MAKING ASSESSMENT MATTER:
FROM SUMMER READING TO TODAY’S CONVERSATION

Nonie K. Lesaux, Ph.D.
September 25, 2015
Minneapolis, MN
This morning’s session: A 360 on Making Assessment Matter

Part I.
RTI: Design and Context
- RTI fundamentals
- What is reading?
- The "at risk" student
- Preliminary case analysis

Part II.
Assessment: Unpacked
- Guiding Principles
- Identifying constructs measured
- Matching type to purpose
- Trends and Patterns
- Assessment Systems

Part III.
Analysis: RTI for Student Improvement
- Examining data
- Moving from data to an action plan

Part IV.
Leading RTI
- Adults, content, & context
- Messaging to key stakeholders
What is Response to Intervention (RTI)?

An approach to instruction that:

• links assessments and instructional practices
• supports schools to prevent students’ reading difficulties and providing timely intervention for those who struggle
• is part of IDEA (2004)
  • many districts now mandating its implementation
What is RTI? (con’t)

Tiered instruction for struggling students

Ongoing student assessment

Excellent Tier 1 (Core) Instruction

A School-Based Improvement Cycle
Example: A 3-Tiered RTI Model

**Tier 1: Instructional Core**
Daily instruction that meets the majority of students’ needs; patterns in the data shape priorities for the core of instruction

**Tier 2: Double-Dose**
Targeted intervention and instructional support for a smaller subset of students

**Tier 3: Intensive**
Individualized, specialized instruction for students with persistent difficulties
# RTI Fundamentals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RTI is not special education</th>
<th>There are no “RTI teachers”</th>
<th>There are no “Tier 2 Students”</th>
<th>At all levels of the model, instruction is provided within the school</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• RTI includes all students within the system</td>
<td>• All educators are involved in the RTI process</td>
<td>• there are students who may be receiving Tier 2 services focused on one particular skill area</td>
<td>• The most highly trained staff should serve the students with the greatest need</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• These supports may be delivered individually or in small groups</td>
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A New Perspective on Student Performance

Following up with struggling students

Screening all students in literacy
The “At-Risk” Reader and RTI

Supports Over Labels
- Strong Tier 1
- Additional Practice
- Intensive Intervention as needed

Mitigates Ripple Effects
- Family well-being, self-esteem, etc.

Timeliness
- Prevention over remediation
- Targeted approach with ongoing monitoring
A type of high-speed train was first introduced in Japan about forty years ago. The train is low to the ground, and its nose looks somewhat like the nose of a jet. These trains provided the first passenger service that moved at a speed of one hundred miles per hour. Today, they are even faster, traveling at speeds of almost two hundred miles per hour. There are many reasons that high-speed trains are popular.
High-Speed Trains

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## Why is this Distinction Meaningful?

<table>
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<th>Developmental Processes</th>
<th>Code-Based Skills</th>
<th>Meaning-Based Skills</th>
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<td></td>
<td>- Constrained, i.e., mastery oriented</td>
<td>- Unconstrained, i.e., not mastered</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g., 26 letters, 44 sounds</td>
<td>e.g., 50,000 words by 12\textsuperscript{th} grade</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e.g., word reading automaticity</td>
<td>e.g., relevant cross-content knowledge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Typically in place by 3\textsuperscript{rd} grade</td>
<td>- Develops from infancy through adulthood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructional Implications</td>
<td>- Highly susceptible to instruction in a relatively brief period of time</td>
<td>- Requires sustained instruction, through adolescence</td>
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The Gap Between Word Reading & Word Knowledge

National Rate of Growth_Word Reading: 135 W-score Points
Sample Rate of Growth: 145 W-score Points

National Rate of Growth_Vocabulary: 45 W-score Points
Sample Rate of Growth: 60 W-score Points

Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011
Complex Ideas Reside in Complex Language
Two of our Case Students: Different “sides” of the Literacy Coin

Rosa Parks

Max
• 2nd Grade

Carter
• 4th Grade
Two of our Case Students: Different “sides” of the Literacy Coin (con’t)

Max (Ch. 4)

Max is a 2nd grader; his reading skills are progressing but are below grade level. Although gaining some accuracy, his decoding remains laborious and his comprehension low. In 1st grade, Max was very eager to learn to read and interact with books, however, as the year went on, he became much less interested in literacy time. Reading is now a source of stress for Max and he is constantly negotiating with his teacher, reading specialist, and parents for less time doing literacy activities.

Carter (Ch. 2)

Carter is a 4th grader who reads aloud with fluency and ease. He had been considered a good reader until he scored in the lowest category of performance on the state test at the end of third grade. While his teachers from the primary grades describe him as an eager participant, in fourth grade, he is seen to be disengaged with novel study. His grades on story test are low, even though he is reading texts that are within his level according to assessments. Carter has become increasingly disruptive during class, and shows little motivation to participate.
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Assessments: Barriers to Positive Change

Common Response to Assessment Reform Strategies:
• Emphasizing the *collection* rather than the *use* of assessment data and information

Barriers to Increased Staff Capacity and Competencies:
• Assessments become compliance driven exercises
• Data-gathering plays out as a time-intensive reporting requirement

Barriers to Increased Student Capacity and Competencies:
• Despite the purpose of assessment, instructional approaches are not tailored to individual needs

Barriers to Setting-Level Improvement:
• Missed opportunity to anchor improvement plans in setting-level data that are tightly connected to the population
Principles of Assessment

Different assessment tools have different capabilities and serve different purposes

- We need to understand relationship between type and function
- We also need to understand how the scores are interpreted

No one assessment is sufficient to screen for early difficulties or monitor progress

- We need measurements across different areas to fully gauge student progress
Using Data for Accountability and Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Categories</th>
<th>Assessments of Classroom Practices &amp; Quality</th>
<th>Setting Level Quality</th>
<th>Reports and Daily Logs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal Student Assessments</strong></td>
<td>• Student learning and development across domains, including identifying risk</td>
<td>• Curricular approaches</td>
<td>• Tracking implementation of interventions</td>
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<td>• Classroom interactions, instruction, and organization</td>
<td>• Staff qualifications and training</td>
<td>• Attendance and behavioral/disciplinary data</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Leadership quality</td>
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</table>
Assessment: The HOW and the WHAT

How we assess

What we assess

- Phonemic Awareness
- Fluency
- Phonics
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension of grade-level texts & ideas

Code-Based

Meaning-Based
## Four Assessment Types

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Formative/Diagnostics</th>
<th>Screening</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Test Prep</th>
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</table>
| • Tied to the curriculum and daily instruction. Largely driven by teacher observation, although they can be formal as well as informal  
  • **Examples:** DRA, F&P Benchmark (formal); quizzes, check-ins (informal)  | • Quick assessments that provide a reference point for student performance outside of the curriculum in specific, separable skills  
  • **Examples:** DIBELS, STAR, Gates  | • Normative assessments given once or twice a year.  
  • **Examples:** MCAS, English Proficiency Tests (e.g., WIDA)  | • Mimics state assessment to provide a sense of how students will perform at the end of the year  
  • **Examples:** Acuity  

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Alignment with Day-to-Day Instruction

Not part of an RTI model
Recipe for A Strong Assessment System: Universal Measures

Timing Dictated by Teacher
- Formative/Diagnostic Measures
  - Ongoing as needed to calibrate instruction

Timing Dictated by School
- Screening Measures
  - Periodic check-in on student mastery against external benchmarks

Timing Dictated by District or State
- Outcome Assessment
  - Annual, summative assessment of student achievement in broad content areas
Key Issue: An Incomplete Picture

Understanding Our Readers
Carter: A Lens on Rosa Parks’ Assessment Battery

Observations: Resilient, talkative, funny

Assessment Results

F & P:
• “P” by the end of 3rd
• “N” at the beginning of 4th

MCAS: Scored “Warning”
Rosa Parks’ Current Assessment Battery: The HOW

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>Screener</td>
<td>None administered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Test Prep</td>
<td>None administered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Administered 1x per year as mandated by state</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Rosa Parks’ Current Assessment Battery: The WHAT

- **Code-Based Skills**
  - No screener
  - Limited formative:
    - Accuracy and miscue analysis from Benchmark

- **Meaning-Based Skills**
  - No screener
  - Limited Formative:
    - Comprehension questions on Benchmark
Look at all the bubbles! Some bubbles are *big* and some are *little*.

All *these bubbles* are *made* with soap and water. *They* are called soap bubbles.

*Soap bubbles* are *pretty*. *They* are very *shiny*, and *they* have lots of *colors*, just like a rainbow.
DIBELS: Sample Text

My uncle, my dad, my brother and I built a giant sand castle at the beach.

First we picked a spot far from the big waves. Then we got out buckets and shovels.

We drew a line to show where it would be. It was going to be big!
Putting it Together: How and What

High-Speed Trains

A type of high-speed train was first introduced in Japan about forty years ago. The train is low to the ground, and its nose looks somewhat like the nose of a jet. These trains provided the first passenger service that moved at a speed of one hundred miles per hour. Today, they are even faster, traveling at speeds of almost two hundred miles per hour. There are many reasons that high-speed trains are popular.
Effective Assessment Systems

Usable
• We need to take an assessment approach that gives us information on students’ literacy achievement in separable, teachable domains.
• Assessments are only worth administering if the data will be used to inform instruction.

Efficient
• A good assessment battery is efficient by design, in order to minimize time on testing and maximize time on instruction.

Feasible
• Schools need a clear, feasible schedule for assessment.

Informed
• It is how assessment results are interpreted and used that make them positive or negative, accurate or inaccurate.
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Serving Struggling Readers: Common Pitfalls

Grouping by demographic indicator (e.g., ESL) or broad reading level (e.g., state test result)

Providing supports that are disconnected from other learning
- classroom or from other supports (ESL and literacy intervention).

Attempting to teach item types from standardized tests (e.g., main idea) rather than identifying and supporting underlying foundational skills and competencies

Investing in test prep assessments and programs
- do not focus on underlying instructional needs, and are calibrated to a shifting target
Assess student progress on key indicators – Also known as “universal screening”

Which areas are problematic for multiple students? Which areas are particularly strong across groups of students?

What does this mean for the instructional core? How can we provide targeted interventions?
Is the student's problem unusual given peers' performance?

No

Focus on the instructional core, following up with class-wide measures at least every 6 weeks

Yes

Provide targeted intervention in the specific skills weakness and follow up with formative assessments every 3 - 6 weeks

Is the student showing progress?

No

Use diagnostic assessments to better understand source of difficulty

Adjust approach and monitor again in 3 - 6 weeks

If difficulties are persistent, call team meeting to discuss possible referral for Special Education evaluation

Yes

Is the student now performing commensurate with peers?

No

Continue approach with follow-up (consider if improvement is at appropriate pace; if not, intensify intervention)

Yes

Return student to Tier 1 activities

RTI Cornerstone: The Decision Tree
Returning to our Case Students

- Rosa Parks
- Max
  - 2nd Grade
- Carter
  - 4th Grade
1. Review the row of data for each case study student.
2. Review the classroom-level data.
3. For each classroom, answer the following questions:
   • What domains of literacy are being assessed? What domain is not comprehensively assessed?
   • How is the overall group of students faring?
     • What about the case student? Is his/her problem unusual given the patterns of the group?
   • What would you identify as an instructional need in this classroom?
   • What additional data would be helpful to you in identify classroom-level strengths and needs?
## Max’s Classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>PPVT Receptive Vocabulary</th>
<th>PPVT Phoneme Segment Fluency (PSF)</th>
<th>PPVT Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)</th>
<th>DIBELS Code (decoding, fluency)</th>
<th>TOWRE Code (decoding)</th>
<th>Nonsense Word Efficiency</th>
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Assessment/Instruction Links:
Identifying the Collective’s Needs

- **Step 1.** What percentage/number of our students are at-risk in each of the areas we assess?
- **Step 2.** How do these rates differ by grade level?
- **Step 3.** What are our instructional strengths? Weaknesses?
- **Step 4.** What are our priority issues?
Is the student’s problem unusual given peers’ performance?

- No: Focus on the instructional core, following up with class-wide measures at least every 6 weeks
- Yes: Provide targeted intervention in the specific skills weakness and follow up with formative assessments every 3 - 6 weeks

Is the student showing progress?

- No: Use diagnostic assessments to better understand source of difficulty
  - Adjust approach and monitor again in 3 - 6 weeks
  - If difficulties are persistent, call team meeting to discuss possible referral for Special Education evaluation
- Yes: Is the student now performing commensurate with peers?
  - No: Continue approach with follow-up (consider if improvement is at appropriate pace; if not, intensify intervention)
  - Yes: Return student to Tier 1 activities

RTI Cornerstone: The Decision Tree
Bolstering the Instructional Core

**Content:** Are students' difficulties with code-based skills (decoding, fluency) or meaning-based skills (vocabulary, background knowledge)?

If code-based:
- The instructional core should place additional focus on providing systematic and explicit phonics instruction, following up with classwide measures at least every 3 weeks.

If meaning-based:
- Additional opportunities to practice target skills and to acquire competencies should be built into the existing curriculum by adjusting the pacing or scope and sequence.

**Opportunities:** Have students been afforded enough opportunities to acquire these skills?

No:
- Use diagnostic assessments to better understand sources of difficulty

Yes:
- Plan and implement additional, sustained professional development to cultivate instructional practices

**Educators:** Do our teachers have the knowledge and skills to address these needs?

No:
- Continue approach with follow-up (consider if improvement is at appropriate pace; if not, intensify intervention)

Yes:
- Adjust approach and monitor again in 3 - 6 weeks

**Is the student's problem unusual given peers' performance?**

No:
- Continue with regular instruction

Yes:
- Provide targeted intervention in the specific skills weakness and follow up with formative assessments every 3 - 6 weeks. Lever 4

**Is the student showing progress?**

No:
- Use diagnostic assessments to better understand sources of difficulty

Yes:
- Is the student now performing commensurate with peers?

No:
- Use diagnostic assessments to better understand sources of difficulty

Yes:
- If difficulties are persistent, call team meeting to discuss possible referral for Special Education evaluation

**Plan and implement additional, sustained professional development to cultivate instructional practices**

- Educators: Do our teachers have the knowledge and skills to address these needs?
- Opportunities: Have students been afforded enough opportunities to acquire these skills?
- Content: Are students' difficulties with code-based (decoding, fluency) or meaning-based skills (vocabulary, background knowledge)?

**Educators:**  Do our teachers have the knowledge and skills to address these needs?

- Yes: Plan and implement additional, sustained professional development to cultivate instructional practices.
- No: Use diagnostic assessments to better understand sources of difficulty.

**Opportunities:** Have students been afforded enough opportunities to acquire these skills?

- Yes: Plan and implement additional, sustained professional development to cultivate instructional practices.
- No: Use diagnostic assessments to better understand sources of difficulty.

**Content:** Are students' difficulties with code-based skills (decoding, fluency) or meaning-based skills (vocabulary, background knowledge)?

- If code-based:
  - The instructional core should place additional focus on providing systematic and explicit phonics instruction, following up with classwide measures at least every 3 weeks.
- If meaning-based:
  - Additional opportunities to practice target skills and to acquire competencies should be built into the existing curriculum by adjusting the pacing or scope and sequence.

**Is the student’s problem unusual given peers’ performance?**

- No: Continue with regular instruction.
- Yes: Provide targeted intervention in the specific skills weakness and follow up with formative assessments every 3 - 6 weeks. Lever 4.

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- No: Use diagnostic assessments to better understand sources of difficulty.
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Bolstering the Instructional Core

Is the student’s problem unusual given peers’ performance?

Yes

Provide targeted intervention in the specific skills weakness and follow up with formative assessments every 3-6 weeks.

No

Is the student showing progress?

Yes

Is the student now performing commensurate with peers?

Yes

Return student to instructional core learning.

No

Continue approach with follow-up (consider if improvement is at appropriate pace; if not, intensify intervention).

No

Use diagnostic assessments to better understand source of difficulty

Adjust approach and monitor again in 3-6 weeks

If difficulties are persistent, call team meeting to discuss possible referral for Special Education evaluation.

Opportunities: Have students been afforded enough opportunities to acquire these skills?

Yes

No

Educators: Do our teachers have the knowledge and skills to address these needs

Yes

No

Plan and implement additional, sustained professional development to cultivate instructional practices

Content: Are students’ difficulties with code-based skills (decoding, fluency) OR meaning-based skills (vocabulary, background knowledge)

Yes

No

If meaning-based

Educators: Do our teachers have the knowledge and skills to address these needs

Yes

No

Plan and implement additional, sustained professional development to cultivate instructional practices

If code-based

Additional opportunities to practice target skills and to acquire competencies should be built into the existing curriculum by adjusting the pacing or scope and sequence.

The instructional core should place additional focus on providing opportunities to build oral language, literacy skills and conceptual knowledge. Classwide assessment every 6 weeks.

Educators: Do our teachers have the knowledge and skills to address these needs

Yes

No

Plan and implement additional, sustained professional development to cultivate instructional practices

If meaning-based

The instructional core should place additional focus on providing systematic and explicit phonics instruction, following up with class-wide measures at least every 3 weeks.
Performance in Context: Rosa Parks

Percentage of Students Identified At-Risk by Literacy Skill: Rosa Parks Elementary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Phonemic Awareness</th>
<th>Phonics</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K2</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td></td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are the instructional strengths? Weaknesses? What is the priority issue?
## Performance in Context: Rosa Parks

### Percentage of Students Identified At-Risk by Literacy Skill: Rosa Parks Elementary

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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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What are the instructional strengths? Weaknesses? What is the priority issue?
Returning to Our Case Students: Data in Context

Response: Strengthening Classroom Instruction for all (Tier 1)

- Carter

Response: Provide Targeted Individualized Supports (Tier 2, 3)

- Max
## Instructional Opportunities or Individual Difficulty?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Opportunity</th>
<th>Individual Difficulty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• More than 20% of class shares the same difficulty</td>
<td>• Difficulty is different from the performance of most peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student is part of a group that shows similar difficulty (e.g., Carter’s classmates)</td>
<td>• In addition:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Insufficient opportunities to learn due to circumstances</td>
<td>• Student has a history of experience in strong instructional environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New arrival</td>
<td>• No sign or history of individual impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Preschooler / Kindergartener</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Reader-Intervention Match**

If a reader has code-based difficulties:

- S/he needs interventions that focus on phonics and fluency
- Instruction is targeted and can be taught one-on-one.
- With targeted intervention, these skills are generally mastered
  - in a brief period of time
- Examples: Wilson, Achieve 3000

If a reader has meaning-based difficulties:

- S/he needs extensive exposure to print and language building.
- Instruction is not targeted or taught one-on-one. It is highly interactive, discussion-based and involves text.
- These skills need to be supported on an ongoing basis
- Examples: Word Generation; Read180
# Basics of Intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions...</th>
<th>...And Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Where** does it happen?        | • Not location-specific  
|                                  | • Additional, targeted support one way or the other  
| **Who** provides it?             | • Variety of personnel as determined at the site  
|                                  | • Any areas impeding literacy development  
| **What** skills?                 | • For ELLs: might be ESL support AND support for literacy skills  
| **How** is instruction designed? | • Assessment-driven  
|                                  | • Adjusted based on progress monitoring (i.e., response to instruction!)  

Three Steps Towards Better Serving Struggling Readers

1. Distinguish the unique struggler from the population
   - Understand and analyze the struggling reader’s profile in context

2. Strengthen the match between the reader’s needs and the intervention

3. Implement screeners to measure and target specific literacy skills
A Common Scenario Calling for Tier 1 Improvement

In high-risk settings, we often need to focus on intensifying Tier 1 instruction.

In isolation, Carter’s vocabulary scores are concerning.

In the context of their peers, they are typical.
Summary: Responding to Low Literacy Rates

Needs are often more extensive than can be addressed by providing one class daily in reading instruction, delivered solely by the reading or language arts teacher.

- Significantly altering the curricula throughout the school day
- Efforts that engage all teachers in a unified approach to improving word and world knowledge are likely required
- More extensive, ongoing interventions are required for those who struggle significantly
- Interventions that are more individualized and responsive to students’ needs