

Executive Brief

Tier 0 MTSS

The upstream layer districts need before intervention becomes the default response

Core idea

Tier 0 is the proactive, universal readiness layer that strengthens the conditions for learning before students require formal intervention. It does not replace Tier 1 instruction; it prepares more children to benefit from Tier 1 the first time they receive it.

What Tier 0 Means in MTSS

Most MTSS models begin with Tier 1: high-quality core instruction delivered to all students. Tier 0 asks an earlier leadership question: what must be true before students arrive for core instruction so fewer children begin school already behind? In literacy, that means building language, vocabulary, background knowledge, oral interaction, print awareness, early writing, family capacity, and school readiness long before gaps show up in benchmark data.

Tier 0 is best understood as a system of prevention. It reaches children and families earlier, equips adults with simple ways to support learning, connects early childhood and K-3 priorities, and gives leaders visibility into participation and growth before the district is forced into more expensive remediation.

Why It Matters Now

Districts are investing heavily in intervention, tutoring, and remediation, yet many reading gaps begin before kindergarten entry. When early language and literacy foundations are uneven, schools inherit needs that are already several years in motion. A strong Tier 0 strategy helps districts move upstream by reducing the number of children who enter Tier 1 needing immediate catch-up support.

- **For students:** more consistent exposure to language, stories, vocabulary, foundational concepts, and joyful practice.
- **For families:** clear, accessible ways to support learning at home without needing to become literacy experts.
- **For teachers:** classrooms with more children ready to engage in routines, instruction, and early literacy practice.
- **For leaders:** a connected readiness strategy that can be monitored before downstream pressure grows.

The Leadership Shift

Tier 0 reframes MTSS from a response system to a readiness system. Instead of asking only, Who needs intervention? leaders also ask, What early conditions can we strengthen so fewer students require intervention later? That shift is especially important for birth-through-8 literacy strategies, because grade-level reading, content learning, and later real-world literacy depend on foundations built over time.

What Tier 0 Looks Like in Practice

Tier 0 Move	What It Strengthens	Leadership Signal
Reach families before kindergarten	Language, vocabulary, oral interaction, early routines	Readiness begins before formal enrollment
Connect early learning to K-3 literacy	Print awareness, phonological awareness, comprehension, writing	Prevention and instruction work together
Make practice simple and joyful	Repeated reading, songs, stories, games, confidence	Engagement is part of the strategy
Monitor participation and growth	Usage, skill exposure, classroom and home activity	Leaders can see momentum early

What District Leaders Can Do Now

- **Name Tier 0 as part of the MTSS strategy.** Make prevention visible in the same way intervention is visible.
- **Define readiness indicators.** Track access, engagement, family participation, early skill development, and transition points into kindergarten and K-3.
- **Align early childhood, family engagement, and K-3 literacy.** Treat them as one connected readiness infrastructure, not separate initiatives.
- **Use technology to extend reach.** Give families and educators high-quality, bilingual, developmentally appropriate tools that can travel between home, school, and community settings.
- **Review Tier 0 data alongside MTSS data.** Look for patterns early enough to adjust outreach, practice, and support before gaps harden.

How Footsteps2Brilliance Supports Tier 0

Footsteps2Brilliance helps districts build the upstream layer of MTSS by connecting early literacy, family engagement, classroom practice, multilingual access, and real-time reporting in one coherent system. From Little Bees and pre-reader experiences through foundational literacy and financial literacy, the platform supports a birth-through-8 continuum that helps children build the language, confidence, and literacy habits they need to keep growing.

Bottom line

Tier 0 gives districts a practical way to stop treating readiness as an aspiration and start managing it as a system. The earlier the system supports children and families, the lighter the downstream intervention burden can become.