

EARLY LITERACY: CARLSBAD MUNICIPAL SCHOOLS RETENTION POLICIES

AGENCY: Carlsbad Municipal Schools (CMS)

DATE: August 19, 2016

PURPOSE OF HEARING:
Review of Carlsbad Municipal School's retention policies.

WITNESS: Gary Perkowski, Superintendent, CMS, and Kim Arrington, Director of Elementary Education, CMS

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EXPECTED OUTCOME:
Identifying strategies to improve policy for promotion and retention practices as it relates to a K-3 quality system.

Response to Intervention Three-Tier System

- Tier-one is high-quality, core instruction and targeted-based interventions for ALL students;
- Tier-two is supplemental, strategic and individualized support for struggling readers; and
- Tier-three is Special Education-related services provided for students identified with disabilities under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and state criteria for gifted students.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The first eight years of children's learning experiences – from birth through third grade – develop a foundation for a student's cognitive, social, and emotional skills that is critical for learning in future grades. Children from poverty and children with culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds often start school lagging behind their more affluent peers who are proficient in English; studies show children from poverty come to kindergarten with a limited vocabulary base making it difficult to catch up. In New Mexico, 33 percent of children birth through 5 years-old live in poverty and 22 percent of children and youth are children of immigrants. To ensure our investments in early learning are successful, we need to guarantee our kindergarten through third grade system is effective.

Identifying students who need intervention earlier in primary grades, as well as implementing effective interventions, will create a pathway for academic success. It is imperative that New Mexico has a comprehensive early literacy strategy in place to ensure students who enter kindergarten have the basic social, literacy, and numeracy skills needed for future academic success, and that New Mexico closes the achievement gap by third grade.

As part of the executive's early reading initiative, legislation mandating the retention of third graders who do not read on grade level has been a priority for the past six years. However, this has been a contentious debate that has failed to gather bipartisan support. Much of the criticism is around the use of a single test score to make retention decisions. Carlsbad Municipal Schools (CMS) has implemented a system that identifies students for retention based on multiple data points after appropriate interventions have been provided.

This brief provides information on current instructional practices targeted to ensure third grade students are able to read, including CMS's retention policy and national information on other state's retention policies.

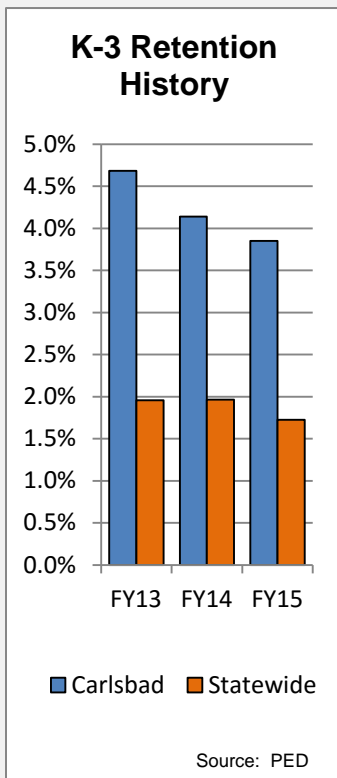
Current Retention Practices. Children with weak literacy skills face potentially damaging short- and long-term consequences; among them, repeating a grade or dropping out of school. Third grade is considered a critical point in a student's academic success because that is when students shift from "learning to read" to "reading to learn."

New Mexico's statutory retention policy is based on teacher and principal recommendation for students in first through seventh grade. Even though New Mexico's retention policy does not specifically focus on kindergarten through third grade, its provisions include alignment with school-district-determined assessment results and an academic improvement plan designed by a student assistant team (SAT) consisting of the student's teacher, school counselor,

Percent of Students Retained by Grade

FY13		
Grade	Carlsbad	State
1	8%	3%
2	4%	2%
3	2%	1%
1-3	5%	2%
FY 14		
Grade	Carlsbad	State
1	6%	3%
2	4%	2%
3	2%	1%
1-3	4%	2%
FY15		
Grade	Carlsbad	State
1	5%	3%
2	5%	2%
3	1%	1%
1-3	4%	2%

Source: PED



Source: PED

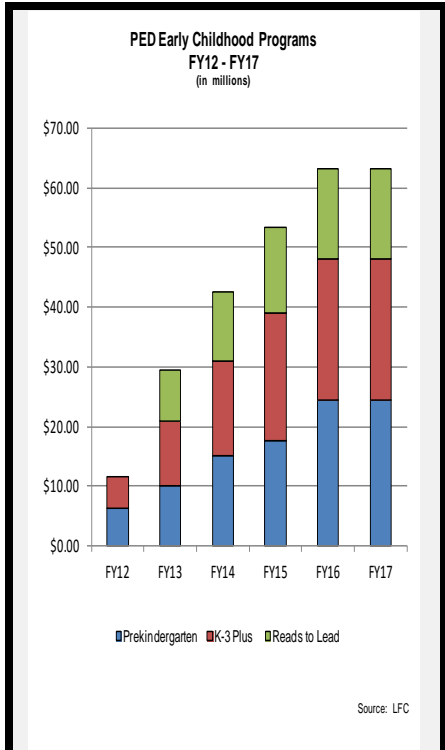
school administrator, and parent. The SAT is responsible for addressing the needs of students referred for tier-two level support that systematically reviews and discusses all relevant data pertaining to a student’s academic progress. The SAT is part of the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework, a student intervention system that all districts and schools shall follow through administrative rule. The RtI framework is a three-tier model of student interventions for students who demonstrate a need for educational support for learning or behavior (see **Attachment 1, NMPED RtI Three-Tier Model**).

Public Education Department (PED) Promotion and Retention Practices Guide. In a promotion practices guidance document dated May 2016, PED requires school districts to collect the following 2015-2016 promotion and retention data for first through third grade (see **Attachment 2, Promotion Practices Guidance Document**): number of students not proficient in reading; number of SAT meetings convened for non-proficient students; number of retention letters sent to parents; number of waivers signed by parents; and number of non-proficient students promoted to the next grade. At a June 2016 LESC meeting, it was noted these data will better inform promotion and retention decisions made in New Mexico.

Statewide Retention History. Between FY13 and FY15, New Mexico has retained 4,472 students in first through third grade with first grade having the highest retention rate of 3 percent. Data shows more students are retained in the earlier grades. Kindergarten retention rates are not yet available (see **Attachment 3, Statewide and Carlsbad Municipal School Retention Rates FY07-FY15**).

Carlsbad Municipal Schools’ Retention Policy. Carlsbad Municipal Schools (CMS) implemented a triangular data approach in the 2014-2015 school year to drive intervention, retention, and promotion decisions for students in kindergarten through third grade. The triangular data set utilizes the RtI framework together with: classroom grades in reading, language arts, and math; data from a state-approved reading interim assessment, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS Next); and Renaissance Learning STAR short-cycle assessment for early literature and math to measure proficiency.

Student Progress. Monitoring student progress on the aforementioned data sets is monitored regularly to ensure student progress. CMS assigns a value to certain marks achieved by each student on the data set, referred to as data points. The data set is based on points earned for each area measured. If the student meets four out of seven data points the student is indicated to be academically on track and will advance to the next grade level. If a student only meets three of the data points, the student is considered “at risk” and will be closely monitored. However, if a student only meets two of the data points, the student is referred to the SAT for tier-two targeted interventions. After nine weeks of targeted instruction, the SAT reconvenes to determine if the student met his academic goal or not. If the student meets their goal the student



New K-3 Interim Assessment

- Istation is a required assessment for all students in kindergarten through third grade to monitor student achievement and for purposes of the teacher evaluation system.

State statute defines “academic proficiency” as:

- Mastery of the subject-matter, knowledge, and skills specified in state academic content and performance standards for a student’s grade level.

moves back to tier-one instruction with continued progress monitoring. If the student does not achieve their goal but growth is evident, the student will continue with tier-two interventions. If the goal was not met and no growth was evident, a new goal is determined and the student receives an additional nine weeks of tier-two level interventions. At the end of the year, the SAT discusses the student’s progress and further analyzes the triangular data set to determine if the interventions were successful or if the student will be recommended for retention or tier-three interventions if a special education evaluation indicates a learning disability.

Carlsbad Retention. CMS retained an average of 8 percent of kindergarten students between FY13 and FY15 compared with first graders who were retained an average of 5 percent. For each year, retention rates declined consistently between kindergarten and third grade. CMS retention rates are higher than the state average by 2 percentage points but a decline in retention rates from first to third grade shows a similar trend compared with the state. It is unclear what effect the use of multiple data points will have on future retention rates for CMS.

Targeted Programs. New Mexico has made significant investments in early childhood learning, including: childcare assistance, home visiting, prekindergarten, K-3 Plus – an extended school-year program – Reads to Lead, and FIT. Since FY12, the Legislature increased spending on early childhood programs by more than \$100 million. New Mexico continues to rank low nationally on child well-being and a continued effort to support and improve early childhood learning programs is crucial to ensuring students have early literacy skills.

New Mexico is improving with regard to prekindergarten enrollment, spending, and quality for early childhood learning, as the state ranks 18th nationally according to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), an independent, research-based organization that offers technical assistance to policymakers and educators on early learning. While New Mexico is making great strides in improving early childhood learning, there is more work to be done, especially with transitioning students from early learning programs to kindergarten.

School Readiness. While there is not a definition for school readiness in state statute, PED has defined it as “the degree to which a child is prepared with the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that are linked to success in school.” State investments in quality prekindergarten are developed with the charge to prepare students with the basic skills needed to be ready for kindergarten success. Studies have found that quality prekindergarten has a significant impact on math and reading proficiency for low income 4-year-olds. Yet, little is known about school readiness for students entering kindergarten, and student reading proficiency data collection in first and second grade is a recent development. Additionally, if a child attends a high-quality prekindergarten and then enters a low-quality

Reads to Lead

- FY14 to FY15, almost all 89 districts participated; and
- FY17, PED reverted back to a competitive grant only serving 36 school districts and 18 charter schools.

K-3 Plus Program

- 2003: K-3 Plus program originally began as the Kindergarten Plus pilot project;
- 2006: the program was enacted to serve more school districts with high-poverty schools, defined as having 85 percent or more of the students eligible for free or reduced-free lunch;
- 2012: K-3 Plus program became permanent; and
- 2016: K-5 Plus Pilot program enacted.

PED Performance Measure for FY16, 2nd Quarter: change in percent of students on early reading benchmark at the beginning of the year to end of year in kindergarten through third grade:

- An average of 63 percent of kindergarten through third grade students scored at or above benchmark at the middle of the year on DIBELS; 9 percent increase from baseline of 54 percent; and
- 61 percent third grade students scored at or above benchmark.

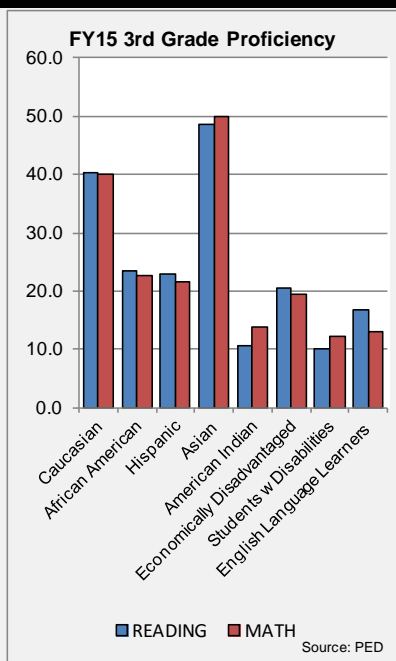
kindergarten through third grade program, they are at risk of losing the gains made in prekindergarten.

Assessments. Beginning with the 2016-2017 school year, a kindergarten readiness assessment, referred to as the Kindergarten Observation Tool (KOT) will be provided by PED for all kindergarten students statewide. The KOT is aligned to New Mexico’s Early Learning Guidelines (ELG) and used as the foundation for the assessment. The KOT assesses six development domains through observation: physical development, health, and well-being; literacy and numeracy; scientific conceptual understanding; self, family and community; and approaches to learning. Students in kindergarten through second grade will be assessed three times annually using a statewide interim assessment, Istation, which assesses growth in: listening and language; phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension; and fluency. Istation replaces the former interim assessment DIBELS Next.

According to PED, the KOT will provide information for teachers about each individual student’s kindergarten readiness, and Istation will provide reliable data with frequent, age-appropriate assessment for students in kindergarten through third grade. Like DIBELS, Istation includes benchmarking three times a year and monthly progress monitoring tools between benchmark windows for students at risk of not reading on grade-level by the end of the school year.

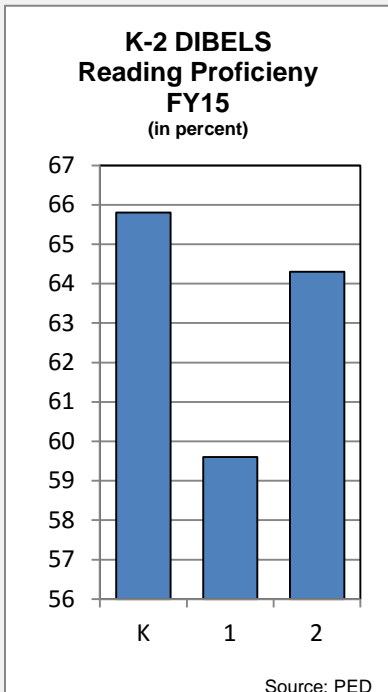
Intervention Programs for Kindergarten Through Third Grade. New Mexico’s early literacy programs, K-3 Plus and Reads to Lead are interdependent. These programs are both designed as early literacy intervention programs targeted for the most vulnerable students of New Mexico. The two programs help support early literacy through embedding: standards and assessment data driven instruction; RtI with a strong emphasis in tier-one core instruction for all students; professional development in literacy best practices, including Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP); and support with reading coaches and interventionists.

Some school districts leveraged general and federal Title I funding to expand both programs to reach all students. In the summer of 2014, Deming Public Schools (DPS) extended its K-3 Plus program to fourth and fifth grades beginning with Columbus Elementary, and DPS expanded the program to all elementary students in the summer of 2015. Legislation was passed in 2016 to pilot a K-5 Plus program. School districts like Belen Consolidated Schools and Albuquerque Public Schools maximized their economies of scale to create a larger impact on school tier-one instruction using reading coaches, interventionists, and professional development through Reads to Lead; however funding has not been allocated to fourth or fifth grade K-3 Plus programs in FY17. Both programs have been evaluated and shown to positively impact student achievement when implemented with fidelity.



New Mexico Public Education Department (PED), PARCC Performance Level Indicators:

- L1: did not meet expectations;
- L2: partially met expectations;
- L3: approached expectations;
- L4: met expectations; and
- L5: exceeded expectations.



Kindergarten Through Third Grade Proficiency. Prekindergarten, K-3 Plus and Reads to Lead have provided support for students who are at-risk, as well as provide professional development for teachers through support from reading coaches using research-based best practices to improve student academic outcomes. All of these programs aim to close the achievement gap by third grade. However, New Mexico FY15 Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment results show that only 24.9 percent of the 24 thousand third graders who took the assessment achieved proficiency in reading and 25 percent in math.

2014-2015 PARCC RESULTS					
Performance Level Distribution Grade 3					
Level Indicators	L-1	L-2	L-3	L-4	L-5
READING	27.5	24	23.6	23.6	1.3
MATH	17.7	28.3	28.8	22.6	2.6

Source: PED

When looking at 2014-2015 kindergarten through second grade proficiency rates, it appears there is disconnect between PARCC data and DIBELS Next data. Proficiency rates for kindergarten through second grade show that 65.8 percent of students are proficient in reading and 61 percent third grade students scored at or above benchmark in reading compared to 24.9 percent third graders scoring proficient on PARCC. It is unclear if Istation is better aligned to PARCC. According to PED, because the Istation is web-based, an entire class can take the assessment in approximately 30 to 40 minutes unlike DIBELS Next, which was administered individually. The department anticipates an overall reduction in the amount of time dedicated to testing.

National Retention Policies. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and the Education Commission of the States (ECS) released a database and report comparing kindergarten through third grade quality in the U.S. Fifty-state comparisons have been conducted around multiple indicators, including third grade retention policies. Third grade retention is required with good cause exemptions in 17 states and is required without good cause exemptions in one – Georgia. Retention is an option or determined to be a local decision in nine states and retention is not required in 12 states. The report also examined parental input requirements for states with third grade retention; 21 states require parental input and/or notification.

Over the past few years, many states emphasized third grade retention as a consequence for not meeting proficiency in reading by the end the school year. This has resulted in legislative mandates focused on literacy and high-stakes assessment practices. As state and local policies require retention for students in kindergarten

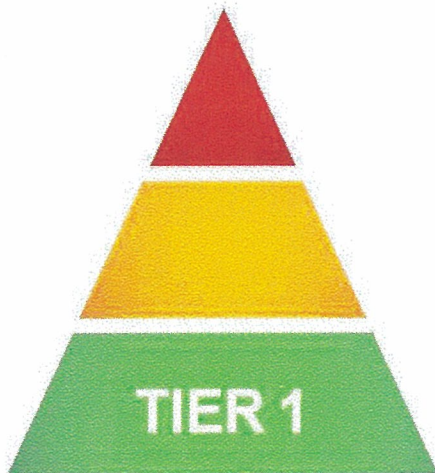
Education Commission of the States: 50-State Comparison of Kindergarten through Third Grade Quality – Key Takeaways

- 18 states plus D.C. provide guidance for the prekindergarten to kindergarten transition process, including written transition plans, family engagement, teacher/provider meetings and assessment data linkages;
- 21 states plus D.C. require some level of parental involvement in the promotion/retention process; and
- 36 states plus D.C. emphasize social-emotional learning in kindergarten through third grade in statute, rules, or regulations. Usually, social-emotional learning is emphasized in kindergarten entrance assessments, school readiness definitions, and/or teacher training requirements.

through third grade, questions have been raised regarding the research to support the pros and the cons of retention resulting in difficulty achieving consensus. However, what seems to be the common thread among states is early interventions and a strong core instructional component for students in prekindergarten through third grade.

While nationally the focus seems to be on test-based retention, many states have also implemented early literacy initiatives that include statewide reading plans emphasizing identification and prompt strategic interventions for students reading below grade level. For example, even though Florida's policy requires retention if a student scores below a level 2 on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT), provisions also require targeted instructional support in reading for kindergarten through third grade. Iowa does require third grade retention but also provides for conditional promotion with progress monitoring and intensive interventions for primary grades. These conditions include district selected assessments approved by the Iowa Department of Education, and other measures such as other subject areas and overall intellectual, physical, emotional, and social development are considered. Iowa also requires parental involvement in the promotion and retention decision process (see **Attachment 4, K-3 Quality: Nationwide Policies on Retention and Promotion**). Both states provide good cause exemptions.

TIER 1: FOR ALL STUDENTS
Appropriate Core Instruction with Differentiation and Interventions



**New Mexico
Response to
Intervention
Framework**

Universal Screening

- General health and well-being
- English language*/home language proficiency**
- Academic proficiency using multiple measures

Core Instruction with Differentiation and Interventions As Identified by Data

- Core instruction for all students
- High-yield, instructional strategies
- Differentiated instruction
- Enrichment activities
- Culturally and linguistically responsive instruction
- Interventions as identified by data

School-Wide Behavioral System with Interventions and Positive Support

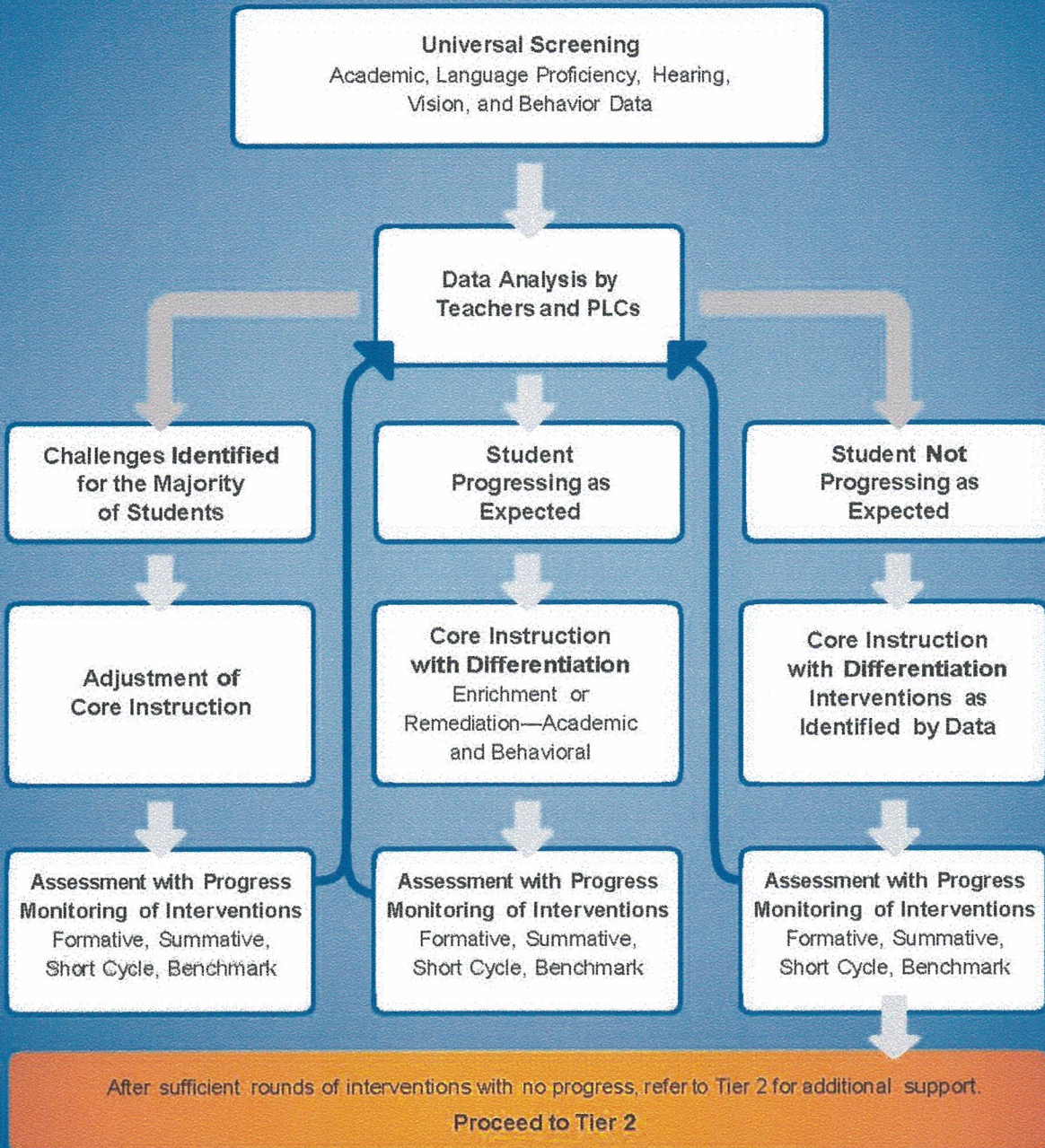
- School code of conduct
- Classroom rules
- School-wide behavioral programs
- Character/social skills programs
- Bullying prevention policy/programs
- Monitoring of office discipline referrals (ODRS) and attendance data
- School wellness policy

* Potential ELs (students whose primary language is other than English or PHLOTE as identified on the Home Language Survey) must be screened for English language proficiency. All identified ELs must then be assessed annually on the ACCESS for ELLs.

** All students participating in a state-funded bilingual multicultural education program, including ELs, must be assessed annually for the home/heritage language using a PED-approved assessment of the bilingual program.

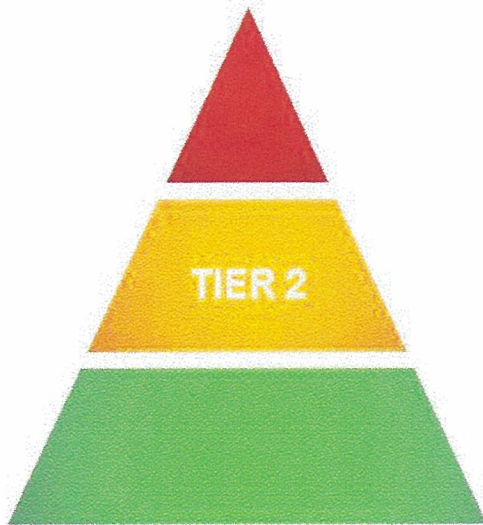
TIER 1: FOR ALL STUDENTS

Appropriate Core Instruction with Differentiation and Interventions



TIER 2: REFERRED STUDENTS

The Student Assistance Team Process



**New Mexico
Response to
Intervention
Framework**

Student Data Gathered and Analyzed

- Conducted by the SAT

SAT Intervention Plan

- Individualized, written plans
- Targeted, intensive interventions

Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP)

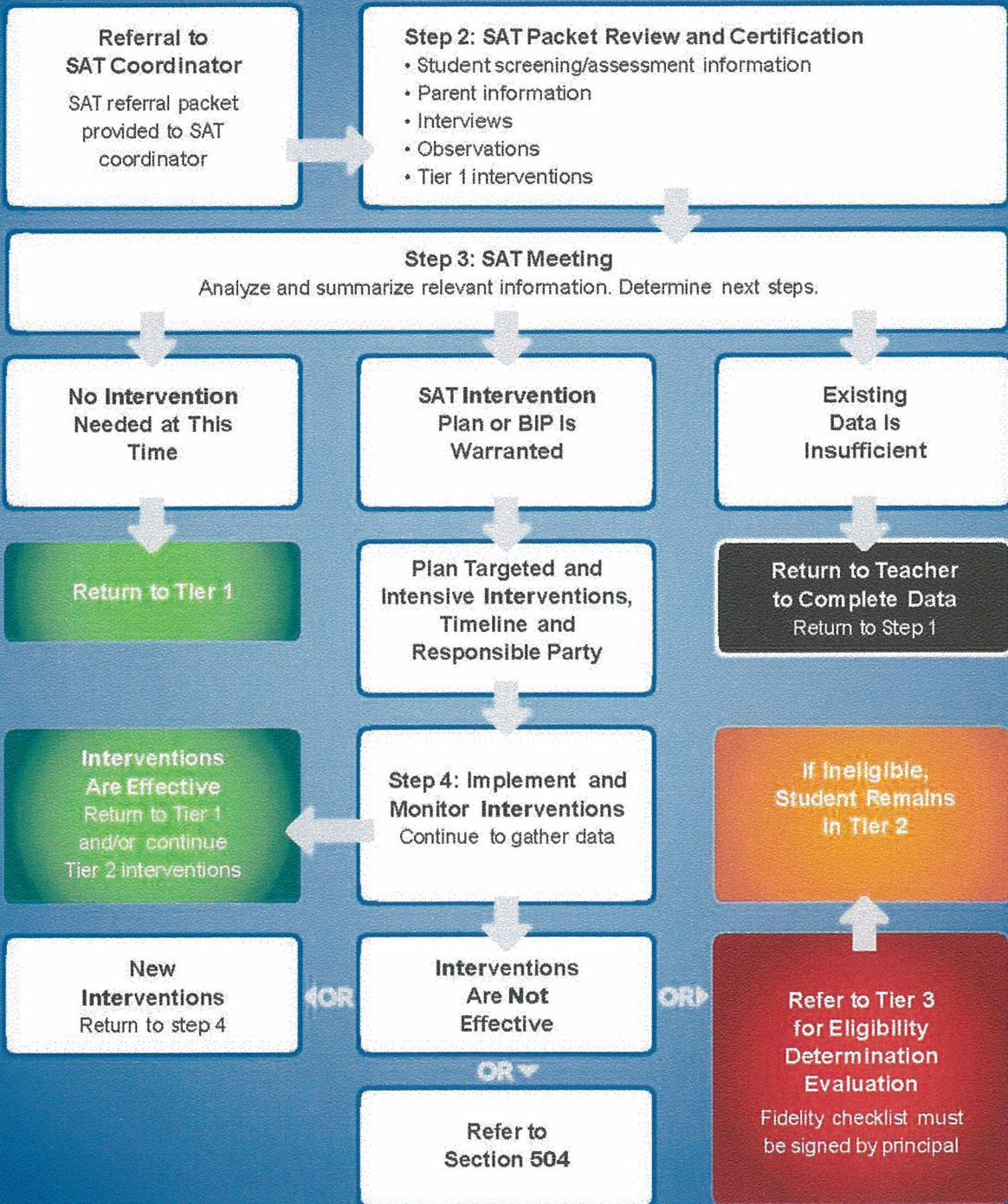
- Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) conducted for diagnosis of behaviors
- Targeted, intensive, behavioral interventions

504 Accommodation Plan

- Aligned to the Section 504 Manual

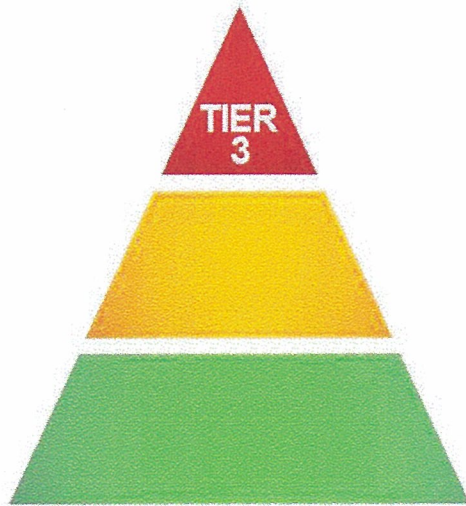
TIER 2: REFERRED STUDENTS

The Student Assistance Team Process



TIER 3: IDENTIFIED STUDENTS

Special Education and Gifted Students



Eligibility Determination Evaluation Process

- Formal assessment and initial evaluation
- Eligibility determination

**New Mexico
Response to
Intervention
Framework**

Individualized Education Program

- Specially-designed instruction
- Related services
- Special education
- Gifted education
- FBA/BIP if warranted

TIER 3: IDENTIFIED STUDENTS

Special Education and Gifted Students

Special Education Reviews SAT Referral

If packet is incomplete, return to SAT coordinator

Obtain Parental Consent Aligned to The New Mexico Technical Evaluation Manual

Formal Assessment and Initial Evaluation

Eligibility Determination

Student is Ineligible, Refer Back to Tier 2
Gifted students remain in Tier 3 unless they are requested by a parent to exit Tier 3 services

Student is Eligible

Develop and Implement Individualized Education Program Aligned to The New Mexico Developing Quality IEPs Manual

If, and when, a student is no longer eligible for special education or related services, refer back to Tier 2.*
See the New Mexico Technical Evaluation Manual

* Gifted students remain in Tier 3 unless they are requested by a parent to exit Tier 3 services