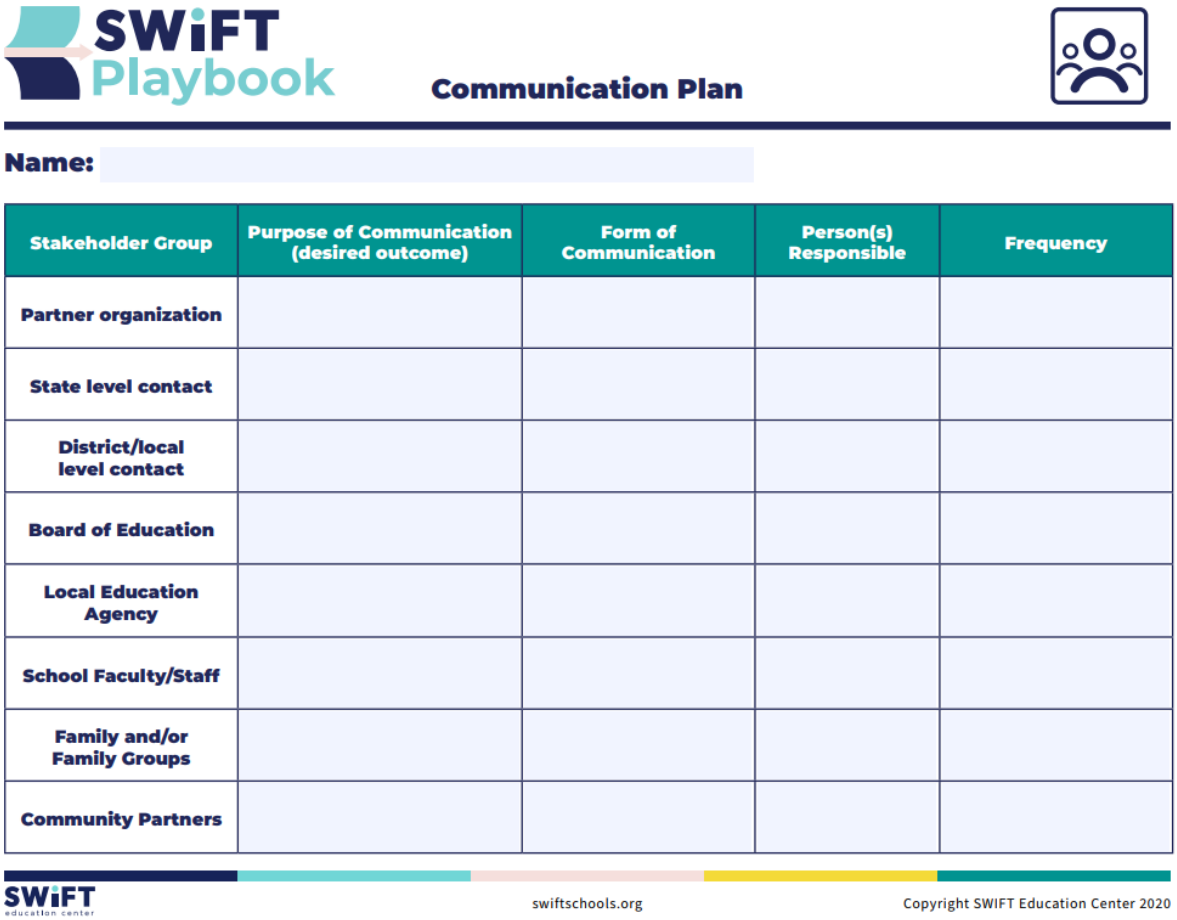
Date(s) of Review Meetings

Precise Problem Statement → *What? When? Where? Who? Why? How Often?*	Goal and Timeline → *What? By When?*	Solution Actions → *By Who? By When?*	Identify Fidelity and Outcome Data → *What? When? Who?*	IMPLEMENT SOLUTIONS	Did it work? *(Review current levels and compare to goal)*
			*What **fidelity** data will we collect? What? When? Who?*		***Fidelity Data**:* ***Level of Implementation*** ☐ Not started ☐ Partial implementation ☐ Implemented with fidelity ☐ Stopped Notes:
			*What **outcome** data will we collect? What? When? Who?*		***Outcome Data** (Current Levels):* ***Comparison to Goal*** ☐ Worse ☐ No Change ☐ Improved but not to goal ☐ Goal met Notes:
Current Levels:					***Next Steps*** ☐ Continue current plan ☐ Modify plan ☐ Discontinue plan ☐ Other Notes:

Note. Source: Todd, A. W., Newton, J. S., Horner, R., Algozzine, B., & Algozzine, K. M. (2015). *TIPS 2 Meeting Minutes Template/Form.*

The form is useful for keeping the conversation focused on problem solving. Meeting minutes serve as documentation and guidance for decisions made during problem-solving and/or coordination/planning team meetings. This form includes sections and prompts to guide users in recording relevant, accurate, and succinct information across the following areas: demographics, systems status update, problem solving, action planning, evaluation, and housekeeping items.

Figure 16. *Sample Communication Plan*



SWiFT Playbook

Communication Plan

Name:

Stakeholder Group	Purpose of Communication (desired outcome)	Form of Communication	Person(s) Responsible	Frequency
Partner organization				
State level contact				
District/local level contact				
Board of Education				
Local Education Agency				
School Faculty/Staff				
Family and/or Family Groups				
Community Partners				

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Note. Source: SWIFT Education Center. (2020). *Communication Plan.*

Appendix J: MTSS and Multilingual Learners (MLs)

Multilingual Learner Program Teams (MLPT) should consider the following general guidelines in determining MTSS support for Multilingual Learners (MLs) beyond Tier I instruction with all appropriate accommodations and modifications:

- Create a MLPT to review multiple points of data and determine the need for any additional services and/or interventions for an ML.
- Closely observe an individual ML's "true peers," those with similar cultural backgrounds, who have been learning English for similar amounts of time, who have similar levels of formal education in their native languages, and who receive similar Multilingual Learner Program (MLP) services.
- Always use multiple points of data to determine the need for any additional services for MLs. For example, qualitative data from the MLPT, time exposed to the English language and high-quality instruction, acclimation to the school setting, the literacy level of native language (L1), prior education and educational background, evidence of MLP services with appropriate accommodations implemented with fidelity.
- Consider whether it is in the student's best interest to receive Tier II or III interventions in addition to MLP support during the school day from different education professionals.
- Always involve either the Multilingual Learner Program Specialist (MLPS)/teacher or the district Title III/Multilingual Learner Program Coordinator (MLPC) in final decisions involving MTSS Tier II or III interventions.

It is critical to ensure that MLs have access to the general education curriculum and appropriate MLP supports based on language development levels.

SC Tier I (Universal) Instruction for Multilingual Learners

Tier 1 is...	Tier 1 is not...
direct instructional services for multilingual learners through the Multilingual Learner Program;	intervention services provided via the Multilingual Learner Program;
appropriate, effective, and research-based core instruction for all students (reading, writing, math, wellness);	core instruction in which some students are successful and others are not, and this is perceived as the reality;
a process that includes using formal, universal screening that occurs at least three times a year, focusing on specific skills, strategies, and content knowledge;	in-class assessments that focus primarily on what is taught rather than what students know and are able to do;

a process that includes using formal and informal progress monitoring on an ongoing and continuous basis;	only about determining student progress every nine weeks and at the end of the school year;
instruction with specific adaptations and modifications based on assessment and progress monitoring;	one-size-fits-all instruction;
targeted, intense instructional support within the classroom for all students who may have difficulty;	reliance on other instructional support staff (e.g., special education and MLP staff) to determine a student's needs and to provide remediation;
a variety of flexible, grouping configurations for instructional practice; and/or	whole class instruction, or fixed instructional groups consisting of students who are high, average, and low achievers; and/or
a team approach with teachers, administrators, and parents working collaboratively.	teachers who work primarily on their own.

An effective data-based decision-making system for MLs includes the following:

1. Screening and progress-monitoring measures with established validity and reliability with MLs.
2. Educator knowledge and use of students' language proficiency data when interpreting student achievement data.
3. Regular review of student data for the purposes of planning instruction.
4. Collaborative evaluation of student progress and instructional planning within all tiers of instruction.

When a collaborative problem-solving team considers the need for Tier II strategic or supplemental interventions for a multilingual learner, the team should consider the following
questions:

1. Have multilingual learners had sufficient opportunity to learn (quality of instruction and reasonable time), with consideration of educational background?
2. Does Tier I instruction reflect high-quality, differentiated best practices where the language and literacy teaching is appropriately scaffolded?
3. Are meaningful opportunities for students to practice in the four language domain (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) implemented?

4. Are our teachers respectful and supportive of multilingual learner students' cultures and language learning needs, and culturally relevant principles applied to instruction and assessment?
5. Are we committed to using only research and evidence-based interventions?
6. Have appropriate accommodations been implemented with fidelity?
7. How will we determine the fidelity of implementation (e.g., data-driven decisions)
8. Prior to Tier II considerations, has collaboration taken place between specialists in language acquisition and/or other related school staff?

SC Tier II Interventions for Multilingual Learners

Tier II is…	**Tier II is not…**
supplemental instruction, in addition to the Multilingual Learner Program;	intervention services provided via the Multilingual Learner Program;
supplemental instruction, in addition to the core grade level instruction;	a replacement of the core curriculum; (Note: If students are not getting the core curriculum, they will only fall further behind.)
focused and targeted to specific skills in small groups that are associated with broader academic and behavioral success;	time to reteach an academic standard(s) or behavioral strategy that students did not master; (Note: These students need to receive differentiated instruction in Tier I.)
designed for students who are not making adequate progress on core skills that are associated with broader academic and behavioral success;	designed for students who did not master a specific standard or behavioral strategy; (Note: These students need to receive differentiated instruction in Tier I.)
explicit instruction that emphasizes key instructional features we know to be important for multilingual learners: opportunities for developing and practicing oral language, key vocabulary emphasis, interaction, learning strategy instruction, etc.; and/or	a replacement for Multilingual Learner Program services; and/or

When collaborative problem-solving teams discuss the need for intensive Tier III intervention for a multilingual learner, the team should consider the following questions:

1. Are we giving our multilingual learners sufficient time, adjusted interventions, and supports in Tier II before considering Tier III?
2. Are the teachers providing the Tier II interventions highly qualified in their content areas and have educator knowledge of the second-language acquisition process and the role of language proficiency?
3. Is the intervention using information based on ML's proficiency level and co-developed with the support of an MLPS/teacher?
4. Is the intervention differentiated, high-quality language and literacy instruction with varying levels of intensity?
5. Is the intervention research-based or evidence-based? For more information on research based/evidenced-based interventions, visit the following:
    1. National Center on Intensive Intervention.
    2. IRIS modules:
        1. Evidence-Based Practices (Part 1): Identifying and Selecting a Practice or Program and Evidence-Based Practices
        2. Evidence-Based Practices (Part 2): Implementing a Practice or Program with Fidelity
        3. Evidence-Based Practices (Part 3): Evaluating Learner Outcomes and Fidelity
6. Are there criteria for successful responses to the intervention, such as rate and amount of growth and/or time in Tier II?
7. Have decisions been data-informed and appropriate for instructional adjustments?
8. Does the intervention lay out a plan for implementation, and is it captured somewhere to review if it was delivered as it was intended (e.g., fidelity of implementation)?
9. Are the progress monitoring probes appropriate for multilingual learners? Do they contain a language bias that may be affecting the data?
10. Have culture and specific language learning needs been considered?
11. Has the multidisciplinary team considered queries in the guidance from the South Carolina Standards for Evaluation and Eligibility Determination (SEED)?

SC Tier III Interventions for Multilingual Learners

Tier III is...	Tier III is not...
direct instructional services for multilingual learners;	intervention services provided via the

	Multilingual Learner Program;
intensive instruction that promotes learning and remediates skill deficits targeted to a child's individualized needs. It is more intensive than Tier II. It is instruction that is: • systematic and explicit with many opportunities for student participation and practice of desired skill; • characterized by increased frequency of targeted instruction in even smaller homogenous groups provided by teachers trained in the specific intervention instruction;	simply more of the same instruction students receive in the core;
intended for a specific duration of time using frequent progress monitoring to inform ongoing decisions about the effectiveness of intervention and placement;	an indefinite Tier III intervention;
part of the MTSS framework which allows for fluid movement between tiers depending on the documented need for support; and/or (Note: Students continue to receive Tier I core instruction for most of the school day even if they receive intensive Tier III intervention in small groups outside of the general education classroom.)	a way to remove challenging students from general education or a direct pathway to special education; and/or
data from intensive intervention can be used to support the identification as a child with a learning disability. The data can show patterns of strengths and weaknesses over time. This data will provide evidence that the student, having been provided evidence-based instruction for multilingual learners, targeted at specific skill deficits by a teacher with expertise in literacy and English language development, may need special education services due to a learning disability.	special education, but intensive general education intervention.

Additional Resources:

- MTSS for ELs: Practice Guides. A collection of resources from Project ELITE (English Learner Institute for Teaching and Excellence) at the University of Texas at Austin (2024).
- MTSS for ELs: Tools A collection of teaching tools for English learners curated by MTSS for ELs (2024).

- Multitiered Instructional Systems for MLs. An introductory brief describing the work of three model demonstration projects as they implement multi tiered instructional models for English learners with and without disabilities in grades 3 to 5 (Project ELITE^2, Project ELLIPSES, & Project LEE, 2018).
- Helping English Language Learners Succeed with a Multitiered System of Support (MTSS). An introduction to what MTSS means for English language learners (ELLs) including guidelines for identifying effective interventions for ELLs who need extra support (Rinaldi, 2018).

Appendix K: MTSS and Special Education

Overview

MTSS is *not* a special education initiative, but rather a framework for providing high-quality instruction delivered by highly effective educators who understand and can implement instruction to support academics and behavior. All students, including students with disabilities, may participate in the tiered support within an MTSS framework. Decisions regarding whether a student's participation is appropriate must consider a variety of data and multiple factors and must be made on an individual basis.

Students who are identified as having a disability and needing special education services receive specialized instruction, services, and supports designed to address the students' individual and unique needs, to benefit from and access their education programs, and progress in the general curriculum. The fact that a student has an individualized education programs (IEPs) does not prevent IEP teams from determining students with disabilities may also benefit from participating in general education interventions. An IEP team may determine the provision of tiered interventions is appropriate for a student with a disability as a means of receiving additional support in an area of an identified disability or to address areas of concern where a disability is not suspected.

However, as soon as the problem-solving team or the IEP team suspects a student, involved in a tiered intervention process who has not previously been identified as having a disability may have a disability, or suspects a student may have disabilities in additional areas, the problem-solving team is required to refer the student for an initial or reevaluation. The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) regulations specifically states, "The use of RTI strategies cannot be used to delay or deny the provision of a full and individual evaluation, pursuant to 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.304 – 300.311, to a child suspected of having a disability under 34 C.F.R. § 300.8."

Data-Based Evaluation and Problem Solving

All students, including students with disabilities, should be included in universal screening and schoolwide assessments. IEP teams, however, have the ability to determine how students with disabilities will participate and whether certain accommodations and modifications are necessary for the students' participation. This data is useful for leadership teams to examine the subgroup's performance as a whole and to monitor the progress of individual students. When a majority of students with disabilities are not making expected progress, considering their unique needs, the school team should examine programming. Problem-solving teams should review their current curriculum, instructional delivery methods, professional development needs, and environments for learning to determine the changes needed. School problem solving teams should collaborate with special education personnel for support and partners in this process.

Universal screening data, schoolwide assessment data, and a variety of data from the implementation of tiered interventions may be used to monitor the performance of individual students. This data should be considered to monitor whether students are responding to interventions, during the initial evaluation and/or reevaluation process for students suspected or identified as having disabilities, in writing the present level of performance portion of IEPs that describe the strengths and needs of students, and to inform decision-making regarding possible changes to an individual student's educational program.

For more information, visit the *Special Education Services Webpage* on the SCDE website.