

*Improving  
Student Success*

through

**NDMTSS**

North Dakota's **Multi-Tier  
System of Supports**

North Dakota's Multi-Tier System of Supports Project is led and funded by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, Office of Special Education, and Early Intervention Services through a State Personnel Development Grant from U.S. Department of Education – Office of Special Education Programs.

*Hello everyone,*

We at the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction are pleased and excited to share this booklet describing our Multi-Tier System of Supports and how it will benefit our North Dakota schools, teachers and students.

NDDPI has worked with N.D. Regional Education Association (REAs) and stakeholders across North Dakota to develop this document to help school districts implement MTSS strategies. This is to assist our schools as they become more familiar with MTSS, discover more about student learning and behavior, support student growth, and sharpen their ability to use data to customize instruction.

I want to congratulate the NDDPI Special Education Unit, the State Advisory Team, the State Advisory Team Work Group, and participating schools for their excellent work on this booklet. It is available for distribution to any interested educator, school, or district.

This document represents another opportunity for us to learn and grow together as we work to promote continuous improvement in our North Dakota schools.

Sincerely,

*Kirsten Baesler*

Kirsten Baesler  
State Superintendent



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# NORTH DAKOTA MULTI-TIER SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS

North Dakota's Multi-Tier System of Supports (NDMTSS) is a framework to provide all students with the best opportunities to succeed academically and behaviorally in school. NDMTSS focuses on providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals. Data are used to allocate resources to improve student learning and support staff implementation of effective practices.

## WHY WE DO IT

### *The Students*

Students fall through the cracks every year because we have pockets of excellence but are lacking a systems approach in many schools. Students who read at grade level by third grade are four times more likely to graduate on time.<sup>1</sup> Freshman year is key to predicting who will graduate from high school. Failing one semester course decreases the likelihood of graduating from 83% to 60%; two semester Fs decreases the likelihood to 44%; three reduces that to 31% chance of graduating. More than 7,000 students drop out of high school every school day. 85 percent of all juvenile offenders rate as functionally or marginally illiterate. Students in the lowest 25 percent of their class in reading are 20 times more likely to dropout and 75% of those end up incarcerated.<sup>2</sup> 70 percent of prisoners in state and federal systems can be classified as illiterate while 43 percent of those whose literacy skills are lowest live in poverty.<sup>3</sup>

Significant and persistent academic and/or behavioral difficulties can limit success in school and postsecondary opportunities. For some students, the typical evidence-based instruction and behavioral supports provided in the classroom are not sufficient to address their educational needs or prepare them for postsecondary opportunities. They will need individualized, more intensive intervention composed of practices that are evidence-based. Recent research on integrating academics and behavioral interventions has demonstrated promise for improving student outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

### The Teachers

Research has identified numerous components within schools' system of instruction and intervention that can make an intervention more or less effective and sustainable. For example, the need to improve educators' knowledge and use of evidence-based interventions through teacher preparation<sup>5</sup> and professional development<sup>6</sup> has been well documented.

### The Schools

The leadership and organizational supports, such as scheduling, roles of staff, adequate planning time, professional development structure, evaluation, leadership support, policies, and funding<sup>7</sup> can also facilitate or impede the effectiveness and sustainability of the system of instruction and intervention. Addressing academic and behavioral difficulties separately, instead of using an integrated approach, may result in inefficiencies in coordinating intervention. By using a more integrated approach, limited resources can be maximized and organizational structures and efficiency and efficiency can be improved<sup>8</sup>.

### The State

If North Dakota increased its overall graduation rate to 90%, the economic benefits from these 300 additional graduates would likely include as much as<sup>9</sup>:

- \$2.3 million in increased annual earnings and \$200,000 in annual state and local tax revenues;
- 20 new jobs and a \$2.8 million increase in the gross state product;
- \$3.1 million in increased home sales and \$400,000 in increased auto sales

1 Hernandez, D. Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation. Annie E. Casey Foundation.

2 Alliance for Excellent Education, High School Graduation Gains Equal Economic Success. 2013

3 National Institute for Literacy

4 Algozzine et al., 2012; Chaparro, Smolkowski, Baker, Hanson, & Ryan-Jackson, 2012; Stewart, Benner, Martella, Marchand-Martella, 2007

5 Ciullo et al., 2015; Gable, Tonelson, Sheth, Wilson, & Park, 2012; Kern, Hilt-Panahon, & Sokol, 2009

6 Bambara, Goh, Kern, & Caskie, 2012; Ciullo et al., 2015; Debnam, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2012; Kern, Hilt-Panahon, & Sokol, 2009; Regan, Berkeley, Hughes, & Brady, 2015

7 Bambara et al., 2012; Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012

8 Chaparro et al., 2012; Lane, Oakes, & Menzies, 2014; McIntosh, Bohanon, & Goodman, 2010

9 Alliance for Excellent Education. High School Graduation Gains Equal Economic Success. 2013

10 AdvancEd. Standards for Quality Schools. 2011

## WHAT NDMTSS IS NOT

To further clarify the definition, it is important to recognize what MTSS is not. MTSS (RtI) cannot be a verb, time, program, or place. It is not an identification system for special education or Title 1. It is not just for some students. MTSS cannot be done by a small group of educators. It is not content specific. Students cannot be “RtI’d”. Students cannot test into or be exited from RtI or be done with RtI.

NDMTSS implementation is no small undertaking and is not likely to be successful if it is not a district priority. Before beginning the NDMTSS implementation process, it would be beneficial for district leadership teams to look at how NDMTSS fits, or conflicts, with all other district initiatives. The exploration stage is important: otherwise, NDMTSS gets added to the multiple other time-consuming initiatives and viewed as one more thing to do.

## WHAT WE BELIEVE ARE CULTURAL CHANGES NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT NDMTSS

- Effective teachers create environments where all students can learn and improve
- Effective schools maintain and communicate a purpose and direction that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.<sup>10</sup>
- Effective systems support both teachers and students by outlining evidence-based instruction and interventions while ensuring appropriate access to resources and supports

## 1 ASSESSMENT

### **Definition**

Assessment is the process of collecting, reviewing, and using information to make educational decisions about student learning. The type of information collected is determined by the intended use of the results or type of decision that is needed.

### **Description [as it relates to NDMTSS]**

Screening, progress monitoring, and other supporting assessments are used to inform databased decision-making.

Four Purposes for assessment:

1. Universal Screening – all students assessed to determine which students may need additional supports – high or low and the effectiveness of the core curriculum
2. Diagnostic – identify skill deficits and inform instructional match at all tiers
3. Progress Monitoring – frequent assessment to determine whether students are making adequate progress toward a specific preset goal
4. Outcome – measures performance of the educational system – e.g. NDSA, ACT

## 2 DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING

### **Definition**

Data-based decision making “optimizes the use of data for purposes of informing individual student instruction, identifying strengths and weaknesses in a classroom, and illuminating trends and gaps across a school district.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Description [as it relates to NDMTSS]**

An ongoing team process that begins with identified questions with clearly established protocols to evaluate and inform decisions and actions at student, classroom, grade level, school, and system levels. Basic steps include gathering accurate and reliable data, correctly interpreting and validating data, using data to make meaningful instructional changes for students, establishing and managing increasingly intensive tiers of support, and evaluating the process at all tiers to ensure the system is working.

## 3 MULTI-TIER INSTRUCTION

### **Definition**

A multi-tier approach is used to efficiently differentiate instruction for all students. The model incorporates increasing intensities of instruction and assessments offering specific, research-based interventions matched to student needs driven by data.

### **Description [as it relates to NDMTSS]**

#### Tier 1

- Focus - All students
- Instruction and Supports – district curriculum and instructional practices that are evidence-based; aligned with state or district standards; incorporate differentiated instruction
- Setting – General classroom (small or large group)
- Assessment – Screening, continuous progress monitoring, and outcome measures

#### Tier 2

- Focus - Students identified as at risk of performing below or significantly above expected outcomes
- Instruction and Supports - Targeted, supplemental instruction practices that are evidence-based (large or small group); additional layer to Tier 1
- Setting – General education and/or optimal setting for need of students
- Assessment – Diagnostic, Progress monitoring

#### Tier 3

- Focus – Students who present with exceptionally high academic or very low academic or behavior achievement, or who have not responded to Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction, or students with disabilities who do not meet their IEP goals; additional layer to Tier 1 and Tier 2
- Instruction – Intensive intervention adapted to address individual student needs through the systematic use of assessment data, validated interventions, and research-based instruction or behavior support strategies
- Setting – General or special education depending on the needs of the student
- Assessment – Diagnostic and progress monitoring



## 4 INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS

### **Definition**

Knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize components of NDMTSS in a unified system to meet established goals.

### **Description [as it relates to NDMTSS]**

Alignment of resources and supports necessary to implement an effective system includes, but is not limited to: Shared Vision, Prevention Focus, Culture, Leadership, Professional Development, Schedules, Resources, Communication, Leadership Teams  
*(Training note: reasonable, practical, and doable)*

## 5 FIDELITY AND EVALUATION

### **Definition**

Fidelity is the degree of exactness with which something is implemented or conducted; and Evaluation is a measure of the effectiveness of individual resources and practices.

### **Description [as it relates to NDMTSS]**

Fidelity happens across multiple points within the NDMTSS framework; system process, and multi-tiered instruction. Did you do what you said you would do? Evaluation occurs frequently and helps to determine the effectiveness of the system, process, or multi-tiered instruction. Did it work? How can it be improved?

# School Quotes

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“The MTSS training we have done through SEEC has fundamentally changed our approach to educating our students. With this training, we have developed clear pathways for academics PK-12 that allow us to intervene with students and meet them at their current level of learning. Students who often had no success in the classroom are now flourishing because we have reduced their stress level by designing interventions which are closing the achievement gap. This led to our development of a behavioral pathway which included placing a licensed therapist on site. It has been highly successful and allows us to meet the needs of the whole student. Our MTSS training has allowed us to change perspectives on how we educate now and in the future.”

- CORY STEINER, NORTHERN CASS SUPERINTENDENT

“There’s a commitment, to NDMTSS and a sense of pride for the growth it brings to our staff and students, within our buildings. Our teachers are doing the work, while administrators are facilitating and supporting them in all aspects of that work. This process has given us a vision for the future not only for our students, but our district as a whole.”

- ANDREW JORDAN,  
NEW SALEM-ALMONT  
SUPERINTENDENT

“MTSS has created a common language and provides a cohesive system in regards to student’s academic and social emotional skills at West Fargo High School. Although there is not a quick fix for skill deficits, we are able to make data-based class placements in order to provide targeted interventions in reading, math, and social emotional skills. Being able to provide the correct level of instruction prior to student failure allows students to gain academic skills, reduces stress and frustration, and puts students on track for graduation. Most importantly, students receiving intervention are closing the achievement gap and gaining confidence.”

- SHANNON MORTRUD, PH.D., NCSP,  
WEST FARGO HS MTSS COACH

“Over the last eight years, West Fargo Public Schools (WFPS) has been implementing and refining MTSS processes for academics and behavior. The assistance of N.D. Department of Public Instruction’s State Personnel Development Grant and our partnership with the South East Education Cooperative has allowed us to develop a comprehensive MTSS in reading, math and behavior. We went from ZERO interventions to a systematic pathway of support, a comprehensive screening system, and multiple research-based interventions in reading and math at our secondary schools (6-12)! We have been able to get high-quality, research-based interventions to students in our high needs elementary schools immediately with our pathways model in reading. Our problem-solving model was refined to address student needs across the elementary schools. Our focus now is on aligning our MTSS model in behavior to incorporate mental health and trauma while continuing to develop our systems for supporting students with social emotional and behavioral needs K-12. With the NDMTSS framework embedded into our work at WFPS, we are prepared to immediately match student need to instruction across all tiers and to support hundreds of students at any given time through our interventions.”

- DAWN MILLER, ED.S., NCSP, WEST FARGO  
MTSS/SPECIAL EDUCATION COORDINATOR

“NDMTSS has provided a comprehensive and systematic approach to supporting students at Wilton Public School. Our staff is committed to success for all kids thanks to the MTSS Leadership Team and an action plan developed by our staff, tailored to our needs that is continually evaluated to ensure alignment and fidelity to how we do business. Teachers feel more confident collecting and analyzing data to plan coherent instruction collaboratively. Student needs are addressed, both academically and behaviorally, using the tiered model to ensure we are meeting students where they are and with what they need, every kid, every day, through purposeful character development, core instruction, and differentiation but also through layered, targeted interventions.”

- AMANDA MEIER, WILTON SUPERINTENDENT

# Letter of Support

## BUILDING EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

North Dakota administrators, teachers, support staff and entire systems expend a great deal of time and effort trying to do the work of school improvement, engaging in the conversation around how to work smarter and trying to answer some key questions:

- How do we create a system where ALL STUDENTS can be successful?
- How do we create a system where ALL TEACHERS can be successful?
- How do we create a system where ALL INITIATIVES align to promote DISTRICT improvement and success?
- How do we create a system where ALL RESOURCES and SUPPORTS are allocated to support these overarching school improvement goals?

North Dakota's Multi-Tier System of Supports (NDMTSS) seeks to provide a framework to guide this work. As we reflect on discussions and observations with teachers, principals, leadership teams, and state and regional leaders about the best way to develop systems that support ALL students – behaviorally and academically – some consistent messages emerge:

### EVERY SYSTEM IS PERFECTLY DESIGNED TO GET THE RESULTS IT IS GETTING!

If we don't like the results, focus on the system, not the students or teachers. This shift in thinking recognizes that while there are pockets of excellence and people may be working hard, it is difficult to realize a deep level of impact because not everyone is part of the solution or not everyone knows the end goal. Leaders must emerge and ensure both accountability and support for the work.

### EFFICIENCY AND ALIGNMENT ARE UNDERLYING THEMES!

The process of creating and refining our systems facilitates efficiencies in data use, instructional alignment, and resource allocation THROUGH aligned processes of school improvement and professional learning. Take another look at the NDMTSS Framework and the five essential components and see how it all fits together!

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## CHANGE & PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED. PLAN ACCORDINGLY!

Questions abound about managing change and involving people. For some, change is hard, while others may feel a sense of relief that something is going to happen that disrupts the status quo. Ironically, we may be talking about the **same change** in the **same school!** Planning must include intentionality about how to communicate and leverage the power of the people who make up the system. There is an abundance of guidance on Leading Change to explore, but we liked this list:

1. Be clear about the purpose for change and paint a picture of the new reality.
2. Understand and communicate the complexity of the change needed.
3. Take the time to help people “see” why the change is needed now.
4. Explore the reasons behind any resistance you encounter.
5. Use internal facilitators (leadership teams) to ensure that the change process taps into the strengths of the institution.
6. Understand that change takes time and is part of a continuous improvement process.

## EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS SUPPORT STUDENTS, TEACHERS, PARENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS

It's true! Effective systems are laser-focused on student success – but they support EVERYONE in the system. Leadership, communication, organization, a growth-mindset, honesty, patience, innovation, creativity, evidence-based interventions, organization and energy are all required, but we always keep sight of the goal. It is hard work, but it is the RIGHT WORK!

We are committed to supporting the implementation of NDMTSS across the state. Let us know how we can help!

Sincerely,

*Jennifer Glasheen & Luke Schaefer*

N.D. State Personnel Development Grant Project Directors

# NDMTSS COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

## EXPLORING OUR COURSE [EXPLORATION]

1/2 DAY

### Description

This event for district leaders and leadership teams serves as introduction to the MTSS framework, including systems, behavior, and academics.

### Objectives

1. Understand NDMTSS Definition and Non-Definition
2. Become aware of Self-Assessment of NDMTSS
3. Understand basics of academics within NDMTSS
4. Begin the decision-making process to explore necessary steps to continue MTSS

## A LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW [EXPLORATION]

1/2 DAY

### Description

Participants will be provided an overview of North Dakota's Multi-Tier System of Supports and the comprehensive nature of this framework and its alignment with school improvement.

### Objectives

1. Understand NDMTSS Definition and Non-Definition
2. Evaluate what it REALLY takes in your building to fully implement
3. Identify current strengths that exist within your system
4. Begin the decision-making process to explore/determine the appropriate next steps based on your data.

## BUILDING A SYSTEM IN YOUR SCHOOL [INSTALLATION]

2 DAY

### Description

This training, intended for school or district lead teams, will assist schools in determining their desired state of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need while monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction and/or goals. The training will empower teams to build an action plan to determine the resources and supports necessary to ensure every student is provided the opportunity to succeed

### Objectives

1. Understand the Essential Components
2. Determine the appropriate structure to begin the process in a school
3. Identify current strengths within a school system
4. Begin the decision-making process

## DEVELOPING PATHWAYS FOR ACADEMICS [INSTALLATION]

3 DAYS +  
SITE VISITS [OPTIONAL]

### Description

This training, intended for a leadership team, is designed utilize the NDMTSS Essential Components to solve problems at the school, classroom, and student level. Emphasis will be given to translating current educational research practice to help schools maximize resources and outcomes for all students. Examples of data systems for universal screening and progress monitoring will be identified, as well as specific interventions and curricula to address problems at a systems level.

### Objectives

1. Identify current gaps in student outcomes based on grade level data
2. Evaluate appropriate pathways for students to increase academic achievement
3. Develop strategies for solving problems at increasingly larger levels
4. Increase awareness of evidence-based interventions and curricula

## DEVELOPING SCHOOL-WIDE BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS [EXPLORATION]

2 DAYS

### Description

Schools will plan for the identification and teaching of school-wide expectations of behavior. Further, they will develop plans for active supervision, problem behavior, classroom management, data collection, and data systems. Upon completion, schools will have identified gaps in current practice and have an action plan for steps to improve practice in their building.

### Objectives

1. Establish commitment
2. Conduct audit of current status
3. Establish expectations
4. Establish information systems (outcome and process tools)
5. Build capacity for function-based support

## DEVELOPING PATHWAYS FOR BEHAVIOR [INSTALLATION]

3 DAYS

### Description

This training, intended for a leadership team, is designed utilize the NDMTSS Essential Components to solve problems at the school, classroom, and student level. Emphasis will be given to translating current educational research practice to help schools maximize resources and outcomes for all students. Examples of data systems for universal screening and progress monitoring will be identified, as well as specific interventions and curricula to address problems at a systems level.

### Objectives

1. Identify current gaps in student outcomes based on grade level data
2. Evaluate appropriate pathways for students to increase academic achievement
3. Develop strategies for solving problems at increasingly larger levels
4. Increase awareness of evidence-based interventions and curricula

## EVALUATING YOUR SYSTEM [IMPLEMENTATION]

**3 DAY**

### **Description**

This training, intended for school lead teams, will focus on innovation of the NDMTSS model with emphasis on:

1. data collection and disaggregation
2. data-driven decision making, and
3. problem solving for student, classroom, and systems level.

Monitoring practices will be developed to determine if the system is having a positive impact on student learning with a strong focus on fidelity and outcome data. Opportunities for collaboration and to observe MTSS in action within the cohort will be organized.

### **Objectives**

1. Evaluate research-based interventions.
2. Determine effectiveness of Placement Pathways
3. Begin the process for assisting teachers in analyzing data for trends in student growth or stagnancy

## RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT

[ANY STAGE PAST INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION]

**1/2 DAY**

### **Description**

Your team has completed the initial training that helps schools learn about the essentials of NDMTSS and how to begin planning for implementation. This is your opportunity to revisit the work that you have started and receive assistance, both from consultants and other schools.

Designed as a half-day kick-start with work time following, this structured work time will address the needs of the participants in their own implementation struggles.



## INTENSIFYING INSTRUCTION

[ANY STAGE PAST INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION]

1 DAY

### Description

NDMTSS focuses on providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals. In order to meet the demands of an MTSS system, educators are asking for assistance in deepening their knowledge and skills in how to intensify instructional practices to meet the needs of all students.

This training will provide educators with evidence-based instructional designs to accelerate students' rate of learning. These can be applied at the universal (Tier 1), strategic (Tier 2), and intensive (Tier 3) levels of instruction. The following features of instruction will be addressed:

- More explicit
- More systematic
- More modeling
- More opportunities to respond
- More feedback
- More judicious review

### Objectives

1. NDMTSS Defined and Described
2. Understand the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model as a foundation to high quality instruction
3. Know how to intensify instruction through evidence-based instructional features to accelerate students' rate of growth
4. Develop an action plan that is practical, reasonable, and doable

## NDMTSS CONFERENCE [HELD ANNUALLY IN JUNE]

3 DAYS

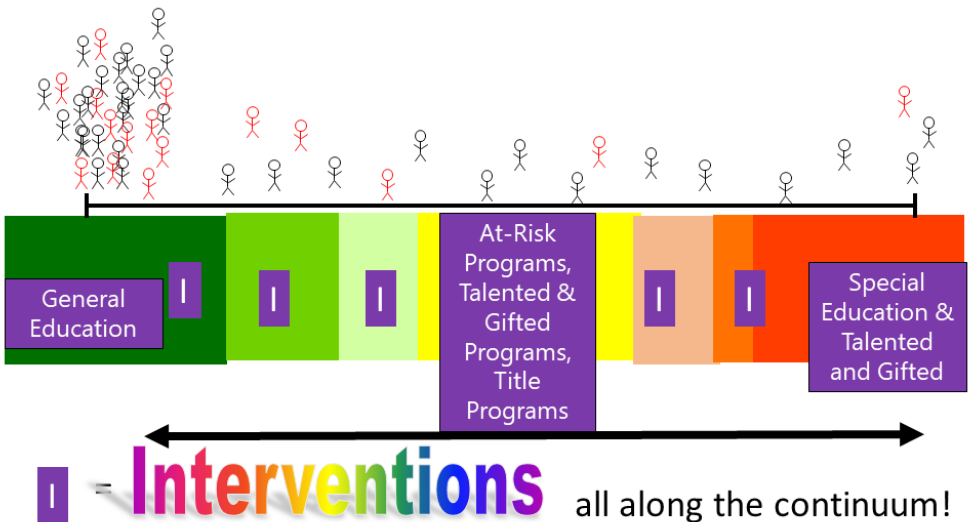
### Description

NDMTSS Conference welcomes around 400 educators from across the state each year to engage in the work of Multi-Tier System of Supports within their schools and districts. The conference brings both nationally recognized experts and teams from ND schools to share the most meaningful and effective work being done statewide and across the nation.

# DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NDMTSS AND RTI

*In parts of our state,*

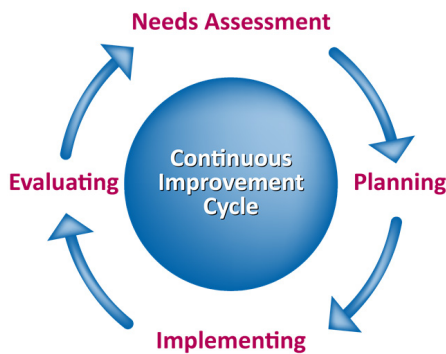
Response to Intervention (RtI) has been viewed as a framework to help struggling students with academics. It provided a fantastic starting point; however fell short of including the state's desire to focus on all students. The state determined the need for a more comprehensive approach to school improvement, encompassing academic, behavior, and social emotional needs of all students. North Dakota Multi-tier System of Supports (NDMTSS) framework offers this opportunity. NDMTSS also includes professional development for educators, and focuses on a systemic approach where infrastructures are designed to meet all students' needs. Some view NDMTSS as an extension of RtI. The goal of North Dakota's Multi-Tier System of Supports is to ensure high quality instruction in every classroom every day for every North Dakota student.



# CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

*We recognize,*

We, NDMTSS, recognizes that providing all students with the best opportunities to succeed academically and behaviorally requires a constant focus on improvement. This is done through needs assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluations. Like any school improvement process, the continuous improvement cycle empowers systems to effectively plan and implement initiatives while accumulating and analyzing data in order to apply changes to improve practice.



## NORTH DAKOTA ADMINISTRATIVE RULES

North Dakota administrative rules chapter 67-23-06-05 effective date July 1, 2012 provide the legal structure for the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI) in districts across the state.

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction believes that increased student learning requires consistent high quality instruction matched to student needs. In a quality education environment student academic and behavioral needs must be identified and monitored continuously with documented student performance data used to make instructional decisions. For RtI to work well, it should be implemented as a part of a Multi-tier System of Supports (MTSS).

*See NDDPI document: Eligibility Procedures and Criteria within a Response to Intervention (RtI) Framework: A Guidance Document*

# TO FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT NDMTSS:

## N.D. REGIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS [REAs]

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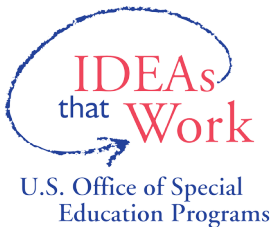
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