

## Core Feature 4: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

**Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) follow a public health model. These approaches focus on what we should do for all. Then, using data, it applies evidence-based approaches to the continuing needs of some individuals and intensive strategies for a few individuals with the most significant needs. An MTSS approach enables schools to identify issues and identify the alternatives to address them. Through MTSS, we “tier” programs and activities to address schoolwide practices and the strategies to improve outcomes for specific groups.**

When mental health services are integrated into the MTSS framework, we add new clinical options to the available alternatives and bring new insights and skills from an array of mental health partners. This increased capacity demands collaboration. School staff and mental health providers have different

training and experience but are united in the drive to address the social, emotional and behavioral needs of students.

The source document, [Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: Guidance from the Field](#), summarizes the expert panel conversations

on multi-tiered systems of support by coming to the following critical agreements:

- Many schools deliver instructional or behavioral intervention to students in varying intensities, also known as a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), to address the academic needs of the larger student body, including (but not limited to) students with identified disabilities.
- Based on a public health framework, prevention is an underlying principle at all three tiers, with Tier 1 focusing on promoting mental health and preventing occurrences of problems, Tier 2 focusing on preventing risk factors or early-onset problems from progressing, and Tier 3 focusing on individual student interventions that address more serious concerns and prevent the worsening of symptoms that can impact daily functioning.
- Professional development and support for a healthy school workforce as well as family-school-community partnerships are foundational elements that support these three tiers.
- Matching the range of academic, behavioral and social needs within a school involves the layering of interventions from universal approaches to targeted programming for students with mild impairment and, for some students, adding on individualized interventions linked to the lower-tiered structures.
- The MTSS approach ensures that all students can access the service array, including students in both general and special education, and that all students will have exposure to universal mental health supports. The number of tiers in an MTSS can vary, though many districts employ a three-tiered model.
- Mental health promotion services and supports (Tier 1) are mental health-promoting activities,

including the strengthening or reinforcement of positive social, emotional and behavioral skills designed to support the well-being of all students, regardless of whether they are at risk for mental health problems. These activities might include efforts to support positive school climate and staff well-being. They can be implemented schoolwide, at the grade level and/or at the classroom level. Examples include schoolwide curricular lessons and grade-level or classroom presentations for all students, regardless of whether they are at risk for mental health problems.

- Early intervention services and supports (Tier 2) to address mental health concerns are provided for students who have been identified through needs assessments, screening, referral or other school teaming processes as experiencing mild distress or functional impairment, or being at risk for a given problem or concern. When problems are identified early and supports put in place, positive youth development is promoted and problems can be eliminated or reduced. Examples include small-group interventions for students identified with similar needs (e.g., students with asthma), brief individualized interventions (e.g., motivational interviewing, problem-solving), mentoring, and/or low-intensity classroom-based supports such as a daily report card or daily teacher check-in.
- Treatment services and supports (Tier 3) to address mental health concerns are provided for students who need individualized interventions for the significant distress and functional impairment they are experiencing. Examples include individual, group or family therapy for students who have been identified, and often diagnosed, with social, emotional and/or behavioral needs.

While there is broad agreement with the Core Features, in co-creating this Dialogue Guide the array of stakeholders identified five issues that are embedded in these common concerns. Consider how you may use these Dialogue Starters in your setting or in your organization. Collectively, we have a role in bringing attention to the need for comprehensive systems of school-based mental health.

The conversation among stakeholders focused on five themes:

- Alignment across frameworks in use in schools and communities
- Inclusive teaming in MTSS

- Commitments to an MTSS approach
- Critical steps in MTSS
- MTSS in COVID-19 recovery and redesign

This Dialogue Guide incorporates both sources. The guide offers *Reaction Questions* and *Application Questions* from which you can choose Dialogue Starters that will allow you to take these conversations into your work.

## Resources

Resources to inform this content are available at:

- [School Mental Health Quality Guide: Mental Health Promotion Services & Supports \(Tier 1\)](#)
- [School Mental Health Quality Guide: Early Intervention and Treatment Services & Supports \(Tiers 2 & 3\)](#)
- [Addressing Social Influencers of Health and Education Using a Multi-Tiered System of Supports Framework](#)
- [The Interconnected Systems Framework 201: When School Mental Health is Integrated within a Multi-tiered System of Support](#)
- [Dialogue Guide Response Strategies](#)

# Practice Issue 1

## Alignment Across Frameworks in Use in Schools and Communities

### Reaction Questions:

1. Using a “tiered system,” an MTSS model describes how to use current services and develop new services to meet a variety of needs. MTSS describes what we do for all students, what we do for some students with specific needs and what we do for a few students with very significant needs. How might a school and its community partners organize current initiatives within these “tiers”?
2. In an MTSS model, how might the school’s staff and clinical service providers share knowledge of evidence-based practices?
  - What do school staff need to know about the competencies that clinical staff bring to schools?
  - What do clinical staff need to know about planning for and delivering services in school environments?
3. In your view, what do “real” partnerships look like?
4. What do your colleagues/networks say about the benefits in shared work through our MTSS approach?
  - What do your colleagues/networks say about the challenges to shared work in our MTSS systems?

### Application Questions:

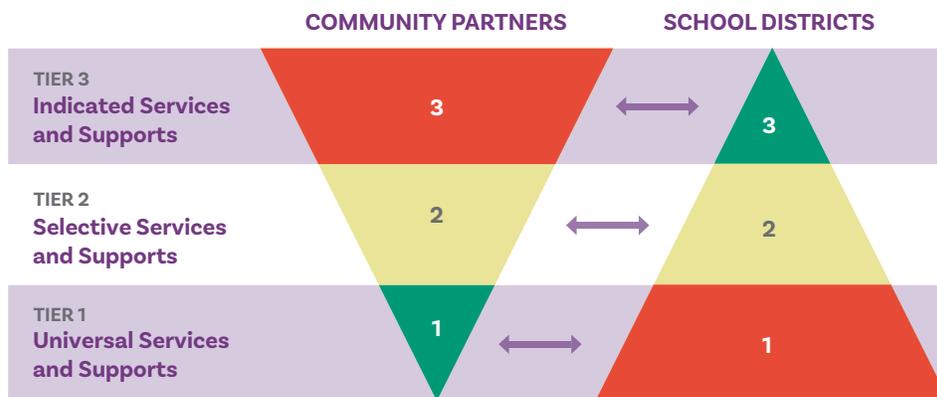
1. Research suggests that it is important that one coordinated team designs school services. What does this imply:
  - About participation and roles?
  - About leadership?
2. To what extent do new collaborators know about:
  - Belief systems that ground the work of your collaborators?
  - Assumptions about your new, shared work?
  - Evidence-based practices used by your new colleagues?

3. Consider an example of complementary roles and resources pictured in [\*Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: Guidance from the Field\*](#) (p. 22) and presented here.

In your experience, describe how this illustration compares to interaction.

- At your school and district level
- At your local/community level
- At your state agency level

**Figure 4. An Example of Complementary Roles and Resources of Community Partners and School Districts in Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems<sup>43</sup>**



4. Using a 1-10 Scale (10 high), rate the extent to which discrete initiatives find their common purpose and align their work. Explain the insights behind your rating.
5. Using the iceberg visual in the response strategy *What Lies Beneath*, “what stands in the way” of discrete initiatives finding their commonality and aligning for shared purposes?
6. In your view, do potential collaborators understand what disciplinary traditions, practice knowledge and experiences influence their ability to interact as true partners? How might we build the sense of partnership in these new partners?
7. Identity is a term that describes the values, beliefs and assumptions that shape our perspective and our reactions. Why is the identity as a collaborator important in terms of:
  - Programs and services?
  - Relationships between school staff and community providers?
  - Relationships between families and systems?

# Practice Issue 2

## Inclusive Teaming in MTSS

### Reaction Questions:

1. When a core team defines the MTSS plan, it is important that potential partners have important roles.
  - Who are the potential partners in an inclusive MTSS teaming process?
  - What roles might they play?
  - What barriers might prevent potential partners from being involved?
  - What could reduce or mitigate the barriers?

**Important Note: See Dialogue Guide 2 for more Reaction Questions on Inclusive Teaming.**

### Application Questions:

1. Using the *Give and Get* response strategy, which potential partners are often overlooked or underused?
  - What will we *Give and Get* in building a more inclusive system?

**Important Note: See Dialogue Guide 2 for more Application Questions on Inclusive Teaming.**

# Practice Issue 3

## Commitment to an MTSS Approach

### Reaction Questions:

1. Is a detailed plan that is grounded in MTSS enough to ensure a commitment?
  - Is it necessary?
  - Is it sufficient?
2. What do you look for (*Response Strategy: My Look Fors*) in determining whether there is a commitment to an MTSS approach?
3. During the DG process, stakeholders suggested that a Community of Practice (CoP) should be formed to support and sustain an MTSS approach. A CoP is a group of people who share expertise and passion about a topic and interact on a regular basis to further their learning (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

- From your perspective, what would a CoP that supports MTSS look like?
- What would this CoP do?

### **Application Questions:**

1. During the DG process, stakeholders suggested that a Community of Practice should be formed to support and sustain an MTSS approach. A CoP is a group of people who share expertise and passion about a topic and interact on regular basis to further their learning (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).
  - In an “MTSS community” how could new collaborators learn about each other?
  - How does an “MTSS community” make it more likely that we will cross the boundaries that separate us?
2. Using the *Give and Get* response strategy:
  - Describe what schools and providers “give and get” in a community.
  - Describe what families and youth “give and get” in a community.

# Practice Issue 4

## Critical Steps in MTSS

### **Reaction Questions:**

1. In an effective MTSS process, partners measure the current levels of academic and behavioral indicators against the desired levels in a process called “benchmarking.”
  - In your view, why is benchmarking a critical first and foundational step in MTSS?
  - From your perspective, why does a benchmarking system measure both academic and behavioral indicators?
  - How should benchmarking data inform decisions about services?
  - How might relationships between school and community providers impact the ability to respond to benchmarking data?

### **Application Questions:**

1. Effective benchmarking is a regular process that provides data to confirm or adjust current measures.
  - What is the role of the school staff in benchmarking?
  - Do system partners have a role in benchmarking?

2. How should benchmarking data help identify the need for specific interventions?
3. How does benchmarking help identify specific students in need of intervention?
4. What should the progress monitoring of specific student interventions look like?
  - Who are the important reporters in the progress monitoring of specific student interventions?
5. How should the results of benchmarking and progress monitoring be used to build capacity in school staff and mental health provider staff?
6. What do school staff need to know about the strategies that community providers use?
  - What do community staff need to know about delivering services in school settings?

## Practice Issue 5

### MTSS in COVID-19 Recovery and Redesign

#### Reaction Questions:

1. Using a *1-10 Scale* (10 high), how important is it to use an MTSS approach in planning recovery services? Explain the insights behind your rating.
2. Using a *1-10 Scale* (10 high), how important is it to use inclusive teaming in a redesign strategy? Explain the insights behind your rating.

#### Application Questions:

1. Using the iceberg visual in the response strategy *What Lies Beneath*:
  - What is above the surface in achieving the goal of “building back better”?
  - What is below the surface?
2. How will we ensure that the voice of families and youth themselves are included in our COVID-19 recovery planning?

**Important Note: See Dialogue Guide 2 on Inclusive Teaming.**