



Dobbs Ferry Union Free School District

**Multi-Tiered System of Support
Handbook
2025-2026**

“Independent Thinkers Change Worlds”

Our Mission

The Dobbs Ferry School District strives to develop independent, curious, and open-minded learners who think critically, work collaboratively, act ethically, and are knowledgeable about the world around them.

In support of our mission, we are committed to:

- Providing a high-quality and challenging curriculum with the depth, breadth, and relevance appropriate to each learner.
- Respecting the unique abilities and learning styles of each student.
- Utilizing the most effective and innovative instructional approaches and technological advances.
- Encouraging students to meet their challenges – whether academic, athletic, or artistic – with openness, enthusiasm, and a willingness to take risks.
- Recruiting, retaining, and developing high-quality teachers and staff.
- Celebrating and learning from the diversity of our students and the greater Dobbs Ferry community.

All students between the ages of 5 and 21¹ years of age and who are residents of the Dobbs Ferry Union Free School District are entitled to equitably participate in the schools of the District and to be entitled to a quality education that provides access to a High School Diploma.

It is the responsibility of the District to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality education, appropriate instruction, and to ensure that they are provided the opportunity to achieve what is required to attain a meaningful diploma and to have access to as many post-secondary pathways as possible.

This procedures handbook has been developed to establish Dobbs Ferry Union Free School District processes to guide the implementation of its Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) (Tiers 1-3), and specifically how MTSS connects to Tier 4, which the District has designated as specially designed instruction (special education). This handbook intends to ensure that the District is consistent in the implementation of MTSS and clear about how Intervention Committees, 504 Committees, Committee on Special Education (CSE), and its Sub-Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) connect to MTSS.

Links to our [Special Education](#) and 504 Handbooks can be found on the Dobbs Ferry School District website.

The MTSS Handbook is divided into four sections:

- I. Screening Provisions for New Students and Enrolled Students**
- II. Provisions for General Education Interventions and Supports**
- III. Building Specific Contacts & The Connection Between AIS, RTI, and MTSS**
- IV. Academic Intervention Services (AIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) in the MTSS Framework**
- V. Glossary**

¹ If a student is determined to be a student with a disability, this entitlement begins at age 3 pursuant to federal and State requirements.

I. Screening Provisions for New Students and Enrolled Students

The District's overarching goal is to improve student achievement using evidence-based interventions matched to the instructional and behavioral needs and respective levels of the child. Therefore, the District has established a multi-tiered system of support that provides additional academic and behavioral assistance to enable students to progress within the existing school-wide instructional program at a rate equitable to their peers.

To provide a quality educational experience, the Dobbs Ferry Union Free School District seeks to understand the strengths and needs of each student on an ongoing basis.

A. New Students

For all new students entering the District, the first step in understanding their strengths and needs is to administer diagnostic screening(s).

Diagnostic screening of new entrants to the District is to determine which students are possibly gifted, have or are suspected of having a disability in accordance with subdivision (6) of [section 3208 of the Education Law](#), and/or possibly are limited English proficient in accordance with subdivision [2-a of section 3204 of the Education Law](#). Such screening is intended to develop a general profile of the student's strengths and needs, including, but not limited to, a student's:

- vision and hearing (including medical history of ear infections) to determine if a student has a vision or hearing impairment that may impact the student's ability to learn;
- schooling history, 504 (if applicable), IEP (if applicable), and Social/Emotional History;
- developmental level in oral expression; listening comprehension; written expression; basic reading skills and reading fluency and comprehension; mathematical calculation and problem solving; motor development; articulation skills; and cognitive development using recognized and validated screening tools;
- primary language status to determine if intake interview and administration of NYSITELL are necessary; and
- IEP status (if a student has an IEP, the director or assistant director of special education will review the IEP).

As a result of the diagnostic screening and intake process, a report will include: a description of the diagnostic screening instruments used, the student's performance on identified instruments, and, if required, the appropriate referral (e.g., MTSS, 504, or CSE). The results of the diagnostic screening report are used to determine, but is not limited to, the following:

- an initial placement of a student in the general education grade level of their peers, and a review of the instructional programs in reading and mathematics to ensure that explicit and research-validated instruction is being provided;
- If required, dissemination and review of the existing 504 document to ensure accommodations and supports are in place for the student;
- If required, initial placement of a student in the general education grade level of their peers with additional general education academic or behavioral supports;
- If required, assessment according to CR Part 154 to determine if the student will be identified as Limited English proficient;
- If required, dissemination of current IEP documents to the District's Committee on Special Education or Preschool Special Education to ensure accommodations and supports are in place for the student; and
- If additional concerns are identified during diagnostic screening, steps will be taken to generate a referral to the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Team.

B. Enrolled Students

In addition to providing diagnostic screening of new entrants, regular monitoring of all students, as well as those students who present with low scores on District benchmark assessments, specific state assessments, and ongoing screening assessments, will also be a cornerstone of the District's procedures. Identifying those students who do not make satisfactory progress in their levels of performance, both academically and behaviorally, and/or in their rate of learning to meet age or grade level standards is essential to meeting the District's vision for all students. These students will be provided with increasingly intensive levels of targeted, time-bound intervention, both instructional and behavioral, which the District will provide through its implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework.

II. Provisions of General Education Interventions and Supports

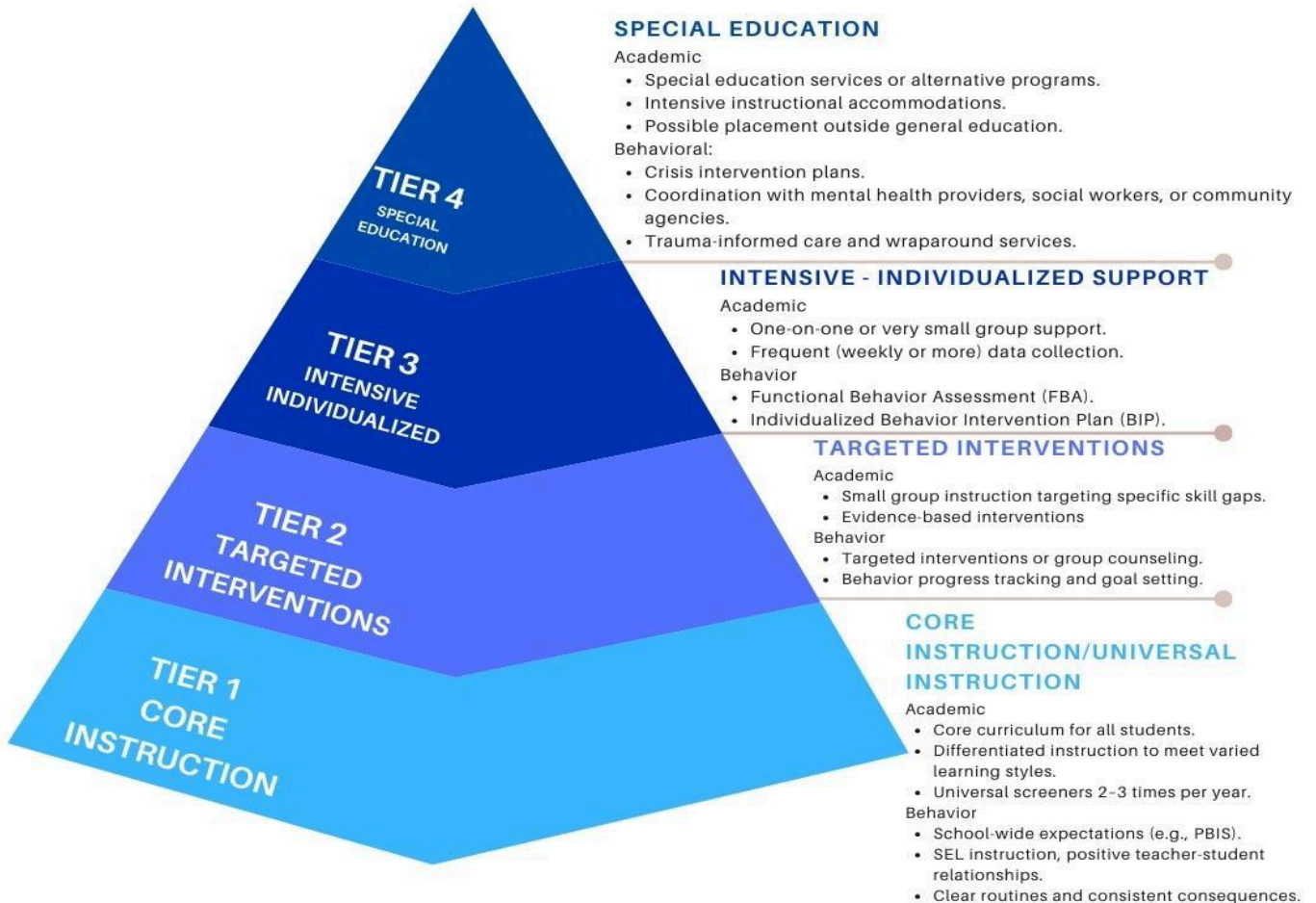
A. Definitions or Key Principles for Interventions and Supports

1. A Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)

MTSS encompasses a school-wide approach to instruction that addresses the needs of all students, including struggling learners and students with disabilities, and integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level instructional and behavioral system to maximize student achievement and reduce problem behaviors. MTSS is an instructional framework that includes universal screening of all students, multiple tiers of instruction and support services, and an integrated data collection and assessment system to inform decisions at each tier of instruction. Monitoring a student's response to a series of increasingly intense interventions to support their needs.

The Dobbs Ferry Union Free School District has determined its MTSS will be divided into the four tiers represented in the graphic that follows:

MTSS



2. Tier 1 level of instruction and support

Tier 1 refers to the universal support provided to **all students** in the classroom, regardless of their individual needs. It's the foundation of the system, where the focus is on high-quality, evidence-based instruction and practices that benefit every student. This is the primary level of intervention and always takes place in the general education classroom. This instruction is evidence-based, and progress is monitored.

3. Tier 2 level of instruction and support

Tier 2 is for students who need **additional support** beyond the general instruction provided in **Tier 1**. These students may be struggling in specific areas, but they're not so far behind that they need intensive, individualized help (which

is what Tier 3 is for). Tier 2 provides **targeted interventions** designed to address those specific needs and help students catch up.

4. Tier 3 level of instruction and support

Tier 3 is the **highest level of support** in a general education setting and is designed for students who need **intensive, individualized help** because they have not responded to the interventions provided in **Tier 1** and **Tier 2**. In Tier 3, students receive **highly personalized, daily instruction** that is designed to meet their specific learning or behavioral needs. This level of support is for students who are not making enough progress despite receiving the universal support of Tier 1 and the targeted support of Tier 2. When a student is unresponsive to Tiers 1-3 of intervention, it may be necessary to conduct an evaluation for Special Education Services.

5. Tier 4 level of instruction and support

Tier 4 supports students who have been classified with a disability and have either an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a Section 504 Accommodation Plan. Students receiving Tier 4 programs and/or services are identified and will receive supports to address their individualized needs. Needs range from the addition of an accommodation plan to specially designed instruction, and, where necessary, related services.

6. Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring involves regularly reviewing data to assess how well students are responding to the supports and interventions they receive. Teachers collect data through standards-aligned assessments, state assessments, ongoing screenings, and district benchmarks. In addition, student observations and work samples are used to evaluate progress in areas such as reading, math, and behavior. If a student is not making progress, the MTSS team will adjust the interventions to better meet their needs, ensuring each student receives the appropriate level of support for success.

B. Procedures to Provide General Education Academic and/or Behavioral Interventions and Supports within the MTSS Team

1. **The MTSS Team**

The MTSS team is a group of educators and specialists who work together to support students' academic and behavioral needs. The team includes teachers, school counselors, administrators, and sometimes specialists like reading or math interventionists. They regularly meet to review student progress, identify those who need additional help, and decide on the best interventions or supports. Their goal is to ensure all students receive the right level of help to succeed in school. Each building has its own designated MTSS team.

2. **Procedures for the MTSS Team**

- a. *Identify the Concern:* The first step is to identify when a student is struggling academically or behaviorally beyond what would be expected based on their profile, assessments, observations, and/or teacher concerns about the student's progress.

- b. *Gather Data*: Once a concern is identified, teachers and staff gather data through regular screenings, classroom assessments, work samples, and behavioral observations. This helps to determine specific areas where the student is struggling (e.g., reading, math, social skills).
 - c. *Tier 1 Interventions*: All students receive high-quality, evidence-based instruction in Tier 1. If a student shows difficulties beyond what might be expected, teachers may use different strategies or modify teaching approaches (differentiation) to address their needs within the general classroom setting.
 - d. *Progress Monitoring*: Teachers track the student's progress in Tier 1. If the student is not responding to these general supports, data is reviewed to determine whether further support is needed.
 - e. *Tier 2 Interventions*: In Tier 2, students receive targeted interventions in small groups or with additional support. This might include specialized instruction in specific skills (e.g., reading groups, social skills training). Progress is monitored more frequently during this stage.
 - f. *Review and Adjust*: The MTSS team (teachers, specialists, and administrators) meets regularly to review the student's progress. If the student shows improvement, they may remain in Tier 2 or return to Tier 1. If progress is not made, further adjustments are made to the interventions, or the student may be moved to Tier 3.
 - g. *Tier 3 Interventions*: In Tier 3, students receive intensive, individualized interventions based on assessment data and teacher input. This could include one-on-one support with a specialist, highly personalized teaching strategies, and frequent progress monitoring. This stage addresses more severe academic or behavioral concerns.
 - h. *Ongoing Evaluation*: At this point, the MTSS team evaluates the effectiveness of the Tier 3 interventions. If the student makes progress, they may move back to Tier 2 or Tier 1. If not, additional support could include referral for a special education evaluation or more targeted interventions.
 - i. *Referral for Special Education/Tier 4 (if needed)*: If referred, the Committee on Special Education will determine if the student qualifies for services under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).
 - j. *Continual Support or Exit*: Once the student has made expected progress, they may be exited from MTSS and returned to general education supports. If ongoing support is needed, they remain in the tiered system with adjustments made as necessary.
3. **Family Engagement**: In MTSS, parents or families are involved at several key points throughout the process to ensure they are informed and can collaborate with the school in supporting their child's success. Here is when and how parents or families are typically involved:
- a. *Initial Concern or Struggle*: When a teacher notices that a student is struggling academically or behaviorally (either through assessments, observations, or work samples), parents are often contacted to discuss the concerns and gather input. This is a good time for the school to understand any outside factors or additional insights the family might provide.

- b. *Tier 1 Support*: As teachers begin to implement general classroom strategies (Tier 1), parents may be informed of the initial steps taken to support their child's learning. Communication could include how the student is being supported in the classroom and any additional resources or strategies the parents can use at home to reinforce learning.
- c. *Progress Monitoring in Tier 1 and Tier 2*: As the student's progress is monitored, parents are informed of their child's progress, especially if the student is not making sufficient progress with Tier 1 or Tier 2 supports. Parents will receive updates on their child's academic or behavioral progress and how interventions are working. Teachers may also request a meeting to discuss strategies that can be used at home in conjunction with what's happening at school.
- d. *Tier 2 Interventions*: If the student moves to Tier 2 for more targeted interventions, parents are formally notified about the specific strategies being used. The school building may invite parents to be involved in the process by providing feedback or helping with home-based interventions.
- e. *Regular Updates and Collaboration*: During Tier 2, regular communication is key. Parents will receive updates on how well the interventions are working and any changes that need to be made. Parents will be asked to provide their perspective on progress and challenges.
- f. *Tier 3 Interventions*: If a student requires intensive, individualized interventions (Tier 3), parents are involved in the process. The school building may invite the parents to discuss specific strategies and the child's progress in more detail. Parents' insights and collaboration become critical in making adjustments to interventions at this stage.
- g. *Special Education Evaluation (if necessary)*: If the student is not responding to interventions in Tier 3, the MTSS team may suggest a formal evaluation for special education services. At this point, parents are officially involved in the decision-making process, and their consent is required for the evaluation.
- h. *Ongoing Communication*: Throughout the MTSS process, parents will have access to regular updates on their child's progress and any changes to the intervention plans. Communication can be through meetings, emails, phone calls, or progress reports.

C. Roles and Responsibilities to Provide General Education Academic and/or Behavioral Interventions and Supports within the MTSS Team

ROLES	RESPONSIBILITIES
MTSS Coordinator:	Receives the teacher's concern(s), schedules the meeting with relevant teachers and specialists, and leads the meeting.
Designated MTSS Team Member serves as notetaker:	Records discussion and recommendations for teacher/ student, and captures outcomes in the intervention plan.
Student's Teacher:	Provides progress monitoring and utilizes research-based instructional strategies to support students in the classroom. Additionally, the teacher will regularly review data and assessment of intervention outcomes to ensure effective support and student growth.
MTSS Team	<p>Instructional (AIS) Specialists: Provide targeted academic support in areas like reading and math to help students build essential knowledge and skills.</p> <p>Behavioral Specialists: Assist with behavior management strategies and interventions to support positive behavior in the classroom/school.</p> <p>School Counselor: Helps students with social-emotional development, peer relationships, and problem-solving skills.</p> <p>Social Worker: Provides emotional and family support, connecting students and families with resources as needed.</p> <p>Related Service Providers: Includes specialists such as psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists who offer additional support based on individual student needs.</p> <p>This team collaborates to monitor student progress, implement interventions, and adjust support as necessary to ensure student success.</p>

***Note: The roles and responsibilities of MTSS members for each school building may differ based on the respective needs of each school and level.

III. School Contacts

Springhurst Elementary School	Gianfranco Bastone (914) 693-1503 bastoneg@dfsd.org
Dobbs Ferry Middle School	Katia Marques (914) 693-3014 marquesk@dfsd.org
Dobbs Ferry High School	Diana Castellano (914) 693-7645 castellanod@dfsd.org

IV. Academic Intervention Services and Response to Intervention in the MTSS Framework

Within the MTSS framework, the district provides Academic Intervention and Response to Intervention services to provide equitable access to high-quality education through a continuum of academic and behavioral supports. This section outlines the differences and similarities in the services and how they relate to the overall MTSS framework in providing support for student success.

Academic Intervention Services (AIS)

Academic Intervention Services (AIS) are mandated by New York State Education Department (NYSED) regulations and are designed to help students who are at risk of not achieving the State Learning Standards in English Language Arts, mathematics, social studies, and/or science. AIS includes additional instruction and/or student support services intended to supplement the general curriculum.

Key Features of AIS:

- Targets students performing below proficiency on State assessments or at risk of academic failure.
- May include small group instruction, extended learning time, or additional counseling services.
- Required for students scoring below specific cut scores on state assessments (as defined by NYSED).

Response to Intervention (Rtl)

Response to Intervention (Rtl) is a multi-tiered approach that focuses on the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. In New York State, Rtl is required as part of the process to identify students with learning disabilities in the area of reading.

Key Features of Rtl:

- Emphasizes high-quality instruction and universal screening of all students in general education.
- Provides increasingly intensive interventions based on a student's responsiveness.
- Utilizes data-based decision making for both academic and behavioral progress monitoring.
- Includes three tiers of support:
 - Tier 1: Core classroom instruction with universal screening.
 - Tier 2: Targeted small group interventions.
 - Tier 3: Intensive individualized interventions

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a broader framework that encompasses both academic and behavioral supports, integrating Rtl and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). MTSS supports a school-wide, data-driven, tiered system to improve outcomes for all students.

Key Features of MTSS:

- Aligns academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports within a single framework.
- Uses data from multiple sources to guide instructional practices and interventions.
- Promotes collaboration among educators, specialists, and families.
- Emphasizes equity, access, and positive school climate.

AIS and RTI in an MTSS Framework

While AIS, Rtl, and MTSS have distinct characteristics, they are complementary and often operate in coordination to support student success:

- AIS and Rtl: AIS can be provided within Rtl frameworks. However, Rtl emphasizes *prevention and progress monitoring* before a student qualifies for AIS. Rtl may reduce the need for AIS by addressing student needs early and systematically.
- Rtl and MTSS: Rtl is a component of MTSS. Whereas Rtl is primarily academic in focus (especially in New York's regulatory context), MTSS integrates behavior and mental health supports, offering a more holistic approach.
- AIS and MTSS: AIS can be layered into the MTSS framework as part of Tier 2 or Tier 3 support, particularly for students not meeting State standards.

Together, these systems provide a comprehensive structure for identifying needs, delivering targeted support, and improving outcomes for all students in alignment with New York State regulations.

V. [Glossary](#)

1. **504 Plan** in school is a legal document under the federal Rehabilitation Act that provides accommodations and support to students with disabilities to ensure they have equal access to education. It outlines specific adjustments to the learning environment or teaching methods to help the student succeed.
2. **Benchmark Assessments** are tests given during the school year to check if students are on track with learning goals. They help teachers see what is working and where improvements can be made.
3. **Commissioner's Regulations Part 154 (CR Part 154)** refers to regulations that ensure English Language Learners (ELLs) receive appropriate language support services. It outlines the requirements for identifying, assessing, and providing instruction to ELLs, ensuring they have access to equal educational opportunities.
4. **Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE)** is a group that identifies, assesses, and provides special education services to preschool-aged children (ages 3-5) with disabilities or developmental delays. It creates individualized education plans (IEPs) to support the child's learning and development.
5. **Committee on Special Education (CSE)** is a team of professionals and parents/caregivers that evaluates and determines the eligibility of students with disabilities for special education services. It creates and oversees Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to support the student's educational needs.
6. **English Language Learner (ELL)** refers to a student whose primary language is not English and who is in the process of learning English. These students receive specialized support under Part 154 (see below) to help them succeed academically while improving their English language skills.
7. **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** is a legal document under the federal Individual with Disabilities Act developed for students who need specialized instruction and related services, outlining their specific educational goals, services, accommodations, and supports to help them succeed in school.
8. **New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL)** is an assessment used in New York State schools to determine whether a student is an English Language Learner (ELL). It helps identify students who may need additional support to develop their English language skills.
9. **Universal Screener** is a quick test given to all students to check how they're doing in key areas like reading, math, or behavior. It helps teachers spot who might need extra help early on.