

What is the Difference Between RTI and MTSS?

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The phrases “Response to Intervention”, commonly referred to as RtI, and “Multi-Tier System of Supports”, understandably shortened to MTSS, are used interchangeably among most educators. I have heard it flippantly said on many teacher blogs and other websites that the two are one in the same. This is not necessarily true. So, what is the difference between RtI and MTSS? For you reading experts who miss standardized tests (and who doesn’t?), a very simplified answer would be; RtI is to MTSS as [phonemic awareness](#) is to phonological awareness (that is, phonological awareness is commonly referred to as an ‘umbrella’ term that includes phonemic awareness). Basically, RtI is an integral part of MTSS but MTSS is more cohesive and comprehensive in the goal of meeting the needs of all learners. Here is a brief explanation:

Response to Intervention (RtI)

As most of you probably know, RtI refers to the practice of providing effective instruction and intervention across three tiers to all students. Assessment, progress monitoring, and data-driven decision making are all components of successful RtI implementation. The hope is to reduce the number of students being referred to Special Ed and to provide research and evidence-based, high quality instruction in all tiers.

RtI is an instructional framework focused solely on student response to instruction and intervention.

MTSS, on the other hand, is also a framework but it differs from RtI as it is more comprehensive.

Here are some ways that MTSS differ from RtI:

- MTSS encompasses RtI and then some.
- MTSS addresses academic as well as the social, emotional, and behavioral development of children from early childhood to graduation.
- MTSS provides multiple levels of support for all learners (struggling through advanced).
- MTSS aligns resources and support for students receiving instruction AND for teachers and other support staff who are delivering the instruction.
- MTSS framework is an educational systems change paradigm continuously focused on overall school improvement that is sustainable.
- MTSS models strive to ensure that practices, policies, and programs are aligned on classroom, school, and district levels.
- MTSS benefits from continued support for teachers in delivering instruction, utilizing and developing effective curriculum, administering assessment, and using data to guide instruction.
- MTSS requires a greater focus on collaboration between general education and special education within each school as well as between the school and the district office.
- MTSS also includes a focus on intervention but has a stronger goal of prevention than perhaps RtI does.
- MTSS is more likely to produce professional development that is aligned across school and district settings.
- MTSS requires that teachers, administrators, district personnel, and student support specialists change the way that they have traditionally worked together to include a more collaborative and cohesive culture.