

Virtual MTSS Fest Keynote Q&A

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- **“We all know that these are extremely unique time with extreme trauma for all involved. It is difficult to understand that while in a public health crisis/mental health crisis time and a time when we know how mental health effects learning, that we have a devaluing of professional school counselors (the governor’s veto of a bill to support schools in gaining and maintaining professional school counselors) who may be the first and possibly only mental health professional students may be able to connect with. How can MTSS work without these valuable members of the team being able to do work with fidelity?”** (Sonia B., 08:57 AM)
 - The challenge you present is unfortunately common across the nation and internationally.
 - Although local contexts vary, good examples at classroom, school, and district levels exist within and outside of the state of Washington. From the context of school behavioral mental health, we encourage you to check the following advocacy groups and resources
 - OSPI MTSS Website (<https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/support-programs/multi-tiered-system-supports-mtss>)
 - National PBIS Center (www.pbis.org),
 - Association for Positive Behavior Support (www.apbs.org),
 - National Center on School Mental Health (www.schoolmentalhealth.org),
 - Washington Association of School Social Workers (<https://www.wassw.org/>)
 - National Association of School Social Workers (www.socialworkers.org),
 - Washington State Association of School Psychologists (<https://www.wsasp.org/>)
 - National Association of School Psychologists (www.nasponline.org),
 - Washington School Counselor Association (<https://www.wsasp.org/>)

- American School Counselor Association (www.schoolcounselor.org),
 - International Council for Exceptional Children (www.cec.sped.org), and
 - University of Washington SMART Center (<https://depts.washington.edu/uwsmart/>)
 - Northwest PBIS Network (<https://pbisnetwork.org/>)
 - Sound Supports (<http://soundsupportsk12.com/>)
- We are learning that working from an interconnected/interdisciplinary perspective may be an effective and efficient advocacy and implementation approach. The “interconnected systems framework” (ISF) (<https://www.pbis.org/resource/the-interconnected-systems-framework-201-when-school-mental-health-is-integrated-within-a-multi-tiered-system-of-support>) may provide some structure for organizing supportive professional practices related to trauma-based behavioral mental health. In addition, the ISF is grounded in the MTSS framework.
- **“Within the context of “New Normal,” I am curious what ways we can re-engineer education, using our newfound tech savvy. Not replacing face-to-face instruction with all online, but using online instruction and enrichment strategically, to enhance what is done in schools physically. I am also thinking about our hi-cap students who may be better positioned to manage their learning at a faster pace. Just some thoughts.”** (Chris H. 9:11 AM)
 - This question is excellent and needs careful consideration so that we can develop and implement tech-supported learning practices and systems that are effective, efficient, and relevant.
 - As mentioned, the concern is that when responding to and recovering from a crisis, the tendency is to
 - Do too much or do nothing,
 - Adopt things that are untested and conceptually unfounded,
 - Ignore the science of teaching and learning,
 - Overlook the successes and failures of the past,
 - Overemphasize the technology at the cost of student-teacher engagements and relationships, and
 - Increase the gap between the “have’s” and the “have not’s” with respect to students and families, classrooms and schools, districts and counties, etc.

- In our PBIS work, we've learned that measuring student progress toward desired outcomes and practice implementation fidelity are essential for development of an effective continuum of support. As we advance consideration of teaching technologies, data from similar measurements should guide the work.
 - Partnerships with technology groups may be an important to increase knowledge, development, and testing capacity. However, in the same way that schools may not have specialized technology capacity, technology companies tend not to have much experience with teaching, learning, and the school organization. Thus, the partnership needs to be highly collaborative, mutually informing, and considerate of ways schools operate and teaching and learning are achieved.
 - Lastly, we think it is important that students and educators are taught to high levels for fluency on how to use, appreciate, and value tech-based teaching and learning. For example, like doing homework, tech-based learning should be linked to opportunities, supervision, corrective/reinforcing feedback, relevant learning outcomes, etc. Similarly, students will need to be taught how to become independent, self-managed learners and reinforced for their efforts.
- **“HYS (Healthy Youth Survey) Washington survey data does not match this level of feeling safety noted here. It is in the low 80%s overall...”** (Kim B., 9:18a)
 - This observation is important. The national survey data represent statistically cleaned averages and trends, with higher and lower variations.
 - It is smart to compare and contrast your local data to the national as well as neighboring data. Results from testing of your hypotheses about why, where, how, etc. become your team's consideration about what adjustments could be made within and across the existing continuum of support.
 - The national survey results and other research suggest that frequent and authentic academic and social behavioral engagements lead to establishment of relationships which in turn result in reported perceptions of safety, respect, and other school climate variables.
 - We like to work from the perspective that what students and family and school members report about their feelings, beliefs, attitudes, etc. about school climate, safety, etc. is directly related to their experiences with peers and adults and with their levels of academic and social behavior success/failure. From this perspective, **our emphasis has been on re-arranging the teaching and learning environments so that opportunities for positive social and academic engagements are increased and subsequent positive relationships are enhanced.**

- **Is there another survey in the works to understand how students feel about safety in school?** (Rebekah S., 9:21a)
 - As indicated in a previous answer, we think it is important to consider “feelings” and “beliefs” about safety (or any other classroom or school climate factor) as verbal reports that have been shaped by one’s past and present experiences and existing risk and protective factors.
 - Thus, a classroom and school climate surveys may be ways to obtain
 - Students reports of their firsthand experiences with peers, teachers, classroom, and school;
 - Family members reports of their firsthand interactions with their child’s teacher, classroom, and school and secondhand reports of what they hear/see from their children; and
 - School staff reports of their firsthand experiences with students and family and staff members.
 - Samples of school climate surveys, reports, and use instructions (elementary, middle, and high school; students, family members, and school staff) may be reviewed at <https://www.pbis.org/resource/school-climate-survey-suite>. These free surveys are available for any school to use.
 - School discipline data may also serve as another indirect indicator of school climate and safety. General guidelines and considerations may be found at PBIS Applications (www.pbisapps.org).
 - Given other concerns affecting perceptions and experiences related to safety, we also encourage examination of tools that assess trauma, school violence, and safety.

- **“Can you say more about “Low quality implementation of evidence-based practices?” Is there a difference between EBP overload, and adaptations those in the field are making in attempt to keep protective factors in place?”** (Mandy P., 9:24a).
 - This question is important because effective practices often fail to produce desired student outcomes because they are not implemented accurately, fluently, and/or relevantly.
 - The factors influencing low quality implementation should be addressed before engaging in a new implementation effort. Considerations, for example, include
 - Competing initiatives and priorities;
 - Lack of fit between the practice and the desired outcome;

- Insufficient training and implementation coaching;
 - Multiple, uncoordinated, parallel implementation efforts (e.g., places, people, times);
 - Limited data to guide decision making; and
 - Insufficient leadership participation.
- As mentioned in a previous comment, an interdisciplinary team should start with an assessment and clear indication of the desired outcome and systematically screened students who are most in need of achieving that outcome may be a good starting point for identifying what intervention.
 - Some of our teams struggle with your question because they develop large collections of evidence-based practices and
 - Elect to implement more than are needed;
 - Do not assess and omit/combine/adapt what is currently in place with regard to whether they are evidence-based, promise to produce the desired outcome, are appropriate for the setting and students, are being implemented with fidelity (accuracy and fluency), etc.; and
 - Fail to align and/or integrate similar practices across disciplines (e.g., counseling, special education, school psychology, social work, physical/occupational therapy).
 - After desired student outcomes are clear, the team should develop the continuum of supports into the three general tiers (all, some, few). This continuum should
 - Sequence and align practices within and across the tiers,
 - Prioritize a few effective practices within each tier that target and align with the most important outcomes for each tier,
 - Reflect the data that have been collected about student desired behavior and current practice implementation, and
 - Reflect practices that increase in frequency, duration, dose, intensity, and individualization from tiers 1 to 2 to 3.
 - A useful tool for use when considering whether or not to adopt a new program or practice is the [Hexagon Tool](#) from the National Implementation Research Network. Use of this tool guides team discussion on the need, fit, capacity to implement, evidence, usability, and supports of the program or practice.
 - Most importantly, we re-iterate that the goal is to do a few important and relevant practices with the high degree of accuracy, fluency, and durability. This goal is related to omitting and/or stopping implementation of competing, lower priority, less defensible practices. Remember that just because

something is evidence-based, doesn't mean a good fit or a need exists for your school.

- **“I would love to have that triangle in a blank editable form to be able to fill out”** (Kimberly Z., 9:45a). **“Specifically, the profile continuum slide as professional activity for developing understanding of the MTSS continuum and person first for students with challenges”** (Cheryl R., 9:46a)
 - Many of these materials are available at the PBIS Center (www.pbis.org). This particular slide is available in the [session materials](#) online at the [OSPI MTSS website](#).
 - We think it is important for the team to deliberate carefully on what activities they would find to be indicated by their data, needs, objectives, student outcomes, etc.
 - If an assessment of an individual's Tiers 1, 2, and 3 strengths and challenges is indicated, then developing a presentation and activity that matches or aligns with the characteristics of the faculty, staff, students, school, etc. should be considered.
 - The quality of participant's responses is related to their understanding the concept, rationale, use, etc. of the activity they are being asked to participate.
 - The above being said, the “form” could be as simple as drawing a triangle and inserting a column of blank lines, or using a table, like the following:

	Tier 1 Successful in the general curriculum (no risk)	Tier 2 Successful with additional practice/support in the general curriculum (low risk)	Tier 3 Successful with more individualized and specialized support (high risk)
List three evidence-based and aligned academic and/or social behavioral practices for each tier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •

- **“If our building has a large number of needs for T3 supports would it be more effective to find a T2 or T1 intervention that would address the roots of the T3?”**

For example, instead of offering DBT skills for schools to small groups, expanding to school wide implementation of the skills.” (Tina J., 9:51a)

- This important question highlights the integrated and aligned nature of the practices that comprise the MTSS tiered or continuum logic. Although all schools, classrooms, programs, etc. have their unique characteristics, the MTSS team develops a continuum that reflects the following considerations.
- It is important to review the extent to which Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 practices are being implemented. Remember, students do not benefit from a support they do not receive. Fidelity of implementation at all tiers is important. As mentioned in an earlier comment, our emphasis has been on re-arranging the teaching and learning environments so that opportunities for positive social and academic engagements are increased and subsequent positive relationships are enhanced. We have found that a high need at Tier 2 and Tier 3 is related to the implementation and contextual and cultural fit of supports at Tier 1 (more below in next question).
- First, MTSS teams develop Tier 1 to reflect the developmental and behavioral levels of all students within a given school or program. For example, in our PBIS work, students and school staff work together to identify a small number (3-5) of broad school-wide value or skills (e.g., safety, respect, responsibility) that can be operationalized into relevant behavior examples (e.g., “reporting a stranger-in-the-building to a staff member is being safe and responsible.”). These social skills values become embedded within the selection and implementation of Tier 2 (e.g., small group counseling session on handling teasing in responsible and safe manner, or the focus on a daily check-in feedback session) and Tier 3 (e.g., included as language within a behavioral contract, or used as a label for teaching a specific desired skill in a behavior intervention plan).
- Second, as emphasized during the presentation, a Tier 2 practice might be modified in intensity to become more individualized for students with more specialized intervention needs.
- Third, regardless of the kinds of Tier 2 and/or 3 practices experienced by small groups or individual students might experience, all students experience the language, routines, supports, etc. provided by Tier 1 practices. Successful classrooms and schools have a common vision or focus, common language for engaging and communicating, and common routines that establish a predictable, safe, and educative environments.
- Fourth, moving up and down the continuum, practice adaptations and adoptions become more specialized, individualized, and intensive based on data about individual student response to intervention and specific needs.
- Fifth, every student and family and staff member has a profile or learning history of strengths and needs. As such, students may receive a variety of

supports. As indicated, all students should experience Tier 1 supports; however, an individual student may be getting small group supports (T2) in one area (e.g., small group language practice facilitated by peer-tutor, extra time to complete worksheets, weekly social skills lessons with the counselor) and individualized supports (T3) in other areas (e.g., supplemental instruction with the reading specialist, daily and brief trauma-based behavior counseling from the special education teacher). To reiterate, individuals should not be categorized or labelled by Tier. Instead the intensity of their supports should align with their profile of strengths and needs.

- Sixth, as need indicates more specialized, individualized supports, the development and implementation of practices are more likely to be led by a team comprised of relevant support professionals (e.g., school psychologist and/or counselor, special educator, social worker, nurse, occupational and/or physical therapist).
 - Finally, to summarize, the outcomes, language, and routines within and across tiers should be as aligned, integrated, and comprehensive as possible to enhance effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance.
- **“Can you comment on the argument that if we have a failing Tier 1, we should focus almost exclusively on improving that? This type of response seems to ignore the framework that speaks to a blended need that will always be present.”**
(Heather R., 9:52a)
 - As a general rule, MTSS teams strive to organize the structure and implementation of school-wide Tier 1 practices such that >80% of students are successfully responsive. At the same time, the same >80% criterion is applied to classrooms (e.g., 19 out of 28 students). Both school-wide and classrooms are the target settings for Tier 1 implementation.
 - If <80% of students are successful at Tier 1, one of the first question addressed by the team is determining whether the Tier 1 practices are being implemented with high fidelity (e.g., >85%) by majority of staff (e.g., again >80%) across all settings. If yes, then team actions shift to the practice (i.e., Effective? Efficient? Relevant?). If no, then team actions focus on improving staff and faculty member practice implementation (i.e. professional development, coaching, modeling, reinforcement, barriers).
 - We have learned that the more effective, efficient, and relevant implementation of Tier 1, the easier implementation of Tier 2 and 3 practices and systems. As such, with initial implementation of an MTSS framework, the focus is often on establishment and fidelity implementation Tier 1 practices and systems while **continuing** to provide existing and adapted supports for students with Tier 2 and 3 needs. As capacity to implement Tier 1 practices and systems becomes

more efficient, greater attention and effort is directed toward increasing alignment and enhancement of Tier 2 and 3 supports.

- As with school-wide Tier 1 implementation, Tier 2 and 3 implementation enhancements are guided by a team often represented by members of the Tier 1 team, administrators, and individuals with specialized knowledge and capacity to select and deliver Tiers 2 and 3 supports (for example, in our PBIS work, school counseling and psychology, nursing, social work, special education)

- **“Due to the economic impact of the Covid-19 I know a lot of schools (and local governmental entities) are already planning to cut budgets. Efficiencies become even more important. Any thoughts about addressing this reality?”** (Hugh F., 9:53a)
 - Proven solutions and guidelines for recovering from unprecedented crisis (like covi-19) do not exist, especially, within the context of the impact of schools and their communities. However, schools have a sound and advantageous history of being structured, positive, safe, predictable environments operated by caring and competent adults.
 - Although challenging, educators need to work much more efficiently and effectively as teams by being extremely diligent about doing a few things really well as an organization. One teacher or one classroom at a time is not sustainable under current and future conditions.
 - School and district teams may need to work in more formal and deliberate partnerships with community supports. We have argued that schools functionally and physically are available in every neighborhood/community and could serve as a good structure and opportunity for community mental health, public health and safety, medical assistance, etc. to work collaboratively in supporting their communities generally and in time of crisis.
 - In our previous work, our teams have learned that implementation can be enhanced by
 - Doing better fewer things that have the biggest effect;
 - Combining/integrating efforts to improve efficiency (e.g., completing an [initiative inventory](#)),
 - Giving highest priority to selection of empirically supported practices that have the greatest alignment with presenting needs;
 - Disengaging in practices, initiatives, programs, etc. for which need is not evidenced or of lesser priority (as such, it is important to know the

extent which the practices are being delivered as well as the impact they are having.); and

- Ensuring that school and district leadership models and supports streamlined implementation efforts.
 - Finally, district and regional teams may need to assume more advocacy responsibilities by shaping priority decisions related to policies, initiatives, funding, personnel, etc. with superintendents, school boards, local and state legislators.
- **“What tool would you recommend for a district leadership team for a large district? What are the initial most critical steps for a district team? Who should serve?”** (Tricia H., 9:53a)
 - Generally speaking, we find it useful to consider the implementation phases proposed by Dean Fixsen, Karen Blasé, Caryn Ward, and others:
 - Exploration - Establish initial exploratory team, define and measure need and solution, identify evidence-based practice, secure agreement and priority;
 - Installation - Develop implementation team, evaluation system, and PD plan, and ready staff;
 - Initial - Test, coach, evaluate small scale or targeted implementation and adjust and prepare for full implementation;
 - Full - Implement across organization and measure implementation fidelity and impact; and
 - Sustained and adapted - Streamline and adapt for durability, fidelity, and expansion across the organization.
 - Some self-assessment and coaching tools exist to guide the process of establishing implementation teams: (a) [PBIS Center](#) and (b) Center for State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence Based Practices (<https://siseq.fpg.unc.edu/resources-and-tools>).
 - With respect to “getting started,” securing agreement, commitment, priority, and participation by district leadership (e.g., superintendent, school board) is important to setting up a district implementation leadership team that has authority, visibility, status, funding, etc. This team initially is charged with collecting relevant data to define and designate important desired outcomes and to maximize fidelity implementation capacity at the district, school, and classroom levels.

- One of the initial information collecting activities of the exploratory district team would be an assessment of existing implementation teams, initiatives, programs, departments etc. This assessment would examine, for example,
 - Purpose,
 - Desired student level outcomes,
 - Membership,
 - Funding and supports,
 - Evidence-based practices, and
 - Outcome data for student progress, school implementation, and district level efficacy.
- Information from the above assessment would highlight who would be good partners in a district level implementation team. Again, this team would be defined by agreements and commitments toward
 - Setting common student outcomes,
 - Collecting and using information on common measures,
 - Blending/integrating funding and professional development activities,
 - Developing common policy and procedural guidelines, and
 - Contributing toward development and endorsement of a district level continuum of effective practices, initiatives, programs, etc. across the continuum of all, some, and few.
- **“What recommendations do you have for teams focusing on building fidelity while in distance learning?”** (Annie P.). **“What are some suggested distance learning strategies for trauma-informed approach?”** (YouTube)
 - Developing and providing supports for distance learning efforts should start with a consideration of the continuum of student needs and outcomes and the strategies that are being employed to address those needs and outcomes.
 - Delineating the skills required for students to engage in distance learning should inform who is prepared to benefit from distance learning. In particular, distance learning activities and expectations must be considerate of the range of traumatic experiences that children, youth, and their families are handling (e.g., illness, death, unemployment, health care, hunger).
 - We find it informative to be guided by what we have learned about homework. For example, many students have family encouragement, structure, routines, expectations, etc. that support homework completion. Some students lack

these same supports and skills and do not benefit from their homework attempts. A few students avoid homework requests completely.

- Under the best of conditions, distance learning parallels and would exceed homework completion. However, students, family members, and educators also are responding under these same traumatic crisis conditions.
- Given that we have little experience with distance learning under these conditions, delivery of distance learning opportunities and activities might be guided by
 - Leading implementation from the all-some-few logic of MTSS;
 - Incorporating trauma-informed supports to enhance the distance learning engagement and outcomes;
 - Starting strategically with a few highly important desired learning outcomes and instructional activities (efficient, doable, relevant);
 - Providing specific strategies for family members to be positively supportive of their children's efforts;
 - Teaching, modeling, and reinforcing self-management behaviors (e.g., how to seek assistance, how to schedule time and set up place for homework, how to handle disruptions and distractions, how to collaborate with parents); and
 - Scheduling regular "engagement" opportunities (e.g., Zoom/FT, emails/texts, tweets, telephone calls) that consider frequency, content, etc. from an MTSS perspective (all, some, and few).