Multitiered Systems of Support in Early Childhood

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Multitiered systems of support (MTSS) is a system of targeted support for students struggling academically or behaviorally. MTSS is considered to be a pre-special education process in which students receive targeted interventions to address areas of need, which are evaluated to determine if the students are responding to the intervention or making progress towards a goal. When implemented in preschool, MTSS aids in early identification of at-risk students, minimizes inappropriate special education referrals, and remediates potential delays affecting school readiness and later learning or social-emotional outcomes (Greenwood et al., 2019). MTSS is separated into three tiers within the general education classroom and curriculum and starts at Tier 1, or the universal level, in which all students are provided core instruction and broad support (Shepley & Grisham-Brown, 2019). In Tier 2, struggling learners in the core curriculum receive targeted instruction and intervention to their areas of need. Individualized interventions are provided at Tier 3. Data collection occurs throughout movement through the tiers, which may result in a referral to determine special education eligibility if students do not make adequate progress at Tier 3. MTSS in preschool may include data collection and progress monitoring of all learners because of the varied experiences students bring with them that affect their skill development and acquisition. It may also include bridging the gaps between learners with diverse backgrounds and development. In short, MTSS is a systematic method of identifying students with potential learning or behavior delays and, in preschool, provides opportunities to remediate delays before students enter kindergarten.

EARLY ACADEMIC MTSS

- Domains of early literacy and language necessary for school readiness and associated with later reading outcomes include:
  - Oral language and comprehension: producing or comprehending spoken language
  - Phonological awareness: identifying or manipulating units of spoken language (phonemes)
  - Alphabet knowledge: associations printed letters with their respective names and sounds (Greenwood et al., 2015).

- Components for early academic MTSS:
  - Data collection: screening, assessment, and progress monitoring
  - Evidence-based curriculum, instruction, and interventions
  - Hierarchy of interventions based on levels of intensity and individualization
  - Collaboration through problem solving: a multidisciplinary team that includes educators, specialists, and parents.

- Early literacy and language:
  - Children enter preschool with diverse language skills and preliteracy experiences (Greenwood et al., 2015).
  - Prereading skills are strongly tied to language development during the preschool period (Carta et al., 2015).
  - Children at risk for language and preliteracy delays in preschool are likely to face significant difficulties learning to read and to become struggling readers (Chard & Kameenui, 2000; Grapin et al., 2018).
• Early writing skills:
  ▪ Early writing skills include knowledge of symbols (letters) and conventions in writing, such as writing letters, names, and words. They also include conveying meaning using drawing and writing, including both invented (attempts at writing or spelling) and conventional writing (Guo et al., 2018).
  ▪ Early writing skills are part of the foundation of literacy development and are the precursors to conventional writing skills (Guo et al., 2018). Emergent writing skills are predictive of later literacy achievement.
  ▪ Relationship between letter knowledge and invented writing: invented writing occurs when children attempt to connect, or map, sounds they can distinguish from the letters, or graphical representations, that they know. It involves matching phonemes to symbols in order to create meaning that can be communicated to others (Otaiba et al., 2010).

• Mathematics:
  ▪ Early numeracy skills include verbal counting, one-to-one correspondence, and cardinality (i.e., quantifying a set; Nelson & McMaster, 2019).
  ▪ Math skills are especially hierarchical compared to other academic skills, thus a skill-building framework starting with early numerical skills is strongly associated with positive math outcomes (Aunola et al., 2004).
  ▪ Math achievement when entering kindergarten is consistently a strong predictor of success in math and broad achievement later (Watts et al., 2018).

BEHAVIORAL MTSS (EARLY INTERVENTION PBIS)

What is early childhood PBIS?

• Early childhood positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) is similar to K–12 PBIS.
• Universal supports or Tier 1, in the form of nurturing and responsive relationships and high-quality supportive environments, are provided to all students. Caregiver engagement and frequent home–school communication are critical at all levels (Powell et al., 2006).
  ▪ Clear directions, a small number of behavioral expectations are explicitly and consistently taught and reinforced.
  ▪ Acknowledgment and praise are used to positively reinforce behaviors; a token economy is not likely used in the early childhood setting (Powell et al., 2006).
• Secondary or Tier 2 supports may involve targeted social skill instruction to address an area of need that often occurs in the early education classroom.
• Tertiary or Tier 3 supports often include identifying the function of the student’s behavior as well as environmental factors that may be maintaining the behavior. A critical feature is caregiver involvement (Fox et al., 2009).

The need for early childhood PBIS

• Early childhood educator’s stability in providing a nurturing environment and emotional support is related to children’s prosocial behaviors, emotion regulation, and negative emotions demonstrated in the early education setting (Zinsser et al., 2013).
• The implementation of PBIS in early childhood is a social justice endeavor, with efforts increasing prosocial climates and student well-being while decreasing disproportionate exclusionary practices and special education referrals for students of color (Albritton et al., 2016).
• Punitive discipline measures are a serious concern in early childhood education settings. Preschool students are expelled at 3.2 times the rate of school-aged students with males being expelled at 4.5 times the rate of females and Black students expelled at 2 times the rate of other racial groups (Gilliam, 2005).
Early childhood PBIS outcomes

- Early childhood teachers implementing PBIS reported significantly fewer behavioral problems compared to the control group (Hemmeter et al. 2016).
- In early education settings, PBIS implementation improved social skills, led to a decline in problematic behaviors, and improved classroom quality (Stanton-Chapman et al., 2016).

REFERENCES


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