

Executive Summary

Since 1984, the State of Georgia has been implementing its commitment to federal district court to require a Student Support Team (SST) in every public school. SST is mandated in Georgia as part of a legal permanent injunction from a federal court case (Marshall v. GA, 1984). Its function is to provide a problem solving team/process to prevent inappropriate referrals to special education and, equally significantly, unnecessary removal of students from general education, especially Georgia's minority students in disproportionate numbers. With state requirements and the requirements of ESEA/NCLB and IDEA 2004 Georgia increased its focus on providing high quality research based instruction, interventions, and data driven practices to help all students succeed in the general education curriculum. This reinforced the legitimacy and vitality of what has become known as **Response to Intervention (RTI)**. In that framework, SST is now part of a system of 4 tiers of support in Georgia, collectively referred to as the Georgia Pyramid of Interventions.

The process of teachers changing their instruction based on how well the students responded to it—known as “Response to Intervention” (RTI)—has steadily become the national model for successfully reaching students when they are just beginning to fall behind expected benchmarks and providing appropriate supports and interventions at increasing levels of intensity. This can prevent the rapid decay of learning desire that comes when a student senses it may be impossible to catch up with the class.

In the DuFour *et al* book, Whatever it Takes, the authors ask three critical questions:

Exactly what do we want students to learn?

How will we know when a student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills?

What happens in our schools when a student does not learn?

These questions are at the heart of Georgia's Response to Intervention (RTI) "Pyramid of Interventions." Indeed, they are embedded in all levels of the Pyramid.

Georgia has implemented a four-tier Response to Intervention (RTI) model in a) identifying and b) addressing students' academic and/or behavioral needs. Standards-based instruction, universal screening, and progress monitoring are the critical foundation elements of our model (Tier 1).

Every public school in Georgia is mandated to teach the standards to all students based on their grade level and/or content area. Universal screening helps teachers identify students who will need more individualized assistance. Progress monitoring allows teachers to assess the effectiveness of instruction and to differentiate their assistance based on the instructional and/or behavioral needs of the students. When a variety of Tier 1 strategies are utilized and the student is not showing significant improvement, this should be the trigger that activates the school's RTI

plan to bring more *focused attention and* more intensive instructional assistance that comprises Tier 2.

Tier 2 is characterized by the addition of more concentrated small-group or individual interventions that target specific needs and essential skills. All Tier 2 Interventions must be research proven and aligned to the needs of the student and resources of the school.

Interventions may involve an increase in intensity, frequency, and duration of the strategies utilized in Tier 1, or they may be entirely different based on information shared among staff members. Collaboration by staff in delivery of rigorous instruction and appropriate Tier 2 interventions is vital in order to ensure a transfer of learning from Tier 2 to Tier 1 activities.

Progress monitoring is more frequent and is vital in order to judge the effectiveness of the interventions based on the student's response to them. If such appropriate interventions-- implemented with fidelity and for an established duration-- are not effective then the staff must call upon the assistance of the Student Support Team (SST), which is Tier 3.

In Tier 3, SST is the structure and RTI is the process. Team members now individualize appraisal and interventions to determine barriers to learning and develop appropriate individual interventions for the student. If a variety of SST/Tier 3 interventions are finally determined not to be adequate and the need for more individualized assistance is thus documented, the SST will make an appropriate referral for consideration of placement of the student in an appropriate Tier 4 program. If found eligible, this student may be placed in Special Education, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Gifted or other programs that are delivered by specially trained teachers.

In summary, the SST is mandated by federal court order and our RTI model is a systemic process to bridge behavioral and academic gaps. Ultimately, the success of any SST relies on the foundation of Tiers 1 and 2. Success is attainable when schools analyze their data to identify school-wide, classroom, and individual student needs and by their use of research based strategies and interventions led by ongoing professional learning, coaching, and measurement of student response to these supports. The Georgia Pyramid of Interventions/RTI is a robust school improvement framework which is guided by data-driven decision making and time-proven practices to proactively address the needs of all Georgia students in the 21st Century.