

# FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN A SYSTEM/MTSS FRAMEWORK

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## FIDELITY AT THE SCHOOL AND TIER LEVELS

What does fidelity of implementation within an RtI framework look like at the school level?

- An assessment system that works to inform us about student-risk status—which students may have reading or other achievement-related difficulties
- An assessment system that informs us about student progress within grade level or curriculum standards
- A curriculum that is evidence-based
- An understanding about how curricular elements link across tiers and grade levels
- Assurance that our instructional practices are evidence-based
- Staff have a clear sense of what they need to do and how to do it
- Staff know when the fidelity checks are going to be completed and that they are routinely applied so that the information is used to improve instruction
- Practices integrated so that the overall framework can be sustained
- Staff have an agreed-upon vocabulary and agreed-upon procedures and practices to support implementation at the school level

All of these practices and advantages help us to face the many challenges inherent in sustaining effective practices, not the least of which is the change in personnel—a change in building-level administrator and changes in instructional staff all can undermine an effective system.

## WHAT DOES FIDELITY LOOK LIKE AT TIER 1 LEVEL?

- If practices are not going well in Tier 1, it is unlikely they go well at the Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels.
- Fidelity at this level is about teachers **consistently** and **accurately** (two words that sum up fidelity) applying a research-based curriculum, assessing student gains, managing and using data to guide instruction.
- Staff members must feel that they
  - work in an open, non-threatening environment; and,
  - can use their colleagues as resources to strengthen own teaching skills and techniques.
- In an open communication system, fidelity checks of classroom techniques can be a useful and supportive way to collaborate and learn in order to become a stronger teaching network

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## WHAT DOES FIDELITY LOOK LIKE AT THE TIER 2 AND TIER 3 LEVELS?

- The important points related to Tier 1 also apply here, but the interventions designed for small groups are often more prescriptive, with specific procedures.
- The NCRTI (National Center of RtI) finds that schools usually use standard treatment protocols for the supplemental level (Tier 2). At this level, fidelity checks are often easily implemented. With the procedural list already in place, an observation checklist can easily be constructed.

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## THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF FIDELITY

In the research literature, various ways of organizing elements of fidelity are presented. We have found that focusing on the five elements of adherence, exposure, quality of delivery, program specificity, and student responsiveness is very helpful when talking about fidelity at the classroom level.

Adherence answers the following questions:

- How well do you stick to the plan?
- How well do you adhere to the curriculum or the instruction or the intervention as intended?
- How well do you stay true to an intervention and avoid the drift?

Duration and exposure answer questions about how often a student receives an intervention, for how long each time and for how many weeks. We can think of this element in terms of learning opportunities, as number of days in a week or minutes per day for delivery of curriculum. When we talk of providing more intense instruction, we often increase the duration and exposure, and thereby provide more learning opportunities.

Quality of delivery relates to the quality with which the interventionist or the instructional staff person delivers that curriculum.

- Was the instructor's enthusiasm evident?
- Was the instructor engaged in delivering the content?
- Was the instructor making sure that students were engaged, that students were understanding the material and if not, doing something to change that?
- Was the instruction explicit? strategic? systematic? scaffolded?

Program specificity is concerned with avoiding contamination or pollution, i.e., being careful not to add a few things from one set of materials and something else from another set.

Student responsiveness must be considered. You can have high adherence, the right exposure, an enthusiastic teacher doing a great job delivering, clear program specificity, but if students are not engaged, it is all for naught. A favorite example for quickly checking student responsiveness—let's count the number of sleeping heads on desks.