

Tier 1 Grade-Level Instruction

Why Tier 1 Instruction?

A tiered instructional process is at the center of any effective multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). This process involves a three-tiered approach to implement high quality, effective instruction using research-based practices across content areas to support the academic and social-emotional learning needs of all learners. To accelerate learning, students at every grade level must first receive strong Tier 1 instruction within an evidence-based, scientifically researched core program or curriculum focused on essential grade-level skills and behavioral expectations. Without access to strong Tier 1 grade-level instruction and content, student learning can be delayed, creating gaps in academic knowledge and skills. When Tier 1 is implemented with a high degree of integrity and by trained educators, a majority of learners will show proficiency on curricular assessments consistent with the grade-level benchmarks (Swanson et al. 2017).

If assessment data identifies gaps in learning or behavior that might prevent a student from understanding upcoming content, a plan must be in place to support students before and during the lessons. This support must take place in the Tier 1 setting alongside grade-level peers. These Tier 1 additional supports, such as extended learning time, targeted tutoring, and expanded mental health supports, will vary in intensity and duration as determined by data for each individual learner. In a system prepared to accelerate learning, all students receive quality Tier 1 instruction, progress is continuously monitored, and supports are provided that complement the core Tier 1 instruction. Additional interventions are provided to learners who do not meet benchmarks after strong Tier 1 instruction through Tiers 2 and 3 of a multi-tiered instructional system. The appropriate level of Tier 2 or 3 support is determined by progress monitoring data for each individual learner.

What is Accelerated Learning?

Too often students with perceived academic gaps are put into remediation classes. Their access to grade-level content is delayed until all their academic gaps are filled. Research has shown again and again that this does not work (Rollins, 2014). Instead, learning should be accelerated. Accelerated learning keeps students moving forward on their intended grade-level trajectories by strategically preparing them for success in current grade-level content.

Acceleration prepares students for new learning combined with “just-in-time” teaching of missing key skills and concepts in the purposeful context of current lessons.

Opportunities to accelerate learning rely on robust Tier 1 instruction that includes grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers who hold high expectations for students. This robust instruction should be enhanced with supports targeted to the skills and services students need to stay on grade level.

Characteristics of High-Quality Tier 1 Instruction

High-quality curricular materials that are aligned to the essential skills and concepts outlined in the Michigan academic standards.

- High quality curricular materials are based on research and reflect coherent, connected learning pathways.
- The curricular materials include relevant, culturally-sensitive, and grade-appropriate assignments and tasks.
- Curricular materials include formative and interim assessments that provide teachers with actionable information to align with classroom assignments.

Learning opportunities are engaging, culturally relevant, and personalized.

- Teachers use active learning strategies, such as cooperative learning and project-based learning.
- Teachers use a range of inquiry-based, experiential learning tasks and activities to help all students deepen their understanding of what they are learning and why they are learning it. The school's curriculum and educator's instruction provide opportunities for students to develop critical thinking and reasoning skills, problem-solving competencies, and technology proficiencies.
- The school and teachers hold high expectations for students and believe they can meet grade-level standards.
- Teachers work closely with students to help them monitor and direct their own progress.
- The school personalizes learning, customizing for each student's strengths, needs, skills and interests, including the flexible use of time to meet student academic and social goals.
- The school provides accommodations to ensure Tier 1 is accessible to all students.

Student progress is monitored purposefully at regular intervals to determine the supports needed in addition to Tier 1 instruction.

- School staff consistently assess and monitor progress on all indicators of student success to ensure progress and make necessary changes to Tier 1 instruction in a timely manner.
- Teachers use a range of results from diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments to monitor student progress, provide timely feedback, and adjust teaching-learning activities to maximize student progress.
- The school uses a balanced approach to formative and summative assessments that provide reliable and developmentally appropriate information about student learning.
- The school implements a proactive approach to support each student's social, emotional, physical, and academic needs outside of regular Tier 1 instruction, including extended learning time, targeted tutoring, and expanded mental-health supports.

Assessing Needs

Research indicates that 75-80% of learners should reach successful levels of competency through Tier 1 alone (Shapiro, 2008). When these outcomes are not reached, schools may need to reevaluate their strategies and use data to answer several questions.

What are the biggest areas of instructional need across grade levels and content areas based on data?

- Assessment data should be disaggregated by student populations and reviewed across all content areas and grade/age levels. Data should include results from interim and summative assessments as well as data from classroom formative assessments.
- If fewer than 75% of students are not reaching grade-level proficiency consistently within and across grade levels, then the school or district should determine strategies that are needed to improve student success.

What evidence-based strategies and curricular materials have been used for instruction and found effective?

- Analysis of current instructional practices and curriculum across all content areas has been found effective, as well as taking inventory of initiatives to gauge effectiveness.
- High quality, engaging, and culturally relevant curricular materials and trainings are available to teachers.
- Implementing a proactive approach to identifying each student's social, emotional, physical, and academic needs and designing coordinated, targeted supports so that students can access the grade-level curriculum has been effective.
- Consistent assessing and progress monitoring on all indicators of student success to ensure student progress is essential.

Does the school have a defined set of schoolwide behavioral expectations? Does the school include behavioral expectations as part of instruction and MTSS implementation?

- Answering these questions involves looking at schoolwide behavioral and social-emotional support practices as an integrated system with academic instruction. Data could include discipline records and reviewing behavioral policies. After the information is gathered, identify the greatest need, and prioritize.

What does grade level mean?

For most students, their grade-level learning trajectories are tied to age. With strong Tier 1 instruction, including regular benchmark assessments to measure grade-level skills and concepts, 75-80% of students should move through each grade with little to no extra support. There are students, however, whose learning trajectories are not tied to age. Some students advance through grade-level content quickly and are ready to move on earlier than others. Other students, including students with disabilities, may need more time to move through grade-level content or may be working on content for a different grade or age level. Students with more significant disabilities may have alternate curricula aligned to their individual needs and post-school goals. Educators must recognize that some students are on different Tier 1 learning trajectories and must be prepared to provide the appropriate level of Tier 1 instruction. There is a strong tendency to remediate perceived learning gaps and **delay access** to grade-level work until all the missing learning is remediated. Research shows this approach moves students backwards and continues to widen the academic gap between students who are being remediated and their grade-level peers (Rollins, 2014). Therefore, schools must purposefully monitor the learning needs of all students to ensure they are challenged, engaged, and empowered by their learning experiences.

Getting Started with Tier 1 Grade-Level Instruction

Review the MDE Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Practice Profile

The [MDE Multi-Tiered System of Supports Practice Profile](#) outlines actions to be taken by educators and leaders when implementing tiered instruction. These actions may help during planning to allocate funding toward improving Tier 1 instruction and include:

- Allocating resources equitably (e.g., fiscal, personnel, time, and facilities) to provide all learners with access to a tiered framework of instructional practices, interventions, and supports intended to meet the needs of the whole child.
- Ensuring time and resources are allocated to support high-quality professional learning for all district staff responsible for implementation of the data, systems, and practices in Tier 1 instruction and supports.

Ensure all teachers have access to high-quality, grade-appropriate curricular materials that are aligned to the essential skills and concepts outlined in the Michigan academic standards.

Ensure all teachers know how to implement learning opportunities that are engaging, culturally relevant, and personalized.

Use the Michigan Integrated Continuous Improvement Process (MICIP)

MICIP should be used by districts in planning for and implementing an accelerated instructional model. Consider “Implementing Tier 1 Instruction” as a goal in the district’s continuous improvement plan.



Funding Sources for Tier 1 Instruction

Federal Funding

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) places an emphasis on high-quality instruction, professional development for teachers and other staff, and comprehensive learning supports based on the unique needs of the school community. ESSA promotes MTSS as a comprehensive continuum of systemic and evidence-based practices to support a rapid response to student needs with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision making.

Title Funds

Title funds can be used to support personnel, training, and instructional materials. [Regional consultants at the Michigan Department of Education](#), as well as [special populations consultants](#), can provide guidance on how to leverage title funds to implement MTSS and provide quality tiered instruction.

Pandemic Relief Grants (ESSER I, II, and III; GEER)

These funds provide for a variety of emergency relief to address the impact of COVID-19 on student learning, health, safety, and wellness. These funds

can be used to support personnel, training, and instructional materials, as well as academic, social, emotional, and behavioral health supports.

State Aid Funding

[Section 31a At-Risk](#)

Although not available for use with all students, the focus of Section 31a is to reduce chronic absenteeism and ensure eligible at-risk students demonstrate proficiency in 3rd grade English language arts, 8th grade mathematics, and 11th grade career and college readiness. Schools using 31a funds are required to implement an MTSS framework that includes the five essential components listed in the [MDE MTSS Practice Profile](#).

[Section 35a\(5\) Additional Instructional Time](#)

This funding source can be used to provide additional instructional time for students who need additional supports and interventions to read at grade level.

[Section 41 Bilingual Funds](#)

This funding source can be used to target additional language acquisition instruction, materials, and supports to students identified at proficiency levels below 3.9 on the WIDA ACCESS for English learners. Funding through section 41 should be aligned to MTSS being implemented by the district.

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