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As a math company focused on equity, All Learners Network (ALN) is cultivating a community of educators who promote math equity and inclusion for all students. Our goal is to support educators and administrators so that all students have access to high-quality math instruction. When we say all, we really, truly mean ALL. We mean every single child entering any school.

There's an abundance of diversity in the needs and goals of the children in front of us. This makes the work exciting and, simultaneously, makes the work incredibly difficult. It is critical for educators to truly understand what Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) can look like to reach all students. We need systems that include regular progress monitoring, evidence-based decision-making, thoughtful goals, and measurable outcomes.

Sometimes when I talk to educators about interventions, they might mishear me and think I've mentioned an interventionist- as in a job, a person who runs interventions. What I'd really like is for us all to embrace the idea and the belief that you are all interventionists. We are all interventionists. Every single one of us is connected to a school in some way. You might be a teacher, you might be an administrator, you might be working in a non-teaching role at a school. You might just have a student that goes to school and you want to know how an MTSS system could work and how your child can receive the instruction that would benefit them most.

Picture the last school that you were in. Imagine you're walking down a hallway and in your hand, you have your morning coffee, tea, or water bottle. All of a sudden, a 10-year-old sprints directly at you and nearly knocks that drink out of your hand. Chances are,



even if you don't work in that school or you don't know that child, you will somehow intervene. You might call out to them to “slow down” or ask them to go back to where they were or you might ask “what’s wrong?”

You're going to have an intervention for that situation because you're invested in that child, whether you work in that school or not. You're invested in that child's existence in school and know they have a right to be there. And, you need to make it so that they can be. Now imagine how this situation would change if instead of that student running down the hall and nearly knocking you over, they were in a math classroom with a worksheet on their desk and their head down. What would your intervention be? How would you engage that child to make sure that they have access to their learning? That is truly what an intervention is.

Intervention is thoughtfully putting tasks, materials, prompts, or time in place to break down the barriers for our students. It is teaching the students the skills that they critically need and giving them the respect and time to learn them for themselves. Whatever your role may be, it's our job as people connected to a school to make that happen. MTSS is a system to help educators and administrators make that happen for all students.

The goal of a Multi-Tiered System of Support is to orient and guide educators as they work to provide appropriate support so that all students can succeed. It is fundamentally about changing opportunities for all students. This is no easy task. We know that there's no fictitious average third grader that comes into school ready to be there, ready to learn exactly on the page in a lesson book that you think they're supposed to be. They just don't exist. Everyone comes with their own unique background, experience, and understanding. We need to work together within a system that builds upon those unique qualities to support all students.

Before we dive into unpacking MTSS, we need to look at language. At ALN, we tend to use the term “layer” more than we use the term “tier.” Tiers are what the definition of MTSS uses, a Multi-Tiered System of Support. Tiers can accidentally indicate that children exist within these categories when actually, the ideal situation is a layered system of instruction where they're getting the specific interventions that are added on to their grade-level instruction, not in place of it. The interventions are what is layered, not the students.



# MTSS: A Multi-Layered Support System

Layer 1: Grade level content for **all**

All plants need soil, sun and water in a garden of diverse species to grow.

Layer 2: Re-teach. Intervention and extension for **some**

Some plants need less water, special fertilizer, another plant to pollinate.

Layer 3: Specialized Instruction for **few**

Few plants need very specific growing conditions and we are providing what they need so they can thrive in the garden.



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In a lot of our workshops at ALN, we use a garden analogy to help visualize MTSS. We are going to think of layer one as what all the plants need- sun, soil, and water. They all need to exist in this garden of diverse species so they can coexist and grow. This is our classroom-based, grade-level instruction. All students at a grade level are working towards the High Leverage Concept (HLC) of that grade. Every student deserves to be there and the garden as a whole would suffer without them.

If all students are accessing that grade-level instruction and they're getting the high-quality support that they need, they can thrive in that garden. The first layer needs to be scaffolded and differentiated. It needs to be accessible to everyone. Our All Learners Lesson Structure includes four components (Launch, Main Lesson, Math Menu, Closure) that support both inclusion and differentiation for all learners. This is an optimal tool for first instruction and that first layer of support.

Every flower is planted in the garden so it can bloom and grow. Some students and some flowers are going to need an additional layer of support so they can thrive. Some flowers need twice daily watering, full sun, or partial shade. Some students may need some reteaching, extra examples, more games that promote flexible thinking or fluency, practice unpacking story problems in a small group, etc. That would be our layer two or our tier two of intervention. Interventions in layer two provide extra support so that students can continue to access their tier-one instruction. Layer two intervention should not happen at the same time as the main lesson as a pull-out group. When we pull students out of tier one instruction, the grade level main lesson, we decide for those children that they aren't going to learn that new grade level concept. Students might need to work on the previous grade's HLC in order to access their grade's HLC.

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The key is to connect the models and strategies they are learning in tier two interventions to the whole class instruction so they can make sense of and build upon what they understand.

If there's a plant that needs extremely specific conditions to thrive, then it needs to receive a third layer of support. It still gets sun, soil and water. The plant might get twice daily watering or full sun. The plant might also need a gardener to put a specific composition of compost near its roots to get nutrients from the soil. We need to consider students who need this third layer of support. These students have a diagnosed disability that requires an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This layer of support considers the multitude of needs a student presents. Students should be working towards High Leverage Concepts that will help them access their grade level's curriculum. Students need to be encouraged to make connections between the models and strategies that make sense to them and explore how those connect to the models and strategies needed at their grade level.

In my work as a special educator, I loved focusing on the HLCs when creating IEP goals and working with small groups because they allowed me to really narrow my focus on what was most important for instruction. The HLCs span pre-K through eighth grade very intentionally to lead toward the conceptual understanding of algebra. When thinking about really high-quality, layer two, and layer three interventions, we need clear and manageable goals. We need goals that lead towards conceptual access to grade-level curriculum. Teachers can utilize the HLC Assessments at the beginning of an intervention cycle to show them evidence of a student's current understanding of a concept, model, or strategy. They can target the critical models from the HLC Progressions to expose students to tools that will help them grow. At the end of the intervention cycle, the HLC Assessments can be readministered to track progress.

All Learners Network's mission is to cultivate "a community of educators that promote math equity and inclusion for all students." An ideal MTSS system provides layers of support and interventions, rather than separating and categorizing students into ability-based groups. All students deserve rich, intentionally inclusive, grade-level instruction. Providing multiple layers of support through a system using common resources such as the High Leverage Concepts and Progressions, allows us to better meet the needs of all students.

For more information on this topic and even more examples, check out our recording of the workshop, "Everyone is an Interventionist: Creating a Robust and Effective MTSS."



**What Now?** Scan the QR code and scroll to the bottom of the post for links to next steps



1. Check out our High Leverage Concepts (HLCs), and watch our HLC Explainer Videos.
2. Review the All Learners Lesson Structure and read more about its application.
3. Bring All Learners Network (ALN) into your school or district for embedded professional development.

