Talking Points on Accelerating Student Learning

The purpose of this resource is to provide some concrete language for how to talk about accelerating student learning with staff, as well as research that supports those recommendations.

What We Know

- Each year students enter the school year with unfinished learning due to a myriad of factors, and students enter the school year having experienced "summer slide." These factors disproportionately impact priority groups of students.
- The above will be true in 2020–2021, but learning needs will be greater due to missed instructional time (reference **NWEA COVID Slide**). COVID-19 has exacerbated the existing disparities in our education systems.
- Intervention practices, for the most part, do not seem to be getting the job done. We need new ways of thinking about supporting students, with a focus on priority groups of students (references: **Rethinking Intervention** and **Academic Intervention Practices: Landscape Study**).

Because of the above, we assume that this school year there will be a need to improve intervention practices and accelerate learning for ALL students. This means making adjustments to Tier 1 instruction as well as instruction in Tier 2 and Tier 3.

Guiding Principles for Accelerating Student Learning Across Content Areas (applies to Tier 1, Tier 2, and 3)

- We believe that more time focused on strong content is our best bet for accelerating student learning for ALL students.
- Effective Tier I instruction using high-quality instructional materials continues to be essential.
    - Identify critical underpinning concepts with which students need help.
    - Conduct "just in time" (NOT "just in case") support that focuses on those underpinnings as needed.
- Use multiple sources of data to determine learning needs:
    - Consider triangulating data from upfront diagnostics, past state test data, and curriculum-embedded assessments

    - Favor research-based assessments over homegrown assessments
    - In assessing students' learning needs, watch out for the role of anecdotal data and/or biases that disproportionately impact priority groups of students
    - Remember that learning needs can vary from student to student and falling in "the bottom 25%" doesn't mean that all students in that group have the same learning needs.
- Do not track students. Research doesn't support this as an effective practice and it can often lead to students missing exposure to Tier 1 content, further perpetuating inequity, particularly among priority groups of students.
- Use best practices for instruction. There are no silver bullet instructional programs in Tier 2 and 3, just like there aren't any in Tier 1. Strong content, teaching practice, and student engagement are still critical across all three tiers.

Content-specific guidance: ELA

Tier 1	Tier 2 and Tier 3
▪ Do a cross-check to make sure there wasn't anything exclusively new in the past grade-level but isn't seen in the current. Likely, new material will carry to the next grade level because of how the ELA standards work. ▪ Check your curricular materials to see how the knowledge-building sequence works (e.g., in Wit and Wisdom there is a vertical sequence and you often need knowledge from the prior grade to access grade-level material). ▪ Prioritize reading grade-level text. ▪ Avoid teaching reading skills in isolation.	▪ Give more time on tasks with additional supports where needed, particularly around building academic language and knowledge-building. ▪ Give students additional time practicing grade-level reading. ▪ Give students opportunities to engage with a volume of reading. ▪ Support foundational skills and fluency as needed. ▪ In choosing an intervention program for tier 2, look for programs—either commercially available intervention curricula, commercially developed supplemental curricula or intervention programs—that are compatible with the school's core reading program and that provide intensive small group

instruction in three to four foundational skills.

- Ideally, the intervention program has demonstrated its effectiveness through independent evaluations using rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental designs. (Alignment to core reading materials is not as critical as ensuring that instruction is systematic and explicit and focuses on the **high priority reading components**.)
- There is no difference between using standalone reading intervention materials and using materials embedded in the core reading program.

Content-specific guidance: Math

Tier 1	Tier 2 and Tier 3
▪ Align Tier 1 instruction to the Shifts: Focus, Coherence, and Rigor. ▪ Update pacing calendars to align to the priority standards for each grade-level identified in the Priority Content Guide and aligned to the major work ▪ Attend to rigor by teaching math in a way that balances students' conceptual understanding, procedural skill and fluency, and ability to apply what they know and are able to do to real-world, problem-solving situations. ▪ Use a concrete to abstract approach when building understanding and	▪ Align Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction to the Shifts: Focus, Coherence, and Rigor. ○ Reinforce procedural, conceptual, and application learnings aligned to the standards. ○ Focus on content that connects to and promotes the grade-level curriculum through an emphasis on conceptual understanding, problem-solving, and reasoning. Do not review low-level basic facts or procedural skills. ▪ Address unfinished learning in the context of grade-level work.

access to content for all students.

- Refer to "**The Culture of Exclusion in Mathematics Education and Its Persistence in Equity-Oriented Teaching**"
- Use "just in time" lessons to address immediate unfinished learning.
- Avoid blanket review.
- Provide additional time to practice grade-level content and enabling pre-requisite understandings needed for grade-level content.

- Instruction during the intervention should be explicit and systematic. This includes providing models for proficient problem solving, verbalization of thought processes, guided practice, corrective feedback, and frequent cumulative review. (Reference **Assisting Students Struggling with Mathematics**)

About Instruction Partners

Instruction Partners works alongside educators to support great teaching, accelerate student learning, name and address unconscious bias, and ensure equitable access to great instruction—particularly for students in poverty, students of color, students learning English, and students with disabilities.