Indicator Explanation

DOMAIN	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Instruction	Diagnose and respond to student learning needs	3A.4. Instructional teams review the results of unit pre-/post-tests and formative assessments to make decisions about the curriculum and instructional plans and to identify students in need of intervention.

Schools should provide a tiered system of instructional and behavioral supports to meet the learning needs of all learners. The Response to Intervention (RtI) approach was developed to address the needs of struggling learners and is defined by the National Center on Response to Intervention as follows:

> Response to intervention integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavioral problems. With RtI, schools use data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity or nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities. (as cited in Bernhardt & Hébert, 2017, p. 1)

Upon initial screening, students are divided into tiers (or levels) and given the proper level of instructional support: Tier 1 represents high-quality evidence-based core instruction and/or social/behavioral programming provided to all students, Tier 2 interventions are added to target support for students at risk of failure in specific academic/behavior areas (most often provided in the general classroom and in small groups), and Tier 3 interventions supplement instruction for students with significant risk identified through screening or who fail to make progress with tier 2 support (Bernhardt & Hébert, 2017; Sugai, n.d.). When students fail to make progress even after extended tier 3 supports, they may be referred for special education (Powers et al., 2008; Hoover & Love, 2011; Gamm et al., 2012). While many schools will have most (80%) students succeeding with core instruction alone (tier 1), schools with large numbers of at-risk learners are likely to have fewer (20%) fall into this category.

Tiered instructional systems require that all service providers (special education and general education) align their resources and practices to prevent struggling students from receiving different instructional approaches from their teachers in each tier, causing confusion and poor progress (Chard, 2012). It is critical that special educators and general educators collaborate to understand and coordinate the instruction occurring within the other tiers to maximize students' learning outcomes (Hoover & Love, 2011). Having a clearly defined monitoring process used by collaborative, multidisciplinary teams can help ensure that interventions are implemented to fidelity and that students' needs are met.

Multidisciplinary Teams. The need for effective collaboration between specialists and regular educators has only grown as students with varying levels of academic and behavioral issues are increasingly included in regular education settings (Pugach et al., 2011). Multidisciplinary teams (MDTs), which were mandated by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) of 1975, required team engagement in decision making to identify and support special education students. Problem-solving teams (PSTs), developed as an alternative to MDTs, were designed to reduce inappropriate special education referrals and improve the performance of students in the general educational setting (Dowd-Eagle & Eagle, 2014; Truscott et al., 2005). PSTs are interdisciplinary, frequently including administrators, general educators, and specialists such as psychologists, nurses, and special education teachers (Truscott et al, 2005). They are prevalent due in part to the rising use of multitiered system of support models (Nellis, 2012). however, research shows that these teams often struggle to use effective team processes (Rosenfeld et al., 2018). MDTs or PSTs will benefit from:

• Team training based on team science, which is rooted in the positive benefits to team performance in other fields, is needed (Salas, Cooke, & Rosen, 2008). For example, Teach Teamwork was adapted for school team use from an evidence-based training program used to improve the performance of health care teams (Benishek et al., 2016).

• Organizational supports are often needed to enable collaborative cultures and effective PSTs. School leaders can work to foster supportive conditions for these teams. For example, many teachers believe that they are not adequately prepared or equipped to meet the needs of students with disabilities, and this diminishes their capacity for serving on PSTs (Yell et al., 2004). School leaders can "utilize professional development as a means to provide training for teachers, particularly in effective instructional and behavioral intervention strategies and collaboration skills that address the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities" (Black & Simon, 2014, p. 161).

Monitoring for Fidelity and Effectiveness. The work of MDTs/PSTs must include thorough documentation of how interventions are selected and assigned and the degree to which they are implemented with fidelity, in order to make the effective data-based decisions required within MTSS and RtI systems (Bernhardt & Hébert, 2017). Data from screening tools must be documented at a variety of levels (schoolwide, grade level, classroom, and individual student) so that instructional teams can analyze results and determine student progress between testing dates (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Teams must also document the benchmarks or cut scores they identify to guide student placement and the corresponding instructional strategies and support needed (Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009). Documentation should always be an ongoing process rather than an event; documenting an entire school year's worth of tier 2/3 interventions at one time suggests weak fidelity of implementation. Documentation forms should be carried from one year to the next to help with evaluation of implementation outcomes, and to help teams and teachers begin instruction and intervention at the appropriate levels each year (Bernhardt & Hébert, 2017).

To monitor the fidelity and integrity of implementation of RtI/MTSS, schools can collect several kinds of data. Direct observation by teacher peers, the RtI/MTSS team, coaches, or administrators of intervention activities in each classroom can help determine whether interventions are being implemented effectively; these observation data should not be used for evaluation purposes (Bernhardt & Hébert, 2017). Teachers can also be asked to self-report their use of intervention activities using checklists; however, these data can be unreliable and should be paired with other types of data. Reviewing lesson plans and work samples in collaborative groups can be valuable for professional learning, and in some cases established teams can conduct these reviews and provide careful documentation of results. Schools are also recommended to consult the curricular materials and instruction/intervention approaches used within the school; purchased materials often include fidelity checklists or observation forms to allow schools to assess implementation (Bernhardt & Hébert, 2017).

Data-based progress monitoring and decision-making. RtI and MTSS are prevention-oriented models that include all students and staff within the school to ensure the accuracy of data interpretation, intervention placement, and instructional effectiveness. Schools must create an infrastructure for MDT/PSTs teams to meet regularly to collaboratively review

and use data to inform their instructional decisions (Dulaney et al., 2013; Prewett et al., 2012). As noted previously, these teams must receive regular and ongoing training and support, as they meet regularly to review student data and adjust the placement of students into intervention tiers as progress is made (Duffy, n.d.; Stuart & Rinali, 2009; Prewett, et al., 2012). One study demonstrated that districts implementing tiered intervention systems with fidelity provided weekly half days for students or additional professional learning days for teachers to allow sufficient time for this critical process (Dulaney et al., 2013). All relevant staff should be included in intervention training and team meetings; this inclusion both emphasizes the teamwork necessary for implementation and provides opportunities to create shared practices and materials appropriate for each tier (Donavan & Shepherd, 2013; Hawes et al., 2020).

Collaborative instructional teams must consider data from multiple sources, such as progress monitoring/screening, behavioral data, and formative assessments to form a complete picture of each student's performance (Prewett, et al., 2012). These collaborative teams can then consider trends across grade levels, classes, and students and identify issues that can be addressed through adjustment to instructional techniques or strategies within tier 1, learning these new intervention strategies/techniques together in a collective way (Donovan & Shepherd, 2013; Kansas State Department of Education, 2013). For students who do not respond to large-scale instructional changes, school teams then determine the tiers and types of intervention that would best meet their needs. Teams must establish and continually review benchmarks, cut scores, or guidelines to determine which students need additional supports, and then group them by similar levels of need or particular skill areas where they require support (Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009). Instructional teams are responsible for assessing the impact of interventions provided, and for moving students up and down the hierarchy of interventions as they experience success or challenges. These teams must also consider timelines for reasonable implementation and skill building when determining how frequently to monitor student progress; for example, tier 3 interventions may require more frequent monitoring and subsequent review than interventions at tier 1 (Kansas State Department of Education, 2013).

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Resources

For an RtI implementation guide and other useful resources, see:

Bernhardt, V. L., & Hébert, C. L. (2017). Response to intervention and continuous school improvement: How to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate a schoolwide prevention system (2nd ed.). Routledge.

National Center on Intensive Intervention: https://intensiveintervention.org