



▶ Section 1:

The New Jersey Tiered System of Supports (NJTSS) Framework

A New Jersey Tiered System of Supports (NJTSS) provides a comprehensive, equitable framework for meeting the academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and health needs of all students through layered interventions and evidence-based practices. The following areas will be addressed in this section:

- An overview of the NJTSS framework, including definitions of all components,
- Highlights from research that underpins its design and implementation, and
- An outline of the three foundational components and nine instructional components that form the framework.

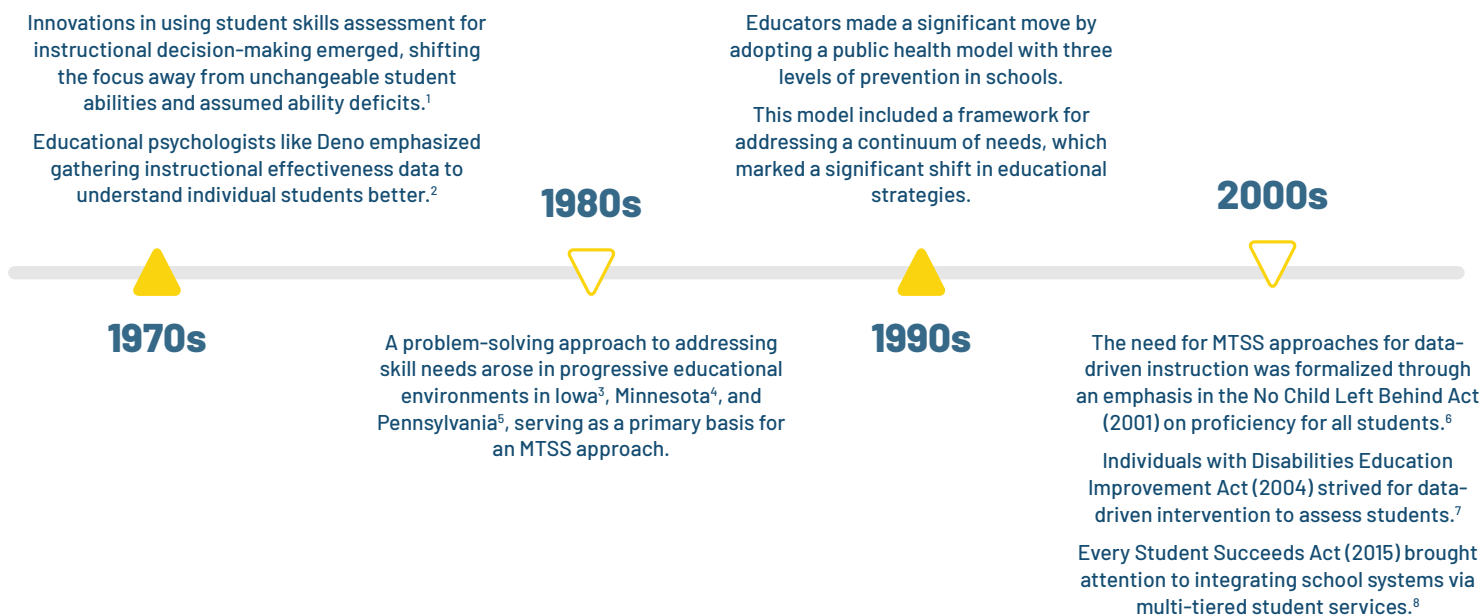
Readers will gain an understanding of the core principles of NJTSS, the evidence supporting its use, and how the framework is structured to promote success for every student in New Jersey's public schools.

It is important to note that this guide provides information about components and implementation of NJTSS in general (i.e., for academic and social-emotional and behavioral needs across age levels); districts may also find resources and guidance materials specific to elementary reading ([NJTSS-ER](#)), behavior ([NJ PBSIS](#)), and [student mental health](#).

New Jersey Tiered System of Supports

New Jersey Tiered System of Supports (NJTSS) is a framework for supporting the academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and health needs of all students through a layered continuum of evidence-based practices, interventions, and services. With a foundation of strong district and school leadership, data-based decision making, a positive school culture and climate, and family and community engagement, NJTSS supports students through a continuum of services provided through core programs and interventions. NJTSS includes nine essential components that promote success for every child. School systems are complicated and often struggle to address the needs of all students. With the implementation of the NJTSS framework, schools take a systems approach to identifying and addressing student needs and therefore minimize the opportunity for inequitably distributing support and services. NJTSS aligns resources within schools, across school districts, and within communities and counties to provide the right interventions to the right students at the right times. Through regular monitoring of student progress, along with data-based decision making and a continuum of support based on student need, NJTSS integrates the various teams and expertise in schools and communities to maximize the efficient use of resources and the effectiveness of academic and social-emotional and behavioral interventions.

Figure 1.2: MTSS Framework Timeline



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7. H.R.1350 - 108th Congress (2003-2004): Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. (2004, December 3). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-bill/1350>
8. S.1177 - 114th Congress (2015-2016): Every Student Succeeds Act. (2015, December 10). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1177>



Foundational Components of NJTSS

Effective District and School Leadership

Definition

Effective district and school leadership, for the purposes of implementing NJTSS, is the establishment of or use of existing district- and school-level leadership teams to support the implementation of the components of NJTSS with fidelity. School and district leadership teams are inclusive of administrators, educators, other pertinent school personnel (e.g., school psychologists, school nurses, etc.), and families and caregivers. The leadership teams are culturally representative of the district and school populations and also represent multiple content areas, a range of support services, and impacted parties. The Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders provide a framework for effective leaders and the [District Capacity Assessment \(DCA\)](#) and [State Capacity Assessment \(SCA\)](#) provide a mechanism for using leadership teams to review student data and make decisions regarding interventions.

Description

District and building leadership teams are essential for providing direction and coordinating school personnel in various aspects of multi-tiered service delivery. They are responsible for the selection and application of protocols and procedures for student assessment, instructional/intervention practices, staffing, annual and long-term fiscal and programmatic planning, and establishing criterion for data-based decision making. Teams utilize a systems approach to analyze data at the district, school, grade, and classroom levels as well as data regarding individual students. Teams make decisions about the effectiveness of core programs and interventions and coordinate multi-tiered instruction/intervention services for students based on data-identified needs. The participation of administrators is important for promoting buy-in and sufficient resource allocation to NJTSS implementation. Schools also typically have school leaders who are responsible for reviewing student screening data and determining core instructional needs and the need for additional targeted interventions. School leaders typically make decisions based on monitoring the implementation of instruction and student performance relative to benchmark expectations both within and across classrooms within a grade level.

Family and Community Engagement

Definition

Family and community engagement refers to ongoing participation of family and community members as partners in the design, implementation, and sustainability of the NJTSS framework.

Description

Family and community partners are both informed and involved in general planning activities as part of leadership teams. Families and caregivers are provided with information about NJTSS and the impact of the framework on the education of their children. Universal screening, high-quality learning environments with core and differentiated instruction that includes Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and is aligned with New Jersey's Student Learning Standards, data-based decision making, accommodations, and culturally responsive instruction are components of NJTSS that have an impact on every child in a school. All schools should have clearly defined procedures for notifying families and caregivers in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways about universal screening processes, curriculum, assessment results, and the instructional supports and enrichment activities available to their children. In addition to participating in general planning discussions and activities, families and caregivers participate in data-based discussions about their children's progress and response to interventions provided.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), two federal education laws, require the engagement of families and other stakeholders as partners in educational programs and services. Schoolwide Title 1 schools and schools identified for comprehensive support complete New Jersey's Annual School Plan, which requires engagement of stakeholders as part of needs assessment, including data analysis, identification of interventions matched to school performance data, and implementation. Community partners (e.g., agencies, colleges and universities, and businesses for structured learning experiences) can provide supports and interventions to students, families, and educators as part of the array of interventions for NJTSS and help implement the Annual School Plan. Both families and caregivers as well as community partners have opportunities for input regarding school and district-level data and communicate information about NJTSS.

Positive School Culture and Climate

Definition

The New Jersey School Climate Improvement Platform defines school climate as “the dynamic and diverse feelings, perceptions, and impressions of school community members—in other words, the quality or experience of how it feels to be a part of the school community from one’s unique identity and perspective, as well as in interaction with other members of the community.” A positive school culture and climate emphasizes positive, proactive, and preventive practices that result in a sense of physical and emotional safety for all students and fosters optimal conditions for learning.

Description

A positive school climate is essential for facilitating effective NJTSS implementation. This involves clear specification of expectations at the school, classroom and student levels and activities designed to promote positive student and staff relationships and an environment conducive to learning. Instruction and school activities are provided as part of a comprehensive approach to promoting positive social norms and relationship building. Students and school staff are afforded opportunities to provide regular feedback regarding the effectiveness of programs and interventions, necessary improvements to the system, and actions to promote and maintain a positive climate.

Instructional Components of NJTSS

Universal Screening

Definition

Universal screening involves assessing all students to identify their performance relative to preset benchmark expectations. It includes administering reliable brief assessments that measure specific skills (e.g., phonological awareness) or behaviors that are highly predictive of future outcomes (Glover & Albers, 2007; Jenkins, 2008). The purpose of universal screening is to identify whether students are at or above benchmarks or if they are at risk for poor learning or behavioral outcomes.

Description

Universal screening is conducted with all students, multiple times per year (typically in the fall, winter, and spring) to determine student performance relative to defined benchmarks. Screening assessments measure skills or behaviors that are predictive of future performance to differentiate between students who are likely to fall below, meet, or exceed desired expectations. Screening data are used to identify whether changes are necessary to core instruction (e.g., if more than 80% of students are below benchmark), which students may require additional intervention, and which students might benefit from more challenging instruction. Universal screening assessments have documented reliability and validity in making screening decisions.

Data-Based Decision Making

Definition

Data-based decision making involves systematic analysis of data within multiple levels of instruction and interventions to identify students’ strengths and areas of need, appropriate interventions, and determine the effectiveness of interventions.

Description

Data-based decision making involves analyzing screening and progress monitoring data to determine how to best address students’ needs. Data are considered within multiple levels (school-wide, grade-level, classroom, individual students) to determine the effectiveness of instruction/intervention. Clearly specified, data-based decision rules are used to guide intervention selection and modification, the need for movement between tiers of support, and students’ response to instruction/intervention. Data are organized, maintained, and displayed using an online student database that enables school teams to make school-wide, grade-level, class-wide, and individual student decisions.

High-Quality Learning Environments, Curricula, and Instructional Practices

Definition

High-quality learning environments, curricula, and instructional practices require a three-tiered service delivery model that aims to prevent learning difficulties, intervene when students need it, and provide enrichment opportunities. The model is inclusive in that instruction and intervention supports—in the classroom, supplemental education, special education, and multilingual/ESL education—are included within the three tiers.

Description

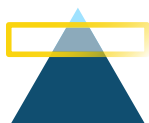
Represented by the inner triangle in the NJTSS graphic, this component refers to core instruction and supports for specific skills offered at three tiers varying by intensity.



Tier 1 - Universal Support

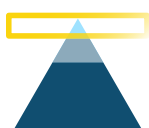
Tier 1, represented by the large dark blue section at the bottom of the triangle, focuses on core whole-group and differentiated small-group instruction in New Jersey Student Learning Standards in all classrooms (including multilingual classrooms and ESL programs), delivered with fidelity by trained teachers with the support of other professionals. In Tier 1, universal screening is conducted two or more times a year in literacy, math, and/or behavior to determine which students in each classroom are meeting grade-level or developmental benchmarks. The data are used to identify students who need additional support, which students may require intervention or enrichment activities, and areas of improvement for core/universal instruction and services.

Collaborative teams—made up of teachers (general education, ESL, and special education), the principal, the school counselor, and other specialists—develop decision criteria, review the screening data, and make decisions about the appropriateness of Tier 1 in meeting the majority of students' needs. When less than 80% of students are meeting benchmark expectations, Tier 1 instruction and curricula are altered and/or supplemented. Teachers are provided with instructional strategies and supports to meet the needs of their students based on data.



Tier 2 - Targeted Intervention

Tier 2, represented by the medium blue section in the middle of the inner triangle, includes additional evidence-based supports and interventions that are often provided in small-group settings. A group size of three to five students is recommended. Tier 2 or targeted interventions are provided in addition to Tier 1 for students who are not meeting grade-level or developmental expectations. These interventions are typically provided 3 to 5 days a week by a classroom teacher interventionist, reading specialist, or other specially trained staff member during an intervention period in addition to core instruction. Interventions are focused on developing skills and increase in intensity, frequency, and duration based upon the review of data during regular progress monitoring intervals. The foci for Tier 2 interventions are typically determined by diagnostic assessments conducted as a follow-up to universal screening. There may be adaptations of supports and interventions based on an individual student's performance using data that are reviewed during frequent progress monitoring intervals.



Tier 3 - Intensive Intervention

Tier 3, represented by the small light blue section at the top of the inner triangle, includes the most intensive level of evidence-based supports and interventions. Tier 3 interventions are provided for individual students or small student groups (two to three students) who are significantly below benchmark expectations and/or those for whom Tier 2 is insufficient in meeting their needs. Tier 3 interventions are more intensive, typically provided more frequently (daily) than interventions at Tier 2. As with Tier 2, Tier 3 interventions are typically provided by an interventionist, reading specialist, or other specially trained staff member in addition to core instruction. There may be adaptations of supports and interventions based on an individual student's performance using data that are reviewed during frequent progress monitoring intervals.

Collaborative Teams

Definition

Collaborative teams are groups of administrators; general, special education, and multilingual teachers; service providers/interventionists; and other staff with complementary expertise who guide the use of data to inform decisions about instruction and intervention at each tier of the NJTSS model as well as analyze overall instruction and intervention system strengths and needs. These teams comprehensively study the functionality and effectiveness of the instruction and intervention system to address the academic, behavioral, and health needs of the students served.

Description

While the structure of school leadership varies due to the availability of personnel resources, teams are pivotal in evaluating student data and devising tailored instructional and intervention plans. These teams are uniquely composed of members selected for their diverse expertise and perspectives, including educators from various subject areas, special education specialists, school psychologists, and administrators. This diversity ensures a holistic view of student needs and educational strategies.

Members are chosen based on their specific skills and their ability to collaborate effectively across disciplines. For instance, educators contribute insights into curriculum and pedagogy, psychologists bring an understanding of student behavior and learning processes, and administrators ensure alignment with school policies and resources.

The team functions cohesively by employing a structured, data-driven approach to address individual student needs as well as broader educational challenges. They are responsible for coordinating supports for groups of students with common needs, critically reviewing the implementation of interventions, and analyzing progress-monitoring data to evaluate students' responses to various interventions. This continual evaluation helps the team refine and adjust strategies to optimize student outcomes. Families and caregivers are included in discussions specifically concerning their own children's data and interventions, ensuring that they receive relevant information and understand how the school is serving their student. Community providers may also offer intervention and support opportunities to complement district services and increase accessibility for families.

When implementing frameworks such as NJTSS, RTI, or MTSS with fidelity, the collaborative nature of these teams is essential. These teams not only meet the criteria for intervention and referral service teams as per the administrative code but also enhance the effectiveness of interventions through a comprehensive and integrated approach.

Progress Monitoring

Definition

Progress monitoring, which involves regularly assessing student performance through brief assessments, is used to determine students' rate of improvement or response to intervention and to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention (National Center on Intensive Intervention, n.d.).

Description

Progress monitoring is used for students receiving Tier 2 or 3 support to determine students' response to intervention. Individual students' progress is determined by administering multiple forms of the same assessment at intervals frequent enough to make decisions about the impact of intervention (e.g., weekly). Districts and schools establish criteria for the number of data-points required to make decisions (e.g., 7 to 8 data points). Progress monitoring assessments allow for repeated measurement of the same skills/behaviors utilizing a common scale of measurement (e.g., number of words read correctly during a weekly oral reading fluency assessment). Progress monitoring assessments have documented reliability and validity in making decisions about student growth/progress over time. Progress monitoring over time in all settings with appropriate, documented interventions is the recommended process to decide if a referral is warranted for both general and multilingual education students.

Staff Professional Development

Definition

Darling-Hammond, in a report published by the Learning Policy Institute (2017), defined professional development as, “structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes.” In New Jersey, professional development is based on the New Jersey Professional Learning Standards and can be intended to increase educator effectiveness in teaching New Jersey’s Student Learning Standards and preparing students for success after high school. Specific to implementing NJTSS, professional development includes learning opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding of all components of NJTSS and how to implement them with fidelity to support all students in the areas of academics, behavior, social-emotional well-being, and health. These opportunities include access to resources, high-quality coaching, training and technical assistance, participation in learning communities, and mentoring.

Description

Implementation of NJTSS requires the ongoing development of skills in the use and integration of assessments, data-based decision-making, and high-quality instruction and interventions. Each school district develops individual, school-level, and district-level professional development plans where knowledge and skill development in these areas can be addressed. Professional learning communities and job-embedded coaching are successful methods to develop these skills. Professional development regarding the implementation of NJTSS and specific academic and behavioral interventions may be included in the Annual School Plan for schools receiving Title 1 and/or the Multilingual Plan for schools receiving Title 3 funds to meet needs identified in a school’s needs assessment. Engaging general, special, and multilingual educators, as well as providers of interventions in development of these plans facilitates a coordinated continuum of instruction and interventions and enables staff members to coordinate their individual responsibilities within the larger system of student support.

Equity and Cultural Considerations

Definition

The New Jersey Administrative Code ([Chapter 7. Managing for Equity in Education Subchapter 1. General Provisions, 6A:7-1.3 Definitions](#)) includes the following definition of equity:

“Equity” means all students have the opportunity to obtain mastery of appropriate grade level New Jersey State Student Learning Standards in an educational environment that is fair, just, and impartial to all individuals. Equity focuses on consistent and systematic access for all students to curriculum, resources, instruction, and environments that sustain opportunities for excellent outcomes.

When developing a tiered system of support, school leadership and educators are encouraged to review current policies and practices to ensure that equity and cultural considerations influence programmatic development, decision making, implementation and evaluation of programming. Viewing current practices through an equitable and culturally responsive lens may be challenging for school districts to accomplish. Districts embarking on this type of retrospection often require a shifting of priorities to ensure that the mindset of the whole school community is in agreement and will work collaboratively at all levels to ensure that all members of the community are represented.

Description

Equity in Tiered Systems. In a brief titled “Equity by Design,” Sullivan, Nyugen, and Shaver (2022) recommend that equity becomes a foundational component of an MTSS framework as a pathway to further social justice efforts and safeguard student rights. The authors introduce the concept of equity-centered MTSS and propose that educators purposefully think about MTSS design and implementation through a culturally responsive lens (Sullivan et al., 2022). As a foundational component, equity ensures that policies, procedures and practices are developed with the needs of all students in mind. Sullivan et al. caution that simply putting a tiered system in place will not improve equity and in some cases can reinforce marginalization and inequity in the absence of intentional efforts to address systemic inequities. Schools can work to challenge common deficit-based assumptions, such as discipline disparities and institutional racism, by developing norms, values, and actions that are based on creating and sustaining social justice and by centering the voices, needs, experiences, and interests of marginalized

populations within a system (Sullivan et al., 2022). The following are three areas Sullivan et al. (2022) identify for school leaders and educators to focus their equity efforts. Readers should refer to the full brief for a more in-depth look at these recommendations.

- **Leadership Equity:** School leadership strives to include members of the school community, students, families, and the larger community in all aspects of planning, design, implementation, and evaluation.
- **Aligning Language with Intent:** School communities reflect on the impact of language within their school to avoid shaping expectations, perceptions, and behaviors. Schools avoid labeling students by tier (i.e., Tier 2 student) or behavior (i.e., behavior disabilities/BD student).
- **Policies and Practices for Equity:** Schools examine current policies and practices to determine the extent to which inclusionary practices are being utilized and make improvements where necessary.

Culturally Responsive Systems of Support. In addition to combining academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and health needs into one integrated system, Cumming and Rodriguez (2018) speak to the need for this integration to occur in a way that takes culturally responsive practices into consideration. The authors outline “10 Principles of a Multi-Tiered Culturally Responsive System of Support”:

1. Use data-based problem solving and decision making.
2. Data is used to identify culturally relevant and realistically achievable goals, expectations, and outcomes.
3. Key concepts, competencies, and student outcomes for academic and behavioral development are culturally responsive, targeted, and modeled across all three tiers.
4. Adopt culturally responsive, evidence-based practices and interventions to support the achievement of academic and behavioral goals, objectives, and outcomes.
5. Resources are organized to support accurate, fluent, and sustained implementation through opportunity, capacity, and resources.
6. There are clear expectations for performance, balanced with the use of student choice to maximize student engagement and motivation.
7. The use of culturally responsive pedagogy that promotes active engagement and opportunities to respond.
8. Have instruction logically progress from easier to more complex concepts.
9. Teachers provide students with opportunities to practice new skills, both academic and behavioral, with varied degrees of teacher support and learning contexts.
10. Mastery of academic and behavioral outcomes is monitored so that instructional adaptations, modeling, and corrective feedback occur when necessary.

When school leadership and educators develop programs that center on equity and culturally responsive practices, the likelihood that all students will benefit from instruction and intervention exponentially increases.

Serving All Student Populations

Definition

Implementation of the NJTSS framework is compatible with and well-aligned to the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). NJTSS is designed to provide a continuum of both academic and behavioral supports to all students (i.e., general education, special education, and multilingual education students) ranging from school-wide prevention practices to intensive individualized interventions. NJTSS is also designed for prevention, intervention, and enrichment of students’ academic, social-emotional, behavioral, and health needs.

Description

NJTSS, New Jersey’s MTSS, includes the foundation principles of Universal Design for Learning, which is an instructional design framework that is based on a notion that all students are varied in their learning needs, and therefore instruction must be flexible to ensure learning for all (King-Sears et al., 2023). NJTSS is a framework inclusive of a continuum of supports, accommodations, modifications, and interventions that can be implemented to support the needs of all students despite their classroom placement. Students with IEPs may be educated in the general education classroom receiving the same Tier 1 support as general education students and the supports and services provided through their IEPs.

To ensure that Multilingual Learners (MLs) have had an equivalent “opportunity to learn,” implementation of effective instructional practices are to be provided for all teachers who work with MLs and coupled with a high-quality developmental ML program. In doing so, MLs are afforded the same Tier 1 supports as general education students in addition to their multilingual education program. A strong NJTSS process is necessary to determine whether an ML is to be referred to the Child Study Team for risk of disability versus language acquisition. A multilingual teacher may be on the NJTSS committee to address normal processes of second language acquisition as opposed to the possibility of a learning disability.

Key Takeaways

- The New Jersey Tiered System of Supports (NJTSS) provides a structured, multi-tiered framework that addresses the academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and health needs of all students. It ensures students receive the right supports at the right time through coordinated, evidence-based practices.
- Decades of research support the effectiveness of multi-tiered systems in improving outcomes for all students, particularly those with disabilities. NJTSS emphasizes early intervention, ongoing assessment, and data-informed instruction.
- Key elements such as strong leadership, universal screening, data-based decision making, high-quality instruction, and professional development work together to ensure effective implementation and positive student outcomes.
- NJTSS promotes equity by addressing systemic barriers and ensuring that all students—regardless of background—have access to inclusive, culturally responsive supports and opportunities to succeed.
- Designed to support general education students, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners, NJTSS integrates Universal Design for Learning and complies with federal education laws to promote access and inclusion for all.

Additional Resources

- [The New Jersey Tiered System of Supports \(NJTSS\)](#)
- [NJTSS-Early Reading](#)
- [New Jersey Literacy Framework](#)
- [New Jersey Positive Behavior Support in Schools](#)
- [Behavioral Supports and Interventions-Special Education](#)
- [New Jersey Comprehensive School-Based Mental Health Resources Guide](#)