

**Michigan Department of Education**  
**Message #121: Early Reading Skill Acquisition and the Achievement Gap**

Students who don't read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of school than proficient readers. For students who can't master even the basic skills by third grade, the rate is nearly six times greater<sup>i</sup>.

### **A Discussion of the Problem**

The statistics concerning early reading skill acquisition and the long-term impact on school achievement are startling. A child who is not able to read by the end of second grade only has a 25% chance of catching up by the end of elementary school<sup>ii</sup>. Conversely, students who are poor readers at the end of elementary school are likely to have encountered literacy problems as early as preschool<sup>iii</sup>. Furthermore, children who fall behind academically will be more likely to find school work challenging and would attempt to escape through problem behaviors<sup>iii</sup>. This suggests that the improvement of children's early literacy skills in the preschool and early elementary school years might influence their reading achievement and behavior in later years. Early literacy instruction and behavior support have great potential to narrow the gap between high readers and low readers<sup>ii</sup>.

### **The Alternative**

A multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) is a problem-solving model that links assessment and data to instruction in order to address the needs of all learners<sup>iv</sup>. The MTSS model puts forth a framework to view student behavior and learning. The primary goal of MTSS is the prevention of behavior and academic problems by implementing evidence-based interventions in the regular classroom at early grades<sup>iv</sup>. There are many MTSS models; however, there are common features across all models, which include: universal screening, data-based decision making, progress monitoring, focus on successful student outcomes, a continuum of evidenced-based practices including a core curriculum with differentiated instruction and strategies to ensure fidelity of implementation<sup>v</sup>. Successful implementation of MTSS allows districts to address the needs of all learners, ramping up supports as needs become apparent, and promotes appropriate referral of students to special education.

### **Call to Action**

Work with your intermediate school district to learn more about MTSS. Michigan's Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (MiBLSi) offers a multitude of resources to districts through their website (<http://MiBLSi.cenmi.org>), including intensive supports for successful applicants. Create a team from your building who will take the lead in acquiring the necessary professional development and support them with regular consultation and training resources. Connect with MTSS efforts that are working in buildings and districts similar to yours. Contact your ISD or MiBLSi for more information. The Michigan Department of Education has developed a guidance booklet <http://teachingforlearning.org/index.php?P=RtI>, which includes essential elements of MTSS and national and statewide resources for implementation, which may be a first step in learning more.

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<sup>i</sup> Hernandez, D.J. (2011). *Double Jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. Albany, New York: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

<sup>ii</sup> Gettinger, M. & Stoiber, K. (2007). Applying a response-to-intervention model for early literacy development in low-income children. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 27(4), 198-213.

<sup>iii</sup> McIntosh, K., Goodman, S., Bohanon, H. (2010). Toward true integration of academic and behavior response to intervention systems – part one: Tier 1 support. *NASP Communique*, 39(2).

<sup>iv</sup> Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S., Stecker, P. M. (2010). The "blurring" of special education in a new continuum of general education placements and services. *Exceptional Children*, 76(3), 301-323.

<sup>v</sup> [www.miblsi.cenmi.org](http://www.miblsi.cenmi.org)