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What's the Difference Between RTI and MTSS?



By Bob Cunningham, EdM



Q I'm trying to understand how different schools use different approaches to help kids who are struggling. I've heard about RTI and MTSS. Are they pretty much the same thing?

A No, these approaches aren't quite the same. One is broader than the other, but many schools use both at the same time. Here's how they work and how they fit together.

Response to intervention (RTI) is a framework that many schools use to help students who are struggling with academics. There are **three levels of intervention in RTI**.

Most students can make progress in the first level, which uses high-quality instruction to help kids catch up. Students who need more intensive help can get it in the second and third levels of RTI.

A multi-tier system of supports (MTSS) is more comprehensive. It may include the three levels of RTI. But MTSS goes beyond just academics. It also covers social and emotional supports. That means it can include behavior intervention plans.

MTSS covers the adults at school, too. It includes things like professional development for teachers. MTSS also focuses on creating ways for adults to team up to help struggling kids.

So, to recap: The RTI framework can be used as part of an MTSS approach. This is one reason why the two ideas have become closely linked. But whether your school uses RTI, MTSS or both, the goal is to ensure that all students get what they need to learn.

Understanding how your school uses RTI or MTSS can help you advocate for your child. That's why it's a good idea to **ask a teacher or administrator how RTI and/or MTSS work at your school.**

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About the Author



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