
As a Buzzword, MTSS will be Counterproductive

We have been flooded with responses to our probe about MTSS.

While most respondents have noted concerns about the way the framework is being used, some have indicated satisfaction with how they are using the framework and point to some positive outcomes. Others see MTSS as a potential starting place for moving forward with improving how schools deal with matters such as PBIS, Social Emotional Learning, and specific student/learning supports.

We recognize that there are benefits to any framework that emphasizes an integrated intervention continuum and focused problem solving. The primary caution we raise is that the way most such frameworks are being conceived is too limited and thus they are grossly inadequate for enhancing equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond. (Note that the concern is about the limited nature and scope of the conceptualization, rather than about insufficient buy-in or lack of fidelity in implementation, which are problems for all systemic changes.)

Stated directly, MTSS and its various iterations must be analyzed with respect to the framework's role in school improvement policy and practice. Our analysis suggests that limiting thinking to multi-tiers and connections with specific initiatives will do little to end the marginalization of efforts to address a wide range of major barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage the large numbers of disconnected students. This certainly is the case when the focus is mainly on connecting PBIS and the tiered continuum, and it continues to be the case as the framework is adapted to connect other specific initiatives (e.g., SEL, school mental health, bullying, involvement with community health and social services, etc.). All such specific initiatives need to be embedded into a framework that not only connects the intervention continuum, but also categorizes and works on connecting the many existing school-community fragmented interventions for learning, behavior, and emotional problems into a unified system.

As we indicated in our recent email, the nature and scope of need in many schools is for developing a much more innovative and transformative framework for increasing the effectiveness of student/learning supports. We fear that the widespread emphasis on limited concepts such as MTSS will be counterproductive to such efforts by giving the appearance that fundamental improvements are being made with respect to addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

At this time, we suggest that all plans indicating adoption of a multi-tier system need to be analyzed to determine whether

- >they conceive the continuum levels as *interconnected subsystems* that weave together school student/learning supports and weave in related community-linked interventions,
- >they systematically *categorize and embed* across each level the many fragmented interventions used by schools to address learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

For a deeper analysis of the matter, go to webpage for the National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports -- <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html> .

For those interested in going beyond MTSS, see "Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide" -- available at this time as a free resource at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/barriersbook.pdf> .

As a statewide example of an effort to develop a more unified, comprehensive, and equitable framework, see the framework adopted by the Alabama Department of Education - see <http://web.alsde.edu/general/ALDOEDesignDocument.pdf> .

For those involved in developing a comprehensive community school - see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/communitycollab.pdf> .

As always, we look to hear from the field. Send comments to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Best wishes and thanks for all you do to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

Howard & Linda