

Tiered Approach to School-Based Speech-Language Pathology Services: A Guide to Implementation



Response to Intervention (RTI) is a three-tiered, needs-based framework that can effectively guide [speech-language pathology service delivery in schools](#). The three tiers of support are:

Tier 1: Universal In-Class Supports

This might include speech-language pathologist (S-LP)-led whole class instruction (e.g., phonological awareness activity) or [S-LP-teacher collaborations](#) (e.g., planning academic vocabulary or text type instruction).

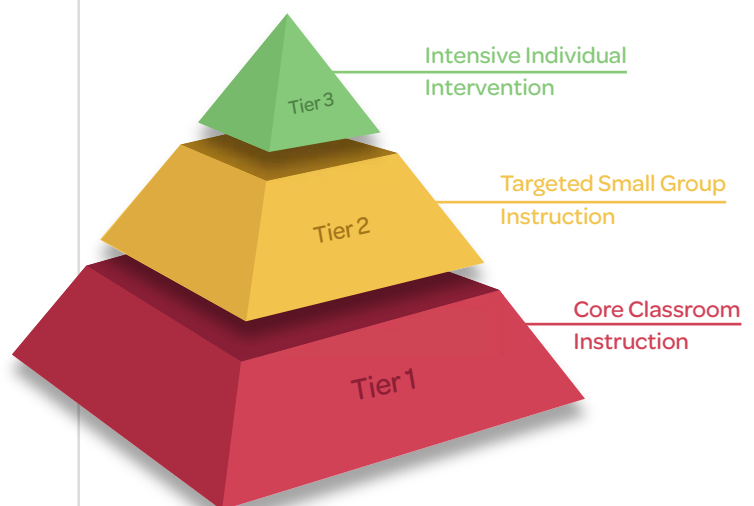
Tier 2: Targeted Small-Group Interventions

Involves small groups of 3 to 5 students, maximum, with similar areas of difficulty. This may include pull-out or in-class intervention targeting speech, language, or literacy. Intervention may be provided by [communication health assistants](#) or other education professionals, under the supervision of S-LPs.

Tier 3: Specialized Intensive Interventions

Often provided 1:1 or in dyads for students whose profiles warrant such intensive supports (e.g., students with developmental language disorder or speech sound disorder). Intervention is usually provided by S-LPs.

3 Tiers of Support



At all tiers, student progress is monitored regularly and systematically to ensure reliability of the conclusions being drawn. If a student requires additional support, services from the next tier are added. Supports provided at each tier are cumulative rather than mutually exclusive.

Each tier should differ by at least three aspects. These could include:

- intensity
- area targeted
- group size
- modality
- expertise of the service provider
- length of the session
- frequency of the sessions
- duration of the intervention

The following considerations can assist the school-based S-LP in successful implementation of RTI:

Tier 1: Universal In-Class Supports

Strategies that reduce barriers to learning are built into classroom instruction (see UDL [link](#)).

Questions to ask include the following:

When considering instructional planning,

- are language supports built into classroom instruction?
- is literacy instruction explicit and systematic?
- are underlying/foundational literacy skills included in the instruction? For example:
 - » letter-sound knowledge
 - » phonemic awareness

When conducting screenings or assessments,

- are the screening tools used to identify at-risk students psychometrically valid and reliable?
- do the screening and assessment tools include foundational skills that cut across languages, allowing the S-LP to separate speech, language or literacy issues from incomplete acquisition of an additional language? Or, are alternative assessment practices considered so as to minimize bias in the case of multilingual learners (e.g., dynamic assessment)?
- have group-administered screening and assessment tools been considered to maximize efficiency?

Tier 2: Targeted Small-Group Interventions and Tier 3: Specialized Intensive Interventions

A maximum of two skills should be addressed per intervention session. At Tier 2, the student should receive at least 8 weeks of intervention before considering adding Tier 3 supports. Questions to ask include the following:

- Is there school-wide planning of instructional time wherein there are protected periods such that students do not miss essential learning if they are pulled out of class for intervention?
- Are Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions also available to multilingual learners? (see SAC position statement on [Learning an Additional Language in the Context of Language Disorder](#))
- Does the intervention allow students many opportunities to practice and respond?
- Is set-up and activity transition time minimized for maximal efficiency?
- Is the intervention targeted and aligned with the specific area of difficulty of the student(s)?
For example:
 - » decoding accuracy versus decoding speed or reading comprehension
 - » phonemic awareness versus orthographic or morphological awareness
 - » phonemic awareness targeting CVCC syllable structures if the student specifically struggles to read or spell CVCC words, targeting multisyllabic words if the student struggles at that level
 - » comprehension of complex sentences versus pronominal inferences
- Is the literacy intervention provided in the language(s) of literacy instruction?
- Is bilingual language intervention provided for bilingual students?
- Are foundational literacy skills included in the intervention? For example:
 - » letter-sound knowledge
 - » phonemic awareness
- Are newly learned skills regularly embedded and practiced within actual classroom activities?
- Does the classroom teacher continue to address the student's instructional needs through carefully planned classroom activities (e.g. targeted station work)?

In sum, RTI facilitates identification and service delivery for students who require additional speech, language or literacy supports. S-LPs work collaboratively with teachers to respond to student needs with the intervention intensity required to address the difficulties experienced at school.

References and Additional Resources

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (nd). Response to Intervention (RTI).

<https://www.asha.org/slp/schools/prof-consult/rtoi/>

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