

## **Tiered Instruction and Intervention**

*Rather than devoting extensive resources to finding out whether students “have” disabilities, we should devote those resources to assessing students’ exact instructional needs using models like Response-to-Intervention. Schools will need to provide this instruction through collaboration between general and special education personnel to ensure that all students continue to have full access to the general education curriculum. Let’s teach the children what they need to know.*  
(Harry and Klingner, 2007)

### **Background**

In recent years, schools and school districts all over America have begun to implement a model of instruction commonly known as RtI (Response to Intervention). RtI originated with the reauthorization of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) in 2004. One of the revisions in IDEA changed the law about identifying children with specific learning disabilities. A summary of the “RtI statute” in IDEA 2004 includes the following changes:

- A local educational agency shall not be required to take into consideration whether a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability.
- In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedure.
- Up to 15% of federal special education funds may be used in a way that enables struggling students to benefit from special education services without being identified as having special needs.

The term “Response to Intervention,” originated with the wording of the second bullet (above) and refers to the alternate method of determining if a child has a specific learning disability. This process requires regular assessment, targeted intervention, and post-assessment. A child’s documented progress, or lack thereof is a component of the evaluation process. RtI is designed as early intervention to prevent long-term academic failure.

### **Tiered Instruction and Intervention**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) underscores the importance of high quality, research-based instruction for all students, differentiated to meet a broad range of student needs. This has resulted in a model of tiered instruction and intervention that includes high quality classroom instruction as the first tier, and RtI as the second and third tiers. The RtI process varies from place to place, and there are many different models; however it is most commonly depicted as a 3 tiered model. (See page 3 for a description of the three tiers.)

### **The Massachusetts System of Tiered Instruction**

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has developed initial guidance to assist districts in establishing systems of tiered instruction. The Massachusetts model assumes a school schedule that is designed to provide adequate learning time for all students in core subjects. For students not yet on track to proficiency in English language arts or mathematics, the school provides additional time and support for individualized instruction through tiered instruction, a data-driven approach to prevention, early detection, and support for students who experience learning or behavioral challenges, including but not limited to students with disabilities and English language learners.

The six components essential to the success of a tiered instruction model are:

- flexible tiers
- high-quality core curriculum and instruction implemented with fidelity
- research-based academic interventions and assessment practices
- research-based behavioral interventions and supports
- universal screening and progress-monitoring
- collaboration and communication between educators and parents

When developing the components, the specific characteristics of the school's student population, such as culture and English proficiency, are factored into the development of the model to ensure that the system is responsive to the full range of students. The model of flexible tiers provides students with increasing levels of support in order to match the instructional support and intensity with the specifics and severity of a student's need. (*Tiered Instruction: Grounding Document and Self-Assessment Instrument*, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Working Draft as of 6/01/10)

### **Tiered Instruction and Intervention in Newton Public Schools**

Newton Public Schools are developing and implementing TII/RtI in each school. The district will provide a model for tiered instruction and intervention; however some components of the model will be flexible to allow for the different school sizes, student needs, and personnel in each school. In order to place the emphasis on standards-based instruction, rather than solely on intervention, this system is referred to as **Tiered Instruction and Intervention**.

### **How does Tiered Instruction and Intervention relate to PLCs?**

The essential characteristics of a professional learning community are perfectly aligned with the fundamental elements of RtI. PLCs are based on 3 big ideas: focus on learning; collaborative culture; and focus on results. Schools which function as PLCs guide their work with four (in Newton, five) key questions: If we believe that all students can learn—What is it we expect our students to learn? How will we know when they have learned it? How will we respond when they don't learn it? How will we respond when they already know it? How will we teach it so all students learn it? These big ideas and key questions of the PLC serve as guides for implementing tiered instruction and RtI.

## **Typical Three Tiered Model of Tiered Instruction and Intervention**

### Tier 1

Core instruction is designed and differentiated to provide for the majority of students' needs and consists of three elements:

- Research-based core instructional programs provided by the general education teacher
- Progress monitoring of students through curriculum-based measurement
- Analysis of the progress monitoring results to determine which students are at risk and require more intense instructional support.

This first level of instruction is designed to serve *all* students with well-supported, evidence-based instructional programs and the continual monitoring of students' progress. Results of the progress monitoring are reviewed periodically to determine which students are failing to make adequate progress and qualify for Tier 2 intervention. 80%-90% of students will achieve established benchmarks within Tier I.

### Tier 2

Instruction starts as soon as possible after students have been identified as falling behind grade expectations through progress monitoring. Tier II consists of targeted services and interventions, usually in small group settings, and provided in addition to instruction in the general curriculum. Progress is monitored more closely, and the interventions usually last between six to ten weeks. At the end of the designated intervention, depending on student progress a student may a) discontinue Tier 2, or b) receive another round of Tier 2 if he/she is achieving progress but still remains behind his or her grade-level expectations or c) move to more intensive intervention in Tier 3.

### Tier 3

In order to meet the needs of students whose core instruction and supplemental instruction has not provided sufficient support for them to show adequate progress, Tier 3 provides: (a) increased time for instruction, (b) smaller group size or one-to-one intervention, and (c) the duration of instruction may be increased. Tier 3 instruction may or may not be special education, however, eligibility for specialized educational services under IDEA may also be considered at this point.