

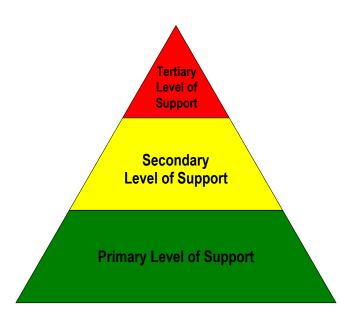
Common Principles of Effective Practice (CPEP) and Implementation: A Framework for Integrating Initiatives and Sustaining Evidence-based Practices

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support to Accelerate the Learning of All Students

What are Multi-Tiered Systems of Support?

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support represent a system in which increasingly intense interventions are directed at correspondingly smaller population segments so that a continuum of supports are available to students based on their needs (Mellard & Johnson, 2008). *Multi-Tiered Systems of Support that Accelerate the Learning of All Students* has been identified as one of the eight *common principles of effective practice* that the Minnesota Department of Education recognizes as an integral component of a systemic framework needed to support and sustain educational innovations.

In their seminal article, Walker and his colleagues (1996) provided a framework for preventing and reducing school problems based on the U.S. Public Health Service's tiered model of prevention (see figure). Their model uses a three-tiered approach with primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of intervention that help match the intensity of prevention and intervention strategies to the severity of the problem. This model can be applied to ensure appropriate supports are in place for students' behavioral and academic educational needs.



Why are Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Important?

A major concern for students, educators, administrators, and parents is how to help students who experience difficulty in school to be successful. Traditionally, schools have had two parallel support systems for educating students: general education and special education. If students struggled academically or behaviorally in the general education system, they were referred to be evaluated for receiving special education services. Implementing a system of tiered supports offers an expanded option so that a continuum of supports based on student need exists to help

accelerate the learning of all students. Students need not wait to fail or be held to different standards than their peers – they can receive the differentiated supports they need to be successful in the general education system.

What are the Key Elements of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support?

The key elements of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support are included in the system of multiple tiers of increasingly intense scientific, research-based interventions that are matched to student need (National Center on Response to Intervention, March 2010). Most commonly the tiered supports fall into three levels (as in the figure above): primary or universal; secondary or targeted; and tertiary or intensive.

Primary/Universal Level of Support

The primary level of support is the level at which all students receive high quality instruction in the core curriculum of the school. The primary level of support should include (National Center on Response to Intervention, March 2010):

- A core curriculum that is research-based
- Instructional practices that are culturally and linguistically responsive
- Universal screening to determine students' current level of performance
- Differentiated learning activities (e.g., mixed instructional grouping, use of learning centers, peer tutoring) to address individual needs
- Accommodations to ensure all students have access to the instructional program
- Problem solving to identify interventions, as needed, to address behavior problems that prevent students from demonstrating the academic skills they possess

Students who require interventions due to learning difficulties continue to receive instruction in the core curriculum.

Secondary/Targeted Support

If students struggle in the primary level (or core curriculum), they receive targeted support at the secondary level. The secondary level of support typically involves small-group instruction that is delivered as part of the general education curriculum (Burns & Coolong-Chaffin, 2006). For example, a small group reading intervention may consist of 15 weeks of 30-minute sessions, 3 times per week. Key characteristics of interventions used at the secondary level of support include a) evidence based, b) adult-led small-group instruction, and c) clearly articulated, validated intervention, adhered to with fidelity (National Center on Response to Intervention, March 2010).

Tertiary/Intensive Support

If students are still struggling in the core curriculum after receiving support at the secondary level, a more intensive level of support may be necessary. The tertiary level includes the most individualized interventions targeted to each student's area(s) of need. The educator engages in a problem solving process to identify the student's specific need and then develops/chooses interventions to meet those needs. One problem-solving process as described by Deno (2005) involves the following steps:

- Problem Identification (identify the difference between what is expected and what occurs)
- Problem Certification/Definition (use assessments to identify the specific need)
- Explore solutions (use research to identify and choose potential interventions)
- Evaluate Solutions (implement interventions and evaluate their effectiveness)
- Problem Solution (continue to implement and progress monitor effective interventions)

How do we know we are using Multi-Tiered Systems of Support appropriately?

One strategy for evaluating the implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support in your school is to assess the percentage of students being served at each level of support (Burns & Coolong-Chaffin, 2006). As a general guideline, about 80% of students should be successful at the primary level of support, meaning they do not need additional support beyond the core instruction provided in the classroom. The secondary level should serve approximately 15-20% of students and the tertiary level of support should serve approximately 5%. If the percentage of students at any of these levels is greater than the general guideline, the interventions and supports may need to be reviewed and modified to improve effectiveness. The percentages are not rigid, and movement between the levels of support should be fluid based on regular assessment of student progress. Students may receive various levels of support based on need during their school career.

References

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- Mellard, D.F. & Johnson, E. (2008). RTI: *A practitioner's guide to implementing response to intervention.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- National Center on Response to Intervention (March 2010). Essential Components of RTI A Closer Look at Response to Intervention. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, National Center on Response to Intervention.
- Walker, H., Horner, R., Sugai, G., Bullis, M., Sprague, J., Bricker, D., & Kaufman, M. (1996). Integrated approaches to preventing antisocial behavior patterns among school age children and youth. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 4,* 193-256.

Additional Resources

- OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports: http://www.pbis.org/
- National Center on Response to Intervention: http://www.rti4success.org/
- Intervention Central: http://www.interventioncentral.org/
- What Works Clearinghouse: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/