10 Success Factors For Literacy Intervention: Getting Results with MTSS in Elementary Schools

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Success Factor #1: Group by Skill Deficit
The most effective approach is to place students in groups by specific skill deficits, which means all
the students in a group need pretty much the same thing and the teacher will clearly know what
to teach.

“The method of assigning students to groups makes all the difference in the results.
Schools experiencing success are ensuring that the groups are skill based.”
(Hall, 2018, p.13, 23)

Success Factor #2: Use Diagnostic Assessments
One prevalent issue is that many schools are using the wrong assessment data to look at skill deficits. Universal screener data do not
provide an adequate drill-down to the skill-level information needed to place students in appropriate skill groups. A universal
screener tells you who is not at benchmark while the diagnostic assessment tells you why and what to do about it. Confusion about
the types and purposes of different assessments is common. The absence of diagnostic assessments is a key reason for the lackluster
results from MTSS.

Success Factor #3: Implement a Walk-to-Intervention Model
One important MTSS structure is how the school organizes to deliver small-group intervention that is
differentiated to meet student needs. While many schools have an additional instructor join a
classroom teacher in the homeroom during the intervention block, this delivery model is not as
effective as the Walk-to-Intervention (WTI) model. Of the 10 advantages of WTI over in-class
intervention, perhaps my favorite is that when teachers collaborate across a grade level to share
students comments like “our kids” replace “my kids.”

“With Walk-to-Intervention the grade-level team thinks and acts more systemically.”
(Hall, 2018, p.68)

Success Factor #4: Monitor Progress with an Appropriate Assessment
Progress monitoring data are what inform decisions between benchmark periods about moving students in and out of groups. One
common problem is using the wrong assessment instruments are given, so the data aren’t all that useful. In other situations, the
amount of time set aside for teachers to use the data for making interim decisions is inadequate. Regular progress monitoring, with
good communication practices, leads to better student results.

Success Factor #5: Flood the Intervention Block with Extra Instructors
Schools are creative in looking to all possible staff members to teach intervention groups. A good rule of thumb for staffing is to
schedule at least 50 percent more assistants or support staff than the number of classroom teachers. Exceeding the 50-percent
rule of thumb for extra instructors will lead to even better results because there can be more specific skill groups and the group
size will be smaller. Principals getting good results are spending funds in ways that schedule more instructors to be available at
the critical intervention blocks, such as funding twice as many half-day morning positions instead of half the number of full-day
assistants.

“Schools that are achieving remarkable gains through MTSS are flooding intervention blocks with an “all hands
on deck” approach to enable smaller group sizes so that students get more feedback and practice.”
(Hall, 2018, p.83, 85)

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Elementary Schools. 2018. ASCD.
Success Factor #6: Use Intervention Time Wisely
Too many times students are sitting in an intervention group where they already know what is being taught. This time is precious and can’t be wasted. When students make mistakes teachers need to respond by modeling it, letting him practice, and giving him feedback each time until he gets it. This feedback loop doesn’t happen during the rest of the day for that struggling reader because the teacher can’t stop to address each mistake he makes. The student gets to master a skill one at a time until he is at grade-level in his skill.

“Struggling readers are under a time line -- they urgently need to catch up to grade level, and there are only so many resources a school has to devote to any one student.”  
(Hall, 2018, p.89)

Success Factor #7: Be Aware of What Makes Intervention Effective
Two critical MTSS success factors are using diagnostic assessment data to pinpoint a struggling reader’s lowest missing skill along a continuum and place that student in the appropriate skill group. Yet that’s not enough. It’s the way the instructor is working with students that leads to profound gains that close the gap for struggling readers.

“It’s not good enough for teachers to know that the instruction works; it’s critical that they understand why it works.”  
(Hall, 2018, p.99)

Success Factor #8: Provide Teachers with Intervention Lesson Materials
When gains in student outcomes are dismal, evaluate if teachers have been provided effective intervention lessons. In many cases it’s not that educators don’t believe in MTSS or don’t want to do it; they simply don’t have the time or knowledge to create all the lessons that are needed to differentiate instruction for all students. Many lessons are available including some that are free on the internet. Yet not all lessons are created equal.

Success Factor #9: Invest in Professional Development
Instructional materials, allocating staff resources, and learning to use data are all important. But MTSS is more complex than those things because it affects the way teachers spend their time, determine what each student needs, and decide what and how they teach during key learning sessions. Getting it right requires an intentional systemic design. The only way to get all staff onboard is to gather them in groups to communicate and engage in dialogue.

“MTSS in literacy is not about the stuff you buy; it’s about implementing new structures, processes, and instructional materials so that the school undergoes a paradigm shift in how teachers identify and address struggling readers.”  
(Hall, 2018, p.127)

Success Factor #10: Inspect What You Expect
After all the other components in Success Factors 1 through 9 are in place then it’s time to make sure that it all comes together so that students can get the best possible instruction within the tiers of MTSS. The challenge is in doing this in a manner that is not viewed as uncomfortably evaluative but is designed to provide feedback that is welcome and informative. An Intervention Observation Snapshot Form with eight key elements is available on our website. The goal is to encourage rich dialogue that leads to high fidelity of implementation.

“It wouldn’t make sense to invest in all the preceding factors and not monitor the outcomes.”  
(Hall, 2018, p.142)