

Engaging School Psychologists to Improve Multitiered Systems of Support

MULTITIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT TO SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) prioritizes the need for expanded access to comprehensive school psychological services within multitiered systems of support (MTSS). MTSS is an evidence-based framework for effectively integrating multiple systems and services to simultaneously address students’ academic achievement, behavior, and social–emotional well-being. Furthermore, MTSS is a strategy for improving outcomes for *all* students and for creating safe and supportive learning environments free of bullying, harassment, and discrimination. School psychologists are critical assets necessary for successful implementation of MTSS. Specifically, school psychologists can assist in the selection of evidence-based curricula and interventions, administer psychometrically sound universal screening and progress monitoring tools, support fidelity of intervention implementation, and facilitate appropriate data analysis and interpretation.

BENEFITS OF MULTITIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

ESSA provides greater flexibility to states in determining specific practices and service delivery models to improve school climate, increase school safety, and expand access to comprehensive learning supports. MTSS enables the integration of multiple school improvement efforts and represents an effective strategy to accomplish the following goals.

- Improve outcomes for *all* students, including high-performing students, English language learners, students receiving special education services, and those struggling with barriers to learning.
- Improve instruction and alignment of curricula across general and special education.
- Improve school climate and safety.
- Create safe and supportive learning environments free from bullying and harassment.
- Support students’ mental and behavioral health.
- Implement effective discipline policy and practice.

Importantly, ESSA recognizes the effectiveness of MTSS. States and districts can use various funding streams (e.g., Title I, Title II, and Title IV) to support the implementation of MTSS and provide all school staff with the necessary and ongoing professional development.

COMPONENTS OF MULTITIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

MTSS is not a prepackaged, one size fits all program. Rather, it is a framework for providing comprehensive systems of differentiated support based on the unique needs of individual schools and districts. The proactive premise of MTSS works by striving to prevent school failure, and by addressing academic challenges in a responsive way. The following are essential components in developing, implementing, and sustaining effective MTSS frameworks in schools.

- **Varying levels of support (tiers).** Students receive varying levels of support in three tiers. Tier 1, or universal supports, typically refers to services available to all students (e.g., wellness/skills promotion and school-wide programs). Tier

School psychologists have expertise and in each component of MTSS and can help schools design and implement a comprehensive range of interventions to improve outcomes for all students.

2 services (targeted supports) are available to some students identified as needing some additional services (e.g., small group counseling, tutoring, targeted behavioral skills training). Tier 3 refers to more intensive services for individuals or small groups and is usually limited to a small percentage of students (e.g., individualized instruction, intensive therapy, wraparound services).

- **Screening.** School-wide multileveled instructional and behavioral systems must be grounded in data-eliciting methods in order to make informed choices on the level of support a student needs. As such, screenings are universally administered assessments utilized in determining potential challenges and areas of concern.
- **Progress monitoring.** As evidence-based instructional strategies are implemented, student achievement is regularly assessed by measuring progress, potentially necessitating a change in future instruction. This data is garnered through many means, thus providing many opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning.
- **Data-driven decisions.** Data collected on student achievement occurs through various mediums when identifying areas of strength and struggle. Data-driven decisions regarding instruction and intervention are provided in increasing intensity (i.e., tiers) based on student needs, which may change over time. Students are placed in these tiers using data, which is collected and analyzed throughout the instruction and intervention times.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' EXPERTISE

School psychologists are often an untapped resource. When utilized appropriately, school psychologists can help schools and districts use limited dollars more effectively while simultaneously improving school and student outcomes. As states, districts, and schools begin to consider various strategies to meet student needs, school psychologists can support the effective development, delivery, and assessment of multitiered systems of support. School psychologists can work with school leaders in the following ways.

School psychologists hold a vital role in the collaboration between families and schools to help support the academic, social, and emotional growth of students.

- Design, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive range of interventions for students at risk for academic, social–emotional, or mental and behavioral health concerns.
- Collaborate with educators, parents, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community for *all* students.
- Offer consultation in how to collect and analyze data that can be used in progress monitoring; help develop indicators of academic, social, emotional, and behavioral health of students; and use data to assist administrators in developing school improvement plans.
- Collaborate with parents and families to promote treatment integrity and improve intervention success at home and school. School improvement efforts are most effective when parents, families, and the school work together.
- Facilitate collaboration and coordination between the home, school, and community providers to promote student success.

RELEVANT RESOURCES

Resources related to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and school psychological services are available on the NASP website (<http://www.nasponline.org/essa>). These resources include:

- Topic-specific ESSA fact sheets
- ESSA/MTSS/NASP Practice Model Crosswalk
- Resources and guidance from the U.S. Department of Education
- Information about specific funding sources in ESSA
- NASP Practice Model Implementation Guide