
Component I: A Systemic and Comprehensive Approach

Careful examination of research on systemic change shows significant relationships between systemic organization and capacity and student achievement (Huie, Buttram, Deviney, Murphy & Ramos, 2004). In addition, real and enduring change is complex and requires commitment and creative thinking (Fullan, 1997; Senge, et al., 1999, 2000).

Operating Assumptions: All of the Guiding Principles apply to this component.

Key Definitions: Refer to the Glossary for the following terms:
Systemic and Comprehensive Approach
Distributed Leadership

The Significance of a Systemic and Comprehensive Approach

Several decades of research has demonstrated that school improvement and change in instructional practice can only be truly effective and sustainable when they occur within a systemic and comprehensive framework. Learning outcomes result from a complex set of interdependent activities, teachers, and settings. Therefore, although individual educators can and do make a difference, the impact is sometimes lost over time (or even quite quickly) when students move to other grades and/or require supplemental instruction or intervention (Vermont Department of Education, 2009; Lipson, Mosenthal, Mekkelsen & Russ, 2004; Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Snow, et al, 1991).

Characteristics of Schools with Effective Systemic and Comprehensive Approaches

Several actions and attributes of effective systems provide direction for school improvement. Leadership will be required at every level if schools/districts are to realize their potential for all students. As Heifetz and Linsky (2002) have noted, there are both technical problems and adaptive problems. Technical problems can often be solved with existing expertise and/or structures. However, adaptive problems often involve personal and interpersonal change, adjustment and developing expertise. Results from a diverse range of studies suggest that the following characteristics of effective schools are evident and important in negotiating change and improvement:

- strong and distributed leadership at all levels of the system with a clear focus and shared vision;
- self-assessment and consideration of roles and responsibilities;
- sustained focus over time, building on existing strengths and examining areas for growth;
- attention to practical matters that create greater learning opportunities – particularly school climate and scheduling;
- careful assessment and allocation of resources – people, time, and materials; and
- articulation and alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Additional essential elements such as effective assessment and use of data, professional development/learning, and family engagement are described in other sections of this Field Guide.

A SYSTEMIC AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Essential Elements of a Systemic and Comprehensive Approach to MTSS-RtII

It is important to avoid a “haphazard approach” to RtII by building competency throughout the entire system (Huie et al., 2004). Success rests on a systemic approach that unifies general and special education in deliberate, intentional, ongoing collaboration to improve outcomes for all students. Through effective collaboration and data-driven conversations, educators can:

- develop coherent and consistent curriculum and behavior practices that guide instruction and intervention to improve outcomes for all students;
- reduce and eliminate disjointed programs across general, remedial, and special education;
- focus on prevention and reduce unnecessary student failure;
- provide more effective instruction for all students and reduce the number of students in special education; and
- pool resources and share expertise in order to meet shared goals for instruction and assessment.

As well, the specific details of a multi-tiered system of RtII need to be appropriate for the particular school/district and take into account leadership, expertise, the student population, expectations of the community, and available resources (International Reading Association, 2010). Despite considerable school-effectiveness research supporting a context-specific approach, some schools believe that there are legal requirements attached to RtII that limit their options. Fortunately, the language in IDEA intentionally provides latitude to LEAs in this regard and subsequent guidance documents like this one provide even stronger support for this concept. Schools and districts can and should develop and/or adopt an approach that best matches their needs and resources, while still honoring the Guiding Principles (see page 4).

A Systemic Comprehensive Approach is the foundation for all of the other components (see Figure 1 for a visual representation of the components of Vermont’s Multi-tiered System of Supports for RtII). It supports all of the other work and, without it, the work is not likely to be successful. It is shown in the middle, uniting the other 4 components, which are represented emanating from the systemic approach. They flow into each other and are all interrelated – success in one area affects success in another. For example, it is difficult to ensure “high-quality instruction and intervention that is responsive and differentiated” if the district/school has not developed or adopted a standards-based core curriculum that is vertically aligned and coordinated across contexts (general education, special education, etc.). Similarly, the development of a balanced assessment system cannot be the purview of individual teachers or grade levels. There are systems implications in each of the key elements of a multi-tiered system.

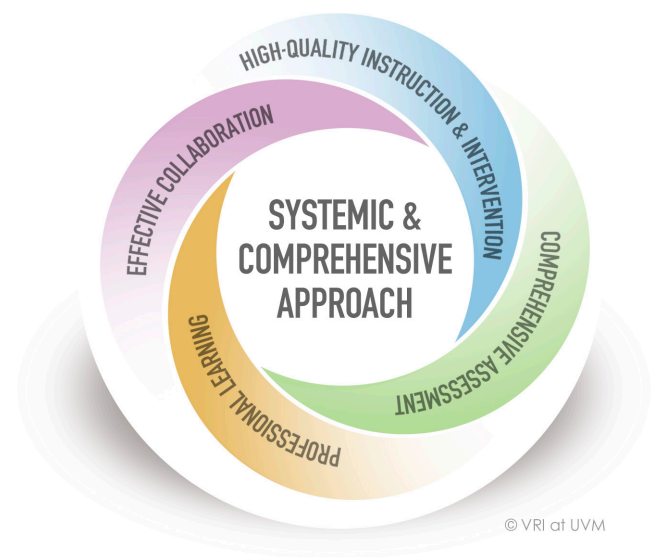


Figure 1. Components of Vermont’s MTSS for RtII

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To begin, schools should draw connections among continuous school improvement, the Guiding Principles and essential components of RtII, and the nature of their pre-existing and ongoing work. We refer you to the MTSS-RtII Self-Assessment Tool at www.vriuvm.org for specific details about critical attributes of a systemic approach.

Roles and Responsibilities within a Systemic Approach

Because of the systemic and comprehensive nature of the enterprise, specific attention must be given to the roles and responsibilities of individuals in a multi-tiered approach to RtII. MTSS-RtII involves many professional roles and responsibilities--some familiar and some less common in many schools/districts. Vermont schools have unique needs, contexts, resources, and talents. Schools/districts will need to decide who will be sharing responsibility for many aspects of a complex system.

Minimally, educators and administrators within a school/district have shared responsibilities to:

- develop a common framework within which to work and communicate, including a shared basic understanding of MTSS/RtII and its processes, and a common language to discuss RtII;
- measure and monitor the effectiveness and integrity of the MTSS/RtII approach or system;
- locate and employ the necessary resources to ensure that students make progress in the general education environment; and
- represent a range of perspectives in high stakes decisions for students.

These responsibilities are essential in order to effectively engage the expertise of all relevant school personnel and family members in an inquiry process to interpret data and plan action steps for how to intervene with individuals or groups of students.

The tool in Table 1 is designed to help schools recognize typical key responsibilities for implementation of MTSS-RtII and consider who will fill such roles and how. While it may not be all-inclusive, its purpose is to prompt schools to thoughtfully create a plan that aligns people with responsibilities, in a way that respects the school's unique culture, resources, and circumstances within a collaborative systemic approach.

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Table 1. MTSS-RtII Roles and Responsibilities Checklist

Date: _____ School: _____

Responsibilities	Resources/Roles	Notes
<p><i>What needs to be done?</i></p> <p>A. Establish and Monitor Culture and Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Assess the school’s collaborative culture and develop steps for improvement. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that all educators are committed to the concept that all students can learn and succeed. <input type="checkbox"/> Lead the development of a shared vision for RtII. <input type="checkbox"/> Design the local RtII multi-tiered model/plan. <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor alignment of implementation with vision, and whether modifications are needed. <p>B. Establish and Monitor Systemic Structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Design and monitor a balanced, comprehensive, purpose-driven assessment system. <input type="checkbox"/> Articulate core curricula. <input type="checkbox"/> Align curriculum, standards, instruction and assessment. <input type="checkbox"/> Adopt and monitor appropriate behavior support system. <input type="checkbox"/> Support development of problem-solving teams. (What teams are needed? For what purposes? Who should participate?) <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure time for RtII problem-solving teams to meet. <input type="checkbox"/> Serve on RtII problem-solving team. <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate and prioritize student concerns to teachers and RtII teams. 	<p><i>Who will be responsible for this? *</i></p>	<p><i>How? When? Other Notable Considerations?</i></p>

* **Specify:** Superintendent, Asst. Superintendent, Director of C/I, Assessment Coordinator, Director of Special Education, Principal, Classroom Teacher, Special Educator, Reading/Math/Behavior Specialist(s), Coach, ELL Specialist, Social Worker, School Psychologist, Parent/Family member, Student, Others

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Table 1. MTSS-RtII Roles and Responsibilities Checklist (cont'd)

Responsibilities	Resources/Roles	Notes
<p><i>What needs to be done?</i></p> <p>C. Acquire and Allocate Resources for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing focused and embedded professional learning; <input type="checkbox"/> High quality assessments, instruction, and intervention materials that support the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and students' individual needs; <input type="checkbox"/> Technology for data collection and analysis; <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the RtII process. <p>D. Implement and Use the Assessment System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Engage in ongoing collaboration in data collection and analysis to address small group and individual student needs. <input type="checkbox"/> Use data to inform instruction. <input type="checkbox"/> Use data to make decisions about tiered supports. <input type="checkbox"/> Store and manage assessment data and monitor integrity of data. <input type="checkbox"/> Examine trends and evaluate programs. <p>E. Ensure the Quality of Instruction and Intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Identify appropriate materials and approaches. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide instruction at Tiers I, II, III <input type="checkbox"/> Examine outcomes and make decisions for individuals and groups of students. <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss specific instructional practices. <input type="checkbox"/> Support innovation and a continuous improvement system. <p>F. Monitor the Collaborative System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate instruction and/or intervention program for individual students or groups. <input type="checkbox"/> Support interventions at the Tier I, Tier II & III level as appropriate. <input type="checkbox"/> Use effective systems of accountability through staff evaluation that is aligned with RtII principles and effective practices. 	<p><i>Who will be responsible for this? *</i></p>	<p><i>How? When? Other Notable Considerations?</i></p>

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Table 1. MTSS-RtII Roles and Responsibilities Checklist (cont'd)

Responsibilities	Resources/Roles	Notes
<p><i>What needs to be done?</i></p> <p>G. Home/School Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Maintain overall positive home-school relationships. <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate and collaborate regularly with parents about student's progress in the curriculum. <input type="checkbox"/> Help parents/families understand the RtII model and how it impacts their children. <input type="checkbox"/> Invite parents/families to participate in goal setting, intervention development, monitoring of progress, and evaluation of their child. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that parent input is integrated into each tier of intervention. <p>H. Professional Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Assess and prioritize professional learning/staff development for responsive teaching and differentiation. <input type="checkbox"/> Develop a multi-year Professional Learning Plan that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evidence-based intervention strategies for academics and behavior, • progress monitoring processes and procedures, • problem-solving methods to facilitate data-based, instructional decision-making, and professional collaboration skills. <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in quality, relevant professional learning opportunities. <input type="checkbox"/> Share successful and innovative practices. 	<p><i>Who will be responsible for this? *</i></p>	<p><i>How? When? Other Notable Considerations?</i></p>