

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:

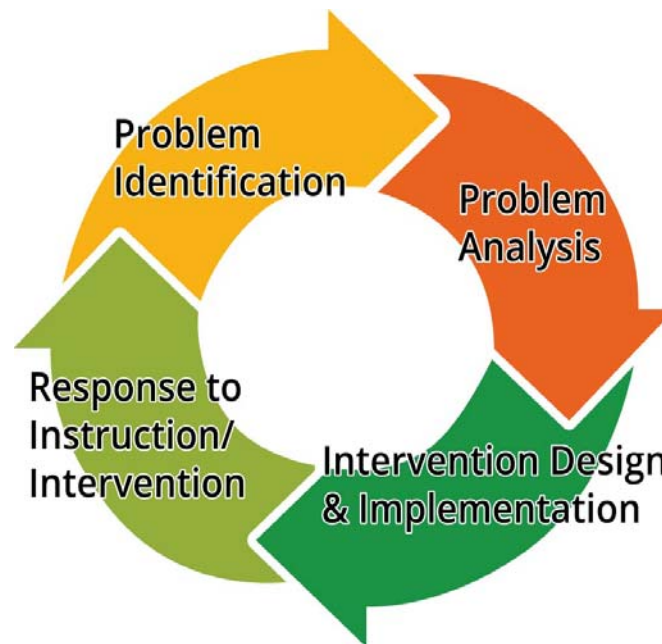
Tier 1: Core Universal Instruction and Supports – General academic and behavior instruction and supports, based on Universal Design for Learning principles, designed and differentiated for all students in all settings.

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:

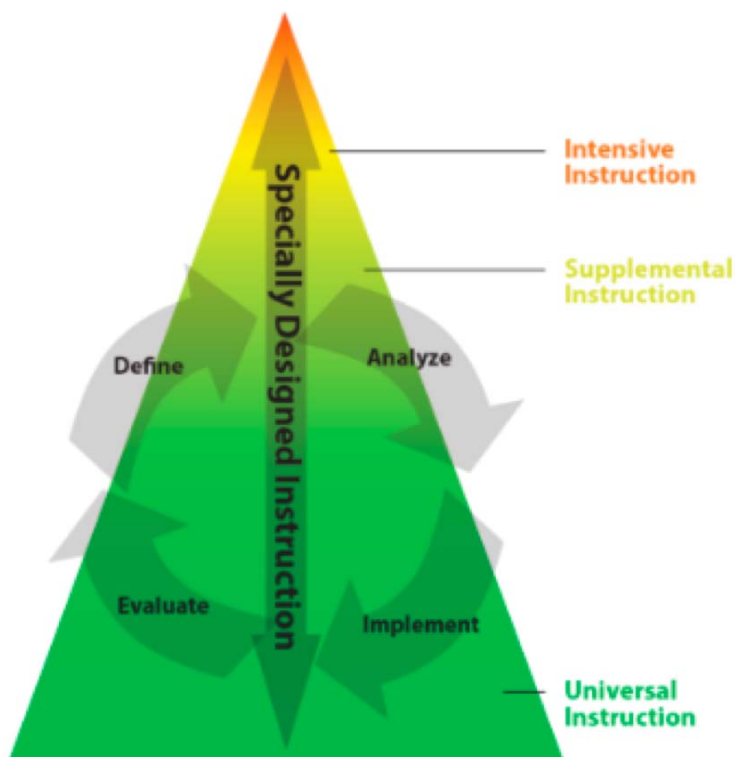
- **Define the problem** by determining the difference between what is expected and what is occurring. Ask, “What specifically do we want students to know and be able to do when compared to what they currently know and are able to do?” When engaged in problem solving at the individual student level,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

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- **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

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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

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- 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.

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?

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- 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.