



***The New York State Education Department's (NYSED'S)
Multi-Tiered System of Supports - Integrated
(MTSS-I) Pilot Framework
October 2023***

NYSED's MTSS-I Framework has been designed to take a holistic approach to identifying and addressing students' unique needs, using a lens that is responsive to every student's social identity, culture, and language. The framework adopts fairness and equity as core principles that help to drive access to opportunity, and to ensure an unwavering focus on supporting the academic, behavioral, and social emotional growth of every student across the State.

This document contains resources with hypertext links or pointers to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. NYSED does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of this outside information. Furthermore, NYSED does not endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered, on these outside sites, or the organizations sponsoring the sites.

Note: This is a “living document” that was piloted in 75 New York State schools during the 2022-23 school year. The framework will be revised and improved upon as we learn through the implementation of this pilot. It is our belief that this document will always be evolving as research, data on implementation, program efficacy, student performance and stakeholder input changes. This information is not intended to be a substitute for professional learning. We hope this document will serve as a guide and help all stakeholders to better serve and support the needs of all students.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document is intended to provide districts and schools with a foundational understanding of the MTSS-I framework and its essential components. It is intended to be used in coordination with professional development (PD) to support districts and schools as they implement MTSS-I.

WHAT IS A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS (MTSS)?

MTSS is a systemic, evidence-based, continuous school-improvement framework in which data-based problem solving, and decision-making are practiced across all levels of the educational system. The Every Student Succeeds Act defines MTSS as a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based¹, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students' needs (e.g., academic, behavioral, social-emotional, student physical and mental health) with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision making that supports all learners. It ensures equitable access to a rigorous, robust, high quality education beginning in pre-kindergarten. Like a computer's operating system that helps organize software and programs so that users are able to navigate and access what they need, MTSS helps schools organize the delivery of a continuum of supports so that students are able to access the level of support they need when it is needed².

WHAT IS AN INTEGRATED MTSS FRAMEWORK?

MTSS-I provides the structure for districts to prioritize the needs of the whole child, including social-emotional, behavioral, and academic growth. It ensures culturally responsive-sustaining environments that are welcoming, safe, and bias aware, forming the foundation of all instruction and interventions. All students are provided an inclusive learning environment regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, zip code, language, socio-economic status, living conditions (i.e., homeless, foster care), migrancy, physical or intellectual ability, and citizenship status.

The MTSS-I framework blends NYSED resources, training systems, data, and practices to develop a comprehensive, coherent, strategically combined system to address instructional, behavioral, cultural, linguistic, social-emotional, physical and mental health support for all students.

MTSS-I is not:

- a curriculum or program;
- just a process for struggling students;
- synonymous with Academic Intervention Services (AIS); or
- implemented by creating and/or utilizing a set of forms to follow a certain set of steps or procedures.

For the purposes of this document, MTSS is used when referring to the concepts of MTSS, in general. MTSS-I refers specifically to NYSED's MTSS-I framework.

¹ [ESSA Definition of Evidence-Based](#)

² [im4education.com](#)

BENEFITS OF MTSS-I

When MTSS-I is implemented with fidelity the focus is on the system to ensure that all students get what they need to be successful learners. The MTSS-I framework enables the alignment of systems necessary to help schools and districts integrate priorities and organize resources. Using a continuum of evidence-based and culturally responsive instruction, interventions, and assessment practices, all students receive the precise level of support they need. Other benefits related to MTSS-I include:

- specific types of support provided for all individuals who interact with students in the form of PD, technical assistance, and instructional coaching;
- clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all individuals who interact with students;
- a coherent system for continuous improvement; and
- a common understanding and language when discussing implementation and expected outcomes.

ALL students benefit when the model is implemented with fidelity.³

UNDERLYING VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF MTSS-I

These underlying values and guiding principles of MTSS-I provide guidance for all program decisions and are used to promote consistency, integrity, and sustainability. MTSS-I ensures:

- An Unwavering Focus on Student Growth: All educational decision-making is driven by ambitious student performance goals.
- Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education⁴ and Equity: All students succeed when they have access to what they need when they need it. Schools and districts are organized in a way that recognizes, respects, and reflects the strengths of each student's culture, social identity, and community.
- Engaged Stakeholders: The voices of family, community, and school personnel (i.e. all faculty and staff) are actively solicited and used in decision making. All stakeholders are responsible and accountable for the decisions made.
- A Whole Child/Whole School Approach: All school personnel and students focus on supporting cognitive, academic, physical, behavioral, and social emotional development through systems of support that are aligned and integrated. School personnel receive ongoing PD to enable them to educate and support children to be healthy, safe, engaged, and challenged.
- Proactive Problem-Solving: Prevention is more effective than intervention. Teachers and school leaders believe that success and failure in student learning is about the actions of teachers and school leaders. They adjust practices and policies to create strong conditions for student success by relying on data-based decision-making.
- Full Access for ALL Students⁵: MTSS-I is for all students. All students have access to and participate in the general education curriculum to meet State Learning Standards. Not every student who receives Intensive Supports (Tier 3) is identified as a student with disability, and not every student identified with a disability needs intensive supports in all areas.

³ CEEDAR Center MTSS/UDL/DI Module

⁴ [NYSED Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework](#)

⁵ [Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities](#)

MTSS-I CORE COMPONENTS

The MTSS-I framework is comprised of four critical, interactive components:

- Systems Capacity
- Program Fidelity
- Assessment and Instructional Decision-Making
- Instruction and Intervention

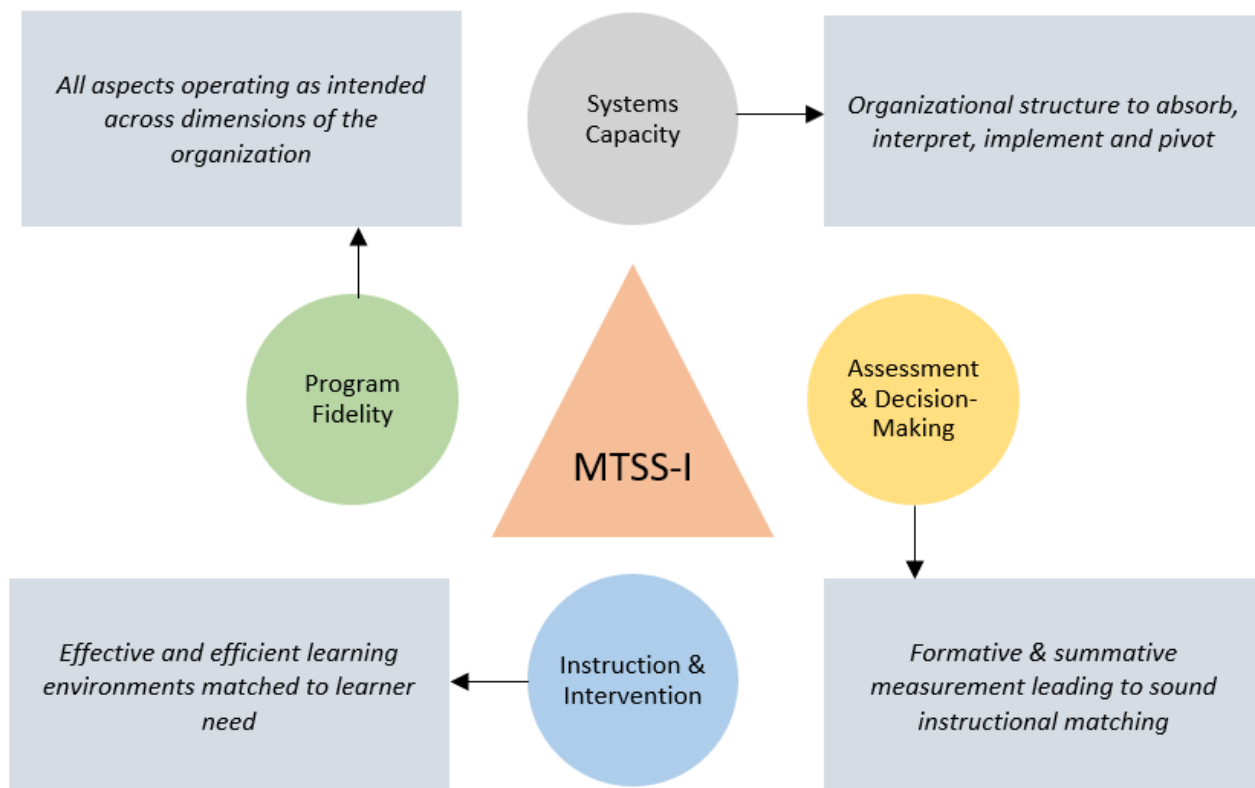


Figure 1: MTSS-I Core Components

SYSTEMS CAPACITY

Systems capacity refers to the ability of a district and school to implement and sustain the MTSS-I framework. Systems capacity includes:

- administrators and staff at the state, regional, district and school levels who actively participate in and publicly articulate commitment to MTSS-I implementation that includes support of the initiative with appropriate and sustained resources, such as staff, material development, policy statements, and leadership;
- family, students, and community groups that are actively engaged in implementation in meaningful ways;
- ongoing professional learning opportunities for school and district personnel that are sustained over multiple years and reflect data-based needs and research-supported adult learning practices;

- team structures that are culturally responsive and representative of the educational community;
- data collection systems and analysis, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and disability, built to persist over time that produce reliable and valid data used in decision making related to MTSS-I; and
- procedures, materials, records, and manuals that are developed and systematically used to ensure staff attrition does not lead to loss of implementation fidelity.

ASSESSMENT AND INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION-MAKING

MTSS emphasizes the need to measure all skills that a district identifies as instructional priorities, and that instructional deficits be evaluated within a problem-solving model (Tilly, 2002; Fuchs et al., 2006; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016; McCart & Miller, 2019; Schaffer, 2023). A four-step problem solving model is a continuous cycle consisting of (1) identification of the goal; (2) analysis of the problem; (3) implementation of a plan to address the problem; and (4) evaluation of instruction through progress monitoring data. Assessment and intervention should blend seamlessly throughout this process. Many different types of assessments serving multiple functions are used within MTSS-I. These functions include:

- screening to identify at-risk students;
- problem solving approached through an asset-based lens to isolate student needs and identify beginning instructional levels for intervention;
- progress monitoring of student performance to guide instructional, behavioral, social-emotional, and physical and mental health support; and
- evaluating fidelity of practices.

At the student level, the value of a measure in improving recommendations for instruction is known as “treatment utility” (Hayes et al., 1987; Nelson-Gray, 2003) and should be a top consideration for the selection of measures used in educational settings. A selected tool or approach should, minimally, meet the following criteria:

- directly measure an observable target or skill;
- produce quantitative data; and
- have known reliability and validity.

INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION

“Interventions” are defined as programmed instructional practices used in schools to improve student outcomes within a given tier of service. They are evidence-based practices, found to work with similar students in similar environments as outlined in research, with explicitly defined steps, and with effects that can be measured. These instructional practices should have evidence of empirical rigor, should fit within the local context, be feasible relative to currently existing practices, and be considered regarding their fit within a tiered system of support. Culturally responsive-sustaining environments that are welcoming, safe, and bias aware form the foundation of all instruction and interventions. Schools must ensure that intervention implementation is a shared responsibility, staff receive appropriate evidence-based professional learning opportunities, and framework implementation is supported with data.

PROGRAM FIDELITY

Research has shown that without active monitoring, interventions are usually not implemented by faculty and staff as intended, especially when these interventions have been recently taught to faculty and/or staff (Noell et al., 2005; Sanetti & Kratochwill, 2013; Bice-Urbach & Kratochwill, 2016). To expect an intervention to work, it must be implemented as intended, with fidelity. In a functional MTSS system, implementation fidelity is actively monitored, and appropriate supports are put into place to aid teachers when it is found that fidelity is below acceptable criteria.

Implementation fidelity data are used to assess the degree to which all key component parts of the MTSS-I framework are being dependably employed. The use of fidelity data is critical to impact instructional practices to yield desired student outcomes. MTSS-I teams at both the district and the school levels are charged with reviewing implementation fidelity data regularly to guide decision-making and problem solving regarding MTSS-I practices, data, and systems.

MTSS-I will employ two fidelity measures; the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) for behavioral supports (Algozzine et al., 2014), and the Reading Tiered Fidelity Inventory (R-TFI) (St. Martin, Nantais, Harms, & Huth, 2018) for tiered supports in literacy. These instruments are well developed, have sound psychometric properties, and have been widely used in MTSS demonstration sites across the country.

FRAMEWORK OF TIERED SUPPORTS

MTSS-I provides a continuum of supports, which are typically conceptualized across three levels of increasing intensity (Rodriguez, Loman & Borgmeier, 2016). These tiers represent the level of support a student may need at any point in their schooling. All tiers are universally designed to ensure access to equitable, rigorous, and engaging learning opportunities for all students in the areas of academics, behavioral, social emotional and physical and mental health.

The MTSS-I framework is an instrument in which to organize all environments in schools. MTSS-I consists of three tiers or levels of support:

- Universal (Tier 1) consists of high quality instruction, services, and supports that are provided for all students. A strong instructional foundation at Tier 1 limits the number of students needing support at Tiers 2 and 3. Characteristics of Tier 1:
 - high quality instruction and supports for academics and behavior;
 - systematic explicit instruction;
 - universal screening to determine present levels;
 - curriculum as aligned to state standards;
 - active student engagement; and
 - differentiated instruction.

Students who are not successful at Tier 1, should begin to receive Tier 2 supports⁶.

- Targeted (Tier 2) refers to interventions that are provided to small groups of students who need more support than they are receiving in Tier 1. Tier 2 supports are provided in addition

⁶ Branching minds What do the tiers mean.

to the Tier 1 supports that are provided to all students. Only 10-15 percent of the student population⁷ should need Tier 2 supports. Characteristics include all of Tier 1, as well as:

- supplemental instruction with scaffolds provided for identified skill deficits;
- groups of approximately 3 to 5 students, for elementary, and 6 to 8 students for middle school; and
- more focused and/or frequent progress monitoring.

Students successful in Tier 2 may continue with Tier 2 or return to Tier 1 (district, schools determine entry and exit criteria)⁸. Students who are not successful in Tier 2 should be referred to an instructional support team for Tier 3 supports.

- Tier 3 refers to intensive supports provided to individual students who need additional support beyond what they are receiving at Tiers 1 and 2. Only 1-5 percent of the student population should need Tier 3 supports⁹. Characteristics include all of those in Tiers 1 and 2, as well as:
 - intensive instruction for identified skill deficits; and
 - focus on teaching skills.

Students successful in Tier 3 may continue Tier 3, return to Tier 2, or return to Tier 1. Students not successful at Tier 3 may continue Tier 3 with an additional intervention attempted, and may then be referred to special education to identify and evaluate the need for special education services.

Each tier has its own set of systems and practices, but some key components appear across every level. Each of these features need to be present for MTSS to be implemented with fidelity ([Center on Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports \(PBIS\) - Tiered Framework](#)):

- evidence-based, culturally-responsive instruction and support in the home language as possible or as applicable;
- practices organized along a tiered continuum beginning with strong universal supports followed by intensified interventions matched to student needs;
- data systems that guide implementation and that are used to screen, monitor, and assess student progress and equity; and
- resources allocated to ensure systems and practices are implemented with fidelity over time.

There are no “Tier 2 or Tier 3 students”, only students who receive Tier 2 or Tier 3 levels of support. Students may receive varied tiers of support based upon their individual needs.

EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION – WHERE DO WE START?

THE SCIENCE OF IMPLEMENTATION

⁷ Hatton, H., & Guffey, T. (April 2020). Tier II Data, Systems & Practices. Eugene, OR: Center on PBIS, University of Oregon. Retrieved from www.pbis.org.

⁸ Branching minds What do the tiers mean.

⁹ [NYSED Office of Special Education: Minimal Requirements of a Response to Intervention Program](#)

“Implementation is not an event”. It is a process involving multiple decisions, actions, and corrections designed to make full and effective use of effective innovations in education settings”. Some of the primary features of implementation science are:

- teaming structures;
- bi-directional feedback loops;
- practices selected based on local need and fit;
- alignment of initiatives;
- resources to meet coherent goals;
- iterative cycles of data guided improvement; and
- stage-based approach to change.

STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation happens in stages. The path between stages isn’t always linear, and a stage don’t always end exactly as another begins. Implementation happens in four distinct stages:

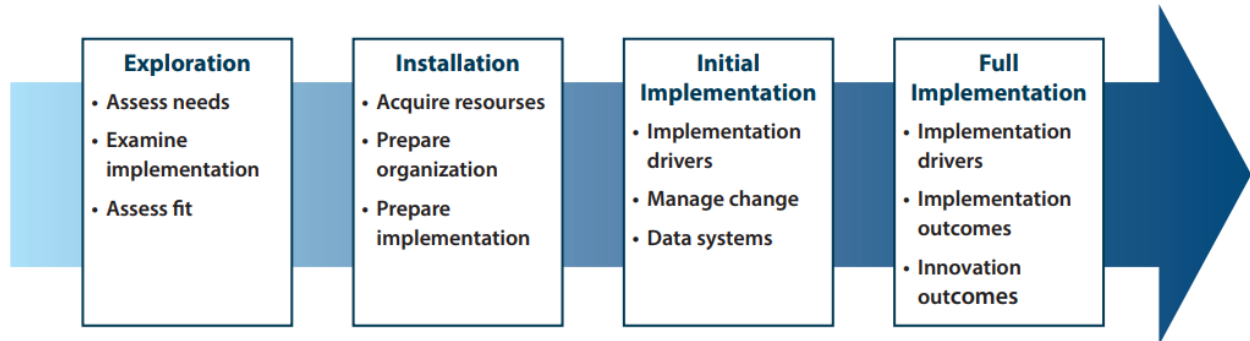


Figure 2: Stages of Implementation

Source: Wayne Regional Educational Service Agencies, “Quick Guide for Multi-Tiered System of Supports: The District Level”

EXPLORATION – Should We Do This?

Leadership teams create readiness for change, by first identifying the need for change, learning about what MTSS-I is and what it takes to implement effectively. When considering the adoption of MTSS-I, teams reflect on the evidence, usability, and supports necessary to implement as well as the need for the program or practice, how well it will fit within existing priorities and efforts, and their capacity to implement as intended. During this stage, teams may ask themselves:

- What is MTSS-I?
- What will it take to implement MTSS-I in our school or district?
- How will we assess our readiness for change so we can eliminate barriers that may prevent successful implementation of MTSS-I?

INSTALLATION – Capacity Building

Once the educational team has made the commitment, the focus becomes, “work to do it right!” Teams focus on building the infrastructure necessary to support MTSS-I implementation, which includes establishing leadership teams, data systems, conducting an audit of current practices and inventorying resources, developing implementation and evaluation plans, and selecting valid

assessments and evidence-based interventions (Fixsen et al. 2005; Saldana et al., 2012; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016; Schaper et al., 2016). Professional learning focuses on building staff buy-in and staff capacity to implement the four essential MTSS-I components. During this stage, teams may consider the following:

- What are our goals, and do we have a defined action plan?
- What professional learning needs to occur to build the foundation for implementation?
- How will success be measured?
- How will stakeholders be engaged to understand the relevancy of this work?

What is the marker of being in installation?

A site is in installation once they have made a decision to move forward with MTSS-I (National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) [NIRN Implementation Stages Planning Tool, 2020](#)).

INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION – Trying To Do It Well

Districts and schools begin to implement MTSS-I processes, practices, assessments, and interventions that were identified and developed during Installation. They use a data-based problem-solving process and engage in continuous improvement cycles to address challenges and barriers. Ongoing professional learning focuses on improving staff's use of data, increasing quality of instruction, and refining implementation fidelity of the four essential components. It is important to remember that full implementation of the essential components is necessary to realize the full benefits of MTSS-I implementation ([MTSS4Success-Implementation](#)). As initial implementation begins, teams may consider the following:

- What structures are in place (e.g., new schedules) to support early implementation changes?
- How can teachers be provided with robust scaffolds and supports such as professional PD and coaching?
- How is data being used to drive the work?
- How much time is provided for teachers to collaborate and reflect on their new practices? (Senge & Kleiner, 1999).

What is the marker of being in initial implementation?

A site is in initial implementation when implementers begin to deliver/use the MTSS-I framework ([NIRN Implementation Stages Planning Tool, 2020](#)).

FULL IMPLEMENTATION – It's How We Do Business!

Full implementation is often the point at which the practices have been implemented well, are integrated into the environment in a manner that is a new way of operating and done long enough to begin showing student benefit (NIRN, 2013). Other indicators of full implementation are:

- regular use of data to inform decision-making and improve implementation of the MTSS-I framework;
- sustained use of the program/practice with all practitioners delivering with fidelity and ease; and
- evidence that identified outcomes are improving through use of the program/practice.

What is the marker of being in full implementation?

At least 50 percent or more of intended practitioners are using the program/practice with fidelity and outcomes are being achieved ([NIRN Implementation Stages Planning Tool, 2020](#)).

SUSTAIN AND EXPAND

Although not a specific stage of implementation, sustainability is an essential focus of implementation. While student outcomes are being realized during full implementation, it's critical that teams continue to maintain their focus and attention on ensuring sustainability. Changes in resources, staff turnover, and changing needs of students and staff must be attended to, ensuring systems are flexible and responsive enough to meet the needs of every student. This means that teams should be required to regularly engage in continuous improvement activities. The focus of these activities is to improve the efficacy and efficiency of MTSS-I implementation, but also address the evolving needs of staff, students, and state and federal demands. MTSS-I teams continue to build infrastructure and align existing systems to ensure staff can sustain full implementation, even when faced with staff turnover and changing priorities. It is important that teams focus on sustaining and expanding MTSS-I implementation through ongoing data analyses and stakeholder engagement ([AIR Center on MTSS](#)). Key considerations during this stage are:

- How will professional learning options be scaled up to meet the needs of more experienced implementers as well as those just beginning?
- How will data be used to refine the system of support?
- How is the focus on this work maintained through transitions in leadership?

RESOURCES

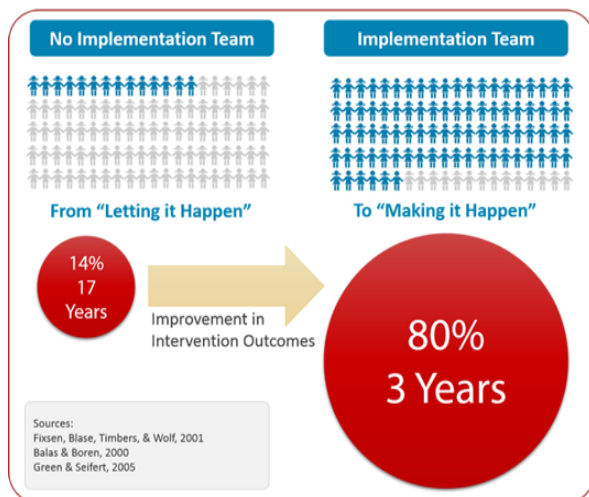
- [NIRN Initiative Inventory](#) – A tool that can be used to guide an organization's review of current initiatives to produce a clear picture of existing initiatives, mandates, and resource commitments. Information and data collected can be used by the organization to explore the fit of additional initiatives with current work, guide decision making to make room for new work, and assist with alignment of efforts.
- [NIRN Implementation Stages Planning Tool](#) – A tool to help districts and schools traverse the stages of implementation.
- [NIRN District Capacity Assessment \(DCA\)](#) – An action assessment designed to help educational district leaders and staff better align resources with intended outcomes and develop action plans to support the use of effective innovations.
- [NIRN Drivers Best Practices Assessment](#) – A tool to assist organizations in assessing their current supports and resources for quality use of selected programs or practices.
- [NIRN: The Hexagon: An Exploration Tool](#) – A tool to better understand how a new or existing program or practice fits into an implementing site's existing work and context. The Hexagon Tool can be used at any stage of implementation to assess fit and feasibility. It is most commonly used during the exploration stage when an implementing site is identifying and selecting new programs and practices to implement.

TEAMING STRUCTURES

MTSS-I utilizes a variety of teaming structures across and amongst levels in an educational system to make the work of implementing more effective and efficient. These teams provide an internal infrastructure to move through the stages of implementation. NIRN defines these groups of individuals as implementation teams, whose roles are to help an organization or system establish a supportive environment and facilitate the implementation of evidence based practices and effective

innovations using implementation science. Implementation teams have the collective knowledge, skills, abilities, and time to succeed and sustain the work.

Why implementation Teams?



Implementation Teams “make it happen!” HOW?

- Increasing “buy-in” and readiness
 - Installing and sustaining the implementation infrastructure
 - Assessing and reporting on fidelity and outcomes
 - Building linkages with external systems
 - Problem-solving and promoting sustainability
- [Tout, Metz & Bartley (2013)]

Figure 2: Why Implementation Teams

Establishing implementation teams and identifying members of a team does not necessarily mean hiring new professionals, or even adding a “new” team. It can begin by assessing existing teams and personnel. Who are the individuals whose support is critical to the success of implementing MTSS-I? Which individuals have knowledge of the district/schools? Should an existing team be “repurposed” or redesigned for this work? Might people be added to a current team as part of the repurposing? What other factors are there to consider? Guidance has been provided below to ensure that implementation teams are representative of the district and school community.

MTSS-I TEAMING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. DISTRICT LEADERSHIP TEAM (DLT)

Prior to year one of implementation of the MTSS-I framework, a DLT must be formed. The key function of the members of the DLT is to ensure that implementation capacity is developed at the school level in all schools, and that collectively the schools and district build the infrastructure needed for high fidelity implementation. The DLT consists of individuals that have decision making authority to guide educational practices, establish procedures, and dedicate necessary resources to implement and maintain the MTSS-I framework. It is recommended that the DLT include the district superintendent, district and building administrators, lead teachers, school board member, family, union, and community representatives, as appropriate. The DLT will conduct a DCA to determine readiness to implement MTSS-I.

2. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)

SLTs are formed during year one of implementation. The SLT plays a critical role in supporting teachers’ competency to use effective innovations with fidelity. Coupled with this goal, the work of the SLT includes ensuring that educators are supported and receive on-going, data-informed training and coaching based on fidelity assessment. The SLT supports and uses a

consistent data system to resolve problems, enact action plans, and monitor feasibility, usability, and impact of interventions using improvement cycles. It is recommended that the SLT include the principal and/or assistant principal, a DLT member, lead teacher(s), content area instructional coach (i.e., behavior and reading), staff in specialty areas (special education, Title I), and a family, union, and community representative, as appropriate ([NIRN: Building Level Teams](#)).

3. GRADE-LEVEL TEAM (GLT)

GLTs are established in year two of implementation. A grade-level teaming structure is incorporated to increase consistency across classrooms and facilitate collaboration in problem-solving for continuous improvement. The focus of the GLT is on improving outcomes for students. Core activities of the GLT include evaluating the effects of practices supporting all students within their specific grade and classrooms, as well as taking steps to strengthen them. The GLT reviews student screening data after each benchmark period for grouping and intervention considerations, reviews overall student progress, and compares results against grade-level targets to assess whether to modify instruction and practices. Participating members include the principal, content area instructional coach (i.e., behavior and reading), special education teachers supporting the specific grade level, general education teachers supporting the specific grade level, and paraprofessionals providing instructional support at the specific grade level (McIntosh and Goodman (2016), *Integrated Multi-Tiered Systems of Support: Blending RTI and PBIS*).

DATA COLLECTION

An effective and efficient data system is essential for successful implementation of MTSS-I. Data is the “Global Positioning System (GPS)” of the MTSS-I framework. Data collection, analysis and decision-making occur at all levels of MTSS-I implementation, from the district level to individual student level. Data is used to inform districts and schools about their current systems and practices. Districts should ensure that their data system provides reliable and valid sources of screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, and outcome data that are utilized to inform instruction and support relative to the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of students.

COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

For districts and schools that are implementing MTSS-I, student assessments may be the cornerstone of the entire system. Looking at school-wide data from student assessments helps with program evaluation. Schools can see the overall impact of supports. The data can show what areas need to be addressed at the district, school, and classroom levels. At an individual level, student assessments show the skills and needs of each student. This information is used to help match the right supports with the student. Students must be assessed in their home language as appropriate and to the greatest extent possible.

UNIVERSAL SCREENING ASSESSMENTS - Identifies at risk students

Universal screening is a critical first step in identifying students who need additional support. It is a brief assessment that is typically administered three times per year (Fall, Winter, Spring) to all students.¹⁰

¹⁰ [U.S. Department of Education - Universal Screening](#)

DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENTS - Pinpoints exact areas of need

Diagnostic assessments provide more in-depth information of an individual student's specific skills for the purpose of guiding future instructional supports. Diagnostic assessments are administered immediately after the universal screening assessment.¹¹

PROGRESS MONITORING - Tracks whether instruction is working

After students are identified and matched with additional supports, the subsequent assessments are used to monitor student progress. The data from progress monitoring determines whether or not current supports should be continued, or different supports are needed.¹²

STUDENT OUTCOME DATA – THE WHOLE CHILD

MTSS-I supports the whole child, which means supporting student success and well-being through many interconnected, data-informed lenses and shifting away from a singular focus on academics. Student outcome data determines the effectiveness of the instructional practices. Data points to consider include, but are not limited to:

Academic

- State assessment scores
- Course, class, gradebook grades
- Screener, diagnostic, progress monitoring data
- Formative, summative assessment results
- Tier entry and exit criteria

Behavior

- Office discipline referrals
- Classroom-recorded incidents
- Attendance rate
- Tardiness, detentions, suspensions
- Health office visits
- Awards/recognitions
- Tier entry and exit criteria

Social-Emotional

- Checklists that assess emotional regulation, social, and interpersonal skills
- Family engagement
- Restorative practices
- School climate
- Trauma
- Mental health
- Tier entry and exit criteria¹³

¹¹ <https://mimtsstac.org/evaluation/student-assessments>

¹² <https://mimtsstac.org/evaluation/student-assessments>

¹³ [Fastbridge MTSS Essentials](#)

FIDELITY MEASURES

District and school leadership teams need to know how well their MTSS-I framework is being implemented. Fidelity measures assess how closely prescribed procedures are followed and the degree to which educators implement practices, assessments, and implementation plans the way they were intended (Gresham, 1989; Sanetti & Kratochwill, 2013; Bice-Urbach & Kratochwill, 2016). When interventions and assessments are implemented with fidelity, teams can make more accurate decisions about an individual student's progress and future intervention needs. In addition, this data helps to ensure that staff have the necessary resources and processes in place to support strong implementation for individual students. For those implementing MTSS-I, the following fidelity measures are recommended:

TIERED FIDELITY INVENTORY (TFI)

The School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)-TFI (<https://www.pbis.org/resource/tfi>) will be used to provide a valid, reliable, and efficient measure of the extent to which school personnel are applying the core features of SWPBIS. The TFI is divided into three sections (Tier 1: Universal SWPBIS Features; Tier 2: Targeted SWPBIS Features; and Tier 3: Intensive SWPBIS Features) that can be used separately or in combination to assess the extent to which core features are in place. The TFI gives teams a single survey to guide implementation and sustained use of SWPBIS. Schools may take the TFI as:

- an initial assessment to determine if they are using or need SWPBIS;
- a guide for implementation of Tier 1, Tier 2, and/or Tier 3 practices;
- an index of sustained SWPBIS implementation; and/or
- a metric for identifying schools for recognition within their state implementation efforts.

READING TIERED FIDELITY INVENTORY (R-TFI)

The R-TFI (<https://mimtsstac.org/>) is a nationally recognized tool developed by Michigan's Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (MiMTSS) and will be used to assess the implementation of a school-wide reading model. Once schools have selected a school-wide reading model, it is important they be able to monitor its levels of implementation. School leadership teams assess the fidelity of implementation to identify what parts of their MTSS-I are already in place, what needs to be improved, and what still needs to be done. Conducting the assessment helps teams examine their reading MTSS in the following areas:

- evidence-based practices for improving student reading;
- systems that create a continuum of supports to meet the variety of reading needs among students; and
- data and evaluation for reading.

COST

There is no cost associated with either of these tools. They are downloadable and links are included above.

SCHEDULE FOR ADMINISTRATION OF FIDELITY MEASURES

Administration of any fidelity measure should occur:

- Before implementation: Administer the assessment for a tier right before its implementation. Use the data to establish a baseline to inform the development of an action plan.

- During implementation: After the initial assessment, administer at least annually. Additional progress monitoring every two to three months is recommended until the tier is implemented with fidelity. The criterion score for each Tier and the Total Score is 70 percent. After each assessment, the action plan should be revised as needed.
- After implementation: Continue to administer the assessment annually each spring and check for sustained implementation.¹⁴

What is the marker of fidelity?

As a general rule, a score of 70 percent for each tier is accepted as a level of implementation that will result in improved student outcomes.¹⁵

PATHWAYS TO IMPLEMENTATION

MTSS-I has evolved from simply focusing on either academic instruction or behavior supports. MTSS-I can be used to integrate any tiered systems related to education (i.e., equity, school-family partnership initiatives, wrap around supports, and mental health supports, etc. (McIntosh and Goodman, 2016)). When determining a path for implementing MTSS-I, districts and schools should anchor their vision on a holistic picture of the skills and mindsets that will make their students successful throughout their educational careers.

When MTSS-I is the overarching framework, it provides the organizing structure for a variety of initiatives that schools must incorporate into their systems (i.e., school improvement, grant funded projects, core curriculum, and student outcomes). Combined systems provide seamless support as opposed to separate systems, where a student may slip through the cracks (McIntosh and Goodman, 2016). Integrating systems can avoid the common challenge presented by silos of responsibility in which different departments or teams accept responsibility for parts of the student and no group takes a shared responsibility for the student as a “whole” (McIntosh and Goodman, 2016). Integrating tiered support efforts may lead to more efficient use of resources and protection against multiple competing initiatives. Having an MTSS-I lens teaches that effective approaches to service delivery can be used for intervention in any domain of student learning.

INTEGRATION OF ACADEMICS AND BEHAVIOR

Academic and behavioral tiered systems of support share many common features and underlying theories. Integration of academic and behavioral support is critical, as academic, and behavioral needs are interconnected: improved social behavior means less time is spent on discipline, leaving more time for academic instruction.

It is recommended that PBIS be implemented first in the sequence. Implementing PBIS first provides structures and practices that in turn support implementation of academics and other tiered programs within the MTSS-I framework. PBIS uses a structured and predictable approach to create a positive and safe environment for students and adults. PBIS is flexible enough to support student, family, and community needs. Even in schools where, on average, behavior problems are not a concern, they may be for select students.

¹⁴ [MiMTSS - School-wide PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory \(SWPBIS TFI\)](#)

¹⁵ [PBIS.org Tiered Fidelity Inventory](#)

WHY IMPLEMENT PBIS?

- Observable improvement occurs more rapidly with behavior
- Improved academic performance
- Reduced bullying behaviors
- Improved social-emotional competence
- Improved social and academic outcomes for students with disabilities
- Decreased rates of student-reported drug and alcohol abuse
- Reduced office discipline referrals, suspensions, and incidents of restraint and seclusion
- Improved teacher outcomes, including perception of teacher efficacy
- School organizational health and school climate
- Perception of school safety¹⁶

Once PBIS Tier 1 is in place and being conducted with fidelity, the needed framework structures and systems will be in place to support the addition of academic supports.

INTEGRATION OF OTHER SUPPORTS

MTSS-I AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

SEL is, “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities” (CASEL, 2020).

Research indicates that effective mastery of social emotional competencies is associated with greater well-being and better school performance; whereas the lack of competency in these areas can lead to a variety of personal, social, and academic difficulties (Eisenberg, 2006; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Masten & Coatworth, 1998; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). A study of young students found a significant relationship between students’ social emotional skills in kindergarten and their outcomes 13-19 years later. Those students with early prosocial skills were more likely to graduate from high school on time, complete a college degree, and achieve and maintain full time employment. During high school they were less likely to be involved with police, abuse alcohol, or be on medication for emotional or behavioral issues (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).

There is also evidence that explicitly teaching these skills can have a wide-ranging impact on students’ development. Studies have found that participating in high quality, evidence-based SEL programs can reduce emotional distress, improve engagement, improve social emotional skills, and improve academic achievement by 11 percentile points (Durlak et al., 2011).

Infusing SEL within an MTSS-I framework enables schools to proactively provide universal interventions for all students, and to customize interventions that address academic and behavioral challenges for at-risk students (secondary interventions) and high need students (tertiary interventions). SEL is an important means of addressing equity and most importantly, ensures that all young people are provided with the kinds of supports they need to thrive.

¹⁶ <https://www.pbis.org/topics/school-wide>

MTSS-I AND MENTAL HEALTH

Pupil personnel service (PPS) staff, which include school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, mental health counselors and school nurses, are uniquely poised to be the primary source of expertise upon which the entire school community can draw in supporting student well-being. These professionals have overlapping skills, such as counseling, assessment, consulting, collaboration, parent/school liaising, PD for faculty and staff, and crisis response. They share in facilitating social-emotional and physical well-being, strengthening family, school, and community partnerships, increasing access to instruction, and promoting a positive school climate. In MTSS-I, however, we can see the specializations of their training and, therefore, roles emerge.

School counselors utilize their specialized knowledge of curriculum and development to design and implement comprehensive programs to help all students build fundamental academic, career development and social/emotional skills. Certified school psychologists focus on administering, analyzing and interpreting psychological and psycho-education assessments, selecting and implementing appropriate evidence based specialized assessments, and promoting success for targeted students with particular needs. Certified/licensed school social workers are both licensed mental health professionals and certified school social workers who are educators with expertise in assessment, individual and group counseling, and crisis intervention. School social workers' systems approach provides a pivotal link between school, home, and community-based assistance. Licensed mental health counselors provide intensive, specialized school-based and/or community-based interventions. School nurses work across disciplines to build a culture of health and improve student and community health outcomes by providing leadership, advocacy, care coordination, critical thinking, and mitigation of barriers to health.¹⁷ School health services programs are required in all public school districts. Such programs are overseen by the director of school health services (a.k.a. medical director) who is the physician or nurse practitioner public school districts must employ. The medical director delegates duties to the school nurse who is a registered professional nurse (RN) within their scope of practice. School nurses provide leadership, community/public health, care coordination, and quality improvement to promote health and wellness and disease management in population healthcare.

Tier 1 services are designed to reach every student in the school. The role of the school counselor is focused on universal interventions since all students must have access to a certified school counselor per section 100.2(j) of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education. For grades 6-12, each student is assigned a school counselor who is responsible for an annual progress review to include social-emotional development, academic success, and post-high school planning. This makes school counselors uniquely situated to take responsibility for providing Tier 1 universal interventions for the entire student body through both direct and indirect services. Tier 1 direct services include providing the core curriculum (K-12) which addresses competencies related to social emotional development, college and career readiness and academic skills. Other Tier 1 interventions include an annual progress review (grades 6-12), individual student planning, and academic advisement. Indirect services include consultation, collaboration, leadership, advocacy, and referrals to appropriately licensed or certified individuals. Due to their specialized knowledge, school counselors also lead the district's efforts, in collaboration with PPS and other school staff, to develop the district's and school's comprehensive developmental school counseling program plans which incorporate descriptions of all three levels of interventions, when they will be provided, and by whom.

¹⁷ Fleming, Laurie MPH, BS, RN, NCSN, Janis Hogan, BUS, RN, NCSN, Karen Graf, MSN, RN-BC, APHN (2018) Healthy Communities - The Role of the School Nurse. National Association of School Nurses.

At the secondary and tertiary levels, supports become increasingly targeted to meet students' specific needs. At the Tier 2 level, some of these supports may be provided by school counselors, but are often referred to school social workers and school psychologists and are targeted to students identified as vulnerable due to academic, social-emotional, and mental health challenges. At the tertiary level, school social workers, school psychologists, and licensed mental health counselors address a smaller number of high need students who require more specialized individual interventions and/or referral to community-based counseling and resources. It should be noted that specific roles can become overburdened when the full complement of PPS professionals are not available in a school. For example, if a school does not have the services of a certified school social worker, the school counselor and psychologist must then compensate for the missing service provider. This is the reality in a school when any role is not available.¹⁸

MTSS-I AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for promoting student equity by removing barriers to learning through consideration of the learning environment. The UDL framework is guided by three principles: Engagement, Representation, and Action and Expression (CAST, 2018). Engagement refers to the multiple methods teachers should consider to encourage student learning and autonomy. Representation refers to the varied ways a teacher should present information, maximizing accessibility of the lesson for all learners. Finally, action and expression refers to the multiple ways students may respond so as to demonstrate mastery.

Universal design for learning (udl) means a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that —(a) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (b) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient.

- *Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008*

MTSS-I and UDL converge on the importance of prevention of learning problems through smart instructional design. In Tiers 1 and 2, the goal is to minimize “instructional casualties” through the use of high-quality curriculum and instruction that’s adaptive to student need. In Tier 3, the goal is to reduce the size of identified problems through changes to the learning environment. Similarly, UDL attempts to make learning goals accessible to all through consideration of instruction and lesson materials. Additionally, MTSS-I emphasizes that no problem resides within the student. Rather problems, where they occur, always reside outside the student, within the learning environment. This is important because it puts the onus of change on teachers and staff to make the environment effective, so the student responds and makes expected growth. UDL makes the exact same assumption.

MTSS-I AND SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

The school nurse employs primary prevention by providing health education that promotes physical and mental health and informs healthcare decisions, prevents disease, and enhances school performance. Addressing such topics as healthy lifestyles, risk-reducing behaviors, developmental needs, activities of daily living, and preventive self-care, the school nurse uses teaching methods that are appropriate to the student’s developmental level, learning needs,

¹⁸ New York State School Counselor Association (2020) Delivering a Comprehensive School Counseling Program – How Training Aligns with Program Activity Tiers.

readiness, and ability to learn. Screenings, referrals, and follow-up are secondary prevention strategies that school nurses utilize to detect and treat health-related issues in their early stage.¹⁹

Based on standards of practice and community health perspective, the school nurse and other licensed school health professionals provide a safe and healthy school environment through control of infectious disease, which includes utilization of school-wide infection control measures, and disease surveillance and reporting.

School nurses are critical to the school mental health team in that they can help address and reduce the stigma of a behavioral health diagnosis, decrease fragmentation of care, and remove barriers to behavioral health services. School nurses, because of their regular access to students and their experience with care coordination, are also uniquely equipped to assist school and community-based behavioral health professionals in providing services including prevention, assessment, early identification/intervention, and treatment of mental illness and substance use disorders.²⁰

MTSS-I AND EARLY LEARNERS

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MTSS-I AND EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

Early childhood education plays an essential role in preparing all students for success in kindergarten and beyond particularly in the area of social emotional growth and development. NYSED's Resource Guides for School Success: The Prekindergarten Early Learning Standards emphasize the social emotional domain as a key lever to support young children's learning across all other domains. "Extensive research indicates that effective mastery of social emotional competencies is associated with greater well-being and school performance," (<http://www.nysed.gov/early-learning/resource-guides-school-success-early-learning>).

MTSS-I frameworks are typically designed for students in grades K-12; therefore, districts and schools must consider strategic and comprehensive approaches to providing the services and supports young children in early childhood need to learn essential academic skills and build social-emotional competencies that impact behavior.

The [Pyramid Model](#) can be used to promote educator competence in addressing the social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of young children from birth to age five. "The Pyramid Model's evidence-based practices fit within the MTSS-I framework, and its tiers closely align with the [MTSS Essential Elements](#). This alignment allows educators to implement the Pyramid Model seamlessly in their work and provides a platform to build on the social-emotional and behavioral structures they already have in place" (<https://nemtss.unl.edu/pyramid-model/>).

The Pyramid Model represents a comprehensive effort to provide teachers, caregivers, and families practical tools and strategies needed to promote and support positive behavior, prevent challenging behavior, and address the social needs of all young children. The Pyramid Model builds upon a tiered public health approach to promoting wellness and provides universal supports to all children and targeted or intensive services to those with persistent challenging behavior.

¹⁹ National Association of School Nurses. (2016). *The role of the 21st century school nurse* (Position Statement). Silver Spring, MD: Author.

²⁰ National Association of School Nurses. (2018). *The school nurse's role in behavioral/mental health of students* (Position Statement). Silver Spring, MD: Author.

Aligning tiered systems of support starting in early childhood classrooms provides districts with a full-continuum of PD opportunities and implementation of evidence-based practices that support young children’s social-emotional, language development (in English and the home language), early literacy, and early numeracy competence, confidence and ultimate success in school and community.

MTSS-I AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

MTSS-I is designed to meet the needs of all learners, including students with disabilities. All students receive Tier 1 supports. Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports do not replace Tier 1 supports. At different points in their educational journey, students may need supports in Tiers 2 and 3 and should have equitable access to them. The MTSS-I framework does not supplant individualized education program mandated services for students with disabilities, but instead provides intensive support when and where needed (Gersten et al., 2012; Vaughn et al., 2015). With full implementation, the MTSS-I framework ensures that the interventions and supports do not only focus on general education, but also incorporate how special education services are integrated at each tier.

A benefit of implementing the MTSS-I framework is that tiered supports will reduce the number of referrals for more restrictive educational placements for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. This helps assure that students remain successful in a more inclusive educational placement. The goal of MTSS-I is to screen early and to deliver targeted support quickly. It can also help schools tell the difference between students who have not had appropriate instruction in the past and those who truly need special education. Accessing an appropriate educational program should be seamless; the MTSS-I framework is flexible enough to meet the needs of every student.

MTSS-I AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELLS)

An English Language Learner (ELL) is a student who speaks a language other than English at home and scores below a state-designated level of proficiency in English upon entering a New York State (NYS) public school system. ELLs require support to become proficient in English as determined by Commissioners’ Regulations Part 154.

While it is implicit in this MTSS-I framework that all students receive quality instruction, it is also incumbent that NYSED address the specific needs of ELLs. Based on the components of the MTSS-I framework, high-quality, research-based instruction—or Tier 1 grounded in culturally responsive instruction—and UDL, will provide greater access to the general curriculum and integrate more coherently with English as a New Language (ENL) or Bilingual Education (BE) instruction and support provided for all ELLs, and for Former ELLs who have exited ELL status within the past two years.

The MTSS-I framework should not supplant ELL services, but instead provide intensive support when and where needed in addition to those already mandated by Commissioners’ Regulations Part 154. ELL student engagement should support oral language and written academic language development for the classroom with a goal of reducing teacher talk and increasing student-centered learning using research-based ELL strategies and NYSED provided tools and resources.

MTSS-I, CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION AND EQUITY

MTSS-I is grounded in the belief that **all** students can learn, and **all** school professionals are responsive to the academic and behavioral needs of **all** students. In order to ensure “*All means all*”, educators must explore the relationship between contemporary conditions of inequality and the ideas that shape access, participation, and outcomes for our learners. Equitable multi-tiered systems take into account the ways local and global contexts, histories, identities, and cultures impact educators and the students and families they serve in order to meet the needs of all students.

NYSED’s [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining \(CR-S\) Education Framework](#) supports implementation of this MTSS-I framework by explicitly working toward those ends. The CR-S Education Framework helps educators create student-centered learning environments that affirm racial, linguistic, and cultural identities; prepare students for rigor and independent learning; develop students’ abilities to connect across lines of difference; elevate historically marginalized voices; and empower students as agents of social change.

CR-S education is a view of learning and human growth that values differences in culture and identity (e.g., race, social class, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, ability) as strengths that should be included in teaching and learning. This approach to education counters dominant narratives about difference as deficits or as characteristics of students and families that should be remediated or assimilated. Using this approach to education, educators acknowledge, value, and leverage the wealth of knowledge found in communities that have been marginalized and ensure educational environments are free of bias and negative stereotypes.

As such, CR-S education supports implementation of MTSS-I in the following ways by ensuring:

- teaming structures (district, school, problem solving, etc.) are representative of the educational community and center family and student perspectives;
- data is viewed in both the aggregate and is disaggregated (by ability, race, language, gender, etc.) in order to identify and address inequities in student outcomes and experiences;
- instruction, assessment, interventions, and supports take into account and affirm student identity, culture, and language;
- student support and problem solving in academic, behavioral, and student wellness are integrated and approached through an asset-based lens;
- welcoming, safe, affirming, and respectful climates and environments form the foundation upon which each tier of instruction and support are considered and implemented;
- regular and continuous reflection on the role systemic inequalities rooted in our country’s history, culture, and institutions play in creating and maintaining educational inequality within the educational community; and
- a whole child approach that considers students’ social emotional growth, builds their ability to acknowledge the limits of their own perspectives, and empowers them as agents of change.

MTSS-I IN A VIRTUAL/HYBRID LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic proved that supporting students in remote and hybrid learning environments, while not always ideal, is essential. Schools must consider how their MTSS-I

procedures may be adjusted based on the learning environment. Data collection systems, in particular, need special attention as the shift to different learning environments may impact a school's ability to assess students in a timely and valid way. Professional learning for teachers administering Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 support is necessary in order to help build capacity in dynamic learning environments.

IMPLEMENTATION PACE AND PLANNING

It is challenging to recommend a timeline for a high-quality implementation process, as it always varies depending on circumstances and context. However, it often takes two to four years for a well-structured framework to be fully implemented. The timeline and duration of the implementation process will depend on the complexity and adaptability of the system; the context of implementation; and other influencing factors, such as policy and funding priorities. Prior to implementation, districts should consider the following:

- formation of a multi-disciplinary DLT;
- district goal/initiative alignment with MTSS-I;
- identification of DLT coaches;
- identification of SLT coaches;
- conducting a DCA to determine readiness to implement MTSS-I;
- completion of baseline of school-level readiness checklists, R-TFI and TFI;
- identification of assessment/materials vendors; and
- resource mapping/collaboration across schools and tiers.

Implementing an MTSS-I framework is no easy undertaking. To implement MTSS-I well and with fidelity, districts and schools will need support, including training, PD, and coaching, to build capacity to implement across all levels of the district.

Resources to support implementation of the MTSS-I Pilot Framework can be found on the Office of Special Education Educational Partnership [MTSS-I Pathways to Implementation website](#).