



# Response to Instruction and Intervention Manual

Tennessee Department of Education | August 2023



## **About this Manual**

The goal of Tennessee’s Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI<sup>2</sup>) Manual is to provide a multi-tiered approach focused on prevention and early intervention that uses a data-driven, problem-solving model to identify and prioritize coherence and alignment of instruction to ensure all students are provided the supports needed to access grade level content. RTI<sup>2</sup> is founded on high-quality core instruction for all students (i.e., Tier I), targeted learning acceleration supports for some students (i.e., Tier II), and intensive skills-based intervention for a few students (i.e., Tier III), situating RTI<sup>2</sup> within a continuum of student support that accelerates all students’ learning and access to grade-level standards by increasing the capacity of educators to provide instructional coherence amongst tiers and to make timely data-based decisions for students.

This manual has been created for use by any educational professional, including but not limited to district or school administrations, teachers, and/or families in the position of impacting the educational outcomes of students in Tennessee schools.

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# Introduction

The role of the public education system is to prepare all students for success after high school, and Tennessee educators, administrators, and staff in our school communities work each day to ensure all students can reach this goal. If we are successful, districts and schools in Tennessee will be well-prepared to support all students, ensuring they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to successfully embark upon their chosen path in life.

The Tennessee Department of Education is pleased to share this updated manual for Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI<sup>2</sup>), which is Tennessee’s framework for teaching and learning that begins with access to high-quality instruction with appropriate scaffolds throughout the day and emphasizes intervening with students when they first start to struggle to avoid prolonged academic difficulties. This manual is intended to support educators and empower districts in their continued implementation of RTI<sup>2</sup> and to ensure they have the structure and resources necessary to provide all students with access to and support for reaching high standards and expectations. **This manual is not inclusive of all aspects and concerns associated with RTI<sup>2</sup> implementation; rather, this provides the vision and expectations associated with practical application.**

*The RTI<sup>2</sup> model provides instructional opportunities for all students and is not exclusively a path to special education eligibility.*

The first “I” in RTI<sup>2</sup> is instruction; strong Tier I or core instruction is the foundation of RTI<sup>2</sup>. Core instruction and grade-level expectations are delivered to all students through the Tier I instructional block. Most of a student’s educational day will be spent in Tier I instruction.

The second “I” in RTI<sup>2</sup> is intervention. Intervention is offered as additional instruction with multiple entry and exit points based on students’ needs. For example, a student on grade-level may receive high-quality Tier I instruction and enrichment, while another student who is showing slight deficits in specific areas may receive the same high-quality Tier I instruction in addition to targeted interventions through Tier II. Alternately, a student who has significant needs may receive extended, intensive interventions through Tier III in conjunction with Tier I instruction.

Special education services are a continuation of the path through the RTI<sup>2</sup> tiers. A critical component of the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework is that student progress is regularly monitored and analyzed, and data-based decisions regarding appropriate interventions are determined and delivered with fidelity. Should a student not show growth in response to an intervention at any point and is suspected of having a specific learning disability,

that student must be referred for an initial special education evaluation. The RTI<sup>2</sup> model provides instructional opportunities for all students and is not exclusively a path to special education eligibility.

## ***Overview of Primary Refinements***

We are committed to providing support to districts and schools as we continue to implement RTI<sup>2</sup> and identify strong practices and common challenges. The department has listened to feedback from the field and examined current research and best practice. This information has led to the following refinements:

- Clearly defined critical components and implementation expectations of the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework.
- Pairing of intervention with a learning acceleration focus to align with Tennessee’s high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring.
- Direction for intensive skill-specific intervention within Tier II or III to better support students with unique learning needs (i.e., characteristics of dyslexia.)

The Department is committed to supporting RTI<sup>2</sup> and continually seeks to align our work to provide clear guidance to educators.

## ***Alignment to State Law***

The Tennessee State Board of Education (SBE) has approved [Special Education Evaluation and Eligibility Standards](#) regarding evaluations for Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). The path to identification moved away from a discrepancy model, sometimes called a “wait to fail” approach, and since July 1, 2014, the RTI<sup>2</sup> model has been our statewide approach to identifying students with SLDs. The Rules of the SBE require all districts and schools to use RTI<sup>2</sup> as a component of the process to determine the eligibility of students to receive special education services for SLDs; however, identification is not the sole purpose of RTI<sup>2</sup>. See [SBE Rule 0520-01-03-.03\(6\)](#).

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized to emphasize early intervention services for at-risk children. Schools can no longer wait for students to fail before providing intervention. Instead, schools should employ a proactive, problem-solving model to identify and address areas of academic need. It is important to the Department that the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework represents a continuum of intervention services in which general education, special education, and other student support services work collaboratively to meet the needs of all students. This includes shared knowledge and commitment to the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework, its function as a process of improving educational outcomes for all students, and its importance to the department to meet requirements related to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The three tiers of RTI<sup>2</sup> work together to provide the framework for student instruction and additional intervention support. The goal of all instruction and intervention is to scaffold instruction so that all students have access to grade level curriculum and the greatest opportunity for academic success. The administration of the universal screening of students in kindergarten through grade 12 in the areas of reading, mathematics, and written expression is the first step in working to identify students who are failing to meet grade level expectations and need additional interventions. The design of RTI<sup>2</sup> provides increasingly intensive intervention as students move through each tier with Tier III being the greatest level of intervention within general education. Even within this continuum of supports, some students may need even greater levels of academic intervention and require a referral for special education. In this way, RTI<sup>2</sup> works in conjunction with the Child Find process to identify students who may have a specific learning disability.

If at any point, a student fails to respond to interventions and is suspected of having a specific learning disability, then the student must be referred for an initial evaluation for special education regardless of what tier of intervention the student is currently receiving or how many weeks the student has been receiving intensive interventions. As always, parents reserve the right to request an evaluation at any time (U.S. ED, [Memo to State Special Education Directors](#), (Jan. 21, 2011)). The school district may implement tiered intervention and conduct an initial evaluation for a specific learning disability simultaneously.

The universal reading screener process also plays a significant role in fulfilling the requirements of [Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-229](#). After taking effect in 2016, this law requires that districts implement a screening process for identifying students displaying characteristics of dyslexia. Districts with an appropriate, effective universal reading screener process in place will be able to use the information they collect to make important determinations about dyslexia-specific interventions, scaffolds, and classroom supports.

The Tennessee Literacy Success Act (TLSA), which took effect in 2021, requires all students in kindergarten through grade 3 to participate in a universal reading screener process to identify those who may need additional support and/or other types of literacy instruction. See [Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-905](#). The universal screening process works to identify students in kindergarten through grade 3 as being at risk for a reading deficiency or having a significant reading deficiency based on their universal reading screener composite scores. According to [SBE Rule 0520-01-03-.15](#), students who score at or below the 15th percentile have a significant reading deficiency, and those scoring between the 16th and 40th percentile are at risk. The Tennessee Literacy Success Act requires LEAs to utilize high-quality instruction materials within Tier I instruction, implement foundational literacy skills instruction, and provide targeted, skills-based interventions to students with identified needs.

The [Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement Act](#) (TISA) and [Chapter 0520-12-05](#) of the Rules of the Department of Education also utilize the universal reading screener process in kindergarten through grade

12 as the tool for identifying students with the unique learning need of characteristics of dyslexia who will receive a specific type of student intervention plan (SIP) called an Individualized Learning Plan for Characteristics of Dyslexia (ILP-D). Students whose data meets specific criteria on the universal reading screener in kindergarten through grade 8 or early warning system (EWS) in grades 9 through 12 are eligible for an ILP-D and must receive dyslexia-specific interventions within the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework to support their skills deficits. See [Dyslexia Resource Guide](#) for detailed guidance on identifying and serving students with characteristics of dyslexia under [Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-229](#), TLSA, and TISA, including guidance on students in grades 9-12.

[Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-229](#), TLSA, and TISA all govern literacy instruction and the identification and service of students identified at risk for or as having significant reading struggles, including characteristics of dyslexia. Compliance with all rules and laws relies on faithful implementation of universal reading screener tools and aligned, targeted skills-based interventions within the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework.

# RTI<sup>2</sup> Framework Overview

The RTI<sup>2</sup> framework provides intentional supports to set all students on a path to success, helps educators understand where students are, and through a continuum of student supports, assist them in moving forward. The framework integrates [Tennessee Academic Standards](#), assessment, early intervention, and accountability for all students. This consistent system of support enables students to persist on the path to success and is a key measure in ensuring more students can ultimately develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for post-secondary success.

*The goal of RTI<sup>2</sup> is for all students to meet grade-level expectations grounded in high-quality core instruction.*

The foundation of the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework is twofold:

1. Effective instruction, and
2. A culture of high expectations for all students.

To achieve the vision of all students graduating K-12 education college and career ready, educators must provide all students with access to high-quality, data-driven instruction every day. The RTI<sup>2</sup> framework is a problem-solving, collaborative methodology designed to answer questions about student performance and ensure all students benefit from strong instruction, receive appropriate intervention when needed, and thrive in a supportive environment. **The focus of RTI<sup>2</sup> should be founded on high-quality core instruction.**

There are four essential components of the framework:

- Leadership
- Assessment
- Data-Based Decision Making
- Instruction and Intervention

Leadership provides the proper guidance and support for collaborative teams to function effectively and efficiently while focusing on the appropriate work to achieve the best outcomes for all students. Assessment is critical in determining a student's progress toward standards and/or skill mastery and provides the data upon which discussions and decisions regarding a student's needs and appropriate response(s) to those needs are held. Data-Based Decision Making encompasses the process of reviewing a student's assessment performance to determine how best to respond the needs of the student. Finally, instruction and intervention provide the system in which students are taught grade-level content and standards as well as providing support for students when the initial instruction does not lead to mastery. These components are not linear in nature but rather form an interdependent web. The strength of the framework functions at its highest levels when all elements are in place and functioning in tandem.

# Leadership

Leadership at the state, district, and school levels are essential for ensuring the success of all students throughout the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework. It is the role of those in leadership to establish a culture of collaboration and high expectations focused on student achievement for all students including students who are struggling or advancing. The collaborative group should include educators, families, and communities. RTI<sup>2</sup> is a process focused on prevention and early intervention that uses multiple sources of data for instruction, scaffolding, intervention, and transitions between tiers; therefore, it is imperative that leaders are active participants in facilitating RTI<sup>2</sup> implementation.

As stated in the framework overview, leadership and a culture of collaboration are essential to the success of the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework. This is not a process led by special education but rather a joint effort led by general education.

To have a strong RTI<sup>2</sup> program and to support a culture of collaboration, leadership teams must be in place to ensure the effective implementation of RTI<sup>2</sup>.

Leadership Teams are responsible for establishing the following at each level:

- Establishing shared vision and participation norms.
- Providing regular communication.
- Creating clear expectations and feedback.
- Providing opportunities for support and capacity development.
- Ensuring proper implementation and execution of RTI<sup>2</sup>.

Leadership Teams:

**State Team:** This team establishes and communicates the expectations for the implementation of RTI<sup>2</sup> for local education agencies (LEAs) across the state. This team works to provide expectations for implementation, regular communication, resources, training, professional development, and support for districts as RTI<sup>2</sup> is implemented at the district and school level.

**District Team:** This team meets regularly to ensure the fidelity of the RTI<sup>2</sup> process. The district RTI<sup>2</sup> leadership team includes a designated chair or facilitator and is comprised of a diverse and representative group of people, which may include district level leaders (i.e., RTI<sup>2</sup> coordinators, content area coordinators, data coordinators, etc.), educational staff (including teachers, specialists, school psychologists, etc.), and parents.

This team works to organize the following:

- Alignment of district infrastructures,
- Setting professional learning, coordinating training, coaching, and feedback,
- Setting and monitoring timelines for implementation and guiding the process,

- Guiding the selection and use of assessments and instructional practices, and
- Gathering feedback to confirm practices and/or make necessary adjustments.

LEAs will have a description of the members of the district RTI<sup>2</sup> leadership team and their roles. The district RTI<sup>2</sup> leadership team will indicate the frequency of district RTI<sup>2</sup> support meetings.

**School Team:** These teams meet regularly to ensure the fidelity of the instruction and interventions and make data-based decisions regarding appropriate student placement in interventions. School teams will ensure that interventions are implemented with integrity. This team will make sure recommended **interventions are matched to the specific area(s) of deficit for each student.**

These teams can include the principal or his/her designee, classroom teachers, interventionists, literacy/numeracy coaches, school psychologists, school counselors, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, special education teachers, and other staff as necessary. The LEAs will have a description of the members of the school level RTI<sup>2</sup> support teams and their roles. However, the interventionist maintains a critical role within the data team as the interventionist provides the intervention and conducts the regular monitoring of student progress. Additionally, the interventionists provide the bridge between the instruction designed to fill the deficit and the instruction designed to support proficiency in the grade-level standards. The interventionist and classroom teacher must work together to ensure the instruction provided in intervention is translated into the Tier I classroom setting. The school level RTI<sup>2</sup> team will meet **at least quarterly and following the close of each universal screening window.**

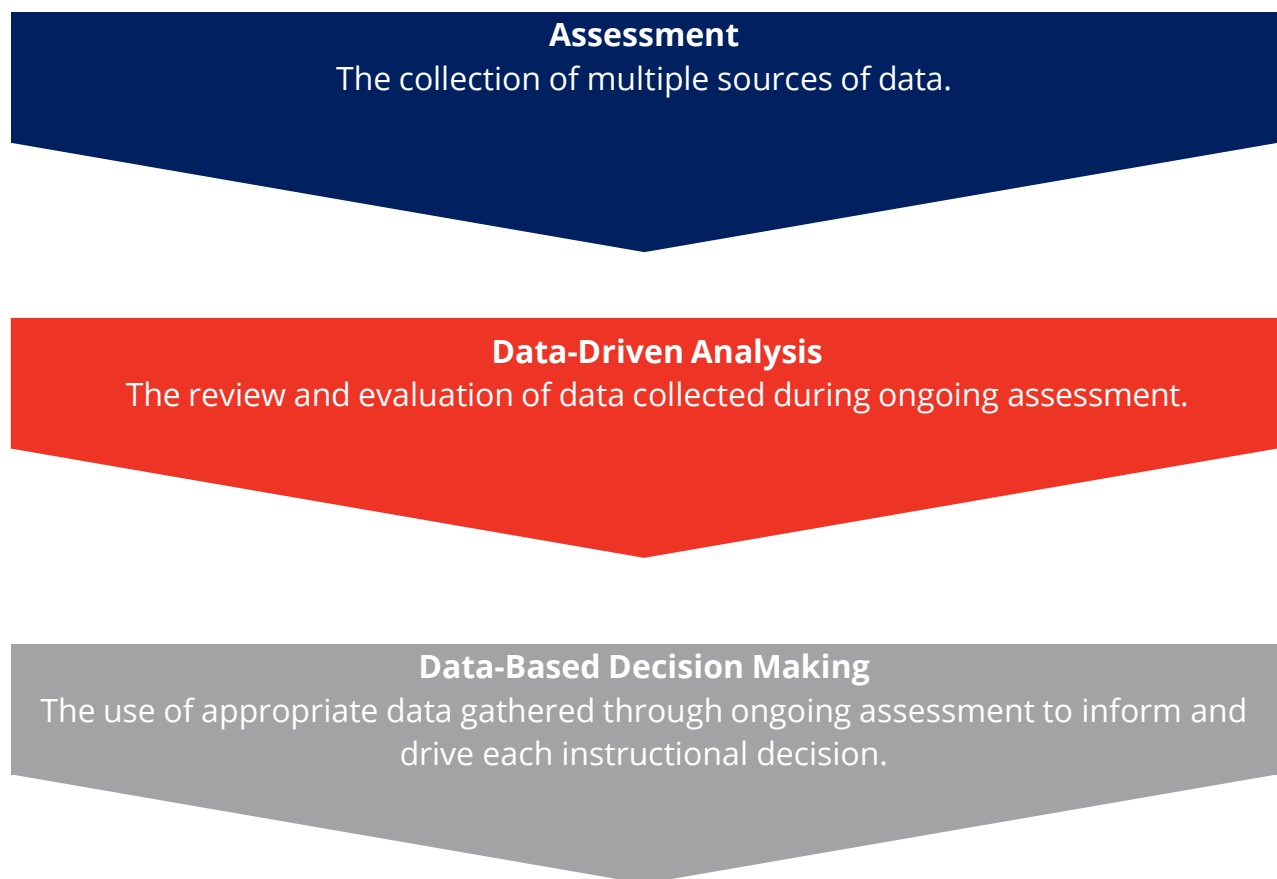
This team works to organize the following:

- Lead school implementation efforts and provide feedback to the district leadership team.
- Facilitate and support data-based decision making at school and student levels.
- Guide selection and use of evidence-based instructional practices.
- Engage school faculty and staff in the support all learners.
- Expect and monitor the use of data to match instructional practices to student need.
- Engage families and students in decision making and learning opportunities.
- Gather feedback to confirm practices and/or make necessary adjustments.

# Assessment

Assessment of student learning provides continuous, vital feedback on the effectiveness of instruction and informs a teacher's instructional strategies. It is essential to provide engaging, tailored instruction that addresses students' individual needs while maintaining grade-level expectations.

Assessment is the collection of data from multiple sources for use during data-based decision making. It can help track and compare individual and/or group performance and help support scaffolded instruction in Tier I as well as provide school teams with vital information to consider when making data-based decisions regarding student support and intervention needs (see figure below).



**Assessment is used for all students, aligned with grade-level instruction, and done continuously throughout the year.**

As stated in the guiding principles, **a culture of collaboration and communication is an essential part of ongoing assessment.** There should be collaboration and communication by all stakeholders around the

data being collected through the data analysis process and throughout the data-based decision-making process.

Assessment, aligned to grade-level standards may include:

Assessment Type	Description	Examples may include
Formative Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measure student learning throughout the year so educators can determine if students are making progress and how best to adjust instruction.</li> <li>• Complement the standards and highlight progress students are making toward annual goals as measured at various points during the school year.</li> <li>• Utilized in the development of supports for students who are not making progress or to plan for re-teaching or acceleration of specific standards with groups of students.</li> <li>• Exposure to samples of state-test questions and the state-test platform or environment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interim and benchmark assessments, teacher-made tests, and school-made common assessments.</li> <li>• Informal formative assessments (i.e., bell ringers, exit tickets, item analysis from benchmark tests, rubrics, oral response, anecdotal observations, etc.)</li> </ul>
Summative Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measure student learning at the end of the semester/year in relation to the grade level expectations.</li> <li>• Provide district and school leaders, teachers, parents, and students specific information about student learning to improve the education of all students.</li> <li>• Provide feedback to all stakeholders who invest in Tennessee students to ensure that funds are being used well and that we are setting our students on a pathway to success.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State-level assessments.</li> <li>• End of unit and/or module culminating tasks.</li> </ul>

**Figure 1.** Assessment types and descriptions

Additional data may also be used to inform important changes to teachers’ instructional strategies for students who may need more support and greater scaffolding of instruction in Tier I. These data may include:

Data Source	Description	Examples may include
Universal Screeners	Brief, informative tools used to measure academic skills (i.e., basic reading skills, reading fluency, reading comprehension, math calculation, math problem solving, and written expression)	See <a href="#">Universal Screening</a> .
Survey Level Assessment	This is a process of determining the most basic skill area deficit and which skill/instructional level a student has mastered. It is effective in determining appropriate, realistic goals for a student and helps identify the specific deficit to determine an accurate rate of improvement and growth.	Phonological Awareness Skills Screener (PASS), Phonics and Word Reading Survey (PWRS), Developmental Spelling Inventories
Progress Monitoring	Progress monitoring is used to assess student's academic performance, to quantify a student's rate of improvement or responsiveness to instruction/ intervention and to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction/intervention.	See <a href="#">Progress Monitoring</a> .
Diagnostic Assessment	This assessment allows teachers to determine a student's current understanding of the grade level subject area content in relation to the expected mastery of the grade level subject area content.	Placement tests, teacher-made tests, text book-based assessments, benchmark assessments, common assessments, etc.
Teacher Observations	Teacher observations and notes can provide contextual information useful for making decisions about students. Informal observation ("kid watching") of students working alone, in groups, or during whole-group instruction can give valuable information about students' progress, understanding, strengths and challenges, cooperation, study habits, and attitude.	Anecdotal notes, interest surveys, patterns in student responses, etc.
Student Records Review	These data can include grades, attendance, and behavioral patterns, and they can provide important supplementary information about student learning and individual needs.	Grades, attendance, behavioral patterns, etc.

**Figure 2.** Potential data sources

## ***Universal Screening***

The universal screening process is a form of ongoing assessment and is a major component of the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework informing data-based decision making. Districts should establish a universal screening process that best meets the needs of their students and should conduct screening for reading, written expression, and mathematics. The district-selected universal screener must be a skills-based, nationally normed screener which produces a composite score as this is the most appropriate, defensible tool for identifying a student's skill-deficit.

The 2016 Dyslexia Law, [Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-229](#), requires districts to implement a screening process for identifying students displaying characteristics of dyslexia. Districts with an appropriate, effective universal screening process in place will be able to use the information they collect to make important determinations about dyslexia-specific support and interventions. Additionally, the administration of a universal reading screener meets the Tennessee Literacy Success Act (TLSA) requirement that all students in kindergarten through grade 3 participate in a universal reading screening process to identify those who may need additional support and/or other types of instruction.

- 1. In grades K-8**, districts should administer a nationally normed, skills-based universal screener as part of the universal screening process. For additional information related to K-3 universal reading screener guidelines, please reference the K-3 TN Universal Reading Screener Administration Guidelines.

**In grades 9-12**, schools should collect multiple sources of data that can be incorporated into an early warning system (EWS). The EWS may include data from universal screeners, achievement tests (from both high school and grades K-8), End-of-Course (EOC) exams, student records (e.g., grades, behavioral patterns, attendance, retention, and past RTI<sup>2</sup> interventions), Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) student score projections, and the ACT/SAT exam or other nationally normed assessments. The EWS should include an attendance indicator, a behavior indicator (discipline history, et cetera), and an academic competency indicator. Other factors included in an EWS are for the district to decide. See [RTI<sup>2</sup> Resources: Educator](#) for EWS guidance.

- 2. In grades K-12**, school teams should use and analyze the results of the skills-based universal screener or EWS compared to other classroom-based assessments. These may include but are not limited to standards-based assessments, grades, formative assessments, summative assessments, classroom performance, teacher observations, etc. This information should be used to confirm or challenge a student's performance on the skills-based universal screener.

**In grades K-12**, students identified as "at-risk" should be administered survey level and/or diagnostic assessments to determine student intervention needs. For reading, these survey-level assessments must explicitly measure characteristics of dyslexia to include phonological and phonemic awareness, sound symbol recognition, alphabet knowledge, decoding skills, rapid naming,

and encoding skills as required by [Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-229](#). See [RTI<sup>2</sup> Resources](#) and the [Dyslexia Advisory Council](#) webpage for resources providing additional information on these requirements.

## ***Administration of Universal Screening***

The universal reading screener (URS) for all grades must be administered following established guidelines; however, the administration of the universal reading screener for grades K-3 must meet the guidelines specified in the TN Universal Reading Screener Administration Guidelines. The guidance for administering the K-3 URS includes the following information:

- How to secure the fidelity of the administration and implementation of the screener along with who can administer the universal reading screener
- How to ensure accurate data collection as well as required data reporting
- Testing windows
- Probe and assessment alignment (See [K-3 Minimum URS Matrix](#)).

For other required universal screening (e.g., written expression, mathematics calculation, mathematics problem solving), districts and/or schools should consider how the universal screener assessments will be administered and who will administer them, how the data will be recorded, and an appropriate schedule for completing all screenings within the allotted testing window.

## ***Universal Screening Tools***

### **Reading**

The Department and the Tennessee State Board of Education (SBE) have approved seven universal reading screeners for kindergarten through grade 3. The Tennessee Universal Reading Screener (TN-URS) is provided by NCS Pearson, Inc. through AimswebPlus, and is available to all districts free of charge for students in kindergarten through grade 3. Per the Tennessee Literacy Success Act, all districts serving kindergarten through grade 3 must select a universal reading screener from the approved options. For the list of SBE approved URS and more information, please see the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener Administration Guidelines and the [K-3 Minimum URS Matrix](#). The selection of a universal reading screener for grades 4-12 is left to district discretion; however, the universal screening tool must meet the established criteria for selection.

### **Mathematics**

The selection of universal screeners for mathematics for all grades is left to the discretion of each district. However, districts must select a nationally normed, skills-based screener that effectively identifies skills deficits necessary for selection of targeted interventions.

## Written Expression

The selection of a universal screener for written expression for all grades is also left to district discretion. This screener could be a nationally normed, skills-based universal screener, or the screener for written expression could be a rubric designed for use with an authentic writing task to determine student need for written expression intervention.

The charts below reflect Universal Screening Administration:

Grade Level	Content Area	Universal Screening Tool	Times of Administration
Grades K-3	Reading	One of seven board approved screeners	Three times a year (fall, winter, spring)
Grades 4-6	Reading	District choice based on established criteria	Three times a year (fall, winter, spring)
Grades 7-8	Reading	District choice based on established criteria	Annually or three times a year for students determined "at risk"
Grades 9-12	Reading	Early Warning System (EWS)	Annually or three times a year for students determined "at risk"

**Figure 3.** Universal reading screening tools and administration guidance.

Grade Level	Content Area	Universal Screening Tool	Times of Administration
Grades K-3	Mathematics	District choice based on established criteria	Three times a year (fall, winter, spring)
	Written Expression		
Grades 4-6	Mathematics	District choice based on established criteria	Three times a year (fall, winter, spring)
	Written Expression		
Grades 7-8	Mathematics	District choice based on established criteria	Annually or three times a year for students determined "at risk"
	Written Expression		
Grades 9-12	Mathematics	Early Warning System (EWS)	Annually or three times a year for students determined "at risk"
	Written Expression		

**Figure 4.** Mathematics and written expression universal screening tools and administration guidance

The [Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement Act](#) (TISA) and [Chapter 0520-12-05](#) of the Rules of the Department of Education utilize the universal reading screening process in kindergarten through grade 12 as the tool for identifying students with the unique learning need of characteristics of dyslexia who will

receive a specific type of student intervention plan (SIP) called an Individualized Learning Plan for Characteristics of Dyslexia (ILP-D). Students in kindergarten through grade 6 should be screened three times a year. By grade 7, student performance is relatively stable from one benchmark period to the next; therefore, for grades 7 through 12, districts may choose to adopt an annual administration of the universal screener at the beginning of each school year to inform intervention decisions as well as identify students who meet criteria for an ILP-D. However, for students determined to be “at risk” districts should administer universal screening three times a year. Additionally, if districts have a large number of students who are struggling to meet grade level expectations, they should continue screening three times per year.

## ***Progress Monitoring***

Once a student is receiving intervention for a specific area of need, progress monitoring must be utilized to assess the student’s academic performance, to quantify the student’s rate of improvement or responsiveness to instruction, and to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Progress monitoring can be implemented with individual students or an entire class. **Progress monitoring must be completed according to the area of deficit using an instrument that is sensitive to change.**

While the universal screening tool measures student performance on grade level, progress monitoring must be conducted with measures that are at a student’s skill/instructional level. The skill/instructional level at which a student will be progress monitored can be determined through a survey-level assessment. A survey-level assessment is a process of determining the most basic skill area deficit and which skill/instructional level a student has mastered. It is effective in determining appropriate, realistic goals for a student and helps identify the specific deficit to determine an accurate rate of improvement and growth. Progress monitoring should take place at a frequency of at least every other week.

While it is important to understand how a student is progress toward mastery of deficits, it is equally important to understand a student’s progress toward meeting grade level expectations. Therefore, a student should also be progress monitored at grade level to monitor the student’s progress toward grade level expectations. Progress monitoring on grade level must occur at least once a month in addition to instructional level progress monitoring.

When used with other data sources, progress monitoring allows educators to determine if the response to instruction and intervention is effectively being met for the individual student. Progress monitoring probes should be measures of grade, age, and instructionally appropriate skills and/or standards. Probes should be brief, valid, and reliable. The time allotted for assessment should not greatly impact instruction.

Results of progress monitoring probes should be recorded and regularly reviewed in comparison to a student’s previous performance and progress toward his/her goal. (See example [Data Collection Tool](#)). This data should be used as part of data-based decisions surrounding a student’s plan for intervention.

Progress monitoring tools may include curriculum-based measurement (CBM) probes, assessments from intervention materials/kits, and/or computer-based assessments.

Any progress monitoring tool must: report according to national percentiles; allow for repeated measures; be sensitive to change; specify areas of deficit (including basic reading skill(s), reading fluency, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, mathematics problem solving and written expression); and report results so that rate of improvement (ROI) can be calculated and transferred to graph form.

### ***Fidelity of Instruction***

Fidelity of instruction refers to providing instruction with integrity, aligning with instructional goals for student learning, and attending to the critical features of instructional best practices designed to meet those goals. To address the diverse range of students' strengths and needs, schools need a comprehensive approach to instruction that reflects the fidelity of standards-based instruction, the use of data-driven goals, and research-based best practices. Fidelity in implementation of instructional practices or programs does not inhibit responsive instruction, ongoing decision making, or instructional scaffolding or enrichment. Some forms of fidelity monitoring may include but are not limited to walk through observations such as [Instructional Practice Guide \(IPG\)](#) walkthroughs for ELA and math, review of lesson plans, curriculum maps, and/or the review student academic data, work, and outcomes for student proficiency.

### ***Fidelity Monitoring***

Fidelity monitoring is the systematic monitoring by a responsible instructional leader (i.e., principal, assistant principal, district supervisor, curriculum coordinator, other school-based leads) to determine the extent to which the delivery of instruction adheres to the expectations and goals set for student learning.

**All students should receive high-quality, scaffolded instruction from the general education teacher during Tier I.** If the majority of students is not meeting grade-level standards, the Tier I curriculum, as well as the delivery of instruction, should be evaluated and adjustments should be made.

**In Tier II and Tier III, fidelity is additionally measured by the accuracy or extent to which the instructional methods and materials are used to provide instruction.** The goal of fidelity monitoring is to ensure that the intervention is being implemented with integrity and to the specifications of the intervention methodology or program being utilized. LEAs must have a process for monitoring fidelity. This process must include a description of who is responsible for fidelity monitoring and how often fidelity in Tier II and Tier III interventions will be monitored. The purpose of monitoring fidelity is to provide ongoing information about the effectiveness of the provided intervention.

Fidelity monitoring should be conducted by school administrators, instructional coaches, or other qualified personnel as determined by the LEA.

**Tier II and Tier III Fidelity Check Guidance**

Guidance for Fidelity Checks	
Direct Fidelity Check	Indirect Fidelity Check
Tier II and Tier III	
1 Direct (Semester)	2 Indirect (Quarterly)
<p><b>Options for Direct Checks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walk through observation</li> <li>• Short observations (partial intervention session)</li> <li>• Full observation</li> </ul> <p>Direct observations may vary in length depending on the intensity of the observation needed.</p>	<p><b>Options for Indirect Checks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of intervention lesson plans</li> <li>• Review of progress monitoring data</li> <li>• Review of schedule</li> <li>• Review of attendance (including reasons for absence)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Documentation:</b></p> <p>Fidelity checks can be done for an entire group at the same time; however, the information they provide should be looked at from the student level because the team will be making decisions about each student's needs.</p>	<p><b>Documentation:</b></p> <p>The data team should conduct reviews of student data. When analyzing one student's progress, the team should consider the group and/or student rate of improvement.</p>
<p><b>Example personnel to include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principals, administrators, or other appointed designees</li> <li>• Instructional coaches: literacy/numeracy coaches</li> <li>• School psychologists</li> <li>• Special education teachers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Example personnel to include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data team (as a regular component of data team meetings)</li> </ul>

**Figure 5.** Guidance for fidelity checks

If students are not making progress in an intervention, it may be necessary to conduct additional fidelity checks to support instructional adjustments to ensure progress for all students.

**Interventions must be implemented with integrity.** If the intervention is not implemented with integrity of at least 80% or greater, the interventionist should be supported with training until integrity reaches 80%.

# Data-Based Decision Making

Data-based decision making is the ongoing process of collecting and analyzing a variety of appropriate data gathered through ongoing assessment to inform and drive instructional decisions. It also determines the need for interventions, re-teaching, and enrichment. The school team should have a process in place for analyzing student performance according to data to determine the most appropriate instructional pathway for each student. The process should be utilized for instructional decision making for all students. Multiple sources of data should be used to identify individual student strengths and areas of need and provide school teams with accurate information for making informed decisions about skills-specific interventions, re-teaching, and enrichment for each child.

Teachers should be knowledgeable about student performance and show evidence of setting goals for each child that are based on grade-level benchmarks or expectations, show how students are progressing toward these goals, and use the data from ongoing assessment to make instructional decisions. The school team should have plans in place, based on data analysis, for students who are making adequate progress and for students who are not making adequate progress.

All data, including data derived from the universal screening process, should be considered when making instructional decisions for students. If a student is not making adequate progress in Tier I, another data-based decision could include administering additional assessments that could determine if additional support through Tier II or Tier III intervention is necessary. A variety of data sources, including assessments and teacher observations, should be used when determining intervention needs. See [Assessment](#).

The universal screening process is used to identify students who may be considered "at-risk" which includes those students who have a significant reading deficiency as measured by a score at or below the 15th percentile. See [SBE Rule 0520-01-03-.15](#). Educators should look at a student's performance as compared to national norms on a skills-based screener and corroborate that performance with additional sources of information to determine how best to support those students considered "at risk" in addition to Tier I instruction. Students who exceed grade-level expectations may be considered "advanced." Students who are considered "advanced" should receive appropriate enrichment in addition to Tier I instruction.

If a school has a large number of students falling below or above national norms, a school data team may use "relative norms" instead of national norms to guide the identification of at-risk students. Relative norms compare a student's performance to other students in his/her school. If a school has a high population of struggling or high achieving students, relative norms allow a school data team to determine which students have the greatest need for intervention. If a school or district determines the need to use relative norms due to high numbers of struggling students, an actionable plan should be developed to address any instructional implications. LEAs should continue to use national comparisons for overall program evaluation to determine whether Tier I instructional practices are successful in improving student performance.

## ***Tier I Instruction***

All data, including data derived from the universal screening process, should be considered when making instructional decisions for students in Tier I core instruction. Each type of data serves a purpose and provides useful information regarding students' strengths and weaknesses. No single source of data should override or supersede another. When deciding which assessment to give, the teacher should first determine what it is he/she wants to know.

Educators should take the evidence collected from multiple forms of assessment and analyze the data for patterns, areas of need, and proof of mastery of content. From this analysis, educators will be able to create curriculum access points using high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) to ensure all students in their Tier I classroom are progressing toward mastery of the Tennessee Academic Standards and are supported individually along the way. Planning decisions may include:

- creating or updating small groups,
- providing scaffolded instruction based on student need,
- deciding on approaches for the delivery of new content or student practice, or
- updating the instructional scope and sequence based on student mastery or the decision to reteach.

Systems for data-based decisions pinpoint areas of strength and opportunities for growth for each learner within Tier I. In addition, a data-based assessment process allows educators to identify if a student is showing characteristics of learning difficulties that might require targeted or intensive supports in addition to Tier I instruction.

## ***Tier II and Tier III Intervention***

For students receiving Tier II or Tier III intervention, data from progress monitoring must be utilized to make instructional decisions for intervention. Expected growth can be determined by using measures provided by or created through the progress-monitoring instrument and should be related to each specific area of need.

Teachers must show how students are progressing toward these goals using a Rate of Improvement (ROI) to determine adequate progress. A student's ROI on progress monitoring is the number of units of measure (e.g., words read correctly, correct responses, correct digits) a child has added per week since the beginning of the intervention. To discover this rate, teachers should divide the total number of units gained by the number of weeks that have elapsed. The ROI of the student is compared to the ROI of a typical peer and is *one* of the factors considered in determining whether a student has made adequate progress. Teams should consider multiple pieces of data including teacher and parent input, classroom assessments and work samples, and other benchmark assessments when determining if a student has not responded to researched-based interventions. If a team believes a student has not made adequate progress and suspects a disability, the team should refer the student for an initial evaluation for special education.

School RTI<sup>2</sup> teams **will meet quarterly at minimum** to analyze data, measure the effectiveness of interventions, and check student progress toward goals. However, should an interventionist or other member of the data team believe a meeting is required sooner based on student performance data, a meeting should be called. A plan must be in place for responding to when students are and are not making adequate progress within Tier II or Tier III. If students are not making adequate progress in Tier II or Tier III, the team should consider making a change. Changes may include:

- increasing frequency of intervention sessions,
- changing interventions,
- changing intervention provider,
- changing time of day intervention is delivered, or
- referring for special education evaluation.

All available data should be considered when making a data-based decision to determine next steps, including transitioning the student to a different intervention tier or making a referral for a special education evaluation. The team should consider any available progress monitoring data points, but a certain number of data points are not required prior to recommending a change. **There is nothing preventing a school team from referring a student in any tiered intervention for a special education evaluation at any time.**

Teams are encouraged to utilize a problem-solving approach when considering student data, instruction, and pathways of intervention to further support student learning. The following model illustrates the cyclical nature of data-based decision-making and is considered best practice for analyzing student performance and response to learning.

**Figure 6**

Illustration of the cyclical nature of data-based decision-making



# Implementation of Instruction and Intervention

The RTI<sup>2</sup> framework is a model that promotes practices for an integrated system connecting general education, special education, and other student services through high-quality, scientifically research-based instruction and intervention within a tiered system of supports. Specifically, the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework is a three-tier model that provides a continuum of supports through an ongoing process of instruction and interventions that allows students to make progress at all levels.

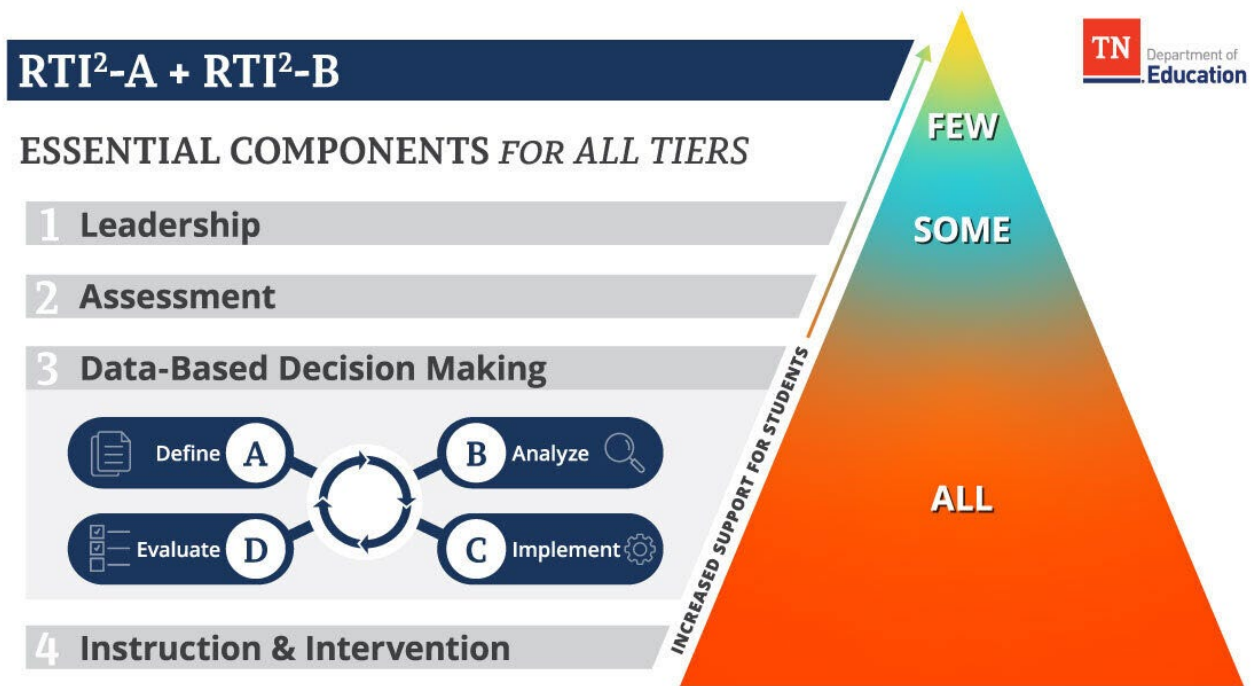
The three tiers of RTI<sup>2</sup> work together **to support a student's access to and acquisition of grade-level skills, content, and standards**. This design encourages a systematic approach to instruction and intervention that creates educational coherence within all aspects of the student's instructional experience. Students who experience greater levels of cohesion within their academic program are more likely to find greater success in achieving grade-level expectations as well as in experiencing a greater sense of connection and purpose behind the instruction delivered within the school day.

**Additionally, current understanding surrounding student learning suggests that a remediation-only approach to intervention is not likely to lead students to grade-level success. Instead, research suggests that an accelerated learning model best works to provide immediate instruction for missing skill sets or content knowledge while anchoring the intervention in grade-level instruction (NIET, 2023).** This methodology gives students the opportunity to build and apply knowledge in a grade-level setting rather than anchor the learning in instruction that is below the grade-level expectation. Thus, all instruction and intervention should provide students opportunities for grade-level application embedded in the instruction and practice.

The RTI<sup>2</sup> model shows the *ideal* framework of the continuum of support of the three tiers in an RTI<sup>2</sup> system:

**Figure 7**

Illustrative model of the ideal RTI<sup>2</sup> framework



A student may be considered for increased tiered interventions based on his/her performance on universal screeners and/or academic progress as reported by the classroom teacher. This referral should be based on multiple data from a variety of assessments. The school level RTI<sup>2</sup> support team will determine which students will be placed in Tier II or Tier III. See [Data-Based Decision Making](#).

A student who is receiving special education services should not be excluded from tiered interventions if their data indicates a need. For example, a student with Other Health Impairment (OHI) may receive special education services for his/her disability; however, he/she may also receive tiered interventions in reading, math, or written expression. In this case, both special education services and tiered interventions would be provided. **School-based data teams working with IEP teams should decide the most appropriate placement for that student's individual service needs, which could include tiered intervention support within the general education RTI<sup>2</sup> framework, in addition to other special education services.**

## ***RTI<sup>2</sup> and Child Find***

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as reauthorized in 2004, requires states to use a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention for determining whether the child has a specific learning disability. See [34 C.F.R. § 300.307](#). IDEA also requires that an evaluation include a variety of assessment tools and strategies and cannot rely on any single procedure as the sole criterion for determining eligibility. See [34 C.F.R. § 300.304](#).

RTI<sup>2</sup> is used as a component of the process to determine whether a child has a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) in basic reading skills, reading comprehension, reading fluency, mathematics calculation, mathematics problem solving, or written expression for students in grades K-12. Other areas of deficit, including listening comprehension and oral language, may fall under speech and language impairment or specific learning disability, depending on the student's learning profile.

A student suspected of having a specific learning disability must be referred for an initial evaluation for special education. A referral for special education evaluation may happen at any time, regardless of the student's current tier of intervention, number of current data points, or the number of weeks a student has received interventions.

## ***RTI<sup>2</sup> and English Learners***

A student who is receiving English as a Second Language (ESL) services should not be excluded from tiered interventions. As stated in the guiding principles, RTI<sup>2</sup> is a process focused on prevention and early intervention and designed to ensure success for all students, including English learners (ELs). LEAs should administer a universal screener to ELs. Universal screeners should be culturally sensitive and free of bias, and thoughtful consideration must be made for how ELs will participate in tiered interventions. An ESL teacher should be a participating member of the school-level RTI<sup>2</sup> data team if an EL is being discussed. See the [Individualized Learning Plan \(ILP\) Instructional Decision-Making Guide K - 12](#).

## ***RTI<sup>2</sup> and Characteristics of Dyslexia***

State laws guide the intervention for students who display characteristics of dyslexia. These laws and their implications are outlined below. Additional information regarding services for students who display characteristics of dyslexia, including dyslexia specific interventions can be found in the [Dyslexia Resource Guide](#).

### **Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-229**

#### ***Overview***

[T.C.A. § 49-1-229](#) requires LEAs to implement procedures for identifying characteristics of dyslexia through the universal screening process required by the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework. The dyslexia screening procedures must

include phonological and phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, sound symbol recognition, decoding skills, rapid automatized naming, and encoding skills.

If a dyslexia screener indicates that a child has characteristics of dyslexia, then the LEA must:

- Notify the student's parent or legal guardian.
- Provide the student's parent or legal guardian with information and resource material regarding dyslexia.
- Provide the student with appropriate tiered dyslexia-specific intervention through its RTI<sup>2</sup> framework.
- Monitor the student's progress using a tool designed to measure the effectiveness of the intervention.

The LEA must also convene a school-based problem-solving team to analyze screening and progress monitoring data to assist teachers in planning and implementing appropriate instruction and evidence-based interventions for all students, including those students who exhibit characteristics of dyslexia.

### **Tennessee Literacy Success Act (TLSA)**

#### ***Overview***

The goal of TLSA to improve Tennessee literacy is rooted in appropriate screening, early identification, high-quality instruction, targeted intervention, and aligned assessments of student progress, performance, and achievement. The TLSA mandates practices for kindergarten through grade 3, including universal reading screener tools and data reporting. See [Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-905](#).

TLSA supports the screening and identification of students at risk for a significant reading deficiency and for students who have a significant reading deficiency. [SBE Rule 0520-01-03-.15](#) defines a "significant reading deficiency" as a student who scores at or below the 15th percentile on one of the state-board approved universal reading screeners. For grades 4 and 5, a student would be determined to have a significant reading deficiency if the student scores below proficient on the most recently administered English Language Arts (ELA) TCAP assessment. "At risk for significant reading deficiency" is defined as a student scoring between the 16th and the 40th percentiles on one of the state-board approved universal reading screeners.

To ensure the literacy development and reading success of Tennessee students, TLSA requires all LEAs to implement foundational literacy instruction in K -3 utilizing high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) for all learners. In addition, the law requires that all students identified as having a significant reading deficiency (at or below the 15th percentile on the URS composite score) receive targeted interventions through the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework.

Immediately upon determining that a student in kindergarten through grade 3 has a significant reading deficiency, based on the results of the universal reading screener most recently administered to the

student, the LEA or public charter school shall notify the student's parent in writing that the student has been identified to have a significant reading deficiency, and shall provide the student's parent with:

- Information about the importance of a student being able to read proficiently at the end of the third grade level;
- Reading intervention activities that the parent may use with the parent's student at home to improve reading proficiency;
- Information about the specific reading interventions and supports that the LEA or public charter school recommends for the student, which may include the interventions provided by the LEA or public charter school pursuant to Tennessee's RTI<sup>2</sup> framework manual; and
- Information about pathways for promotion under [T.C.A. § 49-6-3115\(a\)\(1\)](#) for students in grade three (3) with an achievement level of “approaching” or “below” on the ELA portion of the student's most recent TCAP test.

If a student still flags for risk on dyslexia screeners or drill-down assessments and/or meets criteria for a significant reading deficiency or risk for a significant reading deficiency, LEAs must comply with [T.C.A. § 49-1-229](#) and TLSA to place and serve students within the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework. Districts should still make data-based decisions using multiple sources of data to place students appropriately and to meet individual student literacy needs. Any requirements regarding parent notification, progress monitoring, and interventions remain in place.

### ***Tier I Instruction (Core Instruction)***

**Tier I instruction, also known as core instruction, provides rich learning opportunities for all students that are aligned to the Tennessee Academic Standards and are responsive to student strengths and needs through classroom supports utilizing HQIM and other instructional scaffolds and access considerations.** The entire range of learners, including students who are identified with disabilities, students who are identified as gifted, and English Learners, are included and actively participate in Tier I instruction. Supporting the needs of all learners, based on multiple sources of data, is a hallmark of Tier I.

Strategic and intensive tiered interventions occur in addition to core instruction. Tier I provides a scaffolded model of grade-level rigor aligned to the standards; while Tier II and Tier III interventions target and narrow learning gaps, making Tier I instruction increasingly accessible to all learners.

Tier I instruction should address all students' strengths and instructional needs and prevent difficulties from developing. It should focus on developing both skills-based and knowledge-based competencies and should align with grade-level standards for English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, as well as other content areas. Effective instruction should include contextual problems paired with authentic and complex texts that support critical thinking, problem solving, and knowledge building.

Tier I instruction should be scaffolded and responsive to students' growth. Educators should proactively identify student needs through multiple sources of data and use this information to plan for meeting a variety of student needs. Classroom-level supports designed to meet the needs of all learners should be the primary response to supporting students during Tier I instruction.

To support effective instruction, teachers should be provided with high quality instructional materials (HQIM), tools and training that include attention to:

- core reading and mathematics materials and instructional methods that are supported by evidence and research and are aligned to grade-level Tennessee Academic Standards;
- the universal screening process;
- formative assessment data to determine instructional needs; and
- ongoing, embedded support and professional learning.

Educators should also look to the TEAM rubric for descriptions of effective instructional practices that support student learning.

### ***Implementing Tier I Instruction***

1. Teacher has knowledge and deep understanding of Tennessee State Standards as they apply to grade level.
2. Teacher has selected HQIM in accordance with standards and grade-level expectations.
3. Teacher provides instruction based on an assumption of students' mastery of previously taught content, skills, and standards. (Don't go back to go forward.)
4. Teacher assesses student progress toward mastery of content/standards and responds accordingly.
5. Teacher communicates student progress toward mastery of grade level standards with home via progress reports and report cards.

### ***Tier I Intervention***

#### **1. Flexible grouping**

Flexible grouping is a strategy for providing instruction that meets the needs of all learners. Flexible grouping allows students to work together in a variety of ways and in several arrangements. Groupings may be whole group, small group, partners, individual, teacher-led, or student-led, and depend on instructional activities, learning goals, and student strengths and needs. Flexible grouping accounts for the changing needs of students, as shown in assessment data.

Small group instruction is a method of instructional grouping where students are purposefully placed in small groups and receive targeted instruction related to a specific area of strength or need. Small group instruction is embedded in Tier I instruction and is determined by student progress toward mastery of grade level content or standards. By design, it provides immediate reinforcement or refinement in a student's progress toward mastery of grade-level instructional goals. Small groups are most effective when they are limited to six students or fewer. While small groups can be

used for review or skill-specific gap closure, they can also be used to extend learning for students who have already demonstrated strength in a particular area.

Students should be placed in small groups strategically, based on information gathered from a range of sources, including formal assessments, anecdotal observation, and student work. Groups may be homogenous, based on shared strengths or needs, or they may be heterogeneous, when a particular lesson objective is benefited by diverse abilities, ideas, or approaches to learning or problem solving.

**2. High-dosage, low-ratio tutoring**

High-dosage, low-ratio tutoring, provided through TN ALL Corps or a comparable district-developed program, is an additional learning opportunity designed to provide Tier I support through small-group tutoring sessions centered on learning acceleration via a variety of methods and strategies including reinforcing grade level content using HQIM as determined by Tennessee State Standards. This intensive, small setting experience delivered multiple times per week focuses “just in time” learning meant to bridge the student’s current knowledge to the grade level expectations. (See [TN ALL Corps](#)).

**3. Summer programming**

Summer programming is a learning opportunity that extends Tier I instruction for an additional four to six weeks for students in kindergarten through grade 8. Students participating in summer programming receive additional time to work on grade-level content and preview content for the upcoming year within small group settings with the goal of accelerating learning to ensure a student is on-grade level at the beginning of the year. (See [Learning Acceleration District Resources: Summer Programming](#)).

**Tier I Instructional Time Guidance**

**K-5 Guidance**

Tier I	Time	Description
Grades K-2 ELA	150 minutes daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes a minimum 45 minutes of foundational literacy skills instruction, should match district FLSP.</li> <li>Recommended 90 minutes of uninterrupted instructional time.</li> </ul>
Grades 3-5 ELA	120-150 minutes daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes a minimum 30 minutes of foundational literacy skills instruction, should match district FLSP.</li> <li>Recommended 90 minutes of uninterrupted instructional time.</li> </ul>
Grades K-1 Math	60 minutes daily	
Grade 2 Math	75 minutes daily	
Grades 3-5 Math	90 minutes daily	

**Figure 8.** Grades K-5 Tier I instructional time guidance

## 6-12 Guidance

Tier I	Traditional	Block
ELA	55 minutes daily	90 minutes daily
Mathematics	55 minutes daily	90 minutes daily
Science, Social Studies, Fine Arts, & Technical Education Classes	55 minutes daily	90 minutes daily

**Figure 9.** Grades 6-12 Tier I instructional time guidance

### ***Tier II and Tier III Intervention***

**Tier II and Tier III interventions should be systematic, research-based interventions that target the student's identified area of deficit: basic reading skill(s), reading fluency, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, mathematics problem solving, or written expression.**

There should be a clear description as to whether a problem-solving, standard protocol, or hybrid intervention is being used for each of the areas. **A problem-solving approach within an RTI<sup>2</sup> model is used to tailor an intervention to an individual student.** It typically has four stages: problem identification, analysis of problem, intervention planning and implementation, and evaluating the response to intervention. A standard protocol approach within an RTI<sup>2</sup> model relies on the same empirically validated intervention for all students with similar academic needs. Standard protocol interventions facilitate quality control. A hybrid approach within an RTI<sup>2</sup> model combines methods of problem-solving and standard protocol approaches.

Scientifically research-based interventions are interventions that produce reliable and valid results. When these interventions are used properly, adequate gains are expected. Scientifically based research involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to educational activities and programs and includes research that:

- employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
- involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;
- relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations and across studies by the same or different investigators;
- is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls;

- ensures that experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls;
- allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings; and
- has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review.

An effective tiered intervention is:

- implemented by highly qualified personnel who are trained to deliver the selected intervention as intended with fidelity to design;
- taught by qualified, certified teachers, whenever possible as research supports the most trained personnel working with the most at-risk students;
- implemented with fidelity and confirmed with measurement;
- progress monitored to ensure outcomes are being met; and
- limited in group size.

Tiered intervention should be immediately responsive to student need. The intervention may be developed following an appropriate methodology or may follow a prescribed program. Targeted and intensive intervention best serves students when developed according to the needs of the students in the intervention. **Computer-based and/or technology-assisted interventions can be used for a limited portion of the intervention time, but it should not replace the explicit instruction provided by qualified, certified teachers, whenever possible, who have been trained to provide the selected intervention.** The purpose of intervention is to meet the student instructional need and provide the student better access to Tier I instruction; however, a small number of students may require more intensive intervention.

As previously noted, a student who is receiving special education services should not be excluded from tiered interventions if their data indicates a need. School-based data teams working with IEP teams should decide the most appropriate placement for that student's individual service needs, which could include tiered intervention support within the general education RTI<sup>2</sup> framework, in addition to other special education services.

**Tier II is in addition to the instruction provided in Tier I and should meet the needs of some students "at risk."** Students who are identified as having some risk for challenges with grade-level expectations on universal screening may need more targeted intervention in Tier II. The [Data-Based Decision Making framework](#) should be followed when determining which students should be considered for Tier II intervention. These students would require targeted skills-based instruction designed to address specific deficits. While initial instruction should be delivered at the student's instructional level, the application of knowledge should be anchored in grade-level content and expectations. **The implications of Tier II intervention are to support the student need and better equip the student for success in Tier I**

**instruction.** The work of Tier II should center on scaffolding academic content so students can access grade-level text and content while building necessary knowledge, along with “just in time support” for missing skills.

Students who exceed grade-level expectations may be considered “advanced.” These students may require additional enrichment opportunities. See [Data-Based Decision Making](#) for student selection guidance.

**Tier III is in addition to the instruction provided in Tier I and should meet the needs of students identified as “at risk” for the greatest challenges with Tier I instruction.** Tier III intervention differs from Tier II in intensity of intervention by increased length, frequency, or duration of implementation as well as by instructional design. Interventions will be developed based on the unique needs of students. Evidence-based Interventions that have been researched to have the greatest chance of addressing that area of need should be selected.

### ***Tiered Intervention Guidance***

1. School data team meets to review a variety of data, including universal screening data, to determine student intervention needs. See [Data-Based Decision Making](#).
  - a) Members determined by LEA
  - b) Meeting quarterly at minimum
  - c) Discussion of assessment data
    - i. Universal screening data
    - ii. Survey level assessment data
    - iii. Classroom assessment data
    - iv. Other relevant data
2. A student intervention plan (SIP) is created to outline the specific plan for intervention designed to respond to the student need. Some students identified for an intervention plan may be served through an Individual Learning Plan for students with characteristics of dyslexia (ILP-D) if requirements are met. See [Dyslexia Resource Guide](#) for additional guidance.

The SIP should include:

- a) Date of initial placement
- b) Tier placement
- c) Data to support placement
- d) Defined skill to target to meet grade-level expectations
- e) Intervention to be delivered (methodology or program)
- f) Progress monitoring information as determined by survey level assessment
  - i. Area of deficit
  - ii. Level of instruction
- g) Brief anecdotal notes regarding student progress
- h) Updated as needed or quarterly at minimum

3. Intervention provided in accordance with appropriate methodology or program in area of need which includes:
  - a) Explicit instruction for targeted area of skill-level deficit
  - b) Guided practice
  - c) Application in grade level context
  - d) Appropriate teacher to student ratio
4. Progress Monitoring (See [Progress Monitoring](#) for detailed information.)
  - a) Bi-weekly instructional level probes aligned to identified deficit(s)
  - b) Monthly grade level probes aligned to identified deficit(s)
  - c) Data is recorded and reviewed to determine student progress
  - d) Instruction is adjusted accordingly
5. Fidelity Monitoring
  - a) Intervention aligned to student need
  - b) Intervention adheres to methodology or program and student plan
  - c) Fidelity checks completed according to guidance
6. Attendance Record
  - a) Per student
  - b) Occurs each time intervention is delivered
7. Communication with Family
  - a) Occurs when a student enters or exits Tier II or Tier III intervention (letter)
  - b) Occurs in conjunction with Tier I progress reporting dates (i.e., progress reports, report cards) and indicates student progress toward goal
  - c) Occurs at conclusion of URS administration for identified students (i.e., Home Literacy Report)
8. Exit Criteria
  - a) Student meets goal for three consecutive grade-level progress monitoring probes OR
  - b) Student meets goal for two consecutive grade-level progress monitoring probes and most current universal screening administration OR
  - c)

In addition to meeting the exit criteria, the team should consider a plan for post-intervention success when students return exclusively to Tier I instruction.

Each student placed in tiered intervention should have the following documents completed in alignment with the guidance provided in this manual: an SIP/ILP-D as appropriate, parent letters, and fidelity checks.

***Ongoing documentation for students placed in tiered intervention is required to make data-based decisions. This documentation should be completed for each student and should include attendance records, anecdotal progress notes as appropriate, and progress monitoring data (instructional level and on grade level).***

## Tier II and Tier III Intervention Time Guidance in Grades K-8

When scheduling time for intervention, consideration should be given to developmental needs of the students. The following charts illustrate recommended intervention ratios and instructional times.

Tier II	Ratio	K-5	Ratio	K-5
Reading	1:5	30 minutes/daily	1:3	30 minutes/3x week
Mathematics	1:5	30 minutes/daily	1:3	30 minutes/3x week
Written Expression	1:5	30 minutes/daily	1:3	30 minutes/3x week
Tier II	Ratio	6-8 Traditional or Block	Ratio	6-8 Traditional or Block
Reading	1:6	30 minutes/daily	1:4	30 minutes/3x week
Mathematics	1:6	30 minutes/daily	1:4	30 minutes/3x week
Written Expression	1:6	30 minutes/daily	1:4	30 minutes/3x week

Figure 10. Grades K-8 Tier II intervention time guidance

Tier III	Ratio	K-5	Ratio	6-8 Traditional or Block
Reading	1:3	40-60 minutes/daily	1:4	45-60 minutes/daily
Mathematics	1:3	40-60 minutes/daily	1:4	45-60 minutes/daily
Written Expression	1:3	40-60 minutes/daily	1:4	45-60 minutes/daily

Figure 11. Grades K-8 Tier III intervention time guidance

## Tier II, Tier III, and Early Warning Systems in High School

High schools should collect multiple sources of data that can be incorporated into an early warning system (EWS). The data collected should include information on student attendance, academic performance, and behavior. This data should then be analyzed to determine students who are considered “at risk.” Students who flag for risk on the EWS should be considered for additional screeners, survey-level assessments, necessary classroom supports, and interventions as determined appropriate by the school-based decision-making team. See [Educator Support Tools: High School Early Warning Intervention Template Resources](#).

For some students in grades 9-12 considered “at risk,” intervention that provides “just in time” support and learning may be appropriate during a skinny block, if it is built into the daily schedule. Intervention provided following this model would be similar to high dosage, low ratio tutoring in that the intervention would work to specifically address standards-based knowledge gaps through specific and “as needed” instruction for the learning deficit. Additionally, this intervention would provide grade-level foundational support through pre-teaching or frontloading anticipated grade-level content allowing these students greater opportunities for Tier I classroom success.

The provision of Tier II and III intervention needs to be built into the high school master schedule to ensure students are not prevented from acquiring the needed credits for high school graduation. There are two common scheduling options used within high schools. One is a skinny, or short 30-minute class period, that occurs school-wide for intervention, enrichment, guidance, and other student support that is not credit-bearing. The skinny block is a perfect opportunity for the provision of Tier II intervention. Also, because the time is available school-wide, students move in and out of the intervention based on their current needs. However, it may not be possible to add a skinny block and/or it may not be sufficient intervention time. For these reasons, another common approach is to use the intervention course codes to provide intervention as an elective in the student schedule.

Tier II Course Codes	Tier III Course Codes	Special Education Intervention Course Codes
G01H24 Tier II English Language Arts Intervention	G01H19 Tier III English Language Arts Intervention	S25X27 Special Education Intervention (6-12)
G02H43 Tier II Mathematics Intervention	G02H22 Tier III Mathematics Intervention	

**Figure 12.** High school intervention course codes

The scheduling of students into intervention should be designed to support the student’s identified need, and as a result, a school may have many intervention sections, each focused to meet the needs of a group of students. The intervention courses are elective credits and may meet the elective focus requirement if three courses are completed. Also, a student may waive world language or fine art for an elective course, providing additional flexibility when scheduling Tier II or III (or special education) intervention.

As stated above, the Department offers high school course codes for Tier II and III intervention. Using progress monitoring data to make data-based decisions, students may repeat the intervention courses as needed. These data-based decisions should be made by the school RTI<sup>2</sup> data team. These courses will use research-based interventions and follow the guidelines for Tier II and III intervention. Much of the course should be direct intervention provided by any certified teacher; however, computer-based and/or technology-assisted interventions can be used a portion of the time. The intervention program should match the area of deficit and be delivered with high fidelity.

# Special Education Referral Procedures

**A special education referral for a student suspected of a specific learning disability may be initiated at any time.** RTI<sup>2</sup> may not be used to delay or deny an evaluation for special education. If a school district suspects that a student may have a disability that adversely affects the student's educational performance, the school district should refer the student for an initial evaluation and should not require the student to participate in all tiers of intervention, to participate in any tier of intervention for a pre-defined number of weeks, or to score below an assessment cutoff. Eligibility for special education and related services must be determined based on all data about the student available to the LEA and whether the student meets standards associated with a specific learning disability. The intervention must have empirical evidence supporting its use in addressing the area of suspected disability (i.e., basic reading skills), and the progress monitoring tool selected must be able to provide evidence that the student did not make progress in the area of suspected disability.

## ***Student Screening***

Students may be screened by a specialist (e.g., school psychologist or reading specialist) at any time within the tiers to provide instructional and/or program planning information. For example, the student's phonological processing or academic skills may be screened to provide additional information to inform instruction and/or intervention. All screenings will be conducted in accordance with the examiner's manual regarding standardization and examiner qualifications. Prior to a special education referral, this screening information may only be used to help identify the needs of the student and to assist with instructional program planning. See [34 C.F.R. § 300.302](#). Furthermore, this information will not be used to predetermine the student's ability or lack thereof to make progress.

**If a student fails to make adequate progress, the information obtained from any screenings completed during the intervention process may be used as part of the eligibility determination following informed written parental consent.** Screenings conducted for instructional programming may be necessary but are not sufficient to document underachievement in the event a special education referral is made.

If, within the RTI<sup>2</sup> process, the team suspects that a student may be evidencing a disability other than a Specific Learning Disability, then the referral process for that disability must be followed. For example, a kindergarten-age student who enters school with developmental delays as indicated by multiple sources of information would not necessarily need to go through intervention before being evaluated for a developmental delay. Similarly, a student who is suspected of having an intellectual disability may also be referred prior to the completion of the RTI<sup>2</sup> process. Any information collected through the screening/progress monitoring process will be vitally important when making these decisions but should

not be the only data that the LEA relies upon in determining whether the student should be referred for an initial evaluation. None of these procedures will conflict with the U.S. Department of Education memorandum to state special education directors from January 2011, which clarified that RTI<sup>2</sup> must not be used to delay or deny an evaluation for special education and related services. [U.S. Dept. of Education Memo to State Special Education Directors, \(Jan. 21, 2011\).](#)

## ***Progress Monitoring Requirements***

A student receiving tiered intervention for a specific area of skill deficit (i.e., basic reading skills, reading fluency, reading comprehension, written expression, mathematics calculation, mathematics problem solving) shall be progress monitored at least every two weeks to determine the student's rate of improvement in relation to the grade-level standards.

If interventions have been provided and a gap analysis indicates that a student's progress is not sufficient for making adequate growth with the current intervention, then the team may obtain consent to conduct an initial evaluation for special education and related services. The team must complete all evaluations and establish the student's eligibility for service within the initial evaluation timeline (i.e., 60 calendar days from the date of obtaining consent to conduct an initial evaluation). The student will remain in intervention and will continue to be monitored while the requested evaluations are being completed.

If a student is referred for a special education evaluation by his/her parents or guardian and is not currently in tiered intervention, the team will consider the request for evaluation. If the team does **not** suspect a disability, the team will refuse the initial evaluation by providing the parent or guardian a prior written notice (PWN) detailing the refusal and its justification along with a copy of the procedural safeguards.

If the team **does** suspect a disability, the team should obtain consent to conduct an initial evaluation for special education and related services, the student should be placed in tiered intervention as decided by the school-based team, and progress monitoring data will be collected as part of the evaluation process and within the 60-calendar day timeline. **The team should not reject a parent's request for an initial evaluation simply because the student has not participated in tiered intervention for a pre-defined amount of time.**

All data collected during the initial evaluation process, including the student's responsiveness to intervention, shall be reviewed to determine eligibility. School-based teams should not require a specific number of data points or weeks in any intervention prior to referring a student for an initial evaluation or recommending eligibility.

## ***Special Education Referral Information***

A referral to special education will include (at a minimum):

- **Parent input** to include any pertinent familial information, family/student medical history, etc.
- **Teacher input** to include an indirect observation, work samples, documentation of differentiated instruction, etc.
- **Documentation of the problem** to include classroom-based performance assessments, standardized testing results, direct observations, work sample analyses, and other relevant assessment data
- **A detailed description of the intervention process** to include interventions used, attendance, frequency of implementation, duration of implementation, and fidelity monitoring
- **Progress monitoring data** indicating a lack of responsiveness to intervention
- **Components of a special education evaluation/re-evaluation**

## ***Specific Learning Disabilities Eligibility Criteria***

The [Tennessee SBE Specific Learning Disability Evaluation and Eligibility Standard](#) states the following:

### **Specific Learning Disability**

#### **Definition**

The term *Specific Learning Disability (SLD)* means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken, or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, and that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Such terms include conditions such as perceptual disabilities (e.g., visual processing), brain injury that is not caused by an external physical force, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. SLD does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual impairment, hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, limited English proficiency, or environmental or cultural disadvantage.

#### **Evaluation**

##### *Evaluation Procedures*

A comprehensive evaluation will be performed by a multidisciplinary team using a variety of sources of information that are sensitive to cultural, linguistic, and environmental factors or sensory impairments to include the following:

1. To ensure that underachievement in a student suspected of having a SLD is not due to a lack of appropriate instruction (i.e., empirically research-based instruction that is rigorous, systematic, and

peer-reviewed) in the student's state-approved, grade-level standards. The following must be obtained:

- a. Data that demonstrate that prior to, or as a part of, the referral process, the student was provided appropriate instruction (i.e., empirically research-based instruction that is rigorous and systematic throughout all tiers of instruction/intervention) in regular education settings, delivered by qualified and appropriately trained personnel; and
  - b. Data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement, reflecting formative assessment of student progress during intervention, which was provided to the student's parents once every four and one-half (4.5) weeks.
2. The LEA must ensure that the child is observed in the student's learning environment (including the regular classroom setting) to document the student's academic performance and behavior in the areas of difficulty. The student's performance shall be documented by two systematic observations in the area of suspected disability (one must be conducted by the certifying specialist, and one may be conducted by the special education teacher):
- a. Systematic observation of routine classroom instruction; and
  - b. Systematic observation during intensive, scientific research-based or evidence-based intervention.

In the case of a student who is in a placement outside of the local education agency, a team member must observe the student in an environment appropriate for a student of that age.

3. The student does not achieve adequately for the student's age or to meet state-approved, grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the student's age or state-approved, grade-level standards:
- a. Basic reading skills
  - b. Reading fluency skills
  - c. Reading comprehension
  - d. Written expression
  - a. Mathematics calculation
  - b. Mathematics problem solving

An evaluation of oral expression and listening comprehension shall be completed pursuant to the speech or language impairment eligibility standards if an SLD is suspected in either area. If a student has been evaluated by a speech language pathologist and does not qualify as language impaired, then the IEP team may consider SLD in either oral expression or listening comprehension if either continues to be a suspected area of disability; however, the rigorous intervention and progress monitoring standards must be met.

In order to substantiate inadequate achievement, an individual, standardized, and norm-referenced measure of academic achievement must be administered after parent consent is obtained in the area of suspected disability (i.e., basic reading skills, reading fluency, reading comprehension,

written expression, mathematics calculation, and mathematics problem solving). Intervention, progress monitoring, and an initial evaluation can occur simultaneously.

4. The student does not make sufficient progress to meet age or state-approved grade-level standards in one or more areas (i.e., basic reading skills, reading fluency, reading comprehension, written expression, mathematics calculation, and mathematics problem solving) when using a process based on the student's responsiveness to scientific, research-based intervention in each area of suspected delay. A lack of sufficient progress will be established by examining the student's rate of improvement (ROI) including a gap analysis and will be based on the following criteria:
  - a. The ROI is less than that of his/her same-age peers
  - b. The ROI is the same as or greater than that of his/her same age peers but will not result in reaching the average range of achievement within a reasonable period of time.
5. The team must determine that underachievement is not primarily the result of Visual, Motor, or Hearing Disability, Intellectual Disability, Emotional Disturbance, Cultural Factors, Environmental or Economic Factors, Limited English Proficiency, or Excessive Absenteeism.

**A student whose characteristics meet the definition of a student having a SLD may be identified as a student eligible for special education services if:**

1. all of the aforementioned eligibility criteria are met; and
2. documentation, including observation and/or assessment of how the Specific Learning Disability adversely affects the child's educational performance in his/her learning environment and indicates the need for specialized instruction and related services (i.e., to include academic and/or nonacademic areas) that cannot be met through general education supports alone.

### ***Evaluation Participants***

**Evaluation participants must include the following:**

1. the parent or guardian;
2. the student's general education classroom teacher;
3. a licensed special education teacher;
4. a licensed School Psychologist; and
5. other professional personnel as indicated (i.e., speech-language pathologist or occupational therapist).

## Exclusionary/Rule-out Factors

Within the special education evaluation process, these factors must be ruled-out as the **primary** reason for the student's underachievement.

Exclusionary Factor	Source of Evidence
<b>Visual, Motor or Hearing Disability</b>	Sensory screening, medical records, observation.
<b>Intellectual Disability</b>	Classroom performance, academic skills, language development, adaptive functioning (if necessary), IQ (if necessary)
<b>Emotional Disturbance</b>	Classroom observation, student records, family history, medical information, emotional/behavioral screenings (if necessary)
<b>Cultural Factors</b>	Level of performance and rate of progress compared to students from same ethnicity with similar backgrounds.
<b>Environmental or Economic Factors</b>	Level of performance and rate of progress compared to students from similar economic backgrounds, situational factors that are student specific.
<b>Limited English Proficiency</b>	Measures of language acquisition and proficiency (i.e., BICs and CALPs), level of performance and rate of progress compared to other EL students with similar exposure to language and instruction.
<b>Excessive Absenteeism</b>	Attendance records, number of schools attended within a 3-year period, tardies, absent for 23% of instruction and/or intervention.

Figure 13. Exclusionary factors

## Eligibility Determination

An Eligibility Report and a Prior Written Notice indicating the student's eligibility determination must be completed.

## Non-Public Schools

IDEA requires that districts use a proportionate amount of IDEA Part B funding to provide equitable services to students in non-public school settings. See 34 C.F.R. § 300.133. To establish a student's need for these services, districts must engage in child find activities and respond to parental requests for evaluation.

In order to rule out lack of appropriate instruction, the district should engage in meaningful consultation with the non-public school regarding both the intervention and progress monitoring process. If universal screening and/or academic achievement information is not available, the LEA is encouraged to initiate the

referral/problem-solving process by creating a plan to gather this information in collaboration with the non-public school representatives.

During the evaluation timeline that begins with the receipt of informed written consent for evaluation, the LEA will collect data on the appropriateness of the student's current curriculum, the fidelity of instruction, and any interventions implemented prior to the request. If interventions are put into place and the student begins making significant progress, the LEA will meet with the parent and decide whether to request an extension of the evaluation timeline. This may be done using the formal extension process, which requires any extension of the timeframe to be amended by mutual written agreement between the student's parents and a group of qualified professionals. If the student makes minimal to no progress, the evaluation and eligibility determination must be completed within the evaluation timeframe.

### ***Parent Request for Evaluation***

If a parent or legal guardian requests an evaluation within the RTI<sup>2</sup> process, the team must complete the agreed upon components of the evaluation within the initial evaluation timeline as indicated by the LEA's receipt of informed parental consent unless the LEA does not suspect a disability and refuses the parents' request for an evaluation formally via a prior written notice.

If a parent requests an evaluation, the LEA will include for consideration all intervention and progress monitoring data available at the time of referral including any additional progress monitoring data that can be collected during the evaluation process. The student will continue to receive intervention in the specific area of deficit and will continue to be progress monitored. If the initial evaluation timeline expiration is approaching and the team has a written agreement with the parents/guardians to extend the timeline, the LEA can apply for a timeline extension request via the Department.

Additionally, should a parent or legal guardian present the school with "outside evaluation(s)" or "medical prescriptions" in which a recommendation has been made for a student to receive an IEP, the team should convene to consider those recommendations. However, the team's determination on how to address the needs of the student may or may not include a recommendation for evaluation, and if the team decides not to assess then the refusal to evaluate should be documented formally within a prior written notice.

The student may be eligible for services as a student with a SLD based only on the aforementioned eligibility standards. (See [Special Education and Eligibility](#)).

### ***Fidelity Monitoring (per Guidelines in Tier II and Tier III)***

The fidelity of implementation per intervention should be assessed by qualified personnel throughout the process. Ongoing fidelity documentation of intervention should include interventions used, evidence of implementation at 80% or greater, student attendance, progress monitoring results, and any other anecdotal information that might account for the student's progress or a lack thereof. If the intervention is not implemented with integrity, the interventionist should be supported with training until integrity reaches 80%. Fidelity monitoring should continue within special education interventions and follow the same recommended fidelity monitoring schedule as Tier III interventions.

# Conclusion

RTI<sup>2</sup> is a three-tiered process that provides a continuum of supports to all students in Tier I (core) instruction through additional scaffolded interventions based on demonstrated individual student need. The effective implementation of RTI<sup>2</sup> is driven by data-based decisions centered on a variety of assessments designed to best determine student performance and need in relation to grade level content and standards. As this model is responsive in nature, districts should continually monitor and adjust their practices to better meet the needs of all students. All students should benefit from the data-based decision-making process and all decisions should be made for the best interest of an individual student.

# Glossary

**Affect:** The emotional or psychological effect an environment has on a student; affect includes the tone or mood of the classroom and can be influenced by the physical setup of the classroom, classroom rules, routines and procedures, and interactions between teachers and peers.

**Basic reading skills:** Basic reading skills include the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds in language; to identify printed letters and their associated sounds; to decode written language.

**Benchmark:** A long-term assessment tool used to indicate student progress towards mastery of grade level expectations as part of ongoing classroom assessment. A benchmark is designed to measure progress in a specific grade level content area may assessment multiple state standards and/or skills and may reflect state assessment style questions.

**Certifying specialist:** An assessment professional that is involved in the evaluation of a student for the purpose of determining eligibility for special education services. Certifying specialists may include school psychologists, speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, etc.

**Characteristics of dyslexia:** As defined by TISA, a score below the 25th percentile on a state-approved universal reading screener (K-3) or a nationally normed universal reading screener (4-8) AND displayed deficits in 50% or more of grade-appropriate subtests as identified by the [K-3 URS Minimum Matrix](#). See [Dyslexia Resource Guide](#).

**Child find:** The ongoing, affirmative obligation of LEAs to locate, evaluate, and identify all students who are suspected of having a disability that reside within the geographical boundaries of the LEA. [See 34 C.F.R. § 300.111](#).

**Comprehension (reading):** The ability to understand and make meaning of text.

**Comprehensive evaluation:** Assessments that are completed for the purpose of determining eligibility for special education services. Components of the evaluation are chosen based on the referral and are specific to the [Tennessee SBE Evaluation & Eligibility Standards](#) for the suspected disability or disabilities.

**Conceptual understanding:** Understanding of ideas and the ability to transfer knowledge into new situations and apply it to new contexts.

**Core instruction (Tier I instruction):** Grade level instruction provided to all students in the regular education classroom. Core instruction often includes various instructional orientations to include whole class, flexible groups, collaborative, and individual opportunities for learning. Core instruction is targeted to meet the diverse needs of all learners. Materials and lesson used are based on current data and are designed to meet the needs of all students. The Tennessee Academic Standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics will be used for Tier I instruction.

**Curriculum based measurement (CBM):** A system for on-going monitoring of student progress through a specific curriculum. CBM assessments assess students' academic performance on a regular basis with very brief tests. Results are used to determine whether students are progressing appropriately from the core (Tier I) instructional program, and to build more effective programs for the students who do not benefit adequately from core (Tier I) instruction.

**Data-based decision making:** The process of using appropriate data to inform and drive instruction, movement within tiers, and disability identification.

**Diagnostic evaluation/assessment:** Standardized assessments designed to assess the extent to which students are on track to master grade level standards and to determine individual strengths and concerns of skills. Diagnostic assessments may also provide evidence of curricular strengths and needs in particular skill areas.

**Duration:** The length of time intervention is provided for a student as indicated by universal screening and progress monitoring assessment results.

**Dyslexia specific interventions:** Interventions that are explicit, systematic and cumulative, multi-sensory, language-based, and aligned to individual student need.

**Early intervention:** Specialized instruction specifically designed to target skill deficits and provide appropriate instruction to meet the needs of students. Intervention is provided early in order to prevent future learning disabilities or present academic performance deficits with the goal of maintaining grade-level or above grade-level performance.

**Early warning system (EWS):** A tool that allows school level teams to manage the wide variety of data that may indicate an impact on academics and/or other risk factors for high school students. An EWS may include data from universal screeners, achievement tests (from both high school and grades K-8), end of course (EOC) exams, student records (e.g., grades, behavioral incidents, attendance, retention, past RTI<sup>2</sup> interventions), the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), and the ACT/SAT exam or other **nationally normed** assessments. (A template can be found on the TDOE RTI<sup>2</sup> webpage under "Instructional Resources").

**English language arts (ELA):** Tennessee Academic Standards in English Language Arts that includes teaching, learning, and mastery of skills to appropriately build and possess the strong foundational skills of reading; read various types of texts to include literature, fictional, informational, and technical texts and media technology; write and speak for different purposes and to various audiences; and to have full command and use of appropriate language.

**English learner (EL):** "English Learner" or "EL" means a non-English language background (NELB) student who qualifies for English as a Second Language (ESL) services via a Department-approved English Language Proficiency screener.

**Enrichment:** Enrichment activities expand on students' learning in ways that may differ from the strategies used during Tier I instruction. They often are interactive and project- focused and enhance a student's education by bringing new concepts to light or by using old concepts in new ways to deepen students'

understanding.

**Evidence based intervention:** Interventions that have been tested and have demonstrated success with a particular group of students. This means that the research results are reliable and valid. As a result, the research shows there is reasonable evidence to indicate the program or strategies will result in academic gains when used appropriately.

**Explicit instruction:** Instruction that involves direct, face-to-face teaching that is highly structured, focused on specific learning outcomes, and based on a high level of student and teacher interaction. It involves explanation, demonstration, and practice with topics being taught in a logical order. Another characteristic of explicit teaching is modeling skills, thinking, and behaviors. This also involves the teacher thinking out loud when working through problems and demonstrating processes for students.

**Fidelity:** The extent to which the prescribed instruction or intervention plan is executed. Fidelity includes addressing the deficit area, using the type of intervention prescribed, maintaining an appropriate group size, length of session, etc.

**Fidelity of instruction:** Providing instruction with integrity, aligned with instructional goals for student learning and attending to the critical features of instructional best practices designed to meet those goals.

**Fidelity monitoring:** The systematic monitoring by a responsible instructional leader (i.e., principal, instructional coach) to determine the extent to which the delivery of instruction or an intervention adheres to the protocols or program models originally developed. Fidelity monitoring has increasing significance for evaluation and treatment effectiveness. The fidelity of implementation per intervention and instruction should be assessed throughout the process as per the guidelines in the manual.

**Flexible grouping/small groups:** A basic strategy for grouping students for the purpose of providing targeted instruction to meet the needs of student groups. Grouping provides the opportunity for students to work together in a variety of ways, and in a number of arrangements. Groupings may be whole class, small groups, individual, and partners, teacher-led or student-led and are commensurate to instructional activities, learning goals, and student needs. Flexible grouping provides the opportunity for student groups to change based on the changing needs of students, as indicated in universal screening and progressing monitoring assessments.

**Reading (fluency):** Reading fluency refers to the ability to read words accurately, quickly, and effortlessly with appropriate expression and intonation (prosody) while maintaining sufficient accuracy and rate to support comprehension. Reading fluency can also be the rate at which young students demonstrate and name their conceptual understanding of letter-sound correspondence, alphabetic knowledge, and reading nonsense words, sight words, sentences, and texts.

**Math (fluency):** Mathematical fluency is the ability to make sense of problems and/or patterns and structure and to proficiently calculate and accurately find appropriate solution paths to identify, solve, and find reasonable explanations. Mathematical fluency can also be the rate at which young students demonstrate and name their conceptual understanding of numerals, counting, naming numerals, and addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division facts.

**Formative assessment:** Quality instruction includes assessments during instruction to provide the

information needed to effectively direct and target teaching and learning as it occurs. Formative assessments enable the teacher to push instruction toward the targeted goals to ensure mastery of intended outcomes.

**Frequency:** The number, proportion, or percentage of items in a particular set of data.

**General education:** The program of education that students receive based on state standards that are evaluated by the annual state educational standards tests.

**Grade level content (expectations):** The Grade Level Content Expectations build from the Tennessee Academic Standards. Reflecting best practices and current research, they provide a set of clear and rigorous expectations for all students and provide teachers with clearly defined statements of what students should know and be able to do as they progress through school.

**High dosage, low ratio tutoring:** Intensive tutoring occurring two to three times a week for 30 to 45 minutes per session. Sessions are provided by a qualified tutor and designed to help all students accelerate their learning in an individualized manner. This tutoring is not remedial, but rather it focuses on scaffolding grade level academic content to allow students greater access to the material while simultaneously building student knowledge and skill base.

**Highly trained (qualified) personnel:** An educator adequately trained to deliver the selected instruction as intended, that is, with fidelity to design.

**Hybrid intervention:** A hybrid approach within an RTI model combines methods of problem-solving and a standard protocol approach.

**Integrity (implementation):** The extent to which core instruction and intervention materials are used as intended by the author/publisher. Implementation integrity also includes the prescribed amount of time and the frequency required for the treatment to yield its best results.

**Intense (intensive/intensity):** The measure of strength by which instruction or intervention is delivered. Intensive academic and/or behavioral interventions are characterized by their increased focus for students who fail to respond to less intensive forms of instruction. Intensity can be increased through many dimensions including length, frequency, and duration of implementation.

**Intervention:** Support at the school level for students performing below grade-level expectations. Educational professionals determine academic intervention needs of students (determined by ongoing data), determine methods for dealing with academic issues, and - most important - monitor on an ongoing basis whether these methods are resulting in increased student learning and achievement.

**Interventionist:** An educator trained to deliver a prescribed intervention with fidelity. This may include a general education teacher, special education teacher, trained teaching assistant, trained tutor, or intervention specialist.

**Knowledge-based competencies:** Literacy competencies related to comprehension and meaning making, including concepts about the word, the ability to understand and express complex ideas, and vocabulary. These competencies are constantly developing and require sustained instruction throughout grade levels.

**Learning acceleration:** A learning model in which “just in time” intervention or learning is coupled with grade level content and standards instruction to create a learning environment immediately responsive to student knowledge gaps and/or lack of understanding to provide students better access to core (Tier I) instruction.

**Local Educational Agency (LEA):** A public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a state for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a state, or for a combination of school districts or counties that is recognized in a state as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools.

**Math (Mathematics/Mathematical) calculation:** The knowledge and retrieval of facts and the application of procedural knowledge in calculation.

**Math (Mathematics/Mathematical) problem solving:** Involves using mathematical computation skills, language, reasoning, reading, and visual-spatial skills in solving problems; applying mathematical knowledge at the conceptual level.

**Multi-sensory:** Multi-sensory teaching and learning is simultaneously visual, auditory, and kinesthetic-tactile to enhance memory and learning. Links are consistently made between the visual (what we see) auditory (what we hear), and kinesthetic-tactile (what we feel) pathways in learning to read, spell, reason, count, and compute.

**Nationally normed:** The comparison of student performance to the performance of other students that took the same assessment in a national sample.

**Other Health Impairment (OHI):** Other Health Impairment means having limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia; and Tourette's Syndrome that adversely affects a child's educational performance. A child is "Other Health Impaired" who has chronic or acute health problems that require specially designed instruction due to: 1) impaired organizational or work skills; 2) inability to manage or complete tasks; 3) excessive health related absenteeism; or 4) medications that affect cognitive functioning.

**Phonemic awareness:** The ability to hear, think about, identify and manipulate the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.

**Phonics:** A systematic approach of teaching letters (and combinations of letters) and their corresponding speech sounds. Phonics begins with the alphabetic principle: language is comprised of words made up of letters that represent sounds.

**Phonological awareness:** A broad skill that includes identifying and manipulating units of oral language - parts such as words, syllables, and onsets and rimes. Children who have phonological awareness are able to identify and make oral rhymes, can clap out the number of syllables in a word, and can recognize words

with the same initial sounds like "money" and "mother." (Reference: Reading Rockets)

**Prevention:** The practice of providing additional assistance in any academic area to prevent students from falling behind.

**Probe:** When using Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM), a brief, timed assessment or "probes" made up of academic material taken from grade-level curriculum.

**Problem-solving approach:** Within RTI, a problem-solving approach is used to tailor an intervention to an individual student. It typically has four stages: problem identification, analysis of problem, intervention planning, and response to intervention evaluated (PAIR).

**Progress monitoring:** A process used to assess students' academic performance, to quantify a student rate of improvement or responsiveness to instruction, and to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Progress monitoring can be implemented with individual students or an entire class.

**Rate of improvement (ROI):** The expected rate of improvement on progress monitoring assessments is the number of units of measure (e.g., words read correctly [wrc], correct responses, correct digits) a child has made per week since the beginning of the intervention. To discover this rate, teachers should divide the total number of units gained by the number of weeks that have elapsed. The ROI is compared to the improvement of a typical peer to determine adequate progress.

**Reliable:** The consistency with which a tool classifies students from one administration to the next. A tool is considered reliable if it produces the same results when administering the test under different conditions, at different times, or using different forms of the test.

**Research-based instruction/intervention:** A research-based instructional practice or intervention is one found to be reliable, trustworthy, and valid based on evidence to suggest that when the program is used with a particular group of students, the student can be expected to make adequate gains in achievement. Ongoing documentation and analysis of student outcomes helps to define effective practice.

**Re-teaching:** Teaching content again to students who did not master it initially.

**Scaffold:** Scaffolding is an instructional technique in which the teacher breaks a complex task into smaller tasks, models the desired learning strategy or task, provides support as students learn the task, and then gradually shifts responsibility to the students. In this manner, a teacher enables students to accomplish as much of a task as possible without assistance.

**School psychologist:** School psychologists help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. They collaborate with educators, parents, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community for all students. School psychologists are highly trained in both psychology and education, completing a minimum of a specialist-level degree program. This training emphasizes preparation in mental health and educational interventions, child development, learning, behavior, motivation, curriculum and instruction, assessment, consultation, collaboration, school law, and systems. School psychologists must be certified and/or licensed by the state in which they work. For more information, go to [nasponline.org](http://nasponline.org).

**Scientifically-based research:** Scientifically-based research involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs and includes research that:

- employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
- involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;
- relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators;
- is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls;
- ensures that experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings; and
- has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review.

**Screening:** A quick checklist, survey or probe used to provide an initial general indicator of levels of performance. Screenings may also include diagnostic assessments to gain more information about a student's academic strengths and/or areas of concern.

**Skills-based universal screener:** A brief, informative tool used to measure academic skills in six general areas (i.e., basic reading skills, reading fluency, reading comprehension, math calculation, math problem solving, and written expression).

**Special Education:** The most intensive interventions and specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of students identified with an educational disability. This term may include related services such as speech/language or occupational therapy depending on student needs.

**Specific learning disability (SLD):** A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, and that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Such term includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities (e.g., visual processing), brain injury that is not caused by an external physical force, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific Learning Disability does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of Visual Impairment; Hearing Impairment; Orthopedic Impairment; Intellectual Disability; Emotional Disturbance; Limited English Proficiency; or Environmental or Cultural Disadvantage. Specific Learning Disabilities may be identified in the following areas: Basic Reading, Reading Fluency, Reading Comprehension, Math Calculation, Math Problem Solving, Written Expression, Oral Expression, and/or Listening Comprehension.

**Standard protocol intervention:** Empirically validated intervention for all students with similar academic or behavioral needs. Standard protocol interventions facilitate quality control.

**Standardized Assessment:** An assessment test that is developed using standard procedures and is then administered and scored in a consistent manner for all test takers.

**Standards-based assessment:** An assessment, often adaptive in nature, which provides information regarding students' mastery of grade level standards.

**Summative assessment:** Summative assessment is a form of evaluation used to describe the effectiveness of an instructional program or intervention, that is, whether the instruction or intervention had the desired effect. With summative assessment, student learning is typically assessed at the end of a course of study or annually (at the end of a grade).

**Survey-level assessment:** A process for determining foundational skill deficits and instructional level(s). It is effective in establishing where to begin an intervention and determining appropriate, realistic goals for a student.

**Systematic:** A carefully planned sequence for instruction that is carefully thought out, strategic, and designed before activities and lessons are developed. Within this model lessons build on previously taught information, from simple to complex, with clear, concise student objectives that are driven by ongoing assessment. Students are provided appropriate practice opportunities, which directly reflect instruction.

**Tennessee Academic Standards (Mathematics and English Language Arts):** Curricular standards developed to strengthen the knowledge and skills in English Language Arts and Mathematics to prepare students to become college and career ready. These standards define the knowledge and skills students are required to possess in entry-level, credit-bearing, academic college courses, technical institutes, and in workforce training programs. They are based on the most current national and international standards, with the intention of providing students with a competitive advantage in the global economy.

**Universal screening process:** A schoolwide screening process that uses multiple sources of data to identify individual student strengths and areas of need and provides districts/schools with accurate information for making informed decisions about skills-specific interventions, reteaching/ remediation, and enrichment for each child.

**Universal screening/screener:** A brief screening assessment of academic skills (i.e. basic reading skills, reading fluency, reading comprehension, math calculation, math problem solving, written expression) administered to **ALL** students to determine whether students demonstrate the skills necessary to achieve grade level standards.

**Valid:** Validity refers to the extent to which a tool accurately measures the underlying construct that it is intended to measure.

**Written Expression:** Involves basic writing skills (transcription) and generational skills (composition).

**Transcription:** difficulty producing letters, words, spelling; **Composition:** difficulty with word and text fluency, sentence construction, genre-specific discourse structures, planning processes, and reviewing and revising processes.

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