
5

Tier 1

General Education

RTI is a multitiered service delivery model. Although much discussion continues surrounding the issues of how many tiers constitute an adequate intervention, RTI is most frequently viewed as a three-tiered model, similar to those used for positive behavioral support (Vaughn, 2003).

The three-tiered model aligns the instructional needs of students with increasingly intense interventions in the same way the public health model is organized with primary, secondary, and tertiary intervention levels. Tier 1 is conceived of as the primary level of intervention implemented in the general education classroom. Tier 1 includes the research-based core curriculum, which all students receive. Tier 2 includes secondary interventions. Students who are predicted as having difficulty in Tier 1 or who have demonstrated that they are not achieving at the same level or rate as the class as a whole receive a more intense Tier 2 intervention to supplement the curriculum and instruction in the general education classroom, Tier 1. These secondary interventions are considered as short-term and target specific deficit skills or abilities. They are delivered in small groups of one to five students. Some students may not respond sufficiently in the secondary interventions of Tier 2 and need even more intense, individualized interventions. These most intense tertiary level interventions are included in Tier 3, which is synonymous with special education and the Individuals with Disabilities Education

Act (IDEA, 2004) protections for students with disabilities. See Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1, which depicts a three-tiered model as conceived in an RTI framework.

In multitiered models of service delivery, instruction is differentiated to meet learner needs at various levels. Several specific features distinguish the interventions at the various tiers, to include:

1. Size of the instructional group
2. Performance standards (mastery requirements)
3. Frequency of progress monitoring
4. Duration of the intervention
5. Frequency with which the intervention is delivered
6. Teacher or specialist training in the relevant content area
7. Focus of the content or skills

Some schools organize multiple levels of targeted, secondary-level, and tertiary-level interventions that are distinct from special education, which may result in more tiers in their RTI framework. A critical feature in any organization is that school staffs have a clearly stated framework for organizing their multiple tiers. That framework should include the dimensions on which the tiers can be distinguished.

Similar to other intervention models, RTI is meant to be applied on a schoolwide basis, whereby the majority of students receive high-quality, evidence-based instruction in Tier 1, the general classroom. Within Tier 1 instruction, schools can use special funding allocations related to the early intervening services provision in IDEA 2004. The early intervening services allow school districts to use up to 15% of their special education allocation for supporting students whose academic and behavioral difficulties limit their success in the general education classroom; these are students who are not identified as having a disability. Students who are at risk for reading or learning disabilities are identified through schoolwide screening for more intense support in Tier 2. Students who fail to respond to the interventions provided in Tier 2 may then be referred for an individualized, comprehensive evaluation, and, depending on the results, be considered for specialized instruction in special education.

In this chapter and in Chapters 6 and 7, all of which deal with the three tiers, we use these features as an organizing framework to describe the tier within an RTI model. Additionally, we discuss how

screening and progress monitoring are integral components of the tiered model. Finally, we focus on the importance of data-based decision making and parental involvement in supporting successful RTI implementation. We provide case study examples at the conclusion of the chapter on Tier 3 (Chapter 7) to highlight how schools have implemented a tiered service delivery model.

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Definitions and Features

What Is Tier 1?

As mentioned above (in this chapter and in Chapter 1), Tier 1 instruction occurs in the general education classroom. Here general education teachers deliver effective and engaging instruction in reading, writing, and math. It is beyond the scope of this text to prescribe effective instructional programs for all grades, across all content areas. Rather, we provide a framework consistent with the results of the research on professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) to assist schools in making these decisions. Several sources of information may be used to assist schools in determining what constitutes effective instructional practice at Tier 1 including (a) federal policy initiatives, (b) research related to the relevant academic area (e.g., reading), and (c) research and literature on effective schools and teaching. When these sources are used along with existing state and district curricular frameworks to inform, develop, and evaluate instructional delivery and subsequent student outcomes, the result is effective Tier 1 instruction. To illustrate how these sources may be used, we provide a brief example related to reading instruction.

Determining Effective Reading Instruction at Tier 1

School district staff have several resources to assist them in their organization of high-quality reading instruction in the general education classroom. Reading instruction should be aligned with recent policy initiatives, research on reading, and research on effective teaching of reading.

Policy Initiatives

As noted in Chapter 2, several recent federal policy initiatives, most notably the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and its Reading First component, emphasize the use of scientifically based instruction to promote strong reading outcomes. These initiatives provide federal funding to schools that adopt a so-called scientifically based instructional program in reading, aligned with what have been identified as the major components of reading: phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Closely aligned with these initiatives is the requirement within IDEA that before a student can be considered as having a disability, there must be assurance that the student has been provided with appropriate learning experiences in reading. Two essential features of ensuring appropriate learning experiences are that the instructors delivering the instruction are highly qualified and that the core reading curriculum provides a sufficient coverage of the five reading components.

Research on Reading

The U.S. Department of Education selected 14 experts in reading research and instruction to form the National Reading Panel and gave them the task to review the existing research on effective approaches of teaching reading. The panel's review began with more than 100,000 studies but narrowed their focus to those studies that had clearly described instructional practices, used experimental designs, demonstrated a causal link between the instructional practices and learner outcomes, and had a large sample size. Since the publication of the National Reading Panel's report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000), "Teaching children to read," the Bush administration's focus on what constitutes scientifically based instruction has come under increased criticism. In general, the criticisms highlight two notable deficiencies in the report that has informed federal policy: (a) the a priori decision to focus on the five components of reading (Pressley, Duke, & Boling, 2004), and (b) the narrow focus on experimental and quasiexperimental studies as the

only research that can inform educational practice (Allington, 2003). A more comprehensive review of the existing research on reading highlights numerous related components that contribute to high reading achievement, such as strong language development (Scarborough, 2001), sustained use of reciprocal teaching strategies (Palinscar & Brown, 1984), and exposure to rich and engaging literature to promote strong cultural knowledge and critical thinking skills (Allington, 2003).

Research on Effective Teaching Practices Related to Reading

One major difference between research and practice in education is that, while researchers hope to isolate and control conditions and variables to understand the relationship one factor has on another, practitioners operate within complex environments in which they have very little control over factors that are important to researchers (e.g., random assignment of participants to treatments, reliability, applicability, validity, fidelity of interventions, skill level of the instructors, and narrowly focused interventions). One way that researchers hoping to understand more about effective teaching practices in general have sought to bridge this gap is through grounded theory research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Using this model, evidence of effective teaching is studied through observation, collection of supporting evidence, and careful analysis. In the reading literature, such research has identified that effective primary-grade instruction includes

1. Instruction in reading and writing skills
2. Reading of rich literature and developing strong written communication skills
3. Strong classroom management skills, such that most classroom time is spent on instruction (as opposed to discipline)
4. High motivation on the part of students, supported and encouraged by the teacher (Pressley et al., 2004)
5. Integration of curriculum, instruction, and assessment through the use of continual monitoring and adjustments in instructional practice (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2000; Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005)

When these elements are used to inform and evaluate instructional practice at Tier 1, the RTI framework may be used to support both policy coherence (see Chapter 2) and higher student achievement.

Features of Tier 1 Instruction

In an RTI model, Tier 1 instruction is the base level of educational service delivery aimed at meeting the needs of most students in the school setting. Table 5.1 includes the tasks essential to implementing a rigorous Tier 1. The distinguishing features of this level within the RTI framework follow:

Size of the Instructional Group

Instruction is provided to the whole class. Results of existing research on class size at various grade levels should inform decision making. For example, studies in Tennessee, Wisconsin, and California have shown that class sizes in the range of 14 to 19 students in the early years result in higher achievement that is sustained in later years of schooling (Pressley et al., 2004).

Performance Standards (Mastery Requirements)

Most states have developed content standards across content areas and related grade-level equivalent (GLE) performance standards in reading, writing, and math. Performance in relation to these GLE benchmarks provides one way of determining student achievement. When screening measures predictive of later performance on the GLEs are adopted, performance on screens can help schools monitor and adjust instruction provided at Tier 1.

Frequency of Progress Monitoring

Recommendations on progress monitoring vary from as frequently as daily to as infrequently as four times a year. While research strongly supports the use of at least weekly monitoring (Stecker et al., 2005), emerging studies suggest that monitoring progress every three weeks provides sufficient indicators of student growth (Jenkins, Graff, & Miglioretti, 2006). Students identified on screening measures as being at risk should be monitored at a more frequent rate, with recommendations of weekly monitoring for a period of five to six weeks after the screen (Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bryant, 2006). Further results of progress monitoring should be evaluated at both the classroom and individual levels in Tier 1. Classroom performance provides an overall indication of the effectiveness of the instruction, whereas individual performance helps to identify students who should receive Tier 2 interventions.

Table 5.1 Essential Task List for Tier 1**Directions**

In the second column, *Responsible Person(s)*, write the name(s) of the individual or team who will assume responsibility for the task identified in the first column. In the third column, *Timeline/Status*, write the deadline for the task or the status of the task.

<i>Task</i>	<i>Responsible Person(s)</i>	<i>Timeline/Status</i>
Identify research-based instructional programs and practices in reading, writing, and math.		
Select research-based curricula and interventions and resources to accompany core programs.		
Adopt a system to measure fidelity of implementation (see Chapter 8).		
Select and implement a schoolwide academic and behavior-screening program.		
Establish data collection systems and implement systematic monitoring of student progress to determine both performance and growth.		
Identify a team and a process for analyzing progress monitoring results.		
Develop decision rules (including cut score or zones) to determine which students are at risk and require further assessment or intervention, or both.		
Develop a program of continuous, rigorous, professional development experiences to support Tier 1 implementation.		
Develop and implement a process for collaborating with the problem-solving team and monitoring student movement between Tier 1 and Tier 2.		
Decide when to initiate parent involvement.		

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Duration of the Intervention

Students remain in Tier 1 throughout the school year unless they are found eligible for special education and specially designed instruction that cannot be provided in the general classroom.

Frequency With Which the Intervention Is Delivered

Instruction occurs according to school schedules and curriculum guidelines.

Teacher or Specialist Training in the Relevant Content Area

Instruction is provided by general education teachers.

Focus of the Content or Skills

Instruction represents the range of content standards and related GLEs. In essence, Tier 1 represents a school's full instructional program (see Table 5.2).

Implementation

What Is the Role of Tier 1 Within an RTI Model?

Within a three-tiered model of RTI, Tier 1 represents the base level of instruction. Most students will achieve academic success when provided with high-quality Tier 1 instruction. As such, Tier 1 can help reduce the incidence of so-called instructional casualties by ensuring that students receive appropriate instruction accompanied by progress monitoring.

Tier 1 is particularly important for two reasons. First, it represents the first gate in a system designed to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all students. Thus, Tier 1 provides the foundation for instruction on which all supplementary interventions are formulated. Second, since Tier 1 focuses on all students, it is the most cost-effective means of addressing the population of learners. The subsequent tiers address the needs of fewer learners with additional resources. An important benefit of Tier 1 instruction is that when used in conjunction with universal screening measures, students who require more intense support are easily identified. Universal screening measures assess students' academic or behavioral skills or abilities that are predictive of learning and achievement. Additionally, results of

Table 5.2 Standards for Judging High-Quality Tier 1 Instruction**Directions**

Read each of the standards that have been identified as mechanisms for judging high-quality Tier 1 instruction. The checklist is formatted so that you can indicate current and planned implementation.

- If the practice has been implemented, indicate that with a checkmark (✓).
- If the practice is being developed, rank by priority. Indicate 1 = of highest priority through 3 = of lowest priority. (Thus, practices ranked as "1" would be implemented before those ranked as "2" and those ranked as "2" would be implemented before those ranked as "3.")

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Status</i>	
	<i>In Place</i> (✓)	<i>Priority</i> (1–2–3)
Evidence-based practices consistent with the research and literature in the relevant content area are implemented.		
Teachers provide opportunities for differentiation, according to individual student needs.		
Multiple methods of representation, expression, and engagement are used to deliver instruction and assess learning.		
Progress monitoring of student performance informs teaching practice.		
Curriculum is aligned with relevant content standards and aligned within and across grade levels.		
General education teacher is highly qualified to deliver the instruction.		

SOURCE: Mellard & McKnight (2006).

screening and progress monitoring in Tier 1 provide school staff with evidence that can help inform decision making, such as determining requirements for professional development and required resources for delivering instruction.

Changing Structures and Roles

Alignment of the general education classroom to meet the definition and features of Tier 1 instruction will require significant changes to both school structures and individual staff roles. Tier 1 and the related requirements of universal screening and progress monitoring provide a useful framework for schools to align their school structures with effective school models, such as the professional learning community (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) and instructional program coherence (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001), in which curriculum, instruction, intervention, and assessment are aligned horizontally and vertically; teachers collect and analyze data to inform their practice; and schools work collaboratively to address the learning needs of both students (e.g., high-quality instruction) and teachers (e.g., professional development).

This approach represents a significant change in typical roles within the school structure. In Tier 1, general educators take a more active role in the screening and intervention processes of students determined to be at risk or not making adequate progress. The involvement of general education teachers in this process can help promote stronger collaboration; interventions can be designed that more directly support a student's ability to achieve in the general curriculum. Close collaboration promotes a seamless system of service provision that increases academic outcomes for all students (Learning Disabilities Roundtable, 2002). Table 5.3 divides school personnel into three main areas and describes some of the responsibilities they may be expected to undertake in Tier 1 instruction.

Challenges to Implementation

Because Tier 1 occurs in the general classroom, it is tempting to conclude that it is already being implemented. However, as described in this chapter, Tier 1 instruction is one level within a larger, integrated system of instruction, intervention, and assessment that provides IPC and promotes higher student achievement. Additionally,

Table 5.3 Changing Roles and Structures to Implement Tier 1**General Education**

- Administer schoolwide screening measurements across content areas according to schedule.
- Administer assessments; chart and evaluate results.
- Identify students for further monitoring.
- Provide information to parents if using the results for reporting student progress.

Specialist and Support Staff

- Assist general education teachers in implementation efforts.
- Collect data on a screening tool and associated cut scores to inform the process.
- Collaborate with the general education teacher to determine which students require further assessment.

Administration

- Lead effort to create infrastructure for schoolwide screening.
- Provide necessary technology, materials, and resources.
- Provide initial and continuing professional development opportunities for new staff and refresher training for incumbent staff.
- Ensure fidelity of implementation through routine, periodic observation and discussions with staff.
- Research the availability of screening tool options with staff committee to select appropriate tools and methods.
- Incorporate this system so that it meets multiple requirements, including for example, determination of average yearly progress for NCLB (2001), and ongoing progress monitoring.
- Determine if classroom performance warrants intervention (i.e., entire class performance is considerably lower than other classes in the same grade level).
- Review aggregate data of classrooms with teachers and district personnel to inform decision making.

NOTE: *General Education* includes the general education teacher. *Specialist and Support Staff* includes special education, reading or learning specialists, related services personnel, and paraprofessionals. *Administration* includes building principals and assistants, as well as curriculum and/or assessment specialists at building or district levels.

Tier 1 promotes the adoption of research-based practices, which for some schools may require consideration of new instructional programs, evaluation of existing instruction, and reorganization of school resources. The challenges to implementing Tier 1 may best be categorized by the following:

1. Adopting and implementing research-based instructional practices across content areas
2. Aligning general education instruction both horizontally (across classrooms) and vertically (across grade levels), as well as with supplemental interventions (Tier 2) to promote the achievement of struggling learners
3. Relying on the general education teacher to conduct routine progress monitoring, review the results, and make required instructional adjustments
4. Implementing related universal screening measures as a routine part of Tier 1 to identify students who are at risk for the targeted academic area
5. Developing a system to monitor student movement through the tiers
6. Providing effective, continual, professional development to support and enhance teachers' technical, professional, and collaborative skills

Summary

RTI is built around a framework of high-quality instruction and formative assessments (screening and progress monitoring) that match learners' needs with research-based, appropriate instruction. Tier 1, which is the primary level of the tier structure, is designed for students in the general education classroom and through which the core curriculum in reading, math, and written language is delivered. A successful Tier 1 is an important foundation because it is the most cost-effective level of service and is the first gate for more intensive tiers of service.

Resources

Numerous resources exist to assist schools with Tier 1 implementation efforts. We have categorized the resources into four broad areas to provide logical starting points. The following resources may support your implementation of Tier 1 efforts:

1. Existing State and District Curriculum, Content, and Performance Standard Documents (Available from each state's education department Web site)

2. The Institute of Educational Sciences Regional Education Laboratory Program (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/>)

The Regional Education Laboratory consists of a network of 10 laboratories that provide access to high-quality, scientifically valid, education research through applied research and development projects, studies, and other related technical assistance activities. Links to all 10 labs are available from the Institute of Educational Sciences site. In addition to focusing on specific content areas, the labs conduct research on effective schools, effective instructional practices, and effective school reform models.

3. National Councils and Associations in Content Areas

Professional organizations that develop principles and standards to guide content area instruction, assessment, and professional development include the following:

- **National Council of Teachers of Mathematics**
(<http://www.nctm.org>)
- **National Council of Teachers of English**
(<http://www.ncte.org>)
- **National Council for the Social Studies**
(<http://www.ncss.org/>)
- **National Science Teachers Association**
(<http://www.nsta.org>)
- **National Science Education Standards**
(<http://www.nap.edu/catalog/4962.html>)

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- **National Reading Panel**
(<http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/>)
- **International Reading Association**
(<http://www.reading.org>)
- **National Center for Education Information**
(<http://www.ncei.com/>)

4. Resources to Promote Effective Instruction for Reaching Diverse Populations

- **Access to General Curriculum and Universal Design for Learning: Problem-Solving Approach—CAST Teaching Every Student (2006)**
(<http://www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/tools/>)

CAST is a nonprofit organization that works to expand learning opportunities for all individuals, especially those with disabilities, through research and development of innovative, technology-based educational resources and strategies.

- **Access Center (<http://www.k8accesscenter.org/>)**

The Access Center is a national technical assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs with a mission to improve educational outcomes for elementary and middle school students with disabilities.

- **National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction (<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/>)**

This university-based clearinghouse collects, analyzes, synthesizes, and disseminates information about instructional programs for English language learners and related programs.

- **The Institute for Urban and Minority Education (<http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/>)**

The Institute, which is based at Columbia University, conducts research and evaluation activities, provides information services, and assists stakeholders in program and professional development and evaluation for students in urban settings.

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