



Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports

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Secondary Multi-Tier System of Supports Fact Sheet

Why Secondary Schools Need Multi-Tier System of Supports

MTSS is not another new initiative, an additional task required of schools, nor is it focused solely at the elementary level. Rather, it is a framework to help all schools, including middle and high schools, create an effective and efficient educational system so that every student achieves. While there is not as strong a body of research to support implementation at the secondary level, many researchers attest to the great promise a tiered approach holds in terms of monitoring instruction and learning for all students at the secondary level (Duffy, H. 2007).

Kansas educators do many great things for students on a daily basis. Even with the best of intentions our educational system has not been as cohesive as is desired. In many instances educators and parents have been frustrated with the process to access supports for students. We know that many students at the secondary level would benefit from intervention. According to a national study, 68 percent of eighth-grade students and 64 percent of high school seniors nationally failed to become proficient readers (Deshler, D. 2004). There are many reasons for this lack of proficiency including “lack of appropriate instruction in the primary grades, the difficulty of content area work, the cumulative effect of problems that were not as significant in the early grades, excessive absenteeism resulting in acquisition of splinter skills, and the presence of significant behavior problems that impede student learning” (Shores, C. 2008). Thus, it is no surprise that many educators recognize that in order to expect different outcomes, something has to change.

Research at the Secondary Level that Supports Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) Principles and Practices

While no comprehensive research has yet been completed on the implementation of a multi-tier instructional model at the secondary level, there have been numerous case studies completed over the last few years. These studies seek to examine how secondary schools address the needs of all students in a multi-tiered system. Accordingly, it is this research that informs the principles and practices of MTSS at the secondary level. It is the hope that in ensuing years more research will be completed that will build upon this foundation. In addition to these numerous case studies, what we know of the most recent adolescent literacy research guides the enhancement of the core content areas as well as serves

as the driving force for supplemental and intensive intervention decisions and selections. According to Torgeson's work, the three most important aspects of any secondary literacy program are:

1. Increasing levels of reading proficiency for all students.
2. Ensuring students who are at grade level continue to meet increasingly difficult standards of middle school and high school.
3. Helping students below grade level to acquire skills and knowledge to meet standards.

We know this will require powerful supplemental and intensive instruction to accelerate reading achievement to close the gap. In order to help students acquire these key concepts and skills, secondary schools must redesign their infrastructure to provide opportunities for supplemental and intensive intervention. Schools must arrange support systems amid the demands of graduation requirements and competing priorities to put in place the powerful interventions necessary to help all students meet the increasingly difficult standards. According to Cara Shores (2008), this type of whole school redesign around multi-tiered supports is even more important at the secondary level than at the elementary in terms of improving outcomes for all students and improving schools.

During the 2008-2009 school year, several middle schools and high schools across Kansas have been involved in a pilot project focused on implementing MTSS at the secondary level. These pilot buildings have made recommendations for secondary buildings interested in preparing to implement MTSS when state supported training is available in the 2009-2010 school year. These recommended questions help secondary buildings prepare and come to agreement around what the MTSS effort needs to be for them.

1. What should buildings wanting to begin designing and implementing MTSS think about before starting the process?

It has been recommended that buildings interested in MTSS develop a process and mind set to engage in pre-structuring activities to prepare their leadership teams and building staff to begin the process of designing and implementing a Multi-Tier System of Supports. Some of these pre-structuring activities could focus on taking stock of what is happening currently through data analysis as well as identifying current successful practices. Other activities may include sharing the research on adolescent literacy to ensure that all staff is focused on core content literacy issues. In order to do this, it is important to examine how effective the core content area curriculum is in helping the majority of students be successful.

Team building should also be a key focus. The pilot buildings suggested matching the diversity of the building with the leadership team as well as involving key staff who were seen as influencers in the building. Prioritization of time for interventions is a must as well. Many buildings started with an examination of the master schedule to determine how time for supplemental and intensive interventions would be provided.

Staff engagement in MTSS is critical to its success. Another way to engage staff is to provide an overview of the MTSS framework within a school improvement context. In this manner, staff will understand that this is not a new initiative but a systemization of what works.

2. What are some recommended activities to complete with staff prior to training being available specific to the secondary level?

One of the key recommendations is for buildings to focus on developing or improving its data driven process. If a building is currently using a Professional Learning Communities (PLC) process, it is imperative to examine the successful practices that allow for data-based decision making to occur. If a building does not currently have a process for collaboration and data analysis, the building should begin the work of engaging staff in such a process. It is a priority that building leadership teams as well as other teams examining data have the time built into the schedule to do so.

As can be surmised, data analysis is a key skill for building teams to have when beginning MTSS. Staff must focus on student learning and not only teaching subject content. Allowing for open lines of communication among staff and between staff and leadership is a must. Staff needs to examine and provide feedback about what is working, what is not working as well as the building's strengths and weaknesses and leadership needs to be responsive to staff needs and recommendations.

3. What are recommended resources that can be used to begin a conversation around ideas inherent in MTSS?

Book studies are an excellent way to get staff used to the idea of shared learning. A KSDE SES funded project supports buildings' efforts in conducting book studies by providing book studies in a bag free of charge. Each book study comes with 10 copies of the book and has a corresponding facilitator guide that can be downloaded from www.projectsspot.org. The book study facilitator guides are available online free of charge regardless if books are checked out from the project or acquired locally. Additionally, the questions in each facilitator's guide are written from a tiered perspective to assist in guiding your thinking around MTSS.

Topic	Title	Author(s)
Reading/Comprehension	<i>Collaborative Strategic Reading: Strategies for Improving Comprehension</i>	Janette K. Klingner and Sharon Vaughn
Reading/Vocabulary	<i>Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction</i>	Isabel Beck
Reading/Comprehension	<i>Mosaic of Thought: The Power of Comprehension Strategy Instruction</i>	Zimmerman and Keene
Reading/Fluency	<i>The Fluent Reader</i>	Timothy Rasinski
Reading/Comprehension	<i>I Read It but I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers</i>	Chris Tovani

Topic	Title	Author(s)
Reading/Comprehension	<i>Do I Really Have to Teach Reading: Content Comprehension 6-12</i>	Chris Tovani
Reading	<i>Yellow Brick Roads: Shared and Guided Paths to Independent Reading</i>	Janet Allen
Reading	<i>Effective Instruction for Middle School Students with Reading Difficulties: The Reading Teacher's Sourcebook</i>	Carolyn Denton
Differentiation	<i>The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners</i>	Carol Ann Tomlinson
Effective Instruction	<i>Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement</i>	Robert Marzano
School Improvement	<i>Annual Growth for All, Catch-up Growth for those Who Are Behind</i>	Fielding, Kerr, Rosler
Leadership	<i>Results Now</i>	Mike Schmoker
Response to Intervention	<i>Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation</i>	NASDSE
Response to Intervention	<i>Rtl: Principles and Strategies for Effective Practice</i>	Rachel Brown-Chidsey
Response to Intervention	<i>Response to Intervention: A Practical Guide for Every Teacher</i>	Cara Shores
Response to Intervention	<i>Implementing Response to Intervention: A Principal's Guide</i>	Susan Hall
Response to Intervention	<i>Using Rtl for School Improvement: Raising Every Student's Achievement Scores</i>	Cara Shores
Differentiation	<i>Differentiating the High School Classroom: Solutions and Strategies for 18 Common Mistakes</i>	Kathie Nunley

Topic	Title	Author(s)
Leadership	<i>Influencer: The Power to Change Anything</i>	Kerry Patterson
Leadership	<i>Leadership and Sustainability: System Thinkers in Action</i>	Michael Fullan

4. Should a building begin by forming a team to start focusing on MTSS?

An important first step is the creation of a building leadership team to focus the work of the entire school around MTSS. Deciding how MTSS fits into your building’s school improvement structure will assist in the process of forming the building’s leadership team. A new team is not necessarily needed. Instead, it is important to focus on having a highly functioning team (whether this is the building’s current school improvement team or some other team). All content areas/departments should be represented on the team. Selection for participation on a building leadership team should be a function of a person’s position and not simply on who volunteers first.

5. What advice would help secondary buildings with a plan of attack for preparing to focus on prior to Structuring?

Make MTSS a priority in your building and district. Central office and principal support are necessary for the successful implementation of MTSS. Creating a sense of urgency will also help move the initiative forward. It is also important to examine how your building leadership team will meet, interact, and decide on roles and responsibilities. Being mindful of dealing with communication issues upfront is the key to success. It is also important to consider how often the building leadership team will meet, how the building leadership team will interact with and inform the district leadership team. How will information be shared with building staff? Frequent meetings are an important part of the process (most buildings in the pilot also met with Central Office staff at least once per month) to discuss key aspects of the MTSS framework and design.

For more information on Secondary MTSS, please contact Tracie Kalic at tkalic@keystonelearning.org