

## Appropriate Academic Supports to Meet the Needs of All Students

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is committed to ensuring that all children receive an appropriate public education, irrespective of race, culture and background, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or educational need. NASP maintains that all students learn best in inclusive environments that implement high quality, science-based instruction. Inclusive programs are those in which students with and without disabilities receive appropriate specialized instruction and related services in age-appropriate general education classrooms that are located in the schools that the students would attend if they did not have a disability. NASP believes:

- All children can learn. Schools have a responsibility to teach all children. School personnel and parents should work together to assure every child a free and appropriate public education in a positive and inclusive school environment.
- General education should include all children. General education instructional options and support services should be based on the individual psychoeducational needs of each student, and should be evidence-based. Such a system of instructional supports requires collaboration of general and special education personnel.
- It is imperative to recognize early which students are struggling academically and implement swift remediation of academic deficits through research-based interventions (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005).
- Psychoeducational needs of children should be identified through a multidimensional, non-biased assessment process. Such a process evaluates the match between learners and their educational environment and determines whether scientifically validated curricula are in place. Blame for failure should never be focused on the child. Assessment and intervention activities must always link directly to the needs of students.

NASP supports a multitiered model of evidence-based instruction and intervention, typically referred to as “Response to Intervention” (RTI; e.g., Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005) as an effective approach for meeting the learning needs of all students in inclusive environments. The delivery of services in a multitiered model supports inclusive instruction because it assures that all students in a population receive research based instruction and all decisions are made using data documenting students’ needs. Importantly, such models incorporate awareness of student diversity in race, culture and background, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and educational need. NASP endorses a comprehensive model of support for students with learning problems wherein academic instruction is linked to the needs of the student and does not require assigning students to categorical special education groups. These NASP positions are consistent with recent federal legislation in supporting a multitiered approach to delivering academic instruction including:

- The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), which supports the use of science-based instruction to meet the learning needs of all students. NCLB also requires that states establish accountability standards to ensure academic progress for all students, particularly those from underrepresented groups, such as ethnic minorities and students in special education.
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) mandates the use of science-based academic instruction for all students in general and special education. IDEIA 2004 also allows for the implementation of a multitiered model to determine students' need for special education services and supports.

## FEATURES OF A MULTITIERED MODEL OF ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT AND INSTRUCTION

In a multitiered model of academic assessment and instruction, students receive science-based instruction on a school-wide basis, and when necessary, receive additional instructional support on a small group or individual basis. Frequent formative assessments are used to monitor student progress and make decisions about the need for modified or additional instructional strategies. Such assessments take into account student race, culture and background, socioeconomic status, and educational need. In traditional special education service delivery models, students must meet predetermined criteria and be identified as having a disability before they can receive special education services. NASP believes that the use of a multitiered model makes it possible to simultaneously address all educational needs of any student, rather than narrowly focusing on either academic, or behavioral, or emotional problems (Batsche et al., 2005). Most multitiered models of academic instruction are organized along three levels of support referred to as Tiers 1 (universal), 2 (targeted), and 3 (intensive). Some national experts have advocated for fewer or greater numbers of tiers (e.g., 2, 4, or 5). Prior to implementing such a system, school psychologists can help to identify important stakeholders, conduct needs assessments, and deliver professional staff development.

***Tier 1: School-Wide Screening and Instruction.*** In Tier 1, high quality instruction and support is provided for all students in the general education setting via a sound core curriculum. Observations are conducted periodically to ensure that science-based instruction is delivered as intended. Universal (i.e., school-wide) screenings are conducted routinely (e.g., three times per year) to ensure that all students make adequate progress and to identify students who may require additional academic support. Such universal assessments ensure that all students are able to access the general curriculum, regardless of race, culture and background, socioeconomic status, or educational need. These formative assessment procedures typically include curriculum-based measurement (CBM). CBMs are short, reliable general indicators of core academic skills that are highly sensitive to students' responses to instructional modifications. Roughly 80–85% of students in a given population should succeed with universal instruction alone.

***Tier 2: Targeted Support and Progress Monitoring.*** At Tier 2, targeted supplemental services are offered for students whose performance and rate of progress are below what is expected for their grade and educational setting. Based on data from the school-wide screening given at Tier 1, school teams identify students in need of more intense science-based interventions. At Tier 2, teams select appropriate strategies to support student learning and develop a plan to implement interventions. Typically, evidence-based academic intervention and support is provided *in addition to* the Tier 1 core curriculum (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005) and may be provided on a small group basis. School staff ensure that interventions are implemented as intended. Additionally, student progress is monitored more frequently

than at Tier 1 (e.g., at least monthly) to document students' responses to the intervention(s). About 10–15% of students in a given population, who do not succeed at Tier 1, are successful with Tier 2 support.

***Tier 3: Intensive Support and Continuous Progress Monitoring.*** At Tier 3, intensive interventions are designed and implemented based on data indicating insufficient student responsiveness to Tier 1 and 2 interventions. At this level, students require the most intensive and, sometimes, individualized instruction. More frequent progress monitoring (e.g., at least weekly) is also necessary to document progress toward grade level standards. Progress data allow for objective analysis of student learning regardless of race, culture and background, socioeconomic status, or educational need. A student's continued lack of responsiveness or progress with interventions at Tier 3 might signal the need for a comprehensive evaluation and consideration for special education. A student's inadequate response to interventions at all three tiers may be used to as documentation for special education eligibility as part of the comprehensive evaluation, consistent with IDEA 2004 regulations.

## **ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST**

School psychologists can be instrumental agents in the application of multitiered models of academic support, given their broad training in research-based practice, consultation, assessment and leadership that supports the needs of students from diverse backgrounds (NASP, 2007). School psychologists are trained to deliver a continuum of prevention and intervention services, consistent with a multitiered model of academic support (NASP). Specifically, school psychologists can:

- Lead teams in designing and implementing a school-wide universal screening system and using these data to help identify at-risk students, select science-based interventions, and plan progress monitoring components of Tier 2 and Tier 3 services.
- Provide professional development regarding the most effective ways to address the learning needs of all students. School psychologists also provide culturally competent services at all tiers of service delivery. School psychologists can work closely with teachers and school teams to enhance critical skills, including conducting formative assessments, interpreting data, selecting and using science-based interventions, and making data-based determinations about the efficacy of interventions.
- Consult with teachers and other school staff. Specifically, school psychologists can assist school staff in understanding and using benchmark and progress monitoring data to determine if students are making adequate progress and decide next steps.
- Evaluate new models of service delivery. School psychologists can help administrators determine the impact of multitiered approaches on school-wide student achievement, rates of special education referral and placement, and disproportionate placement.

## **SUMMARY**

NASP believes that all children learn best in inclusive environments that provide high quality instruction to all students, and that access to appropriate academic support services should not require that students be assigned to categorical special education groups. NASP also has advocated for alternatives to categorical labeling that typically reflect traditional approaches to service delivery. Recent research suggests that an effective education for students can be accomplished with alternative multitiered systems that incorporate evidence-based academic curricula and supplemental targeted and intensive interventions. School psychologists play important roles in implementing this model,

including leading school teams and facilitating the design and delivery of multitiered, problem solving systems of academic support to all students.

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