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& counting**

**School Practitioner
Listserv**

**A Weekly Community of Practice Network
for Sharing and Interchange**



February 15, 2016

Concern from the Field:

**>The multi-tiered student support (MTSS)model:
How does it fit into a unified & comprehensive
system of learning supports?**

- Center Perspective
- Perspectives from the Field

Invitation to Listserv Participants:

**>Share what you know about unifying student and
learning supports**

Featured Set of Center Resources:

**>Fitting Response to Intervention and Behavioral Initiatives
into a unified system of learning supports**

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**Please forward this to a few colleagues you think might be interested.
The more who join, the more we are likely to receive to share.**

**For those who have been forwarded this and want to be part of
the weekly exchange, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

**For previous recent postings of this community of practice, see
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>**

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Note: In keeping with the *National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports*,* this community of practice network has expanded in number of participants and topics discussed.* The thematic emphasis is on (1) daily concerns confronting those working in and with schools, (2) the transformation of student and learning supports, and (3) promoting whole child development and positive school climate.

C **oncern from the Field**

>**How does the multi-tiered student support (MTSS) model fit into a unified, comprehensive, & equitable system of learning supports?**

The Center frequently is asked about this. Here is a recent example:

“We have teams working on our district’s multi-tiered system support plan and another team of schools working on Learning Supports. I am trying to find a way to help people see the bridge between these two because as of right now they see them as different. Any thoughts, readings, diagrams you can share that might help align their work? It seems like a natural fit to me but for some reason others don’t see it. We have so many different initiatives going on in the district, and I am trying to find a common language so that people do not see them as separate things, which I believe is the point of both Learning Supports and MTSS.”

Center Perspective: Using the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) as a stimulus, it is time to move toward transforming student and learning supports.* This provides a context for weaving the work related to a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), as well as other related initiatives, into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for learning supports.

Everyone concerned with addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students knows the degree to which student and learning supports are marginalized and fragmented. Now is the time to bring the matter to the forefront as superintendents and principals make the transition from “No Child Left Behind” to “Every Student Succeeds” (and from multi-tiered to ESSA’s “schoolwide tiered model”). Now is the time to drive home the points that the road to every child succeeding involves transforming student and learning supports and that such a transformation is fundamental to enhancing equity of opportunity, enabling civil rights, closing the achievement gap, and promoting whole child development and a positive school climate.

In moving forward, here is a first step to suggest to administrators: All resources used for addressing students’ learning, behavior, emotional, and physical problems need to be mapped and analyzed. Mapping and analysis is the basis for clarifying a broad vision for the future of student and learning supports and for bringing prioritized and strategic recommendations for school improvement planning and implementation. The mapping should use a matrix framework that accounts not only for the continuum of interventions, but also for the range of activity schools pursue in addressing problems each day. (See the Center’s tool for *Mapping and Analyzing Learning Supports* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf> .)

As to who should do the mapping and analysis, this provides the opportunity to establish a *leadership team* focused on the tasks of unifying and then developing a comprehensive and equitable system of learning supports. Such a team brings together an administrative leader and initiative and program leaders. (See *Key Leadership Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Student & Learning Supports* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/report/resource_oriented_teams.pdf .)

In preparing, team members might find the following resources helpful in setting the stage:

>*Another Initiative? Where Does it Fit?* –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/infrastructure/anotherinitiative-exec.pdf> .

>*Moving Beyond the Three Tier Intervention Pyramid Toward a Comprehensive Framework for Student and Learning Supports* –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/threetier.pdf>

>“*Not Another Team!*” *School Improvement Infrastructure Viewed through the Lens of Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/team.pdf>

Perspectives from the Field: We shared the matter with colleagues working to implement a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports. Here is a sample of what they have to report:

- (1) “I understand that part of the situation is a school/district where they are implementing MTSS and learning supports separately. For schools/districts, I liked to frame the conversation as MTSS may be limited to reading (or other academic areas) and sometimes behavior. Learning Supports is a more broad framework that can include MTSS efforts, but has additional content areas that need to be considered in order to have a truly comprehensive and integrated system. Like MTSS, each of the content areas need to address what efforts will support all students, targeted groups of students and those who need intensive supports.. If a school/district were to map their initiatives/strategies, the actual strategies used for MTSS might be shown in the academic content area — if that is a strategy they are using for reading or other curricular area. The first step we took with schools/districts was to ask them to map all of their resources — as you suggest. Then we would ask them to use their data to determine where they needed to begin. Whatever your data suggests as a priority, you still need to figure out how to incorporate/integrate the other areas. For example, if you want to improve reading, you have to figure out how to engage students and parents, how to create a safe environment for learners, what community partners can contribute and what happens during critical transitions.”
- (2) “...we have developed a symbiotic mutualistic relationship as it relates to MTSS and Learning Supports. In other words, we have developed a framework where systemically one could not benefit, exist, or be sustained without the other. MTSS is becoming common language across the nation. Unfortunately, MTSS has become a kaleidoscope of definitions and practices. Herein lies the barrier systems face when looking through this lens. In our district, we have defined MTSS as an overarching comprehensive approach designed to stratify learning and unify systemic practices at all levels. As an overarching comprehensive and unified approach, MTSS in our district takes on a larger meaning and therein allows for a more flexible and organic system, moving and changing with the ebb and flow of school and district practices.

The School Focus: At the school level, MTSS follows the ‘All, Some, and Few’ stratification design. In other words, we practice the concept of Tier I, II, and III. This does not mean we are practicing RTI or PBIS, what this means is that we are implementing a stratified framework in where RTI and/or PBIS can be a small piece of the larger comprehensive MTSS picture. That is important to note, as many believe MTSS is simply the combination of academic RTI and behavioral PBIS. Unique to our district is that learning supports theory is the foundation by which we view and operate MTSS. This is how learning supports and MTSS can work in unison. We have designed a school-based MTSS framework, simplistic in nature but effective in practice, which solidifies and unifies learning supports within the framework. Each staff member at each school is trained first and foremost on the learning supports theory and practice and then on the overarching concept of a stratified design (MTSS). School leaders are taught to view every school-based goal as well as individual student goals through the six learning supports practice areas. In turn, every action of intervention filters through the six practice areas and becomes stratified. As interventions and action begin at the school level, school leaders are taught to bridge perspectives, experience, and expertise with district level personnel in order to practice a more comprehensive and unified approach.

The District Focus: At the district level, the important concept and practice is simply unification. Breaking the habit of compartmentalizing decisions and initiatives is currently

our main goal. Working on the unification of the three components (Instruction, Operations and Management, and Learning Supports) is paramount. If all district office members do not work in a synergistic manner across all components, then the district is arguably fragmented and the bridge of support is not maximized to schools and ultimately students. This is again an example of how MTSS and learning supports work in unison. At the district level MTSS also looks through the “All, Some, Few” stratification lens as it relates to district initiatives and school based support. For example, we examine district practices, programs, and personnel, to name a few, and determine priorities based on student and district needs along the ‘All, Some, Few’ stratification. This perspective allows MTSS to strategically examine linear equity along the stratified continuum.

Evident in our district, the collaboration of MTSS and learning supports produces effective and positive student outcomes. Leaders must break away from practices that produce minimal progress and work toward creating and transforming wholistic systems capable of reaching all children with equitable opportunities to succeed. Educational leaders must not be the barrier to student success but rather become the change agent of historical failures.

The following is recommended to begin the process of transforming systems toward unifying MTSS/ILS;

>Start with a Spark

- Begin with a core group committed and dedicated to positive systemic transformation
- Move beyond excuses and barriers

>Determine HOW (not IF) MTSS/ILS will work in unison

- Break away from traditional systemic thought
- Change and customize common language and definitions
- Move beyond excuses and barriers . . .”

- (3) “I’ve been mulling over this request. My thoughts keep coming back to a particular student I had. Maybe this story will help. I met “Johnnie” as a 17 year old sophomore in high school. Needless to say, graduation wasn’t looking promising as he’d been held back in his middle school years. He was a bright and handsome kid that had friends and no behavior problems to speak of — but he missed a lot of school. Teachers worked hard to keep him caught up but his skills just weren’t there because he’d missed so much. Today, he would have been a likely candidate for the MTSS process and I’m sure his teachers would do their best to help him. I think I was the first ‘staff person’ to get to know him and I finally learned why he missed so much school. He was living in a home with an alcoholic step father who was abusive to his mother. When his dad came home drunk, which was often, he’d fight with Johnnie’s mother. Johnnie would slip to the garage and sleep in the car to avoid the screaming and fighting. Inevitably, he’d oversleep and miss the bus. Did Johnnie need MTSS? Absolutely. Was that going to meet his needs? Absolutely not.

Without a comprehensive system of learning supports in place, kids like Johnnie won’t succeed. Kids with emotional problems won’t succeed. Kids with bullying and peer problems and kids with dysfunctional family problems won’t succeed. It doesn’t matter what reading strategy is used. And for those who might think that it’s not the place of the school to intervene, I go back to that Carnegie quote. ‘School systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students. But when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.’

Review the data to prioritize goals. Then, use the content areas of learning supports to ensure that the actions to meet those goals include as many of those 6 areas as humanly possible. Only then, can staff be sure that they are *meeting student needs* — not just academic *performance standards*. Unfortunately, two very different things in many schools.”

- (4) “In our state, we are doing systems training first so that the infrastructure is there, then training after around specific practices rather than training systems through one specific evidence based

program which is how many States view MTSS. They interchange MTSS and PBIS or MTSS and RtI. We train the systems pieces first that you need to implement and sustain those practices/processes. Doing it the other way, we found the systems' knowledge does not generalize to other EBPs and in at-risk districts, implementation plateaus because implementers do not really understand how to organize for systems change and sustainability.....they're just excited about putting a "program" (EBP) in place."

Invitation to listserv participants: *Your help is needed!* Please share what you know about how schools, districts, states are moving to get beyond the limitations of the Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) model. What is being done to map and analyze student and learning supports? Are leadership teams being established to use the transition to ESSA as an opportunity to unify and develop a comprehensive and equitable system of learning supports? We look forward to hearing from you. Send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Featured set of center resources

>Fitting Response to Intervention and Behavioral Initiatives into a unified system of learning supports

For direct links to resources on this topic, go to the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Find on *Response to Intervention* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/responsetointervention.htm> .

Center resources with direct links from this Quick Find include:

- >*RTI and Classroom & Schoolwide Learning Supports*
- >*The Relationship of Response to Intervention and Systems of learning Supports*
- >*RTI and Classroom & Schoolwide Learning Supports*
- >*Implementing Response to Intervention in Context*

Also see:

- >*Behavioral Initiatives in Broad Perspective* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/behavioral/behini.pdf>

*For information about the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE BECOMES!
Send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences to ltaylor@ucla.edu
We post a broad range of issues and responses to the *Net Exchange*
on our website at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm>
and to *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>)