

# MOVING FORWARD

News and information about the education of special  
needs students for teachers and parents

FALL 2015

## MULTI-TIER SYSTEM OF SUPPORT (MTSS)

### *"The Next Wave of Student Intervention"*

As educators, we see a lot of state initiatives come and go. The next "big idea" fades after a short time to make room for "the next biggest idea." The irony of this is that sometimes we go full circle and end up where we began. Thankfully, that is not the case with the new wave of enhanced student interventions.

Multi-Tier System of Support (MTSS) is really Response to Instruction (RtI) 2.0. Many people saw RtI as a type of screening process for special education, but it's really about efficiently remediating skill deficits using a holistic approach. The two initiatives share many similarities, but MTSS takes student interventions to a new level.

The greatest change generated by MTSS is systemic. It requires all leadership, at both the district and building levels, to commit resources to assist struggling students academically and behaviorally.

That doesn't sound like a new idea, does it? The problem with education is that it is often too compartmentalized. Districts have general edu-



cation, special education, Title 1, bilingual language services, curriculum, and student services to provide support for all types of students. Each department has its own specific missions, objectives and often their own funding sources. This means that communication from all entities has to take place on a consistent basis, and that is not always the case. The key is to get everyone to sit at one table to create one cohesive plan that addresses the needs of all children.

MTSS is a system change that pushes all of its energy into efficient, effective interventions. It embraces measurable progress, technology, teamwork and a diverse set of skill-specific interventions. It's about working harder, but it is also about working smarter.

More importantly, the driving force behind the MTSS movement is about changing the climate of our schools to be more innovative, collaborative and inclusive. When the focus and the resources are proactive and target our youngest learners, we reap the positive benefits for years to come.

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*"I've led a school whose faculty and students examine and discuss and debate every aspect of our law and legal system. And what I've learned most is that no one has a monopoly on truth or wisdom. I've learned that we make progress by listening to each other, across every apparent political or ideological divide."*

*Elena Kagan*

# THE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RTI and MTSS

## Response To Instruction

- A “practice” or way of work
- Focused on student-level problem solving
- Often lead by special education
- Related to interventions and educational evaluations for specific learning disabilities (SLD)
- More in-depth data systems focused on literacy
- School lead

## Multi-Tiered System of Support

- A systems approach to school reform
- Integrating Academics and Behavior District, School and Classroom
- Lead by general education
- Focused on accelerating performance of ALL students
- Broader, integrated data systems
- District lead

## THE CRITICAL ROLE OF LEADERSHIP TO CREATE SYSTEM CHANGE

***“Leadership is an attitude.”***

*George Batsche*

The role of district leadership, which includes administrators and the school board, is critical in the process of creating systems change. Leadership dictates the direction, and provides a global vision of what changes are needed, as well as why, when and how they are going to be implemented.

Consensus becomes far more likely, when under the guidance of leadership, the process of transition is made very clear. Resistance to change decreases when all stakeholders have the opportunity to shape the changes with shared, open communication. Never underestimate the power of diverse perspectives in the school and within the community.

Once the goals are generated, leadership has to create the climate and the energy to fuel the changes. The district leadership needs to convey the message to all stakeholders that while the



process is currently under construction, mistakes may be made along the way, but the outcome will truly improve all student learning.

The most difficult role for leadership is to hold everyone accountable for their specific role in the changes. This is accomplished by communicating clear expectations, goals and timelines.

The word “change” tends to send fear into the hearts of many people, especially those who feel that despite data to the contrary, everything is going just fine. All entities have to become part of the driving force, or else part of the obstruction. The latter of the two is a lose-lose for everyone.

In the spirit of implementing MTSS, the school board and administration of every school district must work as one team to create a positive force that pushes the doubters into constructive action. Failure is clearly not an option.

# SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

## Everyone Working Together for Change



### KEY COMPONENTS OF IMPLEMENTATION

**Leadership Consensus:** All system leaders see the need to change and commit all resources to successful implementation of MTSS.

**Integrated Tiered System:** All disciplines work together to create skill-specific interventions that vary in terms of intensity and frequency.

**Evidence-Based Intervention:** Using programs, strategies and tools that have been proven to be successful through scientific research.

**Universal Design for Inclusion:** The differentiation of the classroom curriculum, and physical layout of the school is modified to accommodate ALL students.

**Empower the Believers:** Give a strong voice to empower the educators who believe that ALL children can learn.

**Literacy Focus:** Foundational reading skills across all subject areas must be the priority across all curriculum and supplemental interventions.

**Create a Climate for Change:** Create a climate where the staff feel free to brainstorm, innovate and try new approaches to learning. Schools where calculated risks are the norm and failures are viewed as learning experiences will increase their probability of success.

**Innovation:** Technology is the preferred modality of our children. Find ways to integrate research-based educational software in the classroom while sustaining interpersonal relationships.



# WHAT ARE RESEARCH-BASED INTERVENTIONS?

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) began a nationwide push for schools to identify and implement programs that improved student academic achievement for all children. The law mandated that these new programs be created on scientifically-based research that proves that these programs are effective in increasing positive student outcomes.



\* Rely on direct measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different researchers.

\* Specific research interventions are evaluated using experimental designs in which individuals, groups, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions, and include within-condition or across-condition control groups.

\* Ensure that research includes sufficient data and explicit detail to allow for other researchers to repeat the studies or at minimum, offer opportunities to build systematically on initial findings.

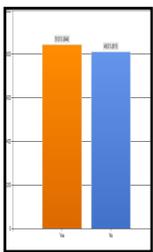
\* Research that has been accepted by a peer-review journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through comprehensive, objective scientific review.

The mandate for scientifically-based research in education includes academic programs for reading, language and math, as well as effective programs for keeping schools safe, drug prevention, increasing parent involvement, and improving professional development for teachers.

Research-based interventions include the following essential elements outlined by the U.S. Department of Education:

- \* Use systematic, empirical methods that rely on direct observation or experimentation.
- \* Involve comprehensive data analyses that are able to test the stated hypotheses and justify the conclusions drawn.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education; SEDL Letter, Volume XV (Number 01/2) "Improving Achievement in Mathematics and Science" by Lesley Dahlkemper.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF DATA

Interventions need to be measurable in order to determine their effectiveness. The process of using data to make decisions starts with a baseline. A baseline is used as a starting point that is calculated before any intervention is implemented. Once the baseline is set, teams can measure progress by comparing new data to the baseline data.

The beauty of data is that it is objective and not based on opinion. The patterns on a spreadsheet can be interpreted as positive or negative, or they can be used simply to measure rate of change. Analyzing data allows educators to make the necessary changes that help lead to positive student outcomes.

### **Moving Forward**

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