
Watch out!

Much Discussion of MTSS, Little Discussion of Student/Learning Support Staff and Developing MTSS into a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System

Student/learning support staff have long been marginalized by districts and schools. Now with the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, only counselors and nurses are frequently cited because they are seen as meeting specific needs created by the crisis. Other student/learning support staff are almost disappearing from the discussion, especially when MTSS is being advocated. Part of the problem is that most discussions of the multi-tiered approach continue to ignore the need to develop MTSS beyond the limited way the three-tiered model is framed.

The reality is that the anticipated increase in students' manifesting learning, behavior, and emotional problems won't be effectively met unless there is a major emphasis on doing more to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

The simplified way MTSS is being framed and discussed does not bode well. As usual, the burden of addressing complex problems is left mainly to teachers. This has never been a responsible position.

And the problems are exacerbated by remote learning. As noted in a Hechinger report:

While some students thrived during the coronavirus-inspired spring of remote learning, educators, parents and students themselves have reported frighteningly low engagement. Among 20,000 middle and high school students surveyed by Youth Truth, a national nonprofit research organization, just 41 percent of them said they could motivate themselves to do schoolwork while their school buildings were closed. Broken down by grade, 57 percent of fifth graders said they could motivate themselves, and that portion steadily dropped by age with barely one-quarter of 12th graders saying the same.

The situation was almost this bad in too many schools even before the pandemic.

Student/learning support staff are needed to help change this. And at this critical juncture in the future of public schools, they need to be asked to help develop MTSS into a much more sophisticated system than currently is being discussed.

These are matters addressed in the Center's new online resource entitled: *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change* - access it from the Center's website by going to http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html .