
Component III: High-quality Instruction and Intervention

A multi-tiered system of RtII focuses first on ensuring that students are experiencing the highest-quality classroom instruction – instruction that is differentiated and responsive to diverse students and provides appropriate supports and feedback for both academic success and socially effective behavior.

Operating Assumptions:	Specifically refer to Guiding Principles #: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 10.
Key Definitions:	Refer to the Glossary for the following terms: <i>Intervention</i> <i>Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3</i> <i>Differentiated Instruction</i> <i>Evidence-based Instruction</i> <i>Integrity/Fidelity</i>

The Significance of High-quality Instruction and Intervention

We have known for decades that students' academic success starts with committed, knowledgeable educators and the highest quality classroom instruction, informed by research, and supported by a standards-based curriculum (IES Practice Guides for Reading and Mathematics, 2009a, 2009b; Readance & Barone, 1997; Riordon & Noyce, 2001; Rosenshine, 2012; Steedly, Dragoo, Arefeh & Luke, 2008; Williams et al., 2005). In addition, we know that improving students' social and behavior functioning often improves academic performance and vice versa. As with academic success, this requires a system of explicit and responsive teaching of behavioral expectations leading to potential gains in positive conduct, academic performance, and teacher-student interactions and reductions in office referrals and suspensions (Bui, Quirk, Almazan & Valenti, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2012). Recommendations for improving outcomes for students who are struggling in the area of behavior are, therefore, intertwined with improved instructional contexts (IES, 2008, 2009).

While contextual factors matter, there has always been considerable variability in student outcomes across schools—even when the contexts are quite similar. Historically, educational research and practice have focused attention first on how to change struggling students. Current emphasis, however, is on first ensuring that students experience the highest quality instruction – instruction that is differentiated and responsive to diverse students and provides appropriate support for both accelerated academic success and socially effective behavior.

HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION

Characteristics of High-quality Instruction and Intervention

Excellent, relevant research on teaching and learning has burgeoned over the past 5 decades. We know a great deal more about “what works” today than we did 50 years ago (What Works Clearinghouse, n.d.). Some behaviors, approaches and conditions appear to be important in all circumstances and across all grade levels. For example, explicit instruction of both word-level components and comprehension strategies has a positive effect on students’ learning (Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Reed, Wanzek & Vaughn, 2012; Scanlon, Anderson & Sweeney, 2010). At the same time, the idea of “best practice” has been refined so that we understand much more clearly that all approaches work with some students/teachers and none work with everyone (Bond & Dykstra, 1967/1997; Edmonds et al., 2009; Mathes, et al., 2005; Torgeson, et al., 2001; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008).

Classroom teachers and specialists often feel pressured to adopt specialized programs for struggling students. Issues of “program” and “approach” are hotly debated in many schools, sometimes limiting collaborative efforts. Studies that shed light on “what” instruction and “what” measures suggest there is not one approach that is essential for accelerating students’ reading achievement. Indeed, there is evidence that differing approaches can be equally successful as long as there is **expert teaching and careful attention to student progress** (D’Agostino & Murphy, 2004; Ehri, Dreyer, Flugman & Gross, 2007; Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004) (emphasis added). In every case, close attention to students’ development is required to realize the potential of any approach (Comer, 2005a) and to recognize that the developmental trajectory over the course of a student’s school career must respond to changing needs and abilities. Some approaches that work well for younger students are not as effective for older ones (Carnegie Corporation, 2009; Edmonds et al., 2009). At every level, student engagement is a critical factor educators must strive for to create a school culture that builds confidence, competence, self-regulation, and motivation (Comer, 2005b; Fisher & Frey, 2010).

A multi-tiered system of support depends on excellent classroom instruction, but it also anticipates that some students will struggle (or be likely to flounder), even when provided with good initial instruction (National Mathematics Advisory Panel, 2008). Both instruction and intervention require our close attention. We must be able to describe our instructional offerings and be clear about how interventions are addressing students’ needs. While it is not possible to provide a comprehensive description of all essential elements involved in high-quality instruction and intervention, in this section, we provide a brief list and a detailed Instruction/Intervention Matrix of Essential Elements (Table 4). As well, we refer you to additional resources.

Several key attributes of instruction in successful learning contexts are notable, since they seem to be important in all settings and with both younger and older students:

- provided by expert teachers with both pedagogical and content knowledge;
- informed by research evidence and responsive to specific student–teacher interactions;
- differentiated —informed by on-going, instructionally relevant assessment;
- involves both explicit instructional approaches and opportunities for independent or self- selected activity; and
- designed for and responsive to the learning needs of diverse students.

HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION

Essential Elements of High-quality Instruction and Intervention within MTSS-RtII

In order to organize thinking about the complex area of instruction and intervention, we invite you to think about 4 essential elements, each of which rests on 4 pillars. The four pillars that support all discussion of instruction and intervention are:

1. Multi-tiered instructional approach

A systemic approach that maximizes opportunities for all students and emphasizes prevention of learning and behavioral difficulties by layering increasingly-tailored instructional interventions and supports for both teachers and students.

2. Standards-based outcomes

Instruction and intervention are based on explicit outcomes that have been determined based on standards, the curriculum, and student needs.

3. Responsive decision-making

Teachers take responsibility for making instructional decisions that consider the child's developmental level and learning needs in order to maximize learning.

4. Access and equity

Students participate in high quality learning opportunities that are accessible, equitable, evidence based, and engaging.

These four pillars support **four essential elements**:

1. High expectations for all students and teachers

Teachers believe that all students can succeed academically and socially, given appropriate support.

2. Alignment and coordination of instruction across settings

Students experience instruction across settings and over time that is coherent, interrelated and designed to ensure comprehensive and balanced achievement and performance. Communication across grade levels and content areas is critical.

3. Differentiation to address learning differences and prevent learning difficulties

Formative assessment data are used to ensure that instruction and intervention are increasingly differentiated, tailored, and targeted in a tiered system designed to accelerate learning.

4. Intervention to prevent difficulties and/or accelerate learning

When needed, as evidenced by multiple on-going assessments, students experience "enhancements of the general education curriculum and instruction" that provide more intensified instruction to promote more accelerated growth and development.

HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION

The following matrix provides guidance in making decisions about the complex area of instruction and intervention. Additional resources related to these areas are (will be) available through web-based resources.

Table 4. Instruction and Intervention Matrix of Essential Elements

HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS			
Multi-Tiered Instructional Approach	Standards Based Outcomes	Responsive Decision Making	Access and Equity
<p>A multi-tiered tiered system is defined as a continuum of instruction that is flexible, differentiated, ongoing, and targeted to the specific needs of each student as informed by the individual’s assessment data.</p> <p>In a tiered approach, intervention responds to a student need. Learning is focused and accelerated, as instruction is gradually intensified.</p>	<p>Instruction and Intervention rest on the CCSS and other AoE-adopted state standards that make explicit the expectations that all students will be career or college ready by the end of 12th grade. ⁴</p> <p>Work in mathematics and literacy reflects the greater depth of knowledge expected by the CCSS. Teachers have created application and interpretation opportunities in math and literacy.</p> <p>Teachers are knowledgeable about, and engage in, challenging standards-based instruction.</p>	<p>Instructional decisions are based on Teacher Knowledge and Expertise. (See Teacher Expertise/ Professional Development section of this Guide).</p> <p>Instruction and intervention are developmentally and culturally responsive to student needs.</p> <p>At each grade level, instruction focuses on extending knowledge (concept development) and skill for all students and, where present, closing the gap between present knowledge and skill and expected standards.</p>	<p>ALL students are provided with access to relevant, rigorous, and standards-based grade level instruction and materials.</p>

⁴ In particular, these items are new in the CCSS: literacy is included in science and social studies; the foundational skills are essential for being able to access complex text; increasing text complexity; speaking and listening; the requirement for argumentative writing; mathematical practices; early emphasis on number and operations to lead to algebraic thinking.

HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION

Table 4. Instruction and Intervention Matrix of Essential Elements (cont'd)

ALIGNMENT AND COORDINATION OF INSTRUCTION ACROSS SETTINGS			
Multi-Tiered Instructional Approach	Standards Based Outcomes	Responsive Decision Making	Access and Equity
<p>A tiered framework allows for a gradual increase in support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first tier refers to high-quality, differentiated instruction within the classroom provided by a highly qualified and skilled teacher using best practice. The second tier is an additional instructional support added to classroom instruction that focuses on a specific area(s) of diagnosed need. That instruction could happen with multiple students in a small group by the classroom teacher or other qualified specialist. The duration of the intervention in the second tier should be flexible, temporary, and based on assessment of progress. Students receiving intervention experience classroom instruction as their main instructional program. Intervention supplements classroom instruction, becomes increasingly intensive, and is delivered by the most expert teachers. 	<p>Alignment and intervention are based on the CCSS and foundational knowledge and skills needed to be literate and think mathematically; i.e. to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them, to reason abstractly and quantitatively, and to construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.</p> <p>Efficacy of a comprehensive MTSS-RtII model rests, in part, on ensuring high quality, evidence-based and standards-driven instruction in every classroom and in all settings.</p> <p>Careful coordination is needed so that students who are receiving instruction in more than one setting, receive a full range of opportunities to acquire appropriate knowledge and skill. Teachers can/should align their work to take advantage of overlapping areas but also to identify areas that will be primarily addressed in one, but not the other, setting.</p>	<p>There is a coordinated process amongst instructional professionals that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steady communication Knowledge of grade level expectations for end of year competencies Approaches and strategies to be used in each setting Agreement on terminology that will be used by all teachers Common assessments and documentation of progress Ongoing analysis of data to make decisions about instruction Engagement of students in the assessment process Understanding that students should be receiving instruction from their classroom teacher as much as possible. 	<p>Curriculum and instruction/ intervention are aligned across settings so that the most vulnerable students are experiencing a unified, consistent approach and emphasis in their instruction.</p> <p>Collaboration among classroom teachers, interventionists and other stakeholders and educators yields greater consistency in student's learning experiences (e.g., what they learn and how they learn it). Collaboration begins at the earliest observation of concern and continues until all stakeholders are convinced that learning has been (re) established.</p> <p>Instruction integrates content areas to provide students with opportunities to engage with:</p> <p>(1) non-fiction text reading and writing in all three genres of Information, Argument and Narrative, and (2) mathematical modeling to answer questions about the world and/or describe and understand systems in various content domains.</p>

HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION

Table 4. Instruction and Intervention Matrix of Essential Elements (cont'd)

DIFFERENTIATION TO PREVENT LEARNING CHALLENGES			
Multi-Tiered Instructional Approach	Standards Based Outcomes	Responsive Decision Making	Access and Equity
<p>Tiered Instruction is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on student’s performance on a variety of assessment measures including curriculum based measures (T:1+) Monitored frequently to document progress (T:1+) Revised as necessary based on results of progress monitoring and continual analysis with immediate adjustments to instruction (T:1+) Developmentally appropriate to meet each student’s needs (T:1+) Differentiated within groups (T:1+) Supported by a comprehensive plan to address student learning needs (T:2+) 	<p>Instruction is differentiated so that all students can access the content and materials at grade level as described in the CCSS and AOE-adopted Vermont standards as well as any supplemental district curricula.</p> <p>Instruction and intervention are differentiated in order to move all students from less to more-sophisticated levels of understanding.</p>	<p>Instruction is differentiated to meet the instructional and developmental needs of every student.</p> <p>The team of educators involved with instruction at each Tier has evaluated and agreed upon the integrity of the instructional program(s) or approach(es) and, in the case of high schools, the set of approaches or methods that will be used across content areas.</p> <p>The focus on “fidelity” in implementation of a teaching practice or program does not inhibit responsive instruction, ongoing decision-making and differentiation.</p> <p>Specific instructional strategies and techniques are selected based on their documented effectiveness for specific populations of students, including those with limited English proficiency, cultural differences and/or learning difficulties.</p>	<p>Classroom teachers and support personnel are skilled in using a wide range of methods and materials within their core program or content/discipline.</p> <p>Schools provide an appropriate range of materials and resources to support the learning and development of a diverse student population.</p> <p>Teachers and support personnel have the content knowledge needed to adapt and adjust materials and/or programs to the needs of individual students.</p> <p>Schools and educators organize their school/classroom schedules to support high-quality instruction and a diverse student population.</p> <p>Schools and educators ensure that students have equitable access to the most critical aspects of education and guard against unintended consequences that may result from scheduling, assignments, and other factors that can be ameliorated by the educational context.</p>

HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION

Table 4. Instruction and Intervention Matrix of Essential Elements (cont'd)

INTERVENTION TO PREVENT FAILURE AND/OR ACCELERATE LEARNING			
Multi-Tiered Instructional Approach	Standards Based Outcomes	Responsive Decision Making	Access and Equity
<p>SEE Attributes of Tiered Instruction (above)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily intervention in addition to daily classroom instruction (T:2+) Purpose is to accelerate student growth and development (T:2+) Adjusted using the general principle: as students require more support and intervention, the student teacher ratio decreases and the expertise of the teacher increases (T:2+) Targeted to a particular skill or set of skills to improve student outcomes (T:2+) Short-term assistance using explicit instructional goals (T:2+) <p>In some schools, Tier 3 will be an indication of Special Education placement. In others, it may precede a referral.</p>	<p>Instruction and intervention are planned so as to ensure that students access the content and materials at grade level and also receive appropriate support.</p> <p>Interventions support students in acquiring appropriate age/grade level standards.</p>	<p>SEE ABOVE and also:</p> <p>Educators engage in close observation of student learning and behavior and use effective progress monitoring tools to gauge the impact of their instruction on students.</p> <p>Educators use the data from observations to refine their practice and tailor their instruction to enhance learning for each student.</p>	<p>The instruction/intervention system focuses on the prevention of learning challenges and on acceleration of learning if students fall behind.</p> <p>Students not making progress have access to more intensive intervention settings (e.g. 1:1, small group support, etc.) provided by a highly qualified teacher before referral to Special Education (T:2+).</p>