

Understanding RTI and MTSS: What Parents Should Know About School Support

Schools often use tiered support systems to give students additional help before problems become larger. The terms can be confusing because districts do not always use them in exactly the same way. Response to Intervention, or RTI, is commonly used for an academic early-detection and support process. IES describes RTI as combining universal screening and strong instruction for all students with targeted interventions for students who are struggling, followed by progress monitoring to see whether the support is working.¹ A Multi-Tiered System of Supports, or MTSS, is broader. U.S. Department of Education guidance describes MTSS as a prevention framework that can address academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs through universal supports for all students, targeted supports for students with additional needs, and intensive supports for individual students.² Parents do not need to memorize the terminology. Ask practical questions: What skill or behavior is being targeted? What intervention is being used? How often and for how long? What was the starting data? How will progress be measured? When will the team review the results? If progress is limited, what changes next? RTI or MTSS support is not the same as a special education evaluation. Federal special education guidance states that a parent may request an initial evaluation at any time and that RTI cannot be used to delay or deny an evaluation when a child is suspected of having a disability.³ Keep copies of progress data and meeting notes. The most important question is not the tier number; it is whether the support is specific, monitored, and adjusted when the data show that a student needs something different.

Did You Know?

- ✓ IES describes RTI as screening plus high-quality instruction, targeted intervention, and progress monitoring for students who are struggling.¹
- ✓ U.S. Department of Education guidance describes MTSS as universal, targeted, and intensive supports across academic and nonacademic needs.²
- ✓ Federal guidance says RTI cannot be used to delay or deny an initial special education evaluation when a disability is suspected.³

Research Sources

1. Institute of Education Sciences/WWC. "Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention and Multi-Tier Intervention."
2. U.S. Department of Education, IDEA. "Positive, Proactive Approaches to Supporting Children with Disabilities." July 19, 2022.
3. U.S. Department of Education, OSEP Memo 11-07. "RTI Process Cannot Be Used to Delay-Deny an Evaluation." January 21, 2011.

RTI/MTSS Support Meeting Tracker

Use this page to record what support is being provided, how progress will be measured, and when the team will decide what happens next.

Child's name: _____ Date: _____

School/team: _____ Current tier/support: _____

1. Name the Need - About 2 Minutes

Write the specific academic, behavioral, attendance, or other need being addressed.

Target need: _____

2. Identify the Support - About 2 Minutes

Record the intervention or strategy and who is providing it.

Support/provider: _____

3. Record the Schedule - About 2 Minutes

Ask how often, how long, and in what setting the support will occur.

Frequency/duration: _____

4. Ask for Progress Data - About 3 Minutes

Record the starting data, progress measure, and date the team will review results.

Measure/review date: _____

5. Decide What Happens Next - About 1 Minute

Ask what the team will do if progress is strong, limited, or absent.

Next-step rule: _____

What Parents Can Say: "Please show me what support is being provided, how progress is being measured, and when we will review whether it is working."