Multi-Tiers Systems of Support: Defining Tiers 1, 2, and 3

Reading proficiency develops over time, and students of all abilities need sustained and intentional reading in order to be ready for college and the work place. To that end, a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) (formerly known as Response to Intervention) provides a framework for delivering interventions to students who require more explicit, systematic, and focused instruction to acquire the knowledge and skills represented in the Minnesota English Language Arts Standards. This redesign model outlines the necessary elements of an effective reading intervention system for elementary students.

Guiding Principles of Intervention:

1. Interventions must be guided by student data and be in response to the data on student progress toward grade level expectations.
2. Interventions must be offered as soon as it is clear the student is not meeting expectations that are critical to reading growth with a particular emphasis on intervention in Kindergarten through Grade 2.
3. Progress is monitored regularly to determine whether or not students are responding adequately to the instruction/intervention. This information is used to match the level, intensity, duration, and frequency of instruction/ intervention to the identified student needs.
4. Interventions must provide the opportunity for explicit (direct) and systematic instruction and practice along with cumulative review to insure mastery.
5. Interventions must be motivating, engaging, and supportive—a positive atmosphere is essential.
6. Research-based practices must not only provide information about “what works,” but also what works with whom, by whom, in what contexts, and on which outcomes.
7. Interventions can be administered by a range of professionals, however the more severe the reading difficulty, the greater the need for expertise in the area of reading. The impact of the teacher is the single most powerful variable in explaining student reading achievement.
8. Pairing effective supplementary instruction (Tiers 2 and 3) with appropriate classroom lessons (Tier 1) produces better gains than classroom reading alone.

Tiers Defined

Tier 1 is general instruction for all students and is designed to provide access to grade level curriculum. All students are part of core instruction, and intervention is in addition to standards-based instruction.

Tier 2 is designed to bridge the learning gap for students who are approaching grade-level mastery. Students who need additional support to reach independence in reading grade level texts are provided with supplemental instruction in addition to core instruction. This tier often represents students who fall in the 26th-40th percentile on district or state assessments. Intervention in this tier can also be supported by differentiation in core academic areas that require reading tasks such as social studies, science, and math.

Tier 3 is designed to provide supplemental and more intensive intervention for students who exhibit significant difficulties with reading proficiency in addition to core instruction and other supplemental services. This tier often represents students who perform at the 0-25th percentile on
district and state assessments and who need sustained, direct instruction in small group or one-on-one settings to support development of independent reading practices.

**Tier 1 Expectations:** *Curriculum and instruction is rigorous, equitable, and aligned.*

1. Use **evidence-based curriculum** that is specifically aligned to grade level benchmarks in the K-12 ELA standards and WIDA and is culturally sensitive and values cultural knowledge.
2. **Effective instructional principles are embedded throughout the school day** and include explicit and systematic literacy instruction.
3. Technology is used by students regularly to gather, organize, manipulate and express ideas and information.
4. **Create high quality literacy rich environments** that foster a positive classroom atmosphere by: Providing effective classroom management, effective feedback to students, positive attitudes toward learning, independence and self-regulation, cooperative learning experiences, and open and responsive classrooms that are open to diverse ideas, demonstrate teamwork, and treat others with respect.
5. **Motivation and self-directed learning is facilitated by:** Building motivation to read and learn for all students, providing students with the instruction and supports needed for high levels of reasoning, including choice reading opportunities regularly, expecting students to read widely across all genres in print and digital text regularly, encouraging students to take academic risks, navigate difficult text, and apply critical reading strategies to deepen learning, value diverse perspectives, manage conflict, and efficiently use time in order to maximize learning.
6. **Direct, explicit comprehension instruction** will support students in using strategies flexibly when reading independently for comprehension. Research-based examples include: Summarizing, comprehension monitoring, use of graphic and semantic organizers, connecting reading to writing, higher-level question answering about text, and question generation before, during, and after reading.
7. A 90 minute block of uninterrupted literacy instruction including a balance between whole group and small group instruction is required. In addition we recommend another 30 minutes of independent reading and writing in response to text totaling 120 minutes of literacy instruction per day.
8. **Classroom Libraries** represent a wide variety of text and multiple reading levels.
9. Families, students, and educators **collaboratively identify learning goals** and measure progress towards goals regularly.
10. Both **formal and informal assessments** are used to provide data that drives instruction, supports differentiation, and documents alignment of instruction to academic standards. Assessments allow students to **demonstrate learning in varied and differentiated ways** that includes self-reflection.
11. Use of screening, diagnostic and progress monitoring data informs the instructional content, activity, delivery, or supplemental materials and assistive technology used to meet children’s instructional needs and strengths.
12. Families, students, and educators **collaboratively identify learning goals** and measure progress towards goals regularly.

**Tier 2 and 3 Expectations:**

1. Use **evidence-based curriculum** that is specifically designed to accelerate learning toward grade level benchmarks in the K-12 ELA standards and WIDA and is culturally sensitive while valuing cultural knowledge.
2. Technology is used by students regularly to gather, organize, manipulate and express ideas and information.
3. **Create high quality literacy rich environments** that foster a positive atmosphere by: Providing effective feedback to students, positive attitudes toward learning, independence and self-regulation, cooperative learning experiences, etc.
4. **Motivation and self-directed learning is facilitated by:** Building motivation to read and learn for all students, providing students with the instruction and supports needed for high levels of reasoning, expecting students to read widely across all genres in print and digital text regularly, encouraging students to take academic risks, navigate difficult text, and apply critical reading strategies to deepen learning, value diverse perspectives, manage conflict, and efficiently use time in order to maximize learning.

5. **Direct, explicit comprehension instruction** will support students in using strategies flexibly when reading independently for comprehension. Research-based examples include: Summarizing, comprehension monitoring, use of graphic and semantic organizers, connecting reading to writing, higher-level question answering about text, and question generation before, during, and after reading.

6. Intervention is provided in addition to a 90 minute block of uninterrupted literacy instruction including a balance between whole group and small group instruction is required. K-2 students in Tier 2 receive intervention at least 4 times a week, K-2 students in Tier 3 receive intervention at least 5 times a week. Students in Grades 3-5 receive intervention at least three times a week in Tier 2 and Tier 3.

7. Families, students, and educators **collaboratively identify learning goals** and measure progress towards goals regularly.

8. Both **formal and informal assessments** are used to provide data that drives intervention. Assessments allow students to **demonstrate learning in varied and differentiated ways** that includes self-reflection.

9. Use of screening, diagnostic and progress monitoring data informs the intervention instructional content, activity, delivery, or supplemental materials used to meet children’s instructional needs and strengths in addition to Tier 1 instruction.

**Tier 2 and 3 Entrance and Exit Criteria Grades K-2**

1. Students are identified for supplemental reading intervention in Tier 2 or Tier 3 if their FAST benchmark data indicates they have some risk (!) or high risk(!!) of not meeting grade level outcomes. Students are re-evaluated at each benchmarking period in the fall – winter – spring. Students who enter SLP outside of the benchmark window will also be evaluated using a defined protocol (not included here).

2. Each building leadership team will gather additional information on individual student needs such as EL status, Special Education placement, grade level needs assessment, or other considerations as deemed appropriate by the principal. This information can be used to inform decisions and must follow legal requirements for EL and Special Education services.

3. Building leadership teams meet monthly to review placement and progress data for students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention. If student need exceeds available staff support, K-2 students must be preferred for service with the most highly qualified staff. For example, reading intervention teachers should be providing intervention for K-2 students, with paraprofessional support for Grades 3-5 when needed.

4. Students exit from Tier 2 intervention when their next FAST benchmarking data indicates growth beyond the 40th percentile AND their progress-monitoring chart indicates growth is above the trend line for at least four consecutive weeks. Students in Tier 2 move to Tier 3 when their FAST benchmarking data indicated they have moved from some risk (!) to high risk (!!) AND their progress-monitoring chart indicates negative growth for at least four consecutive weeks.

**Tier 2 and 3 Entrance and Exit Criteria Grades 3-5**

1. **Tier 2 intervention** is only considered when grade level class size exceeds 26. IF class size is smaller than 26, classroom teachers will provide additional support for students whose FAST benchmark data indicates some risk (!) of not meeting grade level outcomes.

2. **Tier 3 intervention** is provided for students whose FAST benchmark data indicate they have high risk (!!) of not meeting grade level outcomes.
3. Each building leadership team will gather additional information on individual student needs such as EL status, Special Education placement, grade level needs assessment, or other considerations as deemed appropriate by the principal. This information can be used to inform decisions and must follow legal requirements for EL and Special Education services.

4. Building leadership teams meet monthly to review placement and progress data for students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention. If student need exceeds available staff support, K-2 students must be preferred for service with the most highly qualified staff. For example, reading intervention teachers should be providing intervention for K-2 students, with paraprofessional support for Grades 3-5 when needed.

5. Students exit from Tier 2 intervention when their next FAST benchmarking data indicates growth beyond the 40th percentile AND their progress-monitoring chart indicates growth is above the trend line for at least four consecutive weeks. Students in Tier 2 move to Tier 3 when their FAST benchmarking data indicated they have moved from some risk (!) to high risk (!!) AND their progress-monitoring chart indicates negative growth for at least four consecutive weeks.

### Staffing Recommendations

**K-2:** Reading Intervention Teachers will provide direct support for K-2 students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention. 1.0 FTE is equivalent to a caseload of no less than 30 students and no more than 40 students. Similarly, .5 FTE equivalent is a caseload of 18-22. FTE is assigned to schools at the district’s discretion based on needs, budgetary constraints, federal and state fund allocations, and other considerations.

**3-5:** Reading Intervention Teachers should provide direct support for 3-5 students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention whenever possible. 1.0 FTE is equivalent to a caseload of no less than 36 students and no more than 50 students. Similarly, .5 FTE equivalent is a caseload of 20-30. FTE is assigned to schools at the district’s discretion based on needs, budgetary constraints, federal and state fund allocations, and other considerations. Paraprofessionals who meet Minnesota’s highly qualified requirements can provide supplemental practice to students who need assistance after or in addition to an intervention has been delivered by a licensed teacher. Under the direction of a licensed teacher, they may assess and monitor a student’s progress and provide practice activities for students who need additional time and support.

Teachers who provide reading intervention must participate in regular professional development and collaboration opportunities as designated by administrators. This included data review meetings, training on intervention resources, and coaching with a designated literacy teacher leader.

### Resources

A variety of evidence-based intervention materials will be used to ensure students are receiving high quality instruction during supplemental intervention. The needs of students drive instructional decisions, so not all students will need or receive the same intervention options. It is expected that reading intervention teachers begin intervention with tools designated below because they are most likely to meet the needs of students. Additional resources or student performance information may be added as needs arise under the direction of the Teaching and Learning department.

**Tier 2**
- Leveled Literacy Intervention
- Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)
- Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites (PRESS)

**Tier 3**
- iRead
Assessments
Teachers and leaders at all grade levels need reliable and valid assessments so that they can identify those students who are learning as expected, and those who need extra help. This is why St. Louis Park Schools takes a comprehensive approach to collecting proficiency, growth, and grade level data on all students.

Multiple measures used to determine students' level of proficiency include:

- **FAST early Reading Assessment (ERA)** is used by classroom teachers in Grades K-1 to assess and monitor students in: concepts of print, onset sounds, letter name fluency, letter sound fluency, rhyming, segmenting phonemes, blending, final phoneme and word and sentence fluency.

- **FAST Curriculum-based Measures (CBM)** are used by classroom teachers in Grades 1-5 to assess and monitor students reading fluency. This has been proven to be a highly effective tool for monitoring reading proficiency.

- **Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)** is used by classroom teachers in Grades 2-5 to assess and monitor students growth and development in key areas of growth and reading development.

**WIDA/ACCESS Tests** will be used as a screener for identifying English learners (EL). This annual assessment gives educators and parents information about the ELP level of ELs in Kindergarten through grade 12 in the skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Beliefs and Assumptions
It is important to acknowledge that there are a variety of beliefs and assumptions that underlie the redesign of the SLP reading intervention program.

- **Students that are behind their peers in grade-level reading achievement need:**
  - An intervention plan that will accelerate their reading growth and development
  - Provide additional support above and beyond reading in language arts and other content areas
  - Instruction from a licensed reading professional

- **Students reading at or above grade level will also benefit from explicit reading instruction in Tier 1** to encourage ongoing growth and development of critical thinking skills

- An instruction and intervention plan should be data driven and based on student’s need to assure growth in reading development and to support independence in applying strategic reading practices throughout the school day

- Entrance and exit criteria should represent the accelerated growth needed to ensure students are making adequate progress toward grade-level expectations

- Instruction needs to be evidence-based and implemented as intended to be fully accessible and valuable to students

Legislative requirements for ELs
2014 Education Policy Bill (Chapter 272, HS 2397) requires a school district’s long-term strategic plan to include strategies for improving instruction, curriculum, and student achievement, including English, and where practicable, the native language development and the academic achievement of English learners outlines in a World’s Best Workforce Plan. In addition, school districts are directed to adopt a local literacy plan to have every child reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade, including English learners.

Parental Involvement
Communicating with parents about how their children are doing in school is essential to our success. The purpose and benefits of including families in educational programming is well substantiated in research.

We work toward this goal in many ways:

1. Parents are notified when students are not making adequate progress. Current achievement levels and programming is explained, including intervention and/or supplemental instruction, along with resources that are available for parents to access at home.
2. Information on how parents can support their child at home will be communicated regularly.
3. Families will be included in goal setting for their child so to create time and space to build relationships with incoming families, specifically families of color, to facilitate a partnership of educating children based on their strengths.

Summary

St. Louis Park Public Schools has a multi-tiered structure of support for students beginning with intentional instruction by the classroom teacher and progressing to more focused intervention, both in increased time and in support. These interventions include small group instruction provided by the classroom teacher on a daily basis, additional small group instruction outside of the literacy block provided by a reading intervention teacher, Title I teacher, ESL Teacher, or trained paraprofessional. Preference is given to early intervention in grades K-2. Additional support is provided in grades 3-5 as described in the district guidelines.

In the 2015-16 school year we will be implementing a redesign on our reading intervention process and program into a multi-tiered system of support. Implementing interventions for students who have reading difficulties will occur within a scientific process of targeting students’ needs and selecting and applying evidence-supported instruction that matches their needs. Evaluating whether or not students respond to intervention is ongoing and systematic. The amount and types of interventions that may be needed can be determined and evaluated within a multi-tiered system so that as many children as possible who are in need of supplemental reading instruction receive it. More than 30 years of research exists indicating how children learn to read, why some children fail at reading, and what components and practices are necessary to provide effective instruction in reading. MTSS is a prevention model aimed at providing supports to students before they become disengaged from school because of advanced learning needs or fall behind. A multi-tier reading model emphasizes early identification, supplemental instruction, and on-going use of data to modify instruction to ensure progress. Included in the MTSS model is the use of scientific, research-based reading researched practices including language development and the five essential areas of reading. Considerable research supports the importance of using systematic and explicit instruction when teaching language and the five essential areas of reading-- namely, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

St. Louis Park Public Schools also provides Special Education services for students with disabilities. These services include specially designed curriculum and provided by a licensed Special Education instructor.

Intervention in addition to classroom instruction is provided for students significantly below grade level expectation. Placement in Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention are determined based on entrance and exit criteria. Instruction is designed to accelerate learning toward grade level outcomes and materials are chosen based on evidence of success with students of similar need. Group size is determined by the needs of students and the intervention tool used. Regular parent communication is expected.

Effective professional development for educators who support learners is essential for academic success is also part of the plan. These opportunities may be described as learning that results in
improvements in teaching and school and district leader knowledge and practices, more importantly, in increasing student achievement. By supporting common, coherent implementation of teaching and learning practices that will accelerate the learning of all students and educators, we increase student achievement.

By identifying common principles of student achievement, we can all focus on a solution-oriented approach to closing the achievement gap.