

RtI Update

Reviewing or Selecting Interventions

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School psychologists have unique training and experiences to synthesize and apply research to practice. In addition, school psychologists can use their training to conduct program evaluation of existing practices or interventions. As districts continue to develop, implement, and deploy MTSS frameworks, continuous improvement should occur. Ideally, intervention outcomes are analyzed and data-based decisions are made to determine which interventions continue and which are discontinued. Sometimes, needs for new interventions will become apparent as teams find they lack interventions to target specific skills. Either way, school psychologists can become key players in the intervention selection process.

Deciding which interventions to investigate and eventually choose can lead to tense discussions. When schools need to review existing or select new interventions, the [Hexagon Tool](#) from the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) can be used by teams to evaluate interventions in six areas. Having multiple areas to evaluate leads to a more objective discussion and eventual choice. The six areas are (NIRN, 2013):

- **Needs of students;** how well the program or practice might meet identified needs.
- **Fit with current initiatives,** priorities, structures, and supports, and parent/community Values.
- **Resource Availability** for training, staffing, technology supports, curricula, data systems and administration.
- **Evidence** indicating the outcomes that might be expected if the program or practices are implemented well.
- **Readiness for Replication** of the program, including expert assistance available, number of replications accomplished, exemplars available for observation, and how well the program is operationalized
- **Capacity to Implement** as intended and to sustain and improve implementation over Time.

Having used the Hexagon for a few years, the following suggestion is offered. Prior to assembling a large group to review several interventions, have an individual or smaller group (no more than three people) narrow the number of interventions to thoroughly review. For transparency, a document could be provided with all interventions listed with strikethroughs through interventions did not make the first 'cut'. When evaluating interventions, the creators of the Hexagon recommend scoring on a 1-5 scale for each area. However, the preliminary team may want to avoid assigning scores and use obvious criteria to rule interventions in or out (e.g. ruled out due to no evidence or research, ruled in as the intervention is already used in the district).

When larger groups begin reviewing interventions, scoring the interventions in each area can be helpful. The authors caution that using cut scores based on total score may not be as helpful as intended. Each district may have a specific need that could be considered with more weight rather than an

equal rating in each. The overall process of reaching consensus through discussion regarding the specific attributes or weaknesses of intervention is the most important aspect of the Hexagon used in the selection process. The total score is secondary to the process and discussion.

Personally, I find myself drawn to the Evidence area when assessing intervention value. Although this can be viewed as a bias, I find that 'staying in my lane' gives me permission to dig into the evidence base of interventions. I can then unapologetically discuss the presence or absence of evidence to support or refute options. The 6 areas of the Hexagon help ensure a more objective means for others to bring up other areas and strengths. From personal experience, interventions with strong evidence usually, although not always, receive higher ratings in all areas due to careful design and evaluation.

Digging through research to find outcomes about potential interventions can be a time consuming and potentially confusing process. Now, several sites exist that have done the heavy lifting of intervention review for practitioners. These sites are disciplinary agnostic and can be useful when one needs to find evidence quickly and efficiently. The following sites are definitely worth a look:

Evidence for ESSA - <https://www.evidenceforessa.org/>

- Provided by the Center for Research and Reform in Education (CREE) at Johns Hopkins University
- Reading and Math Programs are reviewed by elementary and middle/high

National Center for Intensive Intervention - <https://intensiveintervention.org/>

- Provided by American Institutes for Research
- Academic and Behavior Tools and Interventions are rated

What Works Clearinghouse - <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

- Provided by Institute for Educational Sciences: National Center for Education and Regional Assistance
- Intervention Reports and Practice Guides (Practice Guides could be another article topic, check these out if you have not.)

Arriving at agreement or consensus in the selection of interventions can be a challenge. Having a clear process to assess multiple interventions can lead to more objective and defensible decisions. The Hexagon is a tool that can be integrated into a process to help teams engage in objective and balanced decision making. Additionally, there are now high-quality, online resources to help schools and districts obtain information to make solid, evidence-based decisions. School psychologists can be influencers in their districts to help select the highest quality interventions or tools to maximize outcomes for students.

Reference:

Blase, K., Kiser, L. and Van Dyke, M. (2013). *The Hexagon Tool: Exploring Context*. Chapel Hill, NC: National Implementation Research Network, FPG Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.