

NCL and PBIS Cross Center Collaboration Part I

TIER 3: MYTH VS. FACT

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a framework for schools to match students' needs to a level of intervention (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

Tier 1 provides a strong foundation of support to all students. **Tier 2** supports students who require more explicit or focused instruction, reminders, monitoring, feedback, and/or similar "enhancements" to Tier 1 practices.

Tier 3 includes intensive and individualized intervention based on diagnostic academic or functional behavioral assessment.

Tier 3 interventions are a fundamental part of MTSS systems. Unfortunately, misconceptions about Tier 3. Members of the **National Technical Assistance Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)** and the **National Center for Intensive Interventions (NCII)** collaborated to describe myths and facts about Tier 3 to guide districts and schools in strengthening their MTSS approach to better support students with Tier 3 needs.

1. ALL HAIL THE EXPERT...REALLY?

MYTH

Tier 3 can only be provided by **specialists** and is often **providing more** of the same core intervention but in greater doses.

FACT

Tier 3 relies on a team-based approach that includes content (educators), intervention (e.g., school psychologist, behavior analysts), and student (e.g., student, family members) "experts" as well as school leaders (e.g., administrator)

WHY?

Teams plan, implement, and progress monitor interventions to support students and staff within the school. School-based teams that include content, intervention, and student experts are more likely to develop effective plans that consider the context of the school, classroom(s), student, and family.

3. S/HE WAS BORN THIS WAY?

MYTH

Students in need of Tier 3 have **either** significant academic deficits **or externalizing behaviors**, and these deficits or behaviors are **rooted in the child**.

FACT

Tier 3 supports are based on the intensity, not the type, of need; and needs occur within a context (not within a child).

WHY?

*Teams develop Tier 3 supports in **any identified area of need** (behavioral, academic, social, emotional), regardless of (dis)ability, and (b) prioritize **instructional and environmental** (e.g., adding cues, providing specific feedback) **changes** to support the student (rather than changing the student to fit into the environment). This focus on redesigning environments reduces the likelihood of ineffective, reactive, or exclusionary responses to students' demonstrated needs.*

2. ALL YOU NEED IS...ASSESSMENT?

MYTH

Conducting diagnostic academic and/or functional behavioral assessments **always** leads to high quality Tier 3 supports.

FACT

Although diagnostic (academic and functional behavioral assessment) data are helpful in identifying student needs, data only lead to high quality Tier 3 supports when school teams (a) use the assessment results to inform the individualized intervention plan, (b) monitor fidelity and outcomes of implementation, and (c) adjust the plan based on data.

WHY?

Intensive and individualized intervention plans, which are based on diagnostic data, are more likely to result in improved student outcomes; however, the only way to know a plan is effective is by ensuring it's implemented well (fidelity), monitoring progress toward individualized goals and objectives (outcomes), and adjusting (intensifying, modifying, or fading) supports as indicated by data.

4. YOU MUST TOUCH ALL THE...TIERS?

MYTH

Students must progress sequentially through each tier—a student must receive Tier 1 before moving to Tier 2, and s/he must receive Tier 2 before moving to Tier 3.

FACT

Students should receive the intensity of support they need to promote growth in all skill areas (behavioral, academic, social, and emotional).

WHY?

Requiring a student to progress sequentially through tiers before receiving intensive and individualized supports is the equivalent of a "wait to fail" model. Instead, schools that effectively implement MTSS use screening and other data to identify and support students based on their demonstrated need.

