

TIERED INTERVENTIONS AND SECONDARY TRANSITION PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: 101

David W. Test Catherine H. Fowler La' Shawndra C. Scroggins

National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center



The University of North Carolina
Charlotte

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TIERED INTERVENTIONS AND SECONDARY TRANSITION PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: 101

What are Tiered Interventions?

Tiered Interventions are multi-level approaches for improving student academic and behavioral performance. Research-based interventions are applied in response to a team's analysis of student level performance data. Although different numbers of intervention tiers can be used, most recommendations involve a minimum of three. Typically, tiered interventions begin with Tier 1 which consists of school-wide interventions utilized by all school staff. Tier 2 interventions are designed for students who do not respond to interventions provided in Tier 1. During Tier 2, students receive more intense support. If a student does not respond or progress using interventions provided in Tier 2, then they move to Tier 3. In Tier 3, students receive instruction that is specialized and individualized. Students in Tier 2 are typically assessed to determine eligibility for special education services (NCRTI, 2011). The most common forms of tiered intervention are found in Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Combined, PBIS and RTI provide scientifically-based educational strategies that can be used school-wide to address academics and behavior.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a tiered intervention system designed to address academic skills. It integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level system to maximize student achievement in academic subjects. "With RTI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions, and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities" (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2011, "What is RTI?," para. 1). For RTI to be successful, it must involve instruction that is research-based, screenings that are universal, and progress monitoring to effectively determine students' response to interventions provided (CEC, 2011). See Figure 1 for an example of a 3-tier RTI model.

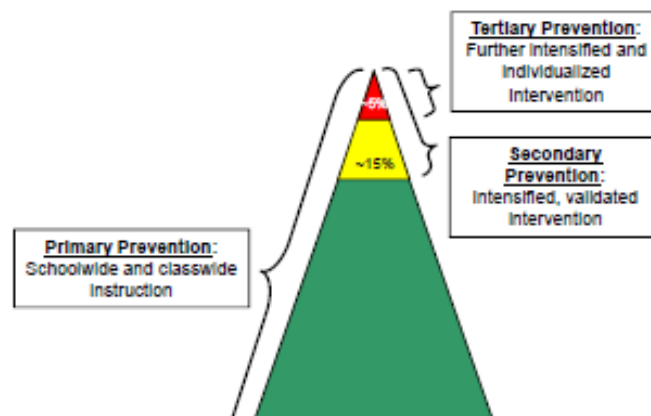


Figure 1. Three-tiered academic intervention and prevention model taken from National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI)

Response to Intervention is addressed in the most current reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA). The law states requirements regarding the identification of students as having a specific learning disability (SLD) (20 U.S.C., 1401 [30]). Specifically it states that determining “if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention (RTI) as a part of the evaluation procedures” may be permitted and “the use of other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child is a child with LD” may be permitted (20 U.S.C., 1414 [b] [6] [B]). It may not, however, be the only criteria used in eligibility determination for LD.

IDEA 2004 mandates that states set aside 15% of allocated federal funds for the use of programs and interventions for students considered at risk (20 U.S.C., 1482 [c] [1] [D]). The law specifically states that the funds are to be used “for students in kindergarten through grade 12 who are not currently identified as needing special education or related services, but who need additional academic and behavioral support to succeed in a general education environment” (20 U.S.C., 1413 [f] [1]).

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 (NCLB) required schools to use models and instructional strategies that are scientifically researched and address the needs of all students, “but particularly the needs of low-achieving children and those at risk of not meeting the State student academic achievement standards who are members of the target population of any program that is included in the school wide program” (20 USC 6314 [a] [2] [B] [iii]).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an example of a tiered model that focuses on student behavior. Grounded in differentiated instruction, PBIS utilizes a problem solving approach to preventing inappropriate behavior and reinforcing appropriate behaviors. Tier 1 is for school-wide/classroom-wide use and is applied to all students, staff and settings. Tier 2 interventions are designed for a specific group of students demonstrating at-risk behaviors. Students not responding to interventions in Tier 2 move to Tier 3. Students in Tier 3 receive instruction that is specialized and individualized for students demonstrating high-risk behaviors. See Figure 2 for an example of a 3-tier PBIS model.

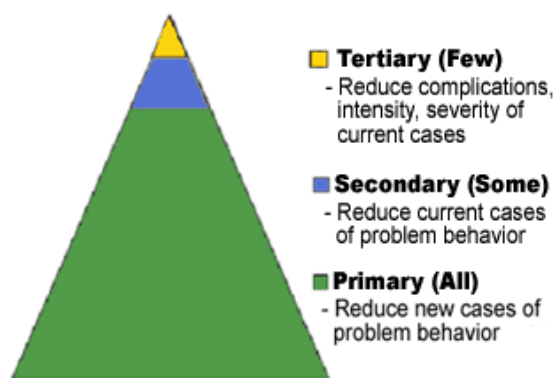


Figure 2. Three-tiered behavior intervention and prevention model taken from PBIS website

Positive Behavior Intervention Supports was addressed in the 1997 Amendments to IDEA. Congress indicated a need to address behavior in the law through the use of functional behavior assessments and positive behavior approaches to promote desirable outcomes. Specifically, the law requires:

- the IEP team is to consider the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports for any student whose behavior impedes his or her learning or the learning of others (20 U.S.C. 1414 [d] [3] [C]).
- a functional behavioral assessment when a child who does not have a behavior intervention plan is removed from their current placement for more than 10 school days (e.g., suspension) for behavior that turns out to be a manifestation of the child's disability (20 U.S.C. 1415 [k] [1] [F] [i]).
- a functional behavioral assessment, when appropriate, to address any behavior that results in a long-term removal (20 U.S.C. 1415 [k] [1] [D] [ii]).

How Do Tiered Interventions Work in High Schools?

The majority of research on the effectiveness of tiered interventions for academic achievement and positive behaviors has been at the elementary level. However, as success has been experienced in elementary schools, and federal laws mandate the use of tiered interventions, districts and states are beginning to look at tiered interventions within high school redesign and improvement efforts. In a document released in September, 2009, the IDEA Partnership at NASDSE suggested that “targeted reform agendas at the secondary level – such as closing the achievement gap, dropout prevention and school-based behavioral and mental health – can be nested coherently within RTI” (NASDSE, 2009, p. 2). In describing efforts in one middle school, it was noted that “implementers at the secondary level have found it necessary to tailor the RTI approach to meet their unique needs and challenges” (NASDSE, p. 3). The need to adapt the application of tiered models to the context of secondary schools is echoed by others conducting research in this area (Mellard, 2009).

While adaptations are required, Mellard (2009) noted that implementation in middle and high school settings share common characteristics of (a) effective general education instruction, (b) universal screening, (c) progress monitoring, (d) levels of intervention, and (e) fidelity of interventions. This basic tiered framework can be applied to academic and behavioral success of students in secondary schools. The challenge of implementing an elementary model within the context of middle and high schools is resulting in numerous of models called “secondary RTI”, which may not reflect the original research base for RTI. To help secondary transition personnel understand how tiered interventions might be used in high schools, three current approaches to tiered interventions in secondary settings are described below to: (a) clarify use of terminology; (b) explicitly link practices to their research base; and (c) provide schools, districts, and states with examples of a continuum of tiered intervention approaches that have been tailored to the secondary level.

A tiered intervention approach to behavioral and academic skills.

Recently, the High School Tiered Interventions Initiative (HSTII) – a collaborative of the National High School Center, Center on Instruction, and National Center on Response to Intervention – summarized case studies of tiered interventions implemented in high schools (HSTII, 2010). First, applying an RTI framework in high schools began with high quality core (or primary) instruction for all students. At the high school level this involved: (a) aligning instruction with curriculum standards; (b) using research-based instructional strategies (e.g., differentiated instruction) in content courses; or (c) embedding literacy strategies (e.g., graphic organizers) in all content courses. Second, high schools implementing tiered interventions used universal screening through state tests and curriculum based measures, often for rising 9th or 10th graders. Some schools examined “multiple failures” in courses as a screening mechanism. Third, schools engaged in progress monitoring including diagnostic measures, curriculum based measures, and course performance. Fourth, schools implemented tiered interventions. Most frequently the interventions focused on English/ language arts and math. Approximately 50% of schools studied provided second and third tier instruction in separate classes. Others provided more intensive instruction in lab classes, seminars, or other supports embedded in the school structure. Finally, schools in the study engaged in data-based decision making, using screening and progress monitoring data with a variety of stakeholders present, which sometimes included the student on the decision making team.

Applying tiered interventions in high schools includes universal systems of positive behavior supports and frequent academic monitoring with high quality instruction for all students; followed by a second tier of targeted group interventions offered during electives or a special “essential skills” or study skills course period offered for all students; followed by a third tier of intensive, individual behavioral (e.g., mentoring, counseling, specialized instruction) or academic (remediation, tutorial, specialized instruction) interventions. From the variability noted in the HSTII (2010) report and reiterated by Rose and Scala (NCRTI, 2011) the following challenges and considerations must be addressed: (a) staff capacity for problem-solving and implementing specialized interventions, (b) scheduling, (c) allocating resources, and (d) implementing interventions with fidelity. Additionally, simply identifying evidence-based instructional strategies beyond adolescent reading is challenging at the secondary level. The selection of screening and monitoring tools that match the purpose of the school’s initiative must be considered (HSTII, 2010). Addressing these challenges and considerations through strategic planning with committed leadership and resources allocated for professional development and staff time for problem-solving and collaboration are critical to successful implementation (HSTII, 2010). Within planning, the flexibility of scheduling (e.g., students moving in and out of tiers) must be considered. Further, the critical stakeholders for data-based decision making and the personnel for implementing targeted interventions, including special education teachers, related service personnel, and students must be identified. It is clear from the successful implementation of tiered intervention to address academic and behavioral success that a school cannot quickly decide to “do RTI,” but must carefully consider factors for successful implementation (HSTII, 2010).

The Content Literacy Continuum.

Adolescent reading has a stronger body of research than any other academic area for secondary students. However, reading at the secondary level (“reading to learn”) is a different task than at the elementary level (“learning to read”). The Content Literacy Curriculum (CLC) was originally proposed to address the shift in academic focus that occurs at the secondary level: students participate in content-specific instruction, which is different than the reading, writing, and math skill development focus of elementary schools in which the original RTI models developed (Lenz, Ehren, & Deshler, 2005). Acknowledging these contextual differences, CLC includes levels of intervention, applied within the traditional tiered model; but focused on student success within specific content. The framework focuses on the critical role all secondary educators play in helping students achieve literacy success. CLC is consistent with RTI in its concepts of high quality instruction implemented with fidelity, universal screening and progress monitoring, and data-based decision making regarding appropriate interventions. CLC provides a process for progress monitoring within content courses intended to identify students needing various levels of support in their core academic courses. It is different in its expectation that content teachers (e.g., social studies, science, math) implement evidence-based strategies to address literacy deficits (Lenz et al., 2005). CLC requires implementing research-based strategies for reading and writing skill instruction and core curriculum instruction.

The CLC framework includes five levels that correspond with the traditional three tiers of RTI (see Table 1). In level one, teachers focus on all students mastering academic content and may explicitly instruct relationships among ideas. In level two, teachers embed strategies that encourage students to take responsibility for learning. Students in level three, four, or five reflect a smaller population of students, as identified through progress monitoring within the content courses. Level three includes explicit strategy instruction with a smaller group of students. Level four incorporates basic skill instruction in reading and writing for students performing below a fourth-grade reading level. Finally, level five includes therapeutic instruction for students who experience language impairments of listening, speaking, reading, or writing and are identified for special education. The authors are clear that interventions are not personnel, location, or time frame bound. Services may be provided through tutoring or after-school and may be provided at any level by special educators or related service personnel (Ehren, Deshler, & Sampson Graner, 2010).

Table 1. *How Content Literacy Continuum Levels Relate to Typical RTI Tiers*

Content Literacy Continuum Levels	Typical RTI Tiers
Level 1 (all students)	• Tier 1: Primary (all students)
• Research validated instructional strategies (e.g., concept diagrams, unit maps)	
Level 2 (all students)	• Tier 1: Primary (all students)
• Content specific strategy instruction	

(e.g., pre-instruction Biology or Civics vocabulary instruction)

Level 3 (students struggling to make adequate progress in a specific academic content area)

- Increased intensity on a more explicit instructional strategy (e.g., writing strategy instruction)
- Increased duration of level 3 approaches for students at Tier 3

Level 4 (students reading below a fourth grade level)

- Basic reading and writing instructional strategies
- Increased duration of level 4 approaches for students at Tier 3

Level 5 (students with language processing difficulties)

- Therapeutic instruction by related service provider (i.e., Speech Language Pathologist) or special educator

- Tier 2: Secondary (some students) or Tier 3: Tertiary (few students)

- Tier 2: Secondary (some students) or Tier 3: Tertiary (few students)

- Tier 3: Tertiary (few students)

As with other tiered interventions, there are challenges to applying this model, such as scheduling and clarifying roles for various personnel (Ehren et al., 2010). The authors point out particular challenges at levels three, four, or five with using related service and special education personnel to provide services for students who may not be on IEPs. In a CEC hosted webinar on CLC in March, 2011, Ehren and Deshler noted that a first step in this approach is providing resources and professional development so teachers understand and identify the literacy demands in their own disciplines. Like the more general tiered intervention approaches described by HSTII (2010), the authors of CLC suggest that this is not a model that should “be put in place overnight” (Ehren et al., 2010, p. 322), but phased in over years.

Multi-Tiered Transition Focused Interventions.

Although neither approach described above explicitly includes secondary transition as a focus of assessment or intervention, there are implicit assumptions based upon research that students who perform better academically or exhibit more pro-social behaviors in high school are more likely to achieve more positive post-school outcomes (NSTTAC, 2011, “Super Table”). There is also the potential to implement self-determination instruction, career exploration activities, interagency linkages for students, or other practices correlated with positive post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (Test, Mazzotti, Mustian, Fowler, Kortering, & Kohler, 2009) at varying degrees of intensity, focused on improving post-school outcomes.

Recently, Morningstar (2011) offered a tiered intervention model focused on helping all students make transitions out of high school. The model is based on common features of multi-tiered interventions (a) interventions matched to academic and behavioral needs, (b) systematic early screening, (c) evidence-based interventions, (d) progress monitoring, and (e) data-based decision making. However, the transition focused tiered model adds post-school considerations to each level of a tiered intervention approach. For example, the collaboration required for problem solving targeted interventions would include stakeholders from post-school systems, along with the general and special education and families. Further, a transition focused tiered intervention model would include data on progress toward post-school goals and outcomes, along with the academic and behavioral data. Morningstar’s (2011) model proposes five separate three tiered interventions focused on post-school success including (a) assessment, (b) curriculum, (c) instruction, (d) family involvement, and (e) collaboration. Figure 3 is an example of one of the tiered interventions for assessment for student-focused planning, followed by an explanation of the characteristics and examples of the assessment process in each tier (see Tables 2-4).

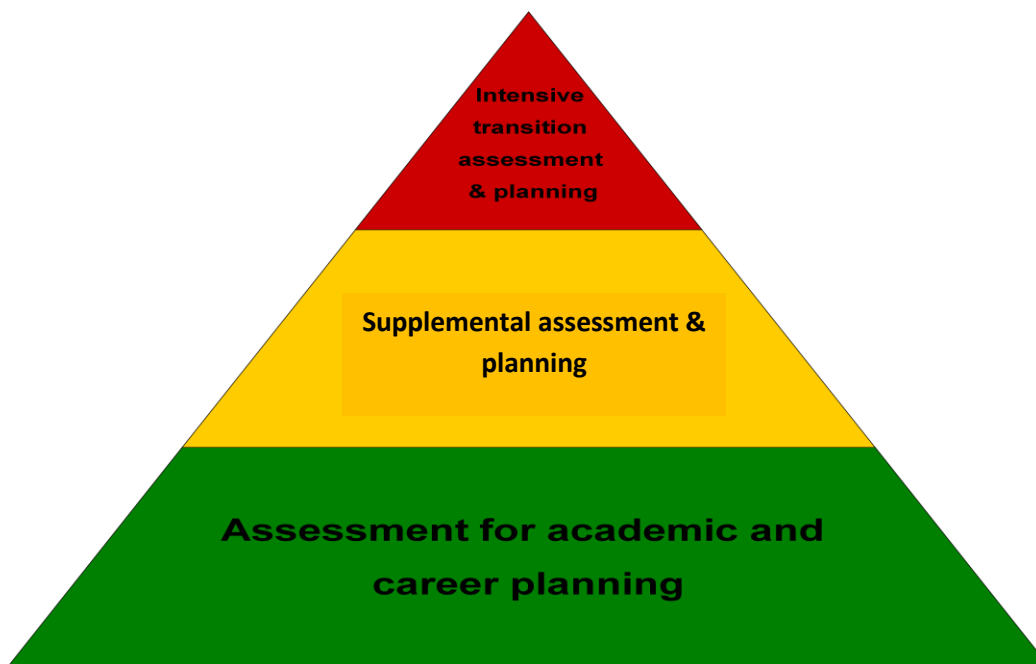


Figure 3. Assessment for Student-Focused Planning (Morningstar, 2011)

Table 2. Tier 1: Universal Assessment for Student-Focused Planning for All Students

Characteristics	Examples
Early & ongoing assessment for developing career & graduation plans with high expectations for postsecondary education and employment and necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Career Assessments • Student-directed Progress Monitoring • Personal Plans of Study • State Assessments + SAT/ACT tests

supports for success Emphasize rigor, relevance & engagement Focused on student engagement and student-directed planning Planning for college and career readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College Planning (including documentation needs) • “Advisories” throughout HS w/ same educator • Aligning HS to postsecondary education • Postschool tracking systems for all students – longitudinal • Early Warning System Screening
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Table 3. *Tier 2: Supplemental Assessment for Student-Focused Planning for Some Students*

Characteristics	Examples
Assessment & supplemental planning across school and community settings with expectations for college and career readiness Ensure linkages to appropriate postschool settings: postsecondary education, employment, community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Warning Systems (performance & attendance) • Expanded AP Courses & Academic monitoring • Additional supports & assessments as needed (GEAR UP, Talent Search, Upward Bound) • Individualized career planning/Career Academies • Expanded practice with college placement exams • Focused attention on documentation of accommodations for postsecondary

Table 4. *Tier 3: Intensive Assessment for Student Focused Planning for Few Students*

Characteristics	Examples
Focus on intensive preparation and supports needed for adulthood including postsecondary education and training; employment; independent and community living; social engagement and relationships, recreation & leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap-around models • Check & Connect • Person-centered Planning • Student-directed & Self-directed planning • Specific transition assessments to guide planning • Planning for 18-21 programs in postsecondary settings •

Morningstar (2011) visualized the five separate tiers of intervention intersecting in a wheel as displayed in Figure 4. For example in tier 1, all students would participate in a school environment in which (a) assessment for career and academic planning was

conducted systematically and frequently, (b) curricula were connected to educational and career goals, (c) there were broad-based connections among schools and community employers and service providers, (d) families were informed and engaged in academic and career planning, and (e) instruction emphasized choice and application of information. Then, based upon academic, behavioral, and career skill performance documented through assessment students may receive supplemental or intensive services within any one or more of the tiers. This approach to tiered interventions in high school provides a vehicle for discussing how to include and embed transition-focused education in the context of the college and career ready standards for all students.

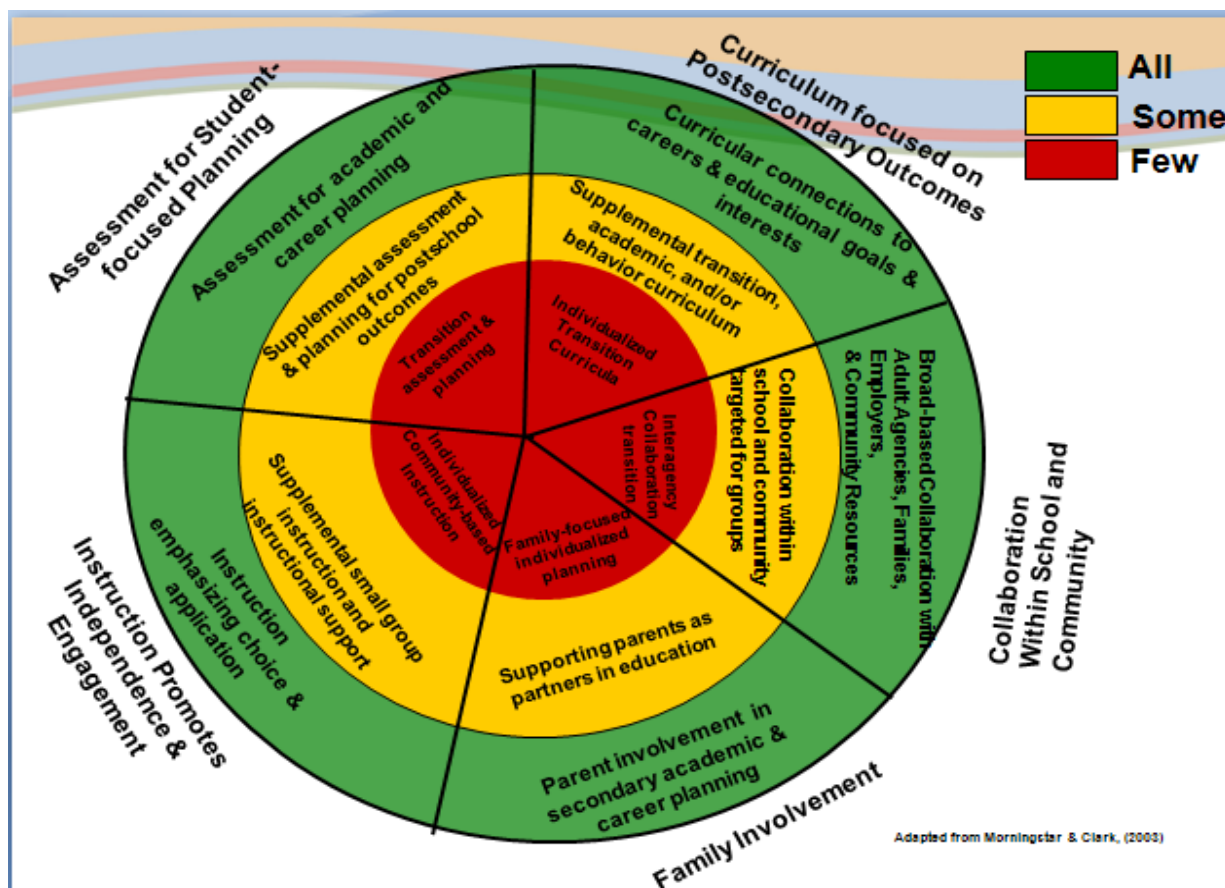


Figure 4. Morningstar’s (2011) Multi-Tiered Transition Focused Model

The National High School Center’s Early Warning System Tool (NHSC, 2010) may be another view of tiered interventions in the context of secondary transition and high schools – beyond academic and behavioral interventions. This tool reflects the concepts of tiered interventions as it includes universal screening (e.g., attendance and course performance data) and progress monitoring and the identification of universal and targeted interventions, based on the data collected and analyzed by a multi-disciplinary team.

Another extension of tiered interventions in secondary transition planning examines transition assessment data (universal screening and progress monitoring and if needed diagnostic assessment) to conduct a gap analysis to identify appropriate transition services, courses of study, and annual goal instruction regarding students' post-school goals. Lowenthal (2011) asserts that the foundation of this process is based on (a) determining post-school criteria, (b) screening, (c) calculating growth rates and achievement gaps, (d) progress monitoring, and if needed (e) diagnostic assessment.

Lowenthal's (2011) approach begins with a student's post school goal. Once a student has chosen a post school goal, educators need to help break down the goal into specific measurable criteria. This will often involve using postsecondary admission requirements, work place competencies, functional life skills or benchmarked measures to determine what a student will need to know and be able to do to meet his or her post school goal.

The next step in this approach is to use screening data to determine the student's current performance level. Screening data can be used to rate a student's proficiency level in relation to his or her peers and can also be used in the transition process to identify if a student is at-risk for not mastering his or her post-school goals. Screening data should also be used to calculate the growth rate of a student. At a secondary level, rate of growth can be calculated using classroom assessments, district measures, departmental rubrics, teacher created assessments, etc.

Using the criteria for post-school success, current performance level, and growth rate, educators can use the foundational components of RTI to determine if the student has any gaps between his or her current level and intended goal. These gaps will help educators identify transition services, courses of study, and annual goals the needs to learn critical skills and strategies to decrease these gaps.

Once gaps have been identified, just as in RTI, progress toward post-school goal attainment will need to be monitored. The progress data will provide educators with information needed to direct a plan of action for a student to master his or her post-school goal. If the progress data indicates that a student's growth rate is not sufficient to attain the post-school goal it may also indicate the need for additional diagnostic assessment data to guarantee that a student's abilities and interests match the intended post-school goal.

Diagnostic data can help create action steps that align a student's post-school goals, transition services, courses of study, and annual goals by specifically identifying what instruction and interventions are needed to attain his or her goals. Or the diagnostic data may lead a student to select a different post-school. Students also may not recognize the amount of preparation required for their identified post-school goals. Diagnostic assessment can help students understand the steps necessary to attain their chosen post-school goal, and based on that information a student may select an alternative post-school goal that aligns to his or her strengths. In either case, this approach provides a data driven plan for creating a meaningful transition plan that outlines the skills and content that a student must master to attain his or her post-school goals.

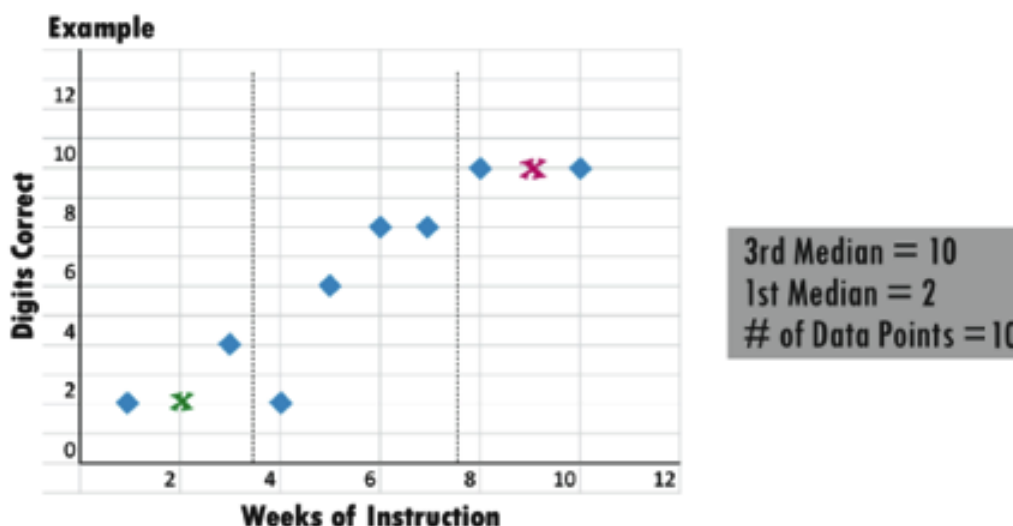
An example of this process is provided here:

Based on the algebra assessment completed 1 time a week for the last 10 weeks, the student is currently mastering 10 correct digits.

Steps for calculating student growth:

1. Collect a minimum of 9 data points over multiple weeks.
2. Graph your data points.
3. Divide the data points into three equal sections.
4. Select your median data point in the first and third sections.
5. Subtract the first median data point by the third median data point, which will equal the difference.
6. Divide the difference by the number of data points minus 1.

$$\frac{10}{\text{3rd median}} - \frac{2}{\text{1st median}} = \frac{8}{\text{Difference}} \rightarrow \frac{8}{\text{Difference}} \div \frac{9}{\text{\# of Data Point - 1}} = \frac{.89}{\text{Current Rate of Growth}}$$



Student has mastered 17 of the 36 algebra constructs based on the algebra assessment.

Steps for calculating student gaps based on time:

1. Determine postsecondary goal attainment levels
2. Assess the student to determine his/het current performance level (baseline).
3. Subtract the student's current performance by the skill(s) and or content proficiency levels needed to meet the postsecondary goal (the student's gap).
4. Calculate the number of weeks of instructional time the student has until graduation.
5. Divide the student's gap by the number of instructional weeks.

$$\frac{36}{\text{End of year benchmark}} - \frac{17}{\text{Current performance}} = \frac{19}{\text{Gap}} \rightarrow \frac{19}{\text{Gap}} \div \frac{10}{\text{\# of weeks left in the year}} = \frac{1.9 \text{ constructs/week}}{\text{How much growth the student needs to make each week}}$$

What Literature is there on Tiered Interventions at the Secondary Level?

Although tiered interventions, specifically RTI, is an emerging area of focus in secondary education, some of the published research on the topic is noted below.

For commentary from Dr. Daryl Mellard at the Center for Research and Learning, University of Kansas' review of the literature on RTI at the secondary level see: <http://cecblog.typepad.com/rti/2009/01/rti-in-secondary-schools-a-review-of-the-literature.html>.

The following articles describe the use of RTI in middle and high school settings.

Burns, M. (2008, March). Response to intervention at the secondary level. *Principal Leadership*, 12-15.

- Describes RTI as a school wide initiative and how it was implemented at the middle school level to initially address the issue of low rates of homework completion.
- Describes components of RTI as: (a) assessment (decisions that are data-based and use multiple sources of data), (b) service delivery (instruction in content and skills that is flexible and uses small-groups), and (c) problem solving (collaboration).

Available at:

<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/RTI%20at%20the%20Secondary%20Level%20Part%20I%20March%20NASSP.pdf>

Carter, A., Klotz, M., & Cowan, K. (2008, February). Response to intervention the future for secondary schools. *Principal Leadership*, 12-15.

- Describes the RTI implementation process of students at the high school level to address the issue of high numbers not passing 11th grade math assessment.
- Describes the three tiers in RTI and common elements of RTI programs.

Available at:

<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/RTI%20Part%20I-NASSP%20February%202008.pdf>

Duffy, H. (2007). Meeting the needs of significantly struggling learners in high school: A look at approaches to tiered interventions. *National High School Center*.

- Presents the history of Response to Intervention
- Overviews the promise of applying a problem-solving RTI model in high schools to address success for struggling learners
- Presents proposed research being funded by the U. S. Department of Education for implementing RTI, including one high school site

Available at: http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_RTIBrief_08-02-07.pdf

Windram, H., Scierka, B., & Silbergitt, B. (2007). Response to intervention at the secondary level: Two districts' models of implementation. *NASP Communiqué*, 35(5).

- Describes the use of RTI to make instructional decisions at the secondary level in language arts and mathematics.
- Discusses challenges with scheduling, instruction/intervention, use of data for decision-making, and outcomes.

Available at: <http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/mocq355rtisecondary.aspx>

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