

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS (MTSS)

COMMON LANGUAGE/ COMMON UNDERSTANDING

2nd Edition



This document was updated by the Florida PS/RtI Project and reviewed by Florida's PBIS Project, collaborative projects between the University of South Florida and the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services.

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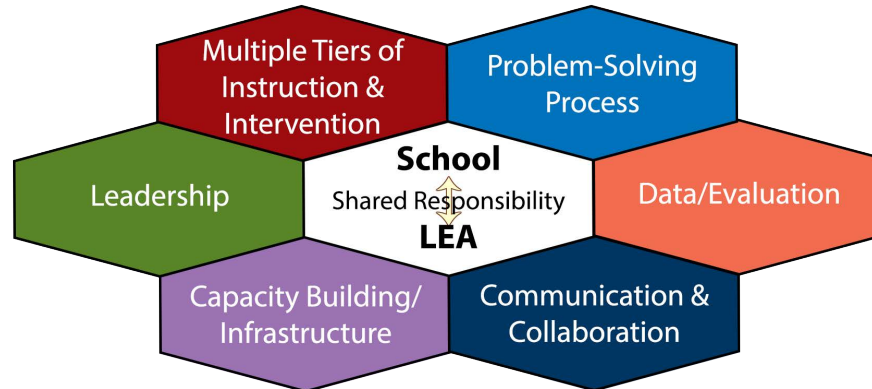
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Many initiatives incorporate various elements of a multi-tiered system of supports. However, differences in the language used to describe the initiatives may result in high levels of variability that can impede the potential positive effect on outcomes for students at the district and school level. Therefore, the establishment of a *common language and common understanding* is necessary to ensure MTSS implementation fidelity and maximize the impact for student learning.

1. How is Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) defined?

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is an educational framework designed to promote successful outcomes for ALL students. When districts and schools are organized as an MTSS, educators use a data-based problem-solving process to inform multiple tiers of standards-aligned instruction and intervention designed to increase the academic, behavioral, emotional, and life skills of students.

A number of critical elements are associated with an MTSS that yield positive outcomes for students. These elements can be grouped or categorized into six domains: Multiple Tiers of Instruction and Intervention, the Problem-Solving Process, Data/Evaluation, Leadership, Capacity Building/Infrastructure, and Communication and Collaboration.



Multiple Tiers of Instruction and Intervention: Educators provide instruction and intervention of varying levels of intensity matched to student need

Problem-Solving Process: Educators use a data-based decision-making process to identify strengths and needs, examine causes of gaps in performance, carefully design instruction/intervention and monitor student response to inform subsequent instruction

Data/Evaluation: Staff understand and have access to data sources that align with the purposes of assessment

Leadership: Effective leaders clearly communicate their vision and expectations for MTSS, model data-based problem solving, and provide necessary resources and professional learning

Capacity Building/Infrastructure: Implementers identify learning standards and expectations, facilitate ongoing professional learning, and establish schedules, processes, and procedures that support problem solving and the provision of tiered instruction/intervention

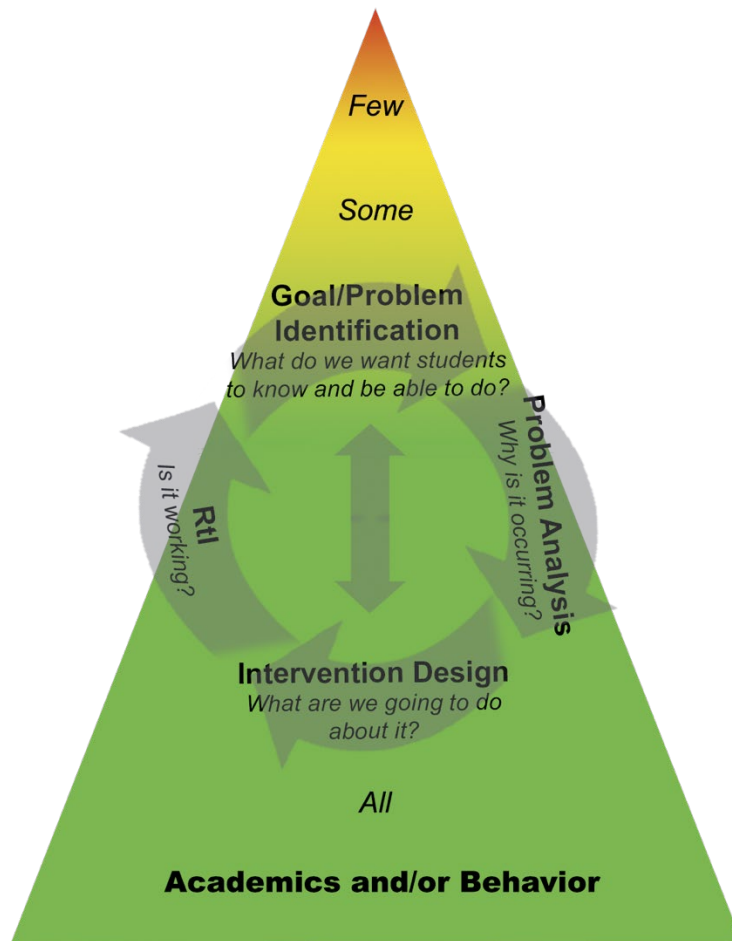
Communication and Collaboration: Stakeholders have the opportunity to provide feedback and be involved in implementation planning

For more detailed information about the critical elements of an MTSS and the domains that comprise them, see [Fact Sheet: Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports](#).

2. What are the steps of the problem-solving process?

The 4-step problem-solving process provides the structure to identify, develop, implement, and evaluate strategies to accelerate the performance of ALL students including those with disabilities. The problem-solving process can be used at all levels of the educational system, including the community, district, school, classroom and/or individual student level, and includes the following steps:

- Step 1 – **Goal/Problem Identification:** Identify what students should know, understand and be able to do; compare the expected level of performance to the current level of performance
- Step 2 – **Problem Analysis:** Identify reasons why the expected level of performance is not being attained
- Step 3 – **Intervention Design:** Design, support and implement evidence-based instruction/intervention matched to student or systems-level needs
- Step 4 – **Response to Instruction/Intervention:** Using both student response data and fidelity data, determine the effectiveness of the instruction/intervention and identify next steps



3. What are Multiple Tiers of Instruction and Intervention?

A multi-tiered model of instruction/intervention is fundamental to an effective MTSS. Although the number of tiers may vary, the three-tiered model based on increasing levels of intensity matched to student need is most common. Instruction is often intensified by increasing time, narrowing the focus to specific barrier skills, and/or reducing the size of the group. The characteristics of each tier, as well as how data are used to make educational decisions within each tier are described in the table below:

	Characteristics	Data and Decision Making
Tier 1	• Instruction and supports provided to <i>all</i> students • High quality, evidence-based instructional routines, differentiated small group instruction, curriculum materials, etc. • Aligned to state standards or local standards • Addresses academics, behavior, emotional and life skills • Fine-tuned using a structured, data-based problem-solving process to meet the needs of the students being served	• Tier 1 alone should be sufficient for at least 80% of students to meet grade-level expectations • Screening data are used to determine sufficiency of Tier 1 and to monitor the progress of all students • Formative data are used to guide real-time adjustments to instruction
Tier 2	• Supplemental instruction, provided to <i>some</i> students for whom Tier 1 alone is insufficient to achieve Tier 1 expectations • Provided in addition to Tier 1 instruction (more time for instruction) • Focused on foundational knowledge and skill gaps that pose barriers to students' success in Tier 1 • Planned through a structured, data-based problem-solving process, often using standard protocol interventions that address high-probability barriers (more narrowed focus) • Delivered to students with similar needs • Systematic and explicit instruction with multiple opportunities for students to practice and receive corrective feedback	• Screening data are used to help identify students at risk • Diagnostic or other drilldown information is used to identify student strengths and weaknesses • Frequent progress monitoring data are used to measure student growth as well as to measure effectiveness of Tier 2 intervention for the group • Tier 2 intervention should result in improvement for at least 70% or more of students receiving the services
Tier 3	• Most intensive, individualized instruction, provided to a <i>few</i> students demonstrating either an intense or severe need • Provided in addition to Tier 1 and Tier 2 (even more time) • Instruction is individualized to address the student's specific needs • Planned using a structured, data-based problem-solving process (even more narrowed focus) • Delivered individually, or in very small groups • Standards aligned, and integrated with Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction • Most systematic and explicit instruction with more extensive opportunities for practice with error correction and feedback	• Diagnostic data are used to identify student's specific skill and knowledge gaps or function of the behavior as well as their strengths • More frequent progress monitoring data is used to measure student growth toward closing gaps as well as to measure effectiveness of Tier 3 intervention

4. What is fidelity as it applies to MTSS and how is it assessed?

In general, fidelity refers to the way in which something is carried out as planned. There are two types of fidelity as it applies to MTSS: implementation fidelity and instructional/intervention fidelity. Both are intended to improve outcomes for students.

Implementation fidelity pertains to the degree to which the critical elements of a particular innovation or process are properly implemented. Quality implementation of MTSS increases the likelihood that instruction and intervention will lead to successful student outcomes. Thus, it is important for schools and districts to monitor not only student outcomes, but also how assessments, instruction, interventions, and data-based problem solving are put into practice (i.e., the fidelity with which these elements are implemented). Therefore, educators can examine the implementation fidelity of their overarching multi-tiered system of support and the problem-solving process.

Implementation fidelity assessments and tools can help teams determine the extent to which critical domains of MTSS, including problem solving, are present and functioning and where improvements can be made. These types of tools are available in Florida to assess levels of MTSS implementation for both academics and behavior. More information about these tools can be found at <https://floridarti.usf.edu> and <https://flpbis.cbcs.usf.edu>.

Instructional/intervention fidelity, on the other hand, focuses on the degree to which the critical steps occur as designed or intended. Instructional/intervention fidelity across the tiers focuses on the delivery and implementation of specific instruction and intervention. It is “the extent to which the essential intervention components are delivered in a comprehensive and consistent manner by an interventionist trained to deliver the intervention” (Sanetti & Kratochwill, 2009, p.448). The following dimensions of fidelity can allow implementers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of intervention fidelity and how it can be monitored and supported (adapted from: Sanetti and Collier-Meek, 2019):

Implementation	the <i>processes</i> involved in putting an intervention into place and supporting the delivery
Adherence	<i>which</i> intervention components were delivered/implemented as planned
Quality	<i>how well</i> intervention components were delivered/implemented
Exposure	the <i>amount</i> of intervention that was delivered/implemented
Intervention outcomes	<i>indicators</i> that the instruction/intervention is having the desired or intended effect

At Tier 1, fidelity of instruction is the degree to which large group and differentiated small group instruction in the classroom setting is delivered in the way it is intended. Assessing fidelity at Tier 1 can include the review of permanent products such as lesson plans or through direct observation or walkthroughs conducted by administrators or peers.

Fidelity of Tier 2 and 3 interventions focuses on how interventions are delivered to either small groups or to individual students. Assessing fidelity at these tiers often includes self-report, permanent products, or direct observation. Self-report requires the interventionist to track or document if the intervention occurs and/or which components of the intervention are delivered. Assessing fidelity via permanent products involves the review of byproducts (e.g., student work, computer generated reports) that provide evidence

that the intervention took place. Direct observation is a more time-intensive way to assess intervention fidelity, but may yield the most accurate measure.

5. How do educators support fidelity of instruction/intervention across the tiers?

Given the daily demands placed on teachers and other interventionists, careful attention is critical to ensure instruction strategies and interventions are supported, planned, and implemented consistently and correctly. Some general strategies to increase the fidelity of tiered supports for students include:

- Provide effective leadership, professional learning and support to teachers and staff aligned on how to implement a data-based problem-solving process with fidelity
- Use MTSS implementation fidelity data to identify gaps in infrastructure or supports needed to sustain efficient and effective evidence-based practices at the school and classroom level
- Identify and promote evidence-based instructional practices and train school leaders and educators about how they can maximize the effectiveness of Tier 1
- Engage Professional Learning Communities at the school and district levels in conversations about instructional/intervention fidelity
- Explicitly communicate that instructional/intervention fidelity are school and district priorities

In addition, well-developed comprehensive instruction/intervention plans promote and support instructional/intervention fidelity. Ideally, the specific components of this plan include:

- Specificity about who is responsible for implementation, what will be implemented, when/how often, and where
- Explicit description of the instructional/intervention steps
- How often progress will be monitored, who is responsible, how often, and when the plan and data will be reviewed
- What fidelity data will be collected, by whom and how often
- And perhaps most importantly, the support plan for the instructor/interventionist. This includes who will be providing support, what that support will entail, and how often it will occur

Finally, *performance feedback* is an evidenced-based practice that incorporates the use of observation, collaborative data review and feedback to support instruction/intervention fidelity. Typically, performance feedback can be provided by a peer or mentor and involves discussion and guidance about areas needing adjustment. The intensity of the support can often be faded as the instructor/interventionist gains confidence and fluency and data indicate successful outcomes for students.

6. What are decision rules and how are they connected to assessing effectiveness of instruction/intervention?

Decision rules are ranges for student performance/response that are predetermined by the problem-solving team. They are used to determine the degree to which instruction/intervention has been effective in enabling students to achieve the goals identified in Step 1 of the problem-solving process. After a review of progress monitoring data, the team uses the decision rules to determine whether the response to instruction/intervention is positive, questionable, or poor.

- A positive response is demonstrated by a significant improvement in student performance, such that the gap between expected performance and observed performance is closing, and it is predicted that the goal will be reached within a reasonable period of time.
- A questionable response is demonstrated by improvement in student performance, but the *rate* of improvement is stagnant or insufficient to achieve the performance goal within the desired amount of time.
- A poor response is demonstrated by little to no change in the rate of student performance, increasing the gap between expected and observed levels of performance over time.

Having recommendations for subsequent instruction/intervention that are aligned to the types of student response, will promote consistent decision making across schools and districts. The recommendation following a positive response to instruction/intervention is to continue the instruction/intervention with the current goal, continue the instruction/intervention with the goal increased, or gradually fade the instruction/intervention. If a response to instruction/intervention is questionable or poor, the first recommendation is always to *ensure the instruction/intervention was implemented as designed and address fidelity issues, if necessary*. Once fidelity is ensured, the recommendation for a questionable response is to increase the intensity of the instruction/intervention (e.g., time, focus) for a specified period of time and assess impact. When the response is poor, the recommendation is to return to problem solving.

7. What are the critical elements of district and school infrastructure needed to implement and sustain MTSS?

The following are critical elements of infrastructure that should be in place to efficiently and effectively implement and sustain a multi-tiered system of supports within a school or district:

- Policies and procedures across the classroom, grade, building, district, and state levels are coordinated and aligned
- Critical elements of MTSS are defined and understood by educators
- Ongoing professional learning and coaching is provided on the topics of multi-tiered instruction/intervention, data-based problem solving, and assessment and data sources
- Schedules provide adequate time for assessment, data-based problem solving, and provision of multi-tiered instruction/intervention
- Comprehensive, efficient, and user-friendly data systems support decision making from the individual student level to the aggregate district level
- Resources available to support MTSS implementation are identified and allocated appropriately

8. What are the skills and activities that best define coaching within an MTSS?

Coaching within an MTSS can be accomplished by either an individual or it can be accomplished as a set of activities and supports that are collectively provided by a district or school-based leadership team. The skills and activities necessary for implementing and sustaining MTSS are:

- Demonstrate effective interpersonal communication skills and the ability to build trusting relationships with stakeholders
- Use multiple sources and types of data for problem solving
- Facilitate effective team-based collaborative planning and the problem-solving process
- Disseminate evidence-based content knowledge about:
 - Organizational change/implementation processes
 - Three-tiered instruction/intervention
 - 4-step problem solving
 - Evidence-based instructional practices
- Support leadership to implement and sustain MTSS
- Provide evidence-based training and technical assistance to support the implementation of MTSS
- Evaluate the impact of coaching activities on staff performance and student outcomes.

For additional information on the foundational skills needed to effectively provide coaching within an MTSS, please see the [Systems Coaching Fact Sheet](#) and the PS/RtI Project's [Coaching Series Professional Learning Modules](#).

9. What skills and actions are required of school and district leaders to implement MTSS?

Leadership is integral to successful implementation of large-scale innovations, such as MTSS, and the effective management of change. It is important for school and district leaders to effectively communicate, foster a positive, collaborative climate that includes all stakeholders, and celebrate student success. District leaders should ensure that school principals receive the professional learning and support needed to develop and maintain these leadership skills. District leadership can facilitate and support a professional learning community (PLC) specific to the implementation of MTSS that helps school leaders to:

- Understand and model the 4-step problem-solving process
- Communicate and reinforce the expectation for data-based decision making
- Communicate and reinforce the expectation that Tier 1 instruction should be effective for the majority of students
- Communicate and reinforce the expectation that Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports will be integrated with Tier 1 standards for performance in academics, behavior, and life skills
- Create an infrastructure to ensure that instruction/intervention is driven by student data (e.g., scheduling “data days” for regular grade level or content area planning)
- Facilitate the development of instructional schedules that are focused on student needs\
- Ensure that instruction/intervention support is provided to all staff
- Establish a system for regular communication of student outcomes with staff and with students and their parents.
- Foster a commitment to continuous improvement
- Create frequent opportunities to celebrate success

10. What should leaders consider when evaluating their district or school's MTSS?

When evaluating effectiveness of an MTSS, leaders need information about their implementation of the critical elements and associated practices that contribute to improvements in outcomes for students. Data collection and analysis should be guided by critical questions about school and district functioning.

Examples of critical questions include:

- Is there consensus among educators for the implementation of MTSS?
- Do school and district staff possess the necessary understanding, knowledge, and skills to implement MTSS?
- To what extent are educators implementing evidence-based instruction and intervention across grade-levels, content areas, and tiers with fidelity?
- To what extent are teams engaging in structured, data-based problem solving with fidelity?
- How are students performing compared to grade-level expectations?
- What other factors may promote or hinder MTSS implementation and improved outcomes for students?

Questions like these allow key partners to prioritize what data to collect, and develop methods and procedures for gathering the information. A variety of methods, tools, and procedures are available for collecting MTSS implementation data, and can be found at the [Florida PS/RtI Project](#) and [Florida's PBIS Project](#) websites.

11. How can leaders increase the likelihood that MTSS will be successfully implemented and sustained?

To increase the likelihood that MTSS will be successfully implemented and sustained, leaders should:

- Achieve consensus – Help district and school level educators understand the need for MTSS
- Consider school norms and expectations – Incorporate district and school beliefs, values, and practices into MTSS implementation, and foster a commitment to continuous improvement
- Provide training and support – Ensure that professional learning is available to help educators acquire the necessary skills and information
- Provide feedback to implementers – Regularly review MTSS implementation data and student outcome data to validate efforts and sustain implementation momentum
- Set realistic expectations - Establish realistic goals for successful MTSS implementation that allow educators to experience early success and maintain enthusiasm
- Measure and analyze progress – Monitor implementation progress frequently to inform decisions and enable timely adjustments to practices
- Involve participants in planning – Gather input from, and involve partners in the development and refinement of the district or school's MTSS