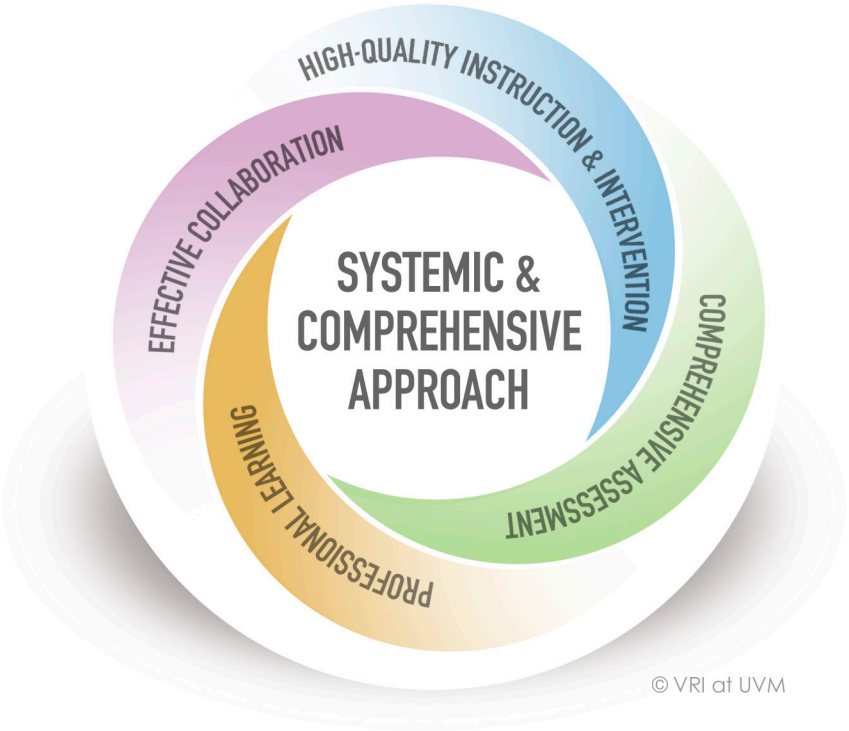

MTSS-RTII
VERMONT

VERMONT Multi-tiered System of Supports Response to Intervention and Instruction (MTSS-RtII) Field Guide

Vermont Reads Institute at UVM
and
Vermont Statewide Steering Committee on RTII

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About this Guide

Background

In fall, 2011, the Vermont Department of Education allocated resources to Vermont Reads Institute at UVM to engage in an inclusive process to create a framework and guidelines for use by schools interested in adopting a "Response to Intervention" approach. From this, a Statewide Steering Committee on Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) formed, chaired by Marjorie Y. Lipson and coordinated by Patricia Gallant, both of VRI at UVM. This group, chosen to represent a broad range of experiences and viewpoints, met regularly and repeatedly from late fall, 2011, through July, 2012. We listened to, discussed, and reconsidered varied perspectives on important aspects of student achievement, assessment, instruction and systemic practice. (See full membership list on page 2.)

This guide represents the best thinking and advice of Vermont's Steering Committee on RtII, which resulted in a decision to refer to this work as a multi-tiered system of supports for Response to Instruction and Intervention, or MTSS-RtII. Readers who are familiar with the policies and practices adopted elsewhere may notice strong similarities with some other states, since we drew heavily on the best thinking from across the nation. At the same time, we benefited from the lessons learned in some areas – lessons that have caused some states to rethink earlier practices and policies. We believe that we have arrived at some important new thinking that represents the best of Vermont traditions and draws on its strong history of educational excellence.

This Field Guide serves as an overview of Vermont's multi-tiered approach to RtII, describing its major guidelines and components. It provides guidance on key components of a multi-tiered system of supports, while intentionally allowing considerable latitude to individual schools/districts to work with existing successful initiatives, programs, approaches and tools. This is consistent with the federal government's stance that states and districts should have the flexibility to establish approaches that reflect their communities' unique situations.

While it is not all that schools and districts need, this Field Guide can provide helpful direction to those who wish to improve outcomes for all students. The materials include:

Guiding Principles for Vermont's Multi-tiered System of Supports - Response to Instruction and Intervention (MTSS-RtII)

Field Guide for Schools and Districts

Tools to Support School Decision Making

We hope that this Field Guide will provoke conversation, provide information about effective practices, and support collaborative and systemic efforts to improve outcomes for all students.

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Response to Intervention

Historical Perspective and Definition

National attention to Response to Intervention (RTI) has its roots in the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which permits states to "use a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention" to identify students with specific learning disabilities and/or behavioral difficulties. This law indicates that states can no longer require school districts to take into consideration whether a student has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in determining eligibility for learning disability services. Rather, they may use an alternative approach that determines whether the student responds first to scientific, research-based classroom instruction and then to more intensive, targeted interventions.

RtII typically involves a "multi-tiered" approach to the implementation of instructional modifications and interventions as a means of improving student performance – an approach supported by the Vermont Agency of Education (VTAoE). It is helpful to think of MTSS-RtII as a comprehensive, systemic approach to teaching and learning designed to improve learning for all students through increasingly differentiated and intensified assessment, instruction, and intervention. Equally important is the idea that qualified professionals with appropriate expertise should provide this instruction. From this perspective, RTI is a process that cuts across general, compensatory, and special education, and is not exclusively a general or special education initiative.

A preventative approach is intended to rectify a number of long-standing problems, including the disproportionate number of minorities and English language learners identified as learning disabled and the practice of waiting for documented failure before providing services. The clear intent of the law is both to provide an alternative means of identifying students with learning disabilities and to reduce the number of students who are identified as learning disabled.

Academic and behavioral difficulties may be prevented from developing by providing prompt and focused instruction and intervention at the first indication of difficulty. After receiving this more tailored and intensive instruction, students who do not demonstrate adequate progress are then considered for an evaluation for a specific learning disability: "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 procedures…" (P.L. 108-446, 614[b][6][B])

Importantly, RtII is not simply a pre-referral process that must be carried out before students are evaluated to determine if they have a specific learning disability. Carefully selected assessment, dedication to differentiated instruction, quality professional development, and genuine collaboration across teachers, specialists, administrators, and parents are among the factors that are important for the success of RtII.

Guiding Principles for a Multi-tiered System of Supports-Response to Instruction and Intervention (MTSS-RtII) [1]

The available evidence suggests that students' academic and behavioral success is promoted when schools and districts adopt a multi-tiered approach to teaching and learning. The following Guiding Principles, developed by consensus of the Vermont Statewide Steering Committee on RtII, build on and extend earlier work regarding RtII that is currently posted on the VTAoE website. They are offered as a starting point for schools wishing to implement a multi-tiered system of student supports to improve achievement for all students.

Vermont's Guiding Principles for MTSS-RtII [2]

Principle 1
Success begins with committed educators who believe that all students learn and can achieve high standards as a result of effective teaching.

Principle 2
A successful **multi-tiered system** begins with the highest quality classroom instruction that is informed by research and supported by a standards-based curriculum.

Principle 3
A coherent, articulated and **balanced assessment system** guides responsive teaching, informs educators and students about progress, and leads to effective decisions.

Principle 4
The analysis and use of on-going performance data to monitor progress, inform instructional decisions, and refine ambitious goal-setting results in acceleration of student learning.

Principle 5
Student success occurs when expert personnel provide targeted and **differentiated instruction** at the earliest indication of student need at a level of intensity that is responsive to the need.

Principle 6
To address the full range of students' needs, schools provide a comprehensive, responsive system of instruction and intervention that reflects fidelity to the **research-based approach** while supporting teachers as they use keen observation to make decisions about and engage in responsive teaching.

Principle 7
Dynamic, positive, and productive **collaboration** among students, families, and professionals with relevant expertise is the foundation for effective problem solving and instructional decision-making within a multi-tiered system.

Principle 8
Effective leadership, including building administrator engagement and **distributed leadership**, is crucial for guiding and sustaining a multi-tiered system.

Principle 9
The success of a **multi-tiered system** is dependent on continuously-developing expertise. Professional development for all members of the school community is needed to build capacity and sustain progress.

Principle 10
These principles are interrelated and will be most effective when integrated within a coherent plan for continuous improvement that recognizes how recursive assessment, reflection, and adaptation are needed to improve instruction and increase student achievement.

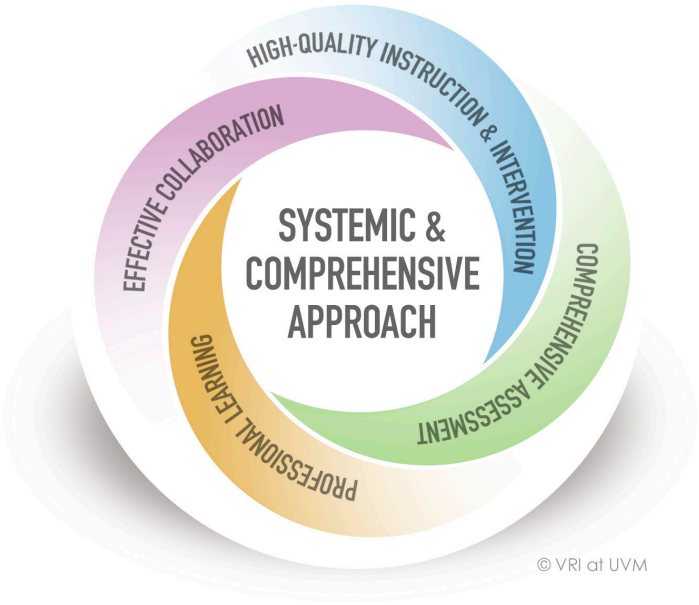
[1] This is a consensus document of the Vermont Statewide Steering Committee on Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) (2011-2012).
[2] Highlighted terms are defined in the glossary.

Components of a Multi-tiered System of Supports/RtII

A ***multi-tiered approach to instruction and intervention*** is a comprehensive and systematic process for assessing and maximizing the opportunities to learn for all students within any content area. It emphasizes the importance of effective, culturally responsive, and differentiated first teaching and effective early intervening supports for both academics and behavior for all students, prior to making a referral for a special education evaluation. The VT AoE has identified a multi-tiered system for RtII as a major component of school improvement and effectiveness.

The **components** of Vermont's Multi-tiered System of Supports/RtII are:

- **A Systemic and Comprehensive Approach**
- **Effective Collaboration**
- **High-quality Instruction and Intervention that is Responsive and Differentiated**
- **Comprehensive and Balanced Assessment System**
- **Expertise (Well-designed Professional Learning)**



While providing flexibility in the selection of specific content, methods, and tools, these guidelines call for common elements in all schools/districts who wish to use a multi-tiered system. Schools/districts may wish to gauge their readiness for a multi-tiered approach by using the **Self-Assessment Tool**. The tool and other information related to each of these key elements, is available by visiting the Vermont Reads Institute at UVM website at www.vriuvm.org. In the next five sections of this Field Guide, we provide an overview of the importance, characteristics, and essential elements of each of these five components, and some tools for getting started with MTSS-RtII.

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/leaming, and family engagment 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 Mult-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.

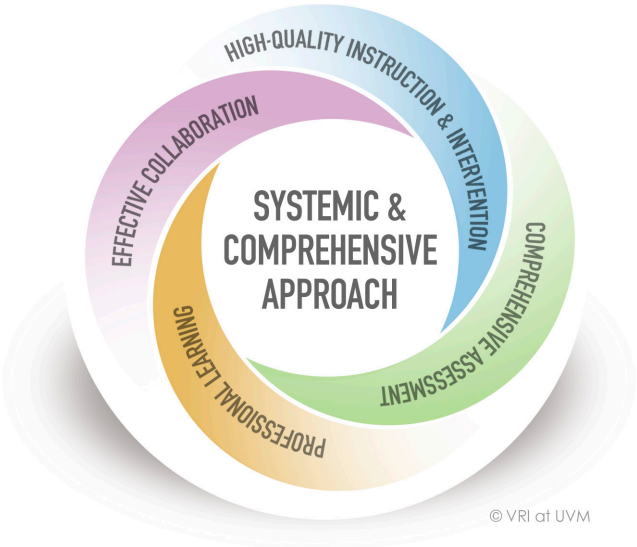


Figure 1. Components of Vermont's MTSS for RtII

A SYSTEMIC AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

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.

A SYSTEMIC AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Table 1. MTSS-RtII Roles and Responsibilities Checklist

Date: _____ School: _____

Responsibilities	Resources/Roles	Notes
What needs to be done?	*Who will be responsible for this? **	*How? When? Other Notable Considerations?*
A. Establish and Monitor Culture and Vision		
❑ Assess the school's collaborative culture and develop steps for improvement.		
❑ Ensure that all educators are committed to the concept that all students can learn and succeed.		
❑ Lead the development of a shared vision for RtII.		
❑ Design the local RtII multi-tiered model/plan.		
❑ Monitor alignment of implementation with vision, and whether modifications are needed.		
B. Establish and Monitor Systemic Structures		
❑ Design and monitor a balanced, comprehensive, purpose-driven assessment system.		
❑ Articulate core curricula.		
❑ Align curriculum, standards, instruction and assessment.		
❑ Adopt and monitor appropriate behavior support system.		
❑ Support development of problem-solving teams. (What teams are needed? For what purposes? Who should participate?)		
❑ Ensure time for RtII problem-solving teams to meet.		
❑ Serve on RtII problem-solving team.		
❑ Communicate and prioritize student concerns to teachers and RtII teams.		

*** 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

A SYSTEMIC AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

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

Responsibilities	Resources/Roles	Notes
What needs to be done?	*Who will be responsible for this? **	*How? When? Other Notable Considerations?*
C. Acquire and Allocate Resources for:		
❑ Ongoing focused and embedded professional learning; ❑ High quality assessments, instruction, and intervention materials that support the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and students' individual needs; ❑ Technology for data collection and analysis; ❑ Ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the RtII process.		
D. Implement and Use the Assessment System		
❑ Engage in ongoing collaboration in data collection and analysis to address small group and individual student needs. ❑ Use data to inform instruction. ❑ Use data to make decisions about tiered supports. ❑ Store and manage assessment data and monitor integrity of data. ❑ Examine trends and evaluate programs.		
E. Ensure the Quality of Instruction and Intervention		
❑ Identify appropriate materials and approaches. ❑ Provide instruction at Tiers I, II, III ❑ Examine outcomes and make decisions for individuals and groups of students. ❑ Discuss specific instructional practices. ❑ Support innovation and a continuous improvement system.		
F. Monitor the Collaborative System		
❑ Evaluate instruction and/or intervention program for individual students or groups. ❑ Support interventions at the Tier I, Tier II & III level as appropriate. ❑ Use effective systems of accountability through staff evaluation that is aligned with RtII principles and effective practices.		

A SYSTEMIC AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

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

Responsibilities	Resources/Roles	Notes
What needs to be done?	*Who will be responsible for this? **	*How? When? Other Notable Considerations?*
G. Home/School Collaboration		
❑ Maintain overall positive home-school relationships. ❑ Communicate and collaborate regularly with parents about student's progress in the curriculum. ❑ Help parents/families understand the RtII model and how it impacts their children. ❑ Invite parents/families to participate in goal setting, intervention development, monitoring of progress, and evaluation of their child. ❑ Ensure that parent input is integrated into each tier of intervention.		
H. Professional Learning		
❑ Assess and prioritize professional learning/staff development for responsive teaching and differentiation. ❑ Develop a multi-year Professional Learning Plan that includes: • 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. ❑ Participate in quality, relevant professional learning opportunities. ❑ Share successful and innovative practices.		

Component II: Effective Collaboration

Research suggests that most organizations can benefit and improve by developing a collaborative culture (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fullan, 1999; Goddard, Goddard & Taschannen-Moran, 2007). A collaborative culture is a distinguishing feature of effective schools (Lipson et al, 2004), and a necessary condition for successful multi-tiered systems.

Operating Assumptions:	Specifically refer to Guiding Principles 7, 9, 10
Key Definitions:	Refer to the Glossary for the following terms: *Collaboration* *Collaborative Team* *Collaborative Team Process* *Problem Solving Team* *School Culture*

The Significance of an Effective Collaborative School Culture

Research indicates that an effective collaborative school culture impacts teaching and learning in positive ways:

- Schools organized around democratic and collaborative cultures produce students with higher achievement and better levels of skills and understanding than do traditionally organized schools (Darling-Hammond, 1997).
- Student achievement increases substantially in schools with collaborative work cultures that foster a professional learning community among teachers and others, focus continuously on improving instructional practice in light of student performance data, and link to standards and staff development support (Fullan, 1999).
- There is a positive relationship between collaborative school culture and student achievement in reading and math. This suggests the value of efforts to improve student achievement by promoting teacher collaboration around curriculum, instruction and professional development (Goddard et al., 2007; Lipson, et al, 2004).
- School-wide coordinated efforts to address behavior have led to reductions in problem behaviors and increases in positive interactions between teachers and students, perceptions of organizational health, and instructional time (Chaparro et al., 2012).
- Collaboration has been identified as a core variable underlying reported district-wide gains in the implementation of reading and behavioral initiatives (Sadler & Sugai, 2009).
- When parents, teachers, students and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students (Epstein et al., 2002).

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Characteristics of Schools with Effective Collaborative Cultures

In schools with effective collaborative cultures, both educators and students learn. Building administrators, and others engaged in leadership activities, create systems and supports that encourage teachers to work collaboratively with each other and with the administration to teach students so they learn more (Fullan, 1997; Newman & Wehlage, 1995). Educators in schools with effective collaborative school cultures:

- share a clear mission and vision;
- focus on student learning (standards and objectives) and on results;
- accept a collective responsibility for student learning;
- value the interchange of ideas with colleagues;
- hold high expectations of everyone, including themselves; and
- engage in professional and purposeful collaborative activities.

Schools that use learning communities (sometimes called Professional Learning Communities [PLCs]) are in a particularly powerful position to effect change. These approaches have an impressive research base to support school change (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). To realize their potential, schools need to work hard to develop effective PLC structures and help teachers work collaboratively within them.

Characteristics of Effective Collaboration

Collaboration involves more than cooperation. Collaboration is built on relationships and trust among people who work together for a common purpose. Research and practice indicate that people who collaborate effectively demonstrate a number of characteristics. They:

- orient themselves towards problem solving;
- display mutual respect for each other's knowledge and skill;
- engage in open, honest, respectful discussions and question each other's ideas;
- employ clearly-defined norms that indicate desired behaviors/types of communication that create a safe environment for their shared work;
- identify roles and responsibilities related to specific processes and decisions aimed at positive change;
- use productive conflict resolution processes; and
- share responsibility for participation, decisions, and actions.

Despite the challenging nature of many of these characteristics, they are critical to improving outcomes for all students and they can form the basis for exceptionally strong professional satisfaction (Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006; MetLife, 2009). Many educators, however, have received little or no training in collaboration skills and benefit from professional learning in this area (see the Expertise/Professional Learning section of this document).

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Essential Elements of Collaboration for MTSS-RtII

MTSS-RtII requires that schools create cultures that embrace change and institutionalize structures that promote teacher collaboration and comprehensive approaches to student learning (Dorn & Henderson, 2010). This collaborative approach often represents a fundamental shift in how schools identify and respond to students' academic and behavioral difficulties, and may require systemic change from an isolated work culture to one in which professionals from diverse backgrounds work together.

Structures that Support a Collaborative Problem-solving Approach to MTSS-RtII

Collaboration advances the critical components of a multi-tiered system. Successful RtII models depend on a commitment of all professionals, school-wide and district-wide, to collaborate in providing a comprehensive purpose-driven assessment system and high-quality instruction and interventions (see Assessment and Instruction/Intervention sections of this document). All school professionals must commit to creating and supporting a problem-solving approach that enables teachers to learn from one another and promotes professional dialogue among general education, intervention, and special education teachers.

Teams

This is typically accomplished through teams. In a systemic approach to RtII, distributed leadership models and professional learning communities support collaborative problem-solving team structures such as data teams, teacher/specialist collaborations, grade-level intervention teams, and educational support teams (Costello, Lipson, Marinak, & Zolman, 2010).

Research suggests that effective teaming has a positive impact on both teaching practice and student achievement/behavior. In a multi-tiered RtII process, teams of administrators, classroom teachers, special educators, relevant specialists, and family members meet regularly to analyze student data and instructional practices to determine the needs of their students so that they can respond effectively. Any number of possible structures can support effective team decision-making. Here in Vermont, many schools have turned to Critical Friends (Bambino, 2002) or Professional Learning Communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

How do these teams work? Essentially, problem solving teams, which include relevant teachers, administrators, specialists and family members, analyze and discuss assessment information at the school, grade, classroom and individual levels and collaborate about why, what, and how to teach. Educators discuss and make decisions about:

- what students will learn (grade-level/course benchmarks; state standards);
- which culturally responsive, high quality instructional strategies and approaches will be used to ensure that students learn;
- how students' progress and achievement will be assessed within a balanced assessment system;
- how the team and/or others will intervene when students are not meeting benchmarks or are exceeding benchmarks and need additional challenges;
- next steps for individuals and groups of students; and
- what professional learning is needed to improve student outcomes.

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Parent/family collaborations

Several decades of research suggest that strong partnerships between families, schools, and communities improve outcomes for all students (Comer, 2005b; Kredier, Caspe, Kennedy & Weiss, 2007; Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall & Gordon, 2009). According to a review of research, children perform better when there is strong involvement between home and school. Specifically, students from all backgrounds:

- earn higher grades, test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs;
- are more likely to be promoted and earn credits;
- attend school regularly;
- have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school; and
- graduate and go on to postsecondary education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7).

The research makes evident the fact that school/family partnerships are not just "nice" to develop, but an essential component in strengthening outcomes for all students at all grade levels.

While one body of research has demonstrated the importance of family/school relations, other studies reveal the types of actions that lead to increased parent involvement. High-performing schools engage families and communities in the following ways:

- build trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members;
- recognize, respect, and address families' needs as well as class and cultural differences; and
- embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

In the context of a school-wide systemic approach, these are useful and effective strategies for improving student outcomes by improving family/school partnerships for all students. A number of scholars and practitioners have categorized the types of parent involvement and/or family/school relationships (see Table 2). The work of Joyce Epstein (2002) is often cited and is useful because it focuses attention on the roles and responsibilities of the parents themselves. The National PTA Standards (2009) and research-based work of Heather Weiss (2009) and Ron Mirr (2009) also describe the necessary actions of the school and/or the family/school relationships. As these researchers note, although home–school relationships tend to wane during or even before children reach adolescence, such relationships continue to play an important role in youth outcomes (Harvard Family Research Project [HFRP], 2007; Sanders & Epstein, 1998). Find a comprehensive bibliography on family involvement and adolescence at: http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/family-involvement-bibliographies/bibliography-on-family-involvement-and-adolescence.

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Table 2. Types of Roles and Responsibilities for Parents and for School/Family Partnerships

Types of Parent Roles and Responsibilities	Roles and Responsibilities of Schools and Family-School Partnerships	
Epstein et al. (2002)	**PTA (2009)**	**Weiss et al. (2009)**
Type 1-Parenting: supporting, nurturing, loving, child raising Type 2- Communicating: relating, reviewing, and overseeing Type 3- Volunteering: supervising and fostering Type 4- Learning at Home: managing, recognizing, rewarding Type 5- Decision Making: contributing, considering, judging Type 6- Collaborating with Community: sharing, giving	• Welcoming all Families • Communicating Effectively • Supporting Student Success • Speaking Up for Every Child • Sharing Power • Collaborating with Community	1. Communication: Systems in place for home-family communication are inviting, useful and set up for two-way communication. 2. Information sharing: Families receive the information they need in order to function as an integral part of their child's school. 3. Participation: Family participation programs invite involvement, value parents as key resources and are utilized by the entire school community. 4. Welcoming: Parents feel they belong on the school campus.

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Parent/family collaborations (cont'd)

When considering these points, schools and districts must give careful consideration to their current context. Fruitful and productive partnerships do not happen without significant work. Reporting on decades of research and practice, Comer (2005b) described how family participation and partnerships evolve over time:

Level 1: Parents/families provide general support by attending parent-teacher conferences, monitoring their children's homework, and supporting fund-raising activities. They participate in calendar events, such as school concerts and awards ceremonies. This level attracts the largest number of parents.

Level 2: Parents/families serve as volunteers in daily school affairs, for example, by providing office support, going along on field trips, or working as library assistants.

Level 3: Parents/families participate in school decision making by serving on the School Planning and Management Team or on other school committees. Parent representation in the governance and management of the school should be as broadly based as possible (School Development Program, 2001).

As important as these are for all schools and families, they are even more critical within a multi-tiered system of RtII. Family partnerships are explicitly addressed both in ESEA (No Child Left Behind) and IDEA (2002). NCLB defines parental involvement as "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities." Parents are described as "full-partners" in their child's education.

In passing the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), Congress stressed: "strengthening the role and responsibility of parents and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home." (20 U.S.C. 1401[c][5][B]). Of course, requirements related to parent participation in IEP meetings are detailed and specific (http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/,root,regs,300,D,300%252E322). NICHCY (2009) has a very useful parent participation guide. Innovative ideas and research for engaging parents of adolescents in meaningful ways is available in the research brief titled, Family Involvement in Middle and High School Students' Education (HFRP, 2007).

Family-school partnerships may change as students access more levels or tiers within MTSS-RtII. Several states (see e.g. Colorado) have created a tiered framework similar to the tiered system of instruction and intervention supports. It specifies which activities and relationships are essential for all families, which are applicable to some families, and which are relevant for only a few families. Schools may find that type of framework useful in their planning and development. In any event, the family-school partnerships should be examined for each of the components of MTSS-RtII. Table 3 on the next page, provides a way to organize self-reflection and action planning about family-school partnerships.

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Table 3. Action Planning to Develop Family-School Partnerships

Components of Vermont's MTSS-RtII	Actions to Support Family-School Partnerships [3]			
	Welcoming Parents feel they belong on the school campus.	**Communication** Systems in place for home-family communication are inviting, useful and set up for two-way communication.	**Information Sharing** Families receive the information they need in order to function as an integral part of their child's school.	**Participation** Family participation programs invite involvement, value parents as key resources and are utilized by the entire school community.
Systemic and Comprehensive Approach				
Effective Collaboration				
High-Quality Instruction and Intervention				
Comprehensive and Balanced Assessment				
Expertise & Professional Learning				

[3] These categories are derived from Mirr (2009).

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: *Intervention* *Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3* *Differentiated Instruction* *Evidence-based Instruction* *Integrity/Fidelity*

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**
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. In a tiered approach, intervention responds to a student need. Learning is focused and accelerated, as instruction is gradually intensified.	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] 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. Teachers are knowledgeable about, and engage in, challenging standards-based instruction.	Instructional decisions are based on Teacher Knowledge and Expertise. (See Teacher Expertise/ Professional Development section of this Guide). Instruction and intervention are developmentally and culturally responsive to student needs. 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.	ALL students are provided with access to relevant, rigorous, and standards-based grade level instruction and materials.

[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**
A tiered framework allows for a gradual increase in support: • 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.	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. 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. 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.	There is a coordinated process amongst instructional professionals that includes: • 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.	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. 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. Instruction integrates content areas to provide students with opportunities to engage with: (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.

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**
Tiered Instruction is: • 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+)	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. Instruction and intervention are differentiated in order to move all students from less to more-sophisticated levels of understanding.	Instruction is differentiated to meet the instructional and developmental needs of every student. 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. The focus on "fidelity" in implementation of a teaching practice or program does not inhibit responsive instruction, ongoing decision-making and differentiation. 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.	Classroom teachers and support personnel are skilled in using a wide range of methods and materials within their core program or content/discipline. Schools provide an appropriate range of materials and resources to support the learning and development of a diverse student population. Teachers and support personnel have the content knowledge needed to adapt and adjust materials and/or programs to the needs of individual students. Schools and educators organize their school/classroom schedules to support high-quality instruction and a diverse student population. 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.

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**
SEE Attributes of Tiered Instruction (above) • 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+) In some schools, Tier 3 will be an indication of Special Education placement. In others, it may precede a referral.	Instruction and intervention are planned so as to ensure that students access the content and materials at grade level and also receive appropriate support. Interventions support students in acquiring appropriate age/grade level standards.	SEE ABOVE and also: 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. Educators use the data from observations to refine their practice and tailor their instruction to enhance learning for each student.	The instruction/intervention system focuses on the prevention of learning challenges and on acceleration of learning if students fall behind. 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+).

Component IV: Comprehensive and Balanced Assessment

Good decision making for groups and individuals requires good information. This critical component acknowledges the central role of assessment in effective MTSS-RtII.

Operating Assumptions:	Specifically refer to Guiding Principles #4, 7, and 8.
Key Definitions:	Refer to the Glossary for the following terms: *Balanced & Comprehensive Assessment System* *Benchmark/Periodic Progress Monitoring* *Progress Monitoring* *Formative* *Ongoing Progress Monitoring* *Screening*

The Significance of a Comprehensive and Balanced Assessment System

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.

COMPREHENSIVE AND BALANCED ASSESSMENT

Purposes and Tools

A well-designed balanced assessment system includes tools and processes that are effective to address various assessment purposes. These tools are often called: *screening, diagnostics, formative progress monitoring, interim/ benchmark progress monitoring*, and summative or *outcome assessment*. These types of assessment tools are employed to address five purposes of assessment: *planning learning, supporting learning, monitoring learning, verifying learning*, and *investigating the cause of learning difficulties*. See Table 5 for an example of assessment types organized by purpose.

School districts and/or supervisory unions can use the concept of a *balanced assessment system* to identify and organize the assessments they use by *purpose*. An analysis of a particular school's overall assessment system may help a school to identify whether or not some types of assessments are used more frequently or receive more emphasis over other types. If the system appears out of balance, adjustments should be made. The specific tools and processes may differ across districts and schools, but a trustworthy system is comprehensive enough to address all purposes and to capture the full range of critical components within the academic or behavioral domain.

Utility

Assessment information alone is useless; it should invite action. Educators must be wise consumers of assessment data, understanding its properties and appropriate uses. The data and information provided by assessment must be examined, discussed, reflected upon, and used to make decisions. As the consequences of these decisions become more serious, so must the range and quality of the assessment information. Overall quality, accuracy and timeliness affect the utility of assessment data, but so do systems' factors such as the school's capacity to analyze and interpret data and the school's structures for supporting collaborative discussion and widespread use of the information (Lachat & Smith, 2005).

To use assessment data wisely, educators should understand the multiple components of reading and math across developmental levels and as they are implicated in diverse content. Educators at different grade levels may gather different types and amounts of assessment data but they are, nevertheless, each responsible for understanding and using information to improve instruction and learning for all students. It is also important to note in Table 5 that different types of assessment can be used for more than one purpose and, generally, no one piece of assessment information can fulfill all purposes.

COMPREHENSIVE AND BALANCED ASSESSMENT

Table 5. Balanced Assessment System By Purpose

PURPOSE	WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?	ASSESSMENT OPTIONS	NOTATIONS
Screening **To Identify Students Who Require a Closer Look**	Data that: • Identify or flag students who are struggling or may be at-risk of school failure and who will require closer monitoring • Raise unanswered questions about individuals or groups of students • Or, the effectiveness of core academic and behavioral curricula	• Dedicated screening tool • Formal review of existing progress monitoring data • On-going formative assessment data	• Data for screening purposes are collected for all students one or more times a year. • Tests dedicated to screening (sometimes called universal screeners) are generally most important when: 1) there is no comprehensive assessment system in place that provides on-going information about individual students or, 2) students are new to school (i.e. PreK-K and/or middle/high school) and/or there are many new students each year. • Screening for behavioral concerns involves reviewing trends for individual students as well as relevant themes within the total or disaggregated population (i.e., grade level/class, problematic time of day, location, etc.). • If behavioral data are reviewed on a routinely fixed schedule, they may serve the purpose of screening in the absence of a standardized tool.

COMPREHENSIVE AND BALANCED ASSESSMENT

Table 5. Balanced Assessment System By Purpose (cont'd)

PURPOSE	WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?	ASSESSMENT OPTIONS	NOTATIONS
Diagnostic **To Investigate and Analyze Learning Difficulties**	Data that: • Inform the educator about possible causes of student difficulties • Explore the domain (literacy, mathematics or behavior) more comprehensively • Identify appropriate focus for instruction/intervention • Explore and identify possible effective instructional/intervention approaches	• Standardized diagnostic assessment tools • Closer and more detailed analysis of existing progress monitoring data • Additional measures/data to get a more comprehensive picture • Observations, interviews, and work samples	• Diagnostic assessment is conducted with only some students but is often necessary to plan instruction and/or intervention to meet the needs of students who are experiencing difficulty. • The goal is to plan more effective and tailored instruction and/or intervention based on more refined information. • Students often provide excellent insights into their own learning strengths and needs. Their self-assessments should be carefully considered.
Progress Monitoring: Formative **To Inform Instruction**	Data that: • Provide information to both educators and students about what has been learned, which objectives have been addressed, and what techniques have been successful • Help educators make decisions about what to teach, how to adjust their instruction along the way, and/or where to start • Data that reveals depth of understanding and partial or developing understandings	• Any data that shows teachers what has been learned and what needs to be addressed instructionally • Student engagement in the process is pivotal	• Standardized information can be very helpful in planning overall instruction for groups of students. • As well, educators use on-going formative assessment data (including student self-assessment) to refine and adapt instruction for groups and individuals (see note above about student self-assessment).

COMPREHENSIVE AND BALANCED ASSESSMENT

Table 5. Balanced Assessment System By Purpose (cont'd)

PURPOSE	WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?	ASSESSMENT OPTIONS	NOTATIONS
Progress Monitoring: Periodic Benchmarking **To Monitor Progress**	Data that: • Show educators (and others) what progress has been made during a specific period • Track student progress on identified tasks/benchmarks	• On-going formative progress monitoring data • Interim/periodic benchmark assessments • Standardized outcome measures	An array of data can and should be used to monitor student progress. A robust progress monitoring system can function in place of a separate screening measure.
Outcome or Summative **To Verify Learning**	Data that: • Confirm what students know and can do; typically at the end of year, semester, course, or instructional unit • Reflect an appropriate and comprehensive picture of the domain (literacy, mathematics, behavior)	• Standardized test data to assess outcomes • Benchmark progress monitoring data • Formative assessment data demonstrating learning	Because data provide information about individual students and also about groups, it can be used to make decisions about instruction, curriculum and program adjustments. Protocols for examining outcome data should support educators as they use data for diverse purposes.

COMPREHENSIVE AND BALANCED ASSESSMENT

Assessment Quality

The quality of assessments matters. Since MTSS for RtII rests so significantly on the decisions made from assessment information, that information must be both **trustworthy** and **useful**. This is more complicated than it may seem since the trustworthiness and utility of assessment information depend on many things – including the assessments themselves (the tests, activities, and content), variation in administration and/or scoring of assessments, as well as the uses to which the assessment data are put.

Two key concepts for judging the quality of an assessment relate to *reliability* and *validity*. Although these criteria were developed for use in judging norm-referenced tests, the underlying concepts have implications for other assessment measures (such as standards-based assessments) as well.

Reliability refers to the degree to which an assessment measure produces consistent and accurate results over time (e.g., a test of reading comprehension has been pre-determined by test developers to produce consistent results for students). Efforts should always be made to make sure that any variation in the data is the result of changes in student performance – not changes in administration, interpretation, random factors, etc.

Validity is judged on the meaningfulness and usefulness of the interpretations made by users of the assessment results (Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, 1999). For the past 15 years, validity has been considered, not as an attribute of the assessment itself, but rather in relation to the testing purpose and to the quality of inferences drawn from the assessment. Presently, there is considerable debate about the appropriate way(s) to determine and judge validity (Gorin, 2007; Lissitz & Samuelsen, 2007), with some scholars arguing that "construct validity" (judgments about the construction of the test) should hold more sway. In either case, a major factor in the valid use of tests is the extent to which there is a match between the test and the test user's concept of the domain being measured. In our case, we would ask whether the test content and process matches our concepts of reading and/or mathematics and/or behavior so that we can make good inferences about students within a specific setting.

In the context of RtII, validity issues are critical. When we interpret the results of any assessment(s), we should ask not only what the data suggest about groups of students but also what they say about the systems surrounding the students' learning/behavior. When the data indicate that a great many students require intervention, educators must consider whether the curriculum and instruction need attention.

COMPREHENSIVE AND BALANCED ASSESSMENT

A particular validity concern surrounds screening measures. Assessment data are only useful for screening if they can demonstrate *predictive validity*. That is, the results from a screening measure must predict students' performance on (other) measures of interest (math, reading, behavior). If there are too many "false positives" (students are identified as having a problem when they do not) or "false negatives" (students are not identified when they should be), the validity of the assessment is called into question. This problem is quite complex and results for most available "screening measures" are vulnerable on this count, leading Hosp, Hosp, and Dole (2011) to conclude that, "the use of a single measure is not prudent for screening decisions" (p. 129).

Finally, not all tests are appropriate for all interpretations and uses. We need to always ask ourselves whether the conclusions drawn from an assessment are valid in relation to the thing(s) we are interested in measuring. In addition, educators must always be asking themselves if their data are trustworthy – even if the assessment tool or approach is not subject to formal tests of reliability.

The quality of assessment measures becomes more important as the stakes increase. It may be appropriate to use "teacher-validated" formative assessments to plan and adapt daily and weekly instruction. However, the process used to determine whether or not a particular intervention is working or whether or not a student is eligible to receive special education services requires additional consideration regarding the degree to which an intervention and/or assessment measure is reliable and trustworthy. Generally speaking, this will require multiple measures – not just repeated use of one measure, but different sources of assessment data.

Standardized and commercially produced assessment measures should contain information to help in the selection of tests. Teachers and school teams, however, will also need to determine what measures are valid in the context of that school. Factors that might be considered include the school's curriculum, student population, cultural considerations, and teacher perceptions of what constitutes valid assessment practices.

Finally, it is important to remember that "assessment" does not necessarily mean "test." A great deal of time, attention, and money has been spent in recent years to improve the quality of high-stakes tests. But Stiggins (2007) reminds us that, behind these considerable accomplishments, there is almost complete neglect of assessment where it exerts the greatest influence on pupils' academic lives: day to day in the classroom, where it can be used to help them learn more" (p. 10). Stiggins also suggests:

> The principal assessment challenge that we face in schools today is to ensure that sound assessment practices permeate every classroom—that assessments are used to benefit pupils. This challenge has remained unmet for decades, and the time has come to conquer this final assessment frontier: the effective use of formative assessment to support learning (p. 10).

These concerns are especially critical at middle and high school levels where the range and utility of conventional tests are so much smaller (Torgesen & Miller, 2009).

COMPREHENSIVE AND BALANCED ASSESSMENT

Essential Elements of Assessment in MTSS-RtII

Layered Approach

A multi-tiered system of RtII requires a comprehensive and balanced assessment system. A balanced assessment system is one that may be "bigger" than the RtII framework in that it articulates and involves all aspects of assessment that occur in a particular school district/supervisory union over the course of a given year and over years. Efficient RtII assessment systems often involve a layered approach in which screening techniques are first used, both to identify which students require further (diagnostic) assessment and to provide aggregate data about the nature of student achievement overall. More detailed diagnostic assessments, used with some students, can provide more comprehensive data to inform instruction.

Although most approaches to RtII focus on screening and progress monitoring, effective multi-tiered systems also contain processes, procedures, and measures for gathering and analyzing diagnostic data. Ideally, the initial review by a school/district of its existing assessment system will reveal measures and tools used for each purpose. However, some schools may find that they need additional measures for a balanced and comprehensive approach.

Although it is much less common, assessment of the instructional context has long been acknowledged as essential in determining a good match between learning and instruction (Lipson & Wixson, 1986, 2012). Recent attention to behavioral outcomes has focused more attention on contextual issues. Because the quality of the instructional context is important for both academic and behavioral achievement, we provide a tool to assist districts/schools in considering how they assess critical contextual features as well as student outcomes (see Table 6).

Table 6. Comprehensive and Balanced Assessment System [5]

Grades:	Component Areas of Math, Literacy or Behavior	Contextual Features
Core Curriculum **All Students**	Outcomes/Screening District/Classroom Progress Monitoring	Classroom Practice(s)
Targeted, Strategic Interventions **Some Students**	Diagnostic Intervention/Progress Monitoring	Features of Intervention and Responsive Instruction
Intensive Interventions **Few Students**	Diagnostic Intervention/Progress Monitoring	Specific and Tailored Modifications

[5] Adapted from Rhode Island RTI Initiative (2007). Building A Comprehensive Assessment System: The Role of Assessment in RTI (Module #3). Rhode Island Technical Assistance Project (RITAP). Accessed at http://www.ritap.org/rti/content/modules/1_BuildingAComprehensive%20AssessmenSystem.POWERPOINT.ppt.

COMPREHENSIVE AND BALANCED ASSESSMENT

Screening

Data used for *screening purposes* are typically collected two to three times per year. All students in a school and/or at a particular grade level participate in one or more common assessments of academic and/or behavioral achievement. Because data are collected on all students, it is important that the system work efficiently. Some schools/districts identify distinct "screening" instruments that are short and easy to administer. However, it is possible within a comprehensive assessment system to use periodic benchmark or interim progress monitoring data for the purpose of screening. When there are common assessments created or agreed upon within a school, even formative assessments can serve the screening function.

The screening function is most critical at points of transition (i.e., entry into kindergarten, movement to middle or high school) when the body of information about an individual student may be small or may be less accessible. Most schools have some type of kindergarten screen, but it should be examined to ensure that key information is collected. District-wide comprehensive assessment systems often neglect, however, procedures for aggregating existing information of students for use in screening students as they transition to middle or high school. Yet, there is typically a great deal of information that can be used. Often educators consider a wide range of available data (e.g., standards-based report cards, curriculum based measures, district level standardized measures, etc.) as they make screening decisions that may help teachers and/or teams to establish a baseline from which to set goals for targeted interventions for students receiving support at the Tier II and III levels.

Tools used in universal screening are generally not designed to collect enough diagnostic information to plan and monitor instruction. However, they should be tools that are reliable and valid in terms of their ability to identify students who may need to be considered for additional support within the RtII framework or who require a closer look using other assessment(s).

Data collected for screening purposes needs to be analyzed to determine whether each student is (or is likely) to meet, exceed, or not meet benchmarks. Ideally, a screening measure will identify only those students who are really at risk (true positives) and would never flag a capable student as struggling (false positive). Educators must be wary of using a single screening tool since virtually no available assessment meets this standard and many are quite likely to misidentify students one way or the other.

Progress Monitoring

Within the RtII framework, both types of progress monitoring (formative and interim/benchmark) are critical to decisions about the provision of instruction and intervention at all levels of a multi-tiered system. Both types help teachers and teams to provide responsive instruction and intervention and are used to decide whether or not planned interventions are working. Tools used in progress monitoring may vary. Here too, schools need to review their assessment systems to identify which assessment procedures are best suited to progress monitoring.

Whole class progress monitoring may be conducted through formative assessment using teacher-designed assessments and/or standardized quantifiable measures. Progress monitoring for students receiving Tier II and III interventions may also be conducted with a variety of measures. Depending on the assessment schedule in the school/district, and the types of assessment data available, some students (at Tiers II and III) may be monitored more closely using additional or different assessments, as they will be used to make more high stakes decisions.

COMPREHENSIVE AND BALANCED ASSESSMENT

Progress monitoring data are also critical to the special education eligibility process for those students who may be considered for eligibility under the category of specific learning disabilities. Schools choosing to adopt the MTSS-RtII framework as a replacement for using severe discrepancy models and other formulas for determining the presence of a learning disability should have a carefully considered plan. That said, certain types of progress monitoring data might be used by any school as part of the determination of "adverse effect" in a comprehensive evaluation, regardless of the type of disability under consideration.

Diagnostic Measures

Assessment for *diagnostic* purposes is a critical part of a school/district's MTSS-RtII framework. As indicated above, few universal screening tools and only some progress monitoring tools are designed to probe student learning at a deeper diagnostic level. As such, those engaged in planning and implementing an approach to assessment within the RtII framework will need to consider what tools are appropriate and necessary for a more diagnostic approach to designing, implementing and evaluating instruction and intervention.

Practical Matters

A successful comprehensive assessment system should invite action. The system must include not only what assessments will be used but also address:

- *Where* will the data be stored/collected?
- *Who* will review the results of assessment(s)?
- *When* will these data be considered?
- *How* they will be used?

Examining data

For example, in a school conducting assessments of all students three times yearly, all teachers would review the data for their own class and grade and teams would examine data across a grade or for the school. However, one or more teams (e.g., the Educational Support Team (EST), grade level team, or a team associated with a Professional Learning Community (PLC)) may review data for some students more often. Classroom teachers use the data to adjust Tier I curriculum and instruction, and/or to identify students who may be in need of further assessment or more intensive levels of support or intervention. Specialist teachers use the data for these same purposes, but also to determine whether the intervention(s) being used are effective for individual students, whether more assessment data are needed, and/or whether decisions about eligibility are suggested.

Monitoring progress for some students

A similar set of questions and a system for making decisions is essential for students receiving interventions. Teachers and/or support personnel who are responsible for implementing interventions are generally assigned to collect progress monitoring data, and often teams (i.e., PCLs, ESTs or other teams designated as "RtI" teams) will review the results of progress monitoring on a pre-determined basis to identify whether or not interventions need to be changed, intensified, decreased, or discontinued.

COMPREHENSIVE AND BALANCED ASSESSMENT

On-going formative assessment as well as more frequent periodic benchmark assessment should be used with vulnerable students. Teachers and specialists who are providing interventions should examine student performance and their own instruction on a daily/weekly basis and use these data to make adjustments. This is especially true for very young students (K-2). Although there are no "hard and fast" rules regarding the timing and review of progress monitoring, schools engaging with the MTSS-RtII framework should consider and agree upon a set of guidelines or "decision rules" for progress monitoring as part of their overall design process.

Making decisions about interventions

How long should a single intervention be continued before it is terminated and/or before some other approach is taken? The literature is mixed on this question and is available only for elementary grade levels. The consensus agreement among professionals using the existing literature is that progress monitoring at eight to ten weeks should reveal progress and, if it does not, school teams and teachers need to review the data carefully to identify potential change(s). The nature of the data to be used to make decisions is also critical here. As we noted above, professionals should be examining on-going (formative progress monitoring) data in a continuous way. The frequency for administering more formal (benchmark progress monitoring) assessments is open to discussion. Although some researchers have suggested that weekly testing is required, the most recent research indicates that brief weekly tests (e.g. one-minute tests of oral reading and/or computation) may not be necessary since little additional information is added before 8-10 weeks (Jenkins, Graff, & Maglioretti, 2009).

Because data-based decision-making is a key element of any assessment system, schools choosing to adopt an MTSS-RtII framework will need to consider the capacity of teachers and decision-making teams to organize, review, analyze and make individual and school wide data-based decisions. Any system of assessment is only as good as the ability of its consumers to understand and use the data that are generated through that system, and for many teachers and teams, data-based decision-making is a skill that needs to be taught and supported on an ongoing basis.

Component V: Expertise (Well-designed Professional Learning)

Expertise and professional learning are the "fuel that drives the RtII Engine" (Batsche, n.d.). The four critical components of MTSS-RtII already described in this Field Guide require significant expertise. The development and refinement of this expertise must be supported by well-designed opportunities for professional learning. In this final section, we describe the significance of expertise and professional learning and offer guidance for how to plan for and tailor professional learning in a multi-tiered system of RtII.

Operating Assumptions:	Specifically refer to Guiding Principles 5, 7 9, and 10.
Key Definitions:	Refer to the Glossary for the following terms: *Professional Learning (Professional Development)* *Job-embedded Professional Learning*

The Significance of Expertise and Professional Learning

Expertise matters. Research has shown that teaching quality and effective school leadership are the most important factors in raising student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fullan, 2009). In fact, the expertise of the teacher has been distinguished as the most important factor in improving students' learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999). Variations in teachers' expertise may account for about 40 percent of the variance in students' reading and mathematics achievement at grades 1 through 11--more than any other single factor, even after controlling for socioeconomic status (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Excellent instruction provided by an expert teacher and effective school leadership are keys to school improvement and the success of a multi-tiered system of RtII (Costello et al., 2010; Lose, 2007).

How does expertise make a difference? Research suggests that students of expert teachers learn more, and that expert teachers make more sophisticated, integrated judgments about students' performances and teach with more fluency, automaticity, and efficiency than novices (Gallant & Schwartz, 2010; Garmston, 1998; Sternberg & Horvath, 1995). As teachers move along a continuum from novice to expert, they develop increasingly detailed, complex, and interrelated knowledge about their disciplines, pedagogy, and students (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995; Shulman, 1987). The novice stage of teaching might last for the first year and most teachers develop a state of competence within three or four years. Only a modest proportion of teachers, however, move to the expert stage (Berliner, 1988).

Well-designed professional learning supports the acquisition or refinement of expertise. For teachers and school leaders to be as effective as possible, they must continually expand their knowledge and skills and develop their abilities to implement best practices in the classroom (Mizell, 2010; Reed, Wexler, & Vaughn, 2012). Educators who experience effective professional learning during pre-service preparation and then throughout their careers are more likely to improve their skills in ways that impact student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1997). To be effective, learning opportunities need to be intentionally planned, practical, and systemic. Initial learning opportunities should be followed by embedded experiences.

While good professional learning is important in all contexts, it is essential in some. A recent publication by the National Staff Development Council/Learning Forward (2011) identified schoolwide collaborative professional learning as a critical factor in increasing student achievement in high-poverty schools. Teacher expertise is critical to MTSS-RtII because there is a strong need for teachers to make good decisions in differentiating instruction, conferring with colleagues, and recommending placements (Dorn & Henderson, 2010; Lose, 2007; International Reading Association, 2010). Some of these roles and responsibilities may be new to educators and administrators, increasing the need for effective professional learning and support.

EXPERTISE (WELL-DESIGNED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING)

Essential Elements of Expertise and Professional Learning within MTSS-RtII

Well-designed professional learning for MTSS-RtII honors research-based characteristics of well-designed professional learning and provides specific support for the development of expertise in the four critical components detailed in this Field Guide (systematic and comprehensive approach; effective collaboration; comprehensive, balanced assessment system; high quality instruction and intervention).

In this section, we identify essential elements of expertise and professional learning for each component of MTSS-RtII and conclude with research-based characteristics of effective, well-designed professional learning. While these elements are not all-inclusive, they can provide a good starting point.

Systemic and comprehensive approach

Professional learning for MTSS-RtII includes all educators in a school system and addresses the learning and skill needs at each level of the system. Purposes and processes of multi-tiered RtII and its implications for curriculum, instruction, assessment practices, and ongoing monitoring of schoolwide progress need to be understood by all within the system. At times, it may involve family and community members.

A school-based needs assessment of the current level and types of all educators' (teachers, specialists, administrators) expertise and an analysis of student performance data are essential components of a systemic and comprehensive approach to RtII. The results of this assessment can serve as the foundation for a professional learning action plan, which will be implemented and continually monitored and evaluated. Leadership ensures that the school's professional learning plan aligns with the school's improvement plan and includes:

- all educators within the system,
- understandings about roles and responsibilities,
- differentiation for professional learning needs,
- the four components of MTSS-RtII,
- sufficient time for professional learning activities and collaboration on aspects of multi-tiered instruction,
- job-embedded professional learning models,
- the use of experts and highly qualified professionals to provide targeted professional learning opportunities,
- a growth-oriented supervision model, and
- well-designed evaluations that determine whether the goals targeted by the professional learning opportunities have been achieved.

COMPONENT V: EXPERTISE (WELL-DESIGNED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING)

Effective collaboration

Skills and strategies for effective collaborating, teaming, and communicating among professionals, parents, and communities are essential in a multi-tiered system of support that emphasizes distributed leadership and a team approach. Well-designed professional learning that supports effective collaboration within a MTSS-RtII:

- develops and maintains shared values and vision for MTSS-RtII;
- creates common language/understanding of terms;
- teaches skills and strategies for how to work as a professional team and effectively use collaboration time (i.e., decision-making protocols, meeting norms, procedures for resolving conflicts and achieving consensus); and
- engages parents and communities.

Comprehensive and balanced assessment system

Educators participating in MTSS-RtII need to be able to collect, interpret, and discuss data from multiple sources for specific purposes. In order to establish and maintain a purpose-driven comprehensive and balanced assessment system, they need to be knowledgeable about:

- the purposes of each component of the school's balanced assessment system;
- assessment tools used to identify students who require a closer look (screening), investigate and analyze learning difficulties (diagnostics), inform instruction (formative progress monitoring); monitor progress (benchmark progress monitoring; and verify learning (outcomes or summative assessment);
- protocols for collection, synthesis, and analysis of student performance data across a variety of assessments;
- how to assess students' progress by looking at student work and observing learning;
- effective use of student performance data for decisions about techniques for differentiating instruction and positive behavior supports; and
- techniques for discussing data with colleagues.

High-quality instruction and intervention that is responsive and differentiated

Research on effective teaching identifies six areas of knowledge critical for expertise in teaching (Garmston, 1998). Because RtII begins in the classroom, each of these knowledge areas is implicated in the success of a multi-tiered system. We have annotated them below to demonstrate the connection of these knowledge areas to MTSS/RtII:

1. **Content.** Expert teachers have deep knowledge about the disciplines they teach. *MTSS/RtII*: Teachers must know the progression of content development so that they differentiate instruction based on students' knowledge and possible misconceptions related to their understanding of the content. The CCSS expectation that the English Language Arts will be developed throughout the curriculum at middle and high school, means that some discipline teachers will need to acquire additional expertise.

EXPERTISE (WELL-DESIGNED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING)

2. **Pedagogy**. Expert teachers have complex understandings of teaching strategies and know which teaching strategies are most appropriate for the content being taught. (This is in addition to the more generalized teaching knowledge such as managing classroom routines, setting expectations, etc.). *MTSS/RtII*: Responsive and flexible decision-making about instruction is critical in a multi-tiered system. Teachers need a repertoire of high-utility, effective teaching strategies from which to draw for instruction and interventions.

3. **Students and how they learn**. Expert teachers are sensitive to progressions of content learning, child/adolescent development, cultural factors, gender differences, and style preferences. *MTSS/RtII*: Understanding the developmental continuum of learning is essential to making good decisions about next instructional steps for all students, and especially those who struggle with learning. In addition, learning differences related to cultural norms or linguistic factors impact students' learning, especially if teachers are not aware of ways to respond instructionally. These factors need to be understood and addressed in research-based ways, and not mistaken for learning disabilities.

4. **Self-knowledge**. Expert teachers use knowledge of their own patterns, preferences, values, standards and beliefs to support informed decision-making about what and how to teach. *MTSS/RtII:* Recognition of one's own knowledge, beliefs and preferences is an essential first step to recognizing that there may be other ways of knowing and learning. Self-knowledge permits teachers to organize for instruction and assessment in ways that support diverse student strengths.

5. **Cognitive processes of instruction.** Expert teachers have higher conceptual levels and are more adaptive and flexible. Their students learn more, are more cooperative, and are more involved in their work than students of lower conceptual teachers. *MTSS/RtII*: Teachers need to be able to continue developing their knowledge and expertise and to apply it to new or unfamiliar contexts in order for students to experience success.

6. **Collegial interaction**. Expert teachers learn from each other and shape the action planning activities. School-based professional communities hold the potential to support teacher learning and improve student learning in powerful ways. *MTSS/RtII*: Teachers must be able to collaborate with colleagues and parents across multiple settings to ensure that students are receiving the best possible instruction and intervention from each member of the team.

EXPERTISE (WELL-DESIGNED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING)

Over the course of an educator's career, effective professional learning supports and develops each of these 6 areas, and each of these has an analog in the components of MTSS-RtII (see above).

Specific (new) learning that may be required for a multi-tiered system of support for RtII includes:

- unique needs of student populations: students with disabilities, ELs, students of poverty, and students representing all ethnicities;
- research-based responsive, differentiated instructional practices for individual learning needs;
- research based intensive intervention strategies for acceleration of learning;
- positive behavioral supports; and
- tools and strategies for evaluating and using a variety of instructional materials, including core instructional and intervention programs within their schools.

Attributes of Well-Designed Professional Learning for MTSS-RtII

Learning Forward (formerly known as the National Staff Development Council) defines effective professional learning as "that which causes teachers to improve their instruction and/or causes administrators to become better school leaders" (2011, p. 43). This organization proposes seven research-based standards for professional learning that can also be useful for schools to overlay as a lens when designing quality MTSS-RtII professional learning programs. They establish that professional learning to increase educator effectiveness and results for all students:

1. occurs within *learning communities*, committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility and goal alignment;
2. requires *skillful leaders* who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning;
3. requires prioritizing, monitoring, and *coordinating resources* for educator learning;
4. uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system *data* to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning;
5. *integrates* theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes;
6. applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for *long term change*; and
7. *aligns* its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards (Learning Forward, 2011).

With these standards in mind, what does well-designed professional learning for MTSS-RtII look like? A wide range of professional learning experiences are available to educators outside of the school setting, such as online or university courses, workshops, and conferences. While these decontextualized professional learning opportunities can provide significant benefit to many professionals, however, they are too often ineffective because the new learning often does not transfer to practice (Learning Forward, 2011).

EXPERTISE (WELL-DESIGNED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING)

Job-embedded models of professional learning have the best chance of improving and sustaining professional practice (Biancarosa, Bryk & Dexter, 2010; Saunders, Goldenberg & Gallimore, 2009). Job-embedded learning occurs while teachers and administrators engage in their daily work and simultaneously reflect on their experiences and share new insights with each other. In fact, the most recent research suggests that even job-embedded professional learning is only effective when there is sufficient infrastructure in place to support it (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching [NIET], 2012).

For job-embedded professional learning, educators may work with a knowledgeable person from inside or outside the school. There are many types, ranging from coaching and individual/group study to action research and peer observation. Professional Learning Communities (Dufour & Eaker, 1998) that support problem-solving teams have been shown to be an especially effective approach to professional learning (see Effective Collaboration section of this document).

In an effective multi-tiered system of support, teachers and school leaders take collective responsibility for the success of all students and work together to use data to understand what students are and are not learning, to identify instructional gaps, and determine what teachers need to learn to improve instruction to help close those gaps. Team members ask questions such as: What worked well? What did not? What evidence exists that students are performing better in response to educators' new skills? In this process, professional learning is immediately relevant, as teachers analyze and discuss with team members what they are learning and their experiences in using what they learned. This process supports a cycle of continuous improvement and ensures that educators continually become more effective in addressing students' learning.

Glossary of RTII Terms

Aim line
Line on a graph that represents expected student growth over time; goal line. The aim line is typically shown as the expected rate of progress toward either the district goal or a goal developed by the problem-solving team.

Balanced and Comprehensive Assessment System
A district level or schoolwide system of assessment that considers all 5 purposes for assessment (identify students who require a closer look (screening); investigate and analyze learning difficulties; inform instruction; monitor progress; and verify learning) and which provides a comprehensive and multi-faceted picture of students' academic and/or behavioral knowledge, abilities, and dispositions.

Baseline Data
The initial performance data taken on a student; often the median score of three baseline data points. The baseline serves as the reference point for all future data collection.

Benchmark (Periodic/Interim) Assessments
Assessments used to gather data several times a year to determine if students are making adequate progress in overall performance in relation to predetermined age/grade expectations and to monitor, over time, students' progress with respect to expected (benchmark) performance.

Benchmarks
Content or developmental standards (levels, cut scores, targets, etc.) that describe sequences of growth that can be monitored over time. Usually measured three times per year (fall, winter, spring).

Collaboration
The systematic process of working interdependently in an atmosphere of trust to accomplish collective commitments.

Collaborative Team
A group of two or more people with shared goals and perceived outcomes who meet on a scheduled or as-needed basis and fill a specific function or purpose.

Collaborative Team Process
Team meetings follow a regular meeting schedule and use protocols for planning and decision-making. Regular meetings and consistent processes in RtII systems help ensure that each student and all students in a school are provided with equitable opportunities to learn and succeed.

Diagnostics
Assessment data that help identify a student's specific strengths and weaknesses for the purpose of planning instruction and identifying appropriate interventions. A range of tools can be used for this purpose including formal and informal assessments such as running records, spelling inventories, oral language assessments in literacy, and response analysis or cognitive diagnostic tasks in mathematics.

GLOSSARY OF RTII TERMS

Differentiated Instruction
Adjusting the curriculum, teaching/learning environment, and/or instruction to provide appropriate learning opportunities for all students in order to support their learning and achievement. When core instruction is not effective for a particular student, it should be modified to address more closely the needs and abilities of the student.

Distributed Leadership
Perspective on leadership that involves considering leadership practices and interactions (versus roles or actions) and that recognizes that school leadership is distributed over multiple leaders – both administrators and teachers, depending on the function or activity (*Spillane & Healey, 2010*).

Evidence-based Instruction
Involves educational practices, instructional strategies, and interventions that have a record of success. There is reliable, trustworthy, and valid evidence to suggest that when the program or approach is used with a particular group of students, the students can be expected to make adequate gains in achievement (IRA, 2002).

Fidelity (see also Integrity)
Implementing a program, system or intervention so that it is aligned with research and ensures the largest possible positive outcome. This may include planning, duration, and attentiveness to the critical features of the design for instruction and/or intervention.

Formative (Ongoing) Progress Monitoring
Assessment that informs instruction quickly and on a regular basis (often gathering data during instruction). The focus is to determine the appropriateness of instruction as evidenced by student progress and to revise instruction when necessary.
Integrity(see also fidelity): Specific actions, approaches, activities, and/or materials that are required by a specific instructional approach or intervention and the degree to which these are maintained by professionals. Instruction must be provided by a teacher who understands the intent of the research-based practice being used and has the professional expertise and responsibility to plan instruction and adapt programs and materials as needed.

Intensity
Characteristics of instruction or intervention that result in more, and more effective, instruction for individuals or small groups. May refer to the length of time during which a student receives an intervention (e.g., 30 minutes), the frequency with which the student receives an intervention (e.g. daily) and the extent to which the intervention and instruction are tailored and responsive to meet the student's specific needs.

Intervention
Interventions are enhancements of general education curriculum and instruction, providing focused and gradually intensified instruction that is based on quality assessments and differentiated to meet student needs and accelerate learning in small groups or individually.

Multi-tiered System of Supports
A comprehensive, systemic approach to teaching and learning designed to meet the academic and non-academic needs and improve learning for all students through increasingly differentiated and intensified assessment, instruction, and intervention, provided by qualified professionals with appropriate expertise.

GLOSSARY OF RTII TERMS

Outcomes/Summative Assessment
Assessments that help teachers to evaluate and verify learning over time and may aid teachers in planning future instruction, informing classroom decisions (i.e. potential use of groupings), evaluating curricular changes, and making school wide decisions regarding curriculum and instruction.

Problem Solving Team
A collaborative team that includes parents, teachers and specialists that meets to evaluate student data, plan interventions and monitor student progress.

Professional Learning Community (PLC)
Educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. These teams may consist of grade level or department staff members who analyze whole class and individual data to assess student achievement.

Progress Monitoring (see also Benchmark and Formative)
Data used to frequently check student progress towards success. Progress monitoring is used to assess students' academic or behavioral performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Progress monitoring procedures can be used with individual students or an entire class.

Research-based Interventions (see Evidence-based Instruction)
Curriculum and educational interventions that have been proven to be effective for most students based on scientific study(ies) that: Use empirical methods, include rigorous and adequate data analysis, have been applied to a large study sample, are replicable, show a direct correlation between the interventions and student progress, and have been reported in a peer-reviewed journal.

School Culture
Historically transmitted patterns of meaning that include the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths understood, maybe in varying degrees, by members of the school community. This system of meaning often shapes what people think and how they act (Deal & Petersen, 1999).

Screening
Assessment data and other sources of information used to identify students who are experiencing difficulty (or are likely to) and who are in need of further diagnostic assessment or additional support within the MTSS-RtII.

Systemic and Comprehensive Approach
Coherent and consistent approach that recognizes the interdependency of all of the components of a tiered instruction and intervention model facilitated by strong, mindful leadership.

GLOSSARY OF RTII TERMS

Tiers (Multi-tiered System)

Refers to an infrastructure and system of supports designed to provide excellent universal, standards-based instruction (Tier 1) as well as supplemental instruction/intervention in increasingly "intensive" (tailored, focused) tiers of intervention for students who do not respond. Although a three-tiered model is common, there is no defined number of tiers that are necessary, as long as students have access to increasingly individualized interventions that increase both the amount of time and the expertise of the teacher. Other terms are sometimes used (e.g. layers). When a three-tiered model is used, the tiers are usually defined as follows:

Tier 1 is effective, standards-based instruction that occurs in the general education classroom and is delivered by a general education teacher. Commonly referred to as "core instruction," it is focused on meeting the needs of all students. The classroom teacher makes use of evidence-based instructional strategies and differentiates instruction to meet the needs of all students and ensure positive outcomes for all. Core instruction should include whole class, small group, and individual student work that are informed by assessment data appropriate for your class/grade and the Common Core State Standards.

Tier 2 is supplemental small group or individual instruction. Even with good first instruction, some students continue to struggle. Tier 2 instruction/intervention is designed specifically for those students who are not making adequate progress in Tier 1, or who are at risk for academic or behavior difficulties. Tier 2 interventions do not supplant Tier 1 instruction, but are provided in addition to what the student is receiving at Tier 1. These enhancements of the core curriculum are provided for a designated period of time and frequency. Interventions must be aligned to core instruction and are designed to match the needs of students identified as at-risk through screening and progress monitoring measures and are provided by trained, knowledgeable and skilled school professionals as soon as a need is identified.

Tier 3 is intended for students who are not making sufficient progress given high-quality instruction in Tiers 1 and 2. Tier 3 interventions are supplemental, individualized and customized for a very small number of students in a smaller group format (1:1 or 1:2) and delivered with greater frequency and duration than Tier 2. Students in Tier 3 continue to receive core instruction at Tier 1, focused on appropriate CCSS, although some portions of Tier 3 may supplant classroom instruction. Interventions at Tier 3 are tailored to the student's needs and provided by a highly trained, knowledgeable, and skilled educator. In some schools, Tier 3 will be an indication of special education placement; in others it may precede special education.

Trend line

Line on a graph that connects data points; it tracks the actual rate of improvement for individual students. It is typically compared against the aim line to determine responsiveness to intervention.

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