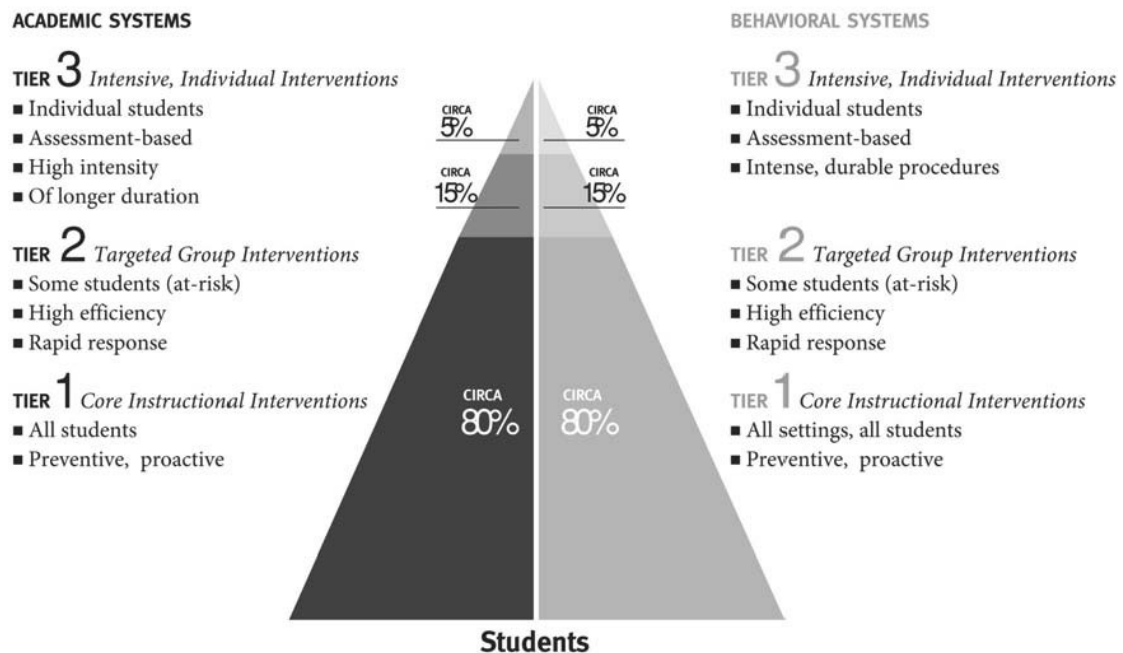


## Response to Intervention

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Although the logic that the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework is based upon may be familiar to school personnel who have implemented high quality school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS; Sugai & Horner, 2002), efforts it is now becoming familiar to school support staff who are responsible for identifying students with a specific learning disability; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) permits school districts to “use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures,” in lieu of establishing a discrepancy between ability and achievement, to identify students with learning difficulties (PL 108-446 § 614[b][6][A]; § 614[b][2 & 3]). Response to Intervention is defined as the practice of providing effective instruction and interventions that match students’ needs, monitoring progress regularly to inform decision-making about changes in instruction or goals, and using child response data to guide these decisions (Batsche et al., 2005). Response to intervention approaches, including SWPBS, can provide a decision-making framework for identifying students who need more intensive levels of academic or behavioral support.

**Figure 1: Multi-tiered Model of Support**



Response to Intervention is associated with the three-tiered prevention model (Walker & Shinn, 2002) that addresses primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention (see Figure 1). The bottom tier, primary prevention, involves the application of **universal interventions**, meaning that they

apply to all students and are used by all adults in the school setting. The focus of primary prevention is on efforts to prevent initial occurrences behavioral or academic failure. The second tier in the model, secondary prevention, involves the use of **targeted interventions** that prevent re-occurrences of behavioral or academic failure. These strategies should be efficient to apply, and result in rapid improvement in students' behavior or academic performance.

The three-tiered model suggests when more intensive interventions should be considered for individual students, based on their response (or lack thereof) to interventions at prior levels of prevention. Figure 2 depicts the RtI process for making decisions about which students should receive interventions at each level. Serving students through primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of behavioral and academic support will lead to the identification of some whose needs dictate that increasingly more individualized and powerful services be provided so that they can benefit from their school experience. The RtI approach is designed to help schools identify students who fail to respond to interventions at each level. As shown in Figure 2, when universal strategies are in place and are effective, approximately 80% of students will be successful. However, another 20% can be expected to need greater levels of support to be successful. Targeted strategies, if properly implemented, will allow many of these students (perhaps another 15%) to be successful. Yet, even with primary and secondary prevention supports in place, as many as 5% of students will demonstrate a need for intensive individual intervention, the highest level of support. By monitoring the success of all students, school personnel can make data-based decisions regarding which students require more intensive levels of intervention.

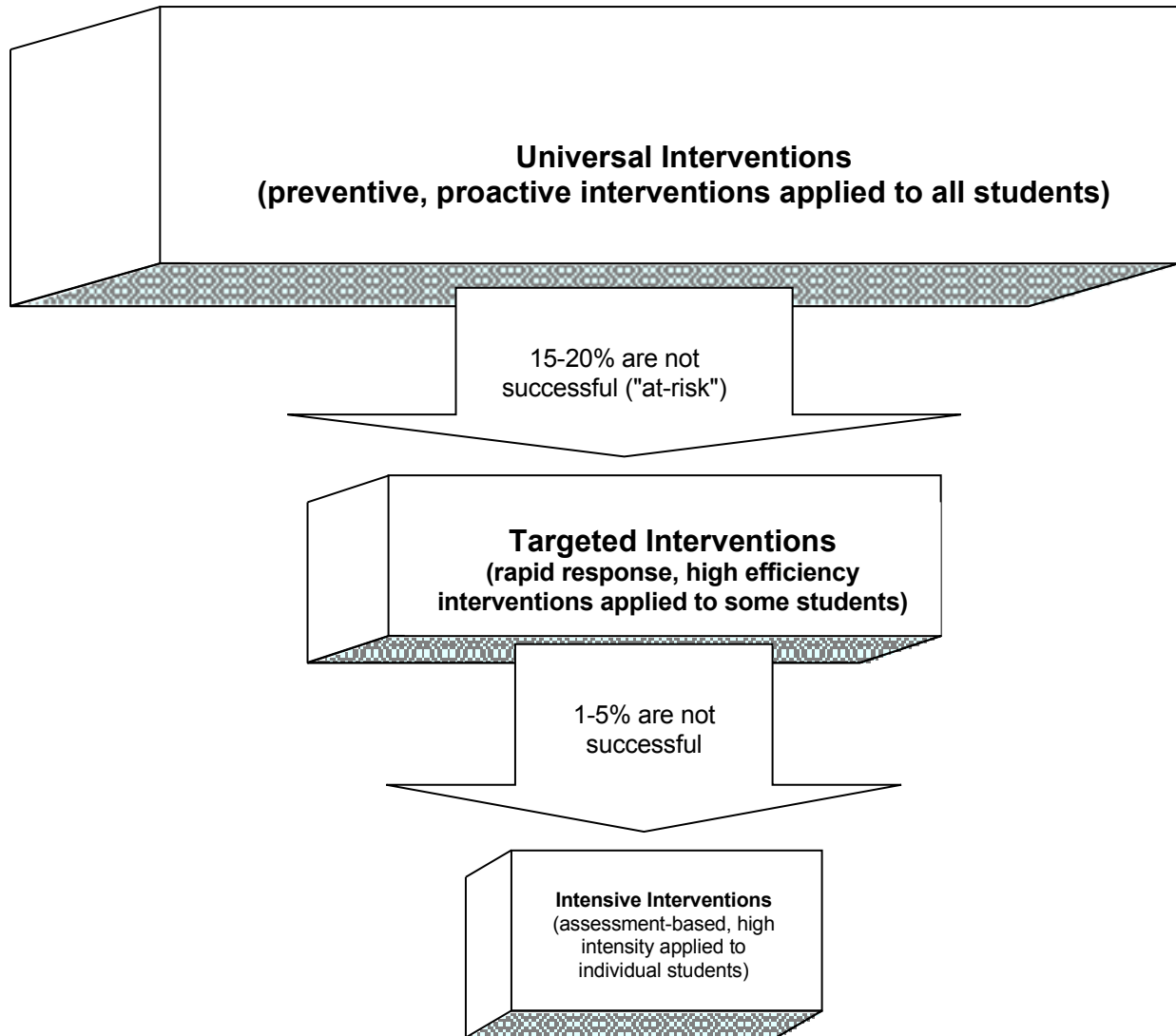
#### *The Role of School Social Workers in Implementing Response to Intervention Approaches*

At the primary prevention level, school social workers can provide indirect services to children by facilitating a systems change process to alter the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of adults (i.e., school faculty and staff). This may be done by facilitating the creation of a vision for the school based on an RtI approach. Since school social workers are far more likely to contribute to the behavioral side of the triangle, adopting SWPBS as a framework is recommended. Support service personnel also analyze and present data to support decision-making within the school. School social workers must be skilled in group facilitation, building consensus, collaborating and mediating, and analyzing and presenting data useful for decision-making to assist schools to adopt an RtI framework. They also should be familiar with evidence-based primary prevention practices.

At the secondary prevention level, school social workers still primarily offer indirect supports to students through facilitating the capacity of regular education teachers to effectively work with pupils for whom universal behavioral supports alone are not adequate. One of the main services these personnel can provide at this level is consultation to the regular education teachers who serve on school teams (e.g., student assistance teams or student support teams) that typically make decisions regarding which children receive targeted behavioral interventions. Consultation can be provided in team meetings, and involve problem-solving and ensuring that referred students have received high quality universal supports (and that these have not been effective) before targeted interventions are provided. School social workers can also support SAT/SST leaders by helping them identify the training needs of team members, and even establish a training program to address these needs. School social workers also can advocate the reallocation of staff time and resources to improve and sustain effective behavioral supports by school and district administrators. Once regular education teachers implement targeted intervention strategies recommended by the SAT or SST, school social workers can provide encouragement and be available for problem-solving when needed. Another role for school social workers is to engage

families, as the school's ability to establish strong working relationships and develop trust with families at this juncture is critical. Additionally, with students for whom targeted interventions are insufficient, this collaboration may mark the informal beginning of the special education identification process. Finally, the school social worker can help the SAT/SST use data to determine when, and with whom, tertiary level supports are needed. The skills needed by school social workers at this level are very similar to those at the primary prevention level.

**Figure 2. Response to Intervention in a Positive Behavior Support Framework as a Basis for Making Intervention Decisions**



Many of the roles that school social workers can assume to facilitate the implementation of an RtI approach at the tertiary intervention level are similar to those at the primary and secondary levels. For example, school social workers must be able to identify and engage participants in a collaborative, participatory process that values buy-in and motivation. Additionally, school social workers can manage the data that will identify appropriate candidates for this level of support and that may be used to determine whether tertiary interventions are producing the desired result.

Again, as at the primary and secondary levels, support personnel may assist administrators to determine and address training needs; suggest reallocation of staff, time, or resources; and consider other systems changes that will improve and sustain the supports being implemented at the tertiary level (Heineman, Dunlap, & Kincaid, 2005).

The school social worker also may be the most appropriate school staff person to provide direct services to students at the tertiary level. Although the provider may work directly with students at the secondary level (e.g., providing social skills instruction to a small group), at this level he or she may work with students individually (e.g., teaching replacement behaviors), particularly in early stages of intervention when these skills may be most effectively introduced outside the classroom.

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