

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports for Literacy

This fact sheet is a companion resource to CSBA’s “[Primer on Literacy and the Science of Reading](#),” providing more in-depth information on the implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports for literacy. The science of reading is implemented within a [Multi-Tiered System of Supports](#) (MTSS) framework, which organizes reading instruction into three tiers:

- ▶ **Tier 1:** General classroom core instruction for all students
- ▶ **Tier 2:** Targeted small-group intervention for students needing extra support
- ▶ **Tier 3:** Intensive, individualized instruction for those with significant needs

Local educational agencies (LEAs) use universal screening and assessment systems to identify needs early and guide effective reading instruction. Screening students for difficulties can take place before Tier 1, after Tier 1 intervention, or be a bridge between Tier 1 and Tier 2 intervention. With the addition of [California Education Code Section 53008](#), all LEAs are now required to implement state-approved universal reading screeners for students in kindergarten through grade 2.

According to Education Code, “The Legislature finds and declares that screening pupils for risk of reading difficulties, including dyslexia, is one of many tools that educators can employ to gain information about how to support their pupils’ learning. Screening should be considered part of a school’s comprehensive instructional strategy and should be used by educators like other types of formative and summative assessments: to inform individualized instruction, measure a pupil’s progress, identify pupil learning needs, and enable parents and educators to discuss pupil needs in a more informed way.”

This law, which took effect in July 2023, requires each LEA to conduct annual screenings and communicate information about testing windows and parent opt-out options at least 15 days prior to administration. LEAs must also provide support to students who are identified as being at risk of a reading difficulty through the screening, which would be considered part of Tier 2 instruction. Educators use data from universal screening, progress monitoring, and team meetings (such as Student Support Teams or Coordination of Service Teams) to determine which students need these supports and to select appropriate evidence-based strategies.

Table 1: State-Approved Universal Reading Screeners

	Multitudes	mCLASS and mCLASS Lectura	Amira	Rapid Online Assessment of Reading (ROAR)
Developer	Dyslexia Center at the University of California, San Francisco	Amplify Education, Inc.	Amira Learning (Imagination Station, Inc. DBA Istation)	Stanford University Brain Development and Education Lab
Grades	K-2	K-2	K-2	1-2
Languages	English and Spanish	English and Spanish	English and Spanish	English
Mode	Digital	Digital or pencil and paper	Digital or pencil and paper	Digital
Grouping	One-on-one	One-on-one	Classroom	Classroom
Time	10–13 minutes	3–8 minutes	16–17 minutes	10–13 minutes
Cost per student	Free	\$5.00–\$9.00	\$4.99–\$10.00	Free

Table source: <https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/californias-adoption-reading-difficulties-risk-screening>

To illustrate how MTSS applies to the science of reading, the following are examples of evidence-based supports at Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 to meet diverse student needs.

MTSS: The science of reading in action

Tier 1: Strong core instruction for all students

At the foundation of MTSS, Tier 1 ensures that every student receives high-quality, evidence-based instruction grounded in the science of reading. In most contexts, Tier 1 instruction happens within the general education classroom. These instructional practices build a solid foundation for literacy and include explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Tier 1 instruction is differentiated and based on [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#) principles of multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement, ensuring that every learner can access grade-level content. Effective Tier 1 implementation strengthens reading outcomes and fosters a positive and inclusive school climate, reducing the need for more intensive interventions later. In an effective MTSS model, the Tier 1 universal instruction should be sufficient to meet the needs of approximately 80 percent of the student population.

Common Tier 1 English Language Arts programs in California classrooms include foundational skills curricula, knowledge building curricula, and comprehensive literacy programs that cover both foundational skills and knowledge building. To ensure a complete and holistic reading program, LEAs must adopt curricula that are aligned with the [California English Language Arts/English Language Development \(ELA/ELD\) Framework](#) and include both foundational-skills instruction and knowledge-building components. While many LEAs choose to adopt a single, comprehensive literacy program, many others choose to combine a foundational-skills curriculum from one publisher, and a knowledge-building curriculum from a separate

publisher. To provide more guidance to LEAs looking to update their ELA curriculum, the California Department of Education is currently undergoing an ELA/ELD instructional materials review to create an updated list of approved curricula to be launched in November 2026.

Tier 2: Targeted support for students who need more

Tier 2 provides additional, targeted instruction for students who do not yet meet grade-level expectations, despite receiving strong Tier 1 instruction. Typically supporting about 15-20 percent of students, Tier 2 interventions occur in small groups and are layered on top of core instruction.

Targeted interventions at this level should be delivered by the classroom teacher or an outside specialist and include evidence-based interventions that build on core classroom teaching to address specific skill gaps, using explicit and systematic instruction aligned with the key components of the science of reading.

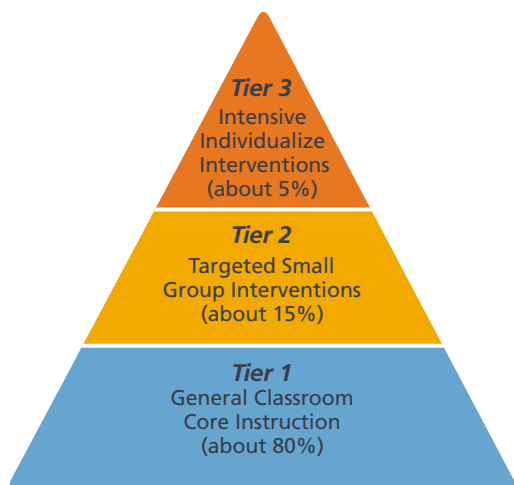
Tier 3: Intensive intervention for individual needs

Tier 3 represents the most intensive level of support within MTSS, typically serving 5 percent of students who continue to struggle despite Tier 2 interventions or who face more acute academic challenges. These interventions are highly individualized, data-driven, and often delivered in one-on-one or very small-group settings with a trained interventionist, often an education specialist or reading intervention teacher. Tier 3 interventions are often, but not always, included as part of a special education program based on a student's individualized education program (IEP) and related IEP goals. A student may receive Tier 3 support in one area, such as reading, while continuing at Tier 1 or Tier 2 in others. By aligning progress-monitoring tools, evidence-based literacy practices, and cross-disciplinary collaboration, LEAs can ensure that Tier 3 interventions are responsive, effective, and grounded in the science of reading. Common Tier 2 and Tier 3 reading intervention programs in use across California include (but are not limited to): [IMSE Orton Gillingham](#), [SIPPS](#), [Amira](#), [Wilson Reading System](#), [REWARDS](#), [S.P.I.R.E.](#), [Lexia Core5](#), etc. The goal at this level is not to label students, but to provide precisely the instruction and resources needed to accelerate growth.

It is important for LEAs to consistently monitor progress and improvements and assess whether interventions are effective. Equally important is engaging in discussions when interventions fail and digging down to find the root cause of why interventions are not working and change course. Together, these actions can provide meaningful improvements in students' literacy and academic achievement.

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Figure 1: Multi-Tiered System of Supports Framework



Source: <https://www.readingrockets.org/classroom/evidence-based-instruction/mtss>