Position Paper

i-Ready

Using Assessment Data to Supercharge Academic Intervention

How to Use *i-Ready* Data to Improve a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

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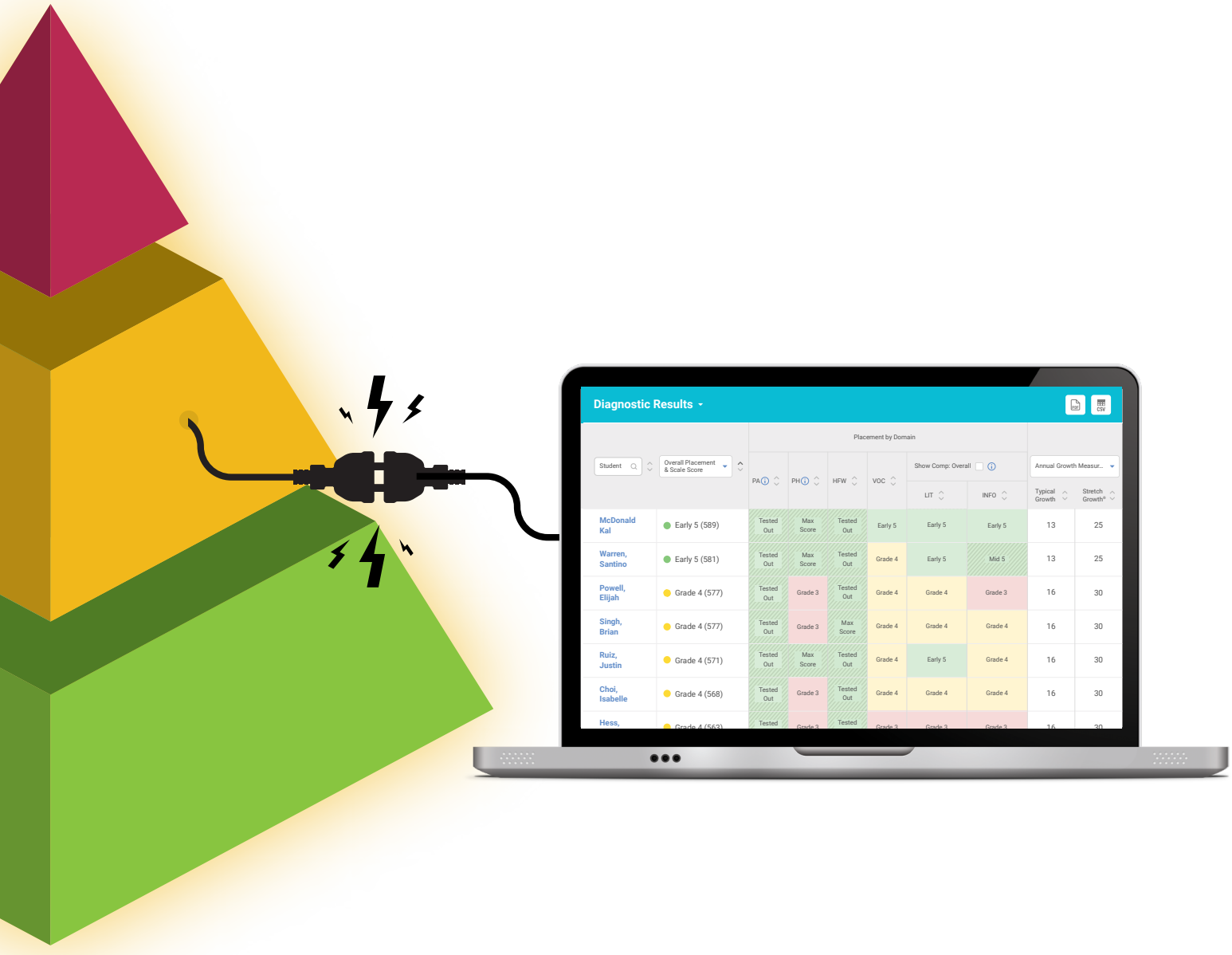


About the Authors

Josh Sain, Ed.D., First Author

Josh Sain, Ed.D., is an assessment implementation director at Curriculum Associates. Before joining Curriculum Associates, he embraced *i-Ready* as a teacher, principal, and district administrator.

In his home state of North Carolina, Sain's passion for supporting educators inspired a new level of focus and commitment from school leaders to ensure MTSS prepares every student for future success. He is thrilled to continue his work at Curriculum Associates on a national level. Sain holds an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Gardner-Webb University, an M.A. in Leadership Studies from Gardner-Webb University, and a B.S. in Secondary Education from Appalachian State University.

Jane Donohue, M.Ed., Second Author

Jane Donohue is a senior program manager on Curriculum Associates' Assessment Insights team. As a classroom teacher in Massachusetts, Donohue used *i-Ready* to better understand her students and celebrate their growth. She now works with colleagues and educators to show how *i-Ready* can help support tiered academic intervention and accessibility for students with disabilities. Donohue holds a B.A. in Economics from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and an M.Ed. from Lesley University.

Introduction

Most educators will probably tell you superpowers are needed to effectively implement academic intervention (i.e., the famous green, yellow, and red triangle) with fidelity throughout the school year. District leaders, interventionists, and teachers understand the urgency to ensure academic intervention supports all students for success in school, but the best-planned implementations are often derailed by resource constraints and inconsistencies in practice.

In my work as a building and district leader, I'm not sure I ever found superpowers, but I did find a way to "supercharge" my efforts using *i-Ready*. This paper explains how *i-Ready* data, reports, and instructional resources can save educators lots of time (and maybe a few headaches!) while creating impactful interventions for student growth. I've identified four key supercharging strategies:

- Consistently identify students in need of intensified academic support.
- Strategically combine students for more manageable and productive classrooms.
- Intentionally adapt instruction to create a pathway to proficiency (not a pathway to referral).
- Course correct as needed.

Because local needs are so critical to implementation planning, Curriculum Associates offers ideas for districts to consider, but we believe final eligibility rules and decisions must come from the teachers and leaders who know their district's and students' needs. Most importantly, we must ensure MTSS is not just a way to identify students. The most effective MTSS implementations are those in which decisions are made collaboratively and maintain a student-centered approach that addresses a pathway to proficiency.

Strategy #1

Use *i-Ready Diagnostic* Data for Consistent Implementation

EDUCATOR INSIGHT

"We use *i-Ready* data to drive our instruction. It's our catalyst to proactively identify students who need additional academic support."

—Jason Faulkner, Director of Accountability and Elementary Instruction, KY

Laurel County Public Schools uses i-Ready *data to drive their MTSS efforts in all elementary and middle schools. The data fosters collaborative conversations amongst teachers to ensure all students' needs are met through differentiated core instruction and targeted interventions.*

The Challenge

District and school leaders are often faced with organizational challenges when implementing a tiered support framework. Those challenges are often rooted in inconsistent use of data when determining student eligibility for different levels of tiered academic support. Whether managing differences among school buildings or among grade levels within a building, inconsistent identification practices can derail a successful implementation in the following ways:

- Over-identification of students needing more intensive academic support
- Teacher confusion with students' identification and academic support plans
- Educator fatigue and student frustration with inappropriate intervention
- Exhausting human and fiscal resources for unnecessary intervention supports

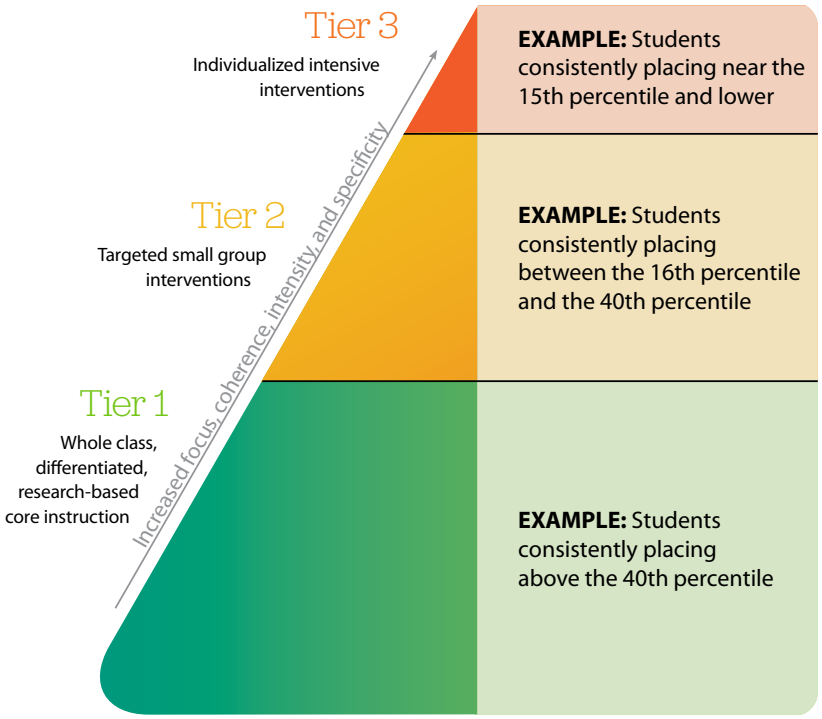
Supercharge It

To supercharge this organizational barrier, educators can consider using *i-Ready Diagnostic* data as a guidepost to identify students in need of intensified academic support. Guideposts are designed as a place for MTSS stakeholders to start conversations using universal assessment or screening data to begin data-based problem solving. Whether the data source is normed or criterion referenced, guideposts establish an organizational data foundation for determining levels of support. Once implemented, educators can leverage domain-specific data when designing precise and meaningful academic interventions.

Begin with Universal Assessment Data

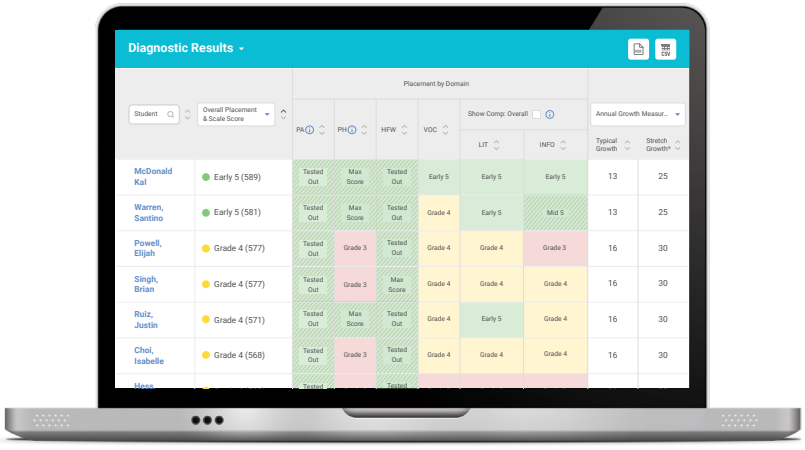
After each Diagnostic is administered, district and school leaders begin analyzing tiered instructional needs using *i-Ready Diagnostic*'s percentile and criterion-referenced data (i.e., overall grade-level placements). Using percentiles and grade-level placements can help avoid over-identification of students in need while respecting the availability of resources in most districts. The percentiles referenced below are examples. Districts need to determine their own percentiles based on the best fit for their students and available resources.

- **EXAMPLE:** Students in need of the most intensive academic support (i.e., Tier 3) might be identified as consistently placing near the 15th percentile and lower when compared to their peers nationally.
- **EXAMPLE:** Students in need of supplemental support (i.e., Tier 2) might be those who consistently place between the 16th and 40th percentiles nationally.
- **EXAMPLE:** All students must receive grade-level Tier 1 instruction. High-quality core instruction must include acceleration, scaffolding, and differentiation strategies to ensure appropriate supports are provided for students also receiving Tiers 2 and 3 interventions. Students who may be able to rely only on core instruction (i.e., Tier 1) might be those who consistently fall above the 40th percentile nationally.



Add Domain-Specific Data for Prioritizing and Targeting Intervention

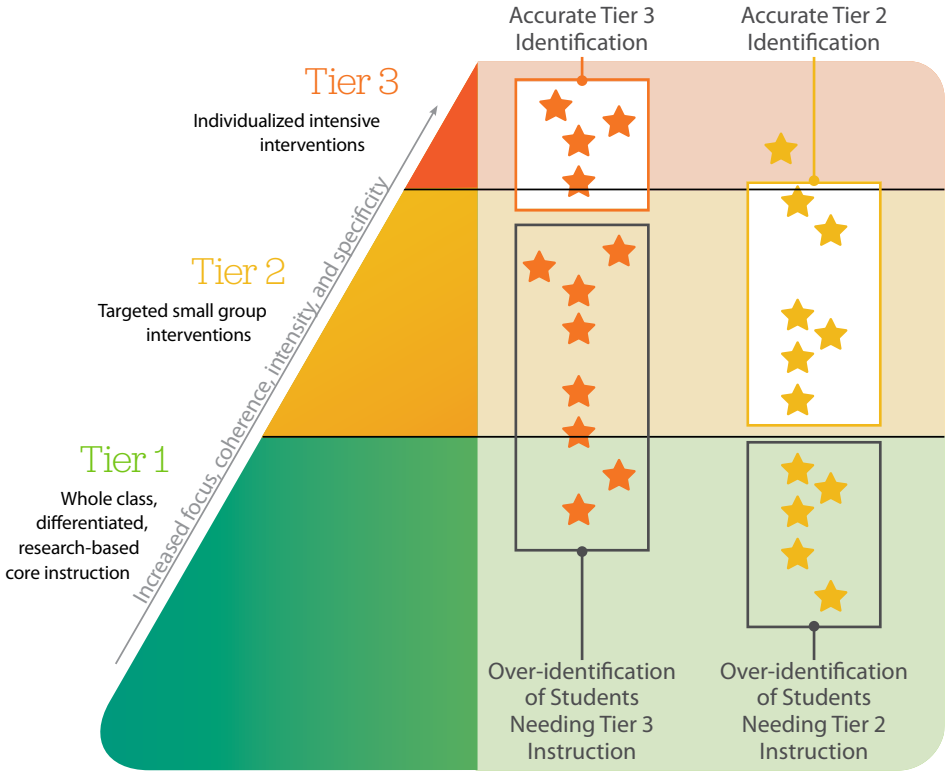
Once district and school leaders determine appropriate eligibility guidelines using overall percentile ranking, the use of criterion-referenced and domain-specific data provided by *i-Ready* (as well as other data) can be critical for further individualizing and driving student support within each tier. The result is a more nuanced approach to tiered identification, compared to the approach of relying solely on a single data point.



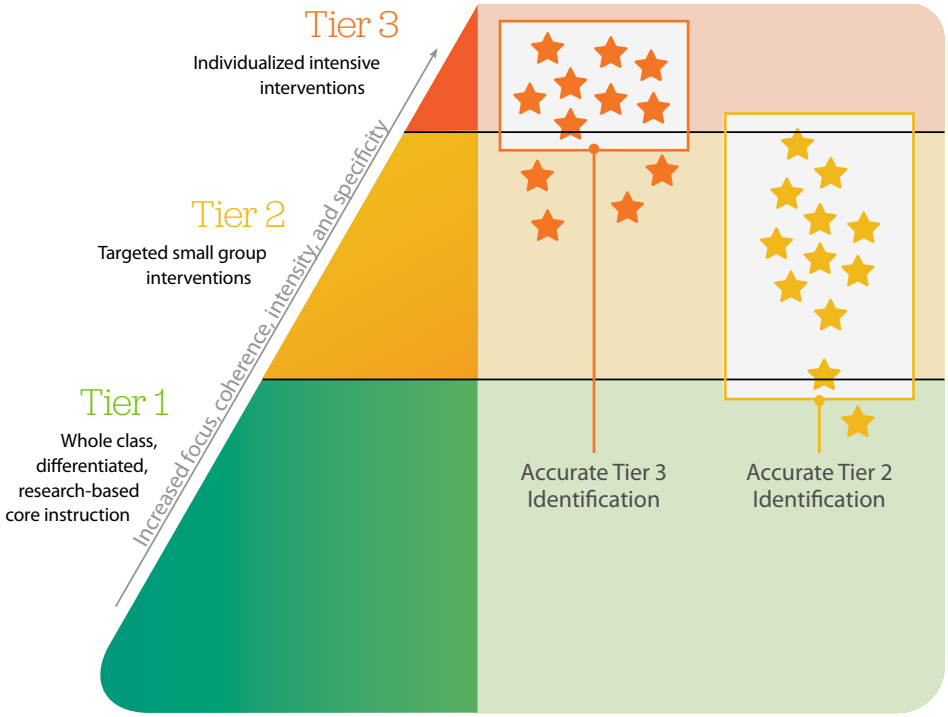
Bringing More Consistency to Eligibility Determination: One District's Story

In an informal study, one district used *i-Ready* percentile data to analyze differences in eligibility guidelines among schools to evaluate opportunities for a more consistent districtwide approach. Using the average median percentile of students eligible for Tiers 2 and 3 instruction in each school, one district found roughly 50 percent of schools were over-identifying students in need of intervention. The average median percentile had a correlation with the district's guideposts. In the graphs below, each star represents a school's median percentile.

Inconsistent Identification
Differences among school buildings in a district or among grade levels within a building can lead to over-identification of students needing intensive academic support. Over-identification results in students receiving inappropriate intensive instruction when they would be better supported through differentiated core instruction.



Consistent Identification
After two years of using *i-Ready* data to support district guidelines, a district in North Carolina significantly improved their ability to support students and effectively allocate resources for Tiers 2 and 3 intervention to students with the most intensive academic needs.



Strategy #2
Design Class Rosters for Differentiation and Scaffolding

EDUCATOR INSIGHT

"There is a trust factor that teachers have when using Diagnostic data to accurately identify student groups."

—David Apodaca, School Principal, CA

Day Creek Intermediate School uses i-Ready Diagnostic *data to drive their Universal Access (UA) block, which supports their students' specific instructional needs during a designated time each school day. The school once used additional datasets when planning their UA groups, but it now relies solely on* i-Ready *data because teachers trust* i-Ready*'s accuracy.*

The Challenge

We all know that differentiating classroom instruction to address all students' specific needs requires hours of planning, analyzing data, and searching for high-quality supplemental materials. Unfinished learning during the pandemic has only increased the urgency and need for scaffolded and accelerated learning. A significant challenge for building leaders and grade-level teams is developing class rosters that provide realistic and manageable combinations of students for productive growth.

Why Traditional Placement Cards Are Inadequate

Traditionally, grade-level teams, support staff, and administrators guide their rostering conversations and decisions with student information/placement cards that fall short of providing a complete picture of students' academic needs. Behavioral needs and end-of-year data are often overemphasized. A cluster-grouping model using more holistic indicators would improve the traditional placement card approach.

End-of-Year Student Info/Placement Cards

Student Name: _____

Overall **ELA** Performance (Circle One): Above Grade Level Below

Overall **Math** Performance (Circle One): Above Grade Level Below

AIG: Yes No **EL**: Yes No **EC**: Yes No

Receives **Supplemental (i.e., Tier 2)** Intervention: Yes No
If yes, what areas:

Receives **Intensive (i.e., Tier 3)** Intervention: Yes No
If yes, what areas:

Behavior Summary:

Helpful hints for next year's teacher assignment:

General grade-level placement information

General intervention information

Subjective behavior information and comments that typically determine placement

Traditional Class Rostering

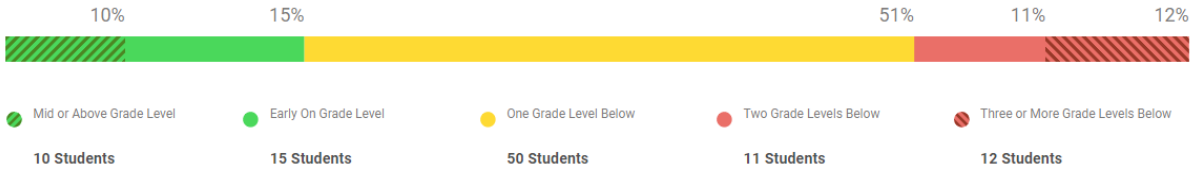
Traditional class rostering is driven by overall academic and behavioral data at the end of the school year. With all the other end-of-year demands, these important rostering conversations often don't include time for full consideration of tiered instructional needs or the potential for strategic instructional groupings. This, along with a heavy emphasis on behavioral dynamics, creates class rosters that may result in an evenly "balanced" set of classrooms (see figure on page 6), but with the range of needs in today's classrooms, this traditional "balanced" approach leaves teachers without enough time to effectively plan for the full range of instructional priorities.

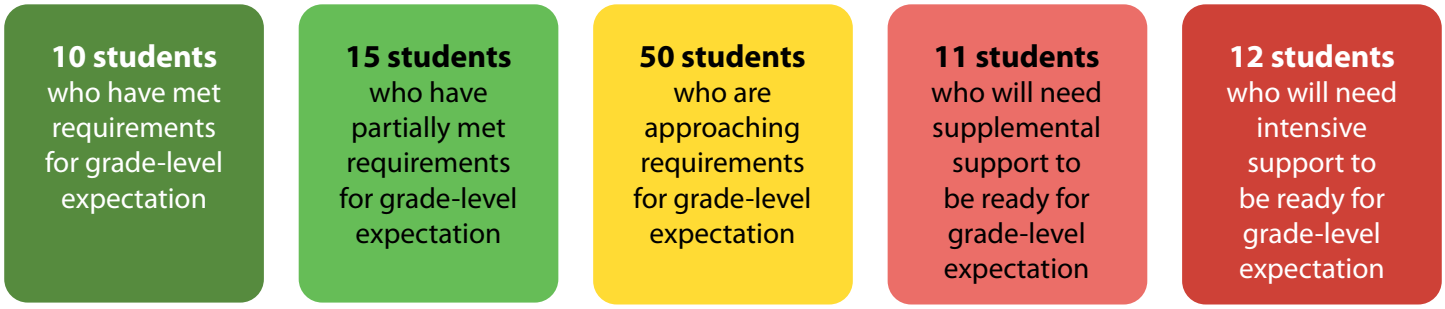
Supercharge It

Data-Driven Class Rostering

A cluster-grouping model[1] can be used to better support educators and students. Instead of using traditional grade-level placement cards to drive rostering decisions, building leaders can analyze end-of-year *i-Ready Diagnostic* data within a priority subject area for each grade-level cohort to identify students who:

- Have met or have partially met minimum requirements for grade-level expectation
- Are approaching grade-level expectation
- Will likely need supplemental or intensive support to be ready for grade-level instruction





The two graphics above show how the 5-Level Placement model can be used to inform rostering conversations.

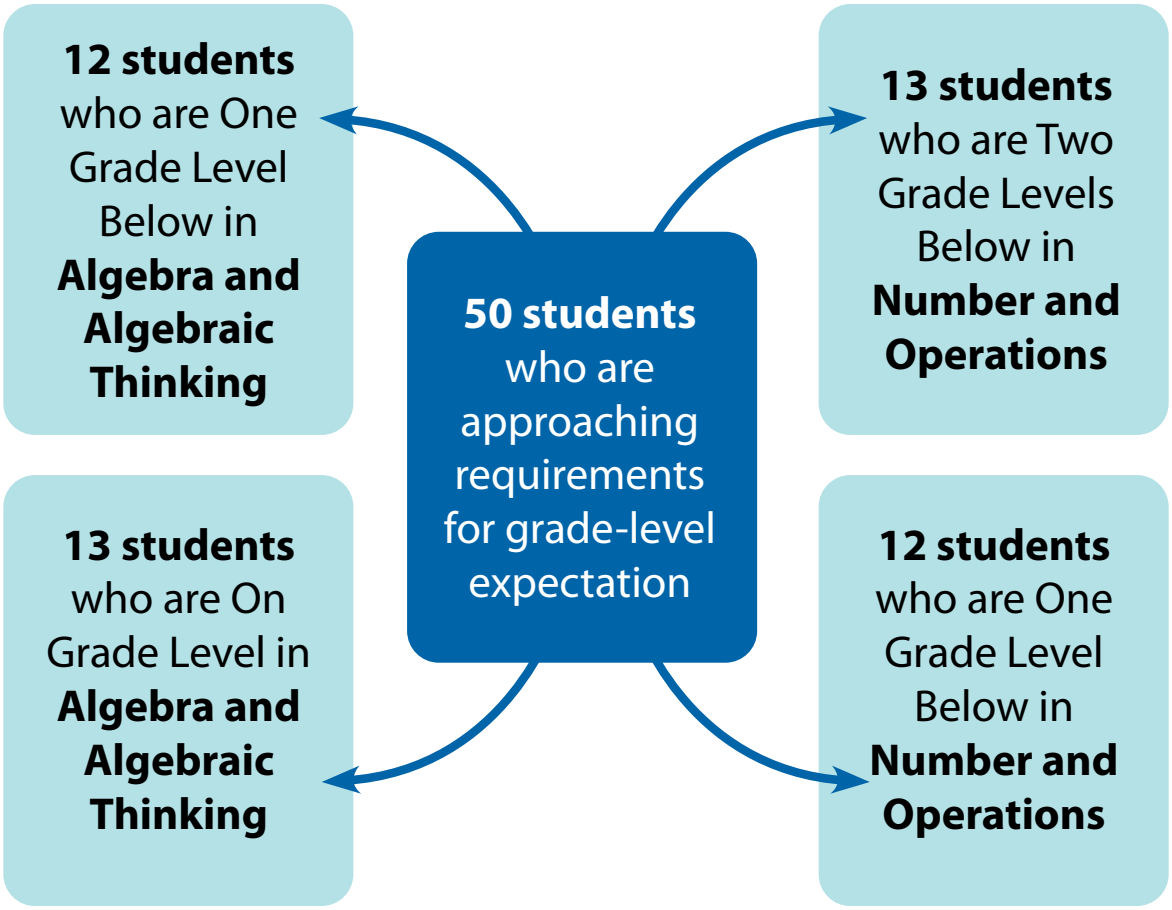
Because cohort needs will vary, grade levels may need to modify their criteria to create evenly distributed organizational groupings. Ultimately, organization should be designed to reflect the academic characteristics and needs of each grade-level cohort.

If the 5-Level Placement is not the best fit for student organization, school leaders should collaborate with stakeholders to design criteria that correlates to the needs of their students and teachers using norm- and/or criterion-referenced data from the *i-Ready Diagnostic*.

[1]Brulles, D., & Winebrenner, S. (2018). *Teaching gifted kids in today's classroom: Strategies and techniques every teacher can use.* Free Spirit Publishing.

Using Domain-Specific Data for Rostering Students

Once all students in a cohort are placed into strategic groups, educators can further analyze *i-Ready*'s domain-specific data to specific academic characteristics of students to identify strategic opportunities for subgrouping. Here's an example of how domain-specific data can be used to strategically identify students by common instructional priorities once their overall placements are determined:



Why Heterogeneous Grouping Is NOT Tracking

It is important to distinguish data-driven heterogeneous grouping from the historic (and controversial) notion of "tracking." People often associate tracking with homogenous groups of students isolated according to their overall level of academic achievement. In some models, tracked students remained in homogeneous groups for the academic day and occupied the same track through multiple school years.[2] Studies indicate this method of tracking resulted in a magnification of inequitable academic outcomes.[3]

Data-driven class rostering provides a heterogeneous alternative to tracking where multiple data points are used to determine levels of readiness for grade-level instruction. Student readiness becomes the foundation of grade-level planning, resource allocation, and instruction to ensure all students are on an accelerated path toward achieving their individual growth goals, while strategic groupings allow teachers a more manageable planning workload. While individual groups of students may share instructional priorities, the combination of groups creates a heterogenous classroom centered around precise assessment data, cohesive instruction, and grade-level content.

[2]McPartland, J., Coldiron, R., & Braddock, J. (1987). *School structures and classroom practices in elementary, middle, and secondary schools: Report no. 14.* The Johns Hopkins University.
[3]Gamoran, A. (2009). Tracking and inequality: New directions for research and practice. *Wisconsin Center for Education Research.*

The graphics below illustrate what a grade-level cohort of four classes could look like using different approaches to class rostering.

Traditional Balanced Rostering

Grade-Level Placement	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4
Mid or Above	2 Students	3 Students	2 Students	3 Students
Early On Grade Level	4 Students	4 Students	4 Students	3 Students
One Grade Level Below	13 Students	13 Students	12 Students	12 Students
Two Grade Levels Below	3 Students	3 Students	3 Students	2 Students
Three or More Grade Levels Below	3 Students	3 Students	3 Students	3 Students
Total	**25 Students**	**26 Students**	**24 Students**	**23 Students**

The goal of **traditional class rostering** is to evenly distribute students across the academic spectrum to create a representative group of students in each classroom. With the range of needs in today's schools, these fully representative rosters leave teachers without enough time to effectively plan.

Data-Driven Rostering

Grade-Level Placement	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4
Mid or Above	5 Students		5 Students	
Early On Grade Level		8 Students		7 Students
One Grade Level Below	13 Students	13 Students	12 Students	12 Students
Two Grade Levels Below	6 Students	5 Students		
Three or More Grade Levels Below			6 Students	6 Students
Total	**24 Students**	**26 Students**	**23 Students**	**25 Students**

The goal of **data-driven class rostering** is to create mixed-ability classrooms with a reduced range of learner variability. When the student grouping process is complete, each classroom should be assigned at least one grade-level group of students and no more than two other groups so teachers have no more than three academic clusters in their classrooms.

With fewer learning variables to consider, teachers in this model have more time to proactively plan, curate materials, and strategically group students—all strategies that make differentiated instruction more effective.

Strategy #3
Intentionally Adapt Instruction to Create a Pathway to Proficiency

EDUCATOR INSIGHT

"We use the 10th percentile as our MTSS team's conversation starter. Once we have identified those students, we analyze their response to intervention (RTI) to determine if we can provide additional support to close achievement gaps. If the student's response is concerning, we discuss the possibility of a referral for special education services."

—Kylie Richardson, School MTSS Coordinator, NC

Norris S. Childers Elementary School uses i-Ready *data to problem solve student RTI during their MTSS meetings. Students who consistently score near or below the 10th percentile are given the most intensive academic supports. Their progress is closely monitored to determine if their response warrants a possible referral for additional support services.*

The Challenge

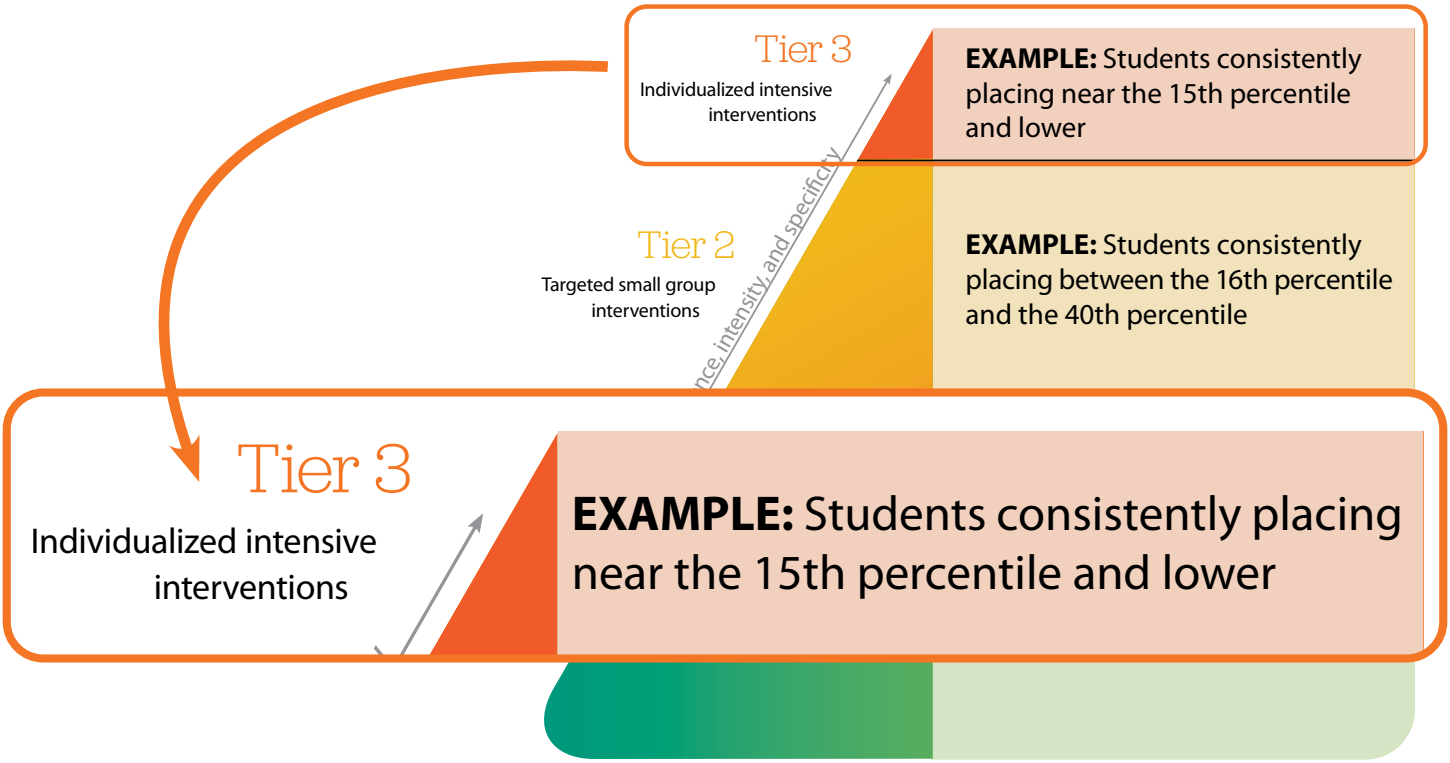
As many states now include RTI within MTSS as part of the evaluation for specific learning disabilities, the focus on a tiered framework can easily shift from a pathway to proficiency to a "pathway to referral." Additionally, the return to face-to-face instruction has only heightened the urgency for educators to accelerate students toward grade-level expectations. Many researchers fear this urgency could result in increased referrals for special education when unfinished learning or trauma-related behaviors could be the primary factor. Districts and schools must ensure student support is targeted through an intervention framework that is designed to ensure student improvement and specifically pinpoint those students who are not responding to intervention and may possibly benefit from additional support services.

Supercharge It

Monitor Impact and Adapt Accordingly

i-Ready Diagnostic data can support appropriate identification of students who may need exceptional or special education services. Students in need of the most intensive (i.e., Tier 3) support need to be regularly monitored to determine if progress is being made or if intervention efforts need to be adapted.

After an appropriate period of time, as determined by the district, data analysis teams can use *i-Ready*'s criterion-referenced data and other student-specific data to determine if a student is responding to their tiered interventions and overall academic support plan. Patterns of inadequate progress or regression can be considered by school teams as they examine and adapt instruction and/or determine if additional academic supports are needed. Alternatively, if a student is having a positive response to Tier 3 instruction, educators can begin planning the student's transition to less intensive interventions.



Strategy #4
Course Correct as Needed

EDUCATOR INSIGHT

"*i-Ready* data enables our MTSS teams to thoroughly review student performance and determine if our academic support correlates with student needs."

—John Gann, Lead District Psychologist, NC

MTSS teams throughout the district use i-Ready Diagnostic *data to analyze overall student performance. That analysis includes a thorough examination of students who may not be receiving appropriate academic supports to close gaps that may develop during the school year. Students receiving additional support services, such as special education, are reviewed to determine if additional analysis is warranted or if services need to be adjusted.*

The Challenge

During MTSS implementations, districts and schools need to be laser focused on ensuring core instruction and delivering interventions with fidelity. It is equally important for leaders to establish districtwide systems of review to avoid:

- Overlooking students who may have been initially ineligible for intervention but become eligible as the year progresses
- Missing opportunities to adjust interventions based on student response to instruction
- Interpreting behavior as an academic indicator

For impactful interventions, it's vital that district and school leaders keep meaningful academic data at the forefront of their implementations to course correct student support as needed.

Supercharge It

Use *i-Ready* Data to Look at the Big Picture

As discussed throughout this paper, consistent identification of students in need of Tiers 2 and 3 instruction is an essential component of any impactful intervention plan. While data benchmarks/criteria are effective ways of ensuring consistency, there are students who are overlooked and do not receive appropriate supports to meet their individual learning goals. Use of *i-Ready Diagnostic* data throughout the year can help districts and schools meet all students' needs. Ultimately, by continually analyzing and responding to intervention data, school MTSS teams can course correct in two critical ways:

- Ensure all students are being served with the appropriate level of intervention. The focus on *i-Ready* data allows teams to filter out other potentially misleading considerations, like work ethic or classroom behavior.
- Identify which students are making adequate academic progress, and reconsider the need for or adaptation of their Tier 2 or 3 supports. By responding to a student's progress to proficiency, the team can analyze the student's support pathway and determine if and when modifications may be needed.

Achieve MTSS Greatness

EDUCATOR INSIGHT

"*i-Ready* has made our MTSS so much more purposeful and engaging for our teachers. The data ensures we are consistent across grade levels, and—most importantly—it enables us to support students in the classroom to ensure they are all on a pathway toward success."

—Alysha Tench, Elementary Assistant Principal, NC

With educators being asked to do so much in today's classroom, it is easy to understand why MTSS implementation feels overwhelming, especially as schools need further support in addressing an increased range of student learning needs. By utilizing *i-Ready* data to supercharge practices, educators can begin implementing an improved framework that serves and supports all students, ensures a pathway toward growth and proficiency, and is aligned with all school, district, and state initiatives. With its clear and concise data reporting, the *i-Ready Diagnostic* can help educators drive collaborative conversations regarding instruction, intervention, and student achievement across classrooms, buildings, and districts.

To see how other educators are maximizing their *i-Ready* experience, follow us on social media!

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Curriculum Associates is a rapidly growing education company committed to making classrooms better places for teachers and students. We believe that all children have the chance to succeed, and our research-based, award-winning products, including *i-Ready*, *Ready*®, *i-Ready Classroom Mathematics*, BRIGANCE®, and other programs, provide teachers and administrators with flexible resources that deliver meaningful assessments and data-driven, differentiated instruction for children.

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