

What is NJTSS?

A FAMILY GUIDE TO THE NEW JERSEY TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

NJTSS stands for the **New Jersey Tiered System of Supports**. It is a way for New Jersey schools to organize the supports they offer so that students receive the level of academic, behavioral, social-emotional, health-related, or enrichment support they need. The New Jersey Department of Education describes NJTSS as “a framework of supports and interventions designed to improve student achievement.” It is based on the core components of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and the three-tier prevention logic of Response to Intervention (RTI). Its purpose is to help schools coordinate people, time, programs, and data so that the right interventions reach the right students at the right time.

NJTSS is not a single curriculum, a special program a child is “placed into,” or a label attached to a student. Instead, it’s a schoolwide structure for:

identifying student needs early

responding with the right level of support

checking whether the support is working

adjusting the plan when needed

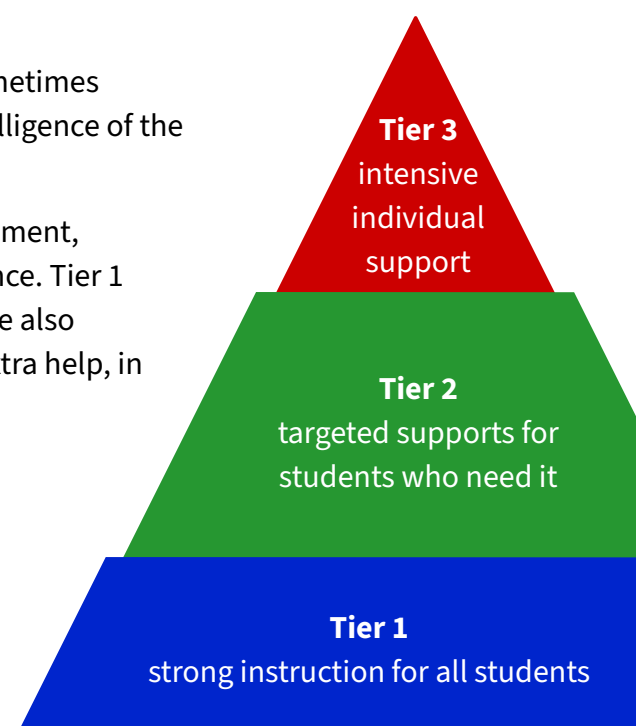
Students learn at different rates and in different ways, and NJTSS helps schools meet those needs. Some students need only strong classroom instruction and teacher feedback. Others need extra practice in a small group. Some may also need more frequent, individualized instruction. A child might receive supports through NJTSS for their reading, math, behavior, attendance, social-emotional learning, or more than one area at the same time. A student may also need different levels of support in different areas. For example, a student may be doing well in math with regular classroom instruction but need a small reading group for fluency. Or, they might be above grade level academically, but need targeted support for organization, behavior, or anxiety at school.

NJTSS gives schools a common process for making those decisions. NJDOE identifies nine essential components of a strong NJTSS implementation, including strong leadership, family and community and engagement, and a positive school culture.

The three tiers are the easiest part of NJTSS to picture, but they are sometimes misunderstood. The tiers describe the intensity of support, not the intelligence of the student nor whether they receive special education services.

Tier 1 is for all students. This is the everyday teaching, learning environment, routines, curriculum, and classroom support that all students experience. Tier 1 includes multilingual learners, students with IEPs, and students who are also receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions. Even when a student receives extra help, in most cases, they still receive Tier 1 classroom instruction.

Tier 2 is for some students who need more targeted support. Tier 2 is targeted, supplemental support provided in addition to classroom instruction. This happens the school adds a more focused intervention because the student’s data show a specific need. Tier 2 often happens in a small group during an intervention period, a skills block, a pull-out session, or sometimes inside the classroom.



Tier 3 is for those students who need more intensive support. These supports are used when data show that Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports are not fully meeting students' needs. Tier 3 support is more individualized, often more frequent, and can be delivered one-on-one or in a small group. NJDOE describes Tier 3 as intensive intervention customized to a student's needs, with adaptations based on the student's performance and frequent progress monitoring. These supports may be provided in or outside the classroom.

Two important tools make NJTSS work: **universal screening** and **progress monitoring**:



Universal Screening

Universal screening means the school gives brief assessments to all students to look for early signs that a student may need additional help. Screening might look at reading, writing, math, or other indicators. Screening is not meant to be a high-stakes test or an evaluation. It is a quick way to ask, "Who may need more attention right now?"



Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring is what happens after an intervention begins. If a student is receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 support, the school will regularly check in on the student's progress. This may happen weekly, monthly, quarterly, or on another schedule depending on the situation. Progress monitoring helps understand if the intervention is working or if changes need to be made.

NJTSS is also a team process. Schools often use collaborative problem-solving teams to review data, discuss concerns, and decide what support a student should receive. They work together on identifying learning, behavior, or health difficulties; collecting information; developing and implementing action plans; coordinating school and community resources; reviewing whether interventions are effective; and modifying plans when needed.

This means **families should be part of the conversation!** Families bring information about a child's strengths, challenges, and what works outside school. That information can help the school choose better supports.

One of the most common family questions is how NJTSS relates to special education. Each school district might have some small differences in the way they organize these two services, so checking a school website or asking directly is the best way to get a specific answer. Generally, a student receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 support is not automatically in special education, but they could be. A child does not need an IEP to receive support through NJTSS. At the same time, a student with an IEP is not automatically in Tier 2 or Tier 3. For example, while a student's IEP may focus on reading, they might be performing above grade level in math!

At home, families may be able to reinforce the supports that their child receives through NJTSS. A family can ask the teacher what specific skill to practice, how to practice it correctly, and how much time is reasonable. For reading, this might mean practicing letter sounds, reading aloud together, listening to the child read a decodable passage, or building vocabulary through conversation. For math, it might mean brief practice with facts, number sense, or explaining problem-solving steps. For behavior or organization, it might mean using a consistent homework routine, visual checklist, or communication log. The most useful home support is usually aligned with the school plan and realistic for the family.



Family Insights

Your observations at home give the school information they cannot get from screening data alone. When you meet with teachers or a problem-solving team, consider sharing:

- How long homework actually takes, and where your child gets stuck
- How you help your child learn at home
- Sources of stress, anxiety, or school avoidance outside of school
- Family events or transitions that may be affecting your child (a move, a new sibling, a loss, a parent traveling)
- Your child's strengths and interests, including skills that show up at home
- Friendships, social dynamics, or peer concerns your child has mentioned
- Languages spoken at home and how your child uses each one
- What your child says about school
- How your child talks about themselves as a learner (confident, frustrated, "bad at" a subject)