



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

*Washington's
Multi-Tiered System
of Supports
Framework*

2020

WASHINGTON'S MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS FRAMEWORK

2020

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Washington Office of Superintendent of
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Dear Colleagues:

Washington has set an ambitious goal for 90% of students in the Class of 2027, in each and every demographic group, to achieve at least one of our state's graduation pathways. This will require that we effectively reduce opportunity gaps for Black, Indigenous, and other students of color, students with disabilities, students experiencing poverty, and others, by increasing access to a full range of evidence-based services and supports. Washington state has traditionally been and continues to be at the forefront for many educational outcomes, including performance in reading, access to higher education during high school and beyond, and overall graduation rates.

As a state, however, we have persistent opportunity gaps. Compared to the statewide average graduation rate of 80.9%, the graduation rates of individual student groups in 2019 were: 61.7% for American Indian and Alaskan Native students; 73.6% for African-American students; 72.2% for low-income students; 62.4% for English Language Learners; 62.1% for students with disabilities; 55.8% for students experiencing homelessness; and 46.2% for students in foster care. And we know that many of the students in these groups are not on-track to graduate by the 9th grade.


MTSS as a Framework to Build Equity in Washington and Close Opportunity Gaps

OSPI is committing to the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) as the approach for aligning our systems and priorities to tackle Washington's persistent opportunity gaps. MTSS is the framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based practices to achieve important outcomes for every student. MTSS involves team-based leadership; continuous data-based decision-making; student, family and community engagement; and the delivery of a continuum of evidence-based instruction and support.

To be successful, our education system needs to intentionally engage our students, families, and communities in the development and provision of supports available throughout the state. The multi-tiered approach, which has been tested and validated in the education field internationally for three decades, involves the delivery of universal evidence-based instruction and supports to all students, additional supports to some, and intensive supports to those who need them.

To be most effective, MTSS requires alignment at all levels, from the state to the classroom. At the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), we have begun the challenging but important task of aligning our MTSS efforts across departments. OSPI is working to build and deliver consistent professional development and technical support across each area of the state, adhering to research and consistent with implementation science. By doing this, OSPI will work with our regional and local partners to provide a cascade of support that creates the conditions necessary for each and every student to realize their full potential.

Sincerely,



Chris Reykdal
Superintendent of
Public Instruction

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS (MTSS)

The purpose of this document is to establish a concise, consistent, and comprehensive framework of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to assist districts and schools in ensuring equitable outcomes for every Washington student in the PK–12 system.

Washington’s MTSS Framework

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based practices to achieve important outcomes for every student. When MTSS is implemented with fidelity, this prevention-based framework ensures that schools create the necessary conditions to systematically integrate academic and nonacademic supports to meet the needs of the whole child. This integration involves coordination of tiered delivery systems, including Academic Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Pyramid Model, and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). By integrating these supports, schools may increase the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of their services (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). The MTSS framework builds on a public health approach that is preventative and focuses on organizing the efforts of adults within systems to be more efficient and effective. MTSS helps to ensure students benefit from nurturing environments and equitable access to universal instruction and supports that are culturally and linguistically responsive, universally designed, and differentiated to meet their unique needs.

MTSS aims to ensure every student benefits from a nurturing environment and equitable access to supports that are culturally and linguistically responsive, universally designed, and differentiated to match their needs.

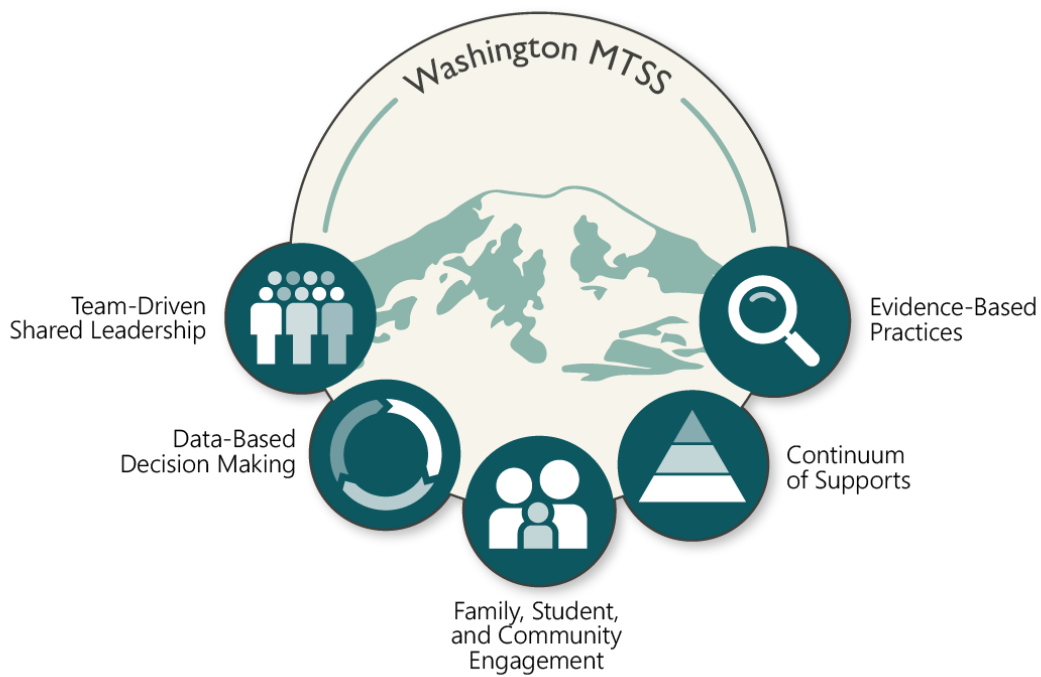


Figure 1. Multi-Tiered System of Supports, from OSPI.

Values

Equity, inclusion, and collaboration guide decision-making at all levels of MTSS implementation (Freeman et. al., 2019). To ensure every student has equitable access to the instruction and supports they need to thrive, district and school teams:

- Identify and address biases and systemic barriers that drive inequitable access and disparate outcomes for Black, Indigenous, and students of color, students experiencing poverty, students receiving special education or English learner services, students who identify as LGBTQ+, and highly mobile student populations.
- Collaborate with students, families, and community partners to leverage the unique cultural and linguistic assets of their communities in order to provide every student an inclusive and responsive learning environment.
- Deliver comprehensive supports that consistently meet every student’s needs and accelerate student academic, social, emotional, and behavioral learning.

MTSS implementation is driven by a focus on equity, inclusion, and collaboration.

There have been many misunderstandings about MTSS, including its application for students with disabilities. MTSS neither excludes nor is exclusive to students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The tiered framework addresses all student needs across all areas (academic, social, emotional, and behavioral). The modifications, supports and services on a student’s IEP should supplement, and not replace, the tiered support available to every student within an MTSS framework. A hallmark of strong implementation is that each student can access supports as soon as they are needed. Tier 1 supports should be provided to all students, including students with disabilities, just as tier 3 supports should be available to students who need them, regardless of the student’s eligibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504.

Essential Components

MTSS consists of essential components which enable teams to work together to adapt instruction and supports to varied student needs.



MTSS incorporates lessons learned from implementation science to help district and school teams integrate initiatives and priorities. Teams make decisions about systems, programs and individual students based on reliable data. Tiered supports are defined by the intensity of support provided to students. Student needs are determined through the systematic collection and analysis of data. Just as a bicycle is made of multiple components (pedals, frame, wheels, chain, handlebars, etc.) that must all work together to ensure a safe and effective tool for transportation, the same logic applies

for the successful implementation of MTSS, which also requires multiple components working together.

The essential components of MTSS are interrelated, and as the intensity of student need increases, each of the components also increases in intensity. Teams share the responsibility of making decisions in an MTSS framework. These decisions are driven by high quality data, collected over time, from multiple sources. Teams intentionally engage families, students, and community partners to plan, implement, and improve services. Staff and community partners provide a continuum of supports to students through a tiered delivery system, starting with strong core instruction. Staff use evidence-based practices to accelerate student learning across all tiers.



Team-Driven Shared Leadership

Sustained Implementation of MTSS is dependent on building the capacity of the organization to lead and support the essential MTSS components. This is done by leadership teams who share the responsibility to support all adults in the school building by planning, coordinating, monitoring, and adjusting MTSS

implementation activities. Leadership teams are responsible for building the capacity of the team to lead the work as well as providing ongoing training and support to staff, families, and community partners to implement as intended. Leadership teams should have broad representation and an established process to regularly solicit input and collect data from staff, students, families, and community partners. This feedback helps drive implementation decisions. These teams also use validated tools such as the [District Systems Fidelity Inventory](#) to assess capacity and [Schoolwide PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory](#) and [Reading Tiered Fidelity Inventory](#) to assess fidelity of implementation in order to prevent drift from the core, evidence-based features of the system.



Data-Based Decision-Making

Teams at all levels of the system (district, school, grade) use data to inform decision-making. District and school teams use an agreed-upon process to guide their decision-making and continually improve supports. Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) is a common process teams use to efficiently solve problems in four main

steps: (1) identify the problem and plan a solution; (2) implement the solution as intended; (3) measure the impact of the solution to determine if the impact met or exceeded the desired outcome; (4) and outline next steps (National Implementation Research Network, 2014).

District and school teams use multiple sources of integrated data to plan, deliver, and improve supports across the system. Teams can determine root causes of problems and coordinate supports more effectively when they review academic, social, emotional, and behavioral data together. When possible, data should be disaggregated by grade level, race, eligibility for free and reduced price meals, and enrollment in special education, Section 504, and English language services to identify disproportionality and inform improvements to ensure systems are supporting equitable outcomes for every student.

The table below summarizes common sources of data that teams use to inform system and support planning. Paired with summative measures, such as state assessment results and graduation rates, these measures can help teams assess overall impact of implementation.

Type	Purpose	Use
Screening	Predict level of risk for poor academic, social, emotional and behavioral outcomes	Identify students who may benefit from additional assessment and support; inform resource allocation and modifications to instruction and supports
Progress Monitoring	Assess rate of growth in response to academic, social, emotional and behavioral supports	Determine impact of supports; inform modifications to instruction and supports
Fidelity	Assess the extent to which evidence-based practices are being implemented as intended	Identify strengths and areas of improvement in implementation; inform modifications to implementation at the system, classroom, and intervention levels
Perception	Assess educator, student, and family perception of school environment	Identify strengths and areas of improvement in school climate; inform modifications to system and classroom environment



Family, Student, and Community Engagement

As organizations work to build systems that benefit every student, they also need to recognize that families are essential to student success throughout MTSS implementation. Family engagement occurs at the district, school, and classroom levels. Garbacz et al. (2019) outline several core features in their guide, *“Family-School Collaboration: Tiered Fidelity,”* including: positive relationships, two-way communication, meaningful decision-making, equity access and representation, training and support options for family, and evaluation of family-school collaboration efforts.

Families and community partners are essential team members.

MTSS should also emphasize student voice in decisions about their own education and provide opportunities for instructional choice and designing supports that fit their individual strengths and needs. Input from students is particularly valuable in assisting educators to adapt and scaffold learning opportunities for students from different cultures, English Learners, students who have experienced trauma, and others. Finally, engaging community partners in multi-tiered supports is critical for building comprehensive systems. Community partners can serve on leadership teams, establish consistent supports between schools and communities, establish common data measures across settings, and help ensure sufficient intensity of supports. The [Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol \(WISSP\)](#) provides a guide for meaningful partnership with families and community members to design supports that meet a range of student needs, particularly when

those needs exceed the school's capacity to meet them alone. MTSS provides the framework and methods for implementing supports in collaboration with community stakeholders, families, and students.



Continuum of Supports

Instruction, enrichment, and intervention are delivered along a continuum to meet the full spectrum of social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of all students. In a multi-tiered system of supports, tiers describe the intensity of support provided. Tiers do not define students. Every student has equitable access to universal instruction and supports that are culturally and linguistically responsive, universally designed, and differentiated to meet their unique needs. **Tier 1** is the foundation for additional layers of support and should meet the needs of approximately 80% of the student population. When more than 20% of students need additional support, leadership teams should re-examine the tier 1 supports in place, as it is an indication that tier 1 instruction and supports may be insufficient.

Tiers describe the intensity of supports provided. Tiers do not define students.

Targeted enrichment and interventions are added to accelerate learning and to remove barriers that prevent students from benefiting fully from universal instruction and supports. Providing students with supports that are integrated, matched to need, and aligned with universal instruction will foster independence and progress in general education universal instruction. **Tier 2** consists of evidence-based intervention programs that have (1) clearly defined entrance and exit criteria; (2) regular progress monitoring to assess their response to intervention; (3) explicit instruction with increased opportunities to practice and receive specific, frequent feedback; (4) gradual release of control and support when students master skills; and (5) increased communication with families to ensure consistency of support in school and at home (Anderson and Borgmeier, 2010; Newcomer, Freeman, and Barrett, 2013).

Students who demonstrate significant risk or do not respond to tier 2 interventions may receive **tier 3** intensive interventions that are individualized to meet their needs. Interventions may be intensified across [seven domains](#), including strength of the intervention program, dosage, alignment, attention to transfer, comprehensiveness, behavioral support, and data-based individualization, to meet the needs of individual students receiving tier 3 supports (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Malone, 2017).



Evidence-Based Practices

To increase instructional impact, it is important that practices and interventions are grounded in evidence. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) defines "evidence-based" as activities, strategies, or interventions that have been proven to improve student outcomes. There are four levels of evidence – strong, moderate, promising, and demonstrates a rationale – outlined in the definition. The Department recommends that districts and schools prioritize practices and interventions supported by the highest levels of evidence when possible. MTSS implementation seeks to ensure equitable

application of evidence-based practices to benefit every student.

At tier 1, curriculum and practices are research-based and aligned to grade-level standards and competencies. At tier 2, interventions have been found to demonstrate positive impact through research, when delivered with fidelity. Tier 3 interventions show student impact through a data-based individualization process that adapts interventions based on data and clinical judgment and expertise.

Cascading District and School Systems

Implementation of MTSS is coordinated through cascading systems. While implementation is often a focus at the school or classroom level, the district's role is critical. The district leadership team is responsible for ensuring key stakeholders are engaged and systems, resources, policies, and practices are aligned to implementation priorities. The district also ensures that coaching, training, and evaluation capacity are developed across the system.

With the guidance and support of the district, school leadership teams are responsible for leading MTSS implementation in their school. They oversee staged implementation, assess fidelity of implementation, and coordinate communication across internal and external teams to continually improve implementation. School staff implement the evidence-based programs and practices through a tiered delivery system to meet the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of students. When implemented with fidelity, students benefit from supports and demonstrate improved social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes.

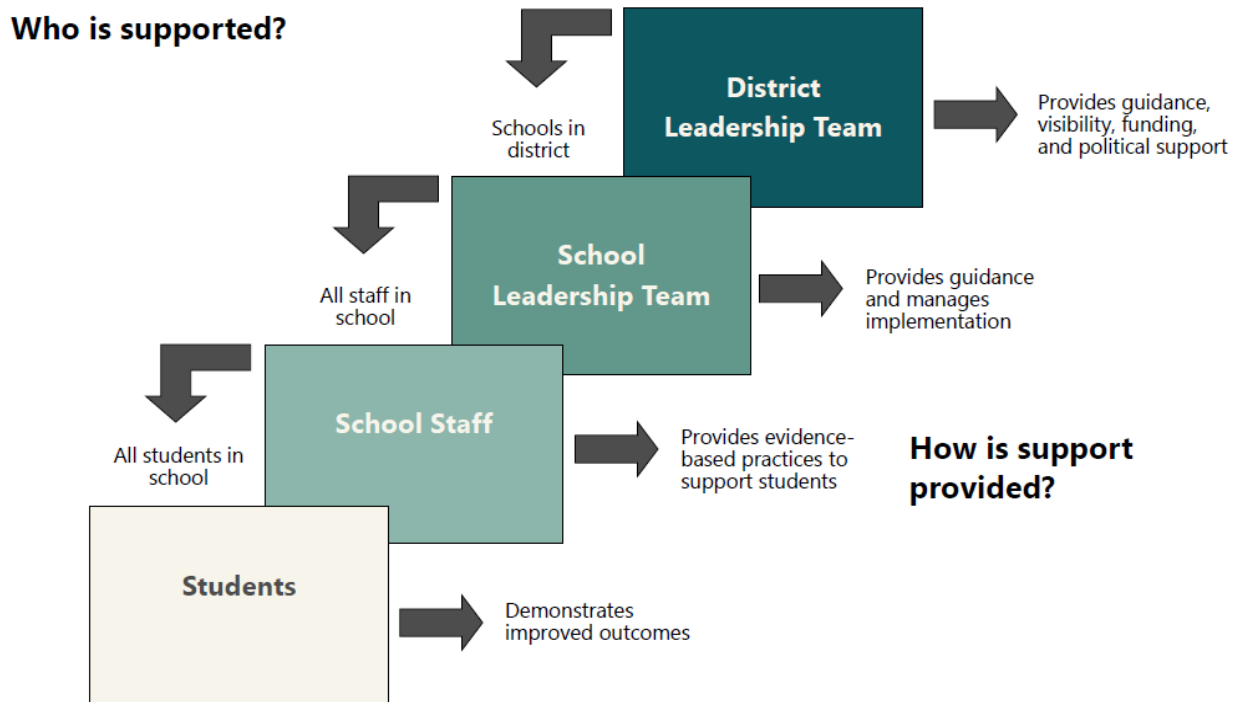
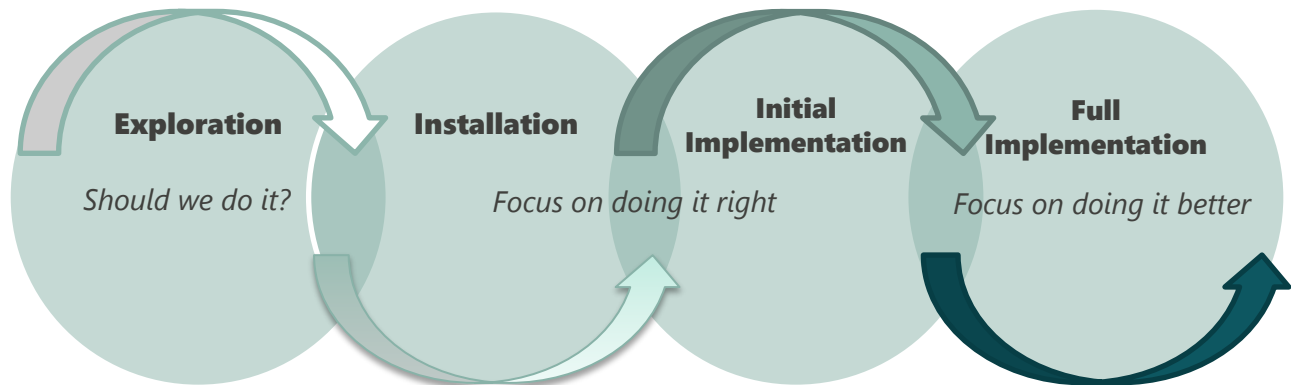


Figure 2: Cascading Systems. Adapted from Michigan Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports Technical Assistance Center (MiMTSS TAC) with permission.

Implementation Stages

Teams implement MTSS in stages to build organizational commitment, capacity, and systems so students benefit from evidence-based practices and improved outcomes are sustained. The National Implementation Research Network (2013) identified four implementation stages to describe the implementation process: **Exploration**, **Installation**, **Initial Implementation**, and **Full Implementation**. Implementation stages identify specific activities, outcomes and unique challenges associated with the implementation process. These stages help in the planning, communication, resource allocation, and evaluation of district-wide MTSS.



During the often-overlooked **Exploration stage**, implementation leadership teams take time to examine their resources and system needs and make informed decisions. When considering the adoption of new programs or practices, teams reflect on the evidence, usability, and supports necessary to implement as well as the need for the program or practice, how well it fits with existing priorities and efforts, and their capacity to implement with fidelity.

Upon determining intent to adopt new practices or programs, teams begin setting up the infrastructure that will be necessary to implement as intended. This **Installation stage** includes developing and securing the necessary support, creating feedback loops, ensuring data systems are in place to allow for data-based decision making, and ensuring financial and human resources are in place. The Exploration and Installation stages of implementation are often referred to as **readiness** to implement. Implementation is likely to take longer, face greater opposition, or fail altogether when teams skip over the exploration or installation stages and try to move directly into implementation.

Initial Implementation is when the practice is beginning to be put into place, but it is not yet a comfortable or fluent practice. Sites are working to implement with fidelity while they are learning new ways of operating. During this stage, challenges emerge and implementation sites may consider abandoning the new practice, particularly since it is too early to realize the benefit to students. During the initial implementation, it is important to leverage data systems and feedback loops created in installation to engage in continuous improvement cycles and communicate swiftly to celebrate successes and address barriers.

As sites reach **Full Implementation**, practices are now integrated into the environment in a manner that is a new way of operating. Full implementation is often the point at which the practices have been implemented well and long enough to begin showing student benefit (National Implementation Research Network, 2013). 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 need to be attended to, ensuring systems are flexible and responsive to meeting the needs of every student.

Conclusion

The Washington MTSS Framework helps districts and schools create equitable, consistent, and flexible systems and supports that empower educators, students, families, and communities to ensure benefit for every student. Each essential component of MTSS is interrelated and strengthens the success of the entire system of supports when integrated and implemented with fidelity. Like the parts of a bicycle, each component needs to be assembled and work together to make an efficient and effective vehicle. With the appropriate level of support, every student can leave the PK–12 system ready for postsecondary pathways, careers, and civic engagement.

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