
Don't Stop with MTSS!

Over the last decade, an increasing number of districts and schools have adopted/adapted a multi-tiered support system (MTSS). The investments in some states have been in the millions. For example, California has allocated 95 million to date to establish its version of MTSS statewide.

In a previous commentary, we asked: *Are MTSS and Community Schools Being Adopted as Buzzwords Rather Than the Basis for Making Substantive System Improvements?* <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/6-6-24.pdf>

In this respect, we note that over the last five years, a variety of concerns have arisen across the country about how well MTSS is meeting teachers' needs for student/learning supports. Some concerns have emphasized implementation problems; others have indicated the buzzword problem..

Our concern is that MTSS is not doing much to end the fragmentation and marginalization that has long characterized the ways that schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students. We suggest that it is essential to realize that more is involved in building a truly comprehensive system of student/learning supports than the emphasis on a continuum of interventions. That is, while a full continuum is essential, it is just one facet of a comprehensive intervention system. Given this, we view schools using MTSS as their intervention framework continue to limit understanding of why school improvement policy marginalizes student/learning supports.

It is time to (1) end the marginalization of student/learning supports in school improvement policy and (2) evolve MTSS into an intervention framework that guides development of student/learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system.

See: *Building on MTSS to Enhance How Schools Address Barriers to Learning*
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/BuildMTSS.pdf>

While our Center's work has produced many resources related to these matters, here are a few to help increase understanding of the need for transformative systemic changes and how to move forward.

> *Student Supports: What's in place? What's Missing?*

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/summer2023.pdf>

> *Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefguide.pdf>

And for a more detailed discussion, we have developed and provide free access to the following three books

> *Improving School Improvement*

> *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*

> *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*

All three can be accessed at https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

Clearly, student/learning supports currently are marginalized and fragmented in school improvement policy and practice. If schools are to be more effective in addressing barriers to learning and teaching (and in reducing the opportunity and achievement gaps), they must start to unify student/learning supports into a cohesive component and develop the component into a comprehensive and equitable system of supports. It is within such a system that a broad and sustainable focus on a full range of mental health and psychosocial and educational concerns can be fully embedded into school improvement efforts.

Our hope continues to be that raising the above concerns and offering guides for transformative system change will encourage greater attention to ending this undesirable state of affairs.