

An Integrated Multi-Tiered System of Support (I-MTSS) is a comprehensive and equitable prevention framework for improving the outcomes of all students, including students with or at-risk for disabilities, through integrated academic and behavioral support. Key components of an I-MTSS framework include the following.



Integrated Continuum of Research-Informed Practices

Within academic (e.g., reading, mathematics, written expression) and behavioral (e.g., social, emotional, behavioral) domains, educators identify, select, implement, adapt, and adjust culturally responsive and potentially efficacious practices based on empirical evidence, local data indicating efficacy, or both. Whereas traditional MTSS frameworks may focus on one domain (e.g., reading), an I-MTSS framework emphasizes (a) selection of research-informed practices within each domain and (b) careful integration of key practices across domains (e.g., embedding opportunities to prompt key behavioral skills within an academic lesson, scripting praise for contextually appropriate behavior and correct academic responses). Integration of academic and behavioral support is critical, as academic and behavioral needs are interconnected: Behavior impacts access to instruction, and quality instruction influences behavior.

Further, educators organize and implement integrated practices within a continuum, often operationalized with three tiers. Educators deliver integrated academic and behavioral support for all students (Tier 1). For students whose screening or progress monitoring data indicate risk in one or more domains, educators provide integrated targeted supports (e.g., small group intervention that supplements Tier 1 instruction, intervention that intensifies implementation of key Tier 1 supports) in identified domains (Tier 2). For students whose screening or progress monitoring data indicate chronic or significant risk in one or more domains, educators conduct diagnostic academic and/or functional behavioral assessment and develop individualized integrated intensive intervention plans (Tier 3).

Comprehensive Data-Driven Decision Making

Although educators are becoming adept at data-based decision making within one domain, an I-MTSS framework requires educators to simultaneously review data across multiple domains (e.g., academic and behavioral screening, diagnostic and/or functional behavioral assessment, progress monitoring, and outcome data). Specifically, educators (a) use data to guide selection of research-informed practices, (b) document implementation fidelity and social validity of research-informed practices, (c) monitor student outcomes, (d) disaggregate data (e.g., by race/ethnicity, disability, gender, and language status) to ensure the needs of all subgroups of students are being met, (e) adjust implementation to maximize benefit for students at each tier, and (f) identify students who require additional support. Thus, educators benefit from a data-management system and data-review routines that facilitate simultaneous review of multiple data streams across domains, enabling educators to make decisions based on screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic or functional behavioral assessment, outcome, fidelity, and social validity data within and across implementation tiers.

Integrated Teaming and Coaching Structures

At each tier, integrated teaming functions leverage expertise at the system (school and district administrators), practice (educators with relevant content expertise, community providers), and student (family members and student) levels to guide implementation of integrated practices and promote effective decision making. For example, an integrated school-wide (Tier 1) leadership team may include (a) one or more administrators, (b) educators who represent various grade levels or disciplines (e.g., general and special education teachers, specialists, interventionists, coaches), (c) one or more family members, (d) student voice (e.g., student council or individual student representatives), and (e) other relevant stakeholders (e.g., community mental health providers). Among team members, there are individuals with expertise in academic and behavioral support; individuals who represent the diversity of the school community, including marginalized racial/ethnic groups; and individuals identified to function as coaches. Integrated teaming functions minimize “silos” (i.e., structures focused strictly on academic or behavior support), and emphasize that academic and behavioral needs and supports are interconnected.

Within this integrated teaming structure, team members use data to drive their decisions about the selection and intensity of practices, as described in the first two sections. In addition, they consider adjusting (a) resource allocation and alignment, (b) policies and procedures, and (c) other key systems to support integrated implementation. To guide this process, integrated teams meet regularly, develop and use an action plan to guide implementation, and conduct regular (at least annual) self-assessments of the fidelity of their own systems-level implementation (e.g., Tiered Fidelity Inventory or Reading Tiered Fidelity Inventory at the school level, District Capacity Assessment or District Systems Fidelity Inventory at the district level). Teams regularly (e.g., quarterly) share implementation data with faculty and staff to set and monitor improvement goals. Further, team members develop reciprocal communication loops with leadership teams at each level of implementation (state, district, and school) and other stakeholders, including staff, families, students, and relevant community members.

Integrated Professional Development

To support educators' implementation of I-MTSS, leadership teams facilitate positive, proactive, and data-driven professional development. First, the leadership team engages educators by (a) promoting the promise of an I-MTSS approach and (b) involving educators in developing their vision for a contextualized I-MTSS framework that is reflective of their local needs, context, culture, and community. Second, the leadership team conducts a self-assessment of relative strengths, opportunities, challenges, and system-level needs for using an I-MTSS approach. Third, guided by self-assessment data, the leadership team invests in relevant, engaging, sustained, and integrated professional development that includes explicit training on implementing specific research-informed practices and on-going coaching to promote professional learning. Like other aspects of the I-MTSS framework, professional development supports are selected, implemented, monitored, and adjusted based on implementation fidelity and social validity data. Further, professional development efforts should prioritize building local capacity to increase the number and skill of educators available to support the implementation of an I-MTSS framework.

Additional Systems to Support Sustained and Scaled Implementation

To increase the likelihood that supports organized within an I-MTSS framework will be sustained (implemented with fidelity across time) and scaled (implemented in additional classrooms, schools, or districts), school and district leaders consider additional systems enhancements. Systems enhancements may include (a) adding I-MTSS competencies into job descriptions, selection criteria, and new-hire on-boarding; (b) aligning funding streams (e.g., general and special education; academic and behavioral resources) to enable efficient allocation, use, and monitoring of resources; (c) developing or revising policies to support I-MTSS; (d) regularly reviewing initiatives, committees, and new priorities to ensure need, alignment, and match to improved student academic and behavioral outcomes; (e) problem-solving implementation challenges; and (f) investing in other structural changes that enhance, sustain, and scale implementation of I-MTSS (e.g., comprehensive data management system, school schedules, software that facilitate efficient and effective communication). See additional information about key “implementation drivers” at the National Implementation Research Network.

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