

Tiered Instruction:  
Grounding Document and Self-Assessment Instrument

Guidance – June 1, 2010

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has developed initial guidance to assist districts in establishing systems of tiered instruction. At the end of three years, every Level 4 School must meet the following Essential Condition for School Effectiveness:

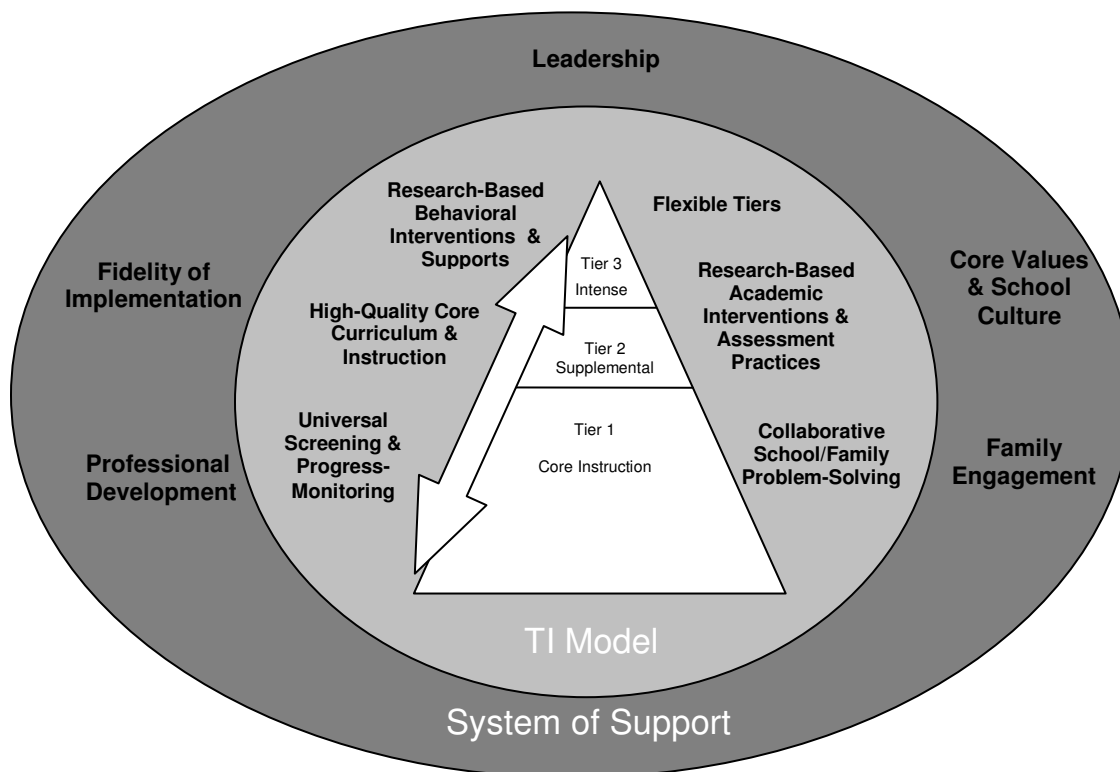
**Tiered instruction and adequate learning time:** The school schedule is designed to provide adequate learning time for all students in core subjects. For students not yet on track to proficiency in English language arts or mathematics, the school provides additional time and support for individualized instruction through tiered instruction, a data-driven approach to prevention, early detection, and support for students who experience learning or behavioral challenges, including but not limited to students with disabilities and English language learners.

The following guidance is intended to assist district, school, and community leaders in planning:

- 1. The Massachusetts System of Tiered Instruction.....2**
  - A draft grounding document that describes a framework to guide the establishment of systems of tiered instruction in districts and schools
  
- 2. Tiered Instruction Self-Assessment Instrument.....13**
  - A rubric intended to support districts and schools in assessing the status of their efforts to develop robust, effective systems of tiered instruction.

## The Massachusetts System of Tiered Instruction

Figure 1: System of Tiered Instruction



### Accountability and Assistance for School Districts and Schools Regulations 603 CMR 2.00

#### 2.02 Definitions

Tiered instruction shall mean a data-driven prevention, early detection, and support system that guides the allocation of school and district resources with the aim of providing high-quality core educational experiences for all students and targeted interventions to struggling students who experience learning or behavioral challenges.

## **The System of Tiered Instruction**

Figure 1 provides a framework to guide the establishment of systems of tiered instruction in districts and schools in Massachusetts. The core components of the tiered instruction model are represented within the inner circle; the broader school and district supports necessary to successfully implement tiered instruction are found within the outer ring. The instruction model is represented by the triangle of flexible tiers.

Schools and districts are encouraged to work toward an integrated approach of tiered academic and behavioral support. To assist with this integration, information on behavioral health components is provided. This information stems from the work of the Massachusetts Behavioral Health and the Public Schools Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force was convened in December 2008 in response to Section 19 of Chapter 321 of the Acts of 2008, An Act Relative to Children's Mental Health. The Task Force focused on building a framework to increase the capacity of schools to collaborate with behavioral health providers while focusing on the development of supportive school environments that improve educational outcomes for children with behavioral health needs.

The Behavioral Health framework is based on a three-part approach, with each part supporting the others. The three parts are 1) supportive school environments that promote the behavioral health of all students through whole-school approaches to behavior expectations, 2) early interventions to identify and address symptoms of behavioral health issues, and 3) intensive services that coordinate individual and small-group interventions for students with significant needs. See [Interim Report to the](#)

[Legislature: The Behavioral Health and Public School Task Force](#) for more information.

The three-part approach of the Behavioral Health framework aligns with the model of tiered instruction presented in this document. However, this document has been written primarily to provide districts a guide for developing a model of tiered academic instruction. The Department anticipates providing additional guidance on developing a tiered behavioral component which can be integrated into an overall system of tiered instruction.

### **Six Core Components: Inner Circle**

The six components essential to the success of a tiered instruction model are:

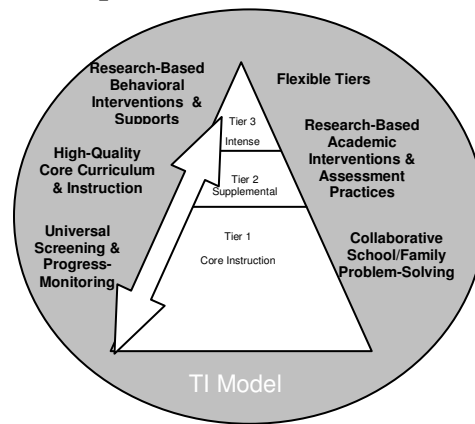
- flexible tiers;
- high-quality core curriculum and instruction implemented with fidelity;
- research-based academic interventions and assessment practices;
- research-based behavioral interventions and supports;
- universal screening and progress-monitoring; and
- collaboration and communication between educators and parents.

When developing the components, the specific characteristics of the school's student population, such as culture and English proficiency, are factored into the development of the model to ensure that the system is responsive to the full range of students.

The model of flexible tiers provides students with increasing levels of support through a tier-based strategy in order to match the instructional support and intensity with the specifics and severity of a student's need. Data from universal screenings, continuous progress-monitoring, and assessments are used to make instructional decisions throughout the tiered process. Ongoing collaboration between educators and parents is key to the success of a model of tiered instruction and is essential if the school is going to use this system as part of the special education eligibility process. To ensure that students eligible for special education services are able to access fully the system of

tiered instruction, relevant information from their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) is to be incorporated into the design and implementation of instruction and assessments in all tiers.

**Figure 2: Core Components of a Tiered Instruction Model**



The first tier in the triangle (see Figure 2) represents the core curriculum and instruction provided to all students. Creating a robust and responsive general education classroom experience is the priority in this tier. All students receive academic instruction and behavioral supports that include differentiation and extension activities. Eighty to ninety percent of the total student population learn the key concepts through instruction in this tier. A successful tiered instruction model is characterized by having a high-quality core curriculum and instruction program that is effective, engaging, and developmentally appropriate.

Administrators, grade-level teams, and teachers within this environment work to ensure that they are teaching a core curriculum that is designed using the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and that is vertically aligned through the grades. Teachers work to ensure that classroom instruction is differentiated to serve the needs of all students and

that a method is used for assessing the effectiveness of the core curriculum on a routine basis. School personnel are skilled at providing large and small group research-based differentiated instruction aligned with individual students' developmental levels and learning needs.

District and school leaders work to address the varied instructional needs identified through active monitoring of instruction and the use of ongoing formative and summative student assessment data. A universal screening system is used to assess the strengths and challenges of all students in academic achievement and to determine which students are struggling and may need additional support.

In the tiered model, universal screening procedures and data collection systems are established to identify, as early as possible, those students needing additional support in mastering key academic and behavioral concepts and skills. Once students are identified as being at risk of not meeting grade-level expectations, they are provided targeted, short-term interventions. This quick response will allow students to learn the essential skills all successful learners must acquire to be able to access fully the core curriculum.

The second tier of the triangle (see Figure 2) provides students with research-based interventions through targeted small group work or extra instructional time. The interventions at this tier supplement, enhance, support, and provide access to the core curriculum; these interventions are provided in addition to the core instruction. Five to ten percent of the total student population receive instruction through supplemental interventions in this tier. When available, the interventions are research-based and valid and they serve as reliable predictors of future performance. See the Institute of Education

Sciences' Response to Intervention practice guides on reading and mathematics for information about research-based practices. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>.

An information collection and management system allows data from continuous progress-monitoring to be used to drive instructional decisions throughout the tiered process. Progress-monitoring data indicate student responses to the interventions and are used to determine student movement through the tiers. Students' academic progress is monitored with increasing frequency as students receive more intensive additional tiered interventions. Additionally, information from assessments of the students' attention skills, participation behaviors, communication skills, memory, and social relations with groups, peers, and adults may be necessary to consider throughout the multi-tiered system.

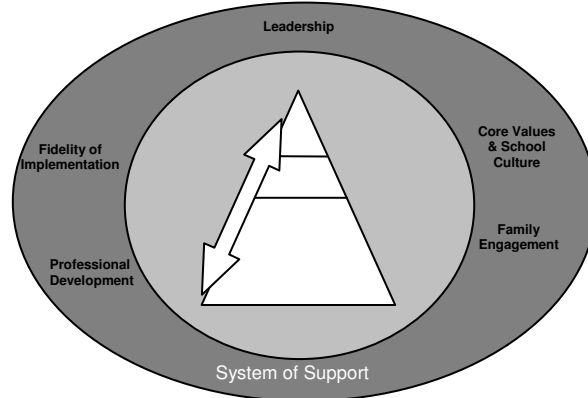
The third tier of the triangle (see Figure 2) provides intensive interventions to students who are at substantial risk of not meeting grade-level expectations. These students are identified through universal screening, progress-monitoring, and assessment data. Intense interventions are provided to struggling learners for longer periods of time, and the students' progress is monitored with increased frequency. These interventions are provided in addition to the core instruction. One to five percent of the total student population receive instruction through these intensive interventions.

Throughout the tiered instruction model, collaborative problem-solving teams use data-driven decision-making and problem-solving processes at the school, classroom, and individual student levels to make educational decisions. Responsibility is shared among all educators (for example, general education, special education, related services, English Language Education, Title I) for the academic progress of all students, and parents are

involved in the decision-making process through all tiers. School-level, grade-level, and student-centered teams meet collaboratively to review assessment data and make instructional decisions. Additional members may participate in these meetings depending on the needs of the individual students and the expertise of the existing team members. To ensure that English language acquisition issues are distinguished from other learning challenges, assessment procedures and interventions are culturally and linguistically sensitive, and administered by trained personnel. Time is scheduled for the grade-level and student-level teams to collaborate and conduct follow-up activities. Team members are aware of the necessary policies and procedures that must be in place to comply with Special Education Regulations regarding the use of tiered instruction to determine eligibility for Specific Learning Disabilities.

Integrating the core components of flexible tiers; high-quality core curriculum and instruction implemented with fidelity; research-based academic interventions and assessment practices; research-based behavioral interventions and supports; universal screening and progress-monitoring; and collaboration and communication between educators and parents is key to the success of the tiered model and requires a system of support from the school and district levels.

**Figure 3: The Outer Circle: School and District Systems of Support**



The outer ring (see Figure 3) contains the system of support that is essential to ensuring that the tiered instruction model is integrated and effective. This system is comprised of:

- leadership;
- core values and school culture;
- family engagement;
- professional development; and
- fidelity of implementation.

Developing a system of tiered instruction may represent a significant organizational change for districts and schools—one that affects the entire school system and requires a long-term change process (of three or more years). Adhering to the model as a vehicle for delivering instruction and organizing resources is instrumental to the success of the system of tiered instruction. Strong models include interim goals, accountability practices, and methods for evaluating the efficacy of the system. District and school administration discuss the underlying value system necessary for the model of tiered instruction to be successful. Administrators should discuss with stakeholder groups the district’s commitment to long-term implementation.

The following core values guide the development and implementation of a successful tiered instruction model.

- All students can learn and achieve at high standards as a result of effective teaching.
- All students have access to a rigorous, standards-based curriculum and research-based instruction.
- Students receive interventions at the earliest indication of need.
- A comprehensive system of tiered instruction enables schools to address the full range of student needs.
- Student results improve when ongoing academic and behavioral performance data inform instructional decisions.
- Important decisions about the needs of students are made using a collaborative problem-solving process that includes classroom teachers, specialists, and families.
- Ongoing and meaningful involvement of families increases student success.
- All members of the school community must continue to gain knowledge and develop expertise in order to build the capacity and sustainability of the tiered instruction model.
- Effective leadership at all levels is crucial for the implementation of an effective system of tiered instruction.

Professional development related to the components of the tiered model of instruction is a critical component of the system of support. Effective professional development is job-embedded, carefully planned and ongoing, and includes topics and skills essential to the implementation of a tiered model of instruction. A successful approach allows teachers to have regular, frequent department and/or grade-level common planning and meeting time that is used to improve implementation of the curriculum and instructional practice. As part of professional development, all staff members receive training in the use of screening data for instructional planning, use of progress-monitoring data, principles of effective instruction, differentiation of instruction,

parent involvement, foundations of reading and mathematics instruction, and principles of positive behavior supports. To build the capacity of the program, advanced training in particular components of the tiered instruction model (flexible tiers, research-based academic and behavioral interventions and supports, high-quality core curriculum and instruction, universal screening and progress-monitoring, and collaborative school/family problem solving) is provided to identified school personnel. Responsibilities of specific persons and their roles are clearly defined.

The district also ensures that parents are provided information on the core curriculum, interventions, and support systems that are serving their children in the tiered instruction model. A system for family engagement is put in place to ensure that:

- Parents are given information on the tiered instruction model, including an overview of the system and ways to support their children at home. The overview is written to provide an explanation of interventions, assessments, and expectations of the model. Ideally, the overview is presented to parents orally, as well.
- Parents are invited to participate in the decision-making process related to the tiered system of instruction, and regular updates on interventions, goals, and formal assessment results are provided to parents when students receive services in more targeted tiers.
- Families are encouraged to participate in the school community and in their children's education through frequent outreach, events, and communication.
- Parents are informed of their right to request a special education evaluation at any time during the tiered instruction process.

Lastly, as part of the system of support, building principals provide leadership and support for the tiered model through the efficient and flexible use of time and resources, including resources for the core curriculum; appropriate interventions; data-gathering, analysis, and storage; specialists; and staff time for progress-monitoring, problem-

solving, and decision-making. The building schedule is designed to support the tiered model of instruction.

To maximize program effectiveness, district and school personnel must work to ensure that the system is implemented with fidelity. A school- and teacher-level system must be in place for monitoring and evaluating the components, including the core curriculum, interventions, the work of the specialists, data collection and analysis, progress-monitoring, outreach to families, and staffing of problem-solving teams. This system of formative feedback and decision-making related to the model of tiered instruction will help minimize the challenges of developing a research-to-practice system.

The model of tiered instruction aligns with the Department's conditions for school effectiveness. Schools and districts will find that seeking to develop a system of tiered instruction based on this framework addresses all of the conditions for school effectiveness:

- effective school leadership;
- effective district systems for school support;
- aligned curriculum;
- effective instruction;
- student assessment;
- principal's staffing authority;
- professional development and structures for collaboration;
- tiered instruction and adequate learning time;
- students' social, emotional, and health needs;
- family-school relationships; and
- strategic use of resources and adequate budget authority.

**Self-Assessment Rubric: Developing a System of Tiered Instruction  
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE)**

This rubric is intended to support schools and districts in assessing the status of their efforts to develop robust, effective systems of tiered instruction. Based on this assessment, leaders can determine priorities and develop research-based action plans to guide improvement. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) recommends that district leaders assemble small teams of individuals who are knowledgeable about the progress of the schools in the district to complete the self-assessment either by evaluating individual schools or by generalizing across the patterns and experiences of all the district's schools. For purposes of the grant program, the self-assessment should be completed for each content area and/or behavior component to evaluate progress, determine priorities, and plan next steps.

The criteria in this rubric are aligned with the model found in the ESE System of Tiered Instruction and the two documents are intended to be used together.

As you fill out the self-assessment, note the school and district evidence that supports your rating in the space provided in the right-hand column. Determine the category that best describes the status in your school/district. The more objective and accurate your assessment, the more readily you can identify and prioritize gaps. Keep in mind that the objective of the self-assessment process is to help you determine priority next steps and develop a coherent action plan tailored to the needs of your district/school. You will find a simple action planning template at the end of this document.

# 1. CORE COMPONENTS OF THE TIERED INSTRUCTION MODEL

<b>I. FLEXIBLE TIERS OF INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTIONS</b>	Does not exist	Not consistent	Somewhat consistent	Consistent	Do not know	District- and School-Based Evidence
a. A system of tiered instruction is designed to provide increasing levels of support that match the instructional support and intensity with the specifics and severity of individual student needs.						
b. Supplemental interventions on specific skills and/or concepts are delivered in addition to core instruction.						
c. More intensive interventions on specific skills and/or concepts are delivered in addition to core instruction.						
d. There is a system in place to move students across tiers.						

<b>II. HIGH-QUALITY CORE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION IMPLEMENTED WITH FIDELITY</b>	Does not exist	Not consistent	Somewhat consistent	Consistent	Do not know	District- and School-Based Evidence
a. Core curriculum, instruction, and assessments are aligned with state standards.						
b. Core curriculum, instruction, and assessments are research-based.						

c. Core curriculum, instruction, and assessments are aligned vertically (between grades) and horizontally (across classrooms at the same grade level and across sections of the same course).						
d. A method for assessing the effectiveness and integrity of the core curriculum is established and implemented on a routine basis.						
e. Teachers are skilled in providing large and small group differentiated instruction aligned with students' developmental levels and learning needs.						
f. Reading instruction addresses five central components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).						
g. Mathematics instruction addresses math content standards and four essential domains (problem-solving, arithmetic skill/fluency, conceptual knowledge/number sense, and reasoning ability).						
h. Information from students' IEPs is used to ensure full access to the core curriculum and instruction.						
<b>III. RESEARCH-BASED INTERVENTIONS AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES</b>	Does not exist	Not consistent	Somewhat consistent	Consistent	Do not know	District- and School-Based Evidence
a. Assessments and interventions are culturally and linguistically appropriate.						

b. Validity and reliability measures are applied to all assessments as part of the selection and administration process.						
c. There are strong correlations between the selected assessments and the outcomes for identified student populations in specific areas.						
d. Appropriate staff are adequately trained to administer assessments.						
e. A range of interventions is available to meet the immediate needs of individual students beyond the core curriculum and instruction.						
f. Staff are adequately trained to provide the interventions that target and address specific skills (such as problem-solving, arithmetic skill/fluency, conceptual knowledge/number sense, reasoning ability, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).						
g. Supplemental and intensive interventions are implemented according to protocols that specify duration of the intervention, number of students, and daily time spent in intervention.						
h. Assessments and interventions are administered with fidelity.						

<b>IV. UNIVERSAL SCREENING AND PROGRESS-MONITORING</b>	Does not exist	Not consistent	Somewhat consistent	Consistent	Do not know	District- and School-Based Evidence
a. A universal screening system is in place and used by the district to assess the strengths and challenges of all students in academic achievement and behavior.						
b. A data collection and management system is in place for the purposes of screening, diagnostics, and progress-monitoring for academics and behavior.						
c. A progress-monitoring system is in place and data from this system drive instructional decisions throughout the tiered process.						
d. Progress-monitoring data indicate student response to intervention and determine student movement through the tiers.						
e. Academic and behavioral (if appropriate) progress is monitored with increasing frequency as students receive additional tiered interventions.						
<b>V. COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL/FAMILY PROBLEM SOLVING</b>	Does not exist	Not consistent	Somewhat consistent	Consistent	Do not know	District- and School-Based Evidence
a. Responsibility is shared among educators for the academic progress of all students.						
b. Parents are involved in the decision-making process across all tiers.						

c. Building, grade-level, and student-centered teams meet collaboratively to review assessment data and make instructional decisions.						
d. Time is scheduled for grade-level and student-level team collaboration and follow-up activities.						
e. Policies and procedures that comply with Special Education Regulations are in place to comply with the regulations regarding the use of tiered instruction to determine eligibility for a Specific Learning Disability.						

## **2. SCHOOL AND DISTRICT SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT**

<b>I. LEADERSHIP</b>	Does not exist	Not consistent	Somewhat consistent	Consistent	Do not know	District- and School-Based Evidence
a. District administration supports the tiered model as a vehicle for delivering targeted interventions and organizing resources.						
b. Building principals provide leadership and support for the tiered model.						
c. The building schedule is designed to support the tiered model of delivering curriculum, instruction, assessment, and targeted interventions.						

<b>II. CORE VALUES AND SCHOOL CULTURE</b>	Does not exist	Not consistent	Somewhat consistent	Consistent	Do not know	District- and School-Based Evidence
a. Staff understand and are committed to the core values of tiered instruction.						
b. All staff act in accordance with the core values of tiered instruction in their daily practice.						
<b>III. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	Does not exist	Not consistent	Somewhat consistent	Consistent	Do not know	District- and School-Based Evidence
a. The district professional development calendar allows sufficient time and flexibility for professional development in the components of the tiered model of curriculum delivery.						
b. Professional development is job-embedded, carefully planned and ongoing, and includes topics and skills essential to the implementation of a tiered model of curriculum.						
c. Professional development includes structures for collaboration that enable teachers to have regular, frequent department and/or grade-level common planning and meeting time that is used to improve implementation of the curriculum and instructional practice.						

d. Specific school personnel are identified for advanced training in particular components of the tiered model of curriculum delivery (data analysis, intervention, differentiated instruction) to build capacity and programs to ensure sustainability of the model.						
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<b>IV. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>Does not exist</b>	<b>Not consistent</b>	<b>Somewhat consistent</b>	<b>Consistent</b>	<b>Do not know</b>	<b>District- and School-Based Evidence</b>
a. Parents are given information on the tiered instruction model, including an overview of the system and ways to support their children at home.						
b. The district ensures that each school takes action to establish regular, two-way communication with parents.						
c. Parents are informed and invited to participate in the tiered process as soon as their children begin receiving tiered supports.						
d. Parents receive regular updates of their children’s interventions, goals, and progress.						
e. Parents are informed of their right to request a special education evaluation at any time during the tiered instruction process.						

<b>V. FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION</b>	Does not exist	Not consistent	Somewhat consistent	Consistent	Do not know	District- and School-Based Evidence
a. Operations, techniques, and components are definitively described.						
b. A data system for measuring operations, techniques, and components is in place.						
c. Responsibilities of specific persons and roles are clearly defined.						
d. A system for formative feedback and decision-making is in place.						
e. A system is in place for monitoring and evaluating the components of the system.						