



**ACADEMIC INTERVENTION PRACTICES
LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS**



**INSTRUCTION
PARTNERS**

Academic Intervention Practices: Landscape Analysis

This report presents the summary findings of a five-month study to understand intervention practices and perceptions of the efficacy of intervention approaches across states. It includes context about intervention approaches, takeaways, and our sense of the short- and long-term opportunities for improvement.

Context

Students whose needs are not met in core academic classes or display skill deficits receive a variety of supports through academic intervention frameworks, such as Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²) and a multi-tier system of supports (MTSS).

These intervention frameworks aim to address skill deficits to allow all students to master academic standards. They also attempt to provide early identification of students that require additional support or ongoing monitoring and allow for quick instructional modifications.

Common intervention approaches use three tiers of supports, as shown in the inverse triangle depiction (a common representation of tiered intervention). The first tier represents the core instruction that every student receives. Tiered instruction relies on student screening to identify students in need of additional support to close skill gaps. The second tier provides targeted support to students identified using data from a screener instrument and typically one other source. Standard guidelines state that students scoring in the bottom 25 percent on the screener are “at risk” and should be placed in Tier 2 intervention. Tier 2 students typically receive additional support in smaller groups. The third tier provides students the most intensive supports, and typically serves around 5 percent of students in the school. Students scoring in the bottom 10 percent on the screener tool generally receive Tier 3 placement. These students are usually 1.5 to 2 years behind grade level. Tier 3 support is more narrowly focused and individualized than Tier 2 intervention.

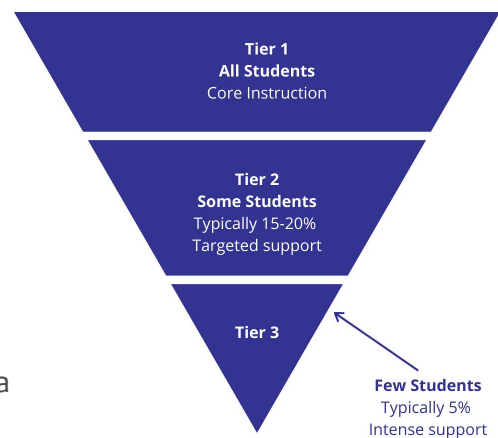


Figure 1: Tiers of Support

Systems of tiered academic interventions grew out of an effort to change the way students were identified for special education services. Historically, student identification for specific learning disability (SLD) came from a discrepancy between cognitive and achievement test results. Federal law still permits the use of the discrepancy model for identification of SLD students. However, it also allows for the use of a Response to Intervention model or other “alternative research-based procedures.” In recent decades, systems of tiered academic intervention gradually

replaced the discrepancy model in many schools to identify students for SLD placement. For some schools this decision resulted from state law requirements, such as those in Tennessee and Florida.

Over the last decade and a half, the framework expanded beyond student SLD identification into the general education setting to support decision-making for all students and increased achievement, with a heightened focus on providing targeted support to struggling students. As of 2019, some form of a tiered academic system exists in every state, with the RTI² model used most frequently.

States vary in their involvement with school and district implementation of intervention frameworks. Some states provide heavy guidance, others require specific processes in rule or statute, and others use incentives such as grant dollars to motivate the use of academic intervention. Involvement from states ranges from specifying the duration and frequency of intervention to selecting screeners and curriculum.

Despite a range of approaches and years of using these systems in schools across the country, results for all students, and especially historically underserved students, remain poor, as evidenced by performance on national and state assessments.

Driving Questions for this Study

While effective Tier 1 instruction is essential to the success of any instructional program, serving all students well also requires an effective approach to identify and meet the needs of students for whom that instruction is not sufficient. Effective intervention practice is therefore fundamental to the mission of meeting the needs of all students, especially those students who are academically behind. Instruction Partners set out to better understand the current state of intervention practice and the perceptions and evidence of efficacy of each element in order to better understand the opportunities for improved practice.

We did not set out to develop a model of what effective intervention looks like or entails or codify best practice; we set out to better understand the trends across intervention practice and how teachers, leaders, and other instructional support staff perceived the systems of intervention used in their schools.

We conducted a five-month study, including a policy review, expert engagement, school and district leader surveys, and school site visits. We randomly surveyed 1,200 educators (with 53 responses). Due to the low response rates, the survey data is not considered representative. We conducted 21 interviews and nine site visits across five states—Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Wisconsin.¹ Two of the nine

¹ More information about the data collection process and methodology can be found in Appendix A.

sites served middle grades. The rest served a combination of elementary grades. These interactions did not yield a representative sample of schools or perspectives. As such, the findings in this paper should be interpreted as directional.

We sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the trends in the current state of practice of academic intervention in schools?
2. What materials and curriculum are used for academic intervention? What are the perceptions of these products?
3. What data points guide intervention decision-making and efficacy determinations?
4. What barriers and motivations exist for individuals delivering and participating in academic intervention?
5. How does policy drive academic intervention practice?

Systems of Intervention

We found several common components across intervention systems in our study. These components work together to form an ecosystem of intervention. As figure 2 depicts, the intervention process is intended to contain feedback loops, which allow monitoring data to modify student placement as the year progresses.

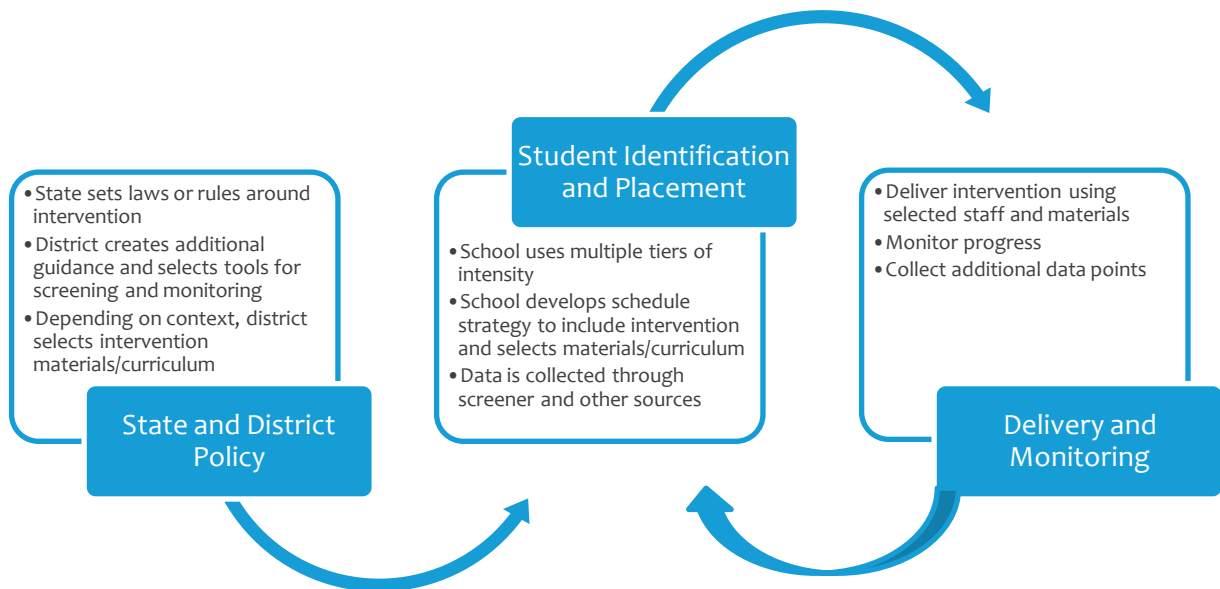


Figure 2: The Academic Intervention Process

We found four common features across intervention systems, illustrated by Figure 3. Although the details of these features vary greatly across school sites, they are consistently the ingredients that need to function (and work together) in order to support intervention effectiveness.

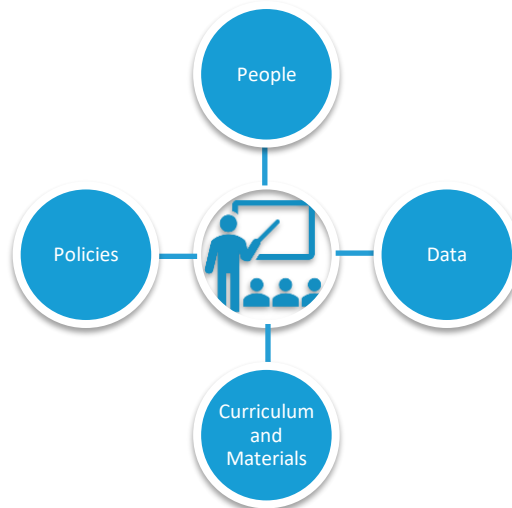


Figure 3: Key Features of Academic Intervention

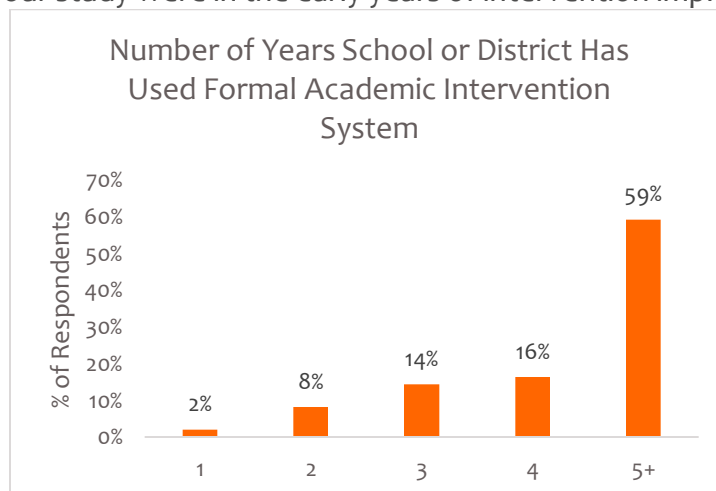
- **People:** Intervention involves most or all of the individuals in a building. Interventionists include general education teachers, instructional coaches, dedicated interventionists, administrators, technology coordinators, and art teachers.
- **Data:** Districts typically make decisions about the screener and monitoring tools and, in some cases, the materials used in intervention. The data used for intervention placement and monitoring varies across schools but always includes data from screener and progress monitoring tools. Some schools also include behavior, attendance, interim, and other relevant data points.
- **Curriculum and Materials:** Schools typically select the materials and create schedules to deliver intervention, as well as select the people who will serve as interventionists. How and whether these materials connect to core instruction varies across schools.
- **Policies:** Policies around intervention are typically set at the state and district levels. Policy includes laws and rules specifying details such as the quantity of the intervention, screening, and monitoring, as well as how the intervention process relates to SLD identification.

Findings

Across our site visits and survey, we found the following:

Overall Findings:

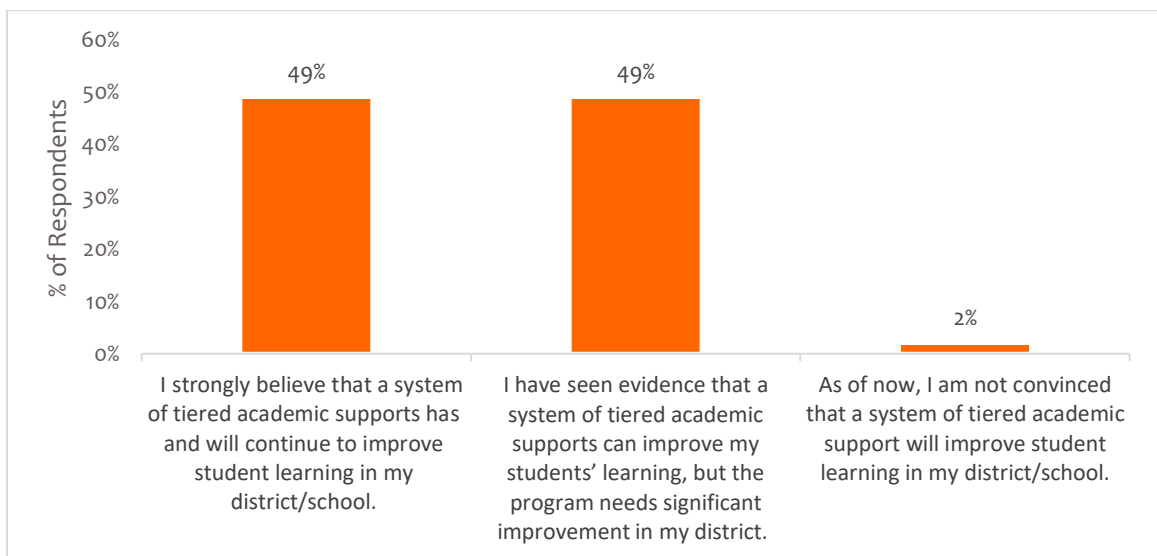
- 1. Significant time is focused on intervention.** Intervention is a cross-cutting structure and considerable time is going towards intervention activities. The vast majority of schools report engaging in a multi-tier model of academic intervention. In our survey, over 90 percent of districts and schools stated they implemented a multi-tiered academic intervention model that typically included three tiers. Across nine site visits, a minimum of 30 minutes was spent delivering Tier 2 and 3 interventions each day. In some sites, the structure of intervention led to the teacher and students spending up to half their day engaged in Tier 2 intervention activities. The monitoring of students, which occurred in all school sites at varying frequencies, required additional time. As one second grade teacher stated, she spends “every minute” of her morning on Tier 2 instruction.
- 2. Significant money is spent on intervention.** Significant spending is directed towards intervention. Leaders revealed in interviews that to conduct intervention they procured screener and monitoring tools and materials and/or curriculum and allocated staff positions for delivery. In the survey, **82 percent** of all districts cited general funds as the stream used to fund academic intervention resources. **56 percent** of districts indicated they used Title I, Part A dollars, often in addition to general funds, to pay for intervention resources. In all site visits, a screener, progress monitoring, and intervention materials or curriculum were identified; all school sites purchased at least one of each of these programs or products, with a few developing additional tools internally.
- 3. The majority of schools in the study have implemented systems of academic intervention for at least five years.** As depicted by the graph below, few schools in our study were in the early years of intervention implementation.



4. **The structure of intervention differed widely across sites.** Structures for delivery included a dedicated block in the schedule for intervention, a classroom-centered approach to delivery within the general education classroom, or a mix of the two. School sites used different mechanisms to group students, including common skill deficits, grade levels, and reading and math levels. Across structures, the groupings for Tier 2 almost all remained below 10 students. All schools used a pull-out approach for Tier 3, although one site did the pull-out within the general education classroom. Tier 3 interventions never exceeded three students, with two exceptions that included an elementary school that placed six students in a Tier 3 class and a middle school where up to 11 students attended a Tier 3 intervention block.

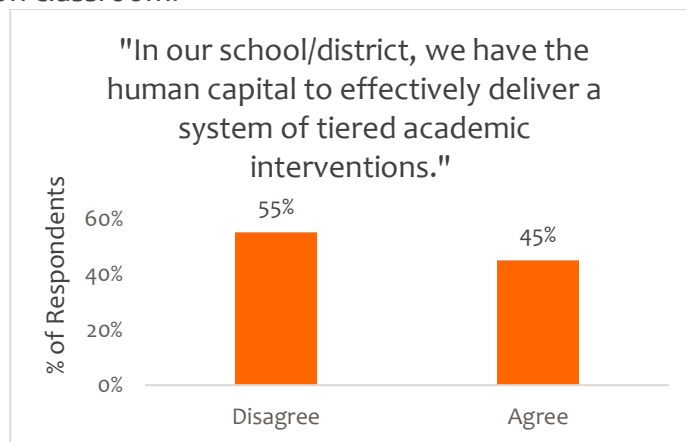
5. **Intervention disproportionately impacts poor students and students of color.** The student groups that schools identified as overrepresented in intervention most frequently were economically disadvantaged students and racial and ethnic minority student groups, followed by students learning English. Over 60 percent of survey respondents stated that African Americans and economically disadvantaged students were overidentified in academic intervention. In one school, with an African American population of 10 percent, all students observed receiving intervention were African American.

6. **Educators and leaders believe academic intervention is improving student outcomes.** All school leaders and 95 percent of district leaders surveyed stated they **saw evidence of student improvement due to academic intervention practices**. Similarly, all but one individual interviewed agreed that intervention improved student outcomes.



People:

- 1. Systems of multi-tiered academic intervention involve a wide range of individuals in schools.** The survey identified seventeen individuals, including parents, as playing a role in the delivery of the intervention process. As one survey respondent and several interviewees indicated, “all adults” in the school building play a role in intervention. One interviewee summarized involvement by saying, “no one is exempt from intervention—student or teacher.” The broad swathe of individuals participating in intervention delivery and data meetings was observed throughout site visits.
- 2. The selection of interventionists varies across sites.** Some sites choose individuals based on their expertise. In other sites, leaders make decisions based on scheduling constraints. On the school leader survey, 40 percent of school leaders agreed that scheduling constraints guided the selection of interventionists.
- 3. The majority of leaders expressed a need for additional or more expert individuals to deliver intervention.** Only 45% of leaders agreed they had the human capital necessary to effectively deliver academic intervention. This led schools to involve a variety of approaches to deliver intervention. For example, in one school “specials teachers” (the art, typing, and technology teachers) delivered Tier 2 intervention. Other schools used reading specialists, English language learner teachers, core instruction teachers, special education teachers, and dedicated interventionists for Tier 2 intervention. At one middle school “peer tutors” were used to deliver Tier 2 to some student groups within the core instruction classroom.



- 4. The “why” for individuals delivering intervention varied considerably both across and within school sites.** The range of responses to the question “Why do you participate in intervention?” varied considerably across actors and schools. Responses included “closing the skill deficit,” “meeting needs without a

disability placement,” “filling in gaps,” “giving kids an opportunity to function in society,” “changing the dynamics of white privilege,” “complying with rules in order to get access to funding,” “making a difference for kids,” “putting kids on the same playing field,” and “providing struggling students opportunities to experience success and build confidence.” When probed, the individuals who stated a version of “preparing kids for life” as their motivation elaborated that they were attempting to give students the skills to read.

Two schools in states with a strong equity focus emphasized equity as a key motivator. This motivation was mentioned by the principals, district administrators, and interventionists. In one of the two schools, where the Tier 2 model included a push-in structure, teachers cited the ability to scaffold and differentiate in ways that would be difficult without the capacity provided by the interventionist as a motivating factor. In other words, they described intervention as a means to an end. All individuals interviewed, with two exceptions at the same school, stated they would participate in intervention even if weren’t required.

5. **Although intervention involves up to all adults in the building, a lack of collaborative culture results in a fragmented process in many schools.** In some schools, little to no collaboration between the core instruction teacher and the interventionist was described. For instance, in two sites, the core instruction teacher played little role in the intervention process. The principal in one school noted this dynamic and stated she wished there were “more communication between general education and interventionists.” However, she also noted the need to protect core instructors’ time by allowing them to focus on grade-level work rather than intervention.
6. **Educator views on the lack of integration between intervention and core instruction exacerbates fragmentation in some schools.** The view that intervention existed apart from core instruction and was measured through progress monitoring tools, as described above, existed in most sites, regardless of the individual charged with delivery. This appeared to lead to a segmentation in the responsibilities of the interventionist and core instruction teachers. One interventionist described the process as feeling “scattered.” The outcomes the school and core instruction teachers were held accountable for did not appear to be a part of the intervention equation, leading to an inattention to intervention accountability.
7. **All schools conducted data meetings, which were the only consistent structure for educator intervention collaboration.** Data team meetings, which occurred in every site visited, took place once every four to six weeks. These meetings included all or almost all adults who interact with the students discussed.

8. Schools providing Tier 2 instruction to all students in the core instruction classroom described strong collaboration across educators. Two schools employed a model where **all students** received Tier 2 in small groups in the core instruction classroom. In these schools, an increased focus on collaboration was described and observed. A coach in one of these schools described the existence of a “framework to work within” for all individuals in the schools. Tier 2 intervention in these schools included the core teacher, interventionist, and other education assistant roles. These individuals all used the same materials, which helped create a common language to discuss students’ need and progress.

Data:

- 1. Data from screener tools guides student placement into academic intervention.** All schools visited used a screener assessment to determine which tier of intervention to place students. Many sites used additional data points to supplement screener data, including prior year state test scores, district diagnostic results, and formative data.
- 2. In most cases, the procurement decisions for screening and monitoring tools are made at the district, not the school level.** All school sites stated the district made the decision regarding their screener and progress monitoring tools. The approach used by districts to select these tools varied. In some places, the school psychologists were charged with selection, while other districts used a selection committee that included principals, teachers and district personnel. In some districts, the state played a role, such as Tennessee (where the state provided a subsidy for certain products on their preferred list) or Wisconsin (where the state historically paid for all districts to use PALS). The data provided by these instruments focused on skills rather than standards mastery.
- 3. Assessments used to screen and monitor students for intervention largely occur digitally.** The observed exceptions were the 95% Phonics screener, standards-based exit tickets, and a teacher-based monitoring tool. In two schools using core curriculum for Tier 2, a form of standards-based interim assessments or exit tickets served as the progress monitoring tools.
- 4. Systems for tracking data points varied across sites.** In some schools, data systems tracked data points across skill-based screeners, standards-based assessments, tardies, and discipline metrics. In other schools, a physical or digital folder system was used to track these data points for students. At minimum, schools tracked data within their screener and progress monitoring product platforms, although this approach led to more fragmented data tracking.

5. **In practice, the success of intervention is measured largely based on improvement on the progress monitoring tool.** Many schools expressed views on the appropriate intervention outcomes that were misaligned with the outcomes discussed in state and national resources. For example, the Center on Response to Intervention website states that MTSS aims to “maximize student achievement.” Student achievement is generally understood to mean standards mastery as measured by tools such as state summative assessments. However, instead of citing the impact of intervention on standards mastery, most school sites stated they believed that students benefit from tiered academic support because of the growth they saw for students on the **skill-based progress monitoring tools**. These tools were also identified more frequently on the school and district survey as measures of intervention outcomes. Most interviewees in these schools did not connect intervention to standards-based mastery directly or indirectly. One teacher, who also delivered intervention, stated that “you have to judge based on the progress students make towards the skills they are taught” rather than the standards. Interviewees frequently cited anecdotes of students testing out of Tier 3 or Tier 2 but not making progress on standards-based assessments.

6. **Decreases in special education identification were also cited as evidence of intervention’s efficacy.** The other frequently cited piece of evidence for intervention success was the decrease in special education identification. **70 percent** of district leaders surveyed agreed that intervention resulted in fewer students identified for special education services.

Curriculum and Materials:

1. **The survey and site visits identified at least 50 separate intervention curriculum programs used for Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction.** The products observed in Tier 3 focused on discrete skills such as sound blends, letter recognition, letter sounds, and reading comprehension. The products observed lacked connections to standards-based instruction and high-quality core instructional materials. Materials and approaches for Tier 2 fell into two buckets. The first used academic intervention curriculum that lacked connections to standards and were purchased from an outside vendor. The second involved schools using the core curriculum and materials to deliver Tier 2 intervention. However, no observed Tier 2 practices included an intervention curriculum that focused on skill gaps with a link to core materials.

2. **Curricular materials are largely selected at the school site.** 57 percent of leaders identified the school as the unit that selected the intervention curriculum program. In all but one site visit, the school selected all or some of the intervention programs or materials.

- 3. Unlike the assessments used for screening and monitoring, all the intervention programs were largely non-digital.** 65 percent of school leaders stated they used an even mix of digital and non-digital materials. School interviews revealed this mostly meant assessment materials were digital and curriculum materials were not. When interviewed, one district administrator stated she was “proud we don’t have a lot of kids on computers.” At another school, a principal echoed this sentiment, stating she did not want students “on the computer” the whole intervention period. Most sites with Tier 2 intervention curriculum used manipulatives, such as letter tiles and white boards and strategies that “chopped” or “clapped” out sounds to words in lieu of software applications.
- 4. While there were leader perceptions of alignment between Tier 2 and Tier 1 materials, instructional practice in Tier 1 and Tier 2 were usually disconnected.** Survey data revealed that approximately 69 percent of school leaders believed that Tier 2 instruction often or always connected to Tier 1 instruction. This belief was misaligned with observations in the study’s school sites. Across observations, little to no connection existed between intervention practices and core instruction in most sites. In many cases it was not even contemplated. For example, one instructional coach stated she had never thought about how intervention relates to core instruction. In other interviews, interventionists described a dynamic where Tier 2 practices existed apart from core instruction. One teacher, who also served the role of Tier 2 interventionist, stated that “the standards do not marry with Tier 2 intervention.”
- 5. Where connections between Tier 2 and standards-based instruction were actively made, the schools were more likely to see progress on standards-based assessments.** Four out of nine schools visited, three of which were located in the same state, sought to make connections between Tier 2 and standards-based instruction. Three of the schools used a push-in model where students received whole group core instruction for approximately 30 minutes after which students switched to a small group structure for Tier 2. In one school, an interventionist led one small group, splitting her time between focus on the discrete skill deficit and the core materials where she focused on both the standard and the skill gap. During this time, the remainder of the class attended separate centers focused solely on the standard. The other two sites, one elementary and one middle, broke out into groups with a variety of individuals leading each group, including the core teacher, assistants, and the instructional specialist/coach. In the middle school, site “peer tutors” led some groups. In both sites, all students received Tier 2 intervention using core instructional materials, which included grade-level texts. In one site, the standard focus of the intervention was the same as the current standard being taught in Tier I. In the other site, the class had one standard for core instruction

and another for intervention time. Leaders in two of the four schools discussed the importance of integrating core instruction with intervention. One stated it “would really be doing kids a disservice if it was disconnected” with another adding this sort of integration was important for providing an “equitable education.”

- 6. Where connections were made between Tier 1 and 2, a delicate balance existed between attending to skill deficits and standards.** Materials used in schools connecting core instruction were standards-based and did not actively connect to Tier 2 instruction. Observations and interviews suggested this proved challenging for educators attempting to attend to both skills and standards. When probed, a teacher working in one of the schools connecting Tier 1 and 2 stated it was “harder to pinpoint underlying” skill deficits in this type of structure. In another site the terms **skill and standard were used interchangeably**, suggesting confusion in differentiating between the two.
- 7. Leaders worry about the quality of Tier 1 instruction in their schools.** On the survey, 35 percent of district leaders disagreed that their schools provided all students high-quality standards-based instruction. Concerns about the quantity and quality of Tier 1 exposure appeared to exacerbate the effects of the struggle to connect Tier 1 to more intense interventions. For instance, some leaders noted the need for improvement in Tier 1. One school leader commented, “Many people just want to spend time and resources building intervention systems, but they do not want to admit or address the fact that high-quality first tier instruction is not happening in EVERY classroom in the district.”
- 8. Leaders feel a lack of both time and training for their people to better support intervention.** 65 percent of school leaders disagreed that sufficient training was provided to all individuals involved in academic interventions. As one principal stated, “We need more time with students and more training. It’s nearly impossible to have students get access to the core and have intervention. They are always missing something.” When asked to comment on what improvements could be made to intervention in their schools, other leaders responded that they would improve “training [for] paraprofessionals and find a way to include them in PLC with the teachers” as well as the “paraprofessionals’ knowledge of the academic content they are assigned to address” and provide “more training for the teachers on creating goals and for the interventionists who deliver the interventions.” Interventionists echoed the desires for additional training. One interventionist stated there was a need for training to be “more applicable.” When probed about the training needed during site interviews, individuals commented on a variety of areas including data literacy, intervention curriculum, and assessments.

Policies:

- 1. The understood motive for intervention is clearly documented in state policy.**
The “why” for intervention tended to be well-defined at the state level in each of the 10 states included in the study. Common motivations at the state level in our study included **equity in access to meeting state standards**, which was present in New Jersey, California, and Wisconsin, and **systems alignment** in Kansas and Michigan. Other states focused on **differentiation for students**. As described above, at the school level, the “why” for individuals delivering intervention varied more considerably both across and within school sites.
- 2. Intervention state policy contexts differed substantially.** In at least four of the study states, intervention was required as part of the SLD referral process. This emphasis correlated with a higher number of individuals expressing a compliance motivation. In two of the states in the study, little to virtually no guidance existed. During a site visit in one state, each interviewee stated they were unfamiliar with any state guidance.
- 3. State policies and guidance in some states appeared to actively dissuade intentional connections between standards-based instruction and intervention.**
In one state with a regimented Tier 3 process related to SLD student referral, individuals described a tension between the state’s prescriptive policies and the desire to incorporate connections to standards-based instruction or adjust to meet student needs. In other states, the guidance provided did not envision a clear connection between Tier 1 and 2. For example, in another state, a guide described Tier 2 as providing “targeted interventions for students who need additional support in addition to core instruction.” This description reflects well what we witnessed during five site visits—intervention as something that occurred in addition to core instruction.

Concluding Thoughts

Across the county, state standardized tests reflect low proficiency rates and low mastery of state standards. In the five states we visited, the rates for ELA proficiency were all less than 50 percent. Similarly, achievement levels in grade 4 reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) hovers around 35% and actually decreased in 2019. More notable, however, are the increases national public schools saw in the percent of students scoring at the lowest level of achievement or, in other words, an increase in the student group that academic intervention targets. As indicated in the below figure, **the percentage of students scoring at the lowest level of achievement on NAEP increased from 2017 to 2019 by 1.5 percentage points**. These figures point to the need to urgently address the reasons preventing students’ mastery of standards.

Our study found substantial time, effort, and resources are spent providing academic intervention. It suggests opportunities for tighter connections between academic intervention and core instruction. Such opportunities exist in the collaboration amongst the individuals delivering instruction, the data used to place and monitor students, the products and curriculum driving intervention practices, and the policies set by states and districts. This macro study did not attempt to codify best practices or recommend a model for academic intervention systems. However, the study does provide insights into how educators perceive academic intervention and the very real opportunity that these systems hold in driving all students toward standards mastery. The following section outlines what actions we believe could strengthen the potential of academic intervention's role in the student mastery equation.

Possible Solutions

The above findings point to several specific solutions in the short- and long- term detailed below.

Short-term solutions leveraging current investments and available resources:

- 1. Develop models to use high-quality instructional materials in conjunction with intervention curriculum for Tier 2.** Using the materials present in the school, develop a framework to integrate the intervention curriculum with standards-based instruction. This solution will require intentional collaboration and planning by the interventionists, coaches, and core instruction teachers.
- 2. Clarify the “why” for all involved, particularly those delivering intervention.** Leaders in schools should begin conversations on intervention with a clear motivation. By discussing the “why” in formal and informal interactions, individuals within the district and school may unify around a common mission in a way that allows them to better serve students and connect intervention to core instruction.
- 3. Improve training on current academic intervention models.** In response to the data collected on a desire for more training, provide more professional development and coaching opportunities for individuals delivering intervention. This training should include motivations as well as how to deliver the intervention programs currently in use.
- 4. Clarify roles and responsibilities and strengthen shared accountability.** Schools and districts should connect the dots between the skills-based and standards mastery outcomes so that all individuals delivering and participating in intervention feel accountable to student performance. Improved shared accountability may also lead to more intentional collaboration between core instruction and intervention.

5. Encourage the sharing of best practices across school sites.

Academic intervention is happening in schools across the country. Where best practices occur using the current models, an effort should be made to share what works and how to implement these solutions. We stumbled on one effective model but there are certainly many more out there and schools are hungry for examples they can learn from.

Long-term solutions requiring new products and models, as well as intentionality about the policy context:

- 1. Develop new Tier 2 approaches intentionally linked to high-quality core instructional materials.** A stronger connection between Tier 2 products and Tier 1 instructional materials could solve for Tier 1 teachers' desire for better solutions for students with unfinished learning and strengthen the effectiveness of Tier 2 skills mastery translating to standards-based performance improvements. This will require new product designs, ideally integrating placement assessments, progress monitoring tools, and Tier 1 and Tier 2 curricular designs. This will also require new models of collaboration or intervention delivery. (Products need to come before the implementation models—educators will need to see what these connections can look like in action before they will demand them.) The market for these products is strong and educators will be highly interested in solutions that make better connections if they are in line with state guidance for SLD identification.
- 2. Advocate for policy or guidance changes to enable approaches that build clearer connections between core instruction and intervention.** In policy contexts that use intervention as a pathway to SLD identification, policy and guidance changes will be needed to allow for a stronger connection between intervention and core instruction. Even in states where intervention is not a pathway for SLD identification, a skills-based construct drives guidance. This is codified in the screener selection and guidance and that the screener becomes the driving motivation for the entire system. The skills-based construct embedded in the guidance creates a fundamental barrier to products that make a stronger connection to core instruction. In order to drive tighter connections between the two, states need to include standards consideration in their selection of these tools or provide guidance for districts to do so in the procurement process. By driving these connections in the data used for student placement, schools will be better equipped to do so in their instructional practices. Based on the current context, it is clear that the market will not move from a skill-based approach unless the policy guidance permits it.

Additional Questions

Further research is needed to fully develop solutions for improvement in tiered academic intervention. Based on the findings from this study, the following questions are recommended for follow-up studies:

1. What bright spots exist for the integration of intervention with standards-based instruction? What intervention models are used in these sites?
2. What policy features enable connections between intervention and core instruction?
3. What are curriculum developers' intentions when they design Tier 2 curricula and materials? What are the incentives and disincentives?
4. What process guides the selection of data screener and monitoring tools? What do school psychologists think about these tools and selection? Is the motivation for the current approach based on research that reflects a discipline-specific evidence base or cross-cutting?
5. To what extent do shared materials across Tier 1 and 2 instruction promote increased collaboration among educators in schools?
6. What considerations exist for middle and high schools that are unique from those in elementary settings?²

² A note on middle schools: Two of the sites visited served middle grades. The takeaways below include trends observed at these sites. In the two sites visited, no commonalities emerged beyond the grades served.

Appendix: Data Summary

Data Collection:

The methodology used for data collection is detailed below.

1. The first step in the data collection process consisted of interviews with individuals with extensive knowledge of the academic intervention landscape. Interviews were conducted with individuals from different backgrounds and policy contexts, including:
 - A former Deputy Commissioner who oversaw intervention implementation at the state level
 - A current Program Officer at the Council of Chief State School Officers and former Deputy Commissioner who oversaw intervention implementation at the state level
 - A current Superintendent, who previously served as Assistant Commissioner overseeing intervention implementation at the state level
 - Current state education department employees in multiple states who work with districts on academic intervention
2. A policy review was conducted that included an examination of state guidance and other forms of academic intervention documentation, including:
 - State Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plans
 - State intervention manuals
 - State websites and training materials
 - State technical assistance partners websites
 - NAEP data
 - Materials from the National Center on Intensive Intervention and Center on Response to Intervention at American Institutes for Research
 - Materials from a multi-state academic intervention convening (May 2019)
 - Materials from the National Association of School Psychologists
3. A survey was sent to a random sample of school and district leaders in 10 states. In order to increase participation, the survey was also sent to 130 leaders that are partners of Instruction Partners. Approximately 1,100 school principals received the survey. Of those, 28 responded. Approximately 700 district superintendents received the survey. Of those, 25 responded. Given the low response rates, the survey data is not representative and caution is suggested in interpreting survey findings.

4. Nine schools were visited as part of this study. They included seven elementary schools and two middle school across Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Wisconsin. In all schools, observations of Tier 2 and 3 intervention occurred.³ Observation protocols included domains on products, student characteristics, and practices. Interviews took place with school leaders, general education teachers, and interventionists. The interview protocol included questions that probed on intervention materials, student placement, intervention practices and perceptions, and motivations with a focus on evidence and data. In some sites, instructional coaches, district leaders, and school psychologists were also interviewed. On average, school sites consisted of student populations of 452 students, where 65 percent of students were identified as economically disadvantaged, 55 percent of students identified as a racial and ethnic minority, and 5 percent of students were English learners.

School characteristics for each school are listed below.

School 1

- Rural Traditional
- Grades 4-6
- 30.4% ELA proficiency
- 44.4% math proficiency
- 4 Tiers
- 681 students
- 42.9% economically disadvantaged
- 5.6% English learners
- 37.4% BLN

School 2

- Rural Traditional
- Grades 7-8
- 34.7% ELA proficiency
- 26.6% math proficiency
- 3 Tiers
- 421 students
- 37.5% economically disadvantaged
- 3.1% English learners
- 31.6% BLN

³ In one school, an incident occurred that precluded classroom observations. However, an interview with the principal and district administrator took place.

School 3

- Rural Traditional
- Grades 2-5
- 50.8% ELA proficiency
- 44.0% math proficiency
- 3 Tiers
- 594 students
- 68.9% economically disadvantaged
- 5.6% English learners
- 29% BLN

School 4

- Suburban Traditional
- Grades PK-4
- 53.2% ELA proficiency
- 70.8% math proficiency
- 3 Tiers
- 495 students
- 21.6% economically disadvantaged
- 5.6% English learners
- 24.9% BLN

School 5

- Rural Traditional
- Grades K-5
- 55.3% ELA proficiency
- 72% math proficiency
- 5 Tiers
- 276 students
- 23.6% economically disadvantaged
- 4.7% English learners
- 6.5% BLN

School 6

- Urban Traditional
- Grades K-5
- 43.0% ELA proficiency
- 53.0% math proficiency
- 3 Tiers

- 348 students
- 100% economically disadvantaged
- 6.3% English learners
- 69.8% BLN

School 7

- Urban Traditional
- Grades PK-5
- 30.0% ELA proficiency
- 30.0% math proficiency
- 3 Tiers
- 428 students
- 92.1% economically disadvantaged
- 10.8% English learners
- 96.1% BLN

School 8

- Urban Traditional
- Grades 6-8
- 14.0% ELA proficiency
- 8.0% math proficiency
- 3 Tiers
- 494 students
- 96.2% economically disadvantaged
- 1.1% English learners
- 99.2% BLN

School 9

- Urban Charter
- Grades PK-5
- 13.0% ELA proficiency
- 20.0% math proficiency
- 3 Tiers
- 333 students
- 99.1% economically disadvantaged
- 0.0% English learners
- 100.0% BLN