

A multitiered system of supports with response to intervention and universal design for learning:

Putting It ALL Together

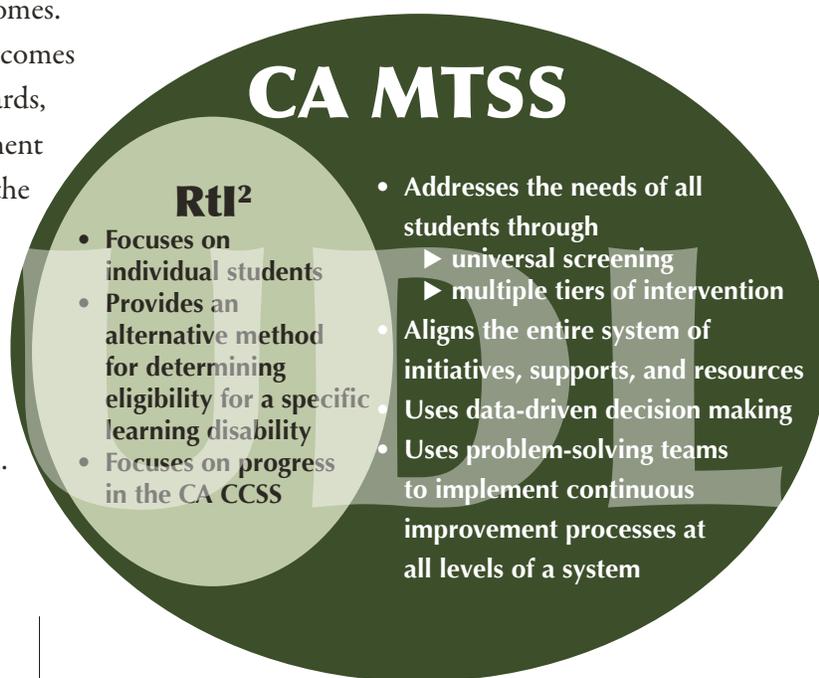
The many new education-related initiatives and plans in California—the Local Control Funding Formula, the State Systemic Improvement Plan, the California Common Core State Standards (CA CCSS) and the accompanying new assessments—all align and support each other in transformational and exciting ways. They focus on coordinating efforts—in terms of human or financial capital, and often both—so that every student is better served and has the opportunity to realize success in school and in adult life. In addition, they all emphasize authentic accountability in support of improved student outcomes.

To secure these outcomes through the new standards, the California Department of Education supports the use of evidence-based practices and specific research-proven approaches to organizing educational systems and instruction. A Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) provides the overall organizing structure, which is enhanced at the student level by Response to Intervention (RtI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

At first glance, busy educators may view the prospect of adapting these approaches as simply too much to attempt all at once. But when examined together and within an MTSS context, RtI and UDL work in concert to create and sustain a cohesive effort. They are not discrete elements, nor are they prescribed programs or models to duplicate and implement. Rather they represent principles that guide educational structures and point to a consistent and integrated approach for organizing schools and instruction so that teachers use—and administrators support—only the best of what is known about ensuring that

all children benefit from school and are prepared for the best possible post-school outcomes.

The following three pages provide an overview of what MTSS, RtI, and UDL are; how they are mutually reinforcing; and how they contribute to success in the new standards. Lists of resources on each page offer additional information for anyone wanting to learn more about this sea change in California's schools.



Blueprint for Improving Instruction, Accessibility, and Outcomes, a California Department of Education, Special Education Division, Symposium from February 2015, examined how UDL and MTSS work in concert. That symposium and its numerous resources are archived and available at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/>



MTSS resources from the California Department of Education: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/>

The Digital Chalkboard, an online tool for California educators, features a training on MTSS, with modules that address data-based decision making, instructional planning, leadership, and more. <https://www.mydigitalchalkboard.org/portal/default/Content/Viewer/Content?action=2&scId=509627>

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) features the California Department of Education's definition of MTSS and a comparison of it with RtI². <http://www.vcoe.org/Portals/VcsoPortals/cici/PBIS14-15/mtsscde.pdf>

Kansas and Florida make available numerous resources for understanding and successfully implementing MTSS: <http://www.kansasmtss.org> and <http://www.florida-rti.org/floridaMTSS/index.htm>

How MTSS creates a community of support for student success is available on YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjyzTNfwdCU>

What's Your Plan? Accurate Decision Making within a Multi-Tier System of Supports: Critical Areas in Tier 1 is available through the RTI Action Network. <http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/tieredinstruction/tier1/accurate-decision-making-within-a-multi-tier-system-of-supports-critical-areas-in-tier-1>

Multitiered System of Supports

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) outlines a system of evidence-based practices and assessments for students with disabilities. MTSS clearly articulates what that system looks like: high-quality first instruction, supports, and interventions in academics and behavior for all students, regardless of whether they are struggling or have advanced learning needs. By definition, a true MTSS does the following:

- Addresses the needs of all students
- Reflects a system-level model of instruction and supports through universal screening and multiple tiers of interventions
- Ensures that practices, policies, and programs are aligned on classroom, school, and district levels
- Uses problem-solving teams to implement continuous improvement processes at all levels of the system
- Makes use of an integrated data system so that information about student progress is accurate, available, and used to make instructional decisions
- Provides continued and aligned professional development for all educators in planning and delivering instruction, developing and using effective curriculum, administering assessments, and using data to guide instruction
- Promotes continuous improvement at all levels (district, school site, and grade/course levels), with routines for program evaluation
- Welcomes parents into the decision-making process for student achievement and instruction
- Focuses on collaboration between general and special education within schools, among district office departments, and between schools and their district office
- Maintains prevention as a central goal

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a term often used interchangeably with MTSS. However, RtI is a subset of MTSS.

First featured in the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, RtI reflects concerns about the increasing number of students identified as having specific learn-

ing disabilities “and the related suspicion that many students currently classified as having a specific learning disability might have avoided the need for special education if instructional support and interventions had been provided to them at an early stage in their education.”¹ However, the meanings of RtI can vary, from this approach to identifying students with specific learning disabilities to a more wholesale structural change in how educators think about teaching.

California’s approach to RtI, Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI²), reflects the two-part focus of the model: instruction and intervention for both academics and behavior at the student or classroom level. As such, RtI is contained within and supported by an MTSS, which encompasses entire school and district systems and creates a coherent structure around RtI practices to sustain them.

A three-tiered triangle is the most common visual depiction of RtI (see graphic below), suggesting (1) core instruction and assessment for all students, (2) strategic interventions for those students who are at risk for academic or behavioral problems, and (3) intensive supports for students facing significant challenges. The instruction and interventions provided in these tiers are informed by student progress data that is continuously gathered through formative and summative assessments. RtI² provides the structures, strategies, and philosophical grounding for educators to

view the struggles that students have as important problems to be solved; most importantly, RtI² provides a framework for solving them.

Universal Design for Learning

IDEA mandates that students with disabilities have access to learning. UDL guides educational practices to secure this access and reduce barriers in instruction, deliver appropriate accommodations and supports in the classroom, and maintain high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities. UDL accomplishes this by providing students with multiple means of acquiring and demonstrating their learning, with the goal of helping all students get to the same place, while providing and allowing different methods, materials, and approaches for getting there. The



RtI² resources from the California Department of Education. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/rtiresources.asp> and <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/rtihome.asp>

Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades, from the Institute of Education Science What Works Clearinghouse, offers five recommendations to help educators identify struggling readers and implement evidence-based strategies to promote their reading achievement. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=3>

The *Center on Response to Intervention* provides comprehensive information on screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, and creating a multi-level prevention system. See especially *Using a Response to Intervention Framework to Improve Student Learning*. <http://www.rti4success.org/resource/using-response-intervention-rti-framework-improve-student-learning>

A collection of *valuable RtI resources* are available through the Rhode Island Department of Education. http://www.ritap.org/rti/resources/web_resources.php

Note

1. *Legal Implications of Response to Intervention and Special Education Identification*. RtI Network. <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/ld/legal-implications-of-response-to-intervention-and-special-education-identification>

application of UDL promotes student engagement, supports student understanding, and guides appropriate student response in the demonstration of knowledge and skills. These three areas—engagement, representation, and action/expression—form the core of UDL.

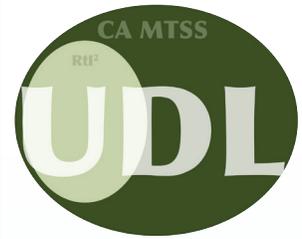
MTSS creates the structure and system for delivering the most effective instruction and supports to students so they can succeed in school. UDL provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, assessments, methods, and materials that work for everyone—not a single, one-size-fits-all solution but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs. When UDL is applied at the foundational level of a tiered system of instruction, all students can become engaged and successful learners.

MTSS and the Common Core

The California Common Core State Standards (CA CCSS) establish what students ought to be able to know and do in order to be college, career, and civic-life ready. In California, the components of MTSS work together to create an integrated, comprehensive framework that focuses on and supports the learning of all students in these standards. By promoting the effective implementation of MTSS, school districts and local education agencies ensure full access to standards-based instruction for all students. RtI² helps by providing educators with student data at the classroom level to guide instruction and interventions that students need to close any learning gaps and address any behavioral challenges that could get in the way of school success and becoming prepared for life after high school. The core components of UDL align with the CA CCSS: they both were formulated to help students become purposeful, motivated, resourceful, knowledgeable, strategic, and goal-oriented learners. Within a universally designed curriculum, as many students as possible and appropriate receive effective and standards-based instruction in their general education classroom settings. UDL uses current research in learning and neurology to define what “effective” means and looks like in a classroom so that students have access to, engagement with, and success in the Common Core.

UDL is really a merging of general education and special education, a sharing of responsibility, resources, and ownership. It gets away from the “their kids-our kids” divide.

—David Rose
The Center for Applied Special Technology



The Center for Applied Technology (CAST) provides extensive explanations of UDL and resources for using it in the classroom. www.cast.org/udl/

The National Center on Universal Design for Learning includes numerous resources for the practical application of UDL in the classroom. <http://www.udlcenter.org>

UDL in Action provides video examples of how teachers apply the principles of UDL in their classrooms. <http://www.engagingalllearners.ca/ip/udl-in-action/>

Strategies for applying UDL in the classroom and a virtual tour of UDL in practice are at <http://marylandlearninglinks.org/1021>

UDL: Principles and Practice is a video of David Rose talking about how UDL addresses the needs of all students. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGLTJw0GSxk>

Instructional Practices Resources for UDL are available from the Office of Special Education Programs. <https://www.osepideasthatwork.org/udl/instrpract.asp>