

Effective Tiered Instruction for Literacy

Introduction

The following case study focuses on a student that is struggling with the Florida Standards in a fifth-grade classroom. The School-Based Leadership Team (SBLT), in combination with the general and special education teachers, developed a multi-tiered plan to provide additional supports for the student.

Tier 1

The focus in core (Tier 1) is on successful implementation of the Florida Standards to drive instruction. Each standard provides clear expectations for the knowledge and skills students need to master in each grade level and ensure high-quality instruction and positive outcomes for **all** students. They provide the foundation for students to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills that will be used throughout life. Two frameworks for supporting the implementation of Florida Standards are the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction, which provide students with options for accessing and engaging with instruction, as well as demonstrating their learning. The effectiveness of instruction is determined through student progress toward grade-level expectations.

Tier 1 Case Study

The fifth-grade teacher incorporated a balanced literacy approach through UDL principles and differentiation (e.g., graphic and text organizers, visual and mnemonic devices, online learning games, writing tools, etc.). The students received ninety minutes of reading instruction on a daily basis. The teacher utilized the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading – Florida Standards (FAIR-FS) data and tools to gain clearer understanding of her students' needs and provided assistance based on those results. She monitored student learning through both formative (e.g., observation, quizzes, daily quick checks, peer review, writing samples, etc.) and summative (e.g., district benchmark assessments, unit tests, projects, rubrics, etc.) assessments.

One of her students struggled in both reading informational text (i.e., *Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a Grade 5 topic or subject area*), and writing (i.e., *Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic*) to examine and convey ideas clearly when responding to text. Additionally, he struggled in both reading and writing fifth-grade-level phonics and word analysis skills when decoding and determining meaning of grade-level vocabulary using affixes and roots. The teacher included mini-group lessons (e.g., writing workshops, individual conferences, vocabulary and syntax clues, etc.) and the use of writing through multiple print and digital resources.

The student's progress monitoring data was reviewed, and it was determined there was not sufficient evidence of progress toward core expectations. Based upon data indicating a poor response to Tier 1 (core instruction), the SBLT determined instruction was not matched to the student's learning needs and more focused instruction (Tier 2 supports) was necessary.

Tier 2

The focus of supplemental (Tier 2) support is to address gaps that pose barriers to learning and to improve student performance with Tier 1 expectations. This requires systematic, explicit, and interactive small group instruction targeted on foundational skills. Instruction is more intense (more time and narrow focus with explicit feedback) and may be provided by various professionals (e.g., general educator, special educator).

Data (e.g., benchmark, progress monitoring, diagnostic) are used to identify groups of students who are in need of supplemental supports and those that share the same academic needs. The frequency of progress monitoring within a tier varies depending on students' needs and assessment parameters. Effective Tier 2 instruction matches instruction to the need of the students in the group and provides multiple opportunities to practice the skill and receive feedback. The additional time allotted is **in addition** to core instruction. The intervention includes materials and strategies designed to supplement core instruction and are integrated and reciprocal within Tier 1.

Tier 2 Case Study

The teacher utilizes the FAIR-FS Class Report and Guide and organizes the data for small group considerations. Additionally she assesses the students' reading level, fluency/comprehension (maze) and fluency measure (oral reading fluency). She reviewed all of the data provided for the student and shared her findings with the core educator. Based on the information provided, they hypothesized the student mastered

the use of common affixes and roots or familiar vocabulary at the third-grade level, but struggled when combining letter-sound correspondences, patterns and morphology when reading unfamiliar multi-syllabic words at the fifth- and fourth-grade levels. Focusing on fourth-grade expectations, the reading teacher determined that she will work with this student five days a week for thirty minutes per day targeting instruction on foundational gaps in reading and writing. In small group format, she began to pre-teach vocabulary words for reading and writing assignments to assist with progress in general education. She ensured UDL principles to connect and build background knowledge with strategies to support vocabulary (e.g., word games, graphic organizers, word study, vocabulary apps, etc.) and to engage in the language. She also included shared reading activities and phonics mini-lesson instruction to increase spelling. To assist with expanding word knowledge, background information and increase reading ability, she incorporated a book club that allowed student choice in reading. The students also received reading support through an interactive web-based program that included lessons, assessments, tracking and reporting that were completed on an individual student basis and were monitored frequently (daily/weekly). Any effective strategies (e.g., graphic organizers, word study and online apps) were incorporated into core instruction to support learning throughout the school day.

Upon review of the data, the student continued to struggle with vocabulary, so the teacher conferenced with him individually and provided specific targeted feedback. She increased her time with him during guided practice in small group, added additional informal assessments to monitor progress, and provided extra practice of applying strategies to reading material. She incorporated word study to increase his vocabulary but noticed he had little background knowledge of concepts described in class. The student continued to struggle with vocabulary with approximately 50% accuracy rates. Although he had little difficulty with simple words and phrases and common affixes and roots, he struggled with reading and writing unknown multisyllabic words and uncommon words and phrases. The teacher also shared when information is read to him he seemed to understand the material. Based on the information and data provided by the teacher, the SBLT determined the student was not responding adequately to instruction, and a more intensive (Tier 3) support was necessary.

Tier 3

The focus of intensive (Tier 3) support is for students who demonstrate both intense (large gap in expected versus current performance) and severe (unresponsive to intervention) learning problems. Effective implementation requires the support to be matched to student need and is provided by the most experienced, and/or specialized expert. Instruction is individualized and targeted to the skills that pose the greatest barrier to learning and is characterized by the greatest number of minutes of instruction with the narrowest focus for an individual or a very small group of students.

Individualized diagnostic data, as well as instructional time, are *in addition* to those provided in Tiers 1 and 2. Assessments occur more frequently and focus on the learning barriers to success at Tiers 1 and 2 and are based on intensity of needs. The larger the gap, the more frequent assessments occur to monitor student progress. The expected outcome, along with Tiers 1 and 2, is for the student to achieve Tier 1 proficiency levels.

Tier 3 Case Study

Using the FAIR-FS Individual Student Data and Guide results, the SBLT determined a further decoding diagnostic measure was required to ensure a thorough understanding of the student's needs. According to the data, the student needed intensive instruction in word study and word recognition and support for applying decoding strategies to connected text to reinforce strategies. He also required assistance with building fluency and comprehension. The SBLT determined that the student would receive Tier 3 support five days a week for 45 minutes per day, targeting instruction focused on foundational gaps in reading and writing monitored on a weekly bases. The interventionist applied a research-based program designed for students who struggle with decoding and comprehension that includes structured lessons designed to develop necessary skills. She also assisted the student through utilizing techniques like syllable and word pattern games and word sorts to increase his use and understanding of unknown multi-syllabic words. To support writing, she included strategies like framed sentences and paragraphs with fading. To increase fluency, she utilized a buddy approach at the student's instructional reading level. The teacher assisted him with learning how to transfer, or generalize, these strategies and strength in learning throughout his school day. She ensured application by applying multi-modal strategies and techniques and applied UDL principles (e.g., reading out loud, auditory books, partner reading, computer-based auditory support). Additionally the interventionist collaborated with the SBLT to share progress and ensure alignment to core instruction with learned strategies to increase engagement. For supplemental support, she provided techniques to include additional vocabulary strategies and an online writing program to ensure learning opportunities occur throughout his day and learning experiences.

Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)

If it is determined that the student is eligible and in need of Exceptional Student Education Services and Supports, they will benefit from SDI. SDI refers to instruction that is provided to eligible students with disabilities (e.g., students that receive procedural safeguards by law and have an Individualized Education Program). SDI is provided collaboratively by the general and special education teachers and is applicable across all tiers of instruction. It enables students with disabilities to access the core curriculum in the least restrictive environment through a UDL approach. SDI provides

unique instruction/intervention supports determined, designed, and delivered through a team approach, ensuring access to core instruction through the adaptation of content, methodology, or delivery of instruction.

Conclusion

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports exists to ensure *all* students access to high quality, engaging instruction. It integrates instruction and intervention to meet the needs of students, identified through data-based decisions, to accelerate performance and ensure mastery of the Florida Standards. Additionally, effective strategies are utilized throughout their learning experience to align tiers of instruction and to ensure students meet with success.

References

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