

RETURNING TO SCHOOL: CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH THE MOST INTENSIVE BEHAVIORAL NEEDS

A Guide to Supporting Students With
Disabilities, Their Families, and Educators
During the 2020–21 School Year

NATIONAL CENTER ON INTENSIVE INTERVENTION
CENTER ON POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS
INTEGRATED MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT RESEARCH NETWORK

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Families, and Educators During the 2020–21 School Year

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Purpose and Context for the Guide

This document is a set of strategies and key practices to restart classrooms and schools in a manner that students, their families, and educators can use effectively, efficiently, and relevantly in the current climate. These considerations are intended to help educators and families enhance or adapt school and classroom action plans to support students with the most intensive behavioral needs in the current context. Often, our most vulnerable students have greater needs across academics and behavior and also have the most difficulty with disruptions and generalizing across settings and contexts or learning content. It is critically important to look for and act upon opportunities to integrate across areas of academic and social-emotional-behavioral content. This document was developed as a companion to the recently published Center on PBIS's guide *Returning to School During and After Crisis* and therefore does not focus on foundational Tier 1 systems or practices. We have a unique opportunity to reconsider how we design education that supports students with intensive needs, including students with disabilities.

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Purpose

The National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII), Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and the Integrated Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (I-MTSS) Research Network collaborated to create this document, which is **twofold** in its purpose. First, we see this document as a set of strategies and key practices to **restart** classrooms and schools in a manner that students, their families, and educators can use effectively, efficiently, and relevantly in the current climate. These considerations are intended to help educators and families **enhance or adapt** school and classroom action plans to support students with the most intensive behavioral needs in the current context. NCII defines *intensive intervention* as a data-driven, iterative process to intensifying and individualizing academic instruction and behavioral supports (NCII, 2013). We consider intensive intervention as part of Tier 3 and see it as fundamental to successful MTSS implementation. Intensive intervention is designed to support students with **severe and persistent learning or behavior difficulties**.

Second, it is critically important to look for and act upon opportunities to integrate across areas of academic and social-emotional-behavioral content. This is especially true for students with the most challenging behavioral needs. Often, our most vulnerable students have greater needs across academics and behavior and also have the most difficulty with disruptions and generalizing across settings and contexts or learning content. This document was developed as a companion to

the recently published Center on PBIS's guide [*Returning to School During and After a Crisis*](#) and therefore **does not** focus on foundational Tier 1 systems or practices. If you are interested in an overview of Tier 1, please review that document.

Context

As many of you know and have experienced, coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has disrupted many aspects of our “normal” home, school, work, relationship, expectations, and home routines. The uncertainty and challenges that have emerged have highlighted disparities in our healthcare system, inequity that has long existed in our education system, and systemic racism that needs to be examined and addressed. As educators, we are often asked to reflect on our own practices and recommend resources to ensure all students have every opportunity to be successful. Given the current and future progression of COVID-19 and the ongoing economic realities, we anticipate the transition back to school in fall 2020 may feel unclear and overwhelming at times. Furthermore, we recognize this transition back to school will likely last longer than a few weeks as schools open in a variety of formats and then transition again as the school year progresses to and from other formats (e.g., remote to in-person).

However, we have **reason to remain hopeful**. We have a unique opportunity to reconsider how we design education that supports students with intensive needs, including students with disabilities. With the national focus on equity, as students, families, schools,

and communities consider the transition back to school, we must continue to prioritize effective, efficient, culturally relevant, and contextually appropriate decision making.

Leadership Teams and Support Staff

With these considerations in mind, this guide provides recommendations for leadership teams and support staff, which involves **general educators** as they develop and implement supports for students with intensive needs, including students with disabilities, in their (in-person or remote) classrooms, groups, and other settings. These recommendations are also for **special educators** as they collaborate with families and other specialists to develop intensive individualized supports for students in the fall. These recommendations will also be helpful for school counselors, paraprofessionals, and all other school-based specialists, including occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech and language pathologists.

Outcome

The ultimate goal of this work is to **support students, families, and educators** in their transitions back to school during and following the global pandemic in a manner that prioritizes their health and safety, social and emotional needs, and behavioral and academic growth. In addition, we recognize that our most vulnerable population, students with intensive needs, including students with disabilities, are at significant risk of losing educational gains or not making progress during this time when education and the

broader educational systems have been disrupted. Therefore, the supports, actionable advice, and classroom and school-level resources this guide provides are critical.

Back to Basics: Implement Well a Small Number of Intensive Intervention Practices

Given the challenging context, we recommend going back to basics by: (a) focusing on a small number of evidence-based, culturally relevant, intensive intervention practices across social, emotional, behavioral (SEB) and academic domains and (b) using them well, consistently, and with fidelity. Specifically, we recommend that educators connect, screen, support, teach, and monitor in both in-person and remote settings and make adaptations as needed.


- **Connect.** Check in on any events (e.g., illness, loss of family member, change in routines or structures, increase in emotional problems) that may have changed or affected the student or family that may impact the student's educational performance, and plan for regular interaction during the upcoming school year. It is critical to help students and families see how continuity in connecting across all settings (in-person and remote) can be accomplished, and check-ins address both successes and changes or challenges. Regular connections will drive decisions about supports for students and partnerships with families as they prepare to start the school year.
- **Screen.** Identify children who need the most intensive intervention, and note that these children may include students with


disabilities. For children who require more intensive supports, use academic and/or functional behavioral assessment data to identify areas of strength and need, which will inform the selection and implementation of targeted and/or intensive individualized supports (see [Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity](#)).


- **Support.** Establish a safe environment (in class and/or remote); explicitly teach and prompt predictable routines, positive expectations, and SEB skills; bridge expectations (teach connections) across settings (e.g., home, school, community); and provide specific feedback to acknowledge and encourage desired behavior. In addition, you may work with students with disabilities who require additional layers of support. To support students with intensive behavior needs, use data to guide intensification and individualization of key practices.
- **Teach.** Effectively teach and prompt critical academic skills, and actively engage students in learning by increasing the frequency in opportunities to respond. Prompt and reinforce expectations and SEB skills throughout instruction. Provide positive and supportive feedback to support development.


- **Monitor.** Continue to monitor safety, health, SEB, and academic needs to: (a) determine whether supports are sufficient and (b) identify students who require more or modified support over time. Match the intensity of monitoring to the intensity of need.


The following table describes each **key practice and highlights specific examples of strategies for students with intensive behavioral needs and examples for in-person and remote learning**. We focus on key practices at the **classroom and school levels**. With the recognition that some classrooms and schools may plan to resume the year in remote, in-person, and/or hybrid models, our goal is to provide information about strategies to intensify, and we include examples of what to prioritize, as well as strategies with research support that you could adapt to a virtual setting that could help maximize strengths depending on the mode of instruction.

	Description of Practices and Strategies for Students With Intensive Needs	Examples for In-Person Learning	Examples for Remote Learning
	<p><i>Make contact with families and students prior to the school year to identify current SEB and academic needs. Plan to discuss both successes observed and challenges that may arise from disruptions or varied routines.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule one-on-one meeting with family members and students to evaluate service needs; update the individualized education program (IEP) accordingly. • Partner with community child and family service providers (e.g., mental health, behavioral health), and plan for provision of services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule virtual (e.g., Zoom) or phone one-on-one meeting with family members and student(s) to evaluate service needs; update IEP accordingly (see PROGRESS Center virtual IEP resources). • Partner with community child and family service providers (e.g., mental health, behavioral health), and plan for provision of remote services.
	<p><i>Develop a process for regularly connecting with families and students throughout the year to assess SEB and academic needs and, for high school students, college and career readiness. Establishing relationships is especially important during the first few weeks of the school year.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule regular calls and/or purposeful visits with families, and ask structured questions regarding their child or adolescent's status and adequacy of services. • Connect regularly using a parent or family member's preferred communication tools (e.g., social media, e-mails, videos from teachers or staff), and be aware and sensitive that some parents may have limited access or involvement at different times for different reasons. • Inform parents of how to contact staff members and how to access emergency services in crisis situations. • Connect regularly, and establish strong relationships between teacher and student (See MIMTSS CICO Resources; CICO webinar). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule regular calls or videoconferences with families, ask structured questions regarding their child or adolescent's status and adequacy of services. • Connect regularly using a parent or family member's preferred communication tools (e.g., social media, e-mails, videos from teachers or staff), and be aware and sensitive that some parents may have limited access or involvement at different times for different reasons. • Inform parents of how to contact staff members and how to access emergency services in crisis situations.
	<p><i>Enhance peer-to-peer social relationships.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a social skills assessment to determine student needs and provide social skills instruction, if needed (e.g., ask parents if/what peer-to-peer interaction the student has had during the pandemic). • Schedule time (e.g., lunch bunch, circle of friends, other modified social gathering options) for students to socialize, connect, and build friendships with peers. • Provide positive feedback for appropriate in-person social interactions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange online activities involving peers, coaching target student in appropriate social interactions (e.g., facilitated virtual social gatherings with identified positive social expectations). • Use the online activities to build on the in-person relationships and generalize to virtual setting. • Provide positive feedback for appropriate remote social interactions.

	Description of Practices and Strategies for Students With Intensive Needs	Examples for In-Person Learning	Examples for Remote Learning
	<p><i>Beyond universal screening, conduct diagnostic academic and/or functional behavioral assessment to identify areas of strength and need to inform selection and implementation of targeted and/or intensive individualized supports.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain screening data at the beginning of the school year, and compare results to the most recent previous screening for students with intensive needs, including students with disabilities. • Obtain information from family members about social and behavior progress during the previous several months. • Collect more in-depth data for any areas where students have made limited progress, which might include diagnostic tests or individualized achievement tests. • Ensure data are available for use at IEP team meetings conducted at the beginning of the school year. • Use screening data to help identify students whose achievement and/or behavior needs are substantial who were previously struggling and/or are unlikely making satisfactory progress. For these students, school data teams or intervention teams should develop intervention plans, which may include the use of NCII data meeting tools and NCII Strategies for Setting Data-Driven Behavioral Individualized Education Program Goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify screening tools that can be used remotely either through computer-based delivery or parent/caregiver administration, and administer these tools at the beginning of the school year to all students (see the NCII virtual screening and progress monitoring tools). • Compare these data to the most recent screening data that are available to identify students who have made limited or no progress. • Administer individualized measures to provide more specific diagnostic and performance data for students most at risk, especially students requiring intensive intervention. Information about social or behavior outcomes may be gathered through telephone or computer-based networking with parents/caregivers. Academic measures may require face-to-face interaction with professionals either at a school location or in the student's home. • Use data at the beginning of the school year to develop intervention plans and in IEP meetings that may be conducted virtually or adapted for virtual settings (see NCII Intervention Plan (For Small Groups or Individual Students); PROGRESS Center virtual IEP resources).

	Description of Practices and Strategies for Students With Intensive Needs	Examples for In-Person Learning	Examples for Remote Learning
	<i>Establish a safe environment (in-person and/or remote); teach and prompt predictable routines, positive expectations, and SEB skills; bridge expectations (teach connections) across settings (e.g., home, school, community); and provide specific feedback to acknowledge and encourage desired behavior.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up students for success by supporting and responding to student behavior during whole-group, small-group, or individual instruction. • Design a safe learning environment. • Establish predictable routines. • Explicitly teach expectations and SEB skills, and prompt as needed. • Actively engage students during instruction. • Provide specific feedback and ensure that specific positive feedback occurs at least five times as often as specific corrective feedback (maintain 5:1 ratio). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up students for success by focusing on critical practices for virtual learning during remote instruction, and teach students to create a safe, reduced-distraction learning environment at home. • Support families and students in establishing predictable routines. • Explicitly teach expectations and SEB skills required for virtual learning, and prompt as needed (see NCII behavior strategies that could be adapted for a virtual setting). • Actively engage students during instruction.
	<i>You may work with students with disabilities who require additional layers of support; in those instances, use data to guide intensification and individualization of key practices.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a functional behavioral assessment to guide the behavior support plan (BSP); ensure the BSP documents are comprehensive, intensive, and individualized to support behavior practices; and implement BSP practices with fidelity. • Develop an individualized BSP, and integrate it with individualized academic supports, as needed, for students who do not respond to Tier 2 and/or who require intensive intervention. Use data to guide individualization of key practices and supports provided. • Engage in a person-centered and/or wraparound process to coordinate services across agencies, contexts, and areas of strength and need for students with complex needs. • Integrate targeted or intensive individualized SEB support practices and academic supports to ensure students with SEB and academic needs experience coordinated support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with families to implement key intensive and individualized behavior support practices, based on individualized BSP, to support academic and other key routines at home, and adjust as needed. • Collaborate with families through remote person-centered and/or wraparound process meetings to continue service coordination during periods of remote learning for students with complex needs. • Collaborate with families to implement key integrated SEB and academic supports at home.

	Description of Practices and Strategies for Students With Intensive Needs	Examples for In-Person Learning	Examples for Remote Learning
	<p><i>In addition to accessing high-leverage Tier 1 instructional practices, implement targeted (Tier 2) and/or intensive individualized academic instruction.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity to evaluate, design, or intensify interventions at Tiers 2 and 3. • Use strategies to promote active engagement. • Use evidence-based practices for providing targeted and intensive reading or mathematics intervention based on individual student data. • Provide explicit and systematic instruction at a brisk pace that includes: (a) teacher demonstrations, (b) clear and explicit language, and (c) multiple and varied opportunities for students to respond and participate. • Use data-based individualization to support students with intensive needs, including students with disabilities. • Provide behavior supports, using behavior strategies to support intensifying interventions, to ensure active engagement. • Use valid and reliable academic or behavior progress monitoring tools to make decisions about responsiveness and intensification. • Ensure and document intervention fidelity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students essential virtual learning classroom routines necessary for successful learning in Tiers 2 and 3 intervention. • Continue to ensure opportunities for social and emotional learning and active engagement within academic instruction. • Use a balance of asynchronous and synchronous learning options, depending on student need. • Using smaller grouping strategies and explicit and systematic instruction to deliver intervention in the virtual environment (see Using Sample Lessons to Support Continuity of Learning During COVID-19: Tips for Educators for examples). • Collaborate with families and build capacity of families to provide increased opportunities to practice and receive corrective feedback (see Using Sample Lessons to Support Continuity of Learning During COVID-19: Tips for Parents). • Collect and analyze progress monitoring data that are feasible, valid, and useful in the remote learning environment (see Frequently Asked Questions on Collecting Progress Monitoring Data Virtually).

	Description of Practices and Strategies for Students With Intensive Needs	Examples for In-Person Learning	Examples for Remote Learning
	<p>While maintaining fidelity of Tier 1 and Tier 2 implementation, use data from these tiers to identify students in need of intensive intervention. Monitor response to intervention for students receiving intensive intervention.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) to monitor implementation fidelity. • Monitor office discipline referrals. • Track Daily Points from Check-in Check-out (CICO) or Daily Report Card. • Use the Direct Behavior Rating (DBR) (see NCII Direct Behavior Rating Overview; University of Missouri EBI resources on DBR). • Use self-monitoring to track teacher praise and opportunities to respond (OTR) delivery (consider simple Be+ App). • Use systematic direct observation for monitoring function-based behavior intervention plan. • Develop decision rules for determining non-responsiveness, and make recommendations for adaptation. • Monitor parent-coach alliance communications. • Monitor student-counselor relationships (see Nebraska School Counselor COVID-19 resources; American School Counselor Association resources). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct the PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) remotely to monitor implementation fidelity. • Use DBR Information for Parents and Professionals. • Use parent report (e.g., BASC-3). • Use student self-monitoring data. • Monitor parent-coach alliance communications. • Monitor treatment integrity of behavioral interventions (see NCII Behavioral Intervention Tools Chart). • Use the NCII virtual screening and progress monitoring tools.

Additional Considerations

Schedule time for students at high risk or students with disabilities who will be new to the school to visit the school early in the school year and connect with their prior or new teacher and become familiar with expectations and supports. Other suggestions include the following:

- Schedule designated days and/or times for students to visit the school to meet with their special education teacher, counselor, therapeutic staff support, general education teacher(s), and other relevant staff who will be providing supports. Identify and discuss supports that each person will provide. These meetings can occur virtually or in person.
- Discuss the routines and expectations for the students. Provide resources (e.g., schedules, educator photos, information) that may help with preparing for transitions to in-person or remote learning.
- Provide a video overview to highlight expectations and supports and to allow students to preview their physical environment at school.

Identify students at high risk for dropout (e.g., students with risk factors during the prior semester, such as high absenteeism, failing grades, behavior concerns; students who did not access or complete online learning during COVID-19), and assess supports and processes needed for school return or alternative education options.

- Designate a staff member to make contact with the students, evaluate status, and develop a plan for transition back to school, including mental health and behavioral supports needed, academic remediation, and credit recovery for both in-person learning and remote options.
- Make sure students and families understand the plan and supports provided during in-person learning and remote options.
- Offer information about how families (and students) can contact educators for support or assistance with concerns regarding in-person learning and remote options (see [Early Warning Systems Resources](#)).

Some students will respond quickly to intensive supports, but quick response is not typical.

- Due to the nature of intensity of instruction and supports required for students with severe and persistent learning needs, many students receiving Tier 3 will likely require ongoing intensive intervention and possibly special education services.
- Some students will demonstrate periods of adequate progress, but, as they progress through the curriculum or the experiences of new grade-level expectations, these students will require additional intensive intervention. To see results and close gaps requires persistence and time.

Additional Resources

Link	Brief Description
National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII)	
www.intensiveintervention.org	General website
https://intensiveintervention.org/about-charts-resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://charts.intensiveintervention.org/bprogressmonitoring (Behavior Progress Monitoring Tools Chart) • https://charts.intensiveintervention.org/bintervention (Behavior Intervention Tools Chart) • https://charts.intensiveintervention.org/bscreening (Behavior Screening Tools Chart) Note: Academic tools charts are included as well.	NCII tools chart overview
https://intensiveintervention.org/resource/dont-socially-distance-physically-distance-how-support-social-behavioral-needs-virtual	Webinar
https://mtss4success.org/special-topics/secondary-schools	Early warning system resources
https://intensiveintervention.org/implementation-support/tools-support-intensive-intervention-data-meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://intensiveintervention.org/sites/default/files/Premeeting_Process_Guidance_Document.pdf (Process Guidance Document—Preparing for the Initial Meeting) • https://intensiveintervention.org/sites/default/files/Initial_Meeting_Participant_Guide.pdf (Participant Guide—Conducting the Initial Meeting) • https://intensiveintervention.org/sites/default/files/Student-Level_DBI_Checklist_508.pdf (Student-Level Data-Based Individualization Implementation Checklist—Facilitating Ongoing Meetings) • https://intensiveintervention.org/resource/student-progress-monitoring-tool-data-collection-and-graphing-excel (Progress Monitoring Graphing Tool—Facilitating Ongoing Meetings) 	NCII tools to support intensive intervention data meetings

Link	Brief Description
Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)	
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osep/index.html	General website
https://osepideasthatwork.org/ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://osepideasthatwork.org/sites/default/files/SWDLearning-Teachers%20Brief_April%202020.pdf 	Practical guidance (i.e. COVID resources, topical issue briefs)
https://sites.ed.gov/idea/policy-guidance/	Policy information

Link	Brief Description
Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	
https://www.pbis.org/	General website
https://www.pbis.org/resource/returning-to-school-during-and-after-crisis	Returning to school during and after crisis guide

Link	Brief Description
Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	
https://www.pbis.org/resource/a-state-guide-for-returning-to-school-during-and-after-crisis	State guide
https://www.pbis.org/resource/a-district-guide-for-returning-to-school-during-and-after-crisis	District guide
https://www.pbis.org/resource/a-school-guide-for-returning-to-school-during-and-after-crisis	School guide
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuXpGnJ2CFY	Video overview of guide
https://www.pbis.org/resource/creating-a-pbis-behavior-teaching-matrix-for-remote-instruction	<i>Creating a PBIS Behavior Teaching Matrix for Remote Instruction</i>
https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-families-with-pbis-at-home	<i>Supporting Families with PBIS at Home</i>
https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-students-with-disabilities-at-school-and-home-a-guide-for-teachers-to-support-families-and-students	<i>Supporting Students with Disabilities at School and Home: A Guide for Teachers to Support Families and Students</i>
https://www.pbis.org/resource-type/materials#high-school-pbis	PBIS high school resources

Link	Brief Description
Integrated Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (I-MTSS) Research Network	
https://mtss.org	General website

Link	Brief Description
Other Resources	
National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH)	
http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/COVID-19/	Resources to address student and family mental health during COVID-19
Evidence Based Intervention Network (EBIN—University of Missouri)	
https://ebi.missouri.edu/	Website with extensive resources to support the use of evidence-based interventions in school settings
National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT)	
https://transitionta.org/	Website with extensive resources to support individuals with disabilities improve postsecondary outcomes (i.e., graduate prepared for success in postsecondary education and employment)

Link	Brief Description
Michigan's MTSS Technical Assistance Center (MiMTSS)	
https://mimtsstac.org/	General website
https://mimtsstac.org/presentations/supporting-educators-in-preparation-for-the-fall	Webinar supporting educators with strategies and practices to promote a successful start of the school year

Conclusion

We know that educators have never experienced the demands associated with our current normal. Your work in supporting students with intensive needs, including students with disabilities, does not have to be perfect to be of value. Keep in mind that this work can be done. We need to get started with supporting our students and work to improve how we provide these supports in response to the changing student needs and our changing educational environments. To help with this process, collect data and use this information to guide your intervention to best benefit your students.

Disclaimer

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