



YOUR QUESTIONS, ANSWERED

25 Insights from the Authors of *MTSS for Reading Improvement*

These questions about implementing the science of reading came from participants of The Reading League Chapter Network's summer book study on *MTSS for Reading Improvement*. Answered by the book authors, Dr. Sarah Brown and Dr. Stephanie Stollar, we hope you find them useful in your MTSS implementation work!

Buy-In, Implementation & Change Management

How do we get all staff (teachers, administrators, specialists) on board with MTSS and overcome resistance to change?

- Help get staff on board by using tools like the MTSS Reflection Guide to clarify the actions required for implementation.
- Create urgency for change by understanding student data.
- Share success stories of other schools.
- Leaders can set the stage for change by communicating the rationale, gathering input from all stakeholders, taking action, and monitoring results.
- Understand where resistance is coming from; very often, it is caused by misunderstandings or legitimate concerns (which should be the topic of CIC in meetings).

What are effective strategies for gaining administrator and leadership buy-in for MTSS?

- Promote buy-in by piloting small-scale changes and demonstrating the results.
- Connect the change you want to see with what administrators are already concerned about (their goals and priorities) so MTSS is viewed as part of the solution and not just one more thing they have to do.

How do you support and sustain mindset shifts needed for MTSS implementation, especially among veteran or reluctant teachers?

- Change in mindset usually follows a change in behavior.
- Use team meetings to collaboratively determine the necessary behavior changes, support and incentivize their implementation, and acknowledge effort.

Where should we start when initiating MTSS for reading improvement—at the classroom, grade, building, or district level?

- You can initiate MTSS at any of these levels.
- Consider where you have the most buy-in for change.
- Whichever level you start at, share successes (and the actions that led to those successes) across the system to build greater capacity.

How can we build and maintain momentum and focus through the MTSS implementation process over time?

- Celebrate successes as well as efforts to plan together and try something new.
- Rotate roles on teams.
- Be clear from the start that MTSS is not a thing we do but a framework we use to ensure our improvement efforts are successful.

Teaming, Collaboration & Communication

What are best practices for structuring and facilitating effective data/team meetings (PLCs, CICs, etc.) to drive MTSS work?

- The structures of teams are described in Chapter 5.
- Facilitation of teams through the CIC process is described in Chapter 4 and supported by the tools in the appendices.

How should teams be composed at the grade, building, and district level, and what are the roles of various staff (including interventionists, EL teachers, paras, etc.)?

- The structures and roles of teams are described in Chapter 5.
- All stakeholders should have a voice in team meetings, usually through a direct representative.

How do we ensure productive, honest, and collaborative discussions—especially when staff may take data or feedback personally?

- The agendas and protocols in the appendices of the book support productive meetings.
- It can be helpful to establish norms for team meetings and perhaps even assign someone to monitor collaborative behavior.

How can we move teams from focusing on individual students to analyzing group/grade/system-level data and needs?

- Schedule time for meetings to review the effectiveness of Tier 1 instruction by analyzing the percentage of students who are on track in each grade.
- Don't schedule individual student meetings until the effectiveness of Tier 2 has been established and reviewed, and there is a need for a student to receive more intensive Tier 3 support.
- If someone wants to refer an individual student, ask, *“Are there other students in this class/grade who scored equally low? How many?”*

What communication protocols or tools help teams document plans, monitor accountability, and communicate progress?

The tools in the appendices are designed for these purposes.

Data, Assessment & Progress Monitoring

What are the most effective universal screeners, diagnostics, and progress monitoring tools for various grade levels and student needs?

The most effective universal screening tools are direct CBMs that can also be used in K-8 for progress monitoring such as:

- Acadience Reading
- DIBELS 8th Edition
- FastBridge
- aimswebPlus

How do we ensure that assessments are purposeful, efficient, and not overwhelming for teachers and students?

- Distribute the responsibility for collecting data.
- Don't ask teachers to test all of their own students.
- Train all staff in data interpretation.
- Be sure you have assessments for all four purposes described in Chapter 4.
- Require assessment data in meetings.
- Conduct an assessment audit and de-implement assessments that are less useful or duplicative.

How should we analyze and use data (including aggregate/grade level and student-level) to inform instruction and intervention, especially for Tier 1?

- Use the percentage of students who meet expectations.
- Use the forms and tools in the appendices.

How do we set appropriate growth goals and determine “enough progress” for students, particularly those well below grade level?

Most CBMs have some form of normative growth percentiles that communicate how much growth is typical, less than typical, or above typical for students who start the year with scores at all places along the continuum - from high to low scores. In other words, typical growth will not mean the same number of units improvement each week for students who start low vs those who start with high scores, but rather reflects the actual growth of students with each and every beginning of year score.

How do we ensure assessments and instruction are culturally and linguistically responsive, especially for multilingual learners?

- Research on culturally responsive teaching is mostly related to motivation and engagement.
- Multilingual learners need the same instruction and assessment as monolingual students.

Data, Assessment & Progress Monitoring

What does strong Tier 1 reading instruction look like, and how can it be improved to reduce the need for more intensive intervention?

- Strong Tier 1 instruction gets the vast majority (80%+) to grade-level expectations without students needing any intervention.
- Tier 1 can be improved by aligning instruction to the needs of the students and the research.
- Grade-level teams should use data to analyze Tier 1 instruction.
- Factors to consider include the time allotted for Tier 1, what is taught and how it is taught, the knowledge level of the teachers, and grouping formats.

How should Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 instruction and interventions be aligned and differentiated?

- Match instruction to student needs by targeting the lowest skill deficit across tiers.
- Use the same program or instructional routines across tiers; this could mean using an effective Tier 1 program in Tiers 2 and 3 to provide pre-teaching or additional practice, or using an effective Tier 2 intervention in place of less effective Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction.

How do we implement flexible, needs-based grouping (e.g., “Walk to Read/Learn” models) without tracking or stigmatizing students?

- The skill-based groups are flexible, meaning they are not stagnant across the year—they are only for the word recognition part of Tier 1, and they are only for reading, not other subjects.
- If you target instruction and get results in Grades K and 1, all students will leave first grade reading for meaning, and you can do whole group ELA instruction in Grade 2 and beyond.

How do we make MTSS work in settings with limited staff or resources (small schools, secondary schools, high EL population, etc.)?

- Teams use the CIC to identify what the needs are in their grade, school, and district and determine how they will use their existing resources to meet those needs.
- There are multiple ways to accomplish this, and the right approach for your depends on the local context.

How do we intensify and accelerate interventions for students who are far below grade level, including those in SPED or EL populations?

- Provide instruction that targets their lowest skill deficit and give them more of it each day so they move faster through the scope and sequence.
- Use instructional materials that have evidence of effectiveness.
- Train teachers in effective instruction and coach them to implement it.
- Teach in small groups, which allows individualization and more student opportunities to respond and practice.

Scheduling, Professional Learning & Resources

How do we find time in the schedule for interventions, collaborative team meetings, and professional learning given existing constraints?

- Schedule the Tier 1 and intervention time for each grade first, schedule the collaborative grade-level team meetings next, and then schedule everything else.
- Map out the building and district leadership team meetings at the start of the year.
- If scheduling time to meet is an issue, this might be the first topic the building leadership team tackles.

What guidance exists for providing ongoing professional development for all staff on reading instruction, assessment literacy, and MTSS?

The district, building, and grade-level teams should identify the topics, scheduling, coaching, and how to evaluate the effectiveness of the staff's professional development needs.

What are some practical examples, protocols, templates, or schedules from schools/districts successfully implementing MTSS?

See the appendices for protocols and templates.

How can we ensure coherence/alignment of curriculum, interventions, and assessment across Tiers and grade levels?

- Make this a topic of CIC during team meetings.
- Measure the curriculum, intervention, and assessment alignment (or lack of), evaluate the findings, make revisions, and report out.
- De-implement instructional programs and routines that don't get results.

Systems & Sustainability

What are the key “levers” or first steps for achieving system-wide change in reading outcomes through MTSS, and how do we prioritize them in overwhelmed or under-resourced contexts?

- Recognize that there is a problem with low performance, and that it can be changed through better classroom reading instruction, supported by all adults in the system.
- Step 1: Implement a school wide assessment system.
- Step 2: Form teams of diverse stakeholders who use assessments in the Collaborative Improvement Cycle to create, implement and evaluate system-level action plans.
- Reduce overwhelm by joining another person in your system who wants better reading results.
- If you believe your school is under-resourced in some way, then deciding how you will use your existing resources differently to get better reading results should be the topic of your first team meeting.