# A bird's-eye view of school attendance and absenteeism:

## Moving from fragmentation to reconstruction

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# Bird's-eye harmonies

## Global issue

School attendance problems are an international phenomenon, with 17.8% (262 million) of youth out of school worldwide (*UNESCO, 2018*).

## Complex population

Symptoms, risk factors, behaviors, and types of school attendance problems are fluid, heterogeneous, and interwoven across multiple ecological levels.

## Integration with schools

Attempts to promote school attendance and ameliorate school absenteeism could involve close coordination with school officials and their service delivery systems.

## Adaptations to the future

Future rapid changes in education and technology may mean reconfiguring some traditional approaches in the field.

# Pieces of the puzzle: The past decade

## Expanded international focus

Growth of clinical and research work across different continents

## Risk factors via ecological levels

Child-, parent-, family-, peer-, school-, community-, and legislative, global, and related factors across different spheres of influence

## Multiple stakeholders

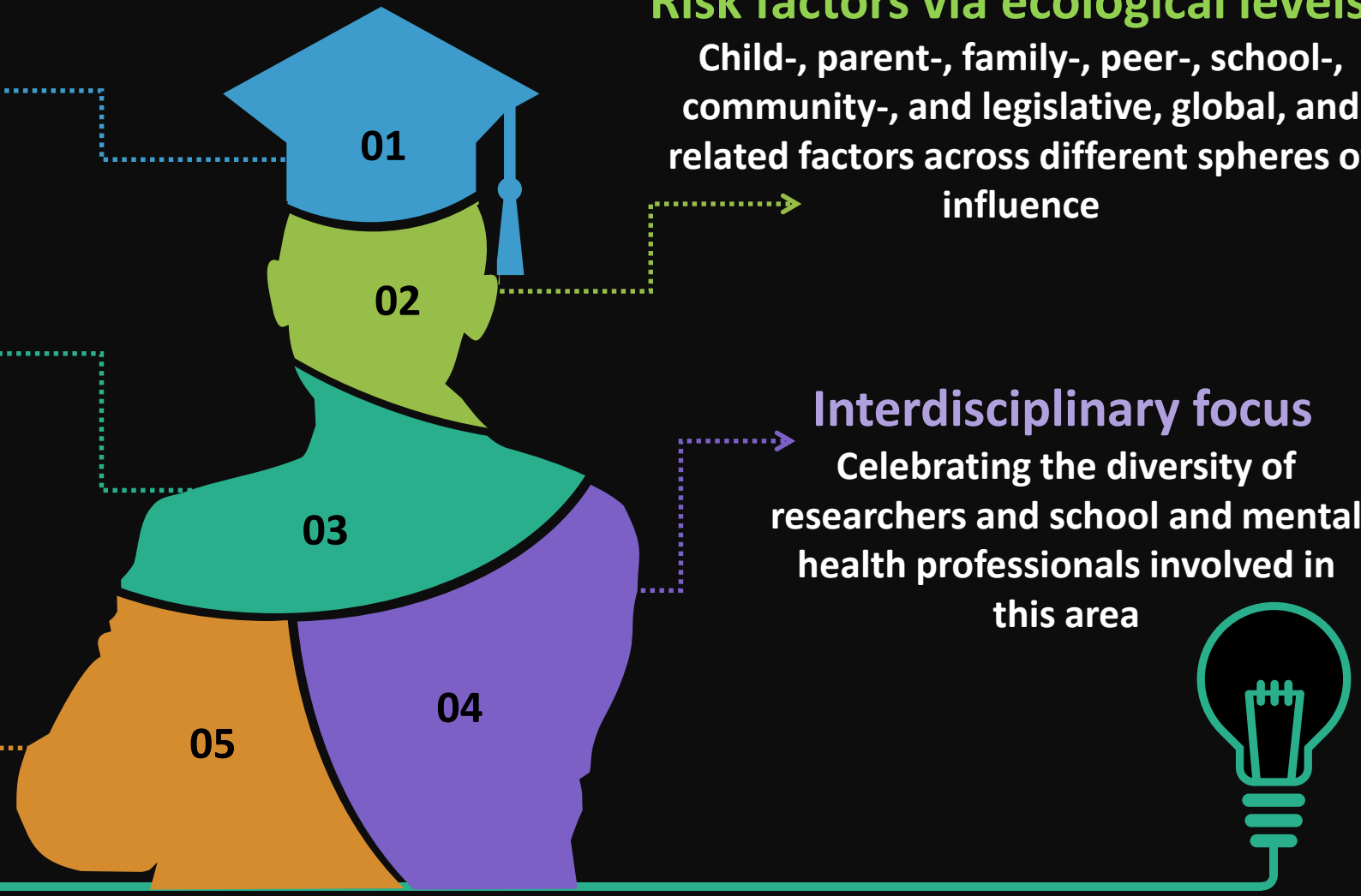
Increased involvement of laypersons, parents, students, and different agencies

## Interdisciplinary focus

Celebrating the diversity of researchers and school and mental health professionals involved in this area

## Big data

Use of sophisticated statistical analyses and predictive analytics to examine large-scale patterns



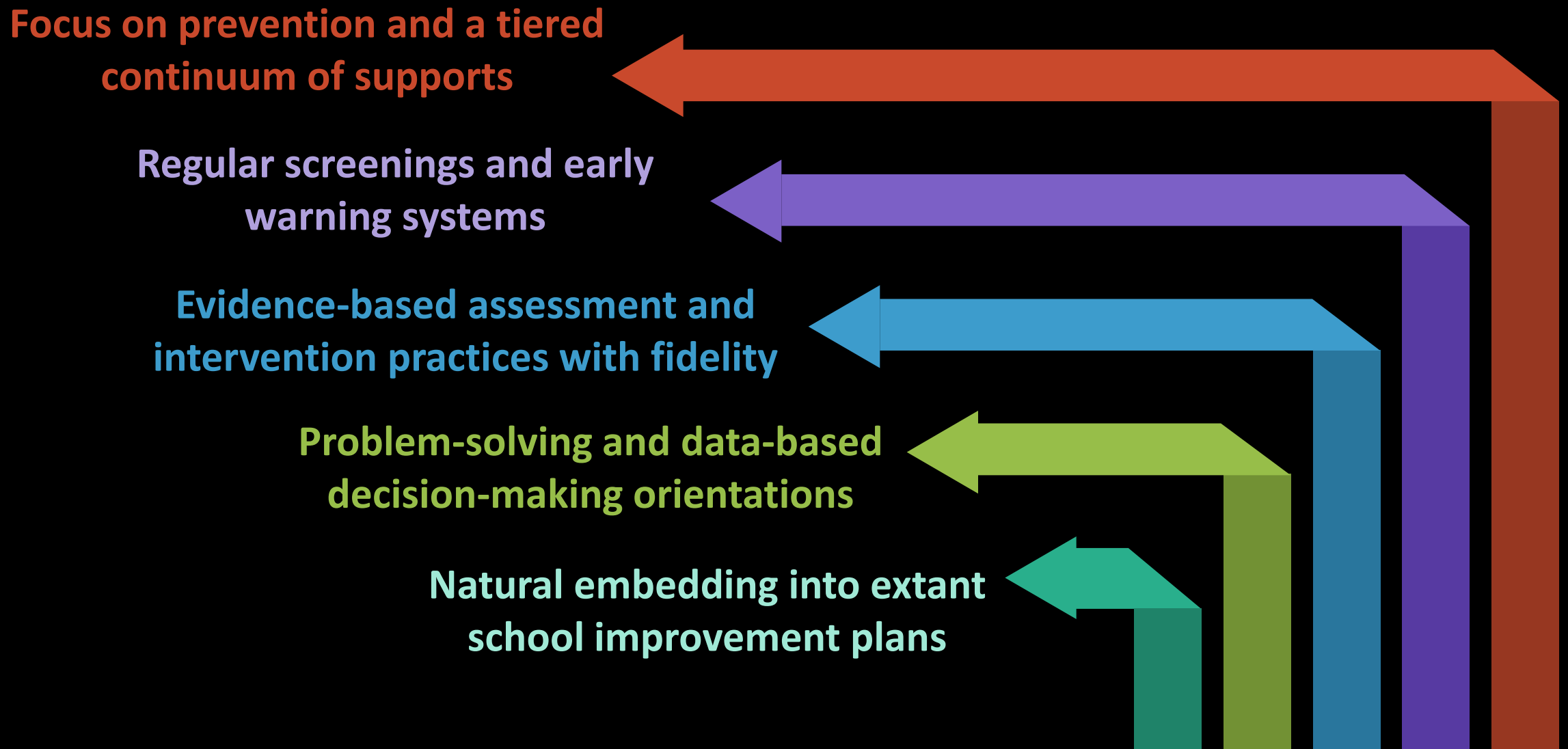
# Moving ahead with the puzzle pieces

## Into the great beyond

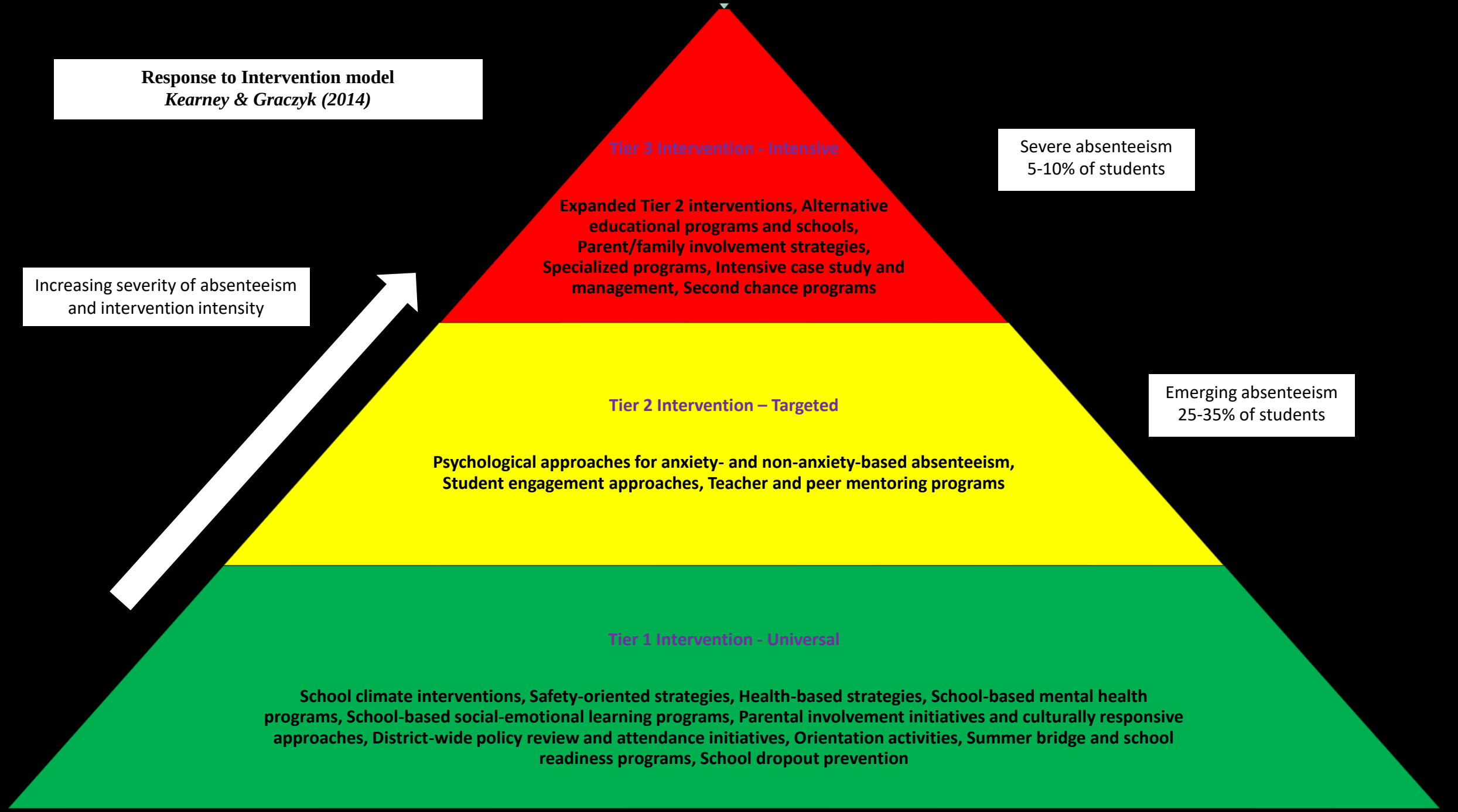
# A professional journey

| Functional | Interdisciplinary | Response to Intervention | Multi-tiered system of supports |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Clinically-oriented** | **Contextual-oriented** | **School-oriented** | **Service delivery-oriented** |
| A focus on individual cases in a clinical setting, with particular attention to circumscribed variables and contexts within a prescriptive treatment approach. | An understanding that many different contextual factors influence children with school attendance and their families, particularly youth not referred to clinicians or mental health agencies. | A desire to integrate clinical research work with school-based contexts and an understanding that behavior, academics, and life skills are interwoven constructs. | Moving toward full integration into blended models of service delivery in schools, with an eye toward a holistic approach to addressing students with complex needs at multiple levels. |
| *Kearney & Silverman (1996)* | *Kearney (2008)* | *Kearney & Graczyk (2014)* | *Kearney & Graczyk (under review)* |

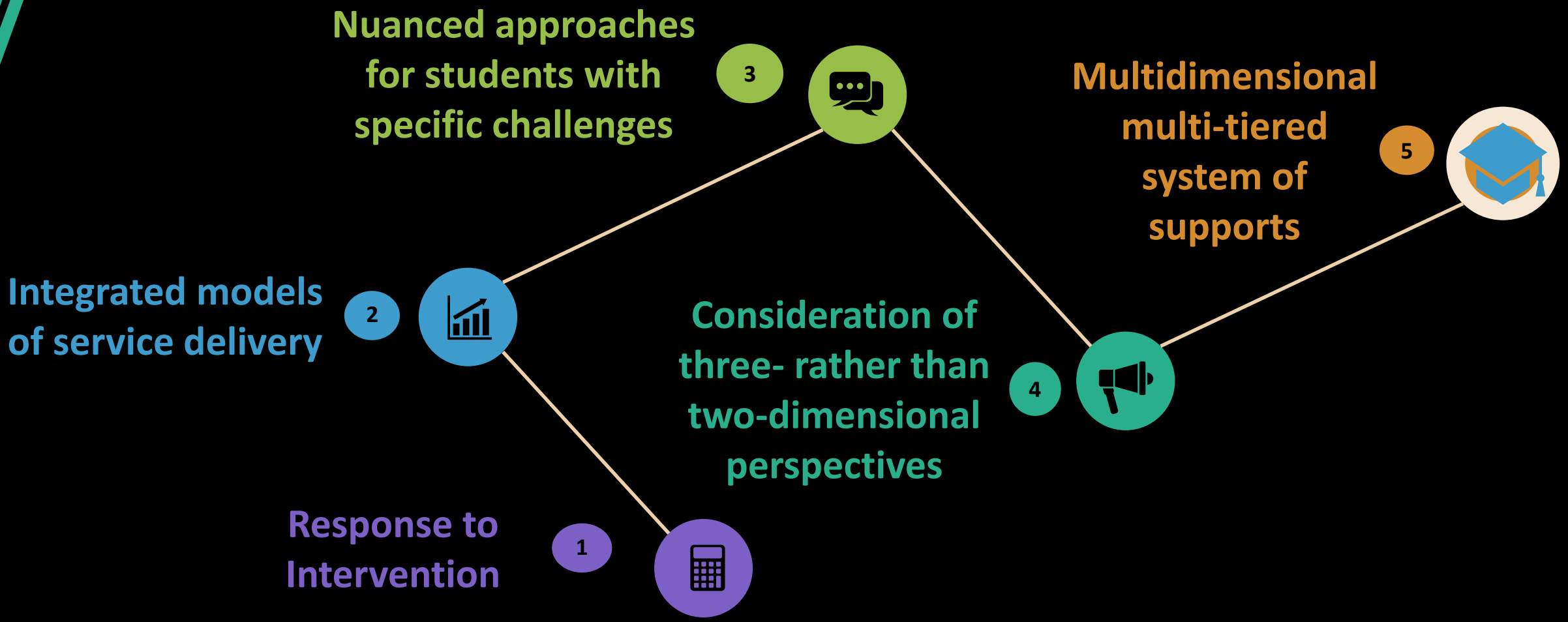
# Integrated multi-tiered system of supports



**Response to Intervention model**
***Kearney & Graczyk (2014)***



# Over the last few years…



# MTSS multidimensional pyramid model

*Kearney & Graczyk (under review)*

*Kearney, Gonzálvez, Graczyk, & Fornander (2019)*

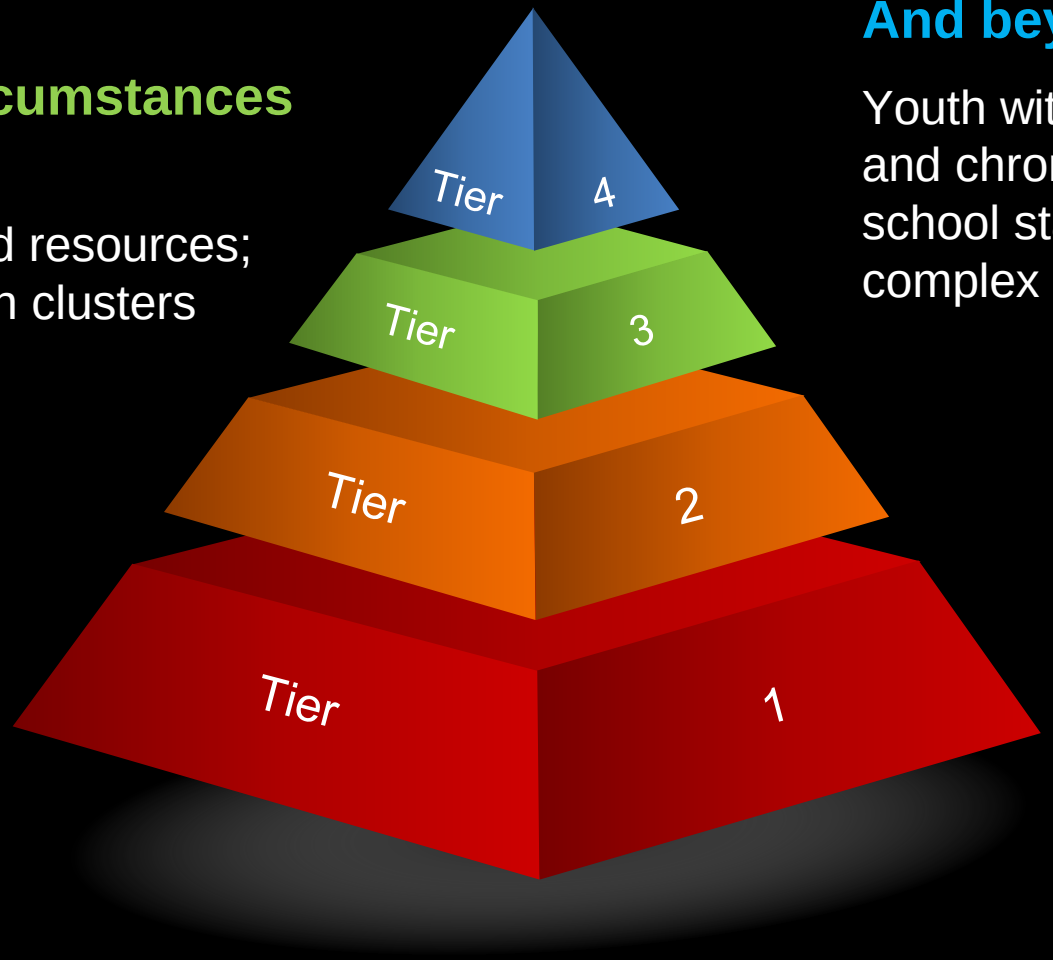
*Kearney, Gonzálvez, Graczyk, & Fornander (under review)*

## Adaptations to unique circumstances

Crafting upper tiers to local requirements, set points, and resources; application to various domain clusters

## Early actions

Development of effective and nuanced assessment and early warning systems and intervention strategies




## And beyond

Youth with extremely severe and chronic absenteeism, school stayout/dropout, and/or complex psychopathology

## Emphasis on prevention

Initial, strong, and outsized emphasis on preventative practices no matter the domain that is addressed

# Sample domain clusters

## Typology domains

School refusal
Truancy
School withdrawal
School exclusion

## Functional domains

Avoidance of negative affectivity
Escape aversive social/ evaluative situations
Attention-seeking
Pursuit of tangible reinforcement

## School level domains

Preschool
Elementary school
Middle school
High school

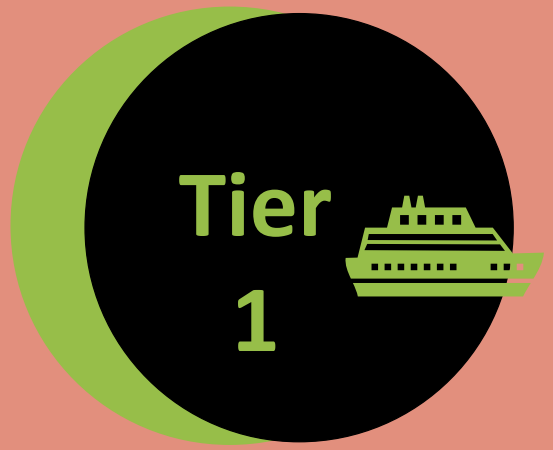
## Severity domains

Low severity
Moderate severity
High severity

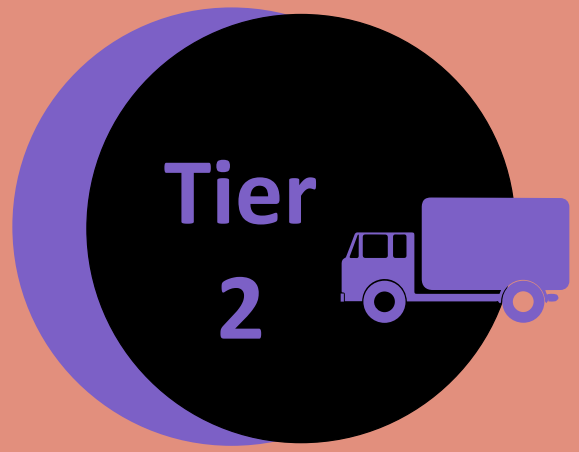
## Ecological level domains

Chronosystem
Macrosystem
Exosystem
Mesosystem
Microsystem

# Typology domains




**Practical universal screening practices, checklists, school-based prevention programs for emotional disorders and externalizing behavior problems; parent involvement strategies; LEA review of exclusionary discipline practices; anti-bullying**




**Adaptations of clinical protocols for school settings, including anxiety management techniques, exposure-based practices, social and coping skills training; family interventions and parenting skills training, contingency management**

**Arrest diversion, in-school suspension, school-based community service, restorative systems including mentoring and academic remediation; frequent parent conferencing; family-oriented social service provision and integration**

# Functional domains

## Tier 1

Schoolwide assessment of antecedents to problem behavior, functional analysis of emerging school attendance problems

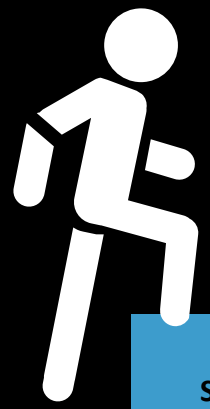
## Tier 2

Differential selection and implementation of social and behavioral interventions for individual students depending on what motivates a behavior

## Tier 3

Intensive assessment to identify setting events, replacement behaviors, areas of environmental change, and broader academic, social service, and family support needs

# School level domains



**Preschool**

Attendance data as an early warning indicator, improve parent social capital and provide extra supports, and form school-community partnerships to address broader social issues

**Elementary school**

Social-emotional competency development, parent education, schoolwide incentives, monitoring with mentoring, removal of barriers to school attendance

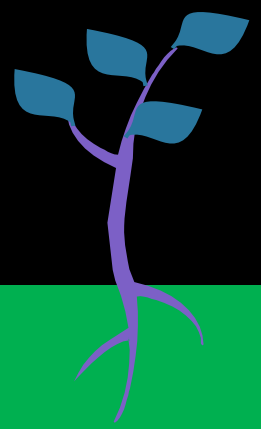
**Middle school**

School engagement practices, school-based mentoring and capacity development, early warning implementation

**High school and beyond**

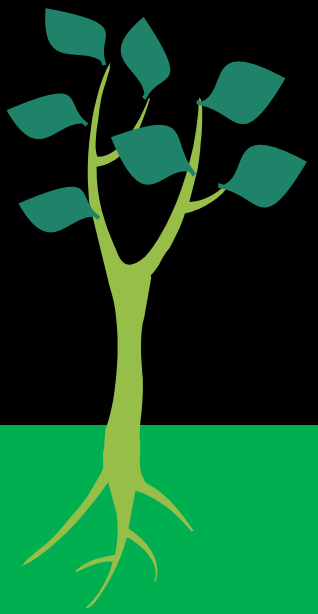
Modification of schoolwide approaches toward small team structures, more active student participation, and a stronger communication system; school completion in some form; adult readiness

# Severity domains



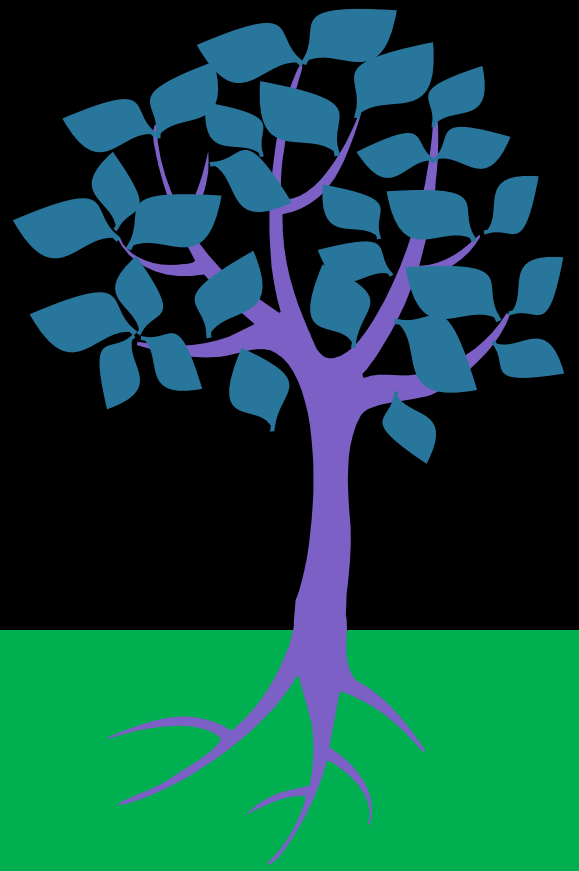
**Low absenteeism severity**

**Early warning systems with a focus on more specific variables**



**Moderate absenteeism severity**

**Blending of educational and juvenile justice lenses**



**High absenteeism severity**

**Algorithms of broader variables to identify highest risk, modification of tiered service delivery perspective**

# High absenteeism severity

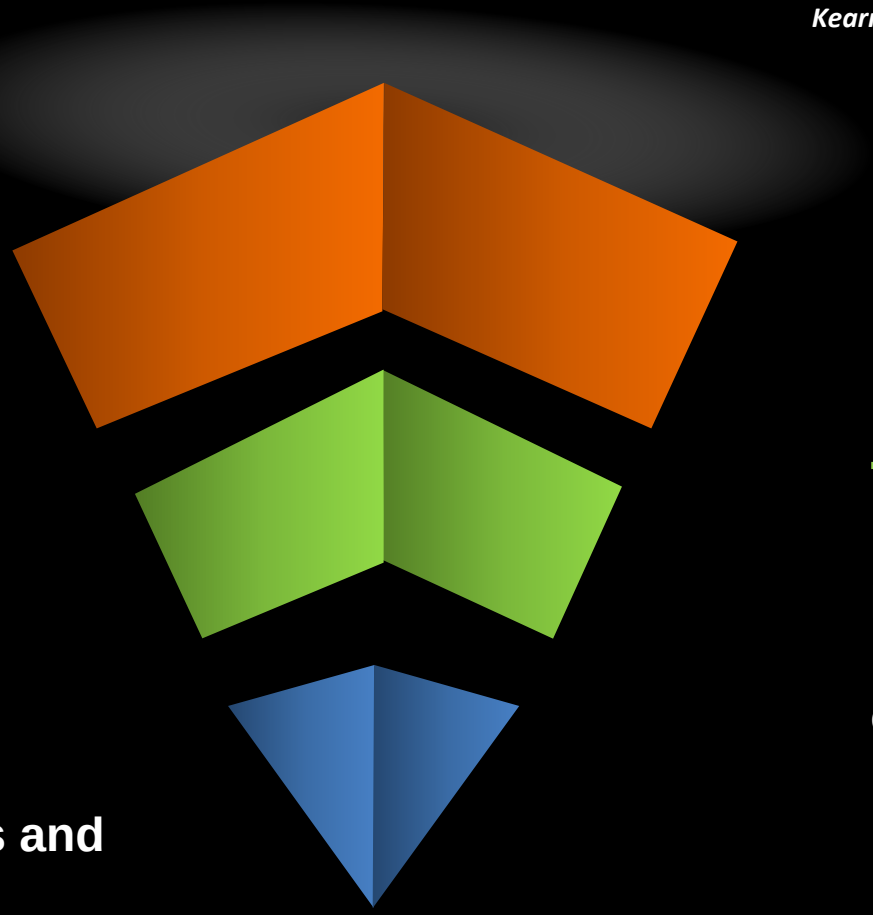
*Kearney & Graczyk (under review)*

*Kearney, Gonzálvez, Graczyk, & Fornander (2019)*

*Kearney, Gonzálvez, Graczyk, & Fornander (under review)*

## Tier 3

**Primary emphasis on full-service community schools**



## Tier 2

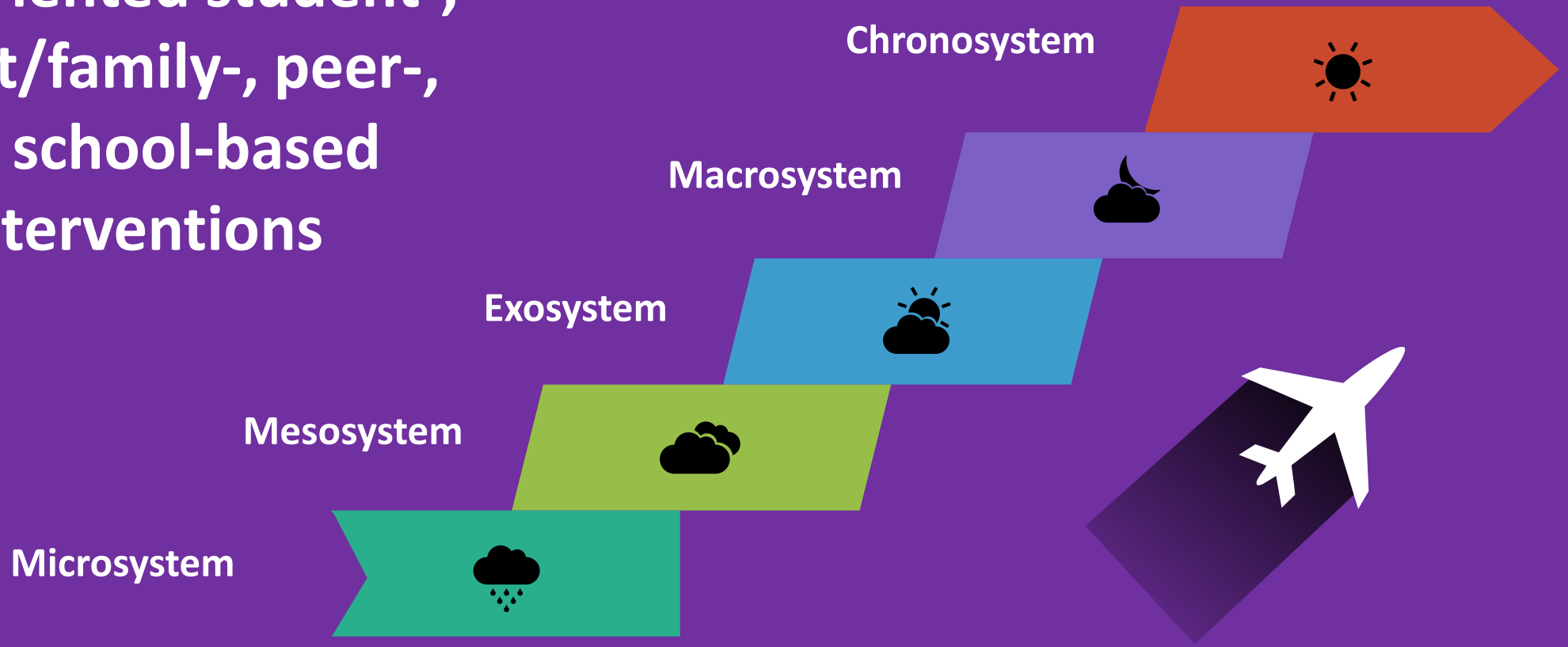
**More reluctance to intervene with lower level offenders**

## Tier 1

**Modified focus and allocation of resources**

# Ecological level domains

**Tier-oriented student-, parent/family-, peer-, and school-based interventions**



# Demarcating the tiers?

Demographics and academics

Internalizing symptoms

Family environment

School climate

*Skedgell & Kearney (2018)*

*Fornander & Kearney (under review)*

*Fornander & Kearney (2019)*

*Kearney & Bacon (in development)*

*Kearney & Gonzálvez (in development)*

## Absenteeism severity levels

**1+%, 3+%, 5+%, 10+%, 15+%, 20+%, 30+%, 40+%**

## Family environment

Achievement orientation, active-recreational orientation, cohesion, expressiveness, conflict

## Academics

Individualized education plan eligibility, grade point average, grade level

## Demographics

Ethnicity, age, gender

## Internalizing symptoms

Lack of enjoyment; anxiety levels

## School climate

Good education, like my school, bullying, parent involvement, school involves parents, diversity, safety procedures, if absent/notice?

# Themes for integrating all the puzzle pieces

Expanding outreach globally

Accounting for high-intensity situations

Informing different perspectives

Implementation science

Adaptations to future changes in education and technology

# Thank You!