

# **Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving**

*Revised 2015*

## **GTIPS-R**



Print version adapted from the online manual at <http://www.florida-rti.org/gtips/index.html>



# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	i
Guiding Principles: Meeting the Needs of All Students.....	1
Making Connections: Aligning Practices, Efforts, Commitments and Initiatives.....	11
Continuous Improvement: The Problem Solving Process.....	21
Team Engagement .....	33
Special Education Eligibility Decisions.....	38
Conclusion .....	49
The Tools .....	50
Common Understandings.....	51



# Introduction

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports is a term used to describe an evidence based model of schooling that uses data-based problem solving to integrate academic and behavioral **instruction** and **intervention**. The integrated instruction and intervention is delivered to students in varying intensities (multiple **tiers**) based on student need. “Need driven” decision making seeks to ensure that district resources reach the appropriate students and schools at the appropriate levels to accelerate the performance of ALL students to achieve and/or exceed proficiency.

Many existing terms and initiatives share common elements of data-based problem solving to inform instruction and intervention (e.g., positive behavior support [PBS], problem solving/response to intervention [PS/RtI], Florida state standards-based **instruction, lesson study, continuous improvement** and differentiated accountability). For instance, teachers and administrators engage in standards-based instructional efforts with common **standards** for all through the implementation of the Florida State Standards. For this effort to be successful, it is important to recognize that students have varying needs and that correspondingly varying levels of support will be necessary for all students to master the standards. A multi-tiered system of supports provides the **framework** for organizing the **supports** that will ensure student success.

In order to make **instructional decisions** to implement the system of supports, the use of a structured, data-based problem solving process is critical to assure that each of the tiers is constructed in response to the specific needs of the students. This team-based process requires that school-based team members apply the following skills to facilitate the process:

1. accurately identify problems and goals; analyze **data**;
2. generate and validate hypotheses about why the students are not yet demonstrating the desired skill;
3. design, support, and implement academic interventions and behavioral supports; and
4. use **student centered data** to evaluate the response to instruction/intervention.

This team-based process applied at all levels of Florida’s educational system supports the mission of the State Board of Education. The mission of the State Board of Education, as stated in section 1008.31, Florida Statutes (F.S.), is to increase the proficiency of all students within one seamless, efficient system by providing them with the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills through learning opportunities and research valued by students, parents, and communities. It strives to maintain an accountability system that measures student progress toward the following goals:

- highest student achievement
- seamless articulation and maximum access
- skilled workforce and economic development
- quality efficient services

Ultimately, the role of the education system is to prepare every student for life with a focus on college and career readiness. To this end, it is the position of the Florida Department of Education that a multi-tiered system of supports represents a logic and set of core beliefs, including the systematic use of a problem solving process that must be integrated seamlessly into educational initiatives throughout Florida. Ideally, this integration should be evident within continuous school improvement efforts, student progression plans, leader and **educator**

**evaluation** models, and the development of K–12 comprehensive reading plans to provide the legal structure for the implementation of a multi-tiered system in districts across the state.

*Florida’s Statewide Response to Instruction/Intervention Implementation (RtI) Plan* was disseminated in 2008 and is still accessible at Florida’s Multi-Tiered System of Supports website — <http://florida-rti.org/floridaMTSS/history.htm>. The plan outlines a **framework** for statewide implementation of problem solving and RtI through the establishment of an **infrastructure** that includes district-based leadership teams (DBLT) implementing district-based plans to support **school-based leadership teams (SBLT)** implementing school-based plans.

As stated in Florida’s Statewide PS-RtI Plan (2008): “...all schools in Florida should ensure evidence based practices, instructionally **relevant assessments**, systematic problem-solving to meet all students’ needs, data-based decision making, effective professional development, supportive leadership, and meaningful student and parent involvement. These are the foundation principles of an RtI system, which provides us the framework to elevate the efficacy of our statewide improvement efforts.” Within the plan, RtI is defined as the practice of providing (1) high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and (2) using learning rate over time and **level of performance** to (3) make important educational decisions.

It is imperative to consider specific types of educational decisions for students, such as eligibility for special education services, in the larger context of the multi-tiered system of supports implementation. More important than its role in making eligibility decisions, the **data** derived during the problem solving process are utilized to create and sustain **learning environments** that are effective and lead to desired outcomes for all students. Consequently, the multi-tiered system of supports outlined in this guide has a significant impact on **instruction** and assessment practices in Florida schools.

Ultimately, this guide provides Florida schools and districts with detailed information on the process for the collection of student performance data through the system-wide use of a data-based problem solving process and delineates how those data can be used to assist with making important educational decisions for all students.

## **About**

The original version of this guide was released as a print-based manual in 2011. GTIPS-R represents updated terminology and an expansion of tools to reflect current federal and state research findings, policies, and guidance. The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) developed *The Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving - Revised* (GTIPS-R) manual with the invaluable assistance of the writers, reviewers, and revisionists listed in the acknowledgements below.

The purpose of this guide is to assist districts and schools as they implement and support data-based decision making using a systematic planning and problem solving process at multiple levels of operation: school level, grade level (pre-kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and high school), classroom level, student subgroup level, and individual student level.

This guide aligns directly with Florida’s implementation of a multi-tiered system of supports using response to **instruction/intervention** data within a data-based problem solving process in every school. As well, the stage is set for schools to approach instructional decisions from a broader context of quality instruction, intervention, and **assessment** to address the learning and behavioral needs of all students.

Additionally, this guide addresses ways in which districts can assess the effectiveness of their core curricula and instruction, as well as interventions and, in turn, use such data in various decision making processes for students. Data reflecting the effectiveness of core instruction and interventions is used to make instructional decisions for all students, not just those who may be struggling. Therefore, it is important that district and school leadership teams take an active role in examining curricular materials, instructional methodologies, the learning environment, and other practices across school settings to determine their impact on academic and behavioral student learning.

The Florida Department of Education views a system comprised of multiple **tiers** of support as an avenue to continue to work collaboratively to significantly improve the way in which the needs of all students enrolled in Florida schools are addressed. In this way, students at all points on the continuum of educational need receive effective assistance. Accordingly, the Department looks forward to continuing unified efforts to support the implementation of a data-driven multi-tiered system across the state.

**Acknowledgements**

<b>Original Contributors, 2011</b>	<b>Revision Contributors, 2015</b>
<p><b>George Batsche, Director</b> Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project University of South Florida</p> <p><b>Clark Dorman, Project Leader</b> Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project University of South Florida</p> <p><b>Heather Diamond, Specialist</b> Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services Florida Department of Education</p> <p><b>Leah Kelly, Executive Director</b> Student Support Services/ Exceptional Student Education Broward County School District</p> <p><b>Kim Komisar, Program Director</b> Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services Florida Department of Education</p> <p><b>Amelia VanName Larson, Supervisor</b> Curriculum and Instructional Services Pasco County School District</p> <p><b>Mary Alice Myers, Coordinator</b> School Psychological Services Volusia County School District</p> <p><b>Mark Neely, School Psychologist</b> Student Support Services Polk County School District</p> <p><b>Teresa D. Sweet, Chief</b> Bureau of Curriculum and Instruction Florida Department of Education</p> <p><b>Melinda Webster, Elementary Reading Specialist</b> Just Read, Florida! Office Florida Department of Education</p> <p><b>David Wheeler, School Psychology Consultant</b> Student Services Support Project University of South Florida</p>	<p><b>George Batsche, Director</b> Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project University of South Florida</p> <p><b>José Castillo, Unit Coordinator</b> Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project University of South Florida</p> <p><b>Clark Dorman, Project Leader</b> Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project University of South Florida</p> <p><b>Heather Diamond, Coordinator</b> Student Support Services Project University of South Florida</p> <p><b>David Davis, Technology Project Coordinator</b> Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project University of South Florida</p> <p><b>Brian Gaunt, Inter-project Coordinator</b> Positive Behavior Support Project Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project University of South Florida</p> <p><b>Jayna Jenkins, MTSS Liaison</b> Student Support Services Project University of South Florida</p> <p><b>Zoe Mahoney, Specialist</b> Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services Florida Department of Education</p> <p><b>Kevin Smith, Director</b> Just Read, Florida! Florida Department of Education</p> <p><b>Jeanne Wanzek, Assistant Professor</b> College of Education Florida State University</p> <p><b>David Wheeler School Psychology Consultant</b> Student Services Support Project University of South Florida</p>

*Note: Individuals are identified in the roles that they were fulfilling at the time the original and/or revised work was being completed.*



# Guiding Principles: Meeting the Needs of All Students

## Purpose

In June of 2008, the FDOE published a *Response to Instruction/Intervention (RtI) Implementation Plan* (<http://florida-rti.org/floridaMTSS/RtI.pdf>) that provided the initial, formal, and state level framework to assist districts with critical components, definitions, and applications to support the development of schoolwide PS-RtI implementation. The publication of the statewide implementation plan marks a significant point in our state's development, reflecting our state level collective intent to engage in large-scale **systems** change.

Since 2004, Florida has engaged in continuous efforts to determine how data-based problem solving and the multi-tiered system integrate the various elements of Florida's education system and how the implementation of this way of work affects resource allocation and access through the federal **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**. As elements of our system grow and change, it is important that we continue to examine how the logic of data-based problem solving affects Florida's system as a whole, rather than applying procedures in isolation.

*The Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving - Revised (GTIPS-R)* illustrate the comprehensive way in which data-based problem solving is universally applied to decision making in Florida, including, **but not limited to**, decisions related to eligibility for special education services and **supports**. It's intended to:

- guide the application of district- and schoolwide problem solving within a multi-tiered system of supports as a system-wide school improvement model
- provide districts and schools with the practical decision making tools that maintain the integrity of the problem solving process using response to instruction/intervention **data** within a multi-tiered system
- reinforce the purpose of effective instructional decision making to improve the effects of **instruction** for all students while acknowledging its role in **evaluation** and eligibility decisions related to special education

## Foundational Beliefs

Florida's educators who are involved in the systematic implementation of a multi-tiered system share the following beliefs about the ideal educational conditions for promoting student achievement. Using the following beliefs to guide our efforts is one way to ensure consistent movement toward maximizing student achievement.

1. Highly effective personnel deliver scientific, research-based **instruction** and evidence based practices.
2. Curriculum and instructional approaches, aligned with the Florida State **Standards**, have a high probability of success for most students.
3. Instruction is differentiated, includes appropriate scaffolds and **accommodations**, and is based on **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** principles to meet individual learning needs.

4. Reliable, valid, and instructionally **relevant assessments** include the following:
  - **Screening Measures** — Assessment tools designed to collect data for the purpose of measuring the effectiveness of core instruction and identifying students needing more intensive interventions and support
  - **Diagnostic Measures** — Formal or informal assessment tools that measure skill strengths and weaknesses, identify skills in need of improvement, and assist in determining why a problem is occurring.
  - **Progress Monitoring Measures** — Ongoing assessment conducted for the purposes of guiding instruction, monitoring student progress, and evaluating instruction/intervention effectiveness.
  - **Formative Measures** — Ongoing assessment embedded within effective teaching to guide instructional decisions and provide indicators for instructional, scaffolding, accommodation, and/or accessibility solutions.
  - **Summative (Outcome) Measures** — Typically administered near the end of the school year to give an overall perspective of the effectiveness of the instructional program.
5. Ongoing, systematic problem solving is consistently used for all students from enrollment to graduation to make decisions across a continuum of student needs.
6. Student data are used to guide meaningful decision making.
7. Professional development and follow-up coaching with modeling are provided to ensure effective instruction at all levels.
8. Actively engaged administrative **leadership** for data-based decision making is inherent to the school **culture**.
9. All students and their parent(s) are part of one proactive and seamless educational system.

### **Data-Based Problem Solving within an MTSS**

Data-based problem solving within a multi-tiered system of supports involves the provision of high-quality **instruction** and intervention matched to student needs, using **learning rate** over time and **level of performance** to make important **instructional decisions**. A multi-tiered system of supports involves the systematic use of **assessment data** to most efficiently allocate resources in order to improve learning for all students. To ensure efficient use of resources, schools begin with the identification of trends and patterns using schoolwide and grade-level data. Students who need instructional intervention beyond what is provided universally for positive behavior or academic content areas are provided with targeted, supplemental **interventions** delivered individually or in small groups at increasing levels of intensity.

The multi-tiered system is characterized by a continuum of academic and behavior **supports** reflecting the need for all students to have fluid access to instruction of varying intensity levels. Three **tiers** describe the level and intensity of the instruction/interventions provided across the continuum. The three tiers are not, conversely, used to describe categories of students or specific instructional programs.

The three tiers are characterized as follows:

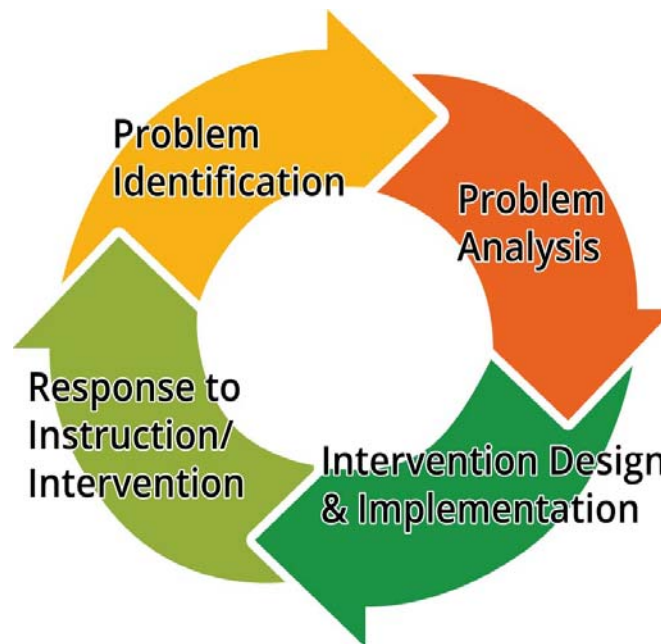
**Tier 1: Core Universal Instruction and Supports** – General academic and behavior instruction and supports, based on Universal Design for Learning principles, designed and differentiated for all students in all settings.

**Tier 2: Targeted Supplemental Interventions and Supports** – More focused, targeted instruction/intervention and supplemental supports in addition to and aligned with the core academic and behavior curriculum and instruction.

**Tier 3: Intensive Individualized Interventions and Supports** – The most intense (increased time, narrowed focus, reduced group size) instruction and intervention based upon individual student need provided in addition to and aligned with core and supplemental academic and behavior, curriculum, instruction, and supports.

The problem solving process is critical to making instructional decisions and adjustments needed for continual improvement, including identifying student current level of performance and **rate of progress**. The process is also critical for assessing the effectiveness of the instruction/interventions that have been provided. Throughout the continuum of instruction and intervention, problem solving is used to match instructional resources to educational needs, which vary across areas of academic content and/or behavioral skills. **Teams continue to engage in problem solving to ensure that student success is achieved and maintained.**

### The Problem Solving Process



The four critical parts of the on-going problem solving cycle as a consistent way of work for teams are as follows:

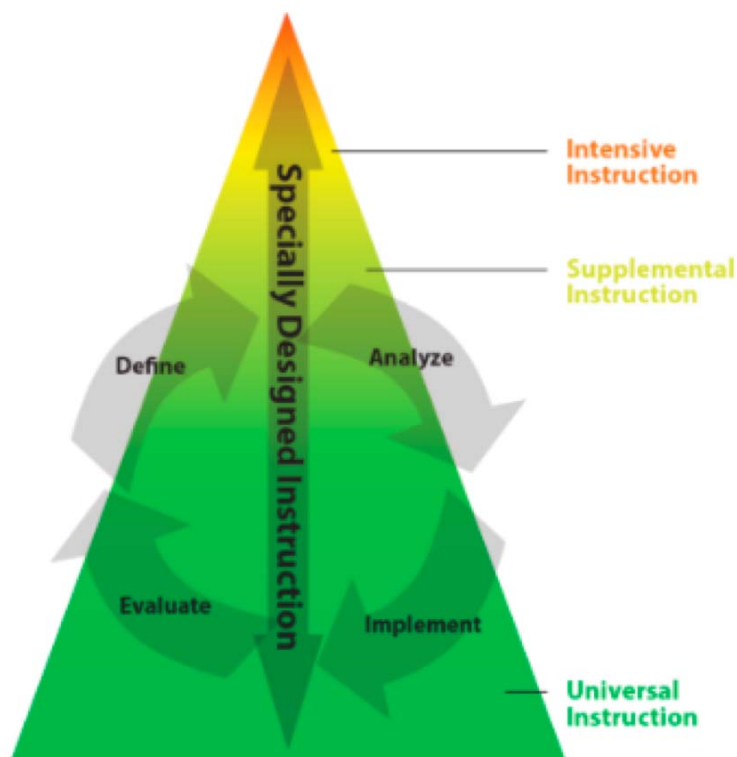
- **Define the problem** by determining the difference between what is expected and what is occurring. Ask, “What specifically do we want students to know and be able to do when compared to what they currently know and are able to do?” When engaged in problem solving at the individual student level, the team should strive for accuracy by asking, “What exactly is the problem?”

## Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving — Revised (GTIPS-R)

- **Analyze the problem** using **data** to determine why the issue is occurring. Generate hypotheses (reasons why students are not meeting performance goals) founded in evidence based content area knowledge, alterable variables, and instructionally **relevant** domains. Gather **assessment** data to determine valid/non-valid hypotheses. Link validated hypotheses to instruction/intervention so that hypotheses will lead to evidence based **instructional decisions**. Ask, “Why is/are the desired goal(s) not occurring? What are the barriers to the student(s) doing and knowing what is expected?” Design or select **instruction** to directly reduce and eliminate those barriers.
- **Develop and implement a plan** driven by the results of the team’s problem analysis by establishing a performance goal for the group of students or the individual student and developing an intervention plan to achieve the goal. Plan development should include how the student’s or group of students’ progress will be monitored and how implementation integrity will be supported. Ask, “What are we going to do?”
- **Measure response to instruction/interventions** by using data gathered from progress monitoring at agreed upon intervals to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention plan based on the student’s or group of students’ response to the intervention. Progress-monitoring data should directly reflect the targeted skill(s). Ask, “Is it working? If not, how will the instruction/intervention plan be **adjusted** to better support the student’s or group of students’ progress?” Team discussion centers on how to maintain or better enable learning for the student(s).

For an illustration of the multi-tiered system, the problem solving cycle, and considerations for progress monitoring at each tier, see below.

### Problem Solving within Florida’s Multi-Tiered System of Supports



### Intensive Instruction

- Intensive instruction and interventions based on individual student needs and aligned with universal instruction.
- Students receiving prolonged interventions at this level may be several grade levels behind or above the one in which they are enrolled.
- Progress monitoring occurs most often to ensure maximum acceleration of student progress.
- If more than approximately 5% of students are receiving support at this level, engage in Tier 1 and Tier 2 level systemic problem solving.

### Supplemental Instruction

- Instruction and intervention are based on data revealing that students need more than core, universal instruction.
- Interventions and progress monitoring are targeted to specific skills to remediate or enrich, as appropriate.
- Progress monitoring occurs more frequently than at the core, universal level to ensure that the intervention is working.
- Supplemental interventions are aligned with universal instruction.
- If more than approximately 15% of students are receiving support at this level, engage in Tier 1 level systemic problem solving.

### Universal Instruction

- Research-based, high-quality, general education instruction and support.
- Screening and benchmark assessments for all students.
- Assessments occur for all students.
- Data collection continues to inform instruction.
- If less than approximately 80% of students are successful given core, universal instruction, engage in tier 1 problem solving.

The four arrows in the pyramid represent the continuous problem solving process:

1. **Define** - What students should know, understand, and be able to do.
2. **Analyze** - What barriers exist to students doing/knowing what is expected?
3. **Implement** - What are we going to do about it?
4. **Evaluate** - Measure and determine if it's working. If not, how do we **adjust**?

Download a copy of *Problem-Solving within Florida's Multi-Tiered System of Supports* at <http://florida-rti.org/gtips/content/chapter1/GTIPS-U1P6.pdf>.

### Applying Problem Solving Across Tiers

The application of the problem solving cycle across the three **tiers** is an essential component of a functional system. The underpinning idea is that the level of support a student needs to be successful exists on a continuum. The continuum includes students needing no support beyond the differentiated core curriculum and **instruction** to those needing extraordinary support. Tiered resources are arranged along that continuum such that students have access to instruction/intervention at a level of intensity corresponding with their need. For this tiered

## Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving — Revised (GTIPS-R)

arrangement of resources to result in maximum student outcomes, instruction within each tier must be effective for large numbers of students.

When this is not the case, the four steps of the problem solving process are applied to facilitate decision making to improve the effectiveness of the instruction/intervention delivered. For example, if the third grade core package of services delivered in math results in only 50 percent of the students meeting grade-level expectations, the four problem solving steps are implemented with a focus on Tier 1 so that the team may

1. identify the discrepancy between what the students are able to do and what we want them to do,
2. generate hypotheses as to why that discrepancy exists,
3. link data-verified instructional changes to those hypotheses, and
4. measure student(s) response to the **adjusted** instruction.

The same process is applied at subsequent tiers if the measured level of effectiveness of the services provided at that tier does not meet expectation. There are imperative questions for teams to address in order to guide discussions about the effectiveness of instruction at each tier.

### **Tier 1: Schoolwide Universal Supports**

To what extent are all students provided with well-delivered, evidence based learning supports that are effective for the desired outcomes? How is this verified?

What **assessment** tools or processes are used to identify student needs and the students' response to learning supports provided?

Are universal learning supports effective?

- What percent of students are achieving **standards**/benchmarks/behavioral expectations (approximately 80 percent or more)?
- What percent of students in subgroups are achieving standards/ benchmarks/behavioral expectations (approximately 80 percent or more)?
- When addressing an individual student's needs, what percent of students in their subgroup are achieving benchmarks/standards/behavioral expectations (approximately 80 percent)?

If universal learning supports are not effective:

- Are the schoolwide learning supports appropriately matched to the needs of the students?
- Are resources and assistance provided to educators for implementation **fidelity**?

To what extent is the school-based **leadership** team engaged in Tier 1-level problem solving in order to increase the effectiveness of universal learning supports?

How are parents and students involved or engaged in selecting and implementing universal learning supports?

How do teams determine when student(s) will require supplemental and more intensive, individualized learning support?

## **Tier 2: Supplemental Interventions and Supports**

What specific supplemental learning supports are planned to improve the performance of students who need additional instruction and support in addition to and aligned with universal supports?

Consider these six key components when planning supplemental interventions and supports:

- Amount of additional academic-engaged time needed
- Focus of the intervention and support
- Specific instructional or behavioral learning support
- Method and frequency of progress monitoring assessments
- Evidence of fidelity of implementation
- Sufficiency of learning support

How are the supplemental learning supports implemented and integrated into Tier 1?

- Academic-engaged time – How much more time is provided?
- Curriculum/Program/Method – What is used?
- Personnel – Who provides the learning support? Are the highest levels of expertise and skill matched to the students with the most significant needs? How is assistance to educators provided to ensure fidelity of implementation?
- Setting for learning supports – What is the setting for the learning supports? Where will the learning supports take place and when?
- Parents – How are the students' parents involved or engaged in implementing the learning supports?

How effective is the supplemental instruction for groups of students who need additional learning supports?

- What assessments are used for ongoing **data** collection aligned with universal learning supports so that impact on learning outcomes is measurable?
- How frequently are data collected? How frequently are the data analyzed by the team?
- How are the student's parents engaged in the progress monitoring and analysis of student engagement, level of performance, and rate of progress?
- How does the team determine whether the learning support is effective?
- If the learning support is ineffective (poor or questionable student response), how does the team monitor and assist with implementation fidelity?
- How will the team determine if student(s) will require more intensive, individualized learning support?

## **Tier 3: Intensive Individualized Intervention and Support**

What specific intensive individualized learning supports are planned to improve the level of engagement and the rate of progress of the individual student in addition to and aligned with universal and supplemental learning supports?

Consider these seven key components when planning individualized interventions and supports:

- Amount of additional academic-engaged time needed
- Reduction of group size

## Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving — Revised (GTIPS-R)

- Narrowed focus of the learning support
- Specific instructional/behavioral strategies
- Method and frequency of progress monitoring
- Evidence of fidelity of implementation
- Sufficiency of learning support

How is the intensive, individualized learning support delivered?

- Engaged time – How much more time is needed?
- Curriculum/Program/Method – What does the student need?
- Personnel – Who provides the learning support? Are the highest levels of instructional expertise and skill being matched to the student with the most significant needs? How is assistance provided to ensure fidelity of implementation?
- Time and setting for instruction – What is the setting for instruction? Where does the learning support take place and when?
- Parents – How are the students’ parents involved or engaged in implementing learning supports to increase the students’ level of engagement, performance, and rate of progress?

How effective is the intensive, individualized learning support for the student?

- What assessments are used for ongoing data collection aligned with universal learning supports so that impact on learning outcomes is measurable?
- How frequently are data collected? How frequently are they analyzed by the team?
- How, and to what degree, are the student’s parents involved or engaged in the progress monitoring and analysis of the student’s engagement, level of performance, and rate of progress?
- How unique is the student’s response in comparison to **peers**?
- How does the team determine whether the learning support is effective?
- How does the team determine any necessary adjustments to the learning support?
- If the learning support is ineffective (poor or questionable student response), how does the team monitor and assist with implementation fidelity?
- If the learning support was delivered with fidelity and is ineffective, how are decisions made to adjust the learning support design or delivery?

Download the **imperative questions** for the tiers to refer to in your own problem solving at [http://florida-rti.org/gtips/content/chapter1/Imperative\\_Questions\\_ProblemSolving-MTSS.pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/content/chapter1/Imperative_Questions_ProblemSolving-MTSS.pdf).

### **Integrating the Tiers through Problem Solving**

The critical questions used at **Tiers** 2 and 3 are essentially extensions of the basic guiding questions used in Tier 1. Problem Identification and Goal Setting, or Step 1 of the problem-solving process for Tier 1, is key to ensuring integration across the tiers while simultaneously ensuring a balance between effectiveness and efficiency of using resources to provide **matched** supports to all students.

In short, the goal(s) identified in Step 1 of Tier 1 should be the same overall goals used to drive analyses and decision making at Tiers 2 and 3. The following are the critical guiding questions



that would be considered for students identified as needing additional **supports** in addition to core improvement plans, organized in the order of the cyclical problem solving process:

**Step 1 - Define: What is the problem?**

- What do we expect students to know, understand, and do as a result of universal learning supports?
  - Are there students for whom the Tier 1 learning supports are ineffective? (How sufficient is Tier 1?)
  - Is there any disproportionality in academic/behavior outcomes (i.e., race, ethnicity, sex, disability, grade level, class distribution, etc.)?
  - Are more than approximately 20% identified as needing additional supplemental learning supports (i.e., Tier 2)? If yes, does the Tier 1 improvement plan address this?
  - Are more than approximately 5% of students identified as needing intensive learning supports (i.e., Tier 3)? If yes, does the Tier 1 improvement plan address this?
- Are there groups of student for whom Tier 2 and Tier 3 learning supports currently being provided are not sufficient?
  - Are there any students who are represented in multiple groups (e.g., demonstrate needs in behavior and academic domains)?
  - Has the team considered the function and/or type of the problem?

**Step 2 - Analyze: Why is it occurring?**

- Since the core and/or supplemental learning supports are NOT sufficient for either a group of students or an individual student, what barriers have or could have precluded students from reaching expectations?
  - Are hypotheses focused on alterable factors?
  - Are **data** available to validate hypotheses?
  - Is there a clear understanding of the situations (i.e., antecedents) that result in the outcomes being achieved for the group/student who is not meeting expectations?

**Step 3 - Implement: What are we going to do about it?**

- What **instruction** and supports will be used?
  - Are the instruction, strategies, and learning supports being designed or planned matched to the function and specific needs of the student(s) and related Tier 1 expectations?
  - Are there any standard protocols or generic approaches that might be beneficial for use?
  - Are there students for whom intensive or complex needs require individualized learning supports?
- What resources (initial and ongoing) are needed to support implementation of the plan?
- How will sufficiency and effectiveness of Tiers 2 and 3 learning supports be monitored over time?
  - What additional data will be collected to monitor progress of instruction and learning supports designed to improve targeted and specific skills/**behaviors** needed to help the student(s) meet Tier 1 goals?

## Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving — Revised (GTIPS-R)

- Do improvements in student(s) progress monitoring data result in improvements in Tier 1 outcome data for those same students? I.e., what impact has Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 had on improving student outcomes in Tier 1 expectations?
- How will fidelity be monitored over time?
  - What educator practices will be monitored to ensure fidelity of learning supports are delivered as planned/designed? How long/often will this monitoring occur?
  - Are the tools used to monitor fidelity of the specific interventions appropriately selected and matched to the area of concern?
- How will “good,” “questionable,” and “poor” student responses to learning supports be defined?
  - Are the specific or narrow goals of Tiers 2 and 3 aligned with ensuring to help the student(s) reach their overall Tier 1 goals? That is, if the students make progress in response to Tier 2 or 3 learning supports, is there an increase in performance at Tier 1?

### Step 4 - Evaluate: Is it working?

- Have planned learning supports at Tiers 2 and 3 been effective?
  - Does the team have a set of guidelines to structure a common approach to analyzing the data (e.g., “**decision rules**”)?
  - If students’ progress in response to Tier 2 or Tier 3 learning supports demonstrates a “good” response, and there is no increase in Tier 1 performance, what decision(s) will the team make?
  - If students’ progress in response to Tier 2 or 3 services demonstrates “questionable” or “poor” responses, is there adequate fidelity of implementation of the learning supports? If yes, or no, what decisions will the team make?

*Download these guiding questions for the steps in problem solving to refer to later at <http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/IntegratingTiers-throughProblemSolving.pdf>.*

The effectiveness of each tier of instruction must be regularly monitored to ensure the strength of the entire system. The problem solving process is a recursive, self-correcting, ongoing methodology used for effective decision making at all levels within the system. This logic and theme of data-based decision making is embedded in a variety of existing **structures** such as school improvement, student progression (including student progress monitoring plans and **individual educational plan (IEP)** present levels and goals), reading plans, **positive behavior support**, Florida State Standards implementation, and district policies and procedures.

# Making Connections: Aligning Practices, Efforts, Commitments and Initiatives

## Florida's Seamless Educational System

*“Begin with the idea that the purpose of the system is student achievement, acknowledge that student needs exist on a continuum rather than in typological groupings, and organize resources to make educational resources available in direct proportion to student need.”*

-David Tilly, Deputy Director, Iowa Department of Education

The Florida Department of Education and districts throughout the state share the goal and responsibility of increasing the proficiency of all students within one seamless, efficient system (section 1008.31, Florida Statutes). An efficient and effective public education system is fundamental to Florida's ability to make significant social and economic contributions in our national and global marketplace. Evidence of a national emphasis on reforming public education to prepare students to be competitive in the 21st century global economy is found in federal legislation such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 2002 and the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** of 2004. Two themes of innovation expressed in both ESEA and IDEA are supported by the adoption and implementation of a multi-tiered system of supports: adopt a needs-based decision-making process that is student centered and informed by data, and establish multiple service and support options for students and families to account for the diverse needs among U.S. students.

Data-based decision making, the use of evidence based practices, and accountability for student performance are also embedded in important federal legislation that impacts education. Congress authorized the ESEA of 2002 to hold schools accountable for the educational outcomes of students. ESEA requires states to ensure that all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve predetermined levels of academic proficiency as determined through statewide **assessments**. Implementation of evidence based instructional practices is mandated to maximize student performance and subsequently increase the percentage of students who demonstrate proficiency on statewide assessments. Similar to ESEA, the IDEA focuses on the use of data and research-based practices in the selection of curriculum and pedagogy. Schools must make decisions regarding how to respond to these mandates using all of the available educational expertise, blending resources, and unifying efforts.

It is the position of the FDOE that implementing a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) **framework** represents a logic and set of core beliefs that support many current federal and state requirements. Implementation of an MTSS framework can be a catalyst for student learning by supporting the implementation of services to improve the academic and behavior performance of all students, including students at risk for educational failure. The framework also becomes a stimulus for adult learning through embedded professional development designed to support educator **engagement** in evidence based **practices**.

At the core of implementing an MTSS framework is the systematic use of a **data**-based problem solving and decision making process that must be integrated seamlessly into all **systems** planning, including school improvement plans, student progression plans, K-12 comprehensive

reading plans, differentiated accountability plans, Early Warning Systems, and leader and educator evaluation plans. This problem solving process applied within the multi-tiered system must be applied to all learners, which includes general education students from pre-k through graduation, students with disabilities, and advanced and gifted learners in order to elevate the efficacy of statewide improvement efforts and processes.

Important education practices, such as **Lesson Study** and Professional Learning Communities, allow teachers the opportunity to create a model for high-quality instructional practices that contribute to an MTSS framework by matching the method of **quality instruction** to students' needs. CPALMS has more information on lesson study at its **Lesson Study Support Initiative**. Other examples of how various initiatives are connected within a multi-tiered system, such as Florida's State Board of Education Strategic Plan, student progression plans, The **Florida Standards**, Florida's Part B State Performance Plan, District and School Improvement Policy, Florida Principal **Leadership Standards**, **Florida Educator Accomplished Practices**, Florida's reading and STEM initiatives, and **Universal Design for Learning** are explored in this section.

### **Florida State Board of Education Strategic Plan**

The Mission of the State Board of Education for the 2012-2018 term is to "...increase the proficiency of all students within one seamless, efficient system, by allowing them the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills through learning opportunities and research valued by students, parents, and communities." The goals of the **Florida State Board of Education Strategic Plan** are:

- Highest student achievement
- Seamless articulation and maximum access
- Skilled workforce and economic development
- **Quality** efficient services

The mission and goals of this plan are aligned with an MTSS **framework** in that increased proficiency of **all** students within a seamless system is achievable when the diversity of **instructional** support options is matched to the diversity of student needs. Decisions about access to this continuum of increasingly intensive **supports** are made by use of a data-based problem solving process. More specifically, implementation of a multi-tiered system of supports aligns with the Florida State Board of Education Strategic Plan in the following ways:

1. **Improving Quality of Teaching in the Education System:** PS-RtI provides teachers with the skills to identify at-risk students, to improve performance in the use of student-based **data**, and to improve performance in the delivery of evidence based **interventions**.
2. **Professional Development:** Increasing the number of **leadership** training opportunities throughout the state.
3. **Strengthening Foundation Skills:** An MTSS is an evidence based system to significantly improve the academic and behavioral skills of low-performing students.
4. **Closing the Gap:** An MTSS is an evidence based method to significantly reduce disproportionality and improve performance for minority populations, students from low socio-economic environments, and **English language learners** (ELLs).

5. **High School Graduation:** An MTSS results in the improvement in performance of students and early intervention will improve graduation rates in the future.
6. **Aligning Resources to Strategic Goals:** An MTSS has proven to be a more efficient way of delivering services and deploying personnel, resources, and time allocation.

### **Student Progression Plan**

In the state of Florida, section 1008.25, Florida Statutes requires each school district to develop and implement a student progression plan which includes policies and procedures that facilitate student achievement in English Language Arts, science, social studies, and mathematics. The establishment of a comprehensive program for student progress must also include plans for informing parents of each student's academic progress and criteria for evaluating student performance towards reading proficiency goals. Students not achieving proficiency on the state's standardized English Language Arts or mathematics assessment must be evaluated to determine the nature of the student's difficulty, the areas of academic need, and strategies for providing academic supports to improve the student's performance. Finally, a district's student progression plan should ensure that the program of study, placement, promotion, reporting, retention, and assessment procedures are **equitable** and comprehensive to support accountability for all students.

Ensuring a common methodology for using **data** to guide instructional planning and decision making is an essential feature of MTSS. When students are identified as "off track" or "at risk" for reaching their learning proficiency goals, decisions must be made to help those students accelerate their learning and reach **learning goals**. Districts adopting an MTSS **framework** in a context of student progression planning recognize that variability of performance needs exists among students. In turn, variability among educators' professional development & support needs also exist. A needs based delivery of supports helps all students reach their learning proficiency goals while also balancing the limited resources with which a district can help all students be successful. A data-based problem solving process is the cornerstone of MTSS and is the process used to identify barriers to student success, aid in the development of instruction and intervention supports to remove those barriers, and devise the method to evaluate effectiveness of instruction and supports provided. While state law provides the accountability expectations for ensuring all students reach learning goals, a multi-tiered system of supports provides the framework for designing and allocating the matched supports each student needs to reach proficiency goals.

### **The Florida Standards**

The Florida State Board of Education approved current math and language arts **standards** on February 18, 2014. The revised standards reflect public input for recommended changes to the originally adopted Common Core State Standards (July, 2010). The **Florida Standards** of 2014 began full implementation across all grades in the 2014-2015 school year.

In a multi-tiered system, the state standards represent what all students should know, understand, and be able to do in order to progress through the K-12 public school system. How those students reach those expectations, and what resources are used to help them reach those expectations, are the decisions that educators are faced with when attempting to ensure every student is successful. Determining who needs additional **supports**, what types of supports, and for how long in order to meet standards is facilitated by use of a data-based problem-solving process. Some students will require supplemental **instruction** or intervention supports and a few may require intensive instruction or intervention supports in order to reach grade level proficiency goals. In short, the

**Florida Standards** represent the finish line, while the tiered options for student supports represents the differential learning paths that students might follow to reach the finish line.

### **Florida’s Part B State Performance Plan 2005-2013**

Florida’s **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, Part B, State Performance Plan (SPP), consists of 17 Performance **Indicators** across three primary targets: (1) free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE), (2) disproportionality, and (3) effective supervision of Part B services. The FDOE has a responsibility to support districts in achieving the performance targets for each indicator and for reporting progress annually to the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Access Florida’s SPP and Annual Performance Report on the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services website at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/>.

Implementation of a multi-tiered system of supports assists districts in addressing applicable SPP indicators in primarily two ways:

- **Problem Solving:** The focus of this framework is to provide districts and schools with a blueprint for problem solving that addresses district, school, and student-level problems. The entire focus is on **systems** change and the process of implementing reform efforts that improve student performance, school **climate**, and family participation.
- **Program Evaluation:** Schools and districts are able to use **data** resulting from multi-tiered system of supports implementation to identify areas that require targeted assistance and to document the effects of **interventions** implemented to address those areas. In particular, this framework is able to provide assistance to districts and schools in addressing disproportionality in the identification of students with disabilities, their educational placements, their proficiency rates, and discipline.

The **quality** implementation of multi-tiered system of supports directly impacts the student outcomes represented in the SPP indicators.

### **Differentiated Accountability State System of School Improvement**

At the heart of an MTSS **framework** is the logic that differential needs exist, and therefore differential **supports** should be provided matched to those needs. The state system for School Improvement shares this same logic. Pursuant to Rule 6A-1.099811, Florida Administrative Code, *Differentiated Accountability State System of School Improvement*, schools demonstrating insufficient student outcomes may be provided differential supports in order to help “turn around” those schools and improve student outcomes. An important feature of this law is recognition that school improvement success hinges on the success of district changes and improvements in operations designed to ensure school practices are sustainable and evaluated for effectiveness in producing desired student outcomes. The process of “turning-around” a school follows a similar process as problem solving: Identify the discrepancy between current performance and desired performance (e.g., school grade of F to A), identify barriers preventing goal attainment (e.g., high quality instruction), develop a plan for reducing barriers (e.g., coaching, PD, instructional planning practices, etc.), and evaluate success of school-based intervention to reach desired goal. MTSS aligns with School Improvement policy in that both share a student centered focus in which all system variables are aligned and organized to support effective student instruction and needs based supports at the classroom level.

## **Florida Principal Leadership Standards**

Rule 6A-5.080, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) defines standards for its principals and school administrators: “The **Standards** are set forth in rule as Florida’s core expectations for effective school administrators. The Standards are based on **contemporary research** on multi-dimensional school **leadership**, and represent skill sets and knowledge bases needed in effective schools. The Standards form the foundation for school leader **evaluations** and professional development systems, school leadership preparation programs, and educator certification requirements.” The following standards represent Florida’s expectations of performance for school principals:

- Student Achievement
  - Standard 1: Student Learning Results
  - Standard 2: Student Learning as a Priority
- Instructional Leadership
  - Standard 3: Instructional Plan Implementation
  - Standard 4: Faculty Development
  - Standard 5: Learning Environment
- Organizational Leadership
  - Standard 6: Decision Making
  - Standard 7: Leadership Development
  - Standard 8: School **Management**
  - Standard 9: Communication
- Professional and Ethical Behavior
  - Standard 10: Professional and Ethical Behavior

### **The Principal Leadership Standards Align within an MTSS**

- **Standards 1 and 2**
  - These standards align with an MTSS in that student performance should drive all decisions about **instruction** and student support practices. Principals are expected to ensure student **learning goals** are based on the state’s adopted standards and ensure a professional environment in which faculty and staff work as a “system” to maintain a school **climate** that supports student engagement and learning by continuously monitoring student performance and closing learning gaps.
- **Standard 3**
  - This standard reflects a core element of MTSS in that principals are expected to ensure alignment of state standards, effective instructional practices, student learning needs, and the assessments used to monitor student learning are up to standards. An effective Tier 1 instructional system prevents student learning concerns and behavior problems. Moreover, the expectations within Standard 3 reflect the MTSS concepts of fidelity of effective **instruction**, evaluation of instructional effectiveness, and prioritization for Tier 1 improvements when insufficient outcomes are evident.
- **Standards 4 and 5**
  - The standards of Faculty Development and Learning Environment contribute to Instructional Plan Implementation in that an effective leader will develop and support an effective faculty and staff by linking student performance with system-

wide strategic objectives and school improvement strategies. A key feature of Standard 5 that is that principals will establish an environment that “improves learning for all of Florida’s diverse student population.” Within this professional learning environment standard are the MTSS concepts of data-driven professional development, differentiated educator supports, and **systems coaching** in that all of these concepts are applied to implementation of evidence based practices within school settings.

- **Standard 6**
  - This standard is a critical role within an MTSS **framework** in that principals are expected to use **data** within a “decision making process” to develop solutions to problems affecting student and teacher proficiency and to evaluate effectiveness of actions to improve outcomes.
- **Standards 7, 8, and 9**
  - Across Standards 7 through 9 exists recognition of the important role principals have in building the capacity of all educators to implement and sustain effective practices in a system where relationships are dynamic, changes in routines and faculty assignments can occur, and changes in student needs fluctuate. These standards also embody the MTSS concepts of effective leadership and systems coaching to implement a **continuous improvement culture** and way of work.
- **Standard 10**
  - Completing the list of principal standards is the overarching importance that principals act as systems change problem solvers. Pursuit of highest student outcomes in the State of Florida drives school improvement planning. Implementation of school improvement plans, just as with student instructional plans, will encounter barriers to the **fidelity** of their use and attainment of desired outcomes. When barriers arise, Standard 10 highlights the critical role of the principal to maintain a clear focus on the school vision and lead problem solving activities designed to address implementation barriers to their improvement plans.

### **Florida Educator Accomplished Practices (FEAPs)**

The **FEAPs** represent the core **standards** for effective educators. They represent the foundation for the State of Florida’s teacher preparation programs, educator certification requirements, and school district **instructional** support appraisal systems. These educator standards are based upon 3 essential principles:

1. The effective educator creates a culture of high expectations for all students by promoting the importance of education and each student’s capacity for academic achievement.
2. The effective educator demonstrates deep and comprehensive knowledge of the subject taught.
3. The effective educator exemplifies the standards of the progression.

The **Educator Accomplished Practices** are organized into two broad categories encompassing 6 standards of practice:

- Quality of Instruction
  - Instructional Design & Lesson Planning
  - The **Learning Environment**
  - Instructional Delivery & Facilitation



- **Assessment**
- **Continuous Improvement**, Responsibility, and Ethics
  - Continuous Professional Improvement
  - Professional Responsibility and Ethical Conduct

Adoption and implementation of MTSS across a school district supports educators' demonstration of the FEAPs in that the skills required of effective educators are the same skills necessary for supporting all students to reach the highest **learning goals**. The FEAPs align with MTSS through the concepts of data-based decision making, needs-based instructional design and delivery, homeschool communication and partnerships, the reciprocal relationship between classroom management and instructional design, and the role of educator as problem solver when barriers to student growth are evident. Differentiation of instruction, instructional design and modification, and analysis of student progress in response to instructional delivery content and methods all represent the intersection of a data-based decision making process (i.e., problem solving process) and a three-tiered service delivery system. Having a clear understanding of what educators should know, understand, and be able to do to help students reach their highest learning outcomes allows all other education professionals to identify their roles and responsibilities to implement and maintain effective educator practices in an MTSS **framework**.

### **Florida's K-12 Comprehensive Research-Based Reading Plan**

Every year, school districts must submit a **K-12 Comprehensive Reading Plan** for the specific use of the research-based reading **instruction** allocation for review and approval by Just Read, Florida! The requirements of this state policy share many characteristics with the implementation of MTSS. This policy requires that decisions about student instruction and **supports** in the area of reading and literacy be driven by **data**, that a sustainable coaching model be provided to educators with ongoing professional development, and that all educators be required to implement a **differentiated instructional** method based on student need. Moreover, districts are required to provide differentiated and appropriately matched intensity of supports to educators based on both student data and educator proficiency progress data. Within an MTSS **framework**, Tier 1 is most critical to ensuring that problems are prevented or otherwise addressed as early as identified. The model advocated by the Florida Department of Education for the instruction of reading and literacy to students recognizes the critical role of effective universal instruction and supports, the need for differential options to match the diversity of student needs, and the importance of ongoing professional development and data-based decision making to continuously monitor and improve student outcomes.

A multi-tiered system supports Florida's reading initiatives by:

1. Collaborating with **Just Read, Florida! (JRF)** and the **Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR)** to increase the number of schools using problem solving and data-based decision making at early grades to prevent reading failure.
2. Including data-based problem solving components in district K–12 Comprehensive Reading Plans.
3. Increasing the number of early grade **interventions** to facilitate early identification and intervention for students at risk for reading failure.
4. Decreasing the percent of students in need of special education services through the use of systematic problem solving as a prevention and early intervention process rather than one that requires the student to fall behind prior to receiving assistance.

While effective instruction is a hallmark of an effective educator, knowledge and expertise in specific content areas is foundational. The State of Florida is fortunate to have many education partners who provide **leadership**, training, and technical assistance to educators at the state, district, and/or school levels to implement evidence based practices specific to literacy, **math, science, STEM**, and **behavior education** in our K-12 public schools. Implementation of MTSS in all schools builds upon existing federal policies such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in that evidence based practice, programs, and interventions are necessary to ensure that all students are provided the highest **quality** education. When students struggle to reach their **learning goals**, it is therefore incumbent upon all educators to ensure they have the most current knowledge from research and the field about practices that have a proven success at addressing student learning or behavior problems. When a team of educators engage in problem solving about universal, supplemental, or intensive needs that students are demonstrating, content experts are necessary to ensure (1) the selected instruction or intervention option is evidence based, and (2) the selected instruction or intervention option sufficiently matches the student(s) needs. These and other agencies in the state are equipped to provide resources to support ongoing professional development to educators to ensure student needs are best supported.

### **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** is a “framework for designing curricula that enable all individuals to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning. UDL provides rich **supports** for learning and reduces barriers to the curriculum while maintaining high achievement **standards** for all” (**Center for Applied Special Technology**). **Universal Design** is found in federal legislation such as the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** of 2004 and the Higher Education Opportunity Act.

The National Center on Universal Design for Learning has developed three evidence-based UDL principles for educators.

- **Principle I** — Provide Multiple Means of Representation (the “what” of learning). Present information and content in a variety of media. **Instructional** materials should be digital and flexible to support adjustments by the user (e.g. enlarging the text, converting text to speech, etc.). Curriculum content should be provided in text, graphic illustrations with descriptions, charts, captioned videos, and immersive formats.
- **Principle II** — Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression (the “how” of learning). Learners differ in the ways that they can navigate a learning environment and express what they know. Options in how students express what they know should be provided. Examples include choices in writing, presentations, story-telling, and video production. Interactive, digital instructional materials can provide choices in how students navigate curriculum content and move quickly between target information, background information, glossaries, etc.
- **Principle III** — Provide Multiple Means of Engagement (the “why” of learning). Affect represents a crucial element to learning, and learners differ markedly in the ways in which they can be engaged or motivated to learn. Learning skills and strategies require sustained attention and effort. Increasing relevance can help students sustain the effort and concentration needed to build self-regulation and self-determination skills.

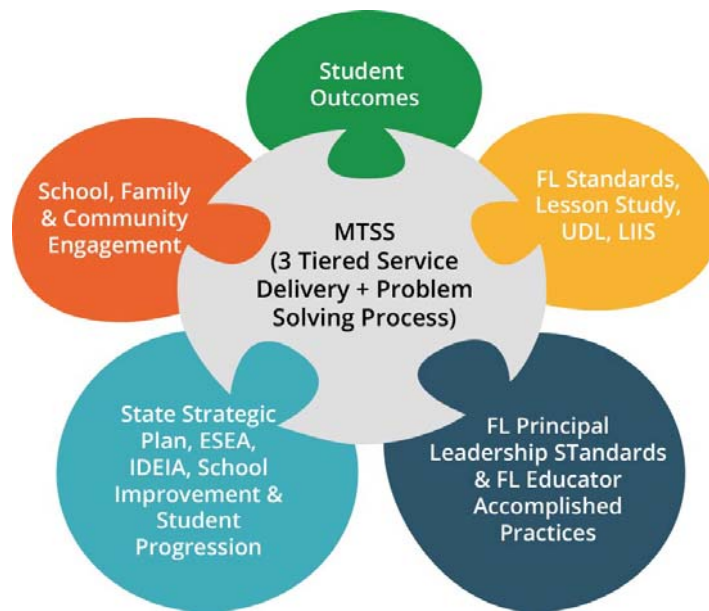
During the planning process for addressing **learning goals**, UDL principles (options in representation, expression, and **engagement**) should be an integral part of the lesson plans and should be made available to all students in core instruction. Technology-rich **learning environments** with digital instructional materials enhance the implementation of UDL. Within a problem solving framework, instruction and **assessments** based on UDL principles should be provided during any intensive **interventions** to identify focused, learner specific UDL supports and instructional scaffolds needed for rapid engagement, academic success, and increased learner independence (release of responsibility). The resulting information on effective UDL supports and instructional scaffolds of these UDL assessments should then be incorporated into Tier I to support these students in that setting as well as provide a focused and customized **data**-driven implementation of UDL in that school.

### **Integrating Student Improvement Initiatives While Implementing MTSS**

Over the past several years, important lessons learned from Florida’s Statewide Problem Solving and Response to Intervention Project and Florida’s Positive Behavior Support Project reveal a need to make connections and blend resources throughout a process of comprehensive **systems** change. With all the various federal, state, and district demands that exist targeting increased student outcomes and performance, state, districts, and school leaders can no longer attempt to implement or comply with each demand in isolation of the others. As schools and districts confront the challenges involved in building **consensus**, making connections, aligning efforts, developing an **infrastructure**, and responding to legislative requirements among all the various educational policies and procedures, it is essential that a comprehensive **framework** be used to guide the integrated implementation of all student/school improvement initiatives in a way that meets compliance with policy requirements, but also maximizes efficiency of operations and use of resources to (1) implement those policies and procedures with **fidelity**, and (2) evaluate effectiveness of those policies and procedures to produce desired student outcomes. The crucial point to understand is that successful implementation of a multi-tiered system of supports encompasses all general education initiatives that impact all students.

Therefore, leaders must help all educators acknowledge the need for change and embrace a shared purpose of ensuring all students learn at high levels and take collective responsibility for achieving this shared purpose. This represents a shift from operating within departmental silos to depending on blended expertise and resources. Download the Matrix for Making Connections (<http://fcim9.fcim.org/gtips/content/chapter2/MatrixforMakingConnections.pdf>), which district- and school-based **leadership** teams can use to blend expertise and resources across state-, district-, and school-level initiatives.

## Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving — Revised (GTIPS-R)



MTSS (which is a 3-Tiered Service Delivery + Problem Solving Process) integrates the following areas:

- Student Outcomes
- School, Family, & Community Engagement
- FL Standards, Lesson Study, UDL, LIIS
- FL Principal Leadership Standards & FL Educator Accomplished Practices
- State Strategic Plan, ESEA, IDEIA, School Improvement, & Student Progression

# Continuous Improvement: The Problem Solving Process

## Needs Assessment

Florida is engaged in a long-term, sustainable, **systems** change effort. As educators, we must continually seek to elevate the effectiveness of our system by building our capacity to scale-up the effective implementation of multi-tiered supports. When scaling up the system of **supports** effort within a district and/or school, a needs assessment can serve dual purpose—both to identify areas in need of development and to mark progress toward the implementation of a functional **data**-based system for decision making. See the Self-Assessment of MTSS Implementation (SAM) — [http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/self\\_assessment\\_of\\_mtss\\_\(sam\).pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/self_assessment_of_mtss_(sam).pdf), which is a tool to help district- and school-based **leadership** teams address the aforementioned dual purpose. The SAM includes a guide for administration that provides descriptions and examples for each item. The SAM is organized around 6 content domains:

1. Leadership
2. Building Capacity and **Infrastructure**
3. Communication and Collaboration
4. Data-Based Problem Solving
5. Three-Tiered **Instructional/Intervention** Model
6. Data Evaluation

## Making System-Wide Changes

The most significant factor driving educational reform is the focus on outcomes for all students and not just those being considered for services through the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**. Within this **framework**, the core question becomes “**What do we want students to know and be able to do?**” Responding to this question requires educators to possess a complete understanding of the behavioral and academic expectations for students throughout the course of the academic year. To illustrate the broad range of students who benefit from existing within a school **culture** of **data**-based decision making, consider the application of systematic problem solving to gifted and high-ability learners. Gifted and high-ability learners may also have needs beyond core **instruction** (Tier 1), and therefore require supplemental **interventions** for acceleration and enrichment purposes.

The expectation that schools provide effective instruction and support to foster success for all students is embedded in Rule 6A-6.0331, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.), *General Education Intervention Procedures, Evaluation, Determination of Eligibility, Reevaluation and the Provision of Exceptional Student Education Services*. Per this Rule, the local school district is responsible for developing and implementing a multi-tiered system of support, which integrates a continuum of academic and behavioral interventions for students who need additional support to succeed in the general education environment using a data-based problem solving process. This includes **virtual settings**. The provision of educational and behavioral evaluations, services, and supports are included as permissible problem solving activities.

Rule 6A-6.0331 leads to a need for reconsidering professional development for teachers and other school staff. Based on the provisions of this rule, teacher and staff professional

development should support the delivery of evidence based **literacy** instruction, academic and behavioral interventions, and the use of adaptive and **instructional technology**.

When educators and stakeholders consider the question “What do we want students to know and be able to do?”, improved academic and behavioral outcomes result. This question is also central when examining response to Tier 1 instruction/intervention (i.e., when considering response to class or grade-level academic and/or behavioral expectations). To effectively implement a multi-tiered system of supports, Tier 1 questions (see the imperative questions on the page Applying Problem Solving Across Tiers) regarding the efficiency of core instruction must be addressed as a **priority** to examining individual student concerns within the multi-tiered system.

### **Steps of the Problem Solving Process**

Regardless of whether examining the effects of core instruction (Tier 1) or determining the need for more intensive **supports** for groups or individual students (Tier 2 and Tier 3), teams should engage in a **data**-based problem solving process. Florida’s model includes a four-step problem solving process, introduced in the Guiding Principles section. The four steps of the problem solving process are as follows:

1. **Step I: Problem Identification** – What exactly is the problem or discrepancy between the current situation and the goal?
2. **Step II: Problem Analysis** – Why is the problem occurring?
3. **Step III: Intervention Design and Implementation** – What exactly are we going to do about it?
4. **Step IV: Response to Instruction/Intervention** – Is the plan working?



Within this cyclical process, the problem to be systematically addressed is defined as the discrepancy between what is expected of a student in a given age or grade level and the current, observed level of performance. Hence the existence of a deficiency is defined, in part, by the discrepancy between expected and observed performance as opposed to any former discrepancies, such as the discrepancy between ability and achievement. Central to problem solving is an analysis of factors that impede performance beyond those that may (or may not) reside within the learner. As a result, all factors that impact learning (i.e., instruction, curriculum, environment, and learner variables) are considered through the analysis of student performance

data when assessing effectiveness of instruction/intervention and determining students' instructional needs.

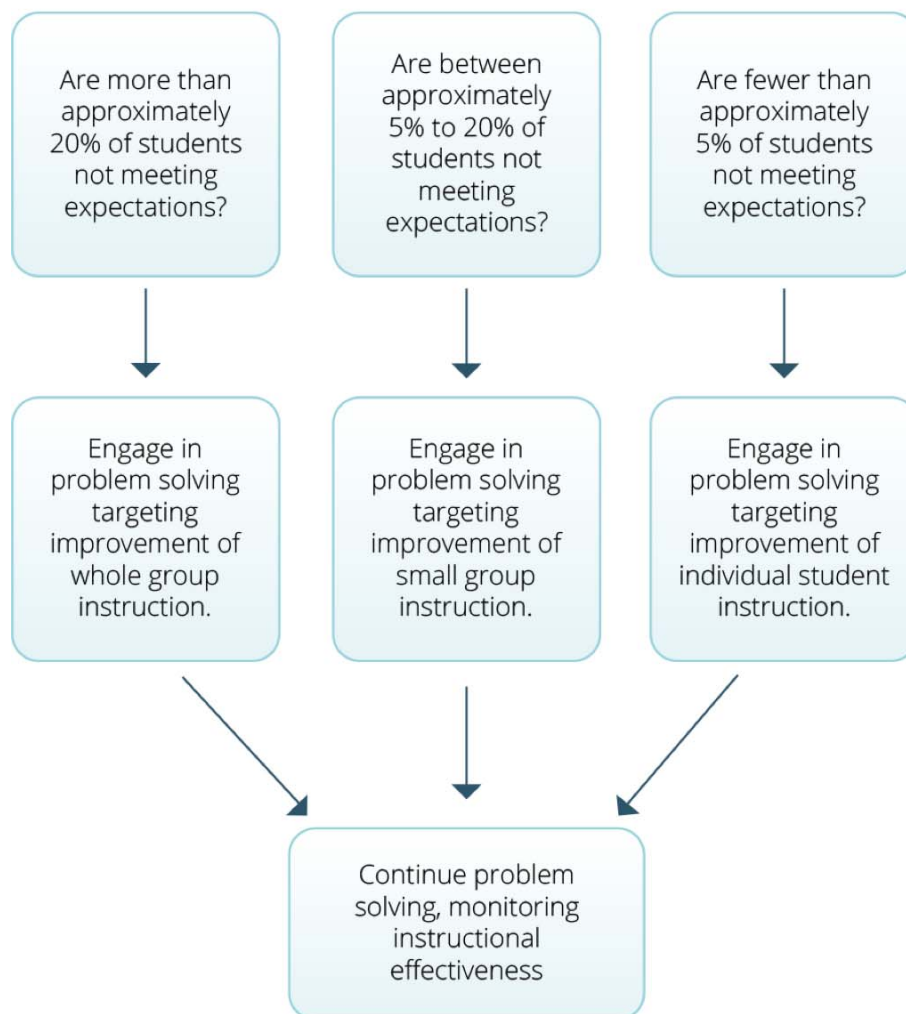
School teams can use Problem-solving/RtI Worksheets ([http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/PS-RtI\\_Worksheet.pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/PS-RtI_Worksheet.pdf)) to systematically address the steps of PS-RtI. The components within the worksheets capture many of the elements addressed in Rule 6A.6-0331., Florida Administrative Code. The school team members use critical thinking skills in order to apply the four steps of problem solving effectively.

**Problem Identification (Step I):** During problem identification, teams are asked to consider academic and behavioral **standards** to clarify what students are expected to know and be able to do as well as **data** to determine **peer** performance in relation to these expectations. Consideration must be given to the percentage of peers demonstrating performance similar to that of the targeted student as the response may lead to the hypothesis that the issue is related to **instructional**, curricular, or environmental variables. As demonstrated below in the Decision-Making Rubric for Use with Schoolwide Screening, when 20 percent or more students show similar problems, the likelihood increases that intervening at a group or systemic level may result in the greatest improvement for the most students through efficient use of available resources.

Conducting a gap analysis can help teams determine at which Tier they should intervene (regardless of whether or not the student receives special education services). Essentially teams must ask, "Is it a large group problem, a small group problem, or an individual student problem?" More importantly, by identifying the percentage of students with similar problems, educators can determine if class-wide instruction should be the focus or if individual/small groups of students would benefit from targeted, supplemental intervention. The figure below, Decision-Making Rubric for Use with Schoolwide Screening, can assist teams in determining how to focus the problem solving effort. If the discrepancy between the benchmark and peer group performance is large and the discrepancy between peer group performance and the student's performance is minimal, it would not be appropriate to automatically determine that the student would benefit from special education. Nor would it be appropriate, in this example, to assume that we would only be focusing on an individual student. The Gap Analysis section of the Problem Solving/RtI Worksheets further illustrates this thinking.

## DECISION-MAKING RUBRIC FOR USE WITH SCHOOLWIDE SCREENING

**Is this an individual student problem  
or a larger systemic problem?**



The Decision-Making Rubric for Use with Schoolwide Screening begins by asking the overarching question: Is this an individual student problem or a larger systemic problem?

Then asks the following specific questions:

- Are more than approximately 20% of students not meeting expectations?  
If so, then engage in problem solving targeting improvement of whole group instruction.  
OR
- Are between approximately 5% to 20% of students not meeting expectations?  
If so then engage in problem solving targeting improvement of small group instruction.



OR

- Are fewer than approximately 5% of students not meeting expectations?  
If so, engage in problem solving targeting improvement of individual student instruction.

No matter which scenario, continue problem solving and monitoring instructional effectiveness.

### **Problem Analysis (Step II):**

During problem analysis, the team seeks the response to “Why is the problem occurring?” Teams develop hypotheses to explain why the problem is occurring and predict what might prevent the problem from occurring in the future. Hypothesis statements are framed as “The problem is occurring because \_\_\_\_\_.” Subsequently, prediction statements are written as “If \_\_\_\_\_ would occur, then the problem would be reduced.” **Data** are collected to confirm or reject the hypotheses that were developed. During this phase, it is important to determine if the problem reflects a skill deficit (i.e., “can’t do”) or motivation deficit (i.e., “won’t do”). For information on problem analysis and, more specifically, on hypotheses development, see the Problem Solving/RtI Worksheets at [http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/PS-RtI\\_Worksheet.pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/PS-RtI_Worksheet.pdf).

### **Intervention Planning and Implementation (Step III):**

During intervention planning and implementation, the team focuses on “What are we going to do about it?” Specifically, the Problem Solving/RtI Worksheets guide teams through the process of identifying who is responsible for intervention plan implementation, what will be done, when will it occur, and where will it occur. Components of the comprehensive intervention plan found in the Problem Solving/RtI Worksheets also include a support plan, which includes relevant training for the individual responsible for carrying out the intervention or a consistent time frame for someone to check in with the individual. Other components are intervention documentation (see the Intervention Documentation Worksheets at [http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/intervention\\_documentation\\_worksheets.pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/intervention_documentation_worksheets.pdf)) to ensure fidelity of implementation and monitoring the plan for determining student **rate of progress** to guide next steps.

### **Response to Instruction/Intervention (Step IV):**

Evaluating the students’ actual response to the instruction/intervention is a critical component of this model. Review and analysis of data are used to determine if the plan is working. For Step IV, the Problem Solving/RtI Worksheets guide the team through thoughtful consideration of graphed data to determine if there has been a positive, questionable, or poor response to intervention.

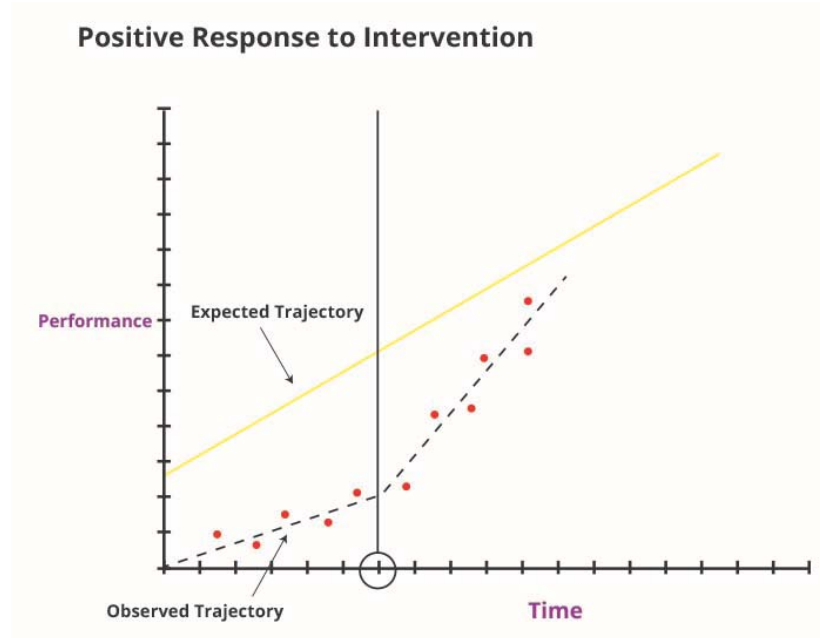
### **Decision Rules**

Response to instruction/intervention is considered positive when the gap between expected performance and observed performance is closing. Ideally, the point at which the target student will “come in range” of grade-level expectations — even if it is the long range — can be extrapolated or estimated. **Questionable response to instruction/intervention** exists when the rate at which the gap is widening slows considerably but is still widening, or when the gap stops widening but closure does not occur. The student(s) response to instruction/intervention is considered poor when the gap continues to widen with no change in **rate of progress** after the instruction/intervention is implemented.

The conditions of positive, questionable, or **poor response to instruction/intervention** result in different sets of decisions to be made, described and illustrated as follows:

**Positive:** Under positive conditions, the current instruction/intervention may be continued with the same or increased goal. Alternatively, the current level of instruction/intervention may be faded gradually to determine whether the same level of intensity of instruction is necessary for student success. See the illustrations below for individual and group decision rule examples for positive responses.

### Decision Rules for *Positive Response* – Individual Student



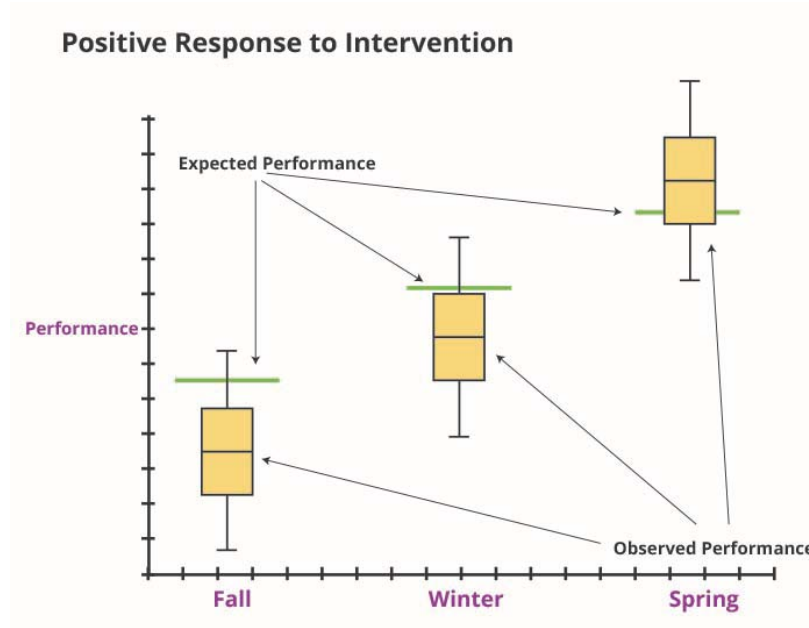
#### Positive Response

- Gap is closing.
- Point at which target student(s) will “come in range” of target can be extrapolated—even if this is long range.

#### Potential Actions

- Continue intervention with current goal.
- Continue intervention with goal increased.
- Gradually fade intervention to determine if student(s) have acquired functional independence.

**Decision Rules for *Positive Response* – Group of Students**



**Positive Response**

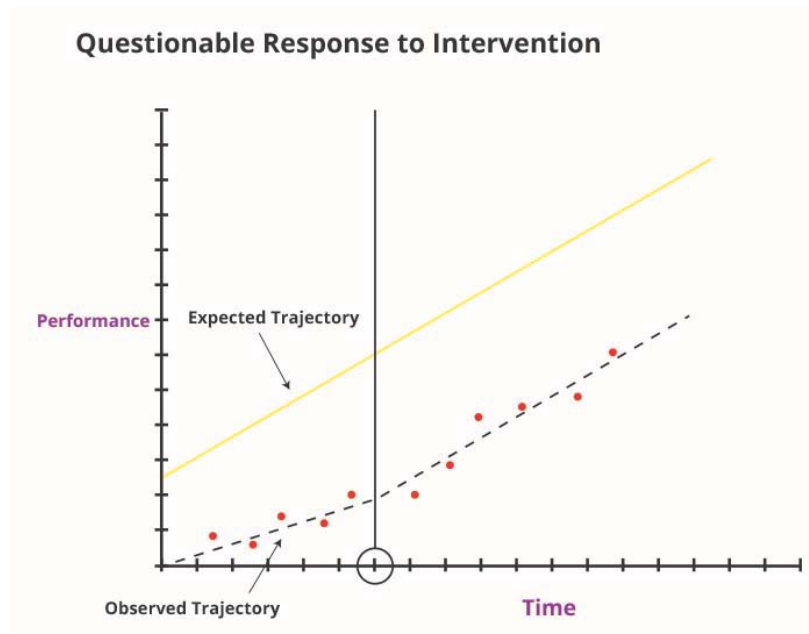
- Gap is closing.
- Point at which target student(s) will “come in range” of target can be extrapolated—even if this is long range.

**Potential Actions**

- Continue intervention with current goal.
- Continue intervention with goal increased.
- Gradually fade intervention to determine if student(s) have acquired functional independence.

**Questionable:** When the response is questionable, the first question to be asked is one of intervention implementation **fidelity**: “Was the intervention implemented as intended?” If not, then supports to increase implementation fidelity are put in place. A variety of tools are used to measure **intervention** implementation fidelity, which include both qualitative and quantitative methods such as direct **observations**, self-reports, checklists, and intervention-specific tools. If implementation fidelity is demonstrated, then the intensity of the current instruction/intervention may be increased for a short period of time. If **rate of progress** improves, then **instruction** is continued at the more intense level. If the rate does not improve, then a return to Steps 1 and 2 of problem solving is necessary. See the illustrations below for individual and group decision rule examples for questionable responses.

### Decision Rule for Questionable Response – Individual Student



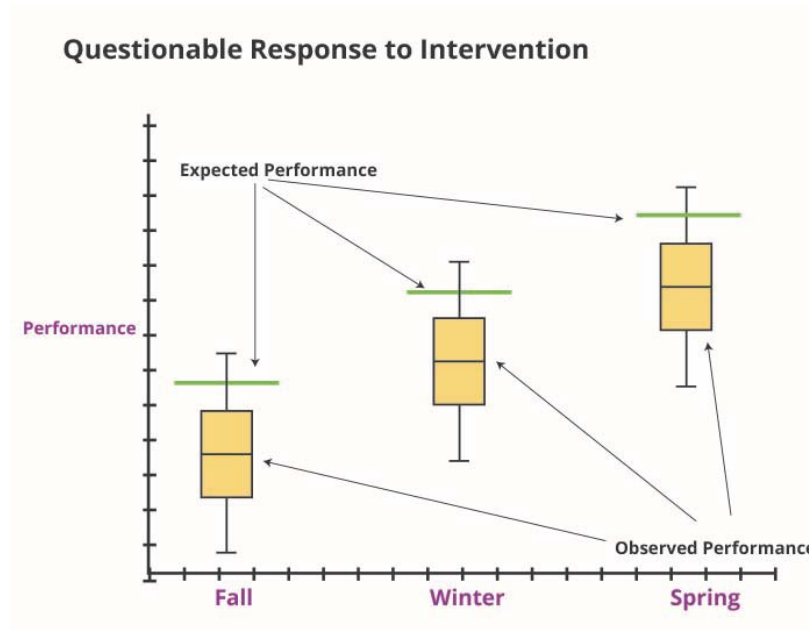
#### Questionable Response

- Rate at which gap is widening slows considerably, but gap is still widening.
- Gap stops widening, but closure does not occur.

#### Potential Actions

- Was intervention implemented as intended?
- If no—employ strategies to increase implementation integrity.
- If yes—increase intensity of current intervention for a short period of time and assess impact. If rate improves, continue. If rate does not improve, return to problem solving.

### Decision Rule for Questionable Response – Group of Students



#### Questionable Response

- Rate at which gap is widening slows considerably, but gap is still widening.
- Gap stops widening, but closure does not occur.

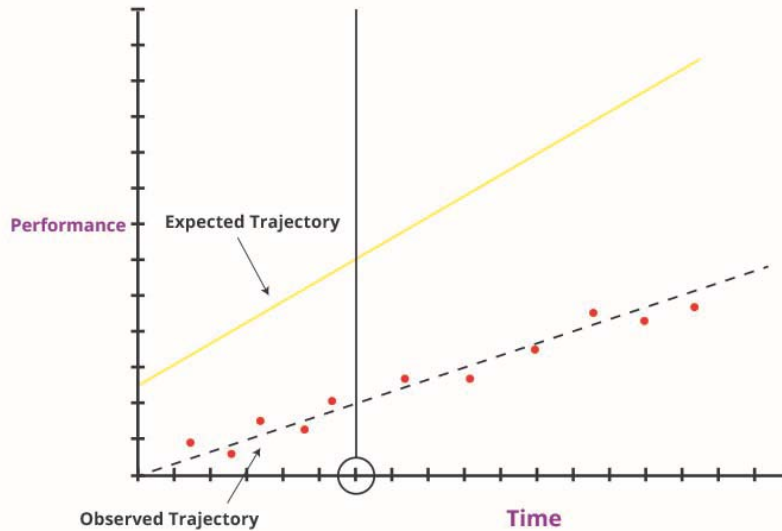
#### Potential Actions

- Was intervention implemented as intended?
- If no—employ strategies to increase implementation integrity.
- If yes—increase intensity of current intervention for a short period of time and assess impact. If rate improves, continue. If rate does not improve, return to problem solving.

**Poor:** When the response is poor, the same question of implementation fidelity is asked. Again, if implementation fidelity is problematic, supportive strategies to increase implementation fidelity are employed. If implementation integrity is good, then the steps of problem solving are retraced, asking: “Is the instruction/intervention aligned with the verified hypothesis, or are there other aligned interventions to consider?” (Intervention Design), “Are there other hypotheses to consider?” (Problem Analysis), and “Is the problem identified correctly?” (Problem Identification). See the illustrations below for individual and group decision rule examples for poor responses.

### Decision Rule for *Poor* Response – Individual Student

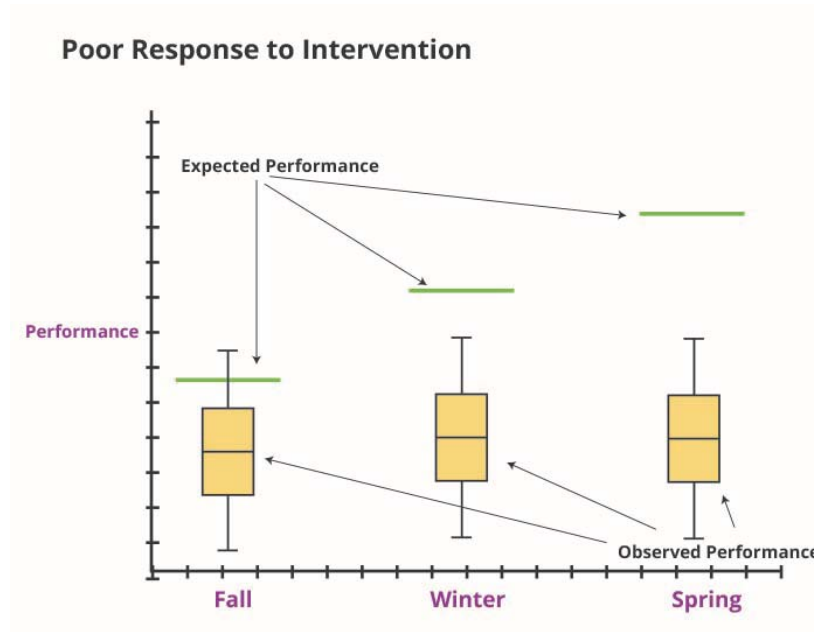
#### Poor Response to Intervention



#### Poor Response

- Gap continues to widen with no change in rate.
- Potential Actions
- Was intervention implemented as intended?
- If no—employ strategies to increase implementation integrity.
- If yes—
  - Is intervention aligned with the verified hypothesis? (Intervention Design)
  - Are there other hypotheses to consider? (Problem Analysis)
  - Was the problem identified correctly? (Problem Identification)

### Decision Rule for *Poor* Response – Group of Students



#### Poor Response

- Gap continues to widen with no change in rate.
- Potential Actions
- Was intervention implemented as intended?
- If no—employ strategies to increase implementation integrity.
- If yes—
  - Is intervention aligned with the verified hypothesis? (Intervention Design)
  - Are there other hypotheses to consider? (Problem Analysis)
  - Was the problem identified correctly? (Problem Identification)

### General Education Interventions

In conjunction with the FDOE’s goal to increase student proficiency within a seamless system, the local school district is responsible for implementing a coordinated system of **intervention** procedures for each student needing additional academic and behavioral support (Rule 6A-6.0331(1), Florida Administrative Code [F.A.C.]). A coordinated, multi-tiered system of intervention support facilitates the success of all students and ensures that students receive the prevention and early intervention services that promote academic success. The general education interventions rule aligns with the statutory requirements to address the needs of students with **instruction** and intervention that is targeted to improve the student’s achievement (s. 1008.25(4), Florida Statutes) and with the intent of the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

Rule 6A-6.0331(1)(e), F.A.C., requires that schools implement evidence based interventions to address the identified area(s) of concern in the general education environment. These interventions must be developed through a problem solving process that uses student performance **data** to identify and analyze the area(s) of concern, select and implement interventions, and monitor the effectiveness of the interventions. The intensity and instructional

## Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving — Revised (GTIPS-R)

focus of the interventions should match student need, and interventions must be implemented as designed and long enough to determine whether the interventions have had the expected effect, rather than for a predefined amount of time.

Ongoing progress monitoring is key to understanding the effectiveness of interventions. According to the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2005), to be useful progress monitoring should:

- Assess the specific skills embodied in state and local academic standards.
- Assess marker variables that have been demonstrated to lead to the ultimate instructional target.
- Be sensitive to small increments of growth over time.
- Be administered efficiently over short periods.
- Be administered repeatedly (using multiple forms).
- Result in data that can be summarized in teacher friendly data displays:
  - Be comparable across students.
  - Be applicable for monitoring an individual student's progress over time.
  - Be **relevant** to the development of instructional **strategies** and use of appropriate curriculum that addresses the area of need.

Ongoing progress monitoring must be conducted and used to evaluate the student's progress and to revise the interventions when the interventions do not result in sufficient improvement.

Therefore, in accordance with Rule 6A-6.0331(1)(e), F.A.C., **taking responsibility for providing effective interventions that result in positive student response through general education resources is required.**



# Team Engagement

## Parent Involvement

Parent involvement in education has been widely reviewed and found to be highly linked to student learning and achievement. Reporting **data** to parents and involving them in decision making is critical for student success, and it is a requirement of both the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**. Schools must help facilitate parent understanding and involvement in this decision making.

Parental involvement is a key component for having an effective multi-tiered system of supports within a school. Schools need to include parent communication and input in all phases of the problem solving process. Some districts have reported benefitting from reviewing their current parent involvement policies to ensure that they are in line with IDEA and ESEA. Suggestions regarding what level of involvement and communication should take place during the problem solving process at each tier are provided in the following paragraphs and summarized on page 4 of this section, Parent Involvement within an MTSS.

Prior to the start of each school year, a plan should be developed for informing parents about using data-based problem solving within a multi-tiered system for supports. Districts and/or schools may wish to download or create parent handouts or brochures, such as Florida's Multi-Tiered System of Supports brochure for parents or parent video, which outlines what the multi-tiered system of supports looks like within their school. A description of data-based problem solving and the multi-tiered system of supports in place at a school should be included in the school's handbook. Student services personnel, such as a school psychologist, school social worker, or school counselor, can share additional information with parents as needed. Display boards, video clips, and PowerPoint presentations can be used to help describe these concepts and benefits to children at teacher-student orientation meetings. Additional resources that support parent engagement are available at Florida's Multi-Tiered System of Supports website at <http://www.florida-rti.org/>.

Different kinds of information should be shared with parents depending upon what level of **supports** are being provided to their child. Specific to Tier 1 instruction, **data** reflecting student progress within the core academic and/or behavioral curricula should be shared with parents of all students. During parent-teacher conferences, graphs of student progress should be provided with explanations regarding student performance. Strategies, materials, and technology tools for home instruction also should be shared. Also, parents may want to use a participation form to help them record notes during problem solving meetings. A Parent Participation Notes example is provided for you at [http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/Parent\\_Participation\\_Notes.pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/Parent_Participation_Notes.pdf).

Students receiving Tier 2 supplemental instruction, in addition to the core academic and behavioral curricula, must be progress monitored more frequently. Reports of student progress also must be shared with parents more frequently at this level. Obtaining parent input and engaging parents at this phase is critical for student success. Parents should be offered specific support regarding skills that need improvement. It might be helpful to provide the parent with written documentation of what data have been collected, the intervention plan(s) put in place to improve skills, and how the plan(s) are monitored. For students receiving additional support through tutoring, schools should make efforts to communicate with the parents/tutor to help

bridge the **understanding** of deficit skills and evidence based interventions that are being used to address the areas of concern. This helps to ensure that the supplemental intervention being provided is aligned with the core instruction and supports.

Students receiving Tier 3 intensive interventions for specific academic or behavioral skills are progress monitored most frequently. Parents should be invited to participate in the problem solving meetings to analyze their child’s progress (response to the Tier 3 interventions) and help make decisions about their instruction. Schools should encourage parents to document and share information about any services that are being provided outside of the school day. Parents should also be provided with detailed graphs and clear explanations of their child’s response to instruction/intervention over time. If the team involved in problem solving is considering the need for **evaluation** procedures to potentially access special education resources, parents also must be informed of their procedural due process rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

### **Parent Involvement within an MTSS**

Parent involvement is a key component for having an effective system of **supports** within a school. Schools need to include parent involvement and input in all steps of the **data**-based problem solving process. Schools and parents benefit when parents are routinely provided information about how they can be involved and participate in this process. The following is an example of what level of involvement and communication should take place respective to the level of tiered **instruction**.

#### **Tier 1**

**Activity:** Preparation for opening of school

##### **How to Involve Parents:**

- Develop a campaign to inform the public regarding data-based problem solving process within a multi-tiered system for supports.
- Include clear description of data-based problem solving process within a multi-tiered system for supports in school handbook (parent and/or student).

**Activity:** Initiation of school year

##### **How to Involve Parents:**

- Send parent brochure or handout home to all parents reviewing processes initiated within the system to address needs of all students.
- Disseminate information through conferences, websites, newsletters, and/or open houses to facilitate parents’ understanding of the problem solving process and its benefit to their student(s).
- Consider using resources, such as a PowerPoint, video, or a display board at an open house or student orientations.

**Activity:** Universal screenings

##### **How to Involve Parents**

- Provide data reflecting student progress within the core curriculum for all parents at their request.
- Conduct parent/teacher conference during which student data will be shared, and which strategies, materials, and technology tools for home instruction are offered.

**Tier 2**

**Activity:** Teams (content area, grade level, etc.) meet to identify students in need of targeted supports

**How to Involve Parents**

- Obtaining parent input is critical. Solicit input from parents when appropriate.

**Activity:** Documentation of progress

**How to Involve Parents**

- Continue to send home reports and continuous progress monitoring data reviewed by team.
- Involve parent in the intervention process. (Note: If we are teaching a targeted skill, the parent should know about this and be guided in helping the student at home to the extent the parent is willing and able.)
- Consider giving the parent the Parent Participation Notes (Appendix D) as a way of helping them understand and document what help their child will be getting.
- Consult with parent regarding any tutoring services the student may be receiving.

**Tier 3**

**Activity:** Team meets to review progress and make **instructional decisions**

**How to Involve Parents**

- Invite parents to participate in meetings and/or receive any of the data the team uses with a summary of the meeting in writing.
- Encourage the parent to use the Parent Participation Notes (Appendix D).

**Activity:** Decisions that result in a student spending more time in intensive instruction than typical **peers**

**How to Involve Parents**

- Continue to communicate with parents and present them information on intervention plans and progress monitoring.
- If a team is considering the need for an **evaluation**, communicate this need to the parents using the data collected during the intervention process and solicit consent from parents.

Download a copy of *Parent Involvement within an MTSS* at <http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/ParentInvolvement-MTSS.pdf>.

**Educator Involvement**

Effective **leadership** is a vital component for a school to be successful within a multi-tiered system. **Collaboration** among administrators, content area specialists, **data** specialists, and other school and district staff should represent instructionally relevant team membership. **Problem-solving teams** should be identified or created and used to problem solve at different levels (school level, grade level, class level, subgroup level, or student level) and may include various members, depending on the need. Though referred to with a wide variety of names, any team engaged in problem solving is considered a problem solving team. Level of expertise, skill, and knowledge will determine the members of these teams, rather than title. Additionally, members of the problem solving team will need to have a shared **consensus** regarding a clearly stated purpose of engaging in problem solving: to increase student learning, as is continually verified by students' positive response to the instruction/interventions being provided.

## Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving — Revised (GTIPS-R)

The makeup of the team engaged in problem solving varies depending upon the purpose and level of the problem solving. Membership for effective problem solving at the school or grade level should include individuals who are knowledgeable about expected schoolwide (or grade level) academic and behavioral performance and **rate of progress**, and have an in-depth understanding of the specific challenges in the school. Members include, but are not limited to, administration, grade-level representation, **intervention** specialists (academic and behavioral), problem solving **facilitators**, intervention support personnel, parents, and data coaches.

Problem-solving teams at the individual student level should always include the parents of the student. Team members should be included according to their knowledge of the student, grade-level expectations, the problem-solving process, evidence based academic and behavioral interventions, progress monitoring, and diagnostic assessment to inform **instruction**. Members, who should be added depending on the student's needs, include:

- the school administrator
- a general education teacher
- a special education teacher
- someone knowledgeable in reading, math, and/or behavior
- student service representatives
- a problem solving facilitator
- a data coach

When forming team membership at all levels of the **framework**, consider the following example: If the student requires acceleration or enrichment in one or more areas in order to remain engaged in the curriculum, then the specialist for gifted learners is an important member of the problem-solving team. Administrators should consider all potential resources on staff, such as fine arts teachers, media specialists, etc. Depending on the nature of the problem, anyone the school employs may be identified as a valuable resource. Administrators should also consider existing teams, such as grade-level teams, that should engage in systematic problem solving at the Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels.

### **Responsibilities**

The general role of the problem solving team is to focus on improving academic and behavioral outcomes for students. In order to accomplish this task, the problem-solving team will need to have certain core responsibilities. An effective problem-solving team begins by reviewing student performance **data** (academic and/or behavioral) at the whole school, grade, class, and subgroup levels. When reviewing the data, it is important to identify any trends that may demonstrate an area of concern. Once an area is identified, the problem solving team develops hypotheses as to why the problem is occurring. Once a team has verified one or more hypotheses, an intervention plan will be created to improve the area of concern. It will be essential to consider the resources available at the school and how best to use them. The problem solving team will review the effectiveness of the intervention and **adjust** as needed. Refer to the section, Continuous Improvement: The Problem-Solving Process, for detailed descriptions of problem solving at each of the four steps in the process.

In order for meetings to be effective, problem solving teams should consider the frequency and duration of their meetings as well as the roles and procedures used during the meetings. For instance, a school-level problem solving team may not need to meet as frequently as a grade- or

individual-level team. It is also important to have a structured format that is consistently used during meetings to ensure that the time is spent efficiently. Problem-solving team meetings should conclude each occurrence with a written plan that outlines not only the intervention plan, including how progress and **fidelity** will be monitored, but also the on-going responsibilities of each of the team members. As many members of the team as possible should be proficient using the problem solving process so that the thinking process can be effectively facilitated.

# Special Education Eligibility Decisions

## Using Information Gathered during Problem Solving

There are multiple state board rules that require school districts to use a problem solving process. They include:

- *General Education Intervention Procedures, Evaluation, Determination of Eligibility, Reevaluation and the Provision of Exceptional Student Education Services* (Rule 6A-6.0331, Florida Administrative Code, [F.A.C.])
- *Exceptional Education Eligibility for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities* (Rule 6A-6.03018, F.A.C.)
- *Exceptional Education Eligibility for Students with Language Impairments and Qualifications and Responsibilities for the Speech-Language Pathologists Providing Language Services* (Rule 6A-6.030121, F.A.C.)
- *Exceptional Student Education Eligibility for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities* (Rule 6A-6.03016, F.A.C.)

School districts in Florida are required to use a problem solving process that determines how a student responds to scientific, research-based **interventions** when determining whether that student is, or continues to be, eligible for special education. The primary catalyst for these changes came from the 2004 reauthorization of the federal **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** and the corresponding regulations issued in 2006. Specifically, 34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 300.307 allows a state education agency to adopt criteria to identify students in the category of specific learning disabilities (SLD) using a process that determines how a student responds to scientific, research-based interventions and requires school districts to use the established criteria.

Using information on how a student responds to evidence based **instruction** and intervention when determining whether a student is eligible for special education services represents a significant shift in practices used to identify students with disabilities. The focus shifts away from identifying and diagnosing characteristics that are internal **to** the student and moves to identifying effective instruction and intervention **for** the student. The central question is: “What about the interaction of the curriculum, instruction, learner, and **learning environment** should be altered so that the student will learn?” not: “What about the student is causing the performance discrepancy?” This redefines the target as the determination of those conditions that enable learning, rather than identifying disabling conditions. When using a student’s response to intervention as a basis for special education eligibility decisions, teams ask the following questions:

- What is the discrepancy between the **student’s level of performance** and the **peer** group and/or standard?
- What is the student’s educational progress as measured by rate of improvement?
- What are the instructional needs of the student?

There are many advantages to using **data** collected within a multi-tiered system to support eligibility decisions over more traditional models of disability identification, including the following:

- Student needs are addressed proactively. The monitoring of student progress is early and frequent, which allows for scientifically based instruction and intervention to be delivered as soon as possible.
- The delivery of scientific, research-based instruction and intervention reduces the number of students who require resources through special education due to a mismatch between the instruction, curriculum, environmental conditions, and the student’s needs.
- Staff members spend their time focusing on finding what works for students and the conditions under which they are most successful instead of attempting to identify problems that are internal to the student and presumed to be stable across environments and across time.
- Eligibility determinations are based more emphatically on educational need. Those with the greatest need are given the most support.
- Problem solving within the multi-tiered system of supports continues when students receive special education **supports**, and the school team continues to work to provide instruction and interventions that result in the greatest progress for the student. The team continues to make regular and ongoing **instructional decisions** based on data, including when special education resources may no longer be necessary.

### **Consent and Evaluation Requirements when Determining Eligibility**

The integration of a PS-RtI **framework** in State Board of Education (SBE) rules has promoted new ways of thinking about addressing the needs of all students. Because Rule 6A-6.0331(1), Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.), *General Education Intervention Procedures, Evaluation, Determination of Eligibility, Reevaluation and the Provision of Exceptional Student Education Services*, permits districts to conduct academic and behavioral evaluations when planning **interventions** in the general education setting, districts must clarify when parental consent is required and how to determine completion of the **evaluation** procedures when students are referred for an **evaluation** to determine eligibility for special education.

The following questions and answers are intended to clarify requirements regarding consent and evaluation:

#### **What is an evaluation to determine eligibility for special education and related services?**

Many parents and professionals use the term “evaluation” to mean a test, or battery of tests, that are scheduled and administered on a given date. Although an evaluation may include specific **assessment** instruments, in the context of the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** and corresponding Florida State Board of Education rules, an evaluation refers to all of the procedures used to determine whether a student is a student with a disability and the nature and extent of the student’s special education and related service needs (Rule 6A-6.03411(1)(l), F.A.C.). An evaluation consists of all **relevant** assessment tools and strategies used to collect functional, developmental, and academic information about a student in order to determine specialized **instructional** need. Therefore, an evaluation includes existing **data** collected prior to obtaining parental consent for an evaluation (e.g., classroom performance; **observations**; interviews; screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic assessments; and district and state assessments; private assessments; and parental input) and any additional assessment procedures conducted subsequent to receipt of parental consent.

### **What constitutes the need to obtain consent per child find?**

Parental consent is required whenever the district proposes to conduct assessment procedures for the purpose of determining eligibility for special education and related services. Within an ongoing problem-solving process, the school team monitors student response to intervention and initiates an evaluation if the data suggest that the student needs special education and related services. Circumstances that trigger the district's Child Find obligations include the following situations:

- The school-based team determines that a K-12 student's response to intervention indicates that intensive interventions are effective but require a high level of intensity and resources to sustain growth or performance (empirically established by fading the intervention) beyond that which is accessible through general education resources.
- The school-based team determines that a K-12 student's response to interventions indicates that the student does not make adequate growth\* given effective core instruction and intensive, individualized, evidence based interventions.
- The results of a developmental screening for a child age three to kindergarten entry age indicate that the child may be a child with a disability who needs special education and related services.
- A parent requests an evaluation and there is documentation or evidence that the student may be a student with a disability and need special education and related services. If, upon review of the parent's request, the district determines the evaluation is not appropriate, then the parent must be provided with written notice of its refusal to conduct the evaluation.

When a school-based team suspects that a student may be a student with a disability, consent is required for any subsequent evaluation procedures, including the collection of additional progress monitoring data. The district has 30 days to request consent to conduct an evaluation whenever any of the circumstances identified above is present, unless the district and parent agree to a different time frame or in the case of a parent-initiated request.

### **Is consent required to conduct evaluations or assessment procedures that inform general education interventions?**

Parental consent is not required if the sole purpose of obtaining assessment data is to inform instruction or intervention as part of problem solving embedded in general education intervention procedures (Rule 6A-6.0331(1), F.A.C.). The purpose for collecting assessment data, not the assessment procedures, determine when consent is required. Whenever assessment and data collection procedures are conducted for the purpose of determining eligibility, then consent is required (Rule 6A-6.0331(4), F.A.C.).

### **How does the team determine what an evaluation should include?**

The team, including the parent, must review existing data on the student and, based on the review and input from the parents, identify what additional data are needed to determine eligibility. In determining what additional data are needed, the team must ensure that the evaluation identifies all of the student's special education and related service needs as well as

---

\* *Growth is measured relative to state-approved, grade-level benchmarks/standards or relative to behavioral expectations.*



establish the presence of a disability. The evaluation must be full and individual, and comprehensive enough to identify all of the special education needs, requiring that the team address the unique circumstances of each student as well as the characteristics of the suspected disability.

The district is required to provide written notice of its proposal to evaluate the student. Prior written notice must include a description the action proposed (or refused) by the district and an explanation of why the district proposes (or refuses) the action (Rule 6A-6.03311(1)(c), F.A.C.). In the case of an evaluation, the notice should include a description of the evaluation procedures the district proposes to conduct and the rationale for conducting the procedures.

### **How is the evaluation completion date determined?**

The “evaluation completion date” is defined in the Florida’s Database Manual (<http://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/database-manuals-updates>) as “the date all applicable initial evaluation procedures prescribed in Rules 6A-6.03011 through 6A-6.03019, 6A-6.03020 through 6.03027, and 6A-6.03030, F.A.C., are completed for the purpose of determining a student’s eligibility for each special education program.” For most students, this will be the date of the last standardized norm-referenced assessment, observation, progress monitoring data collection, or other evaluation procedure. However, if the team determines that existing data were sufficient to establish disability and educational need without conducting further evaluation procedures the evaluation completion date is the date that decision was made (for more see the technical assistance for Rule 6A-6.0331, [F.A.C.] at <http://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-6017/dps-2011-04.pdf>).

After receiving parental consent on the district consent form, the district must complete the evaluation within 60 days; summer vacation, school holidays, and absences beyond eight (8) days are excluded from the 60-day requirement. For specific learning disabilities only, the 60-day evaluation timeline may be extended by mutual agreement between the parent and the team (Rule 6A-6.03018(3)(b), F.A.C. — <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ruleNo.asp?id=6A-6.03018>).

### **Consent for Evaluation within the Problem Solving & Response to Instruction/Intervention Framework**

Each district and school is responsible for implementing a multi-tiered system of supports to address the needs of ALL learners, including students with disabilities, **English language learners**, and students from impoverished backgrounds. A multi-tiered system begins with the provision of effective core **instruction** and leverages additional resources and **supports** that address barriers to learning and maximize success with state grade-level **standards**. An effective multi-tiered system of supports integrates core instruction, supplemental and intensive interventions, and specially designed instruction using a data-based problem solving process that matches the intensity of support to student needs.

#### **District-Initiated Evaluation**

##### *Provide Effective Core Instruction*

Schools provide a coordinated continuum of evidenced-based support that begins with effective core instruction for all students. Universal screenings and Early Warning Systems monitor the effectiveness of core instructional practices and identify students needing additional support. In a

## Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving — Revised (GTIPS-R)

functional multi-tiered system, data-based problem-solving teams use student data to identify the scope, focus, and target of support. For students with the most intense needs, supplemental and intensive interventions may need to occur simultaneously rather than sequentially.

### *Implement & Monitor Evidence-Based Interventions (EBI)*

Develop and implement evidence based supplemental interventions for small groups (Tier 2) and intensive individual interventions (Tier 3) for students needing additional support to succeed in the general education environment. The evidence based interventions (developed by a data-based **problem solving team**) are matched in intensity to student need and integrated/aligned with core curriculum and behavioral expectations. School-based teams monitor student response to intervention and use data from diagnostic assessments to guide intervention development.

### *Monitor Evidence-Based Interventions (EBI) - Systematic Review of Data (Child Find)*

Use data to systemically address district's child find obligation. Group and individual response to intervention data are reviewed periodically and used to determine when to modify/intensify intervention supports. The systematic review of student response to intervention data informs school-based teams when there is reason to suspect that the student may be a student with a disability, and is the most efficient means of meeting the district's child find obligation. The Child Find obligation is triggered when: 1) the student does not make adequate growth given effective core instruction and intensive, individualized evidence based interventions, or 2) the intensive interventions are effective but require an intensity of resources and support that are typically associated with specially designed instruction. The date the school-based team reviews the data and determines that (1) or (2) are present starts the 30-day timeline for requesting parent consent.

### *Request Consent & Evaluate*

The district must request parental consent for an **evaluation** within 30 days of reviewing student response to intervention data that indicates there is reason to suspect that the student may be a student with a disability. Prior to obtaining consent, a group of qualified professionals and the parent review existing data and determine what, if any, additional data are needed. Based on this review and other information, the district proposes an initial evaluation with enough specificity so that the parent understands what they are consenting to.

The district must complete the proposed evaluation within 60 school days. The evaluation must be individual and sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the student's special education and related service needs. If no additional assessment data is needed, an eligibility staffing can be scheduled or held.

### *Determine Eligibility*

A group of qualified professionals and the parent considers the evaluation data and information from a variety of sources and determines whether the student meets eligibility criteria as a student with a disability AND needs special education. A student may not be determined eligible if the determinant factor is: 1) lack of appropriate instruction in the essential components of reading, 2) lack of instruction in math, 3) limited English proficiency, or 4) does not meet the eligibility criteria specified in State Board rules.

*Provide SDI in MTSS*

If the student is eligible, the specially designed instruction needed for success in the core curriculum is provided within the context of a multi-tiered system of supports. Eligibility should never result in a decrease in support nor limit access to the general education supports/interventions available to all students. If a student is determined to be not eligible, interventions and supports with general education resources should continue.

**Parent-Initiated Evaluation**

*Parent Requests an Evaluation*

When a parent requests an evaluation, the district has 30 days to respond by either: 1) proposing an evaluation and requesting consent, or 2) providing parent with a written notice of refusal to conduct the evaluation.

*Obtain Consent*

If district agrees to conduct the evaluation, it must request parental consent within 30 days unless the parent and school agree otherwise in writing. Prior to obtaining consent, a group of qualified professionals and the parent review existing data and determine what additional data are needed. Based on the review of data and other information, the district proposes an initial evaluation.

*Conduct Evaluation & Implement Evidence-Based Interventions (EBI)*

The district must complete the proposed evaluation within 60 days. If there is insufficient data on student response to intensive, individualized interventions, the provision of tiered support and progress monitoring are conducted concurrently with the evaluation. When a parent initiates the evaluation, it may be necessary to implement Tier 2 and Tier 3 simultaneously.

*Determine Eligibility*

A group of qualified professionals and the parent considers data and information from a variety of sources and determines whether the student meets eligibility criteria as a student with a disability AND needs special education. A student may not be determined eligible if the determinant factor is: 1) lack of appropriate instruction in the essential components of reading, 2) lack of instruction in math, 3) limited English proficiency, or 4) does not meet the eligibility criteria specified in State Board rules.

*Provide SDI in MTSS*

If the student is eligible, the specially designed instruction needed for success in the core curriculum is provided within the context of a multi-tiered system of supports. Eligibility should never result in a decrease in support nor limit access to the general education supports/interventions available to all students. If a student is determined to be not eligible, interventions and supports that match student need with general education resources should continue.

**Independent Evaluations**

As part of an **evaluation** to determine whether a student has a disability and to identify the educational needs of the student, a group of professionals determining eligibility must review existing evaluation **data**, including evaluations and other information parents provide. Independent educational evaluations (IEEs) must meet the district's criteria for conducting an evaluation, including qualifications of the examiner (Rule 6A-6.03311(6), Florida Administrative

Code). If the IEE meets the district’s criteria (including qualifications of the examiner) for conducting an evaluation, the results must be considered in decisions with respect to the provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to the student. However, the district is not obligated to accept the recommendations of the IEE. The authority to determine the presence of a disability and educational need is placed with the team, which consists of a group of qualified professionals and the parent(s).

It is likely that districts will need to supplement the results of independent educational evaluations obtained by a parent, especially if student response to intervention is an eligibility criterion. The criteria for determining eligibility should be clearly explained to parents and communicated with independent educational evaluators so that independent evaluations can provide **assessment** data **relevant** to determining disability and educational need. If a parent presents an independent evaluation that does not meet the district’s eligibility criteria, then the following should be explained to the parent: (1) the specific eligibility criterion needed and (2) the reason why the independent evaluation does not provide the information needed to determine eligibility.

### **Connecting Evaluation to Student Achievement**

The primary purpose of **assessment** is to gather information that leads to improved academic and/or behavioral outcomes for students. Evaluations conducted in educational settings may include many procedures, both formal and informal, that provide information **relevant** for educational programming and that support the development of effective **interventions**. Educationally relevant evaluations include the assessment of **instruction**, curriculum, and **learning environment**, as well as the assessment of student performance and other student-related variables.

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) supports models that focus on assessments that are related to instruction and promote intervention for identified children in the “Analysis of Comments and Changes” section of the Federal Regulations implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (71 Federal Register [Fed. Reg.] 46647, p. 109) (<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2006-08-14/pdf/06-6656.pdf#page=109>). The increased emphasis on using information on how a student responds to scientifically based instruction and intervention to support eligibility decisions is coupled with a decreased emphasis on the use of standardized, norm-referenced assessments of cognitive ability and cognitive processing. IDEA makes it clear that the determination of a severe discrepancy between IQ and achievement is not necessary in order to identify a student as having a specific learning disability (SLD).

Additionally, none of the federal regulations addressing special education **evaluation** requirements, including the additional procedures for SLD identification, specify that a particular type of assessment (e.g., assessment of psychological or cognitive processing) must be conducted. Of particular relevance is the USDOE’s response in the “Analysis of Comments and Changes” section of the federal regulations:

*“The Department does not believe that an assessment of psychological or cognitive processing should be required in determining whether a child has an SLD. There is no current evidence that such assessments are necessary or sufficient for identifying SLD. Further, in many cases, these assessments have not been used to make appropriate intervention decisions.”*

71 Fed. Reg. 46651.

When using student response to instruction/intervention **data** to determine whether a student is eligible for special education services as a student with a disability, a variety of sources of information is needed. Routinely collected screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostic/prescriptive assessment data can provide the information necessary for determining a student’s performance discrepancy from the **peer** group and grade-level **standards**. It can also be used to establish a pattern of educational progress over time and identify the educational circumstances under which the student performs best to inform instructional planning.

### **Eligibility Decisions in Specific Areas: SLD and LI**

Making an eligibility decision for a specific special education category, such as specific learning disabilities (SLD) and language impairments (LI), occurs within the context of the problem solving process and subsequent to obtaining consent to evaluate and conduct the comprehensive **evaluation** procedures. When engaging in eligibility decision making, consider the context and order of events as they occur as an ongoing process for the primary purpose of improving the effect of **instruction** for the student, rather than for the purpose of deciding on a categorical placement. If teams maintain focus on the ultimate purpose of increasing the student’s **level of performance** and **rate of progress**, then making an eligibility decision will not impact the ongoing problem solving and monitoring of the students’ response. Instead of interrupting the process or changing the focus of problem solving, the eligibility decision becomes an event for the purpose of matching available resources to provide for students’ instructional needs, thereby improving student outcomes.

The purpose of the Decision-Making Tool for SLD and LI Eligibility is to assist school-based teams in analyzing and evaluating existing **data** to make eligibility decisions. In accordance with Rule 6A-6.03018, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.), *Exceptional Education Eligibility for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities*, and Rule 6A-6.030121, F.A.C., *Exceptional Education Eligibility for Students with Language Impairments and Qualifications and Responsibilities for the Speech-Language Pathologists Providing Language Services*, this tool may be used after consent to evaluate has been obtained and the team determines that all of the necessary assessment data have been gathered.

The purpose of the Decision-Making Tool for SLD and LI Eligibility ([http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/Decision\\_Making\\_Tool\\_SLD\\_&\\_LI\\_Elig.pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/Decision_Making_Tool_SLD_&_LI_Elig.pdf)) is **not** solely to document procedural requirements for compliance, rather, it is a tool to guide the team’s analysis. As a secondary purpose, it provides a vehicle for the required documentation. The *Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Compliance Self-Assessment: Processes and Procedures Manual* can be accessed for guidance about documenting compliance components at <http://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/monitoring>.

## **Required: Written Summary of the Group’s Analysis**

State Board of Education rules require that, for a student suspected of having a specific learning disability or language impairment, the documentation of the determination of eligibility must include a written summary of the group’s analysis of the **data**. The written summary must incorporate the elements listed in Rule 6A-6.03018 and Rule 6A-6.030121, Florida Administrative Code:

- The basis for making the determination.
- **Observations** establishing the relationship between behavior and academic functioning.
- Educationally relevant medical findings.
- Data confirming the existence of a specific learning disability or language impairment, including performance discrepancy, **rate of progress**, and educational need.
- The group’s determination of the effect of other factors, and evidence that one or more of the factors is not the primary cause of the student’s **difficulty** (resources that can be used to make this determination are found on the next page).
- RtI information documenting the intervention plan, **student centered data** collected, the level of response of instruction/intervention, parent involvement, and the required signatures.

The written summary must reflect the professional opinion of the group responsible for determining eligibility. There is no requirement for any additional formal reports, such as separate **evaluation** reports, but districts may develop procedures for documenting and reporting response to intervention data and the rationale for the eligibility decision. The expectation is that the rationale and/or justification for the team’s decision be clear from the evidence provided and the summary of the team’s analysis of that evidence. There is no requirement specifying the author of the report, as all team members contribute and share responsibility for the analysis.

The elements of the example coversheets for the collection of information summarizing the group’s analysis have been integrated into the Decision-Making Tool for SLD and LI Eligibility ([http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/Decision\\_Making\\_Tool\\_SLD\\_&\\_LI\\_Elig.pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/Decision_Making_Tool_SLD_&_LI_Elig.pdf)). In addition, the required summary of the group’s analysis can be represented by the tool. The first three sections (A–C) of the tool reflect the team’s decision making process. Section D of the tool is a culmination of the team’s process as represented in the preliminary sections (A–C) and includes the requirements for documentation in the written summary of the group’s analysis.

## **Exclusionary Factors**

### **Documentation of Factors that Affect Level of Performance and Rate of Progress**

*Visual, Motor, or Hearing Disability* — Sensory screenings; medical records; **observation**

*Intellectual Disability* — Classroom performance; academic skills; language development; adaptive functioning; tests of intellectual functioning

*Emotional/Behavioral Disability* — Classroom observation; student records; discipline history, emotional/behavioral screenings; behavior rating scales

*Cultural Factors* — Level of **performance & rate of progress** compared to students from same ethnicity

*Environmental or Economic Factors* — Level of Performance & Rate of Progress compared to students from similar economic background (free/reduced lunch); situational factors that are student specific; performance of siblings

*Limited English Proficiency* — English **language proficiency** (oral language, vocabulary, verbal ability); Level of Performance & Rate of Progress compared to **English language learners** with similar exposure to language and instruction

*Irregular Pattern of Attendance* — Attendance records; number of schools attended; tardies; discipline records (in- and out-of-school suspensions); migrant status & pattern of attendance; % of instructional time lost

*Classroom Behavior* — Classroom observations; Academic Engaged Time (AET); Office Discipline Referrals (ODR)

*Gender* — Level of Performance & Rate of Progress compared to students from same gender subgroup; familial or socio-cultural factors that are student specific

*Age* — Level of Performance & Rate of Progress compared to same-age peers; situational factors that are student specific; birthdate

### **Ongoing Problem Solving**

Eligibility for special education services is not the finish line for problem solving. It is important to note that the four-step problem solving process is systematically applied before, during, and **after** the determination of eligibility. Students identified as eligible for special education services are receiving specially designed **instructional** and/or behavioral **supports** and, as a result, require frequent progress monitoring to ensure the effectiveness of those supports.



In order to make informed **instructional decisions** that are critical for continued success, the four-step process of problem identification, problem analysis, intervention design/implementation, and response to instruction/intervention must be used routinely. The Decision-Making Tool for SLD and LI Eligibility ([http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/Decision Making Tool SLD & LI Elig.pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/Decision_Making_Tool_SLD_&_LI_Elig.pdf)) prompts teams using the tool to plan next steps in the problem solving process, regardless of eligibility status.

## **Reevaluation Decisions**

At least once every three years the district must reevaluate a student with a disability. A reevaluation may occur more often if a parent or a teacher requests it, but may not occur more than once per year unless the parent and the district agree. As the construct of “**evaluation**” has evolved from the administration of a battery of standardized **assessments** to the review and analysis of **data** collected through the PS-RtI process in conjunction with formal assessment data as needed, teams have struggled with reevaluation for students identified as having a Specific Learning Disability (SLD), Emotional/Behavioral Disability (E/BD), or Language Impairment (LI), asking “What does reevaluation look like within the PS-RtI framework?”

Beginning with the 1997 reauthorization of the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**, districts have not been required to conduct, for reevaluation, the same comprehensive evaluation required for an initial evaluation and eligibility decision. Instead, as part of any reevaluation, the members of the student’s **individual education plan (IEP)** team, including the parent, review existing evaluation data, including information provided by the parent; current classroom-based, local, and state assessments; ongoing progress monitoring; and **observations**. Because schools are increasingly operating within a data-based, decision making **culture**, a wealth of data about students’ needs are available to the IEP team at any point in time. On the basis of that review, the team identifies what additional data, if any, are required in order to determine the following:

1. Whether the student continues to be a student with a disability and the educational needs of the student.
2. The present levels of academic achievement and functional performance of the student.
3. Whether the student continues to need special education and related services.
4. Whether any additions or modifications to the student’s special education and related services are needed to enable the student to meet the measurable annual goals set out in the IEP and participate, as appropriate, in the general education curriculum.

With the exception of sensory impairments that require specific formal assessments as part of reevaluation (i.e., deaf or hard-of-hearing, dual-sensory impairment, visual impairment), the IEP team determines what information is needed to answer the questions above and the best way to obtain it. Students continue to benefit from implementation of a multi-tiered system until effective **interventions** have been identified and growth can be maintained. This includes both general education students and students who have been determined eligible for special education services. Data collected by the team or by individual special education or general education teachers to measure the student’s progress toward the annual goals may also inform the reevaluation process, including the decision regarding continuing eligibility and determining the educational needs of the student.

If the IEP team determines that no additional data are needed, the parents must be notified in writing of that decision and the reasons for it and be informed that they have the right to request assessments. If the IEP team determines that additional data are needed, the district must request written, informed consent from the parent to conduct assessments. If the parent does not respond, the district may proceed with the reevaluation but must retain documentation of the attempts to communicate with the parent to obtain consent (e.g., detailed logs of telephone calls or home visits, copies of written notices).



# Conclusion

The purpose of a multi-tiered system of support is to improve instructional decisions at every tier in order to maximize student outcomes. The problem solving process is applied specific to Tier 1 instruction to adjust the core package of services delivered to all students and to result in a large percentage of students meeting benchmarks. For Tier 2 instruction, the problem solving process is employed to determine standard protocols that are matched to the needs of small groups of students, then monitored for effectiveness. Intensive instructional interventions for individual students (Tier 3) are designed, planned, and monitored as products of the problem solving process.

Regardless of various educational decisions that are made, teams continue to engage in problem solving to ensure that student success is achieved and maintained. It is this continuous problem solving, in relentless pursuit of successful outcomes for students, which characterizes the broad systems change process that Florida is engaging in to integrate the logic of a multi-tiered system of support as a way of work for all educators.

## The Tools

The Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving (GTIPS) is designed to provide Florida schools and districts with detailed information on the process for the collection of student performance data through the system-wide use of a data-based problem solving process. There are tools embedded throughout the guide to assist educators using a problem solving process and analyzing data to make important educational decisions for all students. These tools, also found below, are free to copy, use as is and/or modify for your own specific use.

- Self-Assessment of MTSS Implementation (SAM) - *revised October 2015* ([http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/self\\_assessment\\_of\\_mtss\\_\(sam\).pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/self_assessment_of_mtss_(sam).pdf))
- Problem-solving/RtI Worksheet - *revised October 2015* ([http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/PS-RtI\\_Worksheet.pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/PS-RtI_Worksheet.pdf))
- Intervention Documentation Worksheets - *revised October 2015* ([http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/intervention\\_documentation\\_worksheets.pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/intervention_documentation_worksheets.pdf))
- Parent Participation Notes - *revised October 2015* ([http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/Parent\\_Participation\\_Notes.pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/Parent_Participation_Notes.pdf))
- Decision-Making Tool for SLD and LI Eligibility - *revised October 2015* ([http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/Decision\\_Making\\_Tool\\_SLD\\_&\\_LI\\_Elig.pdf](http://florida-rti.org/gtips/docs/Decision_Making_Tool_SLD_&_LI_Elig.pdf))

Additional guides, tools and other helpful resources are collected on Florida's Multi-Tiered System of Support's site Educator Resources section at <http://www.florida-rti.org/educatorResources/index.htm>.

# Common Understandings

Many terms defined below are terms used throughout the GTIPS-R. The definitions of each of these items have been vetted through multiple sources. However, the collection below also contains items not found in the GTIPS-R. These terms, some specific to the educational system in Florida, are also relevant to problem solving in an MTSS and are included here to develop a common understanding around their meanings.

**Academic Language Proficiency** — Academic language proficiency refers to the level of (English) language ability that students need to successfully understand, participate in, and perform on grade-level academic tasks.

**Access Points** — Access points are embedded in the Sunshine State Standards and reflect the core intent of the standards with reduced levels of complexity. They enable students with significant cognitive disabilities to access the general education curriculum. There are three levels of complexity: participatory (Pa), supported (Su), and independent (In), with the participatory level being the least complex. The Florida Alternate Assessment measures student achievement on the access points in reading, writing, mathematics, and science.

**Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM)** — Accessible instructional materials are instructional materials that have been formatted or adapted to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. Examples include restructured print, braille, large print, digital text (or e-text), audio, graphic-enhanced text, images, and manipulatives. The specific types of adaptations to instructional materials should be based on the student’s IEP statement of how the student’s disability affects involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (34 CFR §§300 and 301, Summary of Changes, pp. 46618 and 46625).

**Accommodation (for ELL)** — Accommodation generally refers to adaptations to language (spoken or written) to make it more understandable to English language learners. In assessment, accommodations are modifications to the presentation, response method, setting, or timing/scheduling of the assessment.

**Accommodations** — Accommodations are adjustments that can be made to the way students access information and demonstrate performances that do not require changes in the curriculum. Types of accommodations include presentation, response, scheduling, and setting. Accommodations are not the same as instructional interventions for academics or behavior, though they may be included in instructional plans for implementing interventions and the assessments used to monitor progress (contrast with “modifications” in ESE terms).

**Active Learning** — Active learning is an umbrella term that refers to several models of instruction that focus the responsibility of learning on learners. Students interact with the learning goals for the purpose of generating knowledge and meaning (from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas). Such strategies require more than passive listening from students. Research suggests that these strategies greatly increase students’ retention of both knowledge and skills.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)** — Adequate yearly progress (AYP) is the component of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for determining whether or not all high school students achieve the same high standards of academic achievement in reading or language arts and mathematics by 2013-2014. AYP requires statistically valid and reliable ways to determine the

continuous and substantial academic improvement of all students from a starting point in 2001-2002 to the proficiency level by 2013-2014. Moreover, AYP includes efforts to narrow the achievement gaps of students who are economically disadvantaged, students from major race and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency. For high schools, AYP must include graduation rates and at least one additional academic indicator, such as local assessments, attendance rates, or college preparatory courses.

**Adjust** — To adjust in a classroom or school setting means paying attention to the appropriateness of student responses, reactions, and/or engagement in lesson activities, deciding if changes (“corrections”) are needed to accomplish the lesson goals, and making those adjustments “on the spot” (meaning the possibility of an adjustment was anticipated and planned for) or by revision to future lessons.

**Alignment** — Alignment is when all the systems, structures, and processes support the district’s purposes rather than work against them. Organizational alignment is the practice of putting everyone in the school district “on the same page” and understanding how job requirements (e.g. Standards-based-instruction, MTSS, and research-based strategies) support organizational purposes. Leaders are key to creating and maintaining alignment by providing clear direction on how each process, structure, and system aligns to purposes and ensuring that each school, class, and educator is working towards priority goals.

**Alternate Assessment Test** — The Florida Alternate Assessment measures student academic performance on the Florida Standards Access Points at three levels of complexity: participatory, supported, and independent. (See definition of access points.)

**Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO)** — Title III of NCLB requires each state to determine annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs). AMAOs indicate how much English language proficiency (reading, writing, speaking, listening, and comprehension) children served with Title III funds are expected to gain each year. [See AYP, for similar content area requirements.]

The AMAO requirements include reporting on these three things:

1. Annual increases in the number or percentage of ELL children making progress in learning English.
2. Annual increases in the number or percentage of ELL children attaining English proficiency.
3. Annual increases in the number or percentage of ELL children making AYP.

**Art and Science of Teaching** — Over time, extensive research on effective teaching has assembled a core of understanding on what works (see high probability strategies and Mind-Brain-Education), so there is a science of teaching that should inform the knowledge bases and skill sets of effective educators. The art of teaching is the teacher’s adaptation of the science to fit the needs of the learners. The true artist looks at the science and applies it in his or her context to produce results. Thirty to forty years of research on teaching has moved the profession from being essentially a craft where one’s feel for the task and wisdom of experience defined the master teacher. Teaching, as we now understand it, is a profession where there is a science of teaching and artistic expression of that science in the classroom defines the master teacher. Emerging understandings from neurosciences deepens connections between education and other branches of science.

**Artifact** — An artifact is a work done by students or teachers. Student artifacts may include, but are not limited to, work samples, portfolios, projects, and creative works. Teacher artifacts may include, but are not limited to, lesson or unit plans, manipulatives, models, data analyses, or student learning aides.

**Assessment** — Assessment refers to a collection of processes to estimate a “current reality.” Formative, interim, and summative assessments provide multiple sources of student data to guide decisions about adjusting instruction and/or providing interventions. Standardized assessments provide a basis for assessing status relative to norms or criteria.

**Assistive Technology** — Assistive technology is any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device. “Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities; Final Rule” 34 CFR Parts 300 and 301, (14 August 2006), pp. 46756, section 300.5.

The analysis of the impact of a student’s disability upon the student’s involvement and progress in the general curriculum, and consideration of how assistive technology may lessen any negative impact, is a responsibility of the individualized education program (IEP) team.

**Assistive Technology Services** — An assistive technology service is any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. “Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities; Final Rule” 34 CFR Parts 300 and 301, (14 August 2006), pp. 46756, section 300.6.

**Behaviors** — Behaviors are observable actions. Practices, descriptors, indicators, strategies, and behaviors are related terms often used interchangeably. Within the common language of instruction, a hierarchy of meaning is assigned to facilitate communications:

- A practice is a collection of related knowledge and competencies that have an instructional purpose.
- A descriptor is a summary of elements associated with a practice (see FEAPs descriptors of practice).
- An indicator is a term used in evaluation and feedback processes to identify specific strategies and/or behaviors that have an association with student learning or job requirements.
- A strategy is a specific instructional behavior that has definable elements of proficiency and an instructional purpose for which it is appropriate.
- Behaviors are the actions that teachers or student engage in to properly implement a strategy.

**Bilingual Education** — An educational program in which two languages are used to provide language, literacy, and content instruction. Bilingual education programs vary in length, in the amount each language is used, and in outcome goals for students.

**Causal Instructional Strategies** — Key strategies revealed by research to have the highest probability of impacting student learning when used appropriately and in appropriate instructional contexts. These are the controllable actions in a school that impact student learning.

**Causal Model of Teacher Evaluation** — Describes the link between classroom practices and behaviors that have a direct impact on student learning and assigns greater importance in evaluation ratings to factors having the most direct link to student learning (based on contemporary research).

**Climate** — The terms “school climate” and “school culture” describe the environment that affects the behavior of teachers and students. School climate characterizes the organization at the school building and classroom level. It refers to the “feel” of a school and can vary from school to school within the same district. Climate can help or hinder learning. School culture is the shared beliefs and attitudes that characterize the district-wide organization, establish boundaries for its constituent units, and give an organization its identity and standard for expected behaviors.

**Code of Ethics** — A Florida State Board of Education rule (6B-1.006) that defines the ethical obligations of Florida educators.

**Cognitive Complexity** — Cognitive complexity is a variable that indicates how complex or simple a mental task is. A person who is measured high on cognitive complexity tends to perceive nuances and subtle differences which a person with a lower measure (indicating a less complex cognitive structure for the task or activity) does not. In Florida’s standardized assessments, the cognitive complexity required to perform an assessment item is a factor in developing the questions. The Florida Department of Education’s Office of Assessment explained in July 2012 that the “categories of cognitive complexity—low complexity, moderate complexity, and high complexity—form an ordered description of the demands an item may make on a student. For example, low-complexity items may require a student to solve a one-step problem. Moderate-complexity items may require multiple steps. High-complexity items may require a student to analyze and synthesize information. The distinctions made in item complexity ensure that items will assess the depth of student knowledge at each benchmark.”

**Collaboration** — Collaboration is a process with recurring interactions over time where colleagues engage in defining problems, clarifying thinking, and developing solutions. Collaboration involves more engagement than just meeting or communicating points of view. Teaching and leadership are complex functions and collaboration plays a meaningful role in being successful in either role. Individual work on self-improvement, while essential, is not sufficient for achieving mastery level proficiency and a deep understanding of the profession. Recurring collaboration experiences are also needed. Collaboration is an essential element in deliberate practice – the career long process of developing professional mastery.

**Collegial** — A collegial process, while building on congenial relationships, is focused on clear identification of growth issues and constructive feedback that supports improvements in understanding and proficiency. Congenial groups develop habits of courtesy and support, but the process is not collegial until trust relationships exist that enables a focus on weaknesses and constructive criticism. Involvement in collegial learning teams is one of the habits of deliberate practice.

**Common Language** — A “common language” is a tool of master practitioners in any profession used to facilitate effective communications about the essential concepts and practices of the profession. Consensus within a group of practitioners on the specific meaning of terms and expressions is used to provide feedback for improvement of proficiency on important job functions and in deepening understanding of the priority practices, standards, and goals of the profession.

**Common Language of Instruction** — The core collection of terms and expressions used in collegial professional development to deepen understanding of the complexity of teaching, promote clarity in professional communications, and enhance the quality of feedback on improvement of instructional proficiency in delivery of a standards-based curriculum.

**Common Language of Instruction: Florida** — Florida’s common language of instruction is the core collection of terms and expressions used to provide feedback for improvement of instructional proficiency in delivery of a standards-based curriculum and in deepening understanding of the complexity of teaching. The common language addresses concepts from instructional practice, curriculum, assessment, continuous improvement, leadership, and student supports and interventions.

**Common Research Theme** — A common research theme is used in lesson study to focus problem identification and analysis. Themes are based on student performance data and the teacher evaluation model adopted by the district. The theme can focus on schoolwide issues or on issues targeted just by the lesson study team.

**Communication Skills** — Communication skills (written, oral, and technological) are needed competencies for the effective educator. Within each mode of communication, a core of basic practices apply:

- **Courteousness:** Use respectful choices of words and tone.
- **Precision:** Focus on key point(s) without extraneous or off-topic digressions.
- **Language:** Work-place communication should be crisp and clear so that everyone understands what you’re saying. Slang terms are at risk of being misunderstood and also look unprofessional.
- **Clarity:** Thoughtful choices of words and non-verbal communications are a key part of clarity of communication goals, but periodic understanding checks (feedback from the other parties) are also needed to be sure clarity of communication is occurring.
- **Listen to Others:** Effective communication is not a one-way street. Be a good listener and not just a good talker.
- **Posture and Body Language:** The body has a language of its own, and at the workplace, the body ought to be courteous and respectful in the messages conveyed.

**Community of Practice (CoP)** — A community of practice (CoP) is a group of professionals who use collegial communication processes to support each others’ efforts to improve professional skill sets and deepen professional knowledge bases. A CoP typically has a focus topic. Exchanges among CoP members range from scheduled times (face to face and/or online) to unscheduled and non-simultaneous interactions using online tools. A CoP tends to be sustained over time and members seek and provide feedback to other members for their mutual benefit.

**Complexity of Teaching** — A concept that proficient practice of teaching involves a complex set of inter-connected competencies and knowledge that is adapted and applied based on variables in the learning environment. Mastery as a teacher is a career long progress and requires merging knowledge from diverse fields (e.g., subject matter expertise, instructional practices, deliberate practice, reflection, collegiality, mind and brain neuroscience, and psychology human development).

**Comprehensible Instruction** — Comprehensible instruction refers to instruction that is presented in a form that is understandable to students. The most common focus is on students who are not yet proficient in English. ESOL strategies are designed to support comprehensible instructions for such students. All students should have an equitable opportunity to learn in school through interaction with their teachers and peers.

**Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA)** — Florida uses the Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA) as a tool to measure English language learners' proficiency level and progress in learning English.

**Consensus** — Consensus is the result of a process where stakeholders involved in a change effort agree to operate in alignment with an established implementation plan or decision, regardless of personal opinion. The implementation plan or decision is typically developed with use of a common language of terms, a common knowledge of core concepts, and a common understanding of the rationale for the initiative.

**Consent Decree** — The Consent Decree refers to a court order that serves as the state of Florida's framework for compliance with federal and state laws and jurisprudence regarding the education of English language learners. (See League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) et al. v. State Board of Education Consent Decree, United States.)

**Constructive Conversation** — Constructive conversation (see SBE Rule 6A-5.080 Florida Principal Leadership Standard 9-e) preserves a positive relationship between communicators while addressing problems. It is a form of discussion that is more likely to support problem solving and less likely to create more problems between parties. The elements of constructive conversations are:

- Problem oriented, not person oriented.
- Congruent, not incongruent (i.e., conveys what the speaker is thinking and feeling).
- Descriptive, not evaluative (i.e., objectively describes problems rather than speaking in an evaluative or judgmental manner).
- Validating, not invalidating (i.e., helps people feel understood, valued, and accepted).
- Specific, not global (i.e., focused on understanding or problem solving on a specific issue, not a “big picture”).
- Conjunctive, not disjunctive (i.e., stays focused on the topic rather than bounce from one issue to another).
- Owned, not disowned (When we “own” our communication, we take responsibility for our statements and acknowledge that we are the source of the ideas conveyed and not someone else. We “disown” communication when we search for third parties to attribute our comments to).
- Listening, two-way communication, not one-way message delivery (i.e., effective listening is actively absorbing the information given to you by a speaker, showing that you are listening and interested, and providing feedback to the speaker so that he or she knows the message was received).

Constructive conversations provide a way to address the “mental models” element in building a learning organization.

**Contemporary Research** — Contemporary research in the context of Florida's goals for improvement in student learning is focused on the deepening understanding of causal relationships between instructional strategies and student learning revealed through research



conducted within the last ten years and focused on issues related to current state priorities. When older research findings, such as those in a meta-analysis, are supported by ongoing contemporary research as still being predictive of outcomes in contemporary educational settings are a useful component in a research base.

**Content Framework** — A content framework is a curriculum concept. It identifies the priority content and functions of a competency based curriculum.

**Continuity of Learning** — Continuity of learning refers to the continued provision of educational services in the event of a natural disaster or pandemic through the use of virtual classrooms, online learning, and distance learning technologies. To achieve a seamless continuity of learning experience, teachers must understand effective pedagogy in a face-to-face classroom as well as a virtual classroom. In addition, teachers and students must be comfortable moving in and out of the use of digital communication and study tools.

**Continuous Improvement (or Progress)** — Continuous improvement is an ongoing effort to improve outcomes, products, services, or processes. These efforts can seek “incremental” improvement over time or “breakthrough” improvement all at once. Florida’s Continuous Improvement Model (FCIM) is a process by which quality is improved over time by examining results and the processes that generate those results and employing problem-solving skills to generate and implement targeted improvements.

**Core Curricula and Instruction** — The common package of instructional materials and delivery methods, including a scope and sequence, that reflects required grade-level standards used with all students through general education resources. Core curricula and instruction targets both academic and behavioral skills.

**Core Values** — The core values of an organization are those values we hold which form the foundation upon which we perform work and conduct ourselves. Core values are so primary and so important to us that regardless of changes in society, government, politics, and technology they are still the core values we will abide by. In an ever-changing world, core values are constants – they are mental models that shape our perceptions of the world around us and the decisions we make. Core values are not descriptions of the work we do or the strategies we employ to accomplish our mission. Core values are the beliefs, values, and mental models that underlie how we do our work, how we interact with each other, and impact which strategies we employ to fulfill our mission. The core values are the basic elements of how we go about our work.

**Course Description** — A course description is the list of standards that are to be learned by completing a credit course in Florida’s K-12 school system. Course descriptions are located at [www.floridastandards.org](http://www.floridastandards.org) (or CPalms). The list of standards that make up the course description serves several purposes:

- Informs students what they are to know or be able to do.
- Form the basis for essential questions.
- Provides teachers guidance in developing learning goals and rubrics.
- Informs teachers on the issues that will be covered in state assessment tests.

**Credit Recovery** — Credit recovery refers to processes for students who are missing credits needed for graduation to acquire those credits by demonstration of competencies. Credit recovery courses are an opportunity for a student to retake a course in which he/she previously

was not academically successful in earning credit towards graduation. They are designed to be on a flexible schedule and are not facilitated by a teacher. They allow students who have completed seat time and calendar requirements to earn credit based on competency of the content standards. They are complete courses containing all NGSSS content for which the student will demonstrate mastery before receiving a grade.

**Cultural, Linguistic and Family Background** — People, students, and educational colleagues come to the school setting with diverse backgrounds, individual cultural identities, and an understanding of language as a system (linguistics). Effective educators take time to be aware of those backgrounds and take into account their potential impact on student learning. Some things to take note:

- Culture tends to be shared by all or most members of some social group. Culture encompasses many elements that interact with each other, including, but not limited, to the shared beliefs, values, worldviews, behaviors, and attitudes of its members. Culture provides rules for beliefs and social life. It is something that older members usually try to pass on to younger members; it shapes behavior and structures perceptions of the world. Culture includes deeply held values, beliefs and assumptions, symbols, heroes, and rituals.
- Linguistic background is rooted in the language(s) of one’s homes and neighborhoods. Linguistic background shapes grammar patterns and how meaning is assigned to words.
- Family background is framed around such issues as the nature and quality of connections among family members, economic factors, mobility, educational and work experiences, social, religious, and political views, and experiences of family members.

**Culturally Connected Curriculum** — A culturally connected curriculum is a curriculum that bridges the gap between the school and the world of the student, is consistent with the values of the student’s own culture aimed at assuring academic learning, and encourages teachers to adapt their instruction to meet the learning needs of all students.

**Culture (Organizational)** — School culture is the shared beliefs and attitudes that characterize the district-wide organization, establish boundaries for its constituent units, and give an organization its identity and standard for expected behaviors. The culture influences the way people interact with each other and with stakeholders outside the organization. A school system’s culture impacts capacity for improving performance and student achievement. (See also climate.)

**Curriculum Mapping** — Curriculum mapping is exploring the primary elements of curriculum: what is taught, how instruction occurs, and when instruction is delivered. It is a process for identifying the core content, processes, and assessments used for curriculum in each subject area. It is used to insure essential concepts are present, to identify gaps, and to check for repetition within a scope and sequence. It promotes vertical alignment across the subjects and grades and supports horizontal alignment of assessments, content, and methods between subjects.

**Curriculum-Based Measurements** — Direct skill assessment tools that are aligned with the curriculum, sensitive to instruction, repeatable, and criterion referenced, which are used for a variety of measurement purposes.

**Data** — Data (plural of “datum”) are typically the results of measurements or objective observation and can be the basis of graphs, images, or observations about the state of conditions or situations. Data may be representation of a fact, figure, and/or idea. Data are numbers, words, images, etc.

Data are the baseline tools for implementing continuous improvement that lead to quality within a learning organization. Such data range from statistical information derived from student testing to observational data from employee evaluation systems to formative data on student and educator progress toward targeted learning goals.

**Decision Rules** — Decision rules, in general, are “if-then” statements that are developed and used to ensure efficiency and consistency of decision making based on possible combinations of (1) student performance data, and (2) fidelity measures. When determining the effectiveness of instructional or intervention services, there are generally 6 possible “effectiveness outcomes”:

- High positive student progress + high fidelity.
- High positive student progress + low fidelity.
- Questionable/moderate student progress + high fidelity.
- Low/insufficient student progress + high fidelity.
- Questionable/moderate student progress + low fidelity.
- Low/insufficient student progress + low fidelity.

The first two possible outcomes should be documented and shared with stakeholders about what worked, for which students, and using what resources so that other schools or districts facing similar student concerns can benefit from the successes learned. The third and fourth possible outcomes warrant a focus on how well the problem-solving process was used to ensure the intervention is matched to students’ needs and/or if increasing the “dosage” of the intervention is needed. The fifth and sixth possible outcomes prevent a determination of effectiveness, as insufficient fidelity cannot allow for identifying why the intervention failed to produce desired results. Therefore, the intervention will need to be re-implemented and/or monitored for increased fidelity before effectiveness of the intervention can be determined. Schools and districts are encouraged to catalogue “what works” and use this collection of known effective practices over time (i.e., evidence-based interventions) to help increase awareness, knowledge, and skills to implement those strategies (also known as “standard treatment practices”) for use in other schools faced with similar student concerns.

**Deliberate Practice** — This is a “way of work” that supports continuous professional improvement through an entire career. It is a mindset, acquired through pursuit of personal mastery and with collegial support, whereby the educator attends to what they are doing in the classroom on a daily basis to identify what is working and what isn’t and to determine why students are learning or not. In deliberate practice teachers identify specific instructional strategies (“thin slices”) to focus their efforts to improve – typically 1 to 3 per year. Deliberate practice requires establishing a baseline for performance in a focus area (the “thin slice”) and engaging in focused practice, feedback, and monitoring of progress within a time-bound goal for improvement. Deliberate practice has been revealed by research as a mindset that distinguishes master teachers who improve steadily throughout their career from others whose improvement plateau after initial growth.

**Descriptor** — Descriptors are summary descriptions of a practice. Practices, descriptors, indicators, strategies, and behaviors are related terms often used interchangeably. Within the common language of instruction, a hierarchy of meaning is assigned to facilitate communications:

- A practice is a collection of related knowledge and competencies that describe a pattern of actions with a focused purpose, typically observable as strategies and behaviors.
- A descriptor is a summary description of a practice (see FEAPs descriptors of practice).

## Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving — Revised (GTIPS-R)

- An indicator is a term used in evaluation and feedback processes to identify specific strategies and/or behaviors that have a causal connection to student learning or are job requirements.
- A strategy is a specific instructional action that has definable elements of proficiency and an instructional purpose for which it is appropriate. Strategies are the building blocks of practice.
- Behaviors are the actions that teachers or students engage in to properly implement a strategy. Behaviors are the building blocks of a strategy.

**Design Questions** — Research-based questions that teachers ask themselves when planning a lesson or unit of instruction. These are questions that guide alignment of purposes and implementing strategies (e.g., What will I do to communicate learning goals? What will I do to engage students? What will I do to communicate high expectations?).

**Diagnostic Measures** — Formal or informal assessment tools that measure skill strengths and weaknesses, identify skills in need of improvement, and assist in determining why the problem is occurring.

**Differentiated Instruction** — An approach to teaching and learning that gives students multiple options for taking in information and making sense of ideas. Lesson design for differentiated instruction provides opportunities for students to do different things during instructional time, those differences being based on tracking student progress on learning goals and adapting instructional strategies to learning needs of students in the class. Differentiation goes beyond a traditional rotating stations approach and provides recurring regrouping of students based on academic needs and issues. In the last decade, differentiated instruction was commonly introduced as an alternative instructional approach to under-performing schools. As research on effective teaching become better understood, differentiation is recognized as an approach that is beneficial to all schools and for all students.

**Difficulty** — Difficulty is an assessment concept that measures of the proportion of examinees who responded to an assessment item correctly. It is also referred to as the “p-value.” For example, an item where 40% of the examinees respond correctly would have a difficulty index (p-value) of 0.4. Difficulty indices vary between 0.0 (where the question is so difficult that no one responds correctly) to 1.0 (where 100% of the examinees respond correctly).

**Direct Instruction** — Direct instruction is a general term for the explicit teaching of a skill-set using lectures or teacher led demonstrations of the material, rather than exploratory models such as inquiry-based learning. Direct instruction is a teacher dominated process where students tend to be passive rather than active learners. This method is often contrasted with active learning. Generally direct instruction needs to be balanced with active learning experiences. Direct instruction to introduce material followed by active learning to engage students in understanding the material is a common practice.

**District Based Leadership Team (DBLT)** — A district-level team responsible for providing instructional and curricular leadership, advisement, and training at the district level, monitoring, and assisting schools in their implementation efforts.

**Diversity** — Diversity describes the reality that variation is the norm. People have divergent capacities, needs, tendencies, physical attributes, intellectual functions, and patterns of adjustment. Effective educators recognize that awareness of the diversity issues in a group of

learners will bring a greater skill base to bear on problem solving when managed properly, improve the overall climate in a class, reduce conflicts, and promote access to new ideas and creative thinking.

**Domain** — A body of knowledge defined by research representing a particular aspect of teaching. Domains are a way to group related issues. Domain titles and the components placed in a domain vary with the research based and focus of the content being organized.

**Dual Language Program/Dual Immersion** — Dual Language Programs serve both English language learners and (English) language majority students concurrently through instruction in both languages, with the goal of developing bilingual and biliterate learners.

**Educational Needs** — Specific curricular, instructional, and environmental requirements that result in positive student performance.

**Educator Evaluation** — An evaluation is a judgment on proficiency of an individual's performance at a point in time on elements that have a significant impact on the outcomes of that person's work. Evaluation is associated with assigning a proficiency status and connects an individual to rewards or consequences regarding status. This is true for students (e.g., grade, promotions) and educators (e.g., retention, salary, promotion). In the content of educators, "evaluation" is not the same as observation. Observations are essential elements that contribute evidence toward an evaluation. Historically, educators have used terms like evaluation, appraisal, and review interchangeably. Prior versions of educator "evaluation systems" were often not useful for distinguishing proficiency levels among a workforce and may not have functioned as true evaluation systems. In Florida's redeveloped systems, evaluations distinguish among proficiency levels and are associated with meaningful consequences. Terms like appraisal and review have other uses and are not useful synonyms for evaluation.

**Effective** — In Florida's common language, "effective" is an objective rather than subjective status. Effective is a level of effect on student learning where standards and practices (and their essential components) are implemented at a level of proficiency sufficient to cause positive outcomes on student learning goals. Research reveals a substantial difference in student growth in a year between students of the most effective and least effective teachers. Ineffective teachers have minimal or negative impact on student growth. "Effective" teaching is a level of proficiency where student growth is predictably and reliably being accomplished. Effective teachers will have patterns of strength and weakness in their repertoire of strategies, but are able to design lessons that employ their strengths and pursue deliberate practice to improve their instructional weaknesses. Being "effective" in the context of Florida's common language of instruction is about moving from "talking the talk" to "walking the walk." State level evaluation rating of "effective" is intended to represent quality work that is causing desired results through proficient implementation of strategies with a positive effect size.

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)** — A federal law funding and regulating public education. Current statutes established reforms based on four principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work.

**Embedding** — The act of inserting within the context of the content the necessary information or skills required to complete the project, solve the problem, or assess the thinking.

**Emergence** — Emergence refers to the process where a higher order outcome results from the interaction of simpler properties. An example in education would be a decision by a student on what their career will be (e.g., deciding to become a scientist). Another example would be the emergence of a positive school climate. Emergent outcomes are often the focus of federal and state grants. STEM programs are one example, where the desired emergent outcomes are students becoming scientists, technology specialists, engineers, and mathematicians. These types of outcomes can be promoted through increased levels of student engagement and intrinsic motivation within a curricular discipline.

**End of Course Exam (EOC)** — EOCs are summative assessments for high school or middle school courses.

**Engagement** — Engagement is evidenced by reflection (dialogue with self about a topic or problem expressed in notes or “in your own words” expressions) and dialogue with others (e.g. other students and instructors); the stimuli for the talk and writing are observations and experiences that pose problems that need to be resolved. Student engagement can be defined as a level of personal investment in an instructional activity. It can be measured in the areas of behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Engagement can be increased through the use of practices that increase intrinsic motivation on the part of the student.

**Engaging Lesson** — An engaging lesson is one that includes appropriate and meaningful activities that engage students in the learning process, address common misconceptions, and incorporate higher-order thinking skills.

**English Language Learners (ELLs)** — English language learners are students whose first language is not English and who are in the process of learning English.

**Equitable** — Equity deals with accommodating and meeting the specific needs of specific individuals. An equitable learning environment where such needs-based accommodations occur will not result in equal treatment of all students. Equal (or sameness) does not assure equitable learning opportunities.

**ESOL Strategies** — ESOL Strategies are teaching techniques designed to support comprehensible instruction for English language learners. ESOL strategies generally provide additional context (such as with the use of visuals and other nonverbal resources) and opportunities for interaction (as with grouping students and cooperative learning tasks).

**Essential Question** — Essential questions are those that focus learner attention on priority aspects of a standard or learning goal. An essential question makes clear to the learner what he or she should know and be able to do at the end of the lesson and/or unit of study.

**Evaluation** — Many parents and professionals use the term “evaluation” to mean a test, or battery of tests, that are scheduled and administered on a given date. Although an evaluation may include specific assessment instruments, in the context of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and corresponding Florida State Board of Education rules, an evaluation refers to all of the procedures used to determine whether a student is a student with a disability and the nature and extent of the student’s special education and related service needs.

An evaluation consists of all relevant assessment tools and strategies used to collect functional, developmental, and academic information about a student in order to determine specialized instructional need. Therefore, in this context, an evaluation includes existing data collected prior to obtaining parental consent for an evaluation (e.g., classroom performance;

observations; interviews; screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostic assessments; district and state assessments; private assessments; and parental input) and any additional assessment procedures conducted subsequent to receipt of parental consent.

**Evaluation System** — An evaluation system provides evidence over time about proficiency of performance, generates feedback on improving proficiency of performance with a focus on elements that have a significant impact of the outcomes of one’s work, and provides periodic summative judgments on the proficiency of both individuals and a collective workforce. Evaluation systems usually have a focus and a link to regulatory expectations. Florida educator evaluation systems, as cited in Florida Statute 1012.34(10(a)) is for the purpose of increasing student learning growth by improving the quality of instructional, administrative, and supervisory services. For teachers the Florida Educator Accomplished Practices (FEAPs) are a foundation for evaluation indicators. For school leaders, the state leadership Standards represents that foundation.

**Evidence-Based Instruction/Interventions** — Instruction/interventions for which evidence of effectiveness in increasing student learning exists.

**Exceptional Student Education (ESE)** — Specially designed instruction and related services that are provided to meet the unique needs of exceptional students who meet eligibility criteria described in Rules 6A-6.03011 through 6A-6.0361, F.A.C.

**Exit Criteria** — Exit criteria are a set of guidelines for reclassifying English language learners as fluent English speakers, thereby ending special instructional services and placing them in mainstream, English-only classes. Exit criteria usually consist of a combination of English language proficiency test performance, standardized test scores, grades, and teacher recommendations.

**Facilitator** — A facilitator in Florida’s continuous process model is one who works with groups seeking improved proficiency or understanding using techniques for keeping the group task-focused, encouraging reflection and creative thinking, building consensus, and keeping all group members involved.

**FEAPs (Florida Educator Accomplished Practices)** — Florida Educator Accomplished Practices (FEAPs) are Florida’s core standards for effective educators and form the foundation for the state’s teacher preparation programs, educator certification requirements, and school district instructional personnel appraisal systems. The FEAPs embody 3 essential principles and six practices that are the foundation for a common language and statewide understanding of the expectations for the quality of instruction and professional responsibility:

- The effective educator creates a culture of high expectations for all students by promoting the importance of education and each student’s capacity for academic achievement.
- The effective educator demonstrates deep and comprehensive knowledge of the subject taught.
- The effective educator exemplifies the standards of the profession.

There are 6 accomplished practices:

1. Quality Instruction
2. The Learning Environment
3. Instructional Delivery and Facilitation
4. Assessment
5. Continuous Improvement, Responsibility and Ethics

## 6. Professional Responsibility and Ethical Conduct

**Feedback** — Feedback is information provided about a prior action that serves to change/modify behavior to improve future actions or depth of understanding. Feedback needs to be timely and specific to be useful for learning purposes. Positive feedback (about what was done well) needs to be specific and make clear what is being praised. Constructive criticism (feedback on what needs change) must identify what needs correction and include guidance on how to improve. Continuous improvement (quality) systems require feedback capacities to enable progress and recurring levels of improvement. In school settings, feedback systems are needed by students, teachers, and administrators. Students and teachers need feedback on how students are progressing toward learning goals. Tracking student progress toward learning goals is an important form of feedback. Teachers need feedback on the proficiency of their practice so they can improve.

**Fidelity** — In the context of implementing education standards, initiatives, programs, and processes, the term fidelity denotes how closely the implementing procedures conform to what they were supposed to have been and how appropriately aligned the implementation is to the intended purpose(s).

**Fidelity of Instruction/Intervention** — There are many strategies that can be used to increase the probability that appropriate levels of fidelity occur when designing and implementing interventions for students. There are some common strategies worth noting in accordance with the three types of fidelity (see definition of fidelity in an MTSS):

- State and district leaders should provide sufficient professional development, align and integrate multiple initiatives, and streamline processes associated with supporting schools' and classrooms' problem-solving efforts and delivery of student instructional services.
- Ensure maximum effectiveness of Tier 1 (e.g., use of evidence-based instructional practices that all students receive) so that adequate and sometimes comparatively minimal resources and supports are available to students who require supplemental or intensive services.
- Involve all stakeholders at the beginning and throughout the problem-solving process, especially the “interventionists” who will be responsible for using the intervention directly with students and the appropriate “content experts” and support personnel who have sufficient foundational mastery in applying their content expertise to design-matched instructional supports.
- Consistently use a structured comprehensive intervention planning process that provides sufficient scaffolding for staff that is matched to their current knowledge and skills to engage in problem solving. A structured planning process involves at a minimum: (a) identification of validated hypotheses the team will use to develop an instructional/intervention plan; (b) specific details about who (by name) will do what, how often, when, and using what resources and materials; (c) who (by name) will provide what specific support to whom (by name), at what times, and for how long; (d) how student progress will be monitored, how often, and when coordinated with analysis of other data; (e) how fidelity of implementing the plan will be documented/measured; and (f) some basic decision rules (e.g., if-then statements) for use based on future progress monitoring and fidelity data that yield any of the 6 basic effectiveness outcomes.



**Fidelity of MTSS** — There are three basic types of “fidelity” for districts and schools to consider monitoring:

- Fidelity of implementing the critical components of a multi-tiered system of student supports (MTSS).
- Fidelity of using the problem-solving process across all three tiers.
- Fidelity of implementing evidence-based interventions matched to specific need(s).

The first type of fidelity involves a broader topic of ensuring alignment and integration of federal, state, district, and school policies and procedures to support use of research-based or evidence-based practices in classrooms and schools. The second type of fidelity refers to the efficient and effective use of the 4-step problem-solving model to a particular situation. The final type of fidelity is tied to using outcome data to determine the effectiveness of an intervention. Several organizational structures can affect the degree to which the problem-solving process is conducted with fidelity (e.g., efficient and easy to use data systems; school/district schedules that allow for data reviews, decision-making, and planning; provision of on-site professional development and technical assistance, etc.) A related question to collecting fidelity data is, “How much and what types of fidelity measures need to be documented or collected, and for how long?” For example, a measure of intervention implementation fidelity is warranted in order to determine effectiveness of instructional/intervention services. Student data alone is necessary but insufficient to identify potential evidence-based interventions over time. In order to identify “what works” in a manner that allows for efficient and effective ways to support other students in other schools facing similar problems, both progress-monitoring data and fidelity of implementing and supporting the plan is needed. However, student progress is the bottom line and the “amount” and “type” of intervention fidelity collected should depend on students’ responses to interventions.

**Flexible** — Flexible refers to the capacity and willingness to make adjustments based on changes in circumstances or new insights as to what will be helpful to learners.

**Florida Standards** — The Florida Standards define content, knowledge, and abilities; provide grade-level or course expectations for students; provide clear guidance to teachers for depth of knowledge and instructional goals; provide framework for state adopted instructional materials and assessments; and serve as a guide to improve student learning. The standards delineate what matters, provide clarity and a fixed point of reference for students and teachers, guide instruction so that it is focused on student learning, provide a common language to have clarity in collaborations, help ensure equal educational opportunities, and assist in identifying struggling students. These standards provide the foundation for standards-based instruction in Florida’s public schools.

**Focused Feedback** — Focused feedback is an element in the “feedback and practice” process that supports improving one’s proficiency in specific instructional practices. Focused feedback (on what is observed when the instructional strategy is being used) is generally provided by administrators, coaches, and peers. It is intentionally limited to the issue(s) to be addressed and focused on specific classroom strategies and behaviors during a set time interval. The feedback is informative, constructive, objective, and actionable – meaning the educator has guidance on how to make changes that improve proficiency of the practice. Focused feedback is usually provided through these five processes: self-rating, walkthroughs, comprehensive observations, coaching or cueing, and student surveys (where student perceptions of teacher behaviors are collected).

**Focused Practice** — Focused practice is an element in the “feedback and practice” process that supports improving one’s proficiency in specific instructional practices. It involves a teacher understanding the differences in proficiency levels and tracking one’s progress toward effective and highly effective performance capacities. It is intentionally limited to the issue(s) to be addressed and focused on a limited number of strategies where corrections, modifications, and adaptations are made to improve student learning at an appropriate level of difficulty so that the teacher can experience success.

**Formative Assessment** — Formative assessment is a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students’ achievement of intended instructional outcomes. Formative assessments are questions, tools, and processes that are embedded in instruction. They are used by teachers and students to provide timely feedback for purposes of adjusting instruction and/or learning efforts to improve learning.

**Foundational Principles** — Foundational principles delineate core “building block” values that guide definitions of fundamental duties and are a basis for understanding standards of behavior. There are foundational principles set forth by state board rule in the Florida Educator Accomplished Practices (FEAPs) and the State Leadership Standards, documents which establish Florida’s core standards for effective educators. Standards, sometimes used as a synonym for principles in general language, have a more refined use in the common language of instruction. Standards are something set up and established by authority as a rule for measures of quality, focus on levels of understanding or proficiency in specific subjects or areas of practice, and are within the scope of responsibility for the individuals to whom the standards are to apply.

**Framework** — Framework is an organizing term used to associate diverse elements in a complex system to some common connection. For example, a research framework for teacher evaluation could focus on research that was based on a common view (e.g., a behaviorist framework or a constructivist framework).

**Game Learning Environment/3D Virtual World** — 3D virtual world and 3D game learning environments are increasing in popularity due to instructional effectiveness and an emerging digital pedagogy. For students with disabilities such environments can shift the focus from disabilities to virtual abilities. Some programs, such as the Florida Virtual School (FLVS), are providing complete courses within immersive learning environments.

**Gaps** — The standards-based curriculum that is the backbone of Florida’s public education system is based on repeatedly deepening and expanding essential student knowledge over time. Students will typically have gaps in their understanding of the content in the standards. Effective educators are alert to what prior knowledge is needed for current tasks and take actions to address gaps as they become known.

**Growth Mindset** — See “mindset” for clarification.

**High Probability Strategies (High Effect)** — High probability strategies (also called “high effect size”) is a term that refers to those research-based instructional and leadership strategies that have been found to have a high probability of a positive impact of student learning when done correctly and in appropriate circumstances. The term “high probability” is preferred over “high yield” strategies because there is no basis for certainty that any given strategy will work well in every case. Research can never identify the instructional strategies that work with every

student in every class. The best research can tell us is which strategies have a good chance of working well. Teacher must determine which strategies to use with the right students at the right time. Research-based strategies have a higher probability of raising student learning when they are used at the appropriate level of implementation and within the appropriate instructional context. These strategies are aligned with the FEAPs and should be in every teacher repertoire of practices.

**Higher Order Questioning** — Higher order questions posed by teachers and students are those that engage students in higher order thinking skills. Such questions require much more “brain power” and often a more extensive and elaborate answer than typical recall or description questions. Questions that require analysis, applying information, making value judgments, or predictions are examples of higher order questions.

**Higher Order Thinking Skills** — Higher order skills include critical thinking, analysis and problem solving, and hypothesizing. They are an important aspect of standards-based instruction. Standardized assessment processes are often not structured to assess student progress on higher order thinking skills. Consequently that aspect of tracking student progress is often a task that the classroom teacher must address. A significant portion of the Florida Standards require students to master such skills and educators need to monitor the design of lessons to insure that adequate learning time is focused on application of higher order thinking skills.

**Human Development** — Human development applies to a variety issues ranging from human growth patterns to developmental psychology to patterns of economic conditions. In the context of Florida’s common language of instruction, the focus is on awareness of the patterns of human physical, intellectual, and emotional growth from early childhood to young adults. This knowledge base enables a teacher to recognize and address learner needs.

**Implementer** — The person identified as responsible for delivering instruction or intervention in accordance with the team’s implementation plan.

**Indicators** — Indicators are guides for evaluation and professional development feedback. Practices, descriptors, indicators, strategies, and behaviors are related terms often used interchangeably. Within the common language of instruction a hierarchy of meaning is assigned to facilitate communications:

- A practice is a collection of related knowledge and competencies that describe a pattern of actions with a focused purpose, typically observable as strategies and behaviors.
- A descriptor is a summary description of a practice (see FEAPs descriptors of practice).
- An indicator is a term used in evaluation and feedback processes to identify specific strategies and/or behaviors that have a causal connection to student learning or are job requirements.
- A strategy is a specific instructional action that has definable elements of proficiency and an instructional purpose for which it is appropriate. Strategies are the building blocks of practice.
- Behaviors are the actions that teachers or students engage in to properly implement a strategy. Behaviors are the building blocks of a strategy.

**Individual Differences** — While there is a wide range of characteristics that are observable in a group of people, no one individual is likely to have all of those characteristics. Each individual has an ensemble of characteristics. They may share some of those characteristics with others in a group, while other characteristics may set them apart.

**Individual Educational Plan (IEP)** — A written plan to identify the annual goals and objectives and special education and related services designed to meet the individual needs of a student with a disability. The IEP is developed by teachers, parents, the student, and others, as appropriate, and is reviewed annually.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** — The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law ensuring effective services for children with disabilities. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to eligible students with disabilities.

**Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)** — ICT consists of instructional technology (audio-visual systems, computers, etc.) as well as telephony, broadcast media, all types of audio and video processing and transmission, and network-based control and monitoring functions. Educators use ICT to align school house learning practices to those students encounter in the world outside the school.

**Infrastructure** — The physical, procedural, organizational structures and resources necessary to establish, support, and sustain implementation of problem solving using response to instruction/intervention data within a multi-tiered system of student supports.

**Instruction** — Instruction means actions planned and delivered by a teacher or mentor that result in learning (of knowledge or competencies) by those for which the instruction is designed and on which the instruction is focused.

**Instructional Decisions** — Choices made regarding what to teach and how to teach it, typically informed through engagement in the problem-solving process and focused on student improvement.

**Instructional Strategy** — Strategies are actions crafted to lead to a defined and desired outcome. An instructional strategy is a specific instructional action that has definable elements of proficiency and an instructional purpose for which it is appropriate. Strategies are the building blocks of practice. High effect strategies are those most likely to support student success (see high probability strategies). Rigor in instruction can be provided through the design of the instructional strategy (see rigor). Also see definition of “strategies.”

**Instructional Technology (and Educational Technology)** — Instructional technology usually refers to the utilization, management, and evaluation of processes and resources for learning [Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT)]. Educational technology usually refers to the use of technology to support effective pedagogy and learning (e.g., the use of computers, mobile devices, digital microscopes, etc.) within the curriculum. Many people use instructional technology and educational technology interchangeably with some debate continuing on exact definitions.

**Intensity of Instruction/Intervention** — Intensity consists of three variables: time, focus, and group size. An increase in intensity would be reflected by an increase in the amount of time a student(s) would be exposed to instruction/intervention and/or a narrowing of the focus of instruction/intervention and/or a reduction in group size.

**Inter-Rater Reliability** — A process where those providing feedback about proficiency of practice (whether for evaluation or professional development purposes) are usually able to reach substantially similar conclusions about what was observed. This is accomplished through two coordinated elements: (1) Access to specific understanding on what effective proficiency in a

strategy or behavior looks like (“thin slices”), and (2) appropriate training so that observers have similar understanding of the strategies/behaviors to provide appropriate feedback.

**Interim Assessment** — An interim assessment is an assessment that is given at regular and specified intervals throughout the school year, is designed to evaluate students’ knowledge and skills relative to a specific set of academic standards, and produces results that can be aggregated (e.g., by course, grade level, school, or LEA) in order to inform teachers and administrators at the student, classroom, school, and LEA levels.

**Interventions** — Curricular, instructional, and/or other adjustments made to address core instructional issues. Interventions may also be provided to students in small groups or individually, in addition to and aligned with core instruction in order to target a specific skill or concept.

**Knowledgeable Others** — Knowledgeable others are outside advisors to a lesson study team (or similar long-duration collegial learning group) who supply deep knowledge of content of lessons under study (either subject matter and/or instructional practices).

**Language Proficiency** — Proficiency in a second language refers to the ability to effectively understand and communicate through the language using its grammar and vocabulary, as well as its sounds or written symbols. Language proficiency entails the use of oral (listening and speaking) and written (reading and writing) components in academic and non-academic settings.

**Language Proficiency Assessment** — A language proficiency assessment measures ability in a language being learned in relation to an established measurement scale.

**Leadership** — Leadership is a process in which one person enlists the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. It is focused on developing shared vision, team learning processes, and connecting individual and organizational goals. Leadership stresses engagement and alignment of interests (contrast with management).

Effective district leadership is evidenced by teams or individuals who:

1. Establish and articulate a clear vision with a sense of urgency for change, maintain focus and deliver a consistent message of implementation over time.
2. Focus on schools (districts are successful when schools are successful).
3. Create relationships with stakeholders based upon mutual respect and shared responsibility.
4. Engage in expert problem solving.
5. Invest in professional development.

**Leadership Standards** — Florida’s standards for educational leaders define the essential practices of leadership that have high effect on the quality of instruction, climate in schools, and culture in school districts.

**Learning Community (or Professional Learning Community)** — Learning communities are groups of faculty who meet regularly to study more effective learning and teaching practices. They share common learning goals that align with school and/or district goals for student achievement. Learning communities can be effective methods for infusing scientific and evidence-based research programs into classrooms. According to information from the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), “the most powerful forms of professional learning occur in ongoing teams that meet on a regular basis, preferably several times a week, for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning, and problem solving. These learning communities operate with a

commitment to the norms of continuous improvement and experimentation and engage their members in improving their daily work to advance the achievement of school district and school goals for student learning” (NSDC Standards – Learning Communities). This method for encouraging and developing expertise in our professional educators is encouraged throughout the state. Adults learn more effectively when they are engaged in the learning and relate learning to their job responsibilities (State Board of Education Rule 6A-5.071 – Professional Development Protocol – p.5).

**Learning Environment** — The environmental variables that either promote or inhibit learning include the physical classroom arrangement, rules, management plans, routines, expectations, peer/family influence, task demands, etc.

**Learning Gain(s)** — Learning gains are a statistical measure of a student’s achievement over a specified period of time on a defined set of academic targets. Learning gains are based on a comparison of test results at one point in time to test results at a later period of time.

**Learning Goal(s)** — A learning goal is a statement of what learners will know and/or be able to do. In teaching situations, effective teachers state learning goals in a rubric (or scale) format where ascending levels of proficiency of the goal are specified. The rubric form guides learners in self-assessment of progress toward mastery of the goal and guides teachers in tracking student progress and providing feedback on progress toward accomplishing the goal.

**Learning Organization** — A learning organization is one where the people (who comprise the organization) continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and enlightening patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is developed and focused on shared goals, and where people are continually learning together (see systems thinking).

**Learning Theories** — Learning theories are research-based frameworks that address how people learn. There are a variety of perspectives about human learning and each framework or theory is based on a specific perspective. Behaviorist, cognitivist, constructivist, and humanist frameworks each offers insight into the complexity of human learning.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** — An IDEA principle that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum in the general education setting to the maximum extent possible. Removal of exceptional students from regular educational environments occurs only if the nature or severity of the exceptionality is such that education in the regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

## **Lesson Segments**

A lesson segment is a cluster of research-based instructional strategies addressing a general instructional function. (A strategy is a specific instructional action that has definable elements of proficiency and an instructional purpose for which it is appropriate. Strategies are the building blocks of practice.) In Florida’s state model of teacher evaluation, lesson segments are organized into two categories:

- Lesson Segments Addressing Routine Events
  - Learning goals and feedback strategy cluster
  - Rules and Procedures strategy cluster
  - Lesson Segments Addressing Content
  - Interacting with new knowledge strategy cluster

- Practicing and deepening knowledge strategy cluster
- Generating and testing hypotheses strategy cluster
- Lesson Segments Enacted on the Spot
  - Student engagement strategy cluster
  - Adherence to rules & procedures strategy cluster
  - Teacher/student relationship strategy cluster
  - High expectations strategy cluster

Lesson design, planning, and delivery involve selection of instructional strategy(s) from the segments that fit the learning needs of the students, implementing the strategies correctly and in appropriate circumstances.

**Lesson Study** — Lesson study is a form of long-term professional development in which teams of teachers systematically and collaboratively conduct research closely tied to lessons, and then use what they learn about student thinking to become more effective instructors.

**Level of Performance** — A single measurement at a point in time revealing the student’s performance relevant to a standard expectation. Examples: 72 words correct per minute, 75 percent compliance to directions, percentile score of 5, and standard score of 95.

**Lexile** — There are two kinds of Lexiles: the Lexile reader measure and the Lexile text measure. Students receive a Lexile reader measure as a score from a reading test - it describes his or her reading ability. Books and other texts receive a Lexile text measure from a software tool called the Lexile Analyzer - it describes the book’s reading demand or difficulty. When used together, these measures can help match a reader with reading material that is at an appropriate difficulty, or help give an idea of how well a reader will comprehend a text. The Lexile reader measure can also be used to monitor a reader’s growth in reading ability over time. Lexile helps readers grow, and helps parents and teachers know.

**Literacy** — Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute, and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

**Management** — Management is getting people together to accomplish desired goals and objectives using available resources efficiently and effectively. Management comprises planning, organizing, staffing, or directing, and controlling an organization (a group of one or more people or entities) or effort for the purpose of accomplishing a goal (a contrast with leadership).

**Management System** — A management system is the framework of processes and procedures used to ensure that an organization can fulfill all tasks required to achieve its objectives. It is focused on planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling. Leadership and management systems combine to support quality outcomes.

**Mastery** — Mastery refers to a highly effective level of proficiency in use of an instructional strategy. Mastery of a repertoire of related strategies (see lesson segments) leads to mastery of a practice (see FEAPs). Mastery of an essential set of practices leads to personal mastery as an educator. The process leading to this level of personal mastery is deliberate practice.

**Mental Models** — Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. Mental

models need to be tested against reality from time to time to monitor whether data supports our assumptions and beliefs.

**Mentor** —A mentor is a trusted guide or supporter who assists in development of proficiencies in critical practices, in deepening understanding of the role of educator, and in feedback about professional growth. Mentors may be particularly proficient peers, school leaders, or knowledgeable others.

**Mind, Brain, and Education (MBE)** —The emerging field known as Mind, Brain, and Education (MBE) is committed to connecting diverse disciplines — including cognitive psychology, biology, and education — and using this collected knowledge to inform education policy, practice, and research.

**Mindset** —Mindsets are internalized belief systems. As with mental models and paradigms, mindsets are ways of thinking that impact behavior in significant ways, often without our being fully aware of a cause and effect relationship between the mindset and decisions. Mindsets are typically classified into two broad categories:

- A fixed mindset
- A growth mind set

A fixed mindset is the belief that the basic qualities of people like intelligence and talents are fixed traits that do not change. The fixed mind set perceives both self and others as having started life with defined abilities that do not change significantly over time. There is an assumption that talent or intelligence – not sustained effort – is the cause of meaningful success.

A growth mindset is the belief that most basic abilities can be developed (improved) through learning and hard work through sustained deliberate effort. This mindset perceives intelligence and talent as starting points and that sustained effort to learn and growth will result in meaningful growth and eventual success.

The significance of a growth mindset to educators is obvious:

- Highly effective educators have a growth mindset and strive to enable their students to have a growth mindset that recognizes that sustained effort will lead to success in school and in life.
- The substantial research on “deliberate practice” illustrates the relationship of growth mindsets and rising to the highest levels of educator proficiency.
- Faced with rising expectation for preparing students to be college and career ready, a growth mindset promotes the risk taking and effort needed to make needed changes in practice.

**Modifications** — Modifications refer to significant changes in curriculum expectations based on student learning limitations and usually involves use of “access points” rather than the usual academic standards.

**Monitoring Skill Set** — Monitoring is a professional skill set that enables one to understand the current reality of his/her areas of responsibility. Multiple formal and informal monitoring processes generate information on the quality of implementation and impact of work processes. Walk-throughs, data analyses, observations (formal and informal), collegial meetings, and constructive conversations are all part of a monitoring skill set. The purpose of monitoring workplace behaviors, instructional practices, initiatives, or programs is to ensure successful implementation. Monitoring provides the data used to analyze current conditions. Those analyses enable feedback on quality and proficiency of implementation. When implementation



proficiency can be improved or where implementation is unsuccessful, specific and timely feedback on how to improve can be provided as a result of the monitoring processes. A school culture that promotes professional learning routinely relies on monitoring and feedback processes to assist individuals improve their practice by providing developmental feedback, additional practice, and continued observations of improvement efforts focused on growth. Monitoring skills are essential to school administrators, teacher leaders, mentors, instructional coaches, and collegial learning teams such as lesson studies and PLCs.

**Multi-dimensional** — “Multi-dimensional” is a way of conceptualizing the complexity of teaching and school leadership that organizes the various dimensions or areas of knowledge and skills into understandable groups from which standards and expectations for performance may be developed.

**Multiple Intelligences** — Research findings on how humans perceive and process information indicate that there are patterns to intellectual functions. “Intelligence” is not just one thing – but a collection of distinguishable types of intelligence. There are several different models for describing these research findings. For educators, a few key concepts of interest include: (1) Some types of intelligence are particularly helpful in typical school settings – and other types are more useful in circumstances found outside the typical school setting (so “school” will be easier for some than others); (2) within the range of intelligences particularly helpful in school settings, many learners will vary in their strength of the various intelligences (i.e., learning will be easier on some things than others); (3) intelligences are not fixed at birth but have a range of growth potential where capacity can improve with use and decline with disuse; (4) diversity in the learning methods and activities planned for students increases the probability that students will encounter something that works for them and leads to success (i.e., one approach does not fit all) (see also learning styles).

**Newly Hired** — A teacher who is employed fulltime in a district for the first time. The “newly hired” may or may not have prior teaching experience elsewhere, but is required under Florida law to have 2 evaluations in the first year of employment in a district. “First year teacher” refers to those with no prior teaching experience. Newly hired refers to initial service in a district regardless of teaching experience elsewhere. “Beginning teacher” typically refers to those in their first 3 years of teaching experience.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB)** — The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also called No Child Left Behind, is the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. No Child Left Behind is based on stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents.

**Observation** —

*Informal:* The informal observation is any of a variety of processes where supervisors, mentors, or peers observe specific strategies or behaviors over a sufficient period of time to frame specific feedback that will improve or acknowledge proficiency. The time involved may range from a few minutes to as much time as a formal observation. Informal observations are often unannounced or unscheduled. These observations are useful for providing feedback to teachers, acknowledging professional growth and collecting additional evidence to further inform the annual evaluation process. While planning and reflection conferences are not required, observers usually provide timely and actionable feedback to teachers regarding these observations.

*Formal:* The formal observation is a primary method for collecting evidence that will be used as a source of data for the summative evaluation and provides a rich source of feedback to teachers regarding their instructional practice and professional growth. It is not the summative evaluation. The formal observation typically consists of an observation for at least ½ of full class period as deemed appropriate for various levels (early childhood, primary, intermediate, middle, and secondary school). The formal observation usually includes a planning and reflection conference with the teacher. These conferences provide a rich opportunity for teachers to reflect upon their practice, engage in a collaborative decision-making process and help administrators clarify expectations. Both the planning conference and the reflection conference should be conducted in a timely manner (often 1-5 days preceding and following the observation).

**Organization** — An organization is the collection of people who work together and whose work products and processes are inter-connected. Organizations are understood systemically not by organizational charts and printed rules but by the interactions and relationships among the people who constitute the organization. The “organization” is the people and the “system” is the collective behaviors (e.g., actions, decision, and beliefs) of those people that determine the outcomes achieved. The descriptions of what people are responsible for (job descriptions, organizational charts, etc.) are not the “organization” – these are the structures that focus their work and working relationships.

**Organized Abandonment** — The systemic changes needed to succeed in meeting rising expectations for school performance require building capacity for new and/or improved processes. However, the shift to a higher quality system will also require thoughtful and decisive action that leads to reductions in, or elimination of, traditionally implemented processes that are found not to contribute to success on those rising expectations, and/or are barriers to success on more critical elements. Organized abandonment is the process of deciding what to stop or reduce in priority so time and effort on essential school improvement work and professional learning is not delayed or impeded.

**Peer** — A peer, in the context of making a decision regarding the pervasiveness of a problem (Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3), is a student with similar characteristics such as age, grade, or socioeconomic status. When reviewing student data, it is important to make comparisons to demographically similar peers or groups of peers.

A peer, in the context of an organization of professional educators, is a colleague with similar roles in the organization. “Peer” is focused on someone whose job responsibilities have significant similarities to your own and whose work experience and/or training make them an appropriate colleague for professional learning and proficiency development.

**Peer Evaluator** — A teacher, trained in the performance expectations assessed in a district’s evaluation system and in the evaluation system processes, who will observe the instructional practices of other teachers and provide formative feedback to guide improvement in proficiency. Their observations/evaluations will contribute to the teacher’s final evaluation.

**Peer Mentor** — A teacher, trained in the performance expectations assessed in a district’s evaluation system, who will observe the instructional practices of other teachers and provide formative feedback to guide improvement in proficiency.

**Personal Mastery** — Personal mastery is the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively. Deliberate practice is the result of a continuous pursuit of personal mastery.

**Planning (Pre) Conference** — The planning or pre-conference provides an opportunity for the teacher and the administrator to talk about the lesson prior to the formal announced observation. During this time, the teacher and observer use the planning conference form as a means to discuss the lesson, engage in collaborative decision making, clarify expectations and identify areas where specific feedback will be provided.

**Poor Response to Instruction/Intervention** — Student rate of progress data reveals that the gap continues to widen with no change in rate after the instruction/intervention is implemented.

**Positive Behavior Support (PBS)** — The application of behavior analysis to achieve socially important behavior change. PBS was developed initially as an alternative to aversive interventions that were used with students with severe disabilities who engaged in extreme forms of self-injury and aggression. More recently, the technology has been applied successfully with a wide range of students, in a wide range of contexts and extended from an intervention approach for individual students to an intervention approach for entire schools. Positive behavior support is not a new intervention package, nor a new theory of behavior. Instead, it is an application of a behaviorally-based systems approach to enhance the capacity of schools, families, and communities to design effective environments that improve the fit or link between research-validated practices and the environments in which teaching and learning occurs. Attention is focused on creating and sustaining school environments by making problem behavior less effective, efficient, and relevant, and desired behavior more functional.

**Positive Response to Instruction/Intervention** — Student rate of progress data reveals that the gap between expected performance and observed performance is closing. Ideally, the point at which the target student will “come in range” of grade-level expectations – even if it is long range – can be extrapolated.

**Practices** — Practices are what you do. Practices, descriptors, indicators, strategies, and behaviors are related terms often used interchangeably. Within the common language of instruction, a hierarchy of meaning is assigned to facilitate communications:

- A practice is a collection of related knowledge and competencies that describe a pattern of actions with a focused purpose, typically observable as strategies and behaviors.
- A descriptor is a summary description of a practice (see FEAPs descriptors of practice).
- An indicator is a term used in evaluation and feedback processes to identify specific strategies and/or behaviors that have a causal connection to student learning or are job requirements.
- A strategy is a specific instructional action that has definable elements of proficiency and an instructional purpose for which it is appropriate. Strategies are the building blocks of practice.
- Behaviors are the actions that teachers or students engage in to properly implement a strategy. Behaviors are the building blocks of a strategy.

**Primary Language** — The primary language is the language in which bilingual/multilingual speakers are most fluent, or which they prefer to use. This is not necessarily the language first learned in life or used in the home.

**Principles of Professional Conduct of the Education Profession of Florida** — A disciplinary rule of the Florida State Board of Education (6B-1.006) that defines obligations of Florida educators to students, public, and education profession. Violation of any of these principles shall

subject the individual to revocation or suspension of the individual educator’s certificate, or other penalties as provided by law.

**Prioritization** — As a single word it means to “arrange according to priority,” As a principle, it means doing “first things first.” As a process, it means evaluating a group of options for expending fiscal and human resources, and ranking them in their order of importance or urgency. Strategic resourcing allocates resources (human, fiscal, and time) based on such prioritizations.

**Problem Solving** — The recursive, self-correcting, systematic process of finding solutions by accurately identifying problems, analyzing relevant data to understand why the problem is occurring, designing and implementing probable solutions, and measuring the effectiveness of the solutions that were implemented. Teams continue to engage in problem solving to ensure that student success is achieved and maintained. The four critical parts of the ongoing problem-solving cycle as a consistent way of work for teams are as follows:

1. Define the problem by determining the difference between what is expected and what is occurring. Ask, “What specifically do we want students to know and be able to do when compared to what they do know and are able to do?” When engaged in problem solving at the individual student level, the team should strive for accuracy by asking, “What exactly is the problem?”
2. Analyze the problem using data to determine why the issue is occurring. Generate hypotheses (reasons why students are not meeting performance goals) founded in evidence-based content area knowledge, alterable variables, and instructionally relevant domains. Gather assessment data to determine valid/non-valid hypotheses. Link validated hypotheses to instruction/intervention so that hypotheses will lead to evidence-based instructional decisions. Ask, “Why is/are the desired goal(s) not occurring? What are the barriers to the student(s) doing and knowing what is expected?” Design or select instruction to directly address those barriers.
3. Develop and implement a plan driven by the results of the team’s problem analysis by establishing a performance goal for the group of students or the individual student and developing an intervention plan to achieve the goal. Then, delineate how the student’s or group of students’ progress will be monitored and implementation integrity will be supported. Ask, “What are we going to do?”
4. Measure response to instruction/interventions by using data gathered from progress monitoring at agreed upon intervals to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention plan based on the student’s or group of students’ response to the intervention. Progress-monitoring data should directly reflect the targeted skill(s). Ask, “Is it working? If not, how will the instruction/intervention plan be adjusted to better support the student’s or group of students’ progress?” Team discussion centers on how to maintain or better enable learning for the student(s).

**Problem Solving Team** — Any team that systematically engages in the process of accurately identifying problems, analyzing relevant data to understand why the problem is occurring, designing and implementing probable solutions, and measuring the effectiveness of the solutions that were implemented.

**Process** — A process is a specific sequence of steps, activities, or operational methods. For example, developing growth targets by analysis of disaggregated student data, evaluation data, and consultations between educator and supervisor is a process.

**Professional Goals** — Professional goals are growth targets focused on specific improvements in proficiency. They are “thin slices” of practice that have a probability of improved performance if accomplished.

**Professional Growth Opportunities** — Professional growth opportunities are all the formal and informal short and long duration experiences that enable one to make progress on professional goals.

**Professional Learning Community (PLC)** — A professional learning community (PLC) is an extended learning opportunity to foster collaborative learning among colleagues within a particular work environment or field. It is often used in schools as a way to organize educators into working groups focused on a targeted improvement issue. A variety of national organizations provide protocols and processes to help PLC’s run effectively.

**Progress-Monitoring Measures** — Progress-monitoring measures are ongoing instructional strategies conducted for the purposes of guiding instruction, monitoring student progress, and evaluating instruction/intervention effectiveness. Progress monitoring is typically practiced in two forms: formative assessments and interim assessments. When student participation in the progress monitoring process is added the instructional strategy of “tracking student progress” is in use (see definition for “tracking student progress”).

**Progress-Monitoring Plan (PMP)** — A written plan for individual students or groups of students that reflects the interventions provided and the students’ response to those interventions with student-centered data, resulting in ongoing progress-monitoring measures at a frequency appropriate to the level of intervention.

**Protocol (Evaluation Standards for Professional Development)** — District professional development activities in Florida are guided by Florida’s Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol. The protocol contains standards for planning, delivery, and evaluation of professional development of Florida’s educators.

**Quality** — Quality in an educational setting is meeting or exceeding customer (stakeholder) expectations. Continuous improvement in quality is a process of moving actual results toward a clearly defined set of desired outcomes, and periodically modifying the perception of the desired outcomes by attending to evolutions in customer (stakeholder) expectations.

**Quality Teaching** — Quality teaching is a label used to describe an approach to teaching the academic standards that differentiates instruction using formative data and research-based instructional strategies used correctly, in appropriate circumstances, and adjusted to meet student needs. Effective teachers use these quality processes with consistent proficiency to meet or exceed student learning expectations.

**Questionable Response to Instruction/Intervention** — Student rate of progress data reveals that the rate at which the gap is widening is decreasing considerably, but is still widening, or when a gap stops widening but closure does not occur.

**Race to the Top** — Race to the Top is a federally funded competitive grant program intended to enable participating states to upgrade and refocus their public education system, so that systemic changes enable research-based improvements in instructional and leadership practices to result in increased student learning on priority learning goals.

**Rate of Progress** — This is typically the amount of growth (e.g., words correct per minute, level of compliance, etc.) over a specified time period (week, month, etc.) demonstrated by a student or group of students.

**Reflection (Post) Conference** — The reflection or post-conference provides an opportunity for the teacher and the administrator to reflect about the lesson, clarify expectations, and plan forward using the reflection or (post) conference form as a guide for reflection and feedback.

**Reflective Practices** — Reflective practices are higher order thinking processes. The capacity to reflect on actions taken as part of one’s work in a process of continuous learning is a defining characteristic of deliberate practice. Master educators cultivate the capacity to reflect “in action” (while doing something) and “on actions” (after you have done it) in order to objectively assess the proficiency and impact of their work and guide improvement efforts.

**Relevant** — Relevant, in the context of educator proficiency in standards-based instruction, refers to strategies or subject content having a significant bearing on the matter at hand. For strategies this usually means a research-based strategy done correctly and in appropriate circumstances. For subject matter it usually means the subject content of a lesson is aligned with appropriate academic standards.

**Response to Instruction/Intervention (RtI) Framework** — The multi-tiered practice of providing high quality instruction and intervention matched to student needs using learning rate over time and level of performance to make important instructional decisions [also referred to as a Multi-Tiered System of Student Supports (MTSS)].

**Rigor (Rigorous)** — Rigor is a goal rather than a level of difficulty. Rigor is the goal of helping students develop the capacity to understand content that is complex, ambiguous, provocative, and/or personally or emotionally challenging. Rigor is embedded in an instructional strategy when instruction and the learning outcomes expected of students require them to think in complex ways (e.g., to analyze, compare, create, and evaluate). Rigor is not about severity or hardship. All students need both rigorous content and direct instruction in the skills needed to manage that content. Instructional strategies that are designed to provide rigor are the most useful for student success (see definition of instructional strategies). There are different ways in which content can become rigorous, such as attention to interacting or overlapping ideas, dealing with dilemmas, identifying problems, conducting inquiry, evaluating alternatives, interpreting, and identifying patterns.

**Routine Events** — Routine events, in the context of effective teaching, are the central organizing strategies that link other strategies into a coherent lesson plan. They are typically such things as learning goals with rubrics, tracking student progress, celebrating student success, feedback, and rules and procedures that enable an effective learning environment.

**RtI Logic** — A way of thinking and working grounded in student centered data-based decision making that reflects the routine application of the four steps of the problem-solving process.

**RtI Tiers** — A level/type/intensity of instruction or intervention defined by student needs.

*Tier 1:* Core Universal Instruction and Supports – General academic and behavior instruction and support designed and differentiated for all students in all settings.

*Tier 2:* Targeted Supplemental Interventions and Supports – More focused, targeted instruction/intervention and supplemental support in addition to and aligned with the core academic and behavior curriculum and instruction.

*Tier 3: Intensive Individualized Interventions and Supports* – The most intense (increased time, narrowed focus, reduced group size) instruction and intervention based upon individual student needs provided in addition to and aligned with core and supplemental academic and behavior, curriculum, instruction, and supports.

**Rubrics (or Scales)** — Rubrics (often called scales) are a method for guiding improvement in performance. They are used in both personnel evaluation systems and in guiding student learning.

- In evaluation, they describe a proficiency range for indicators in an evaluation system. The rubrics (scales) provide guidance on performance levels ranging from low quality to high quality patterns of work relevant to the indicator. The rubrics (scales) provide a means for the employee to gauge their use of particular strategies and for administrators to provide feedback on proficiency or improvement needs regarding use of specific strategies. Rubrics are typically embedded within the observation protocol using labels for each proficiency level. Labels may be the same as the final summative rating levels (e.g., Highly Effective, Effective, Needs Improvement, or Unsatisfactory) or describe other classifications (e.g., Not Using, Beginning, Developing, Applying, and Innovating).
- In instructional use, rubrics are used by classroom teachers to describe the levels of progression (based upon degree of difficulty and/or the order in which content knowledge is acquired) that students will encounter as they strive to attain specific goals. Instructional rubrics also guide students and teachers in tracking student progress on learning goals based on course requirements.

**Safe** — Safe means a learning environment where a learner is able to engage in the required learning without fear.

**Scaling-up** — Increasing the capacity and quality implementation of the RtI logic.

**School Based Leadership Team (SBLT)** — A school-level team responsible for developing a school implementation plan. The school-based team becomes “trainers” and “coaches” for the school staff and will be responsible for schoolwide implementation.

**Scientific, Research-Based Instruction/Interventions** — Those instructions/interventions that involve the application of rigorous systematic and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to educational activities and programs. Those instructions/interventions that involve research that employs systematic methods that draw on observation or experiment and rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn.

**Screening Measures** — Assessment tools designed to collect data for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of core instruction for all students and identifying students who may need more intensive interventions and support.

**Sequences** — A sequence is a set of things that are in an appropriate or correct order. One aspect of being an effective educator is understanding appropriate or correct sequencing of content and implementation of instructional strategies.

**Shared Vision** — The practice of shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared “pictures of the future” that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance.

**Sheltered Instruction** — Sheltered instruction refers to grade-level content area instruction provided through English in a manner that makes it understandable for English language learners.

**Silent Period** — The silent period refers to an initial period of second language learning during which beginner English language learners are uncomfortable speaking in the new language and remain largely silent.

**Skills and Competencies** — The terms “skills” and “competencies” are often used interchangeably, but they are not necessarily synonymous. Competencies may refer to sets of skills, but “competency” is more of an encompassing term that also includes behaviors and knowledge, whereas skills are specific learned activities that may be part of a broader context.

**Standard Diploma** — A standard diploma is a high school diploma earned in Florida via a traditional 24-credit route, the 3-year 18 credit college or preparatory program route, IB curriculum, or AICE curriculum. Each route is dependent on state and district credit, grade point average (GPA), and testing requirements.

**Standardized Test** — A standardized test is a test that is administered and scored in a consistent, or “standard” manner. It is constructed by specialists and experts based on standardized norms and principles. Standardized tests are designed in such a way that the questions, conditions for administering, time for completion, scoring procedures, and interpretations are consistent and are administered and scored in a predetermined, standard manner. This standardization permits more reliable comparison of outcomes across all test takers.

**Standards** — Standards, while having many uses in general language, is used in the common language of instruction to focus on levels of understanding or proficiency in specific subjects or areas of practice. Standards are something set up and established by authority as a rule for measures of quality and are within the scope of responsibility of the individuals to whom the standards are to apply.

- The Florida Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The Standards are designed to be relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in both college and work. These Standards establish what students need to learn, but they do not determine how teachers should teach (“how” is based on research on instructional and student characteristics).
- Standards of professional practice identify the expectations for performance and understanding on which educators and districts will be evaluated and which focus the goals and processes of professional development (e.g., Florida Educator Accomplished Practices, Florida’s Leadership Standards, and Florida’s Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol).

**Standards-Based Instruction** — Standards-based instruction is a process for planning, delivering, monitoring, and improving academic programs in which clearly defined academic content standards provide the basis for content in instruction and assessment. Standards help ensure students learn what is important. Student learning is the focus. In Florida, setting standards for academic proficiency is a state-level task. Districts develop local curriculum to provide students access to the state approved standards in appropriate contexts. School site educators engage students in meeting the standards through standards-based instruction.



**State Model for Teacher or Principal Evaluation** — During Race to the Top, the Department of Education worked in consultation with national experts on the research based on effective teaching and school leadership to develop a process for observing, providing developmental feedback, and evaluating proficiency on research-based indicators that represent the basis of the FEAPs and state leadership standards. The “state model” in the evaluation context refers to a specific set of observation indicators, observation and feedback processes, and rating scales used in a manner that aligns evaluation outcomes with the state professional development standards.

**Strategic Resourcing** — Strategic resourcing is the process of allocating resources (human, fiscal, time, etc.) based on prioritizations. (Prioritization is a process for evaluating a group of options for expending fiscal and human resources, and ranking them in their order of importance or urgency.)

**Strategies (or Instructional Strategies)** — Strategies are specific instructional actions. Practices, descriptors, indicators, strategies, and behaviors are related terms often used interchangeably. Within the common language of instruction, a hierarchy of meaning is assigned to facilitate communications:

- A practice is a collection of related knowledge and competencies that describe a pattern of actions with a focused purpose, typically observable as strategies and behaviors.
- A descriptor is a summary description of a practice (see FEAPs descriptors of practice).
- An indicator is a term used in evaluation and feedback processes to identify specific strategies and/or behaviors that have a causal connection to student learning or are job requirements.
- A strategy is a specific instructional action that has definable elements of proficiency and an instructional purpose for which it is appropriate. Strategies are the building blocks of practice.
- Behaviors are the actions that teachers or students engage in to properly implement a strategy. Behaviors are the building blocks of a strategy.

**Structure** — A structure is a formal pattern of relationships between groups and individuals. Examples:

- “All teachers who teach language arts are in the language arts department” is a structure.
- The group of teachers working together in a lesson study group is a structure.

**Student Evidence** — Student evidence refers to specific observable behaviors in which students engage in response to the teacher’s use of particular instructional strategies. These behaviors contribute to understanding the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process and are foundational elements for reflection and/or collegial dialogue in support of deliberate practice. The nature of student evidence aids in assessing the proficiency with which the teacher implements the instructional strategy.

**Student Growth** — Student growth is a measure of a student’s change over time. In general, such measures focus on a student’s academic growth in relationship to students with similar academic histories, as well as progress towards proficiency standards.

**Student Outcomes (Desired)** — What a student should know and be able to do after a lesson or course of instruction.

**Student-Centered Data** — Instructionally relevant student information gathered through record reviews, interviews, observations, informal and formal assessments, and tests that are utilized to

inform instructional decisions, including data that reflect students' level of performance and rate of progress tied to the standard expectations of the enrolled grade-level or chronological age.

**Student-Centered Learning Environment** — Learning environment refers to a collection of factors that affect student learning. A student-centered learning environment is structured and maintained to ensure physically and emotionally safe conditions, control of distractions, access to appropriate resources, differentiation of instruction, providing each student and teacher with direct, consistent access to 21st century learning tools, effective use of time, and on-going feedback on progress toward learning goals.

**Subject Matter** — Subject matter is used to refer to broad and deep content areas that organize related principles, generalizations, concepts, and facts into a coherent form. Professional expertise in subject matter is expected for those teaching about it (see FEAPs). Within a subject area one will find “standards” which are the agreed upon expectations for student mastery in that subject, and “curriculum” which is the collection/package/set of materials and tools that the teachers and learners use to progress toward the standards of the subject matter.

**Summative Assessments or Measures** — Assessments typically administered near the end of the school year or academic term to give an overall perspective of the effectiveness of the instructional program. They typically are cumulative in that they cover content from previous interim assessments and the term or year.

**Supports** — Behavioral or academic assistance provided to any student or group of students to enable their learning.

**Systemic Change** — A process of building consensus, developing infrastructure, and implementing a different way of thinking and operating within an organization. Effective systemic change in complex institutions like schools requires the interaction of a core of essential elements (thinking and behaviors of the participants). Those essential elements (or patterns of thought and behavior) are often (1) personal mastery, (2) mental models, (3) shared vision, (4) team learning, and (5) systems thinking.

**Systems** — A system is typically explained as a set of interacting or interdependent components forming an integrated whole. For example, Florida's public school system has such components as standards (e.g., The Florida Standards, FEAPs, Leadership, Professional Development, etc.), academic instructional practices (those experienced by students), leadership practices (those experienced by teachers), academic standards (those taught to students), professional development practices, data capacities, assessment practices, evaluation capacities, communications processes, funding mechanisms, and policy development processes. Each component in a large system like public education is a sub-system to the state as a whole, but has a system structure of its own.

Understanding a system requires awareness of the actual behaviors (actions, decisions, beliefs) employed by the organization (the people). The documents that describe how the people are expected to perform their responsibilities (e.g., policies, manuals, regulations, and directives) inform on expected behaviors, but the actual system is what the people actually do. Understanding one's system requires accurate information on what people do.

The “organization” is the people and the “system” is the collective behaviors (e.g., actions, decision, and beliefs) of those people that determine the outcomes achieved.

**Systems Coaching** — Implementing and sustaining large-scale evidence-based practices necessitates an alignment of roles and responsibilities to support effective implementation practices. Instructional coaching is one of the critical roles that schools provide as a resource for teachers to implement effective instructional practices. From a systems thinking perspective, coaching is a set of skills that may be shared and distributed across several educators across school, district, and state levels. The essential systems coaching skills are (1) interpersonal communication skills, (2) data analysis and interpretation skills, (3) dissemination skills specific to sharing content expertise, (4) team-based problem solving facilitation skills, (5) leadership and staff support planning skills, (6) provision of effective evidence-based training and technical assistance, and (7) program evaluation skills to assess impact of coaching supports and activities.

**Systems Thinking** — Systems thinking is a key behavior where the learning organization, and particularly the leaders within the organization, maintain awareness of the interactions between the various behaviors that comprise the system. Systems thinking is being aware of the connections between people and practices in an organization, the impact of their interactions over time, and insight into how various aspects of people’s thinking, actions, and decisions impact the quality of the organization’s work.

**Teacher Evidence** — Teacher evidence refers to specific observable behaviors that teachers engage in when using a particular instructional strategy. These behaviors contribute to understanding the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process and are foundational elements for reflection and/or collegial dialogue in support of deliberate practice.

**Team Learning** — The discipline of team learning starts with “dialogue,” the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine “thinking together.” It also involves learning how to recognize the patterns of interaction in teams that undermine learning.

**Text Complexity** — Text complexity involves making an informed decision about the difficulty of a text. Complexity is impacted by a variety of factors.

- Levels of Meaning or Purpose: texts with a single level of meaning or purpose tend to be easier to read than texts with multiple levels of meaning or purposes.
- Structure: texts of low complexity tend to have simple, well-marked, and conventional structures, whereas texts of high complexity tend to have complex, implicit, and unconventional structures.
- Language Conventionality and Clarity: texts that rely on literal, clear, contemporary, and conversational language tend to be easier to read than texts that rely on figurative, ironic, ambiguous, purposefully misleading, archaic or otherwise unfamiliar language or on general academic and domain-specific vocabulary.
- Knowledge Demands: texts that make few assumptions about the extent of readers’ life experiences and the depth of their cultural/literary and content/discipline knowledge are generally less complex than are texts that make many assumptions in one or more of those areas.

**Thin Slices of Behavior** — Notable teaching moves that can be observed in a classroom, often a specific instructional strategy or teacher behavior.

**Tiers** — The term “tiers” is often used to communicate a hierarchical relationship among elements in a complex system. For example, the broad instructional design of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) in Florida addresses three tiers or levels of academic and behavioral support aligned to ongoing formative and interim assessments of student learning needs. Tier 1

instruction & support is provided to all students and includes differentiation to meet a variety of needs. Tier 2 is supplemental instruction and supports provided in addition to and integrated with Tier 1 instruction to smaller groups of students who demonstrate need for that level of instruction. Tier 3 is the most intensive and individualized level of instruction in addition to and integrated with Tier 1 for specific students based on unique needs.

**Tracking Student Progress** — Tracking student progress is an instructional strategy designed to inform the teacher and student on student progress toward mastery of learning goals. The process informs the teacher and student what has been accomplished, at what level of proficiency, and what still needs to be learned. It involves both the teacher and student being engaged in the tracking process and typically focuses on the learning goals and associated rubrics that are the basis for lessons and units of instruction. The linkage of learning goals and tracking progress on their mastery is revealed by research to have a high probability of improving student learning.

**Understanding** — Understanding is a relationship between the learner and an object of understanding. Understanding implies abilities and dispositions with respect to the object of understanding sufficient to support intelligent behavior. Educators seeking student understanding as part of a learning goal will be able to specify the abilities, dispositions, or knowledge that will be accepted as evidence of understanding.

**Understanding by Design (UbD)** — Understanding by Design (UbD) is a framework for improving student achievement. Emphasizing the teacher’s critical role as a designer of student learning, UbD works within the standards-driven curriculum to help teachers clarify learning goals, devise revealing assessments of student understanding, and craft effective and engaging learning activities. It is often referred to as backward planning or design where the planning of classroom activities is delayed until goals have been clarified and assessments designed.

**Universal Design** — The term “universal design” means a concept or philosophy for designing and delivering products and services that are usable by people with the widest possible range of functional capabilities, which include products and services that are directly accessible (without requiring assistive technologies) and products and services that are interoperable with assistive technologies.

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** — Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for designing curricula that enable all individuals to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning. UDL provides rich supports for learning and reduces barriers to the curriculum while maintaining high achievement standards for all. This framework includes multiple means of representation, multiple means of expression, and multiple means of engagement.

**Value Added Measure (VAM)** — A statistical method that estimates the effectiveness of a teacher or school. The difference between a student’s actual and predicted results is the estimated “value” that the teacher or school added during the year with respect to the content tested. There are a variety of different types of value added models. Florida has selected a “covariate adjustment model” to measure student learning growth on FCAT. This model begins by establishing expected learning growth for each student. The expectation is estimated from historical data each year, and represents the typical learning gains seen among students who have earned similar test scores and share other characteristics. Visit the FDOE website for more information on Florida’s student growth model.

**Walkthroughs** — As in the informal observation, walkthroughs can be announced or unannounced. Walkthroughs generally consist of very brief classroom observations of 3-10 minutes in length in which the observer gathers evidence regarding classroom instructional practices and behaviors on a regular basis. Timely and actionable feedback to teachers is also strongly recommended. Walkthroughs provide opportunities for individual feedback as well as trend and pattern data over time. Walkthroughs also inform professional development needs for individual and groups of teachers and provide a means to gauge the implementation of professional development against individual professional development plans and school improvement plans.