
Is MTSS becoming another buzzword?

We keep looking for evidence that schools are moving efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students out of the margins. When we inquire about this, the current quick response is to say a state/district/school has adopted some form of a multi-tiered system of support (usually referred to as MTSS, although some places are using other acronyms).

This is not surprising given the term's emphasis in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In ESSA, a schoolwide tiered model (also referred to as a multitier system of supports) is referenced for preventing and addressing behavior problems. The tiered model is defined as "a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students' needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision-making." The tiered model (including use of early intervening services) and specific approaches such as positive behavioral intervention and supports are presented as strategies for enabling children with disabilities and English learners to meet challenging state academic standards and are to be coordinated with similar activities and services carried out under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Our preliminary analyses of responses we have received suggest that the adoption of the term MTSS is a planning convenience, but probably will do too little to enhance a school's effectiveness in addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Enhancing equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond requires going beyond how MTSS generally is being used. The need is for a much more innovative and transformative framework for increasing the effectiveness of student/learning supports.

Let us know: Does your experience support or refute this?

Specifically, our analyses stress that current discussions of the multitier student support (MTSS) model do not account for its severe limitations as a framework for student and learning supports. Among the problems are concerns that MTSS

- >is an inadequate depiction of an intervention continuum (e.g., delineating levels of school interventions, rather than subsystems of school-community interventions)
- >does not clarify the contribution each level can make to reducing the number of students in need of special assistance (e.g., how the continuum applies the principle of using the least intervention necessary and the practice of response to intervention)
- >does not systematically organize the content of what schools do each day to address learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

Let us know: Does your experience support or refute these concerns?

We look forward to hearing and sharing your views as a step forward in improving schools (and before MTSS becomes just another buzzword).

Send your comments to Ltaylor@ucla.edu