

Guidance for District Leadership on Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports

January 2025



**Center on
Multi-Tiered System of Supports**

The Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports at American Institutes for Research (MTSS Center) is a national leader in supporting states, districts, and schools across the country in implementing MTSS. The MTSS Center provides professional learning, consultation, and technical assistance to support sites with implementation of MTSS. The use of MTSS enables sites to integrate data and instruction within a multi-level prevention system that maximizes student achievement and supports students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs from a strengths-based perspective.

For more information, contact us at mtsscenter@air.org or visit our website: mtss4success.org.

Suggested citation:

Harlacher, J. E., & Bailey, T. R. (2025). *Guidance for district leadership on multi-tiered system of supports*. Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports at American Institutes for Research. <https://mtss4success.org/>



**Center on
Multi-Tiered System of Supports**

Introduction

To assist district leaders with planning for MTSS, the Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports at American Institutes for Research ([MTSS Center](#)) has developed this guidance document on district infrastructure. This document provides a definition of MTSS, summarizes the essential MTSS components, and outlines our guidance for district leadership on MTSS.

What is Multi-Tiered System of Supports?

Since 2007, the MTSS Center and its parent company, [American Institutes for Research](#), have provided comprehensive, ongoing professional learning opportunities to hundreds of districts in over 40 states on MTSS. In our approach to MTSS, we focus on ensuring consensus among key personnel, building the capacity of educators to sustain implementation, and leveraging existing resources to create a manageable action plan. We provide a layered, systematic, and comprehensive approach that builds readiness and understanding at the district level, from which we then build capacity and provide support to school teams and local educators. We have [worked with](#) large and small school districts in rural, urban, and suburban settings across the United States and internationally conducting needs assessments, facilitating virtual and in-person professional learning, and providing direct and ongoing coaching.

Our understanding of MTSS and approach to implementation was developed from over 15 years of experience supporting State departments, school districts, school sites, and local educators with MTSS. In creating a practical definition and applied method for MTSS, we leveraged extensive local expertise and collaborated with leading national experts. As such, the MTSS Center defines MTSS as follows:

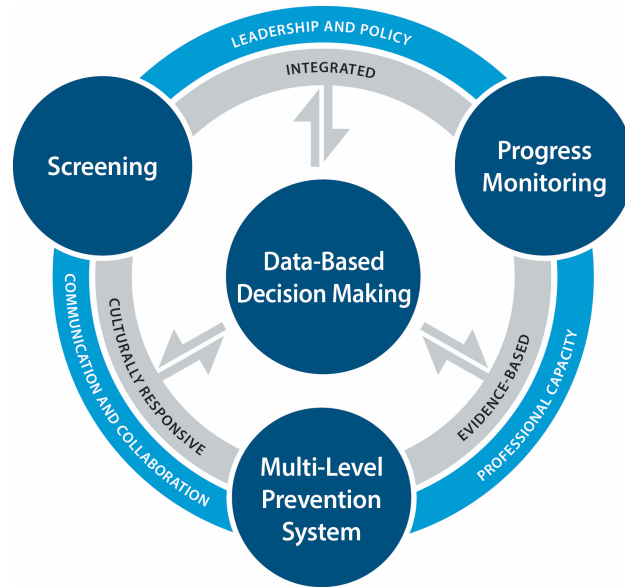
A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is a proactive and preventative framework that integrates data and instruction to maximize student achievement and support students social, emotional, and behavioral needs from a strengths-based perspective. MTSS offers a framework for educators to engage in data-based decision making related to program improvement, high-quality instruction and intervention, and social-emotional-behavioral supports necessary to ensure positive outcomes for districts, schools, teachers, students, and families.

For a complete and successful MTSS, our research and decades of experience has identified four essential components of MTSS:

- [Screening](#)
- [Multi-Level Prevention System](#)
- [Progress Monitoring](#)
- [Data-Based Decision Making](#)

Exhibit 1 illustrates the components of MTSS, as well as the infrastructure and support mechanisms needed to support it (i.e., leadership and policy, communication and collaboration, and professional capacity). Further, the components and infrastructure must be implemented in an integrated manner using culturally responsive and evidence-based practices.

Exhibit 1. Illustration of MTSS and Its Components



Summary of Components for MTSS



Screening

A systematic process for identifying students who may be at risk for poor learning outcomes.



Multi-Level Prevention System

The organization of supports for students that includes three tiers of intensity for instruction and intervention.



Progress Monitoring

The ongoing, frequent collection and use of formal data to assess a student's performance.



Data-Based Decision Making

The use of screening, progress monitoring, and other forms of data to make decisions within MTSS.



Infrastructure and Support Mechanisms

The knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize and implement all components of MTSS in a unified system to meet the identified implementation and outcome goals.

The Role of District Leadership with MTSS

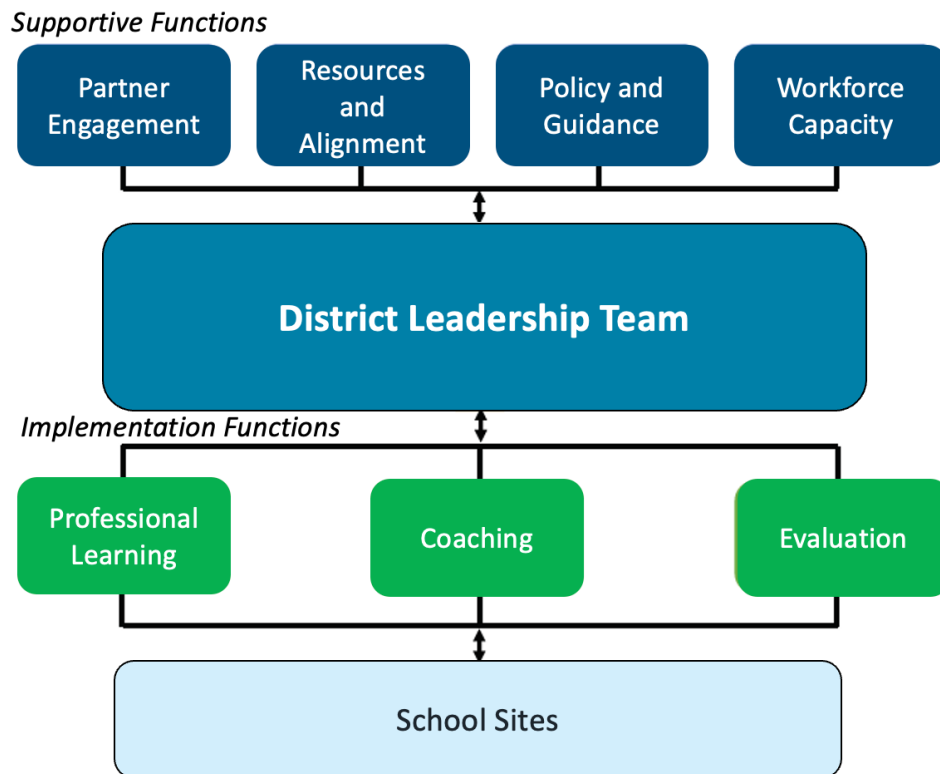
Drawing upon best practices and the decades of experience from our consultants, we know that having a district leadership team is critical to guide and support schools with implementation. In particular, a district leadership team focuses implementation of MTSS within the district by outlining a vision and creating an action plan. Further, they provide the guidance and professional learning to [school teams](#) and educators so that they can successfully implement MTSS in their sites. The district leadership team has 3 key functions that are illustrated in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2. Key Functions of a District Leadership Team



In particular, a district leadership team establishes infrastructure at the district level to ensure that the district can effectively support schools with implementation of MTSS. As illustrated in Exhibit 3, the district infrastructure includes *supportive functions* and *implementation functions* as a key part of implementation of MTSS within a district.

Exhibit 3. Illustration of District Infrastructure for MTSS



Adapted from: <https://www.pbis.org/resource/returning-to-school-during-and-after-crisis>

Supportive Functions

Supportive functions are those important tasks and duties that ensure there is sufficient funding, resources, and support for MTSS across the district. They are those activities focused on ensuring the district is aligned and has the necessary structures to support sites.



Partner Engagement

The structures and activities that promote internal and external collaboration, bi-directional communication, and engagement to support MTSS implementation.

- What are the communication structures among offices, partners, and key personnel?
- How is information communicated with and gathered from partners and key personnel?
- What partnerships among offices or within the community are there related to MTSS?



Resources

The funding and financial resources available for MTSS, including how funds are blended and braided.

- What external and internal funding is allocated to MTSS initial and sustained implementation?
- How are time, materials, and necessary resources dedicated to support MTSS?
- How are funds blended and/or braided to support MTSS?



Alignment

The coherence and alignment among initiatives to support MTSS.

- How does MTSS support current priorities within the district?
- How does the district promote alignment and avoid duplication or conflicts among initiatives?
- To what extent do current initiatives and strategic goals support each other?
- Is there a regular review of programs and initiatives to ensure efficiency?



Policy and Guidance

The outlined expectations and parameters provided to school sites on MTSS.

- How are district policies promoting implementation of MTSS?
- What district guidance and resources are available to schools to implement MTSS (e.g., practices, interventions, assessments, decision rules, processes, etc.)



Workforce Capacity

The expertise, content knowledge, and implementation knowledge of staff, which also includes the logistical capacity of staff to implement and supports MTSS.

- What mechanisms are in place to build internal knowledge of and support for MTSS among district personnel?
- What processes ensure hiring of staff with MTSS experience or backgrounds?
- How do district staff remain up-to-date with MTSS knowledge and skills?
- What infrastructure is in place to ensure that staff can logistically support sites with MTSS (e.g., scheduling, hierarchy of roles, allocation of job duties, FTE, etc)?

Implementation Functions

The implementation functions are the active connections to schools, including the professional learning, coaching, and use of data to evaluate implementation efforts. They are the direct and tangible activities to train and support educators with implementation, including the use of data by district leadership to ensure the training efforts are effective (e.g., *Are schools implementing MTSS as a result of the training? Is MTSS benefiting staff, students, and families?*).



Professional Learning

The initial and ongoing professional development provided to schools on MTSS.

- What professional learning structures are used in the district?
- What is the initial and ongoing professional development provided to schools on MTSS?
- Is there differentiated training provided to schools (i.e., by cohort, by grade-levels, newer versus older schools with implementation)?



Coaching

The coaching and post-training support available to schools for MTSS.

- What coaching structures are available and how are they used by schools in the district?
- To what extent are coaching supports available to schools on MTSS?
- How is coaching support differentiated for schools (i.e., more intensive support provided to schools with more needs)?
- How are MTSS coaches selected to support schools? How are those coaches supported by the district?



Use of Fidelity Data for Evaluation

The data on implementation used by the district team for decision making.

- What fidelity data on the entire MTSS system is gathered (e.g., Rubric)?
- What fidelity data on certain practices and assessment used is gathered?
- How are fidelity data used to improve implementation of MTSS practices and systems?



Use of Outcome Data for Evaluation

The outcome data related to staff, students, and families used by the district team for decision making.

- What key student outcome data does the district use?
- What data does the district examine to determine if MTSS is benefiting staff, students, and families?
- What processes or methods are used to analyze data (e.g., problem solving model, Plan-Do-Study-Act)?
- How are outcome data used to evaluate the impact and improve the district's approach to MTSS?

Summary:

The MTSS Center provides training and information on a variety of topics related to MTSS. We have a structured method for supporting district leadership teams. Generally speaking, we guide teams through 6 key steps illustrated below. [Contact the MTSS Center](#) to see the technical assistance that best suits your needs.

OUR APPROACH WITH DISTRICT TEAMS

1. Identify the roles, norms, standard agenda template, and meeting schedule for the district leadership team.
2. Identify current status of implementation and develop an action plan.
3. Select and de-select key practices for school to use.
4. Outline guidance for schools to use and customize for their students.
5. Provide professional learning and coaching to school teams and educators.
6. Meet on a regular basis to resolve unforeseen barriers or needs.

Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS Center)

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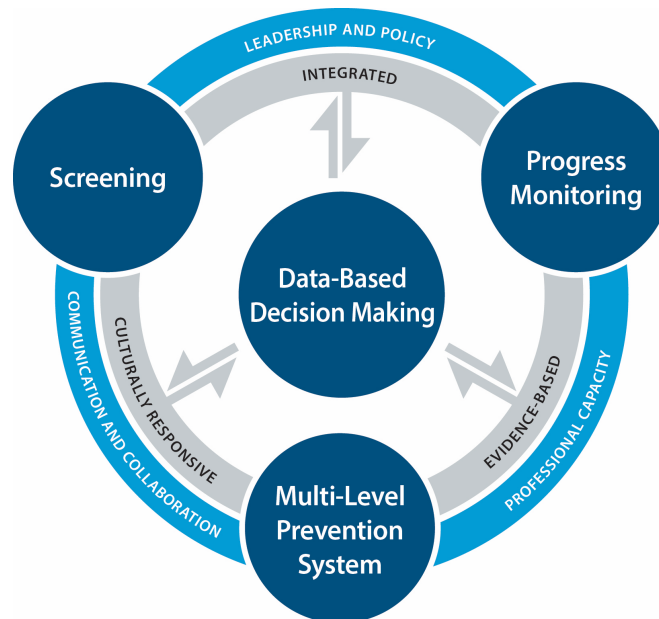
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