# Aligning a System of Support to Reach All Readers

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Introduction

Learning to read is an intricate process that can be cumbersome for many children. This fact has led to many different approaches to reaching all readers, but none has been as clearly defined as the Response to Intervention/Multi-Tiered System of Support (RTI/MTSS) efforts over the last 15 years. The RTI framework is a multi-tiered approach to the early identification of and support for students with learning and behavioral needs (RTI Action Network, n.d.). Most models of RTI/MTSS include three tiers of support. The three tiers are often represented graphically by a triangle divided into three horizontal bands. Each band represents the rough percentage of students who will learn to read, given increasingly intensive instruction. The lowest band of the triangle represents Tier I, or core instruction that all students receive. With high-quality Tier I instruction, the majority of students (approximately 80%) will meet grade-level targets. The second band shows that many students who need more than Tier I instruction will reach grade-level targets with appropriate intervention (generally 15%). Tier II instruction is more intensive than Tier I, and is designed to accelerate learning so that students can fully access and benefit from Tier I instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). Tier II intervention is often taught in smaller groups so that students benefit from a more intimate setting and closer contact with the teacher. The top band of the triangle represents Tier III intervention. Tier III intervention is the most intensive and personalized. Students in need of Tier III instruction (generally 5%) often have severe skill deficits that require a more individualized approach. Collectively, the tiered supports provide a framework for high-quality instruction that reaches all learners.
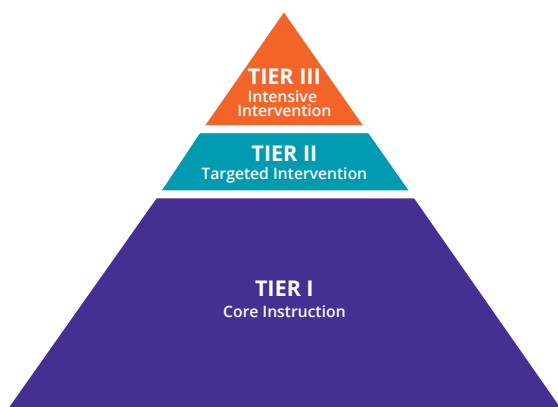
Many studies have explored the effectiveness of the RTI/MTSS model in achieving higher outcomes for students (e.g., Grapin, Waldron, & Joyce, 2018; O'Conner, Harty, & Fulmer, 2005; Vaughn et al., 2009; Vellutino, Scanlon, Zhang, & Schatschneider, 2008). We know that a data-based, problem-solving approach supports our learners robustly. This paper provides research support for the components of a strongly aligned RTI/MTSS system with the goal of supporting schools and districts as they make decisions that meet the needs of all their learners. While RTI/MTSS frameworks attend to many aspects of academics and behavior, this paper will focus on the RTI/MTSS implications for reading instruction. We identify alignment across tiers as a piece that is missing from many current RTI/MTSS implementations, and we draw attention to the need for districts and schools to consider alignment as a key tenet in their choice of systematic and explicit curricula.

The Need for High-Quality Tier I Instruction

When it was first developed, the RTI/MTSS approach was a significant departure from the general way of supporting the needs of all students in learning to read. For the first time, emphasis was placed on quality core instruction that is robust and differentiated, rather than the "within-child" variables that had previously been focused on as the initial step in supporting students who had difficulty learning to read. Many students who were (and still are) targeted as needing additional support have, in fact, been "instructional casualties." Learning to read would not necessarily be difficult for them; they have not learned because they simply haven't had robust core instruction.

Ensuring robust core instruction that includes ample amounts of reteaching when needed and frequent opportunities for student practice is the most effective way to prevent and remediate reading difficulties. Currently, renewed interest in the science of reading has provided a basis for Tier I instruction that includes an early, systematic, and explicit approach to foundational reading skills as essential for students learning to read (Rose, 2006; Torgesen, 1998). Research demonstrates that students need explicit and systematic instruction in mapping the sounds of words onto letters and speech units and that instruction is essential for comprehension (Snow et al., 1998).

While Tier I instruction is designed to meet the needs of the majority, it is not intended to be "one size fits all." Tier I instruction can and should be differentiated to meet the needs of students (Rose, 2006; International Literacy Association, 2019). High-quality formative and summative assessments allow teachers to tailor core instruction to the needs of their specific students and class. High-quality core instruction includes ample opportunity for students to practice new skills, such as reading and rereading controlled-vocabulary text that includes recently learned phonics elements in addition to reading words in isolation. High-quality core instruction also includes reteaching opportunities teachers can utilize as needed, based on assessment and observation. For example, when the teacher notices that some students are unable to read controlled-vocabulary text, she may conclude that the students have not had enough practice with newly taught material and reteach as appropriate.

When high-quality, robust Tier I instruction is in place, the need for intervention is greatly reduced (Rose, 2006). The RTI/MTSS diagram is a visual reminder that Tier I instruction should meet the needs of approximately 80% of students. Often, schools and districts are faced with an inverted triangle, meaning that Tier I instruction is not meeting the needs of the majority of students, and as a result more than 20% of students are identified as requiring intervention. When this occurs, school and district leaders should consider how to strengthen core instruction as a first step. It is ineffective and inefficient to continually attempt to intervene to account for poor Tier I instruction.

The Need for Aligned Tier II Support

When students struggle to read despite strong Tier I instruction, Tier II interventions are necessary. One goal of the RTI/MTSS framework is that students who receive support in Tier II eventually transfer what they are learning into Tier I instruction and cease to need intervention. In order for that to happen, Tier II intervention must be explicit and systematic, and aligned with Tier I instruction (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012). Instructional coherence between the two tiers has been shown to be associated with stronger student outcomes (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Byrk, 2001).

All too often, students are receiving Tier II intervention that is unrelated to their classroom instruction. This model is less successful than an intervention where there is alignment across the two tiers. There are

several ways in which Tier II interventions can and should be aligned with Tier I instruction. First, an aligned scope and sequence of skills is beneficial for students in a Tier II intervention. When Tier II instruction increases the instructional intensity of a particular skill that a student has learned in Tier I, students have more time and more opportunity to learn that essential content (Baker, Fien, & Baker, 2010). An aligned scope and sequence also improves efficiency of instruction by allowing for a seamless shift from Tier I to Tier II, saving effort and time in determining placement. When there is no alignment, variations in the sequence of instruction across curricular programs may result in situations where a skill is instructed for the first time in Tier II.

A second benefit to aligned curricula is the ability to maintain consistent instructional routines and language. Consistency is essential for students to make associations between what they are learning in Tier I instruction and the intervention support they receive in Tier II instruction. For example, students often have difficulty keeping up with the pace of learning new sight words as they are introduced and taught during core instruction. An aligned Tier II program would provide repeated and more intense instruction for the same sight words. Other crucial consistencies are the ways the teacher explains tasks and provides feedback to students as well as how expectations for student responses are aligned across the tiers. Students are more likely to make connections and understand content when routines and expectations are aligned. For example, when continuous blending is introduced and used in Tier I instruction to support the accurate decoding of words, and then used again in Tier II, there may not be a need to introduce continuous blending unless the support is warranted. Consistency in materials, content, and language is highly desirable to support our fragile learners (Baker, Fien, & Baker, 2010; Carnine, 1992).

An aligned Tier II intervention does not necessarily mean the program was designed by the same developer that designed the Tier I program. Even when the same publisher provides both core and Tier II instruction, the scope, sequence, instructional language, or routines may not be aligned. It is important to consider that the first criterion for selecting a Tier II intervention to support decoding decificts is that it is explicit and systematic. From there, leaders and teachers can work to align the important pieces to their core instruction.

Tier II interventions are designed to be used in addition to Tier I instruction, not to supplant it. The increased intensity and additional time devoted are intended to ameliorate the reading difficulty. Several meta-analyses of small-group interventions found moderate to strong effects of daily Tier II instruction (Elbaum, Vaughn, Tejero Hughes, & Watson Moody, 2000). In addition, an Institute for Education Science panel found strong evidence for the effectiveness of providing small-group interventions as supplemental instruction to support the Tier I core curriculum (Gersten et al., 2008). According to the panel, small-group Tier II instruction should:

a) target the components of reading instruction in which the student needs additional support

b) be implemented three to five times each week for approximately 20 to 40 minutes each session

c) build skills gradually with high student-teacher interaction and frequent opportunities to practice the specific skill and receive feedback

It is also important to note that the instruction in Tier II needs to focus on a particular aspect of reading, for example decoding, and be targeted to students who need to practice that specific skill (Burns, 2010).

Individualized (Yet Still Aligned) Tier III Support

When quality Tier I and II efforts are exhausted and a student continues to demonstrate deficits in the skills already taught, Tier III supports are warranted (Denton et al., 2013). Tier III interventions are the most intense, and are often personalized to meet the individual student's specific need(s) (Burns, 2010). For example, intensity

might be added in Tier III foundational skills intervention by incorporating elements of multisensory instruction. These multisensory elements add layers of auditory, visual, and/or kinesthetic cues to support learning. Other types of considerations include decreasing group size, increasing the time spent in intervention, increasing the frequency of intervention, and slowing the pacing of instruction (Denton et al., 2013). Tier III supports should only remain in use for as long as the child exhibits the need.

Tier III interventions typically happen outside of the child's regular classroom; however, it is still critical for Tier III work to be coordinated with the instruction in Tiers I and II (Rose, 2006). Tier III should take into account what the student did and did not learn in previous instruction. While the goal of Tier III is narrowing the scope of skills to teach them at one time, ensuring a common instructional language and building from the work done in Tiers I and II are essential for supporting these fragile readers. If a student experiences disconnected learning, skill gaps are not likely to be closed (Batsche, 2013).

Implications for Practice

A successful RTI system is well planned, coordinated, and carefully monitored across all three tiers (Rose, 2006). Schools and districts should consider the alignment (or lack thereof) of instruction across tiers (Bean, 2008; Hill et al., 2012). Careful side-by-side examination of the core and supplemental scopes and sequences, instructional routines, and teacher language will provide a clear indication as to whether or not the instruction will be complementary.

A large-scale, systematic analysis of research by Marzano (2003) and DuFour and Marzano (2011) posited a coherent, content-rich curriculum as the probable single largest factor affecting levels of achievement in school. By itself, curriculum has the potential to alter a school's academic trajectory. Students benefit greatly when they receive instruction that guarantees that certain important agreed-upon content and literacy skills are actually taught and learned (Marzano, 2003; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). In closing, we suggest that schools and districts reflect on their current RTI/MTSS implementation and consider the following guiding questions:

- Do the instructional materials provide a systematic scope and sequence?
- Does the scope and sequence from each tier align to provide complementary instruction?
- How are the instructional routines similar across tiers? Different?
- How does instruction intensify across tiers without creating confusion for students who struggle?
- How does pacing need to be adjusted in Tiers II and III?
- How will high-quality implementation of Tier I be ensured?
- How will inconsistencies be addressed as part of the overarching RTI/MTSS implementation?

In order to reach all readers, we must consider the implications of the entire system of support that we provide to students. Many well-designed studies have shown the positive impacts a high-quality RTI/MTSS framework can provide (Gersten, Newman-Gonchar, Haymond, & Diminio, 2017); however, considerations beyond the intervention programs used in the system are important. As many researchers have shared, "*how* implementation occurs matters just as much as *what* is being implemented" (Arden et al., 2017, p. 217). A thoughtful, coherent, aligned system of support can help us achieve our goal of reaching all readers.

ABOUT COLLABORATIVE CLASSROOM

Our mission as a nonprofit is to help students grow as readers, writers, and thinkers while they develop the social and emotional skills necessary to thrive. Founded in 1980, Center for the Collaborative Classroom conducted seminal research on social development. Collaborative Classroom has evolved into a partner for schools and districts that is dedicated to transforming the school experience, developing students, and empowering teachers as they engage students.

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GUIDED SPELLING

haunt	"Some people think that there are ghosts that haunt old houses."
soil	"We planted flower seeds in the soil."
word	"*Soil* is another word for *dirt*."

Guide the students through spelling each of the decodable words, paying particular attention to sounds that can be spelled in more than one way. Then have them write the high-frequency word.

Spelling Support

haunt: Tell the students that in *haunt* the sound /aw/ is spelled *a-u.*

soil: Tell the students that in *soil* the sound /oi/ is spelled *o-i.*

DAY 2: *Grizzly Bears*
aw and *large*

IN THIS LESSON, THE STUDENTS:

- Learn the spelling-sound *aw* /aw/
- Read decodable words
- Learn the high-frequency word *large*
- Review high-frequency words
- Read a new book

1 Introduce the Spelling-Sound *aw* /aw/

Explain that today's sound is /aw/, and have the students say the sound. Point to the spelling *au* below the *saw* picture on the Spelling-Sound Chart and remind the students that they have already learned that the spelling *au* stands for the sound /aw/. Point to the spelling *aw* on the Spelling-Sound Chart and tell the students that the spelling *aw* also stands for the sound /aw/.

Write *aw* on your wipe-off board, point to the spelling, and say the letter names. Point to the spelling again and say /aw/. Have the students repeat the sound as you point to the spelling.

Materials

- Teacher and student copies of *Grizzly Bears*
- Wipe-off board, dry-erase marker, and tissue or cloth
- Student bags of sorting words, prepared ahead from "Sort 45" (R)
- Intact copy of "Sort 45" (R), prepared ahead
- High-frequency word card for *large*
- High-frequency word card review deck

Tell the students that they will usually see the spelling *aw* in the middle and at the end of words. Write the words *draw*, *hawk*, and *saw* on your wipe-off board and have the students read them. Then have the students each trace the spelling *aw* on the table in front of them with one finger as they say /aw/.

2 Read Decodable Words

Write the following words on your wipe-off board:

birth

numbers

claw

paws

raw

platforms

Point to each word and sweep under it as the students read it.

3 Introduce the Sound Sort

Display the intact "Sort 45" and explain that these are the words the students will sort this week. Point to each word and read it aloud. Then have the students read the words as you point to them. Explain that all of the words have the sound /aw/.

Distribute one bag of sorting words to each student. Remind the students that they will sort these words into two groups during independent word work. Tell them that in one group of words, the spelling *au* will stand for the sound /aw/, as in *haunt*. In the other group of words, the spelling *aw* will stand for the sound /aw/, as in *draw*. Remind them that after they have sorted, they will check their sorts by reading each word to make sure it is in the right group.

Have the students put their bags in their toolboxes.

4 Introduce the High-Frequency Word *Large*

large   "Whales can be very large."

Introduce *large* by saying the word as you show the word card to the students. Use the word in a sentence. Have the students read it and spell it twice, and then read it a third time.

📓 **Teacher Note**
Explain that a *fawn* is a baby deer.

📓 **Teacher Note**
Add the word card for *large* to the high-frequency word card review deck.

5 Review High-Frequency Words

Review the previously introduced high-frequency words by showing each word in the review deck and having the students read it, spell it, and read it again.

6 Read *Grizzly Bears*

Distribute a copy of *Grizzly Bears* to each student. Tell the students that they will read this book today. Read the title to the students and identify the names of the author and illustrator. Explain that this is a nonfiction book about grizzly bears. Open to page 2, and ask the students to find today's new word, *large*. Turn to page 11, and ask the students to find the new word *young*. Then ask the students to find the new word *learn* on the same page.

Write the words *dawn* and *dusk* on your wipe-off board and have the students read the words. Explain that *dawn* is the time when the sun is first coming up in the morning and *dusk* is the time when the sun is going down. Then write the words *grizzly*, *bear*, *away*, and *months* on your wipe-off board and read them for the students. Have the students say the words. Then write the number *1,000* on your wipe-off board and explain that this number means "one thousand." Tell the students that they will see this number and these words in today's book. Explain that they will have to remember these words when they see them, or ask you for help. Leave the words on the wipe-off board as a reminder and place the board where everyone can see it. Have the students turn to page 1 in their books and read the story quietly to themselves.

Listen to the students as they read. Support any student who struggles and jot down any observations. When all the students have finished reading, ask and briefly discuss:

Q *What do grizzly bears look like?*

Q *What do grizzly bears eat?*

Have the students put their books in their toolboxes. Remind them that when they go to independent reading, they will read today's book before reading the other books in their toolboxes.

GUIDED SPELLING

dawn	"Some people wake up before dawn."
crush	"I crush water bottles before I recycle them."
answer	"I will try to answer all your questions."

Guide the students through spelling each of the decodable words, paying particular attention to sounds that can be spelled in more than one way. Then have them write the high-frequency word.

Spelling Support

dawn: Tell the students that in *dawn* the sound /aw/ is spelled *a-w*.

DAY 3: *Grizzly Bears*
Review and Reread

Materials

- Teacher and student copies of *Grizzly Bears* from Day 2
- Sound card review deck
- High-frequency word card review deck
- Wipe-off board, dry-erase marker, and tissue or cloth

IN THIS LESSON, THE STUDENTS:

- Review spelling-sounds
- Review high-frequency words
- Read a familiar book

1 Review Spelling-Sounds

Use the sound card review deck to have the students say the sound of each spelling.

2 Review High-Frequency Words

Review the previously introduced high-frequency words by showing each word in the review deck and having the students read it, spell it, and read it again.

3 Reread *Grizzly Bears*

Have the students take *Grizzly Bears* from their toolboxes and tell them that they will reread this book today. Read the title aloud with the students. Write the words *grizzly*, *bear*, *away*, and *months* and the number *1,000* on your wipe-off board, say the words and the number, and remind the students that they will see them in today's book.

1 Phonological Awareness

MANIPULATION

"Say _____." "Drop /___/. What's left?"

☐ __ __   **A** Say _____, drop /mp/: damp, pump, limp, jump, hump, dump

__ __ ☐   **B** Say _____, drop /sw/: switch, sweet, swing, swim, sweep, swam

2 Phonics and Decodable Words

INTRODUCE

[1] (Present a sample word in a sentence and have the students say the new sound.)
[2] (Show the spelling on the wall card and explain its features.) [3] (Point to the sound card.) "Sound." "Again."

au_, aw   *(mnemonic: "awful yawn"; She saw the cause of the crash.)*

Note that *au_* and *aw* are grouped together on a wall card. When spelling words with this sound, the students should ask which spelling to use.

REVIEW

(Mix order.) "Sound." "Again."

final *e*, spellings taught since Lesson 16

READING A MIXED LIST

(Point. Pause.) "Read."

A brass, crawl, jar, hail, pause, moist, raw, employ, crowns, haul, stretched, fault, jay, boiling, cause, stall, saw, broil, Troy, laws

Challenge words: spoiled, fawns

B grown, vault, toy, chewing, caw, foil, cases, lane, hauled, coast, dawn, cause, hunted, coo, jaw, coin, slaw, haunt, oyster, spoil

Challenge words: launched, crawling

3 Polysyllabic Words

READING VCCV WORDS

[1] (Point to the vowels.) "How many consonants are between the two vowels?" [2] "Where do we divide?" (Place a dot.) [3] (Have the students read the syllables and then the word.)

Basketball and *afternoon* are three-syllable words. Guide the students through both syllable divisions.

A haircut, master, unhurt, ugly, basketball

B unlock, sailboat, party, sister, afternoon

Corrections

If the students misread an individual syllable, use the correction that you would use on the mixed list.

If the students misread the entire word, pronounce it for them correctly and have them read it again.

4 Sight Words

INTRODUCE

(Introduce in a sentence.) "Read." "Spell." "Read." "Spell." "Read."

bought   *(We <u>bought</u> our school supplies.)*

brought   *(She <u>brought</u> an extra sweater.)*

thought   *(He <u>thought</u> of the answer.)*

For additional words with the sound of *ought* as in *bought*, see page 497.

REVIEW

(Mix order.) "Read." "Spell." "Read."

15–20 words

5 Guided Spelling

DICTATION OF DECODABLE WORDS

[1] (Say the word and use it in a sentence.) "Say _____." [2] (Guide as needed.) [3] "Read and spell the word as I write it."

DICTATION OF SIGHT WORDS

[1] (Say the word and use it in a sentence.) "Say _____." [2] "Use your Sight Word Dictionary if you're not sure. Write _____." [3] "Read and spell the word as I write it."

SENTENCE DICTATION

[1] "Say (sentence)." [2] "First word?" (Guide as needed for decodable word or sight word.) "Write _____." [3] "Second word?" [4] (Continue word by word.) [5] "Read and spell each word as I write it."

A	
1. dime	"Question?" (Students: "Which /ī/?")
2. coil	"Question?" (Students: "Which /oi/?")
3. hope	"Question?" (Students: "Which /ō/?")
4. fault	"I'll sound it slowly: *fault*."
	"Question?" (Students: "Which /aw/?")
5. <u>Mr.</u>	
6. <u>Ms.</u>	
7. <u>Two</u> teeth came out.	"*Teeth*: Question?" (Students: "Which /ē/?")
	"*Came*: Question?" (Students: "Which /ā/?")
	"*Out*: Question?" (Students: "Which /ou/?")

B	
1. boil	"Question?" (Students: "Which /oi/?")
2. haul	"Question?" (Students: "Which /aw/?")
3. claw	"Question?" (Students: "Which /aw/?")
4. shake	"Question?" (Students: "Which /ā/?")
	"In *shake*, the sound /k/ is spelled *k*."

(continues)

B	*(continued)*
5. <u>Miss</u>	
6. <u>Mrs.</u>	
7. It <u>was</u> her fault.	"I'll sound it slowly: *fault.*"
	"Question?" (Students: "Which /aw/?")

6 Fluency Practice/IDR

Have the students read their "easy reader" trade books for at least
30 minutes. Have them record what they read in their reading logs. Over
the course of a week, conduct at least one 1-minute accuracy and rate
check for each student and record the results on the student's Fluency
Record sheet.