Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports

The Integration of MTSS and RtI

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Since the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 the term Response-to-Intervention (RtI) has became a buzz word within education. RtI is built upon a broad research base resulting in multiple models with the common features of (1) multiple tiers of intervention service delivery, (2) problem-solving method and (3) data collection/assessment to inform decisions at each tier of service delivery (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2006).

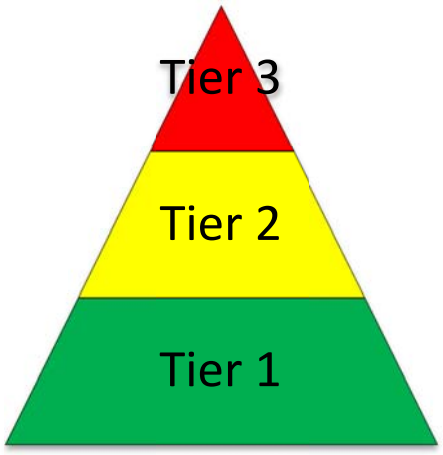
It is not uncommon to hear the term RtI and Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) used interchangeably. However in many instances the meaning applied to RtI does not align with the principles and practices of a MTSS. The principles and practices of a MTSS are based upon what research has shown to be effective in both creating successful and sustainable system change as well as what is necessary in providing the most effective instruction to all students. The MTSS framework is designed to address the academic and behavioral needs of every student, regardless of whether the students are struggling or have advanced learning needs. An introduction to the research base of the MTSS framework can be found in the *Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports: Research Base* on the Kansas MTSS website, www.kansasmtss.org.

The meaning and practices referred to as RtI vary from a narrow view point such as the identification of students with specific learning disabilities under IDEA (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Kavale, Kauffman, Bachmeier, & LeFever, Summer 2008), to a broad view point as an educational change paradigm (Sansosti & Noltemeyer, Annual 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009). Since all models labeled RtI do not always have the same purpose or practices, Kansas has intentionally chosen to call this model the Multi-Tier System of Supports. The MTSS approach provides a framework to create a single system that has the availability of a continuum of multiple supports for all students. This approach aligns the Kansas MTSS framework with the broad educational change paradigm view of RtI. When implemented fully, an effective MTSS results in a self-correcting feedback loop that uses universal screening assessment data to not only intervene at the student level but also to continuously refine the system by analyzing grade, building and district level data for the purpose of school improvement.

The focus of most RtI models is on instruction and intervention and is typically represented as a triangle. Through years of experience Kansas educators came to the conclusion that focusing on the triangle alone is insufficient when truly realigning resources to support all students.

At the center of the Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports graphic is the triangle that represents instruction and intervention. To effectively support instruction and intervention within classrooms both students and staff need aligned support

Response-to-Intervention



Multi-Tier System of Supports

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including evidence based curricula, instructional practices and a comprehensive assessment system. For these to be used effectively and systematically throughout a building or district and for the self-correcting feedback loop to function effectively Leadership, Professional Development and an Empowering Culture must be included.

Some of the key points in understanding how RtI practices integrate into the MTSS framework are:

- MTSS is the Kansas framework and encompasses the concept of response-to-intervention (RtI).
- The MTSS framework is an educational systems change paradigm (Sansosti & Noltemeyer, Annual 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009) that provides a framework for supporting students and staff as part of school improvement.
- MTSS begins in general education by establishing a strong core for all students that provides the foundation of prevention within the entire system.
- MTSS includes PreK-12 literacy, mathematics, and behavior as a continuum of instruction.
- The MTSS framework is inclusive to school accreditation (QPA, NCA) and school improvement as well as school-wide behavior programs (SWPBS, Safe and Civil Schools) and provides a common framework for schools to integrate efforts.
- Universal screening assessments used within MTSS must measure the fluency and accuracy of critical early skills that are predictive of future student skill attainment.
- Tiers within the triangle describe the intensity of instruction; not specific programs, students or staff (i.e., Title I, special education, etc.).
- The tiers describe instruction not steps in a process; therefore, students do not leave Tier 1 to receive instruction in Tier 2 or 3 nor must a student receive Tier 2 instruction prior to receiving Tier 3. The intensity of instruction (or tier of instruction required) is determined by the data.
- Students remain fluid within the tiered instruction meaning intensity of instruction students receive should be transitioned up or down within the tiers based on student performance over a set amount of time compared to predetermined decision points.
- The MTSS framework is a hybrid model using both protocol interventions and problem solving.
- Tier 3 is not special education nor does student success/failure at Tier 3 determine eligibility for special education. In no way should MTSS delay the initial evaluation of a student that is suspected of having exceptionality.

From a practitioner's perspective, it is important to understand the differing views of RtI and to have discussions about how the beliefs and practices of the building and district align with those views. By having a clear understanding of the views, practitioners can evaluate information to determine how to best implement MTSS.

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