



MTSS TOOLKIT

SECONDARY READING

Purpose, guiding questions, and best practices
to support every adolescent with
equity and efficiency

2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction.....2
- Why Implement MTSS for Secondary Reading.....3
- Research and Rationale MTSS Framework for Secondary School.....5
- How to Implement MTSS for Secondary Reading.....6
 - Step 1: Screening.....7
 - Step 2: Responding.....10
 - Step 3: Monitoring.....13
 - Step 4: Improving.....16
- Conclusion.....19

INTRODUCTION

This Toolkit is designed to capitalize on the intended benefits of a Multi Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) specific for reading. The goal is to gain **systemic equity** and **efficiency** that ensure **dynamic student growth**.

Rooted in data-informed practices, the MTSS framework is designed to meet the needs of all students by ensuring that schools utilize data to make decisions, monitor progress, and use evidence-based supports and strategies with increasing intensity to increase student growth.

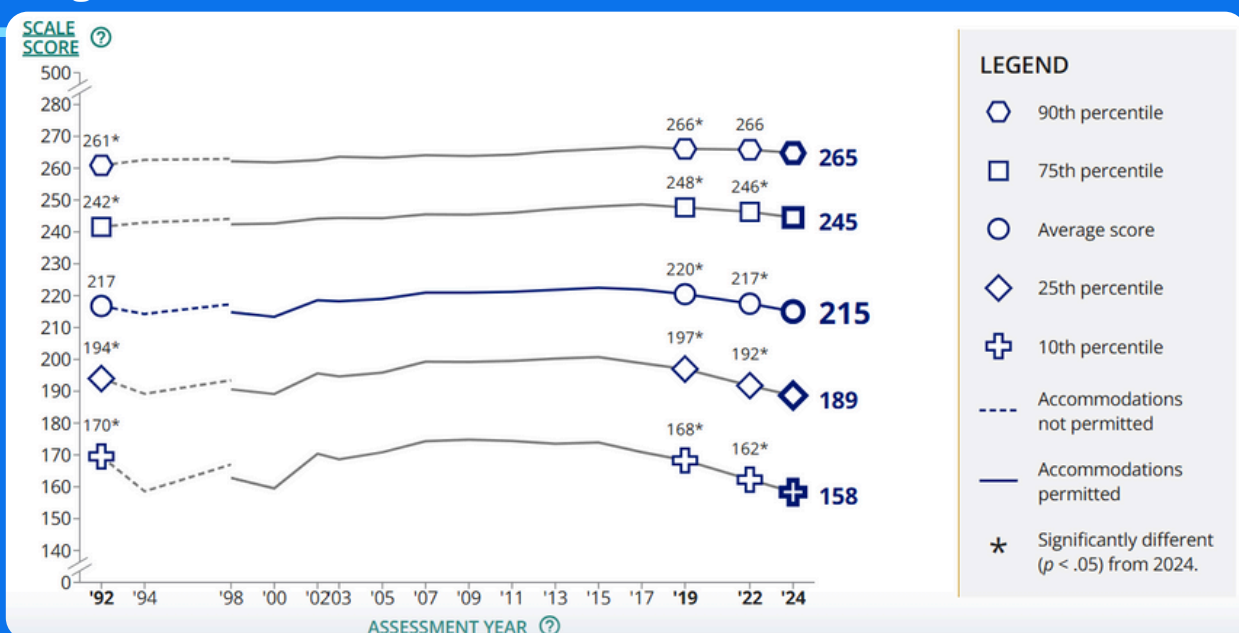


MTSS FOR SECONDARY READING

WHY?

The latest standardized reading test scores reveal bleak reading proficiency for students across the United States with more than one-third of eighth graders, more than ever before, reading below a basic proficiency level on the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; U.S. Department of Education, 2024). Reading below a basic level means readers are unlikely able to identify basic literary elements in a text such as the order of events, character traits, and main idea. Therefore, students who demonstrate reading difficulties deserve support in building foundational reading skills to become skilled readers.

However, students in secondary schools are unlikely to receive the instruction they need in foundational reading skills because the standards that address these skills do not exist past fifth grade. In addition, state legislation and funding tends to focus on early literacy to support most school systems in addressing reading difficulties in Grades K-2. For students in Grades 3-12, the MTSS reading focus should support building foundational reading skills that may contribute to reading difficulties.



(NAEP Reading, 2024)

MTSS FOR SECONDARY READING

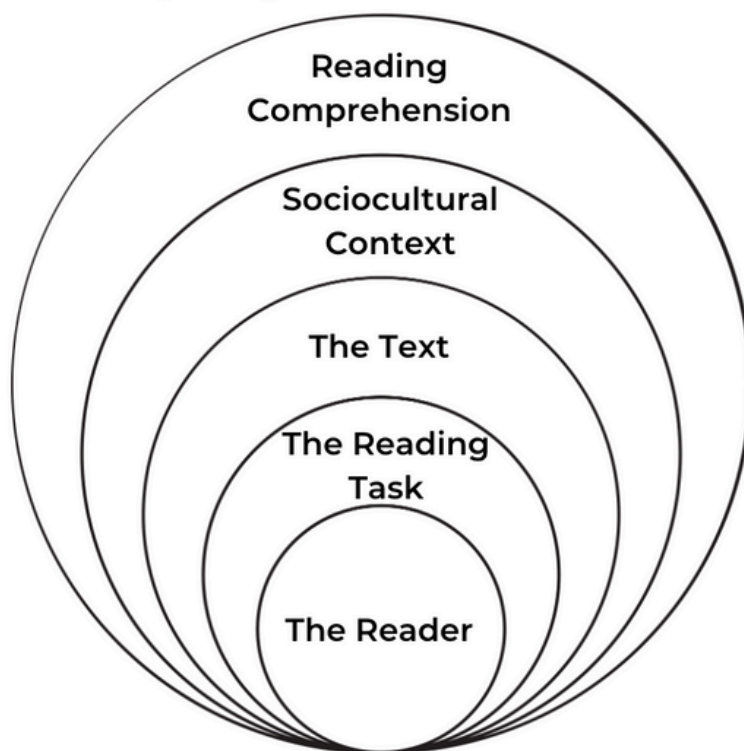
WHY?

Unfortunately, many schools are not currently set up to meet all students' needs (Meyer et al., 2014), especially adolescent students in Grades 4-9; however, there is evidence that suggests schools and teachers can raise student achievement (e.g., Hattie, 2018; Meyer et al. 2014) through explicit instruction that includes wrap-around services and high-quality reading curricular materials.

To increase reading success, schools can employ instructional materials and approaches that are equitable and include tiers of support that are specifically designed for adolescent readers.

A universally-designed system of support addresses each individual's academic needs, eliminates barriers, and produces positive outcomes. For adolescent readers, assessments need to measure the foundational skills that may impede reading comprehension with instructional materials that build the skills necessary for reading comprehension and other complex literacy skills (e.g., critical thinking, analysis, synthesis).

The Complexity of the Adolescent Literacy



Adolescent readers often face a variety of challenges when it comes to comprehension, stemming from several interrelated factors.
(Information synthesized from various sources including Cervetti et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2025)

Research & Rationale

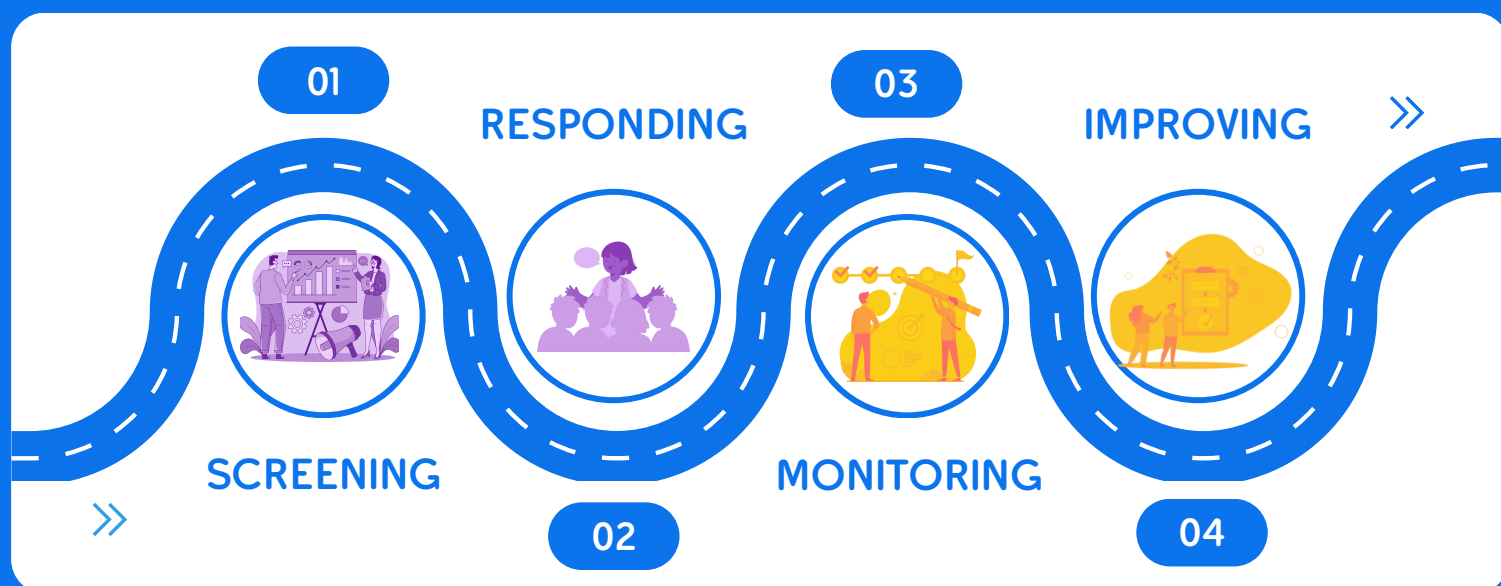
MTSS builds on decades of work related to Response to Intervention (RTI; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004) and Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Both frameworks are based in the United States Public Health Service's conceptual multi-tier pyramid model of prevention, which involves primary, secondary, and tertiary approaches as an organizing framework for efficiently delivering interventions in order to improve outcomes (e.g., Walter et al., 1996). These frameworks provide the foundation for MTSS.

MTSS is a comprehensive framework and is defined as “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision making” (Every Student Succeeds Act; ESSA; 2015). Harlacher and colleagues (2014) highlight several key characteristics of the MTSS framework. They emphasize that decisions and procedures are driven by data from both the school and individual students, ensuring that support is customized to meet each student’s specific needs. Evidence-based practices inform these strategies, and successful implementation requires a school-wide effort, with the commitment and collaboration of all stakeholders. The MTSS framework relies on proactive strategies to prevent potential challenges as the underlying belief is that **all students can achieve grade-level learning when provided with the appropriate support**. Ultimately, MTSS relies on teams of educators collaborating to manage and apply the data-driven system to meet learners’ needs.

MTSS FOR SECONDARY READING HOW?

Implementation

The rest of this toolkit is dedicated to your application of this proactive and preventative framework. Equity and efficiency are achieved when each of the following four aspects are viewed through the local lens of your school. Therefore, each section will provide a 1) purpose, 2) best practices, and 3) guiding questions.



Equity Tip

Use instructional materials that are both accessible and meaningful for the students. Review the cultural responsiveness of resources used in tiers 1, 2, and 3.

This implementation guide prioritizes systemic equity and efficiency, so look for the sidebar notes that may offer insightful practices proven to be effective for secondary schools.



Efficiency Tip

Start small! Starting with a small team of educators is perfectly appropriate and beneficial for building capacity and sustainability within your MTSS framework.

STEP 1: SCREENING

Purpose

A key factor in MTSS is a system for identifying reading difficulties through the use of a **universal screener** that helps to identify students facing reading challenges and discerns the specifics of their difficulties to inform instruction. A universal screener serves as the starting point in identifying students who are at-risk for academic difficulties. An effective screener can predict students' future performance to determine if a student will benefit from intervention.

Since a screener is used to identify students who may struggle to access content at their current grade level, it is important that the data provides context of the students' literacy skills in relation to grade level expectations.

For adolescents, these data sources typically consist of comprehension assessments, state reading assessments, and summative course assessments. Screening should not overly rely on one data point.



Efficiency Tip

A screener providing predictive measures for students' future performance will help in determining the most appropriate instruction.



PREDICTING READING ACHIEVEMENT ON STATE TESTS BASED ON READBASIX

OPTIMAL CUT SCORES

ReadBasix Cut Scores	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Word Rec. & Decoding	225	233	243	237	247	251
Vocabulary	226	232	238	243	251	256
Morphology	230	237	238	242	251	251
Sentence Processing	235	241	248	253	256	264
Reading Efficiency	225	230	243	249	252	256
Reading Comp.	236	238	247	253	261	267
Lexile	510	611	785	884	932	1138

STEP 1: SCREENING

Best Practices

WHAT

At least two assessment data points that gauge students' reading comprehension skills in relation to grade level expectations.

WHO

The term *universal* screener indicates it is appropriate and valuable for all students.

WHEN

Conduct assessments at the start of the school year and repeated at least twice more during the academic year.

HOW

Use computer-based assessments that can be completed in one class period and provide immediate and reliable data.

Screening Data Examples

Grade 8



No Intervention Recommended

Based on the students' scores, no reading intervention is recommended.

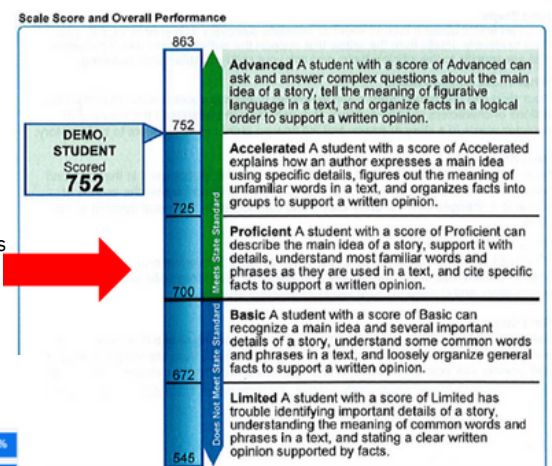
Student Name	Lexile*	Word Recog.-Decoding	Vocabulary	Morphology	Sentence Proc.	Reading Effic.	Reading Comp.
[REDACTED]	1465L	-	-	-	274	274	301
[REDACTED]	1205L	-	-	-	259	269	280
[REDACTED]	1180L	-	-	-	268	274	267
[REDACTED]	1240L	-	-	-	256	269	287
[REDACTED]	1255L	-	-	-	279	269	272

Reading Comprehension

138 students completed



Performance level descriptors vary by grade level.



STEP 1: SCREENING

Guiding Questions

1) Which 2-3 data sources provide the most accurate picture of students' reading ability? Do they predict students' future performance?



Efficiency Tip

Communicate the school's screening method with clarity and transparency to all staff and families.

2) How much instructional time are we sacrificing to screen students?

3) How are our screening practices responsive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of our students?



Equity Tip

Multilingual learner (MLL) professionals can help to evaluate student data for accuracy and if there is bias to be considered.

STEP 2: RESPONDING

Purpose

The screener's valid and accurate data provides the evidence needed to determine the most appropriate next step for every individual. The ultimate goal is to succinctly provide the most effective instruction according to each student's assets and needs. We respond in two ways:

- Administer a diagnostic assessment to students at risk of reading difficulties, and
- Evaluate and adjust instructional practices in Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3.

Identify the Need

Administer a diagnostic assessment that focuses on foundational skills including word-level skills. The assessment should also be designed and intended for the adolescent reader.

Group Report

Grade 7 ▾
Grade 3 of 4

ReadBasix: Students

△

🔄

📄

🖨

📧

ReadBasix

Overview

Growth

Students

MTSS Guide

Score

Percentile

Grade Eq.

Find student

Students	Lexile*	Word Recog. and Decoding	Vocabulary	Morphology	Sentence Processing	Reading Efficiency	Reading Comprehensi
570L 14 tests	236	243	236	232	247	229	
315L 11 tests	250	221	215	214	214	230	
585L 29 tests	216	228	221	243	236	230	
435L 25 tests	240	242	243	234	215	231	
690L 26 tests	216	246	228	254	243	232	

Display

30

per page, 177 total.

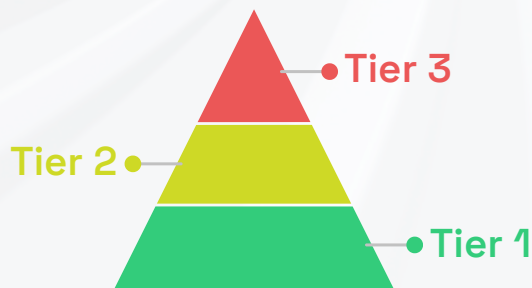
Page

1

of 6

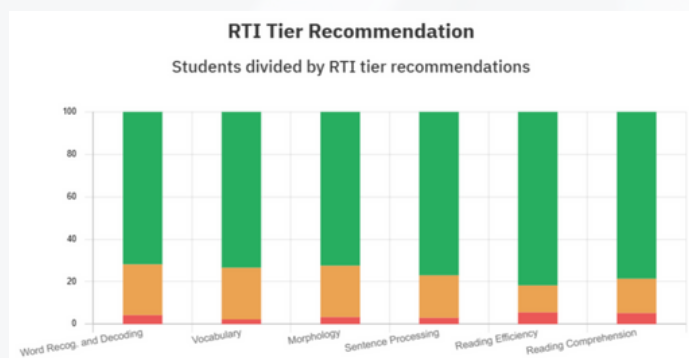
<

>



Implications for Instruction

High-quality instruction is emphasized at every tier. The data will indicate instructional adjustments to be made in Tier 1 settings across all disciplines. The diagnostic assessment directs the content and skills to be explicitly taught in the Tier 2 and Tier 3 instructional groups. This will also prompt an evaluation of the school's capacity for offering the necessary interventions.



STEP 2: RESPONDING

Best Practices

WHAT

A diagnostic assessment that includes word-level skills allows interventions to be targeted to the necessary foundational skills. The screener reveals trends that impact Tier 1 instruction.

WHO

The screener has targeted scoring thresholds that clearly identifies any student at risk for reading difficulties who will be administered the diagnostic assessment.

WHEN

Diagnostic assessments and intervention placement should happen immediately following screener analysis.

HOW

Use research- and evidence-based interventions that address the needed skills. It is likely that the majority of students that do not pass the screener will require explicit word-level intervention.

Diagnostic data examples

Group Report

Grade 9 ▾
Grade 1 of 4

ReadBasix: MTSS Guide

ReadBasix ▸

- Overview
- Growth
- Students
- MTSS Guide

Measure Decoding Skills 3 students • < 1%

Based on the students' performance on the Word Recognition and Decoding subtest compared to other subtests, it may be beneficial to complete an additional phonics survey to pinpoint students' needs.

Phonics Intervention 10 students • 1%

Any student who scores below 220 on the Word Recognition and Decoding subtest should receive a phonics reading intervention. We recommend **PHONICS for Reading** because it focuses on sound-to-letter correspondence and is designed for students in Grades 3-12.

Word Reading Intervention 28 students • 5%

Any student who scores below 235 on the Word Recognition and Decoding subtest should receive a multisyllabic word reading intervention. And, students below 250 on the Word Recognition and Decoding subtest will benefit from a multisyllabic word reading intervention. We recommend **REWARDS Secondary** because it is a multisensory intervention that includes multiple reading components (word analysis, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension). This is important because multi-component reading interventions have been shown to yield better results than isolated skill development (e.g., Edmonds et al., 2009).

Sentence Level Reading 1 student • < 1%

ReadAuthentix ▾

Activity Stats ▾

Student Summative Report

Margot ▾
7 of 26

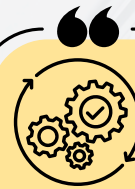
ReadBasix: Latest Report

Student	Subtest	Score	Percentile	Grade Eq.	Elapsed	Completed
ReadBasix ▸	Word Recog. and Decoding	234	36	6	3 min	Sep 25, 2024
Latest Report	Vocabulary	223	13	3	3 min	Sep 25, 2024
Report History	Morphology	255	80	9	3 min	Sep 25, 2024
Skill Resources	Sentence Processing	247	62	8	3 min	Sep 25, 2024
	Reading Efficiency	236	41	7	3 min	Sep 25, 2024
	Reading Comprehension	214	7	3	3 min	Sep 25, 2024

STEP 2: RESPONDING

Guiding Questions

1) What capacity does our schedule and do teachers have for providing the necessary Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction?



Efficiency Tip

Administer the diagnostic assessment with the screener to new students or those being screened for the first time.

2) What instructional resources do we need to obtain in order to provide the most effective interventions?

3) How can we maximize flexibility and fluidity to our intervention and supplemental instruction offerings?



Equity Tip

Use a diagnostic assessment that is designed for secondary students that utilizes age-appropriate content and delivery.

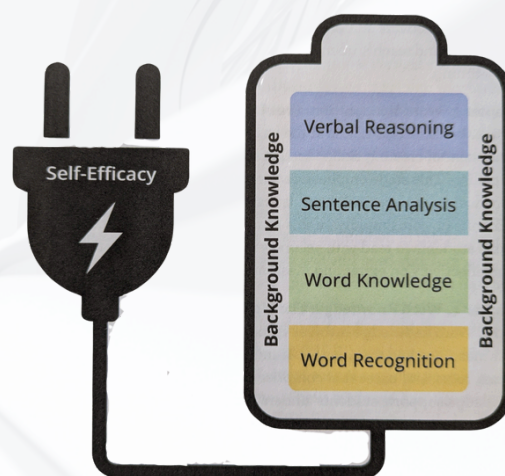
STEP 3: MONITORING

Purpose

Progress monitoring is another staple of MTSS that supports equity and efficiency. Data analysis is the cornerstone of teaching and intervention within this framework. Educators rely on regular, dependable data to assess the effectiveness of their instruction. Progress monitoring tools play a crucial role in this process, enabling educators to identify the progress of students' skills, validate the efficacy of interventions, and determine what instruction will be most beneficial in the future.

Setting Goals and Stacking Success

Teachers and students collaboratively set learning goals. While important for all, engagement and motivation is critical for the self-efficacy of the adolescent reader. Setting goals and tracking progress allows the student to experience success through the evidence of their literacy data. Progress monitoring also provides accountability for all stakeholders and it communicates to the student and their family, 1) *this is what we are doing* and 2) *why we are doing it*.



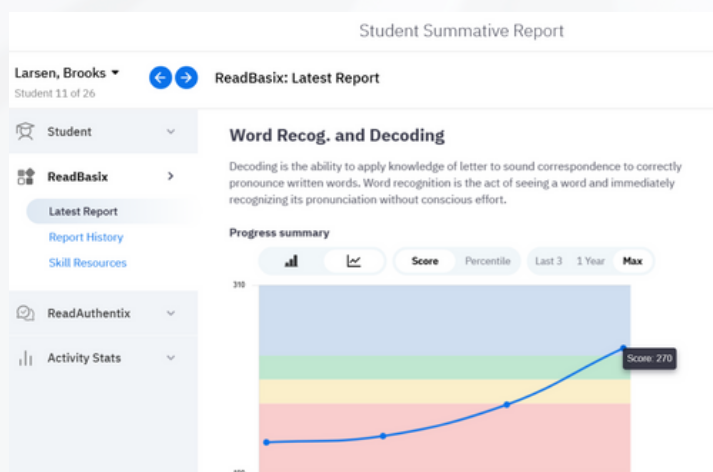
(Fisher et al., 2025)

Implications for Instruction

Monitoring tools should provide metrics on the development of the students' skills for which they are receiving instruction. Curriculum-based measures (CBMs) provide the most sensitive data and aligns with instruction.

Progress monitoring offers immediate insight into:

- The skills students have mastered,
- The effectiveness of different strategies, and
- How to customize instruction to meet individual needs.



STEP 3: MONITORING

Best Practices

WHAT

Use curriculum-based measures (CBMs) to track progress. CBMs and progress monitoring data inform instructional decisions and provide insight into curriculum and instruction effectiveness.

WHO

Progress monitoring happens at all tiers of instruction. Data Analysis Teams support all teachers as they make sense of the data and adjust their instruction accordingly.

WHEN

Frequency varies depending on the reading skills being assessed. Foundational skills grow at different rates. Benchmark assessments should evaluate progress of broader skills like comprehension.

HOW

Afford educators flexibility and time to evaluate their students' responsiveness to instruction and their rate of improvement. Leaders set procedures and protocols that empower educators' abilities to problem solve.

Progress Monitoring Examples

New Assignment

Custom

Canonical

Assignment name

Progress Monitor - Phonics

- select difficulty -

Timed test (show timer)

Directions

Press start when you are ready to begin

Select skills to assess (plan for about 8 minutes)

☒ 1. Word Recog. and Decoding

☐ 2. Vocabulary

☐ 3. Morphology

☐ 4. Sentence Processing

☐ 5. Reading Efficiency

☐ 6. Reading Comprehension

Create

Allison Harris

Capti Assess + ETS ReadBasix

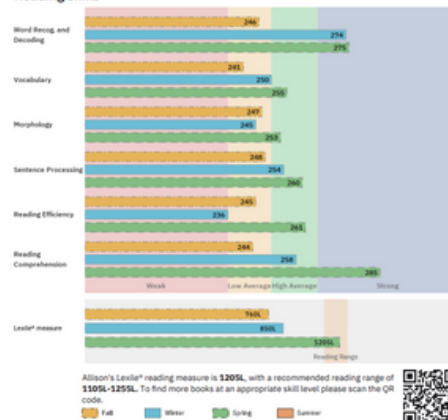
Allison participated in a reading assessment known as ReadBasix. This tool evaluates five critical reading abilities and assesses the student's comprehension skills. This report provides insight into the areas where Allison excels in reading, along with areas where Allison might need additional support. For more information about the tested skills, please scan the QR code.



Overall reading ability

Readers with a medium profile tend to read and understand words correctly. Readers at this level can expand the words they know through reading. They get better by using strategies to understand what they read so they can imagine what's happening in the story or ask questions to help clarify misunderstandings.

Reading skills



STEP 3: MONITORING

Guiding Questions

1) Do our progress monitoring tools and practices meet the following expectations: brief, reliable and valid, sensitive to skill growth?



Efficiency Tip

Progress monitor with CBMs to evaluate the particular skills for which the students are receiving instruction.

2) What does data informed instruction look like at Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3?

3) To what extent are teams problem solving for students not making progress?



Equity Tip

Collaborative and transparent goal setting targets instruction while engaging and motivating students.

STEP 4: IMPROVING

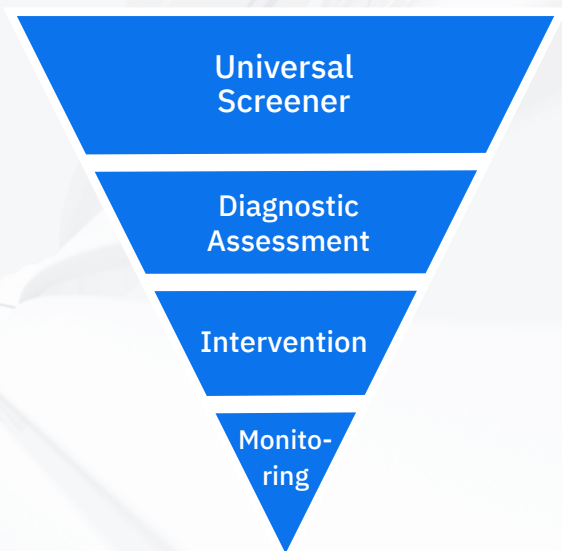
Purpose

No MTSS framework is perfect and there's an overwhelming amount of variables to consider. The improving phase allows us to reflect with a focus on two main goals: **building capacity and sustainability**. This reflection produces clarity—and clarity produces actionable next steps.

Reflect on the data gathered from the most recent screener. Reflect on feedback from families, teachers, and administrators. What adjustments will build capacity and sustainability?

Building Capacity

Every school and the community it serves is unique and boasts a wide spectrum of diverse learners. Building capacity means developing expertise and agility in differentiating instruction. Ongoing professional learning and supportive instructional coaching should emphasize data-based problem solving. School schedules and calendars can be a critical asset in allowing teachers the structure to plan and implement differentiated instruction.



Building Sustainability

Recognize the school's current capacity for MTSS implementation. Building a lasting framework depends on the school's ability to strengthen three key factors:

1. Equitable practices
2. Effective interventions
3. Collaborative decision-making

The improving phase is an ideal time to conduct needs assessments and establish priorities as the school conducts the next screener.

Instructional Recommendations for Grades 6-8										
Intervention Group	Instructional Recommendations	Students Statistics								
Phonics	<p>Any student who scores below 220 on the Word Recognition and Decoding subtest should receive a phonics reading intervention.</p> <p>1. Further assess the student's phonics understanding using an assessment that measures sound-letter correspondence.</p> <p>2. If the student's results suggest a need for sound-letter correspondence instruction, provide multisensory systematic and explicit phonics instruction using a curriculum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CKLA Skills Units (below grade lessons)• Lexia Power Up (6-9)• Wilson Reading (6-12)• Bowman Orton Gillingham Plus	<table><tr><th>Grade Level</th><th># of Students</th></tr><tr><td>6</td><td>21</td></tr><tr><td>7</td><td>17</td></tr><tr><td>8</td><td>11</td></tr></table>	Grade Level	# of Students	6	21	7	17	8	11
Grade Level	# of Students									
6	21									
7	17									
8	11									
Intervention Group	Instructional Recommendations	Students Statistics								
Morphology-based Word Reading Intervention	<p>Any student who scores below 235 on the Word Recognition and Decoding subtest should receive a multisyllabic word reading intervention. And, students below 250 on the Word Recognition and Decoding, Vocabulary, or Morphology subtests will benefit from a multisyllabic word reading intervention.</p> <p>1. Teach derivational morphemes that are detailed by the identified words used in Amplify ELA Vocabulary Supports-morphology routines that are found in the supplemental instruction</p>	<table><tr><th>Grade Level</th><th># of Students</th></tr><tr><td>6</td><td>15</td></tr><tr><td>7</td><td>28</td></tr><tr><td>8</td><td>15</td></tr></table>	Grade Level	# of Students	6	15	7	28	8	15
Grade Level	# of Students									
6	15									
7	28									
8	15									

STEP 4: IMPROVING

Best Practices

WHAT

Embrace and use feedback. Screening, responding, and progress monitoring each offer valuable feedback to be processed. Approach necessary changes through the lens of research and your school's data.

WHO

Data and feedback have given MTSS teams a true pulse of the last cycle's implementation. Everyone becomes more fluent in using data to make informed decisions.

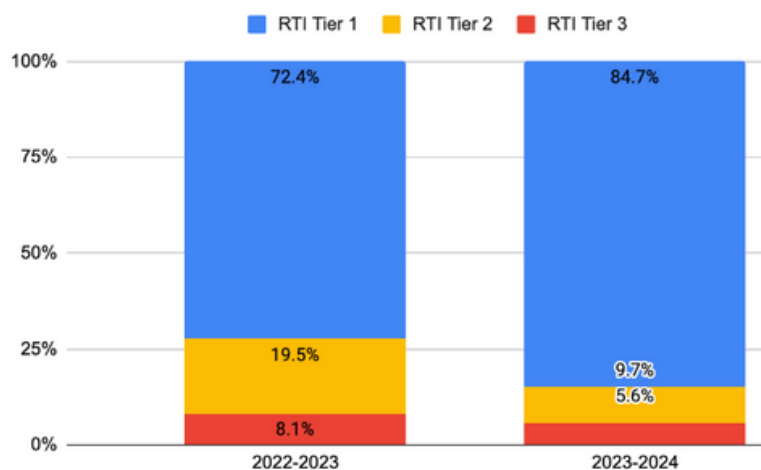
WHEN

Always. Building capacity and sustainability takes years, not months. Understanding the dynamics of all your stakeholders is important in determining the best time to implement changes.

HOW

Recognize the constant challenge of balancing the MTSS framework to meet the ever evolving educational needs. A collaborative leadership team communicates changes clearly and provides high quality support as needed.

Improving Examples



Data Analysis Recommendations prepared for Unity Local Schools



Overview

- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School

Instructional Recommendations for Intermediate School Grades (4-5)

- Word Recognition and Decoding
- Vocabulary
- Morphology

Instructional Recommendations for Middle School Grades (6-8)

- Word Recognition and Decoding
- Word Recognition and Decoding and Reading Comprehension
- Word-Level: Vocabulary and Morphology
- Sentence Processing

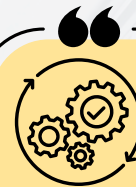
Instructional Recommendations for High School Grades (9-12)

- Word Recognition and Decoding
- Word Recognition and Decoding and Reading Comprehension
- Word-Level: Vocabulary and Morphology
- Sentence Processing

STEP 4: IMPROVING

Guiding Questions

1) To what extent were screening, responding, and monitoring processes implemented with fidelity?



Efficiency Tip

Gather feedback from a wide range of individuals about potential changes. This reveals blind spots and avoids future obstacles.

2) What changes are necessary? How can we prioritize these improvements based on their urgency?

3) Does our MTSS capacity meet all students' needs? What assets do we have within our staff and schedule to build capacity?



Equity Tip

MTSS Leadership Teams should consist of stakeholders fulfilling a variety of roles to ensure 100% of students are represented.

CONCLUSION

Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) for secondary reading is an ongoing, dynamic process that requires commitment, collaboration, and data-driven decision-making. This toolkit has outlined a structured approach—screening, responding, monitoring, and improving—that ensures all students receive the instruction and interventions necessary to become skilled readers. By embracing a proactive and equitable framework, schools can address literacy challenges systematically, supporting both struggling readers and those ready for more advanced learning opportunities.

As you move forward, reflect on the effectiveness of your MTSS implementation. Use data to refine practices, provide targeted professional development, and foster a culture of continuous improvement. Collaboration among educators, administrators, and families is key to sustaining meaningful change. By consistently evaluating student outcomes and adapting instruction accordingly, your school can build the capacity to support every learner—ensuring literacy success for all.

Interested in learning more? [Reach out to our team to start the conversation!](#)

