10 SUCCESS FACTORS FOR LITERACY INTERVENTION
Getting Results with MTSS in Elementary Schools
List of the 10 Success Factors:
1. Group by Skill Deficit
2. Use Diagnostic Assessments
3. Implement a Walk-to-Intervention Model
4. Monitor Progress with an Appropriate Assessment
5. Flood the Intervention Block with Extra Instructors
6. Use Intervention Time Wisely
7. Be Aware of What Makes Intervention Effective
8. Provide Teachers with Intervention Lesson Materials
9. Invest in Professional Development
10. Inspect What You Expect

Why this Book was Written
Education initiatives come and go shining brightly for a while and then fizzling out like shooting stars. That’s what worries me about MTSS/RTI. It’s at risk of fizzling out. Instead of focusing on strengthening MTSS implementation, attention has shifted to the newest ideas like personalized learning and flipped classrooms. MTSS just makes good sense; it shouldn’t be considered a fad but rather should be as fundamental to how an elementary school operates as following a master schedule and assigning students to homerooms.

One reason that MTSS is vulnerable to being pushed aside is that although results have been outstanding in some schools, they have been negligible in too many others. Yet the reason that results have not been consistently strong is that in implementing MTSS, too many schools have left out some components that are critical to success.

Is your school getting great results with its literacy MTSS? If not, have you left out one or more critical components? This book provides 10 success factors for gains in literacy interventions within an MTSS framework.

“Instituting a systemic approach to differentiate instruction in order to meet the needs of all students should be non-negotiable.”

10 Success Factor for Literacy Intervention is available for purchase in the 95 Percent Group Web Store.
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Success Factor #1: Group by Skill Deficit
One of the most important processes in MTSS is the criterion a school uses for placing students in groups. Too often schools are using grouping processes that, from the outset, will limit potential gains. A few key decisions drive results, and grouping is among the most important, which is why it is the first of the 10 factors for success. The most effective approach is to place students in groups by specific skill deficits, which means all the students in a group need pretty much the same thing and the teacher will clearly know what to teach.

“The method of assigning students to groups makes all the difference in the results. Schools experiencing success are ensuring that the groups are skill based.”

Success Factor #2: Use Diagnostic Assessments
One prevalent issue is that many schools are using the wrong assessment data to look at skill deficits. Universal screener data do not provide an adequate drill-down to the skill-level information needed to place students in appropriate skill groups. The universal screener tells you who is not at benchmark while the diagnostic assessment tells you why and what to do about it. Confusion about the types and purposes of different assessments is common. The absence of diagnostic assessments is a key reason for the lackluster results from MTSS. Read about seven characteristics of an effective diagnostic assessment.

“Diagnostic assessment is the gateway to being able to group by skill deficit, which is probably the most essential requirement for robust results.”

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Success Factor #3: Implement a Walk-to-Intervention Model
One important MTSS structure is how the school organizes to deliver small-group intervention that is differentiated to meet student needs. While many schools have an additional instructor join a classroom teacher in the homeroom during the intervention block, this delivery model is not as effective as the Walk-to-Intervention (WTI) model. Of the 10 advantages of WTI over in-class intervention, perhaps my favorite is that when teachers collaborate across a grade level to share students comments like “our kids” replace “my kids.”

“With Walk-to-Intervention the grade-level team thinks and acts more systemically.”

Success Factor #4: Monitor Progress with an Appropriate Assessment
Progress monitoring data are what inform decisions between benchmark periods about moving students in and out of groups. There are two common problems associated with progress monitoring, however. Sometimes the wrong assessment instruments are given, so the data aren’t all that useful. In other situations, the amount of time set aside for teachers to use the data for making interim decisions is inadequate. In spite of these challenges, regular progress monitoring, with good communication practices, leads to better student results.

“It’s pretty much impossible to say that a school is implementing MTSS if it doesn’t have an effective progress-monitoring process.”
**Success Factor #5: Flood the Intervention Block with Extra Instructors**

Schools are creative in looking to all possible staff members to teach intervention groups. A good rule of thumb for staffing is to schedule at least 50 percent more assistants or support staff than the number of classroom teachers. Exceeding the 50-percent rule of thumb for extra instructors will lead to even better results because there can be more specific skill groups and the group size will be smaller. Principals getting good results are spending funds in ways that schedule more instructors to be available at the critical intervention blocks, such as funding twice as many half-day morning positions instead of half the number of full-day assistants.

“Schools that are achieving remarkable gains through MTSS are flooding intervention blocks with and “all hands on deck” approach to enable smaller group sizes so that students get more feedback and practice.”

**Success Factor #6: Use Intervention Time Wisely**

Too many times students are sitting in an intervention group where they already know what is being taught. This time is precious and can't be wasted. During intervention time the teacher responds to a struggling reader’s mistake by explaining it. Modeling it, letting him practice, and giving him feedback each time until he gets it. This feedback loop doesn’t happen during the rest of the day for that struggling reader because the teacher can’t stop to address each mistake he makes. The student gets to master a skill one at a time until he is at grade-level in his skills.

“Struggling readers are under a time line -- they urgently need to catch up to grade level, and there are only so many resources a school has to devote to any one student.”
Success Factor #7: Be Aware of What Makes Intervention Effective
Two critical MTSS success factors are using diagnostic assessment data to pinpoint a struggling reader’s lowest missing skill along a continuum and place that student in the appropriate skill group. Yet that’s not enough. It’s the way the instructor is working with students that leads to profound gains that close the gap for struggling readers. Understanding the eight characteristics of effective intervention instruction is critical because when teachers don’t know them, there is a risk that they’ll make adjustments or eliminate elements that are essential for results. Not only are these eight characteristics provided but three descriptions of effective instruction are described to illuminate what it looks like.

“It’s not good enough for teachers to know that the instruction works; it’s critical that they understand why it works.”

Success Factor #8: Provide Teachers with Intervention Lesson Materials
When gains in student outcomes are dismal, evaluate if teachers have been provided the effective intervention lessons. In many cases it’s not that educators don’t believe in MTSS or don’t want to do it; they simply don’t have the time or knowledge to create all the lessons that are needed to differentiate instruction for all students. For districts to take MTSS to scale, it’s critical to provide teachers with many things, including data, intervention time built into the schedule, professional development, collaboration time, and materials. Many lessons are available including some that are free on the internet. Yet not all lessons are created equal.

“Saving funds by not buying evidence-based intervention lessons is penny wise and pound foolish. The amount of salary dedicated to intervention instruction exceeds the cost of a good intervention program within a month.”
Success Factor #9: Invest in Professional Development

Instructional materials, allocating staff resources, and learning to use data are all important. But MTSS is more complex than those things because it affects the way teachers spend their time, determine what each student needs, and decide what and how they teach during key learning sessions. Getting it right requires an intentional systemic design. The only way to get all staff onboard is to gather them in groups to communicate and engage in dialogue. Professional development by role is most effective because although nearly all staff members in a school are affected when MTSS is implemented, not everyone needs to know and do the same things.

“MTSS in literacy is not about the stuff you buy; it’s about implementing new structures, processes, and instructional materials so that the school undergoes a paradigm shift in how teachers identify and address struggling readers.”

Success Factor #10: Inspect What You Expect

After all the other components in Success Factors 1 through 9 are in place then it’s time to make sure that it all comes together so that students can get the best possible instruction within the tiers of MTSS. The challenge is in doing this in a manner that is not viewed as uncomfortably evaluative but is designed to provide feedback that is welcome and informative. An Intervention Observation Snapshot Form with eight key elements is provided in this book. It’s designed for colleagues and administrators to jot notes while conducting brief spontaneous observations of instruction. The goal is for these observation notes to encourage rich dialogue that leads to high fidelity of implementation.

“It wouldn’t make sense to invest in all the preceding factors and not monitor the outcomes.”
Dr. Susan L. Hall, CEO and Co-Founder, 95 Percent Group, is a nationally recognized leader in RTI/MTSS, data analysis, and reading instruction.

Dr. Hall has more than 20 years experience as a consultant to districts and schools in the field of reading intervention, and is a frequent speaker at reading conferences nationwide. Other books written by Dr. Hall include:

Are you interested in getting faster results from your Response to Intervention (RTI) implementation? Jumpstart RTI: Using RTI in Your Elementary School Right Now, is filled with practical suggestions and no-nonsense implementation strategies to put your school on the path to better intervention instruction and improved student outcomes.

Implementing Response to Intervention: A Principal’s Guide emphasizes the critical role elementary and middle school administrators play in ensuring RTI success at their own schools to:

- Motivate staff for optimum success
- Formulate an assessment plan including a calendar and data management
- Design a year-long staff development plan for using data to make instructional decisions
- Use data in grade-level, teacher, and parent meetings

I’ve DIBEL’d, Now What? Next Edition is a great resource for teachers wondering what to do after they have administered and scored the DIBELS Next™ assessment. This book provides a step-by-step process for analyzing DIBELS Next™ data to look for error patterns, identify which students need further diagnostic assessment, and organize effective intervention groups.

You can purchase these publications in the 95 Percent Group Web Store: store.95percentgroup.com.