

▶ Section 5: Implementation Planning



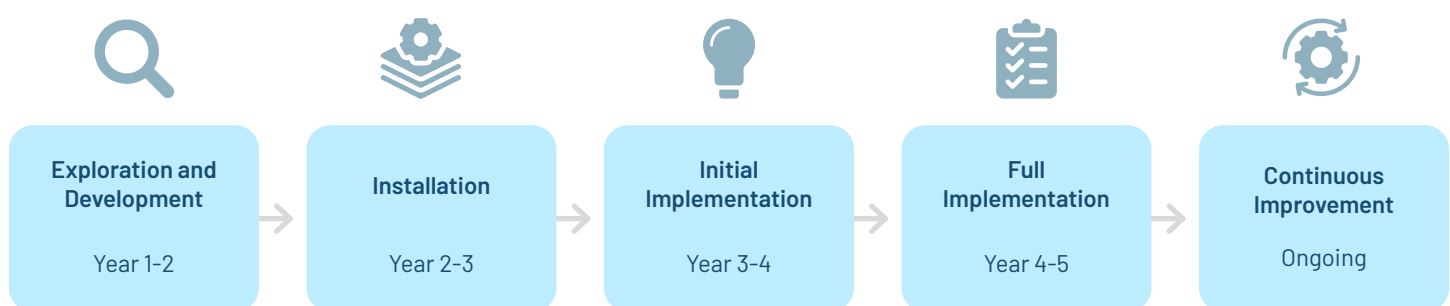
Implementation is best approached as a process comprising multiple phases and through formation of plans that realistically address the realities and needs of the various individuals and roles that make up the school system. Without deliberate assessment of the system's status and needs, barriers to change or sustained implementation are harder to surmount (Sugai & Horner, 2005; Fixsen et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2024). This section provides guidance on the following:

- Generation of implementation plans, and
- Development of rollout plans.

A Framework for Implementation

Planning for a systematic framework such as NJTSS can be enhanced through application of findings from decades of research on organizational change and new program implementation. Implementation of new programs within an organization such as a school system can be described as occurring across five stages: exploration, installation, initial implementation, and full implementation (see Figure 5.1 below). Each stage can be distinguished from other stages primarily in terms of a balance between information gathering and planning versus incremental implementation efforts.

Figure 5.1: Five Stages of Implementation



The first two stages, “Exploration” and “Installation,” are the stages in which information gathering and planning are prioritized.

- **Exploration and Development:** Taking stock of the school system as it is now (the ways in which students’ needs are identified and how individuals or teams work together in response to those needs), as well as organizing stakeholders to conceptualize potential changes to the school system.
- **Installation:** Gathering the materials, training, and information required by components of the plan. The final two stages, called “Initial Implementation” and “Full Implementation,” are characterized by a shift in the balance between information gathering and actions taken.
- **Initial Implementation:** New practices and resources are put into action for the first times. Initial implementation may be regarded as a “phase,” rather than a “stage,” as various elements of tiered systems are best implemented gradually over time.
- **Full Implementation:** Within this phase, the practices and resources that comprise NJTSS have been fully implemented and are in full effect. This phase is characterized by ongoing evaluation to maintain and enhance components of the tiered system and their implementation.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Even after all components of NJTSS have been fully implemented, schools continue to adjust practices and resources across the components based on the results of ongoing formative evaluation of the system and its outcomes. Implementation does not stop, but changes as goals are met or adjusted over time.

Planning for Implementation

An implementation plan is a specification of what the district will implement as its tiered system of support. The rollout plan is the set of district-wide and school-level action steps that will be taken, as well as the timeline within which key changes are planned to occur. Rollout refers to the actual initial implementation of components of NJTSS.

Forming a Leadership and Planning Team

As outlined in [Section 3: Development of Multidisciplinary Teams and Accompanying Processes](#), the establishment of teaming structures is essential to the formation of an effective implementation and rollout plan. This pre-determined group’s responsibility is to begin the exploration process (described above) by assessing and developing their own knowledge of the concepts that underlie tiered systems of support in schools. This can occur at all levels within the pre-determined teaming structure.

Creating an Implementation Plan

An implementation plan is an outline of the specific resources—such as assessments or intervention programs—and procedures that will comprise the district’s tiered system of support. A useful implementation plan is sufficiently detailed, specific, and responsive to a school’s and/or district’s current needs and goals.

Components of an implementation plan can include the following:

- Rationale, goals, and starting point (baseline) for implementation of a tiered framework, and
- A detailed description of the program (what will be implemented).

1. Rationale, Goals, and Starting Point

Rationale

In development of a tiered framework in schools, it may be beneficial to start with the “why,” or the needs the framework is meant to address, as well as the specific goals the district, school and/or grade or content level aims to achieve through use of the framework. The general rationale for implementation of tiered systems is that schools aim to enhance learning and outcomes for all students; more specific aspects of the rationale for tiered systems may vary by district. For example, at the heart of one district’s rationale for implementation of NJTSS may be a need to address inequities in achievement between groups of students. In another district, a key part of the rationale may be more effective identification of student educational needs, including students with disabilities.

Goals

Identification of goals coordinates the efforts of a team and provides a basis for evaluation of the success of various aspects of implementation (see more about the role of goal setting in [Section 9](#), on evaluation practices to improve implementation). Examples of goals for NJTSS may include the following:

Table 5.1: Examples of NJTSS Goals

Example Goal	Example Data Sources
Greater rates of cognitive, behavioral, and affective engagement with school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance School Climate Surveys Discipline Data
Increased rates of growth for students at risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Growth Percentiles Fall, Winter, & Spring Benchmark / Screening Data
Increased achievement of students at risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual State Test Outcomes Student Grade Data Fall, Winter, & Spring Benchmarks / Screening Data
Decreased number of referrals for special education evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Records of Referrals for Evaluation Records of Evaluation Outcomes (% eligible)

Districts' goals in implementation of tiered systems may (and often should) change over time (e.g., Shapiro & Clemens, 2009). Initially, schools may focus on accelerating learning for students at risk. Later, after successful implementation of targeted and intensive intervention, priority might shift toward goals focused on enhancing outcomes in Tier 1, core instruction.

Starting Point

The leadership and planning teams complete a needs assessment (refer to [Section 4](#)) that informs what resources and practices are already within the system and which need to be identified, obtained, and implemented. Note that some resources and practices already in use might be identified as requiring some change, such as adoption of better tests for screening or progress monitoring or adoption of intervention resources more closely aligned with students' learning needs.

It will often be necessary to consider prioritizing such changes. Some existing resources and practices might be identified as areas for improvement, but might represent less urgent change, given immediate needs, whereas others might be prioritized for more immediate action. For example, as noted in [Section 2](#), some tests will be stronger or more useful for some purposes than others. Although a particular test appears to be time intensive or not optimally accurate as a screener, it might prove to be sufficient for use (better than no screening at all) until a better option can be identified, acquired, and implemented.

2. Detailed Program Description and Components

It is helpful to simplify and focus on planning within specific categories. These include details of (a) Operations, (b) Assessment, (c) Curriculum and Interventions, (d) Personnel, (e) Processes, and (f) Professional Development.

- **Operations:** Team structures and practices across levels, as well as scheduling, budget, and sustainability plans.
- **Assessment:** Data systems, screening and progress monitoring instruments, as well as procedures to assess fidelity of data collection and use.
- **Curriculum and Interventions:** Core curriculum, Tiers 2 and 3 interventions, fidelity checks, and vendor management.
- **Personnel:** Establishing buy-in and defining roles of administrators and staff.

Assessment

Assessment concerns the test and methods to be used for screening, diagnostic assessment, and progress monitoring. Typically, decisions around which tests and procedures to use for these three forms of assessment are made at the district level, as uniformity in assessment practices within grade levels across school buildings promotes more seamless tiered systems, as well as more effective ongoing program evaluation. Refer to [Section 2](#) on characteristics that tests or procedures should exhibit to be useful in assessment for screening, diagnostic, or progress monitoring purposes.

Table 5.3: Assessment Sub-Components and Responsibilities

Responsibility	Assessment Sub-Components
District-Wide	Data System(s) for NJTSS data
District-Wide	Screening Assessments
District-Wide	Diagnostic Assessments
District-Wide	Progress Monitoring Assessments
District-Wide	Assessment Fidelity Checks

Exploration and selection of specific tests and procedures for assessment needs within NJTSS is best carried out by teams, including those (a) knowledgeable of the age level and content area in which the assessment is to be conducted and (b) those knowledgeable of educational and psychological measurement. These teams might include those with training specific to assessment, including district level assessment, evaluation specialists, special education teachers, or support staff, such as school psychologists, speech/language pathologists, etc.

Data Systems

The easiest component of this category to overlook is the data system or systems. This refers to the database or databases that will be used to store, manage, and report out assessment data collected to inform instruction and intervention planning within NJTSS. As with the tests or procedures themselves, the decisions about data system(s) used to support NJTSS are made at the district level. Refer to [Section 9](#) on “Data Management and Reporting” for more information on important characteristics of data systems.

Assessment Instruments

This includes instruments and procedures to be used for screening, diagnostic assessment, and progress monitoring. See [Section 2](#) for a detailed description of each of these three purposes for assessment within tiered systems and for guidelines on selection of instruments (i.e., tests) and procedures that will be used to collect data.

Assessment Fidelity Checks

A final sub-component of this category is the set of fidelity checks to be used in monitoring (and promoting) the correct administration and scoring of the various assessments used throughout a school system’s tiered service framework. Fidelity checks are typically associated with implementation of Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions, yet they also can be used to protect the usefulness of data collected. Any deviations from typical test administration procedures, any modification of test content or tasks, and changes to any non-automated scoring procedures can alter the meaning of the data collected. This, in turn, reduces accuracy of decisions made, based on those data (e.g., Cummings et al., 2014).

Personnel

Personnel refers to the leadership team, administrators, educators, and staff required for the planning and implementation of NJTSS.

Table 5.5: Personnel Sub-Components and Responsibilities

Responsibility	Personnel Sub-Component
District-Wide	Administrator / Leadership Team Knowledge, Buy-In
District-Wide	Educator Knowledge, Buy-In
District-Wide	Data Specialist(s)
District/Schools	Tier 2 Interventionists
District/Schools	Tier 3 Interventionists
District/Schools	Scheduling Management
Schools	Progress Monitoring Data Collectors

District-Wide Personnel Planning Considerations

Sub-components in this category concern the establishment of knowledge of and buy-in for NJTSS among leadership team members at the district level and among educators and staff throughout each school.

Also included at the district level is the identification of one or more data specialists. These are staff members who have responsibilities for leading data management, reporting, and potentially also analysis. (See [Section 9](#) for additional discussion of data management and evaluation). This group of responsibilities may be shared across different staff members or, depending on resources, dedicated to a full-time position.

Planning Shared Across District and School Levels

Planning for who will be responsible for implementing interventions—Tier 2 and Tier 3 alike—involves decisions that might typically be made at the individual school level (i.e., paraprofessionals trained to implement a supplemental Tier 2 reading intervention protocol), or at the district level (e.g., specialists involved in implementation of intensive academic, behavioral, or mental health intervention).

Planning Considerations at the School Level

Decisions regarding who will be responsible for screening and progress monitoring data collection, and in some cases, data entry, might be made at the individual school level.

Processes

Processes refers to the scheduling of district-wide and school-level activities across Tiers 1, 2, and 3. These may include scheduling communications with families, screenings and benchmarks, assessments, evaluations, and meetings across tiers.

Table 5.6: Processes Sub-Components and Responsibilities

Responsibility	Processes Sub-Component
District-Wide	Guardian/Family Communications
District-Wide	Screening/Benchmarking Schedule
District-Wide	Annual Program Planning & Needs Assessment
District-Wide	Annual Program Planning & Evaluation
District-Wide	School Climate and Culture Assessment
District/Schools	Intervention Record Keeping
Schools	Tier 1 Meeting Agendas & Schedule
Schools	Tier 2 Meeting Agendas & Schedule
Schools	Tier 3 Meeting Agendas & Schedule

District-Wide Responsibilities

These subcomponents chiefly involve scheduling periodic district-wide assessments, including screening schedules across all grades and schools, as well as school climate and culture assessments. See NJ School Climate Improvement (SCI) platform for additional information. The other primary NJTSS process at the district level is hosting regular, often annual, meetings for the purpose of evaluating NJTSS implementation and outcomes.

Intervention Record Keeping

This includes data on intervention implementation, including which students were assigned which interventions. If possible, these records can all feature additional details related to dosage, including when the intervention started, the number and length of sessions per week (both scheduled and completed), teacher or interventionist names, and any records of implementation fidelity. These data are essential for effective intervention decision making and ongoing program evaluation.

Professional Development

Everyone involved in NJTSS implementation will require (and some might be tasked with delivering) regular training and professional development. Some training can be brief, e.g., training aides/paraprofessionals on collecting and entering progress monitoring data. Other trainings/professional development can be expected to take longer, such as training on interpretation of screening data, making links between assessment and intervention, and making instructional decisions based on progress monitoring data. Regardless of the training topic, it will be necessary to plan for follow-up. One-off learning opportunities such as workshops cannot be expected to precipitate change in systems and practices. High-quality workshops can help educators build knowledge, but change in practice is more likely in the context of job-embedded, ongoing coaching or consultation (Kraft et al., 2018).

Table 5.7: Professional Development Sub-Components and Responsibilities

Responsibility	Professional Development Sub-Components
District/Schools	Screening Training
District/Schools	Team Process Training
District/Schools	Team Data-Based Decision-Making Training
District/Schools	Progress Monitoring Training
District/Schools	Tier 2 Intervention Training
District/Schools	Tier 3 Team Process Training
District/Schools	Tier 3 Intervention Training

3. Rollout Plan

The rollout plan is generated after the implementation plan has been specified. The rollout plan articulates the timing of initial implementation of each element defined in the greater implementation plan. A full table of all subcomponents, organized within their respective categories, can be found in [Appendix 5.1](#) and is recommended for use during initial planning stages. In addition, there is an interactive District Resource Inventory Tool available on the NJDOE website.

Staged Rollout

It would be prohibitively challenging to implement every component or subcomponent of NJTSS at the same time. It is far more realistic, and outcomes may be far stronger and more sustainable in the long term, if initial implementation is planned and carried out in stages. Although the order in which components of NJTSS are initially implemented must depend on district needs (as identified through processes described in [Section 4](#)), general suggestions are offered here—both as a way to guide thinking about implementation in stages and also as an example of how to schedule multiple stages of initial implementation over multiple school years.

Strategic Sequence

One principle that might aid in the formation of a rollout plan is that of necessity and sufficiency: Is a specific resource or practice necessary, prior to implementation of other elements, and are existing practices and resources sufficient to enable implementation of the new item? For example, implementing Tier 2 interventions could be impractical or ineffective if a school was not already engaged in periodic screenings. Screenings, then, might be necessary prior to initial implementation of Tier 2 interventions. For the initial implementation of screening to work, there should be already sufficient instrumentation available (i.e., tests) and a way to store and report the data. It is best to build readiness first (infrastructure, schedule, staff know-how) and then begin installation and implementation of evidence-based assessment (EBAs) and evidence-based interventions (EBIs). Without foundational elements, the ancillary (but more visible) features of tiered systems will not be as effective, and implementation will be less effective and sustainable.

Focused Rollout

Another consideration in planning for initial implementation is the scope of changes scheduled to occur. For example, it might be helpful to start implementation of tiered services for a subset of students (many schools focus on initial implementation in elementary grades first), and within a specific domain (many schools focus initial implementation on students' reading or social-emotional and behavioral functioning). This eases the burden of change throughout the greater system and allows for program modification and improvement as implementation spreads to other areas.

Example Rollout

A plan is outlined below demonstrating one way to stage out the initial implementation of sub-components of a tiered system of support; see [Appendix 5.1](#) for a chart detailing each element of the example plan. This plan begins with organizational changes that build capacity for subsequent planning and implementation and then proceeds through implementation of resources and practices at each tier, starting with Tier 1. As stated above, this is not necessarily the only way to organize a rollout plan; the timing and duration of this process depends heavily on local conditions and current practices ([Section 4](#)).

1. Communication and Buy-In

The step that can be considered after completion of an implementation plan by a leadership team is that of communication and buy-in. It is helpful to disseminate information within and outside the organization regarding the rationale for implementation of tiered services, the goals to be achieved, and the main details surrounding how those goals are to be achieved. This information can be shared with all whom will be involved in implementation, from administrators to teachers and support staff.

The term “buy-in” could be defined as a shared understanding of and commitment to goals. Obtaining buy-in is important in that it may promote greater engagement, collaboration, and sustained change after initial implementation. With poor buy-in among key stakeholders, districts can expect less engagement and lower quality implementation of new practices. The process of obtaining buy-in starts within the leadership and planning team and continues to the rest of the organization.

2. Initial Implementation in Tier 1

Many schools that implement tiered systems begin elements associated with Tier 1, or universal instruction. These can include aspects of curriculum, teaching, and assessment. At this stage, schools often engage in installation and initial implementation of NJTSS components in the realm of Tier 1. For example, this might include adoption of a scheduling model that leaves time for Tier 2 and Tier 3 activities and flexible movement of students within and between different levels of support. (See Sections 3 and 7 for more on the importance of scheduling for implementation of tiered services). This will also typically involve scheduling and initial implementation of screening assessment, as well as use of screening data by Tier 1 teams to evaluate and enhance effectiveness of current Tier 1 support.

3. Initial Implementation of Tier 2

Initial rollout of elements of Tier 2 starts with capacity building (i.e., training on assessments and interventions) and concludes with first uses. As noted above, it can be best to start by focusing on one area. Most schools start with elementary reading, which is the area in which there is a greater supply of assessment and intervention resources. Other schools begin with a focus on assessment and intervention for students’ mental health and behavioral needs. After initial implementation of tiered support in a specific domain, schools then begin to explore, install, and implement tiered support in additional areas (e.g., schools might begin with elementary reading and later move into tiered support for elementary math and interventions for middle school).

4. Initial Implementation of Tier 3

As noted in [Section 2](#), interventions that are considered Tier 3 are more intensive than those considered to be Tier 2. This means they involve more resources (i.e., often smaller groups of students or individual intervention in some cases) and require greater expertise (i.e., involvement of specialists). As with installation and initial implementation of Tier 2 intervention, the start of Tier 3 intervention requires that plans concerning personnel (interventionists), materials, and processes have been made, and any necessary training has occurred.

Example Multi-Year Rollout Plan

An example rollout plan is available in [Appendix 5.1](#). In this example, a district has established a plan for implementing and rolling out NJTSS over a span of 4 years. The rollout plan can be structured across multiple school years. The number of years depends on the extent to which a school district already implements portions of NJTSS (e.g., many districts have been collecting screening/benchmarking data but might be in early stages of planning Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention programs). It may be helpful, in designing a rollout plan, to think in terms of foundational elements and what is built on top of them. Foundational elements may include scheduling (to create times and places for interventions to occur), assessments (including schedules for screening and progress monitoring), and data systems that store, manage, and report screening/benchmark and progress monitoring data.

Ongoing Considerations

- Evaluate implementation periodically across each year of rollout. The leadership team should meet and review data, as well as hear from stakeholders.
- Plan on changing the plan. Be ready to make changes when needs are urgent but allow time for change. Alterations that are too rapid can jeopardize sustained systems change.
- Acknowledge successes and opportunities for improvement.
- Implementation is a process and does not stop after Tier 3 has been implemented. There's often some change happening in some aspect(s) of the tiered system.

Key Takeaways

- The process of the initial design and implementation of tiered systems may be guided by a conceptual framework including exploration, installation, and implementation.
- Implementation planning may be facilitated through use of an inventory of NJTSS components.
- Plans for rolling out initial implementation of NJTSS will likely need to span multiple years. Implementation is an ongoing process, as student, district, and community needs may change over time.

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](#)