

Tiered System of Supports: Referral Phase



What Is It and Why Is It Important?

The Referral Phase goes hand in hand with the [Identification Phase](#) because there are some tasks that are continued from the Identification Phase. For example, the teacher continues to collect and analyze information to develop a deeper understanding of student needs. This process supports the teacher in ensuring the student receives timely and appropriate support. This example primarily focuses on the actions of the teacher and is one component of the Referral Phase.

The second component of this phase is the process for receiving referrals. Planning for and implementation of both submission and receipt of student referrals are important because they play a role in the quality of support a student receives. The action taken in the Identification and Referral Phases together set the stage for choices around the type of support, developmental appropriateness, and timeliness of that support for students. As noted in previous phases of building a Tiered System of Supports, the stakeholders, along with the systems and processes in schools, can inadvertently reinforce the very inequities and barriers that have historically disadvantaged students of color. The more time and attention that is paid to how students are identified, what type of data is collected about them, from where that data is collected, and what decisions are made about how to best support them, the better the likelihood of positive outcomes.

What Things Should I Consider?

Let's take a look at some questions to consider when setting up, refining, or working within the Referral Phase of your Tiered System of Supports:

1. What structure or process will be used to access additional support for a student?
 - Where do staff or caregivers who want to make a referral access the referral form?
 - Is the referral form a hard copy, a fillable form, or completed online?
 - What does the referring individual do with the completed referral form?
 - Is supporting data submitted with the referral or brought to the meeting?
 - Who is responsible for receiving Tier 2 referrals? Tier 3 referrals?
 - How will the referring individual be notified about the meeting?
2. Who is responsible for managing and supporting the referral process?
3. What type of data will need to be collected and shared to best support the student being referred?

- Do the data points represent a holistic picture of the student and their need(s)?
- Will the same data be required for Tier 2 and 3?
- Is there data that requires the presence of a stakeholder not in the school? If so, how will that data be collected?

4. What is the process or procedure for communicating or sharing that data?

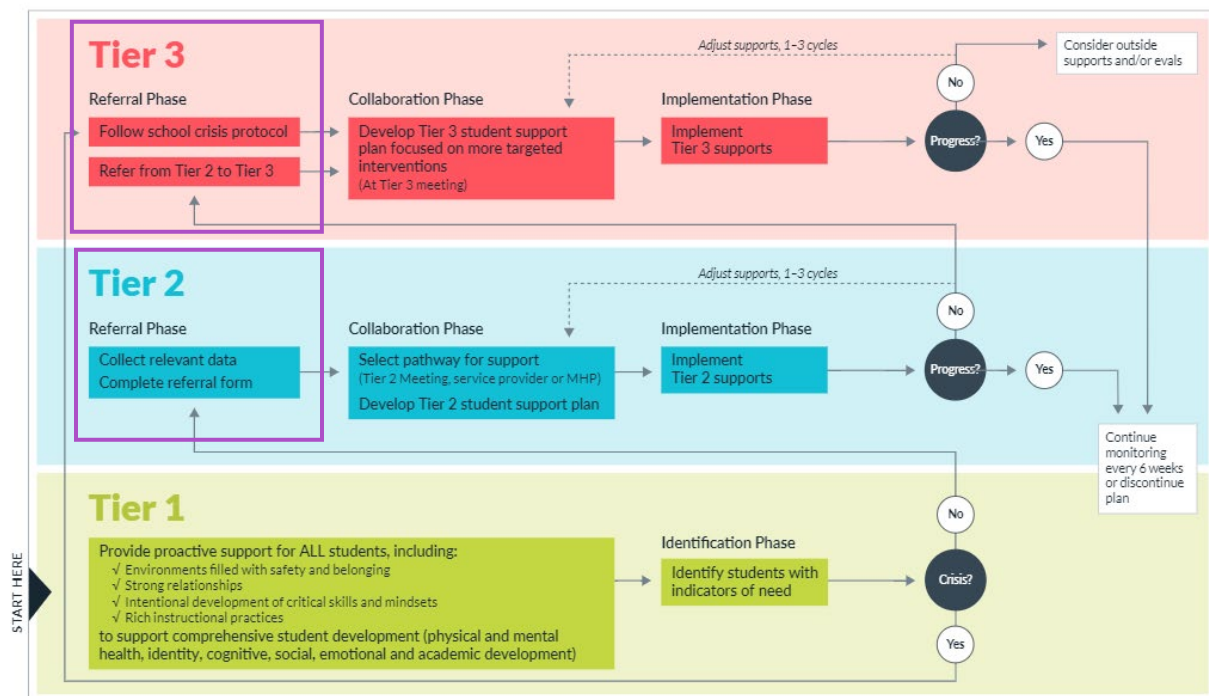
- Is the data submitted with the referral form or is it brought to the meeting?
- Should the referring individual bring one copy or multiple copies of the data to the meeting?

5. How will information be communicated back to the referring person about next steps after the referral is brought to the attention of the stakeholder(s) receiving the referral?

The questions above are intended to serve as a starting place to develop your school's process for providing additional support to students. Each school will have varying processes given their available time and staff resources.

Considerations for both Tier 2 and Tier 3

Tiered Supports



As you can see from our visual above, there is a Referral Phase in both Tier 2 and Tier 3. Therefore, the referral guideline questions should be considered for both levels of support.

As a reminder, our approach to Tiered Systems of Support defines Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports as follows:

- Tier 2 provides selective supports for individuals or groups of students with some additional learning and development needs.
- Tier 3 provides intensive supports for individual students with more significant needs, or whose needs are not being sufficiently met by Tier 2 supports.

[Click here to read more about the differences between Tier 2 and Tier 3.](#)

In cases where the support is being accessed from an external resource (mental health agency, community program, etc.), it is ideal to follow their existing process or collaborate on a process tailored to the needs of the agency and the schools' capacity (see p. 2 of [Partnering with a Mental Health Agency](#) for more information).

What Should Educators Be Doing?

There are several steps that educators should take during the Referral Phase. As noted earlier, some of these steps are a continuation of activities that began in the Identification Phase:

- The teacher collects and documents quantitative and qualitative data from observations, interactions with caregivers, formative and summative assessments, discussion with other staff, etc.
- The teacher reflects on the data and continues to reflect on their practice and relationship with the student.
- The teacher uses this data to determine severity of concern.

The teacher completes and submits the referral data (as determined by relevant school staff members responsible for designing the process) to the predetermined support pathway.

What Are the Referral Pathways for Tier 2 or Tier 3 Supports?

There are primarily two pathways in the Referral Phase, based on the [Identification Phase: Indicators of Need tool](#):

- Referral for Tier 2 supports (Tier 2 meeting or internal consult with service provider or mental health provider)
- Direct referral for Tier 3 supports (otherwise known as a crisis referral)

A third referral pathway is a referral from Tier 2 to Tier 3; this occurs when the Tier 2 supports are not meeting the needs of the student after several cycles of implementation. We will discuss this pathway in the Tier 2 Implementation Phase.

To determine which pathway is best suited to supporting students, The *Indicators of Need* tool is leveraged. This tool is divided into Tier 2 Student Concerns and Tier 3 Student Concerns. Students may be experiencing challenges in one or several areas with multiple indicators. The larger the quantity and level of severity of indicators, the greater the need, typically.

Read below to learn more about the differences between a Tier 2 referral and a Direct to Tier 3 referral (Crisis Referral).

Referral for Tier 2 Supports

An educator who has exhausted all universal supports for a student they deem needs additional support – but is not in need of immediate, urgent support – should complete a referral form for Tier 2 supports. They can refer to the [Referral Phase Guiding Questions tool](#).

Many schools may already have an existing referral form; however, Turnaround for Children's Referral Form has been created to keep a holistic and integrated, whole-child approach in mind. Our form allows for documenting the discussion and guiding the process. There is a place on the referral form for the educator to determine the referral venue:

- A grade-level Tier 2 meeting
- A conversation/consultation with a member of the school's Student Support, Mental Health or Wellness Team

As the teacher is making the referral for Tier 2 supports, they should be collecting relevant information about the student. Strategic and holistic data collection leads to a more precise response, challenges any biased assumptions and, ultimately, increases the likelihood of equitable outcomes for students. Data helps the team determine how the student is functioning currently, so that the team can be clear about the support the student needs. Throughout the Referral Phase, the teacher continues reflecting on the data they are collecting and continues reflecting on their practice and relationship with the student.

To determine the kind of support most helpful to a student, the team needs to understand the significance of the concern or need of the student. Observing and collecting data helps to determine the frequency, duration, and scope of the student's needs. See the [Data Collection Checklist tool](#) to consider what types of data may be pertinent for a student referral for Tier 2 supports.

Direct Referral for Tier 3 Supports (Crisis Referral)

The crisis component of a Tiered System of Supports allows students who are experiencing disruptions in their health, mood, behavior and/or skill development (academic and otherwise) to receive support immediately.

Any student who has any indicator of need related to a crisis does not have the same qualifiers to receive services. The intent is for the student to receive supports immediately. Once the student is receiving supports that meet their unique need and demonstrates progress on goals (as determined by the referring individual and/or by the team), their plan should continue to be monitored for quality and progress.

Read our [Direct Referral for Crisis Supports Plan](#) for more information.

What Else Do I Need to Know?

The Referral Phase serves as the link between recognizing a student needs additional support and accessing it. The efforts put forth during this phase are intended to provide as much data as possible to help make holistic and educated decisions about what the challenges are and how best to address them. The emphasis placed on reflection and interrogation during the Identification and Referral Phases are intended to allow for a more comprehensive perspective of how to best support any student. This approach saves time and allows for strategic use of resources, which in many cases can be limited, within a school setting.