Comparing IDEA and MTSS

In blended classroom settings, early childhood staff members are responsible for administering the general education curriculum as well as implementing both multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) services. Use this table as a brief overview of the similarities and differences across IDEA and MTSS.

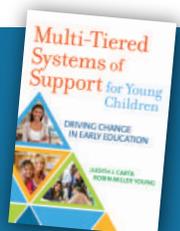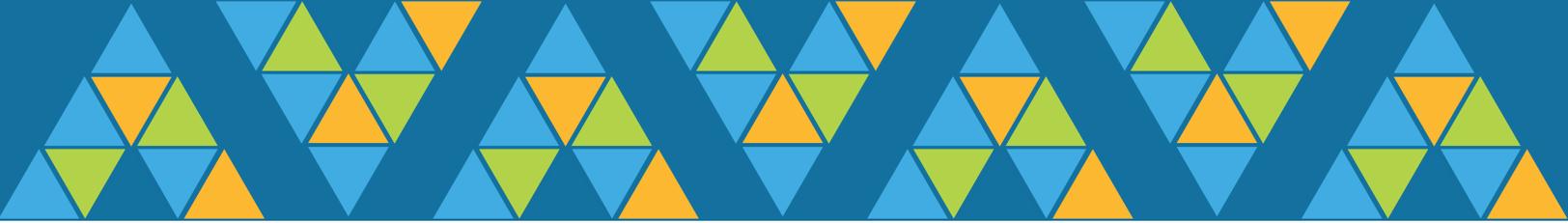|	IDEA requirements	MTSS
Target population	Children from 0 through 21 with disabilities	Children from K through 21. May be used with children from birth through five as well.
Focus	Provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) that includes services and supports to meet the child's academic, functional, and developmental needs.	Provide early intervening strategies to address a selected number of targeted skills/behavior (e.g., early literacy).
Eligibility assessment/evaluation	Programs conduct a case study evaluation (CSE) of academic achievement and functional performance. The CSE includes technically adequate formal assessments, observation, interview, family input, records review, and progress monitoring. Data from MTSS may be used in some cases.	Universal screening is used to identify children at risk or with delays in specific areas (e.g., math, early literacy).
Eligibility criteria	Two criteria must be met: identification of one or more of the disabilities identified by the IDEA and documentation that the disability adversely affects the student's educational performance.	Eligibility for more intensive intervention (provided through tiers) is determined by the program (e.g., child scores at or below the 25th percentile).
Child goals	The individualized education program (IEP) details the child's FAPE. The IEP includes annual goals to address academic achievement and functional skills for each academic area and functional performance skill affected by the student's disability.	Goals to address specific needs identified through universal screening are developed by the class or program team.
Supports and services	Special education and related services, supplementary aids and services, linguistic and cultural accommodations, and supports for teachers that 1) address IEP goals and 2) enable the child to participate and make progress in the general education curriculum are documented on the IEP.	Tiered levels of instruction with increasing intensity of support are aligned with the general education curriculum and targeted skills. Intervention strategies to address the child's needs are developed by the program.

Turn for more! ▶

Location of services	The IEP team identifies the least restrictive environment (LRE) in which services will be provided. Services to address IEP goals may be provided in or outside of the early childhood classroom (e.g., services provided in a resource room or therapy room). Services may be provided in a variety of settings including public school-based programs, Head Start programs, and community child care.	MTSS may be implemented in a variety of settings, including public school-based programs, Head Start programs, and community child care settings.
Interventions, teaching practices	Scientifically based instructional practices are used to the extent possible	Recommended practice is to use scientifically based instructional practices to the extent possible.
Family involvement	Family concerns must be considered during assessment and when developing the IEP. Document the type and frequency of communication used to share progress with family.	Involve families as appropriate.
Progress-monitoring assessment/evaluation	The frequency of progress monitoring, progress-monitoring strategies, and evaluation criteria for IEP goals must be documented on the IEP.	Teams determine the frequency of and strategies for monitoring progress on targeted goals.
Personnel	Special educators, therapists, and other related service staff (e.g., occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech-language pathologist, behavior specialist), general educators (as appropriate depending on LRE), and families	Classroom teacher and family members. Recommended practice is to also include, as appropriate, special educators and related service staff.
Transition	For young children, programs follow specific procedures to facilitate the transition from early intervention to school-based special education services.	Programs may share information about the child's performance on universal screening measures and progress in tiered instruction when a child transitions to a new program.