

Implementation Challenges for Multi-Tiered Systems and Where Does Special Education Fit

WASA Special Education Directors' Academy

Cohort 1

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The Introduction of Tiered Systems

- In the early 2000s, the U.S. Department of Education (ED)'s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) convened a summit of stakeholders to discuss methods for identifying learning disabilities (LD), including a new concept called ***response to intervention*** (RTI).
- RTI was discussed as a promising alternative to traditional identification procedures because of its focus on providing increasingly intensive, research-based instruction to students based on demonstrated response or nonresponse.

SEA Guidance for Implementation: 2013-2016

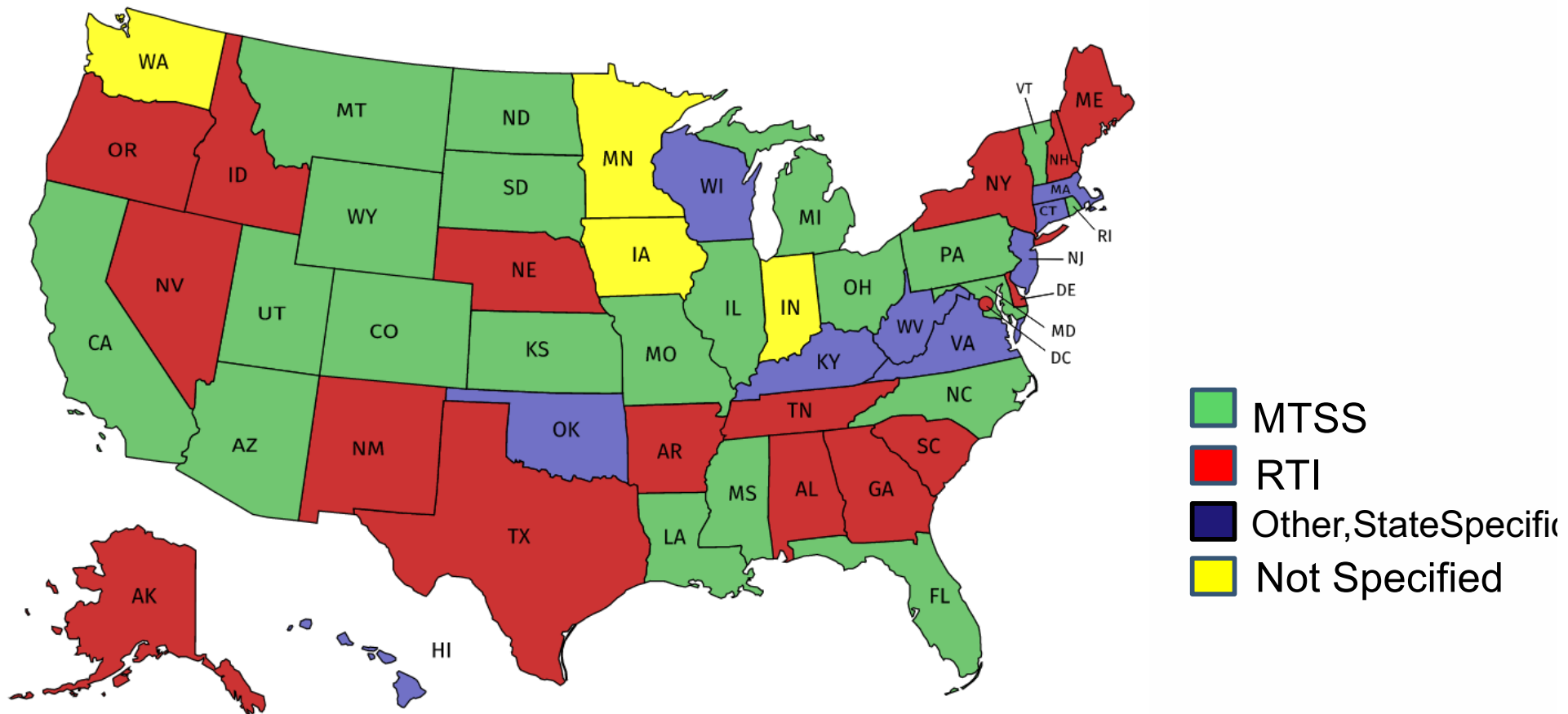
- Policy reviews from the last 3-6 years indicated that 45 or more state education agencies (SEAs) recommended using RTI in schools and districts (Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013; Hudson & McKenzie, 2016)
- Those same reviews revealed that of the SEAs recommending the use of RTI, fewer than 10% provided guidelines for its implementation.

SEA Guidance for Implementation: 2018-2019

A review of SEA websites (Feb 2019) revealed ***that most are using MTSS or a variation of MTSS*** when referring to an integrated tiered system of support.

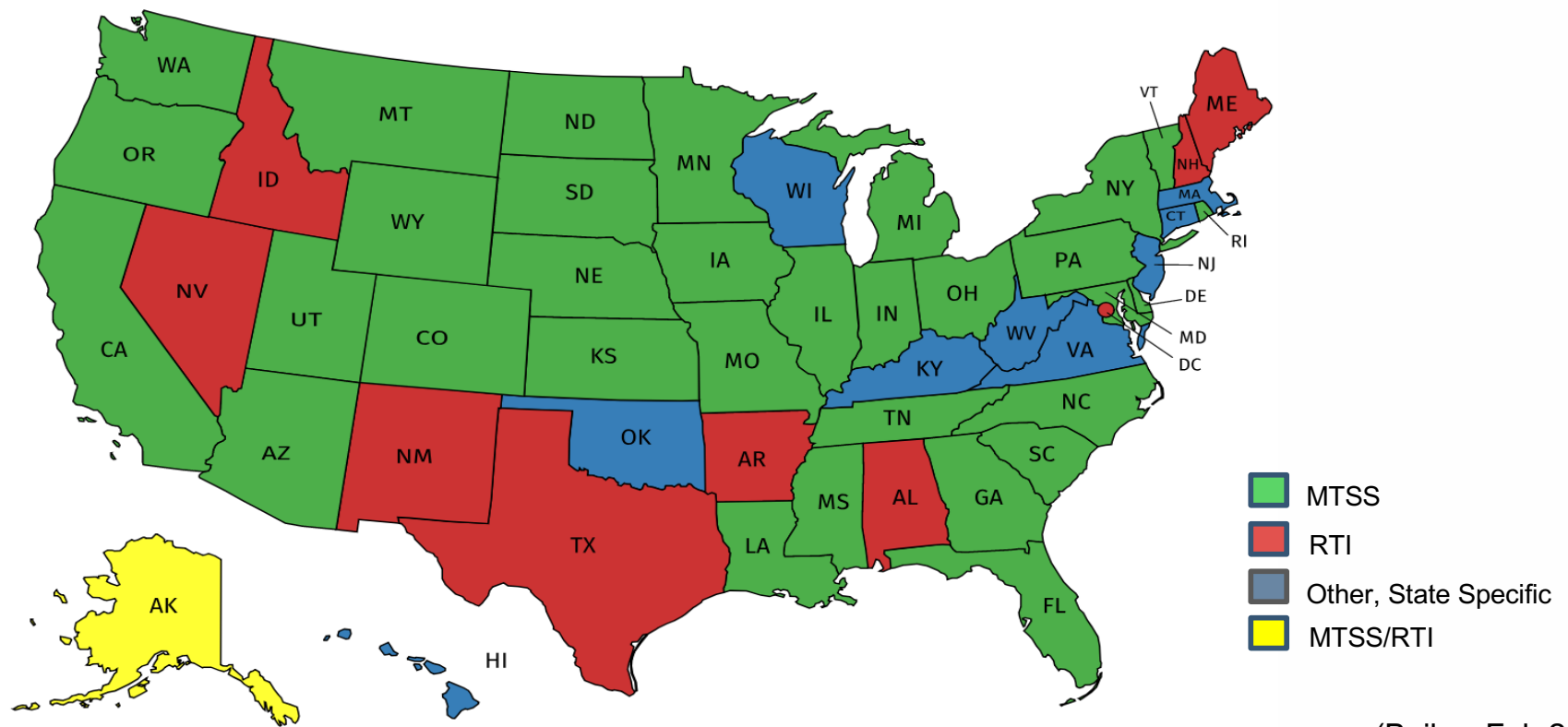
- In some cases, states used state specific terms with a variation of tiered system of supports (MA, OK, VA, NJ).
- Four states used unique terms Kentucky System of Interventions (KSI), Hawaii Comprehensive Student Support System (CSSS), Connecticut Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI), and Support for Personalized Learning (WV).
- In 2018, five states systematically changed from RTI to MTSS (WA, NE, GA, NY, DE). Only Alaska currently uses the two terms interchangeably in its communication.

Prevalence of MTSS/RTI (2017)



(As of March 2017)

Implementation of MTSS/RTI Recognized or Supported by Every State (2019)



(Bailey, Feb 2019)

Does Language Matter?

- ESSA mentions MTSS only briefly, in the context of ***helping students with disabilities and English language learners access challenging academic standards***. State leaders may choose to use multitiered frameworks as a way to organize school improvement efforts in the improvement plans they must submit to the U.S. Department of Education next year.
- RTI/MTSS 3 Ways:
 - » RTI = MTSS
 - » MTSS includes RTI as an academic framework
 - » RTI viewed as SLD eligibility process

MTSS in Washington: What's going on here?

- Development and implementation of an integrated (academic + behavior) tiered system of support model in Washington began at the state level in the late 1990s and continues today
- Momentum and support for RTI/MTSS over the last two decades can be characterized by fits and starts. RTI/MTSS is an unfunded mandate
- Similar to work at the national scale, academic and behavior focused work in Washington began in a siloed manner and have begun to integrate with more intentionality in recent years

MTSS in Washington – Timeline

- **1997** – Washington Task Force on Behavioral Disabilities is formed.
- **1999** – Report published by Washington Task Force on Behavioral Disabilities recommended multi-tiered transdisciplinary “comprehensive system of care” with universal, targeted at-risk, and intensive level services
- **1999** – Northwest PBIS (NWPBIS) began in Lane County, OR
- **2005** – [Washington State K-12 Reading Model](#) Implementation Guide released
- **2006** – [Washington RTI Manual](#) created
- **2007-2011**– Gov. Christine Gregoire signed into law HB 2136 *Improving Core Subject Instruction for All Students* (Previously named *Special Pilot Project* under HB 2012 in 2005)
 - Seven WA districts implement a RTI framework (Hoquiam, Kona-Benton, Odessa, Richland, East Valley, Vancouver, Walla Walla) [Report](#)

MTSS in Washington – Timeline

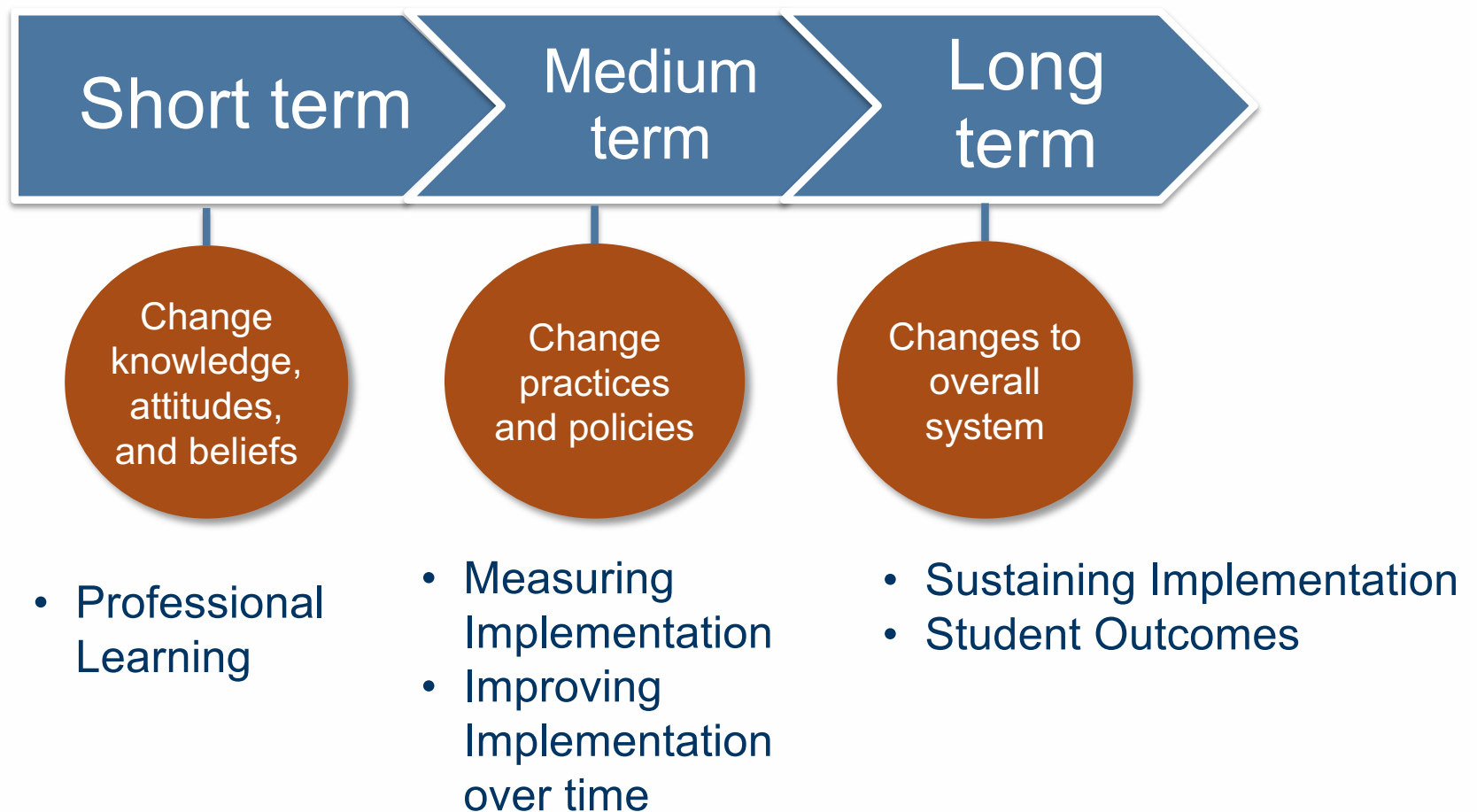
- **2007-2012** – OSPI State Personnel Development Grant – “Re-tooling Instruction through Response to Intervention”
- **2010** - OSPI RTI Implementation team defines RTI: Response to intervention (RTI) integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement.
- **2013** – [ESSB 5946](#) passed requiring a panel of experts to identify best practices. Menu of Best Practice created for ELA, and included a limited piece of information about RTI/MTSS.
- **2015** – OSPI PBIS Advisory Committee shifted name to MTSS Advisory Committee to include both academics and non-academic supports
- **2016** – [HB 1541](#) created the Washington Integrated Student Supports protocol framed in an integrated MTSS framework
- **2017** – OSPI is selected to partner with the National Center for Intensive Intervention to support capacity building around intervention and MTSS
- **2018- 2019** – Washington’s Inaugural MTSS Conference in Seattle & Spokane

Addressing Challenges in Schools and Districts

Evaluations of RTI/MTSS

- A national evaluation of RTI (Balu et al., 2015) , found a lack of positive effects for student achievement for those receiving Tier 2 interventions who performed close to their school's screening cut point.
- While not a full evaluation of the MTSS/RTI framework, the authors reported several issues surrounding ***how schools interpret and implement RTI***
- Lessons learned from the work of many of the federal- and state-funded TA centers charged with supporting schools, districts, and states with adoption and scaling of initiatives like RTI have noted similar trends in implementation

Logically Moving Toward Systems Change



Questions to ask...

- Who's trained?
- Who's implementing?
- Are they implementing with fidelity?
- Have they sustained implementation?
- Are students benefiting?
- Are ALL students benefiting?

Real Life Example

School A

- Has a principal dedicated to implementing MTSS
- Does not have a system in place for school-wide progress monitoring
- Has a schedule that allows for reading and mathematics intervention
- Students with IEPs rarely receive supports outside special education

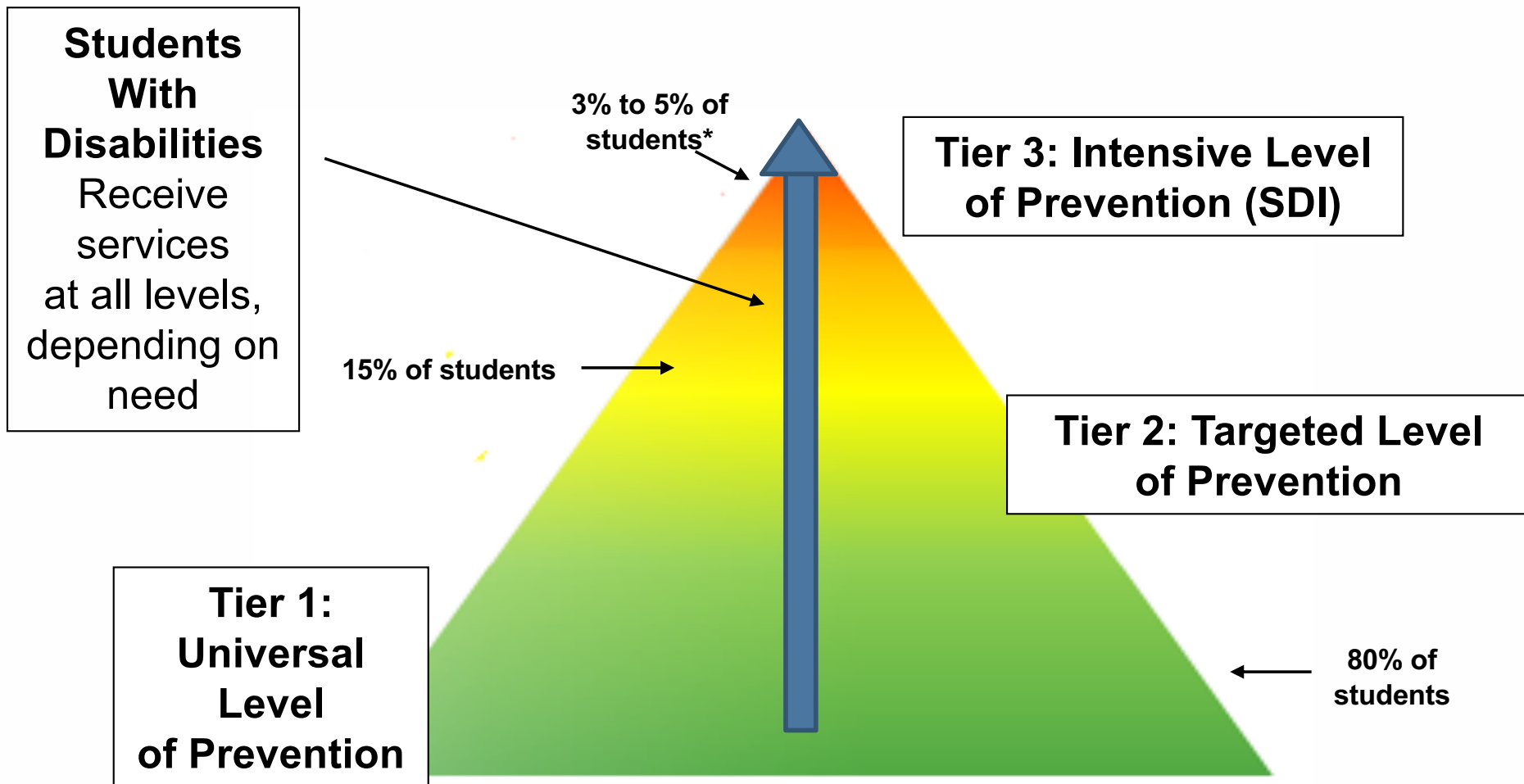
School B

- Has a principal who has delegated implementing MTSS to other staff
- Has a system of progress monitoring in place; struggles to use the data
- Has a schedule that does not include built in intervention time
- High levels of general education buy-in for supporting students with IEPs

“Well-functioning” MTSS includes, but is not limited to...

- A team of committed staff that meets regularly to discuss student needs
- Valid and reliable screening and progress monitoring procedures
- Time for data review and planning
- Schedule that includes time for intervention
- Ensure that intervention occurs with fidelity
- Interventions aligned to student need
- Staff and leadership commitment to implementation

Multi-Level Prevention System



Three Major Pitfalls to MTSS Design and Implementation



- Poor quality Tier 1 programming
- Flooding Tier 2 with false positives
- Failing to meaningfully distinguish the intensity of Tier 2 from intensive intervention

Poor Quality Tier 1 Programming

- This is a costly error because poor quality Tier 1 increases the number of students who will require expensive Tier 2 intervention.
- When schools provide Tier 2 to a high percentage of students, the quality of what can be provided in Tier 2 decreases (larger group size, shorter duration sessions, fewer qualified tutors, less support for tutors).

Flooding Tier 2 with False Positives

- Results from poor screening system or failure to use risk verification procedures.
 - ALL 'yellow' kids get Tier 2
 - Too much deference to screening results
 - Poor predictiveness of cut points or inappropriate for population
- Universal screening cut scores are designed to identify *false positives* (FPs) to avoid missing any truly at-risk children.

Indicator: More than 20% of population receiving Tier 2 interventions

Providing Tier 2 with False Positives

Problem

- Over-identification of FP for Tier 2 is a costly error.
- It dilutes the effectiveness of intervention for the students who do require Tier 2.
- It negatively affects FP students because they don't require Tier 2's foundational level remediation and should instead need instructional time on more challenging material.

Solution:

- Use at least **two other data sources to verify decisions** about whether a student is or is not at risk.
 - Assess only students who fail initial screen
 - Consider data on classroom performance, performance on state assessments, diagnostic assessment data, short-term progress monitoring

Failing to meaningfully distinguish between Tier 2 and 3

- Tier 3 students fail to receive required the clinical approach afforded by specialized teachers engaged in data-based individualization.
- Costly error because these students fall farther and farther behind if permitted to languish in Tier 2+, when they have already demonstrated inadequate response to validated (standard, non-individualized) programs.

Indicator: More than 7% of population receiving Tier 3 interventions, paras/volunteers delivering Tier 3, or a 'Tier 3 intervention list'

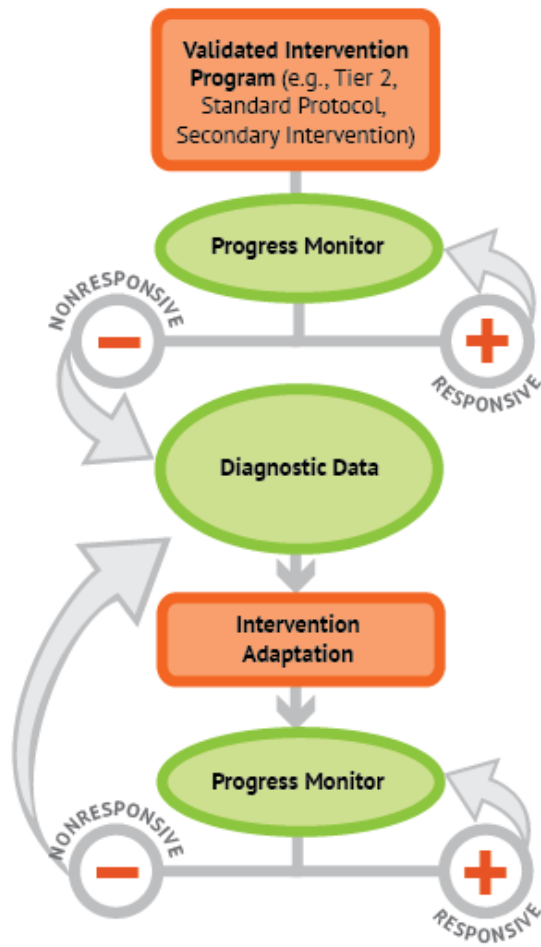
How do Tier 2 and Tier 3 Differ?

| Characteristics | Tier 2 | Tier 3 |
|---|--|---|
| Instruction/ Intervention Approach | Follow standardized evidence-based programs as designed | Use standardized evidence-based program as a platform, but adapt instruction based on student data |
| Duration and timeframe | Use duration and timeframe defined by developer | Increase frequency and/or duration to meet student needs |
| Group size | 3–7 students (as defined by developer) | Decrease group size to meet student needs (no more than 3) |
| Progress Monitoring | At least monthly | Weekly |
| Population served | At-risk (typically 15–20% of student population) | Significant and persistent learning and/or behavior needs (typically 3–5% of student population) |

Tier 3 and Special Education

- Reserving Tier 3 for students who prove unresponsive to Tier 2 delivered with fidelity (with quality Tier 1 and Tier 2, the expected rate in intensive intervention is 5-7% of the school population).
- Relying on special educators to fuel the intensive intervention system.
- Relying on the validated individualization process known as data-based individualization to structure intensive intervention.
 - Provides indicator if students NEEDs specialized instruction

Using Data-Based Individualization to Support Tier 3 MTSS



NCII's Approach to Intensive Interventions for Students with Significant and Persistent Learning Challenges

- www.intensiveintervention.org
- Origins in experimental teaching
- Systematic *process* for decision making and intensifying instruction
- NOT A ONE-TIME FIX

Where does special education fit?

Ensure Access for Students with Disabilities

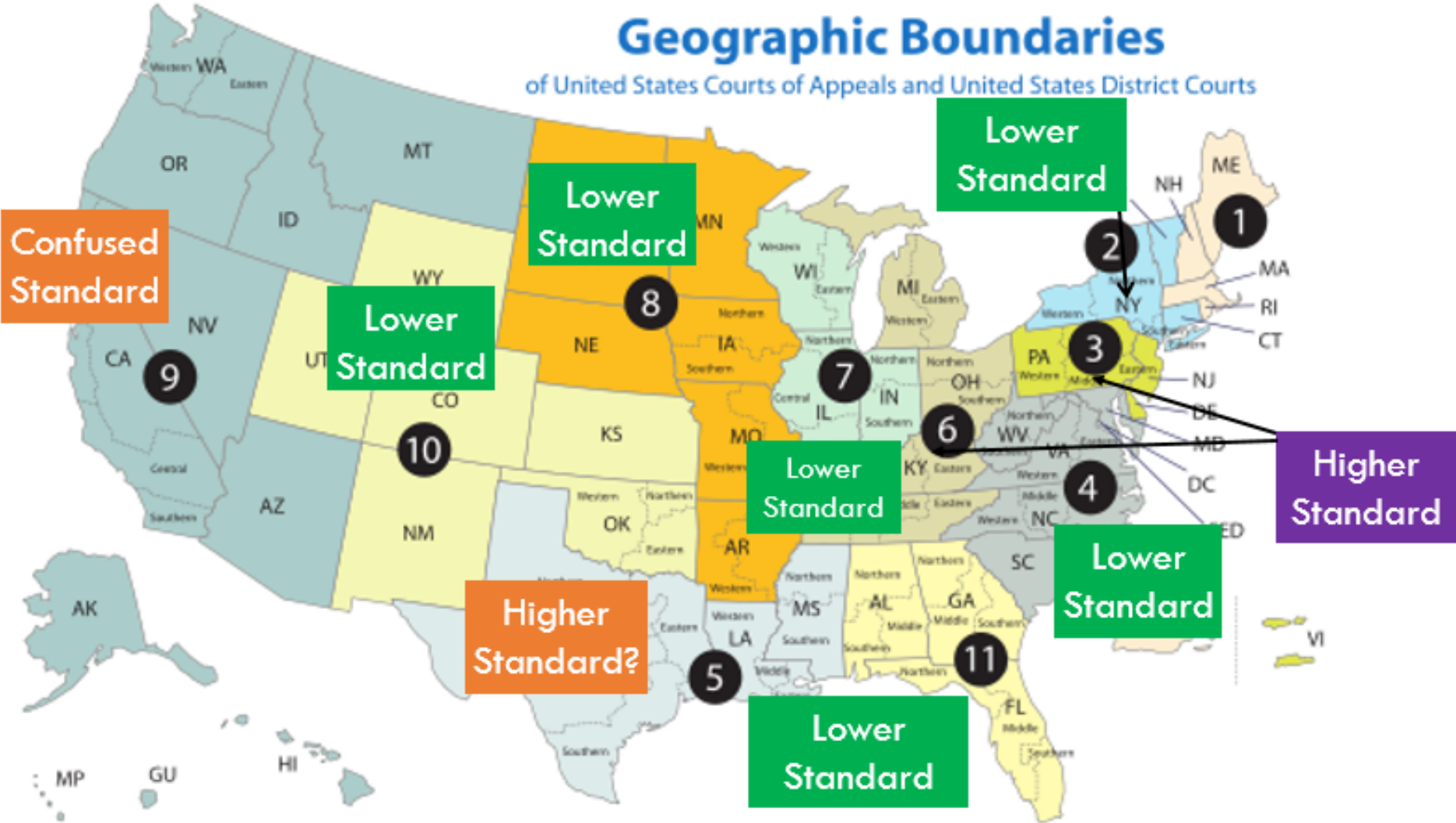
- Students with disabilities must have access to the full range of services offered through a tiered system, just as their peers do
- An unfortunate side effect flawed implementation is that students with disabilities, once considered primary beneficiaries of a tiered systems approach, are now too often excluded from this model altogether
- We suggest:
 - Provide students with disabilities access to the most skilled practitioners
 - Combine and integrate teams who look at student level data

A Call to Action: *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017)

- **Addresses** the “de minimis” ***educational benefit*** standard set in the 1982 *Board of Education v. Rowley* decision
- **Vacates** the Rowley standard to instead require that, “a school must offer an IEP reasonably calculated to enable a child to make ***progress appropriate in light of the child’s circumstances.***” (*Endrew*, 2017, p. 16)

Geographic Boundaries

of United States Courts of Appeals and United States District Courts



So What?

- Now all states *must* apply this higher standard for determining compliant Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and documenting progress.
- When districts fail to provide such services and document progress, they may face stiff penalties (e.g., private school placements, reimbursement of attorney fees).

Endrew & The Impacts of Special Education

- Because students with disabilities consistently score below their same-age peers on standardized achievement measures, some argue that special education is ineffective in impacting student outcomes.
- This question of systematic efficacy comes when we compare the performance of students with disabilities to their non-disabled peers
- However, the Endrew decision marks a shift in how we think about the goals of special ed and how we measure ‘success’ within the context of differing abilities (Hurtwitz, 2019).
- ***How does achievement change within students over time as a function of services received?*** (Hurwitz, 2019; p. 2)

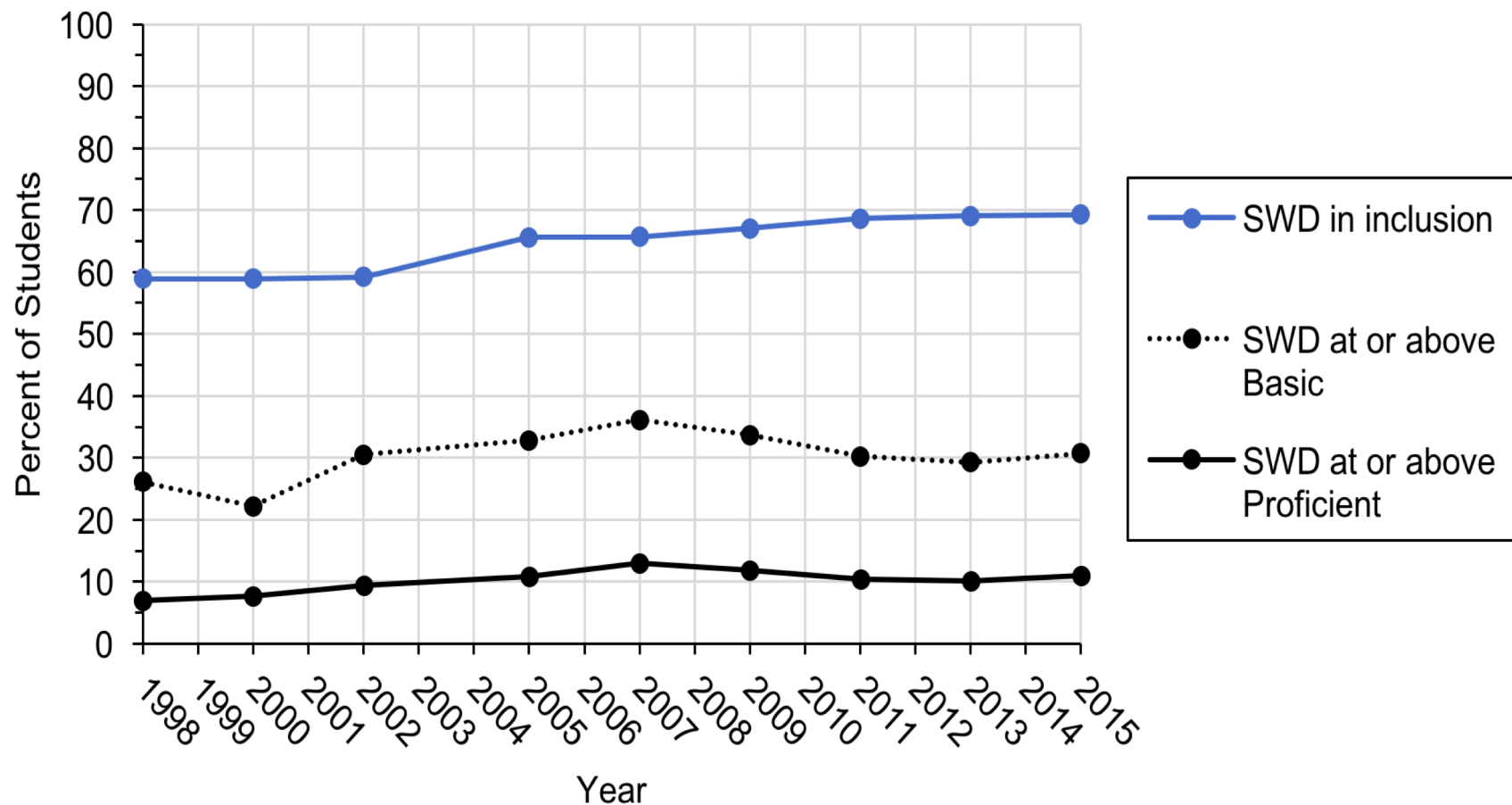
Endrew & The Impacts of Special Education

- By requiring districts to develop individually aligned IEP goals and vacate the diminished standard, Endrew effectively endorsed a within student growth-model rather over a model of comparison to achievement on grade-level benchmarks
- Longitudinal analysis of within-student effects of special education in two studies (Hurwitz, 2019; Schwartz, 2019) show statistically significant impacts on student outcomes when receiving services when compared to not receiving services

Things to consider.....

- Where does MTSS live in your district? Does the department that “owns it” also have the staff with the knowledge and skills to support schools and districts in their implementation?
- How do we overcome perception barriers that MTSS is “less restrictive” than special education and therefore students with disabilities can not participate?
- What kind of guidance can we provide to teams who are refining their teaming processes to include special and general educators at the table when discussing MTSS?
- How does the DBI process work for a student with a disability is not making process on their IEP goals and objectives ?
- What is the right mechanism for providing SDI – how can we leverage the DBI process?

Inclusion and Reading Achievement of SWD in the United States



Shared with permission from Fuchs, D., Gilbert J., & Minowitz, J. The Principles and Practices of Inclusion, 2017

Questions & Discussion?



Additional Resources

Evidence-Based Practices

- What Works Clearinghouse/IES Practice Guides:
http://www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Publications_Reviews.aspx?f=All%20Publication%20and%20Product%20Types,3;#pubsearch
- Best Evidence Encyclopedia:
<http://www.bestevidence.org/index.cfm>
- IRIS Center: http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/ebp_summaries/
- EBI Network: <http://ebi.missouri.edu/>
- RTI Center: www.rti4success.org

Additional resources

- National Center on Intensive Intervention
<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/>
- Center on Instruction:
<http://www.centeroninstruction.org/intensive-interventions-for-students-struggling-in-reading-and-mathematics>