



LEVERAGING MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT (MTSS) TO ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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PREFACE

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) School Climate Transformation Grant (SCTG) was a five-year annual renewable award established by the U.S. Department of Education. The work was designed to build capacity to develop, enhance, and expand Connecticut's Statewide Systems of Support to local education agencies (LEAs) and schools using multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). MTSS provides guidance for the selection, integration, and implementation of the best evidence-based behavioral practices for improving behavioral outcomes for all students, particularly marginalized and

vulnerable populations. This document is a vital component of maximizing the school community's organizational success by providing direction, demonstrating alignment, and generating commitment as a collective.

This grant was a collaborative effort between the CSDE, the Center for Behavioral Education & Research (CBER) at the University of Connecticut, LEARN, and the State Education Resource Center (SERC).

INTRODUCTION

The role of schools in addressing societal, community, family, and student needs has expanded dramatically over the last decade. In addition to ensuring all students meet increasingly rigorous academic standards, schools are asked to reduce school violence and bullying, improve overall school climate, support student and staff mental health needs, prevent school dropout, and prevent or reduce disproportionality.¹ Researchers have repeatedly demonstrated the importance of effective educational leaders for both student achievement² and faculty job satisfaction, attitudes, collegiality, and overall commitment to school.³ Professional standards have been developed for educational leaders to guide the preparation and practice of leaders⁴ within the changing educational context. Unfortunately, despite this knowledge and significant federal and state investments, many evidence-based practices have limited effects, scalability, or sustainability when implemented without research support.⁵ Barriers include limited or ineffective professional development, misalignment between the initiative and documented school or student needs, competing initiatives, lack of cultural or contextual relevance, inattentiveness to basic principles of teaching and learning, and a lack of priority, leadership, or resources.⁶

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) are derived from the public health and disease control model and emphasize prevention for all with increasing levels of targeted or individualized supports as indicated.⁷ MTSS provides a structure for states, districts, and schools to organize initiatives and related resources to maximize effectiveness and meet clearly defined outcomes. Additionally, strong educational leadership is linked to improved adoption, implementation, effectiveness, and sustainability of interventions.⁸ A distributed leadership model in which leadership is conceptualized as interdependent contingencies (interactions) between educational leaders, staff in supportive roles, and relevant contextual variables⁹ offers a useful approach towards MTSS implementation. Thus, roles and responsibilities are distributed amongst leaders, and systems are adapted to the specific setting. *The purpose of this document is to describe how school leadership standards align with the core tenets of MTSS, providing context for the value and relevance of the framework. Additionally, specific actionable examples and resources are provided so that the document may serve as a resource for both pre-service and in-service school leaders in leveraging the MTSS framework to organize and enhance effectiveness in supporting student learning.*

1 Jimmerson, Nickerson, Mayer & Furlong, 2012; Kauffman & Landrum, 2013; Walker et al. 1996; Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004

2 Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004

3 Markow & Cooper, 2008; Price, 2011

4 http://npbea.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Professional-Standards-for-Educational-Leaders_2015.pdf

5 Fixsen, Blasé, Horner & Sugai, 2009; Fixsen, Blasé, Metz & Van Dyke, 2013; Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; Wandersman, Alia, Cook, Hsu, & Ramsey, 2016; Wandersman et al., 2008

6 Pinkelman, McIntosh, Rasplia, Berg, & Strickland-Cohen, 2015; Strickland-Cohen, McIntosh, & Horner, 2014

7 Biglan, 1995; Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai, 1999; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016; Walker et al., 1996

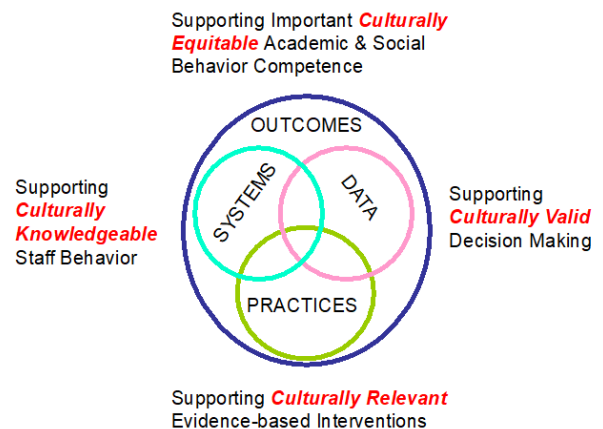
8 Benz, Lindstrom, Unruh, & Waintrup, 2004; Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012; Coffey & Horner, 2012; Debnam, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2013; Kam, Greenberg, & Walls, 2003; McIntosh et al., 2013; Payne, Gottfredson, & Gottfredson, 2006; Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009; Rohrbach, Graham, & Hansen, 1993

9 Spillane, 2005

WHAT IS MTSS?

MTSS is a framework for enhancing the implementation and adoption of a continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve important academic and social-emotional outcomes for ALL students. MTSS originated in other three-tiered approaches to supporting students, including academic response to intervention (RTI) and school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS). It has been conceptualized as the integration of a number of tiered systems into one comprehensive system intended to address multiple domains in education (e.g., academic, social-emotional; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016).¹⁰ MTSS implementation is led by a leadership team and emphasizes clearly defined, measurable **outcomes**, using **data** to identify need and monitor implementation and outcomes, the selection and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based **practices**, and **systems** to support staff implementation of the selected practices.¹¹ MTSS is implemented through a cascade of state, district, and school-level organizational supports and coaching. Research has repeatedly indicated that adoption of a multi-tiered approach can be an effective means of supporting students both academically and behaviorally, with favorable outcomes including improved academic achievement, decreases in referrals and eligibility for special education services, reduced disruptive behavior, increased school safety, improved teacher climate and self-efficacy, and increased social competence and emotional regulation in students.¹²

Therefore, when school leaders invest the necessary time and resources in developing and implementing MTSS within their schools and districts, the potential benefits to students and staff are significant and far reaching.



MTSS GUIDING VALUES

MTSS emphasizes the central values of **equity, inclusion, collaboration, and family and community partnership** throughout all aspects of implementation. These values serve as a primary filter for decision making and action planning at all levels of implementation. MTSS organizing structures and implementation features support states, districts, and schools with systematically operationalizing these values.

¹⁰ <https://www.pbis.org/resource/pbis-implementation-blueprint>
<https://www.pbis.org/announcements/two-new-self-assessments-for-district-and-state-leadership-teams>

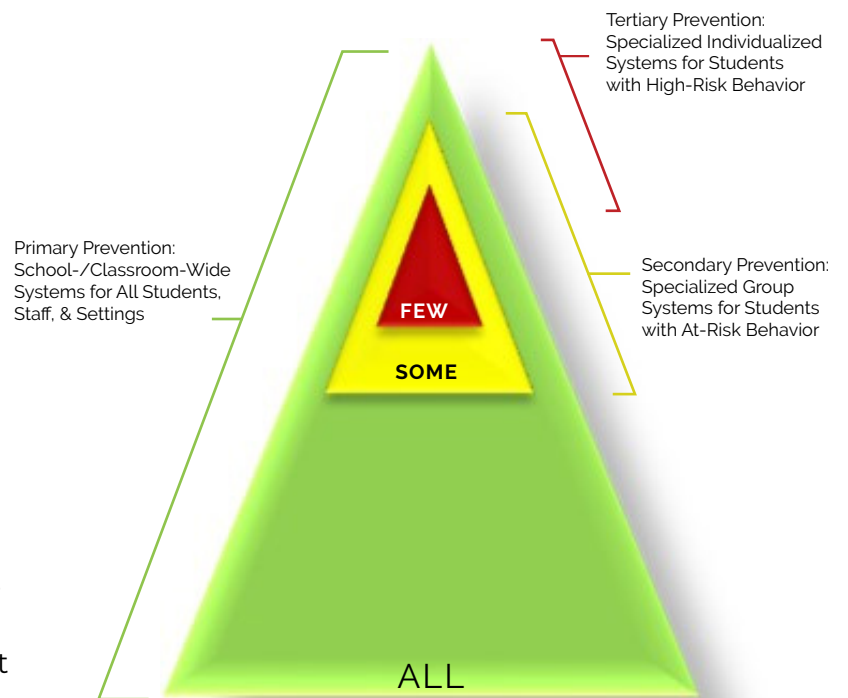
¹¹ Biglan, 1995; Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai, 1993; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016; OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2015; Walker et al., 1996

¹² McIntosh & Goodman, 2016

MTSS ORGANIZING STRUCTURES

The MTSS framework rests on several key structures. **Leadership** is distributed among team members, and clear norms, roles, and responsibilities are developed to ensure transparency and shared responsibility for both process and outcomes. A **continuum of evidence-based practices** is developed to ensure students and staff are proactively and effectively provided with appropriate levels of intervention and support. The continuum of evidence-based practices involves providing high-quality, evidence-based, differentiated instruction to all students to address both academic and social-emotional and behavioral (SEB) skills (Tier 1). Valid and reliable screening measures are used to monitor academic and SEB progress of all students, as well as to identify students in need of more support. Based on screening results and other diagnostic measures if needed, evidence-based small group instruction is provided for at-risk students (Tier 2). Valid and reliable progress monitoring measures are utilized more frequently to evaluate progress. For high-risk students who do not demonstrate adequate progress with Tier 2 supports, more individualized supports are provided (Tier 3). Throughout the MTSS process, decision-making rules are utilized to guide data-based evaluation of the

success of the framework at both student and systems levels, as well as to guide adaptations to supports as appropriate.



SIDE NOTE:

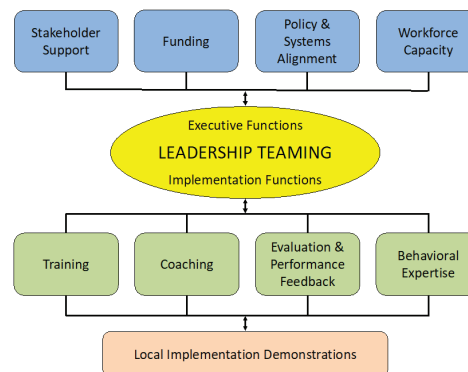
The continuum of evidence-based practices involves providing high-quality, evidence-based, differentiated instruction to all students to address both academic and social-emotional and behavioral (SEB) skills (Tier 1).

MTSS IMPLEMENTATION FEATURES

MTSS implementation is further operationalized by attending to key implementation features. The leadership team has two primary sets of functions, executive and implementation. The executive function implementation features are related to securing and maintaining political visibility and supportive policy structures:

- ▶ MTSS teams are typically comprised of district and/or school-level administrators, along with representatives from a variety of roles within the school or district. Teams proactively and intentionally engage a wide range of school and community stakeholders in all aspects of implementation to ensure **stakeholder support**. Stakeholders share responsibility for defining key outcomes, disseminating information, selecting and supporting implementation actions, and utilizing evaluation to make appropriate adaptations to implementation.
- ▶ Multiple sources of **funding** are secured for both short- and long-term implementation as teams plan for sustained implementation.
- ▶ State, district, and school policies are examined and revised to ensure **policy and systems alignment** and to maximize efficiencies in support of MTSS implementation.
- ▶ District leaders ensure that **workforce capacity** is systematically built for both pre-service and in-service staff, and hiring and evaluation systems are examined to ensure long-term capacity for MTSS implementation. Implementation features relate to the specific actions leadership teams take to support implementation:

- ▶ School administrators ensure that teams have ongoing access to effective **training** so that all staff members know what accurate implementation looks like and can carry out key implementation actions in the district or school.
- ▶ **Coaching** supports are systematically and proactively provided to ensure staff are able to contextualize the skills learned in training to their specific context.



- ▶ A transparent system of **evaluation and performance feedback** ensures that all stakeholders are engaged and aware of the state, district, or school's progress toward outcomes. All staff members receive timely and actionable feedback to guide their implementation progress. These implementation features are directed toward

the development of local demonstration sites (e.g., classrooms, schools, districts) that serve as local models for high-quality implementation and allow the leadership team to refine systems for supporting implementation prior to scaling up.

ORGANIZING LEADERSHIP STANDARDS WITHIN MTSS



Educational leadership programs and practices are guided by standards established by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA). The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders were developed by the NPBEA to summarize foundational principles of educational leadership necessary to effectively influence student achievement. The standards were based on current research and organized around domains of leadership that contribute to the academic success and social-emotional well-being of students (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). These standards were utilized within this document as a guiding framework to illustrate how school leaders can leverage the implementation of MTSS to effectively support student learning.

► CROSSWALK OVERVIEW

To promote the integration of MTSS within leadership support systems such as pre-service preparation programs and in-service professional development, we developed

a crosswalk demonstrating the alignment between the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders¹³ developed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration and the core MTSS implementation features. To clearly define MTSS features, two self-assessments for district and state teams were developed.¹⁴ The blueprint self-assessments were refined to more clearly operationalize equity and cultural responsiveness, as well as to broaden integration and alignment, incorporating language from the PBIS Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide: Resource for Trainers and Coaches¹⁵ and the Interconnected Systems Framework Action Planning Companion Guide.¹⁶ The resulting modified self-assessment items are aligned with specific Professional Leadership standards to support the development of leaders who are able to effectively implement and work within the MTSS framework.

¹³ http://npbea.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Professional-Standards-for-Educational-Leaders_2015.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.pbis.org/announcements/two-new-self-assessments-for-district-and-state-leadership-teams>

¹⁵ Levenson et al., 2016;

<https://www.pbis.org/Common/Cms/files/pbisresources/PBIS%20Cultural%20Responsiveness%20Field%20Guide.pdf>; <https://www.pbis.org/video/aligning-multiple-initiatives-sctg-webinar>

¹⁶ OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (2016); <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DNeh2SjiAaraFlhRbJMqh2OzxPDp-L-3IPc5zJ28Cjk/edit>

Supports

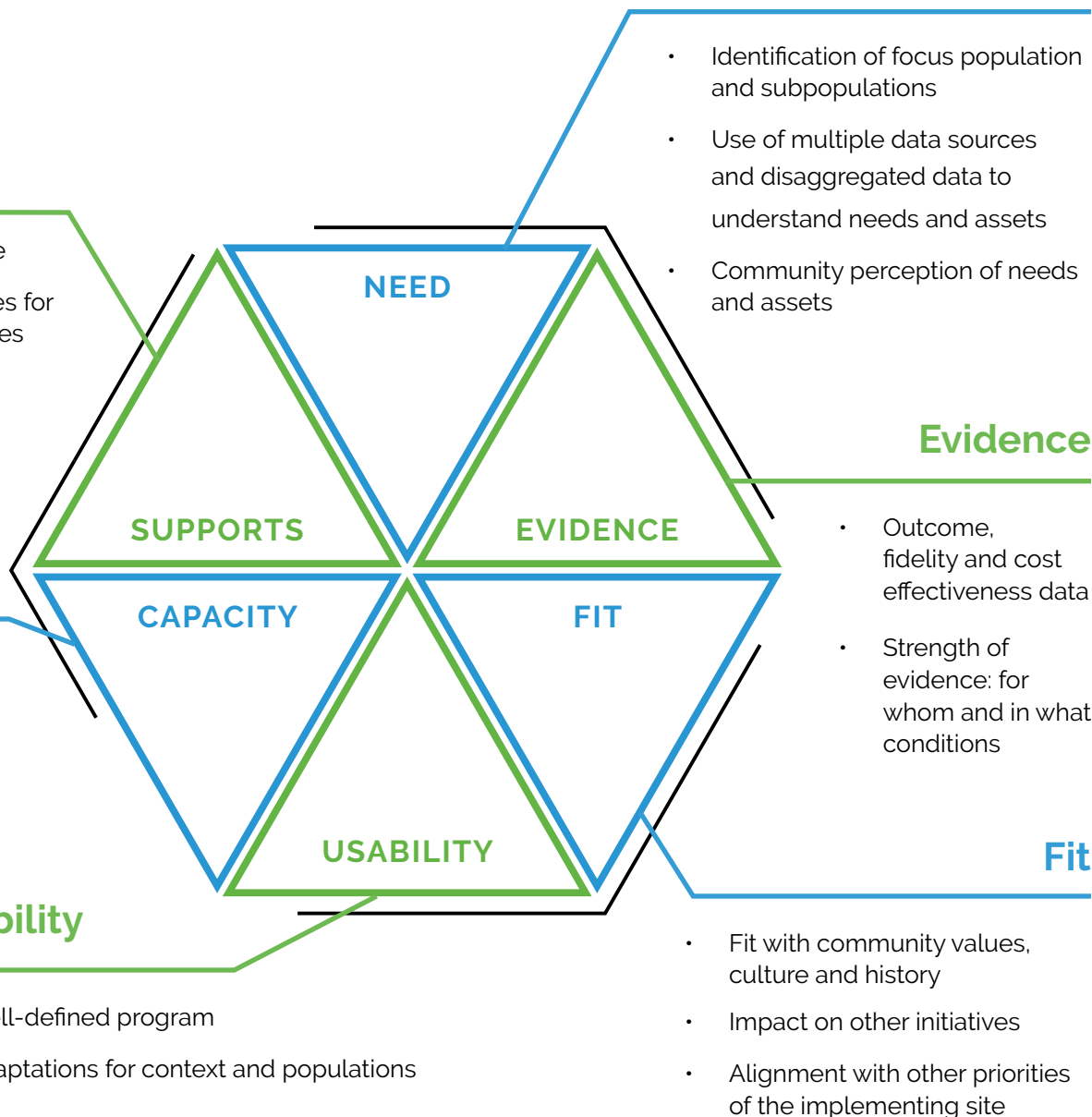
- Expert assistance
- External resources for implementing sites

Capacity

- Implementation costs
- Resources needed and available for implementation

Usability

- Well-defined program
- Adaptations for context and populations



► THE HEXAGON OVERVIEW

The Hexagon: An Exploration Tool¹⁷, developed by the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), is a tool frequently used within MTSS implementation and is designed to support decision-making related to the selection and adoption of new practices or programs. The tool supports administrators and leadership teams as they consider the capacity, fit, need, evidence, usability and available supports for implementation. The effective implementation of MTSS requires careful consideration of each of these factors, and as such this crosswalk highlights where this tool can support leaders as they meet professional standards through MTSS implementation. Throughout the process of MTSS development, district and school-level administrators can use the Hexagon Tool to guide decision-making regarding the selection and adoption of new practices or programs within the framework.

STANDARD 1:

MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.

Leaders develop an educational mission, vision, and core values for their school or district using a range of relevant data and in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders. Once developed, the mission is used to guide and evaluate all actions and to promote a shared understanding of school or district actions within the school and community.

The MTSS framework provides a structure within which to develop, promote, use, and evaluate the mission, vision, and core values. For example, the MTSS leadership team is intentionally built to include a range of stakeholders who can directly support the development of the mission, vision, and core values. In fact, one of the leadership team's first key jobs is to identify specific measurable locally important student outcomes that are aligned to the school and district mission and vision. Once developed, the MTSS framework provides a mechanism for moving the mission

and value statements into action. Key activities within each implementation feature ensure the actions taken by the school or district are aligned with the mission, vision, and core values. Key stakeholders are engaged in both disseminating and recruiting feedback, and developing specific action steps to support the mission, vision, and core values. Funding and resources are strategically aligned and allocated to support the implementation of these actions. The mission, vision, and core values are used to identify and align competing or duplicate priorities or initiatives, revise and review personnel selection and hiring criteria, and performance evaluations. Data systems are developed to efficiently and effectively measure progress toward key action items and to guide overall implementation. Training and coaching supports are allocated based on data to ensure all school or district personnel have the knowledge and support needed to carry out key activities in support of the mission, vision, and core values. Resources are allocated to ensure priority is given to building internal school or district capacity over hiring external supports whenever possible.



KEY RESOURCES:

▶ [TECHNICAL GUIDE FOR ALIGNMENT OF INITIATIVES, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS](#)¹⁸

This technical guide published by the Center on PBIS provides a structured alignment process with concrete steps to assist educational leaders as they examine current practices across educational units and systems.

▶ [ALIGNING MULTIPLE INITIATIVES](#)¹⁹

This webinar created by the Center on PBIS provides guidance on aligning and prioritizing multiple initiatives based on shared values.

▶ [THE HEXAGON: AN EXPLORATION TOOL](#)²⁰

This tool created by the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) can be used by educational leaders to evaluate how a program or practice might fit into the school or district's MTSS.

▶ [INTERCONNECTED SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK ACTION PLANNING COMPANION GUIDE](#)²¹

This tool was developed to assist schools in translating data gathered from the Tiered Fidelity Inventory, which assesses core features of SWPBIS, into action steps using a framework in which support for mental health is integrated within an MTSS.

¹⁸ <https://www.pbis.org/resource/technical-guide-for-alignment-of-initiatives-programs-and-practices-in-school-districts>

¹⁹ <https://www.pbis.org/video/aligning-multiple-initiatives-sctg-webinar>

²⁰ <https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/resources/hexagon-exploration-tool>

²¹ <https://www.pbis.org/resource/isf-action-planning-companion-guide-to-swpbis-tfi>

STANDARD 2:

ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL NORMS

Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 2 focuses leaders on the ethical implications of their actions and decisions at each level of leadership. Excellent leaders keep student well-being and academic success at the forefront at all times and act with integrity, fairness, and transparency to promote continuous improvement for students.

The MTSS framework supports this standard by ensuring that data, practices, and systems at the school and district level are all aligned in support of locally important and operationally defined student outcomes. Leadership teams develop norms to guide decision making and team functions allowing for transparency in decision making and communication. A wide range of stakeholders are intentionally engaged to encourage a clear consideration of student and family backgrounds and cultures

in decision making, planning, and resource allocation. Policies and systems are aligned to keep student progress and well-being at the center of all school or district actions. New evidence-based initiatives are identified based on documented need, and a clear process is in place to ensure the initial and ongoing cultural and contextual fit of all practices. Each student is provided with high-quality, differentiated instruction and the appropriate level of support to address his/her academic and SEB needs. Training and coaching supports are allocated to promote ongoing professional learning and continuous improvement. Data systems are developed and used to guide the differentiation of supports as needed for both students and staff. The transparent routines and data-based decision-making within the MTSS framework promotes and supports ethical interactions and decision making at all levels. It also encourages student, family, and community engagement and feedback, ensuring that student and family needs remain the top priority.

SIDE NOTE:

Policies and systems are aligned to keep student progress and well-being at the center of all school or district actions.



KEY RESOURCES:

▶ [IS MTSS/RTI HERE TO STAY? ALL SIGNS POINT TO YES!](#)²²

This article published by the Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports summarizes positive outcomes resulting from MTSS implementation that have been demonstrated through research and provides links to articles on supporting studies.

▶ [MTSS/UDL/DI PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODULE](#)²³

This professional development module created by the CEEDAR Center was designed to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to equip educators with providing multi-tiered instruction and interventions matched to students' needs by employing principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI).

▶ [USING PROGRESS MONITORING DATA FOR DECISION MAKING](#)²⁴

This learning module created by the Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports focuses on the steps needed to effectively utilize progress monitoring data in the decision making process.

▶ [USING SCREENING DATA FOR DECISION MAKING](#)²⁵

This learning module created by the Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports addresses how to analyze screening data within a systematic, data-based decision making process to make decisions at the district, school, grade/class, and individual level.

²² <https://mtss4success.org/blog/mtssrti-here-stay-all-signs-point-yes>

²³ <https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/mtssudldi-professional-development-module>

²⁴ <https://mtss4success.org/resource/data-rich-information-poor-making-sense-progress-monitoring-data-guide-intervention>

²⁵ <https://mtss4success.org/resource/how-can-we-advance-our-screening-tools-provide-more-accurate-measure-risk-students>

STANDARD 3:

EQUITY AND CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 3 ensures leaders consider and directly address equity and cultural responsiveness at all levels of a school or district. Leaders are asked to consider individual student strengths and promote the benefits of diversity for learning. Additionally, leaders are asked to directly confront systems that promote or maintain inequities or bias.

The MTSS framework supports leaders in meeting this standard in two key ways. First, schools and districts are led by diverse teams to identify, teach, and reinforce core values that promote and value students' individual and cultural strengths. Making school and district norms reflective of student and family values and transparent allows all individuals to more fully participate in all aspects of the school community, thus increasing stakeholder engagement. Second, the MTSS

framework provides leaders with a system to examine and address structural barriers or bias that exists within the system. For example, discipline policies and systems are examined to ensure clarity and consistency and alignment with student and community values. Implementation fidelity and student outcome data are routinely examined and disaggregated to ensure supports are implemented consistently and available to all students and that student well-being and progress is equitable. Analysis of outcome data can assist school leaders in identifying when the core curriculum is not meeting the needs of most students or particular groups of students so that they may address issues of equity and educational opportunity in a systematic way. Any identified performance gaps can be quickly addressed through differentiated systems of support. The MTSS framework focus on building internal capacity and ensuring behavioral and content area expertise ensures that when needs are identified they can be addressed quickly and effectively.



SIDE NOTE:

“...leaders are asked to directly confront systems that promote or maintain inequities or bias.”

KEY RESOURCES:

▶ **[RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION AND THE DISPROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION OF CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION](#)**²⁶

This article published by the RTI Action Network describes how a tiered service delivery model can be used to address disproportionality in schools.

▶ **[PBIS CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS FIELD GUIDE: RESOURCES FOR TRAINERS AND COACHES](#)**²⁷

This field guide created by the Center on PBIS outlines an integrated framework to embed equity efforts into MTSS by aligning culturally responsive practices.

▶ **[A 5-POINT INTERVENTION APPROACH FOR ENHANCING EQUITY IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE](#)**²⁸

This technical brief published by the Center on PBIS describes a multicomponent approach that can be incorporated into MTSS to reduce disproportionality in schools.

▶ **[EXAMPLES OF ENGAGING INSTRUCTION TO INCREASE EQUITY IN EDUCATION](#)**²⁹

This technical brief published by the Center on PBIS defines key principles of evidence-based instructional practices that are essential in reducing disproportionality.

26 <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/diversity/disproportionaterepresentation>

27 <https://www.pbis.org/resource/pbis-cultural-responsiveness-field-guide-resources-for-trainers-and-coaches>

28 <https://www.pbis.org/resource/a-5-point-intervention-approach-for-enhancing-equity-in-school-discipline>

29 <https://www.pbis.org/resource/examples-of-engaging-instruction-to-increase-equity-in-education>

STANDARD 4: CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT



Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Ensuring student's academic success and well-being depends directly on an educational leader's ability to establish a coherent and rigorous system. Standard 4 emphasizes the need to align instructional systems across grade levels and within the mission, vision, and core values of the school or district. Effective leaders ensure the use of effective evidence-based pedagogy, differentiated supports, and rigorous standards.

Leaders working within the MTSS framework can ensure this standard is met

with the support of the leadership team which regularly reviews and evaluates implementation activities to ensure alignment within and across school systems and with the mission, vision, and core values of the school or district. Implementation activities and practices are aligned and integrated before training and coaching supports are developed in order to ensure the coherence of training and coaching supports across practices. Data gathered from reliable assessment tools that have demonstrated validity for the purpose in which they are used are reviewed regularly and used to guide decision making related to the adoption of new practices, the ongoing use of existing practices, and differentiation of supports. Internal capacity and expertise is prioritized to help prompt and ensure that rigorous standards and effective supports are consistently available to all students.

KEY RESOURCES:

▶ [SELECTING A SCIENTIFICALLY BASED CORE CURRICULUM FOR TIER 1](#)³⁰

This article provided by the RTI Action Network presents guidelines for selecting scientifically based instruction/curricula used in Tier 1.

▶ [FEATURES OF EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION](#)³¹

These online learning modules created by the National Center on Intensive Intervention, in collaboration with the University of Connecticut, the National Center on Leadership in Intensive Intervention, and the CEEDAR Center, were designed to focus on enhancing educators' skills in using explicit instruction.

▶ [CLASSROOM INTEGRATED ACADEMICS AND BEHAVIOR BRIEF](#)³²

This brief was developed by the Center on PBIS to provide core features and strategies for integrating academic and behavior practices to support students in a “whole child” approach in the classroom.

▶ [CASEL PROGRAM GUIDES](#)³³

Program guides are available from CASEL which provide a systematic framework for evaluating the quality of social and emotional programs and apply the framework to identify and rate well-designed, evidence-based, social-emotional learning (SEL) programs. The program guides can be useful in supporting school leaders in selecting appropriate SEL programs for their school or district.

▶ [UNDERSTANDING SCREENING: WHAT DO THE TECHNICAL STANDARDS MEAN?](#)³⁴

These five one-page documents created by the National Center on Intensive Intervention and the National Center for Improving Literacy provide a brief overview of concepts important in understanding the quality of screening measures.

▶ [ACADEMIC SCREENING TOOLS CHART](#)³⁵

This chart provided by the National Center on Intensive Intervention summarizes a variety of academic screening measures and provides information on classification accuracy, technical standards, and usability features.

30 <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/research/selectingcorecurriculum-tier1>

31 <https://intensiveintervention.org/intensive-intervention-features-explicit-instruction>

32 <https://www.pbis.org/resource/classroom-integrated-academics-and-behavior-brief>

33 <https://casel.org/guide>

34 <https://intensiveintervention.org/resource/screening-standards-overviews>

35 <https://charts.intensiveintervention.org/ascreening>

▶ **BEST PRACTICES IN UNIVERSAL SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIORAL SCREENING: AN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE**³⁶

This guide created by the School Mental Health Collaborative summarizes the current state of research and practice related to universal SEB screening and provides practical and defensible recommendations.

▶ **SEB SCREENING TOOLS**³⁷

This website provides an overview of several universal SEB screening measures.

▶ **ACADEMIC INTERVENTION TOOLS CHART**³⁸

This chart provided by the National Center on Intensive Intervention presents information about academic intervention programs, including information on and ratings of the technical rigor of supporting studies.

▶ **BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION TOOLS CHART**³⁹

This chart provided by the National Center on Intensive Intervention presents information about behavioral interventions, including information on and ratings of the technical rigor of supporting studies.

▶ **PROGRESS MONITORING**⁴⁰

The National Center on Intensive Intervention website provides an overview of the progress monitoring process within MTSS and provides links to charts summarizing a variety of academic and SEB progress monitoring tools.



Ensuring students' academic success and well-being depends directly on an educational leader's ability to establish a coherent and rigorous system.

³⁶ <https://smhc.wceruw.org/universalscreening>

³⁷ <http://www.ci3t.org/screening>

³⁸ <https://charts.intensiveintervention.org/aintervention>

³⁹ <https://charts.intensiveintervention.org/bintervention>

⁴⁰ <https://intensiveintervention.org/intensive-intervention/progress-monitor>



STANDARD 5: COMMUNITY OF CARE AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

An inclusive and supportive learning community is a place where all members of the school or district community feel accepted, valued, trusted, and cared for. Community members are encouraged to take an active role in the community and share responsibility for the success of all community members. Standard 5 encourages educational leaders to focus on ensuring their school or district provides a safe, predictable, and positive environment where students' social, emotional, behavioral, physical, and academic needs are met.

The MTSS framework can again assist educational leaders in meeting this standard. Specifically, by empowering the leadership

team and stakeholders to take an active role, leaders can ensure the school community is reflective of and inclusive of the cultures and languages in the school's community and that school norms support a respectful and caring learning environment. School or district policies are revised to reflect these values and prompt an instructional approach to discipline and social, emotional, and behavioral development. High rates of positive staff and student interactions are supported by training and coaching and facilitate the development of peer and adult relationships. The development of a continuum of evidence-based differentiated social, emotional, behavioral, and academic supports ensures students (and staff) have access to support that is matched to need and contributes to a school community that values and promotes the academic success and well-being of all students.

KEY RESOURCES:

▶ **[ADDRESSING SCHOOL CLIMATE: 5 WAYS SCHOOLS CAN POSITIVELY AND PROACTIVELY SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS](#)**⁴¹

This practice guide provided by the Center for PBIS describes positive, proactive practices that schools can adopt to support students and a positive school climate.

▶ **[SUPPORTING AND RESPONDING TO BEHAVIOR: EVIDENCE-BASED CLASSROOM STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS](#)**⁴²

This document published by the Office of Special Education Programs provides an overview of evidence-based classroom management strategies that can be used to promote a positive classroom environment. The document also provides a self-assessment tool, examples of practices across grade levels, descriptions of supporting evidence, and links to resources.

▶ **[TRAUMA-INFORMED CLASSROOMS](#)**⁴³

This technical assistance bulletin published by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges provides a basic understanding of the impact of trauma and adverse life experiences, how those experiences can impact behavior in the classroom, how to recognize trauma, and strategies for creating trauma-informed classrooms.

41 <https://www.pbis.org/resource/addressing-school-climate-5-ways-schools-can-positively-and-proactively-support-all-students>

42 <https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-and-responding-to-behavior-evidence-based-classroom-strategies-for-teachers>

43 <https://www.ncjfcj.org/publications/trauma-informed-classrooms>

STANDARD 6: PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 6 focuses on the development of school personnel capacity. Planning for recruitment, mentoring, retention, and opportunities for skill and leadership development for all personnel are critical aspects of effective educational leadership.

A focus on personnel supports and resources is a key feature of the MTSS framework. For each practice, data source, or initiative, leaders must carefully evaluate the capacity of school personnel to implement effectively. This includes providing broader support for workforce capacity development such as reviewing hiring and evaluation systems and supporting the development of preparation accreditation standards that support the development of teachers and staff to be able to effectively implement and support MTSS. Implementation of MTSS involves reviewing data to evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives and interventions, thus promoting engagement and cohesiveness among school staff, which could potentially improve retention. More directly, though, school leaders must ensure access to ongoing effective training, coaching, and performance feedback. These elements ensure that all staff understand what they need to implement and have the support they need to implement it accurately in their specific context. Leaders working within an MTSS framework can rely on these implementation features and the support of their leadership teams to ensure they address this professional standard.

KEY RESOURCES:

▶ **[COACHING FOR ONGOING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING WITHIN TIERED SUPPORT MODELS](#)**⁴⁴

This document developed by the National Center on Intensive Intervention in collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Education provides content-specific examples of how to structure educator-level and/or systems-level coaching as a mechanism to ensure ongoing professional learning within a tiered support model.

▶ **[TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BLUEPRINT FOR PBIS](#)**⁴⁵

This blueprint developed by the Center on PBIS provides an overview of essential features of professional development and the basic logic of building internal district systems capacity for implementing effective practices and making sound data decisions.

⁴⁴ <https://intensiveintervention.org/resource/coaching-within-tiered-support-models>

⁴⁵ <https://www.pbis.org/resource/training-and-professional-development-blueprint-for-pbis>



STANDARD 7: PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF

Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 7 describes the specific actions educational leaders can take to build a professional community dedicated to ongoing learning, mutual accountability, and collaboration in support of student academic success and well-being.

The MTSS framework directly supports the development of a professional community through shared leadership structures, systematic and effective training and coaching supports, and the use of data to guide the allocation of resources and provide support for students and staff as efficiently and effectively as possible. Leaders can leverage these MTSS features to develop an MTSS for staff that provides proactive support to most staff in order to promote success, with supports systematically intensified as needed. Rather than attempting to provide intensive individualized support for all staff, school leaders can improve efficiency by building Tier 1 training, coaching, and performance feedback structures that effectively support most staff, effectively freeing resources to support those who will need more.

KEY RESOURCES:

► **[TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BLUEPRINT FOR PBIS](#)**⁴⁶

This blueprint developed by the Center on PBIS provides an overview of essential features of professional development and the basic logic of building internal district systems capacity for implementing effective practices and making sound data decisions.

⁴⁶ <https://www.pbis.org/resource/training-and-professional-development-blueprint-for-pbis>

STANDARD 8: MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY



Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Community and family engagement is essential for student success and community well-being. Standard 8 asks educational leaders to establish practices and systems that promote two-way collaboration that benefits both families and schools and focuses efforts on improving student academic success and well-being.

The MTSS framework can support leaders by clearly defining opportunities for engaging families and community partners. Teams begin by ensuring they are representative of a wide range of stakeholders and then work to intentionally develop relationships with key

community stakeholder groups. Educational leaders can ensure that this remains a priority for MTSS teams and can then help focus the efforts of this collaboration on student outcomes. Families and community partners are key supports for leaders and teams evaluating the fit of specific programs or practices to the educational context and can collaborate with teams on the development of school and district discipline policies. In addition to asking family and community members to partner on the development of school practices and policies, family and community members can support the dissemination of information from the school to the broader community as well. Educational leaders can use these key stakeholders to ensure that all community members are informed of school and district goals, progress toward those goals, and opportunities to contribute and shape that work.

KEY RESOURCES:

▶ **[INTENSIVE INTERVENTION: A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE FOR COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES](#)**⁴⁷

This guide created by the National Center on Intensive Intervention was designed to support school teams in better understanding the process of providing students with intensive intervention, as well as how to engage parents and families with the process.

▶ **[ALIGNING AND INTEGRATING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS \(PBIS\): CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES FOR FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS IN KEY CONTEXTS](#)**⁴⁸

This e-book, supported by the Technical Assistance Center for PBIS funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, comprehensively reviews reasons for and ways to significantly enhance family engagement in schools within the context of MTSS.

▶ **[FULL, EQUAL, AND EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES: CONNECTICUT'S DEFINITION AND FRAMEWORK FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT](#)**⁴⁹

This document, created by the Connecticut State Department of Education, was developed to promote a common definition of family engagement and to encourage a shared understanding and collaboration between educators and families.

⁴⁷ <https://intensiveintervention.org/resource/intensive-intervention-practitioners-guide-communicating-parents-and-families>

⁴⁸ <https://www.pbis.org/resource/aligning-and-integrating-family-engagement-in-pbis>

⁴⁹ <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Publications/Full-Equal-and-Equitable-Partnerships-with-Families>

STANDARD 9: OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Resource allocation is critical for the success of any educational organization and especially when resources are scarce. Standard 9 suggests educational leaders strategically allocate school and district resources in a transparent but flexible manner that allows the system to meet the academic and social, emotional, and behavioral needs of all students.

Maximizing efficiency is one of the primary benefits of the MTSS framework, and educational leaders use the key implementation features to meet this standard. Transparency and shared decision making are important outcomes of the distributed leadership team model used within the MTSS framework. Educational leaders are supported in resource allocation and operations management decisions by key stakeholders and an open feedback loop. Additionally, data are reviewed regularly and used to inform decisions about what is working and what is not so resources can be realigned as needed. Building internal capacity for implementation ensures the district is able to effectively and efficiently address staff turnover and meet the changing needs of the school and community. Additionally, by investing in internal capacity building and effective professional development and coaching supports, educational leaders can ensure resources are used in ways that lead directly to student academic success and well-being.

KEY RESOURCES:

▶ [MTSS AND THE KEYS TO SUCCESS](#)⁵⁰

This guide published by the National Association of School Psychologists provides a concise, yet comprehensive, overview of the essential components of MTSS along with evidence-based resources for implementing each component. The guide was developed to help school leaders in understanding and advocating for efficient and effective systems-based delivery of services to benefit the academic

development and mental health of all learners.

▶ [INTRODUCTION TO HIGH-LEVERAGE PRACTICES THROUGH A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT](#)⁵¹

This webinar created by the CEEDAR Center discusses how Georgia is strategically using High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) within the state's MTSS service delivery model.

⁵⁰ <https://www.nasponline.org/x41417.xml>

⁵¹ <https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/portfolio/an-approach-to-implementing-high-leverage-practices-through-mtss>



STANDARD 10: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Continuous improvement is a critical component of any educational system, and effective educational leaders foster this within their school communities. Continuous improvement relies on a system's ability to provide timely and actionable feedback as well as effective supportive structures for learning.

The MTSS framework is powered by data-based decision making and structured to promote continuous improvement. Educational leaders working within an MTSS are assisted at all levels with ongoing school improvement efforts. Leadership teams regularly review implementation and outcome data and use that data to revise action plans and re-align practices and supports. Flexible and differentiated systems of training and coaching are available to support staff growth as needed, and data are used to guide the allocation of these resources as well as to assess the effectiveness of the systems. Clearly defined evaluation and performance feedback routines across state, district, and school levels promote transparency and shared accountability for student outcomes and for continued school improvement.

KEY RESOURCES:

▶ [EVALUATION BLUEPRINT FOR PBIS](#)⁵²

This blueprint developed by the Center on PBIS provides a framework for developing Evaluation Plans and Evaluation Reports to address useful evaluation questions, select evaluation measures, and measurement schedules that meet the needs of local decision-makers, and use evaluation information for active decision-making at the school, district, regional, and state levels.

▶ [MTSS INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS](#)⁵³

This document summarizes the infrastructure and supports needed in schools to support successful MTSS implementation. This resource can serve as a useful starting point for district- and school-level teams to assess core features currently in place.

▶ [MTSS FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION RUBRIC](#)⁵⁴

This measurement tool was developed by the Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports to facilitate monitoring of school-level fidelity of MTSS implementation. This measure can serve as a useful starting point for school teams that want to assess core features of MTSS that are currently in

place so they may prioritize action steps moving forward in creating systems and processes.

▶ [SELF-ASSESSMENT OF MTSS IMPLEMENTATION \(SAM\)](#)⁵⁵

This tool created by Florida's State Department of Education was designed for teams to comprehensively measure school-level implementation of MTSS, differentiating between structures addressing academics and behavior while also considering equity and family engagement. The rubric is accompanied by a scoring sheet, an action planning document with guiding questions, and suggestions regarding how to use the data. As with the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric above, this measure can likewise serve as a useful starting point for school teams that want to assess core features of MTSS that are currently in place so they may prioritize action steps moving forward in creating systems and structures.

52 <https://www.pbis.org/resource/evaluation-blueprint-for-pbis>

53 <https://mtss4success.org/resource/mtss-infrastructure-and-support-mechanisms>

54 <https://mtss4success.org/resource/essential-components-mtss-rubric>

55 http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/resources/presentations/2016/nasp/eval/SAM%20Packet_October%202015.pdf

CONCLUSION

MTSS is a powerful framework for organizing resources and maximizing the effectiveness of schools, districts, and states. School leaders can enhance their effectiveness and meet leadership standards by organizing leadership functions within an MTSS. Leaders who are working with an MTSS framework are supported as they address all ten of the Professional Standards for Educational leaders. Unfortunately, many educational leaders do not receive training or support to know how to best leverage MTSS to maximize their effectiveness. This guide and the companion

crosswalk can be used by educational leaders at the state, district, or school level to support implementation and to demonstrate how MTSS implementation can promote and enhance educational leaders' effectiveness. Additionally, this guide and crosswalk can be used by educational leadership preparation programs to explicitly integrate MTSS features into course work and internship opportunities, ensuring that leaders are adequately prepared to use the MTSS framework to organize their work and maximize student academic success and well-being.

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IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLE



IMPLEMENTATION

EXAMPLE

The superintendent of Smithville Public Schools has been faced with significant budget cuts in recent years. Providing students in the district with high-quality, rigorous academic instruction while promoting respect for others and self-advocacy have been important core values of the district. However, the superintendent must find a way to uphold the values and high-quality instruction with fewer resources. She has heard that implementation of MTSS is an approach that can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of current systems and structures, so she decides to explore implementation of MTSS within the district.

Assessing

She begins by creating a district-level leadership team comprised of curriculum specialists in reading and math, the director of special education, an administrator representative from each school in the district, and herself. The team begins by completing the [MTSS Infrastructure and Support Mechanisms](#)⁵⁶ to assess current infrastructure for MTSS districtwide. Upon completing the rubric, the team feels that the district as a whole has a strong sense of the mission and vision. Additionally, district-level leadership have a good understanding of MTSS and commitment to refining systems and practices to improve efficiency across the district. Some core features of MTSS are already in place district-wide. For example, evidence-based curricula are used to address academic content areas across most schools. Universal screening measures are also used to assess the academic progress of all students. However, the district-level team believes that Tier 2 and 3 systems and supports are somewhat inconsistent and not clearly defined across schools. Additionally, until this point, district-level leadership of the MTSS process has not existed. The team decides to begin by identifying one school in which to pilot MTSS implementation. Pleasant Valley School, one of the elementary schools in the district, already has more clearly defined Tier 2 supports to address reading, so they select that school to refine and strengthen current systems. Their hope is that they can build a model site for MTSS implementation within the district which can be used as an example for other schools district-wide.

Next, a school-level leadership team at Pleasant Valley School is established. The team is comprised of the principal, assistant principal, school psychologist, reading coach, math coach, a special education teacher, and two general education teachers. The team plans to meet every other week while initially establishing systems and structures within the school. The principal of Pleasant Valley School will also participate in the district-level leadership team, which will continue to meet every other month, to share the progress that his school is making. The team at Pleasant Valley School begins by taking stock of current MTSS features that are already in place by completing the [Self-Assessment of MTSS Implementation](#)⁵⁷ (SAM) as a team.

Upon completing the SAM, the team is happy to note that several

⁵⁶ <https://mtss4success.org/resource/mtss-infrastructure-and-support-mechanisms>

⁵⁷ http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/resources/presentations/2016/nasp/eval/SAM%20Packet_October%202015.pdf



foundational components of MTSS are already in place at Pleasant Valley School. For example, the school has an intervention block built into the schedule in which students currently receive small group reading or math intervention if needed. Additionally, teaming time is built into the schedule, which provides staff with time to regularly meet in grade-level teams to share ideas and problem-solve strategies to support students. The school also utilizes evidence-based curricula to guide reading and math instruction. According to data obtained from universal screening measures, over 80% of the school's population has achieved the identified cut score on the measures in reading and math, indicating that they are meeting grade-level standards. This is a good indication that the Tier 1 core curricula for reading and math are currently successful in supporting the student population.

In order to address SEB skills, the school has implemented PBIS for the past five years. The school has clearly defined behavioral expectations which are routinely taught and reviewed in all classrooms. A school-wide ticket system is utilized to reinforce expected behaviors across the school. Additionally, a systematic continuum of responses to problem behaviors is implemented by staff throughout the school. A school-level PBIS team meets regularly to review school-wide behavioral data and to assess the fidelity of PBIS implementation. According to evaluation measures, PBIS is currently implemented with fidelity across the school. However, the PBIS team has noted that there is a large number of students (>20% of

the student population) who currently have more than one office discipline referral (ODR), suggesting a potential need for extra support. Analysis of ODR data also indicates that students of color within the school are more likely to receive ODRs than white students. Additionally, members of the PBIS team have noted that there seems to be a large number of students who visit the nurse regularly with complaints of headaches and stomachaches. The team wonders if these students might also benefit from additional support. However, there is not currently a system in place to easily identify these students and provide them with support, as they are not typically captured in the office discipline referral data. Overall, information gathered from the PBIS team suggests that Tier 1 SEB supports in the school may not be adequate in supporting at least 80% of the student population, and that a universal screening measure that captures students with internalizing behaviors may be warranted.

Other weaknesses were noted on the SAM as well. To begin, the team felt that most staff across the school did not clearly understand the rationale and benefits of MTSS implementation. They wondered if that would be a barrier in securing buy-in and would ultimately affect the success of implementation. The team noted that Pleasant Valley had some good programs and resources for providing evidence-based reading intervention; however, they recognized that they did not have as many high-quality resources for math or to address SEB skills. Additionally, progress monitoring for both reading and math intervention was currently happening informally, rather than through the use of validated measures. The team felt that interventionists in the school struggled with selecting and utilizing appropriate progress monitoring tools, as well as analyzing data to inform decision-making. Results of the SAM also helped the Pleasant Valley team identify a need for clear decision-making rules to determine which students were in need of Tier 2 and 3 supports, as well as clear guidelines for evaluating whether or not a student was making adequate progress with intervention. Finally, the team identified a need to increase family engagement in the MTSS process, as well as the school in general.

In summary, as a result of completing the SAM, the Pleasant Valley team identified the following potential action steps to further MTSS implementation:

- ▶ **TIER 1** – address equity in school discipline; consider implementing a universal SEL program to supplement the PBIS framework; explore using a SEB screener to more readily identify students in need of support with internalizing behaviors (e.g., those who may visit the nurse frequently rather than receive ODRs); develop decision-making rules in determining how to identify students in need of Tier 2 supports.
- ▶ **TIER 2** – identify additional programs to use for math and behavioral intervention; select and use progress monitoring measures for reading, math, and behavior; develop decision-making rules in determining if a student is making adequate progress, to inform intervention modification, and to determine if a student is in need of Tier 3 supports.

- ▶ **TIER 3** – identify additional programs to use for math and behavioral intervention; select and use progress monitoring measures for reading, math, and behavior; develop decision-making rules in determining if a student is making adequate progress, to inform intervention modification, and to determine if a referral to special education is warranted.
- ▶ **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS** – intro to MTSS training for all staff; training on culturally responsive discipline practices for all staff; training on SEB screener and/or universal SEL program for key staff if purchased; training on new math and behavioral intervention programs for interventionists; training on progress monitoring and data analysis for interventionists.
- ▶ **ONGOING COACHING** – MTSS implementation steps specific to Pleasant Valley School; monitoring implementation fidelity of all core curricula, interventions, and MTSS procedures; data analysis and data-based decision making.

The team plans to focus efforts on strengthening Tier 1 systems and practices in the first year, with the hope that fewer students will be in need of Tier 2 and 3 supports when universal supports are more robust. They find [The Hexagon Tool](#)⁵⁸ to be useful in selecting an appropriate SEB [screening measure](#)⁵⁹ and universal [SEL program](#)⁶⁰ for the school. The team utilizes other resources from this document to select and implement practices to address [family engagement](#)⁶¹ and [equity](#)⁶². They find the [Training and Professional Development Blueprint for PBIS](#)⁶³ to be an important resource for organizing and prioritizing professional development needs for staff. The team establishes a regular schedule for sharing universal screening data pertaining to both academics and behavior with all school staff, as well as updates on progress with MTSS implementation. They also seek feedback from staff when developing MTSS systems to ensure clarity and understanding. The Pleasant Valley team finds that involving all staff in MTSS implementation through opportunities to share feedback and by regularly sharing data promotes transparency and helps to strengthen buy-in.

Implementing

58 <https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/resources/hexagon-exploration-tool>

59 <http://www.ci3t.org/screening>

60 <https://casel.org/guide>

61 <https://www.pbis.org/resource/aligning-and-integrating-family-engagement-in-pbis>

62 <https://www.pbis.org/resource/pbis-cultural-responsiveness-field-guide-resources-for-trainers-and-coaches>

63 <https://www.pbis.org/resource/training-and-professional-development-blueprint-for-pbis>

Evaluating

At the end of the school year, the team completes the [SAM](#)⁶⁴ again to assess their progress on implementation of core MTSS features. Results indicate that they have made significant progress on Tier 1. Analysis of universal screening data indicates that over 80% of the student population continues to meet grade-level expectations in reading and math. Average ODRs per student per month have decreased over the course of the year. Additionally, after implementing a universal SEL program, the number of students visiting the nurse has decreased over time. This is a good indication that Tier 1 academic supports continue to successfully support the majority of the student population, and that the modifications made to Tier 1 behavioral supports have been successful in supporting more students, potentially decreasing the need for Tier 2 and 3 supports for some students. The team also finds that behavioral support staff are spending less time responding to problem behaviors in the classroom, which has freed up time for them to assist with implementation of the universal SEL program in the classroom and to engage with other initiatives.

⁶⁴ http://www.floridart.usf.edu/resources/presentations/2016/nasp/eval/SAM%20Packet_October%202015.pdf

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