

Section 1 – Identification Process

Student Support Team State Board Rule 160-4-2-.32

Decision Making Along the Continuum of the Pyramid of Interventions

Prior to a student being referred for evaluation for Special Education eligibility, the student moves through various levels, or tiers, through the RTI (Response to Intervention) process. All students participate in general education learning that includes but is not limited to the following:

- Universal screening to target groups in need of specific instructional and/or behavioral support
- Implementation of the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) / Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) through a standards-based classroom structure.
- Students receive differentiation of instruction including fluid, flexible grouping, multiple means of learning and demonstration of learning.
- Progress monitoring of learning through multiple formative assessments.

All teachers in Towns County Schools must seek ways to meet the unique educational needs of all children within the general education program prior to making a referral for special education services. By developing a systematic model within the general education and special education areas, schools can provide preventative, supplementary instruction and supports to students who are having trouble reaching benchmarks.

Special education eligibility and the required pre-referral process are intended to support the practice of providing high quality instruction and intervention matched to student needs, while monitoring progress frequently in order to make decisions about changes in instruction and to apply child response data to important educational decisions. This framework should guide eligibility teams in applying decisions to general, remedial, and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction guided by child outcome data.

To obtain child outcome data, a multi-tier system of intervention options integrates educational problem solving across educational levels. Multi-tiered systems of interventions are consistent with the federal legislation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, 2004) and evidence-based research. This law serves two purposes; to produce better outcomes for all children, and to apply procedures with strong scientific bases to a wide range of educational decisions, including determination of eligibility for special education.

This four-tiered Pyramid process provides an integrated approach to service delivery that encompasses general, remedial, gifted, and special education. The Pyramid is based on strong academic standards and research-based intervention. It relies heavily on frequent progress monitoring to assess student progress in the curriculum. Each school has established procedures for implementing this pyramid. By developing and implementing the Pyramid of Interventions framework at the local level, child outcome data are expected to increase due to the consistent use of common formative assessments that guide decision-making procedures for student interventions. Implementation of the Pyramid of Interventions requires three essential components:

- Multiple tiers of interventions service delivery (Georgia employs a four-tier model.)
- A problem-solving method
- An integrated data collection system to inform decision at each tier of service delivery.

TIER 1

- Universal screening or benchmarking is conducted at the school level.
- Evidence-based curricula and strategies are in place for all students.
- Differentiation is documented by general education teachers through the general education environment.
- At-risk students are identified in an area of instructional delay (language, academics, behavior).
- Data are analyzed by classroom general education teachers for decision making.

Movement between Tier 1 and Tier 2 is fluid and flexible. Adequate time should be given for the Tier 1 instructional program to be implemented before determining whether Tier 2 support is needed. However, common sense is critical in assessing student performance and individual responses to Tier 1 instruction (i.e., a student with a documented visual impairment would be provided interventions immediately.)

TIER 2

- Parent is notified that additional small group instruction may be needed for student.
- Parent is contracted concerning interventions to be implemented.
- Small group instruction is provided in addition to the core curriculum.
- Progress monitoring is administered frequently to determine whether a change in delivery or intervention is required.
- Data are analyzed by classroom general education teachers for decision making purposes.

After the appropriate amount of time (time in weeks dependent on the intervention), the data team should assess student progress and determine whether continued support through Tier 2 is required, additional Tier 2 interventions are required, or Tier 3 support, in addition to Tier 1 and Tier 2, is required.

TIER 3

- Baseline and progress monitoring data from Tier 2 are analyzed to create specific goal(s) for student improvement
- The RTI team may determine the need for additional information including the use or administration of information or formal measures to gather individual data in the area of concern.
- The interventions are continued if the student is making progress; however, if progress toward the goal is minimal, RTI members will revise or change the intervention.

Parents/guardians are invited to participate in all Student Support Team meetings and in the development of interventions for their child. Alternative strategies for increasing the student's academic, social, and/or behavior performance are identified, reviewed, and implemented during the

time the student is being served through the Student Support Team. The team will meet at prescribed intervals to review progress monitoring toward interventions, to devise more, or revise original strategies/interventions. The team records minutes of each meeting along with outcomes of interventions and plans for the next strategies. The RTI team may make a referral to special education (Tier 4) if the intervention plan and its revisions are not successful in helping the student meet the goals identified by the team.

Documentation of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, along with progress monitoring results are included in the referral packet if a child is referred from Tier 3 to Tier 4. All student referrals are preceded by evidence-based academic and/or behavioral interventions and the monitoring of progress. Before a referral for special education evaluation can be made, documentation that attempted reasonable alternative strategies and interventions have been made and have not been successful is provided. The referral for evaluation is then made in order to determine if physical, emotional, and/or academic problems may be interfering with the student's school progress. If the student is referred directly for an evaluation, by passing Tier 3 interventions, the SST committee fully documents the reason for the by-pass through written minutes.

Exclusionary Factors

Possible exclusion factors are discussed at length during the Student Support Team (Tier 3) process as to whether the factor had an impact on the child's educational progress. Exclusionary factors are considered in eligibility determinations and each factor is considered to determine its impact or lack of impact on educational progress. The explanation describes why or why not a factor has influenced educational progress. Once the factors have been addressed, the team refers to the responses and to the eligibility criteria for each disability category.

Towns County Schools utilizes the following guidance from the Georgia Department of Education when addressing each exclusionary factor:

- Lack of appropriate instruction in reading, math and written expression. The eligibility team discusses whether or not the child had access to quality instruction and research-based curricula
- Limited English Proficiency – It is very important to include an English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) staff member who is familiar with the child suspected of having a disability if the child being evaluated is an English Language Learner. A language profile for this child is necessary so that it specifically investigates the language proficiency in both the primary language and English.
- Cultural Factors – A child's culture should not be a determinant factor of a disability. Towns County Schools obtains pertinent cultural information by interviewing key family members. All results obtained are then interpreted in relation to the child's dominant cultural influences.
- Environmental or economic disadvantage – A child's environment or economic disadvantage should not be a determinant factor for determination of a disability. The committee thoroughly examines family stressors that may be impacting educational progress to include homelessness, unemployment, extended illnesses, death in the family, divorce, pre-school experiences, lack of books in the home or expectations of the family for the child.
- Atypical education history – The team discusses if the child has high levels of mobility and/or absenteeism which may have influenced the educational progress of the child.

- Visual, hearing, or motor disability – The committee analyzes information in order to rule out as a source of difficulty when determining specific disabilities.
- Mutism, tongue thrust and dialectic – Mutism, tongue thrust behavior without associated speech sound impairment, and dialectic differences cannot be a speech language disorder. The committee analyzes information in order to rule out as a source of difficulty when determining specific disabilities.