

# IMPLEMENTING SYSTEMATIC INTERVENTIONS

Accessibly written and specifically designed for secondary schools, *Implementing Systematic Interventions* provides you with the tools you need to successfully organize for and smoothly implement schoolwide intervention strategies. Discover how to:

- Organize administrative support and leadership teams;
- Create effective communication techniques and protocols;
- Use effective models to select school-specific priorities;
- Support staff and students during the transition;
- Identify desired outcomes and assess whether or not they've been achieved.

Featuring supplemental online resources, this essential guide helps your team avoid common mistakes, identify clear goals, and implement successful interventions to help every student succeed.

**Hank Bohanon** is Professor of Special Education at Loyola University Chicago, USA.

**Lisa Caputo Love** is a Learning Behavior Specialist and Bilingual Coordinator in the Chicago Public School District, USA.

**Kelly Morrissey** is Director of Personal Learning and Student Support at Maine Township High School District 207, USA.



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# IMPLEMENTING SYSTEMATIC INTERVENTIONS

A Guide for Secondary  
School Teams

*Hank Bohanon, Lisa Caputo Love,  
and Kelly Morrissey*

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# PREFACE

## Using This Book

### In a Nutshell

- Keep in mind the following themes: *Ask before you tell, do not train or implement what you cannot support, remember the humanity of your stakeholders, and be patient – it won't be perfect right away.*
- Integrate the models of tiered support for effective schoolwide improvement.
- Suggestions for use: Educators, schoolwide leaders and stakeholders, and pre-service teachers can use this book to enhance discussion and drive successful implementation of high-leverage practices in classrooms, schools, and districts.
- Checklist for implementation

### Important Themes to Keep in Mind

While reading this book keep several key themes in mind. First, you must “*ask before you tell.*” A leader or small team may believe they know what is best, but even if they are correct, it is crucial to base recommendations or directives for change on the needs stakeholders have expressed, as well as the data driving the work. Jumping in before establishing some level of consensus around the need for change can set teams up for an eternal struggle. Second, *do not train or implement what you cannot support.* Sometimes ideas and plans sound wonderful on paper, but unless the systems elements are in place to support the effort, it is likely to be wasted. Next, *remember the humanity* of your stakeholders. Students, teachers, and other staff members are contending with many stressors every day, and this can impact how

receptive they are to changes. Before recommending a change in practice, think through how it would impact the day-to-day experience for each stakeholder group. Don't forget to think of it in the context of the other four million factors they are juggling each day! And finally, ***don't throw out "better" because it's not perfect.*** Systems change is a marathon, not a sprint. In a large school, it will typically take years to get even a few strategies universally implemented with fidelity.

It would be overwhelming to start from square one and fully build out all the systems, data, and practices described in this book, and we authors would be the first ones to tell you that we have yet to achieve perfection in our own work! It is difficult to find examples of secondary schools that are implementing tiered systems well. But the good news is, even incremental steps forward in schoolwide systems of support can yield a positive impact. So start with one element, one cohort, or one practice and build from there. Keep the big picture and ultimate goal in mind, but use data to choose a step forward that you think will give you the best return on investment with the lowest amount of effort. Rinse and repeat!

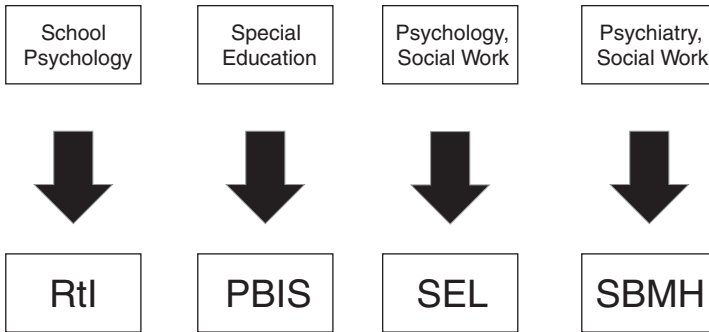
## Models and Terminology

This book is intended to help educators design and/or refine their efforts to create and sustain systems that support schoolwide improvement. There are a wide variety of models, programs, and practices that can fit within this framework, specifically tiered systems of support for students, known as multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Examples of models that fit within MTSS are positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS), social emotional learning (SEL), and response to intervention (RtI). There is considerable overlap between these various MTSS-related approaches, and also with the process of school improvement. Throughout the book, when you see phrases such as "schoolwide efforts" or "schoolwide model," we are referring to these practices and models that fall within an MTSS framework.

Originally, tiered systems approaches like RtI, SEL, and PBIS evolved separately, primarily because they were developed by people with different professional orientations (e.g., special education or school psychology), and in some cases because they focus on different (but related) student outcomes (e.g., academic functioning, social skills). To help you visualize this, Figure 0.1 provides an illustration of a general idea of the origins of RtI, PBIS, SEL, and SBMH. However, the way you would approach a school improvement plan and these models are very similar: Look for trends in student outcomes and data, then develop a tiered, targeted system of support to help make improvements. In addition, many times the functions and/or needs of the students transverse multiple categories.



### In General - Professions and MTSS



**Figure 0.1** The Origins of MTSS Approaches by Profession

Teams will be able to utilize this book regardless of whether they have adopted (or are considering) a specific model (such as PBIS), or they are selecting one schoolwide practice (such as teaching common steps to organize the writing process) that they would like to put into place with fidelity. However, for long-term planning, we strongly encourage schools to integrate all these into a unified comprehensive school improvement process that is driven by the school's vision and mission. A comprehensive school improvement process that follows the MTSS model (including both academics and the social emotional and behavioral realm, as well as tiered levels of intervention), ensures all efforts are integrated and effective.

### Suggestions for Use in Staff Development

This book was designed to be used by staff members in secondary schools, as well as professors and students in higher education programs. The “Application” and “Pondering on Purpose” activities throughout were designed to allow the reader to actively engage in the content, and also to guide the discussion or activities of a book study group. Teams or small groups of stakeholders may wish to read a chapter at a time, and select some of these activities to complete together. Supplemental materials are available on the companion website, and readers are strongly encouraged to utilize that resource.

## Checklist for Implementation

As you read through this book, you will encounter many different steps, as developing schoolwide systems of support is a complex and lengthy process. The following checklist is a summary of the steps you will be reading about throughout the book. You may want to refer to this as an anticipation guide, as a review, or as a tool to increase the fidelity of your implementation of what you have learned.

### Exploration and Adoption Stage

- Determine areas of need by gathering existing information and data.
- Create an environment of transparency by advertising an outline of the steps including timelines and various formats for input that are accessible to all stakeholders.
- Assess the readiness, perceptions, and existing methods of the stakeholders using surveys and interviews.
- “Dive” into data together using protocols that involve a variety of stakeholders.
- Establish consensus on the area of need and the desired outcomes of any intervention/change implemented.
- Engage in additional (diagnostic) data gathering processes to narrow down on current trends related to the desired outcomes.
- Determine specific training, resources, and environmental needs that may be roadblocks to successful implementation.
- Share findings with stakeholders.
- Establish and train a team that will lead the work to create the change.
- Address the biases and working styles of the team to make the team effective.
- Select the resources and/or interventions to be implemented to create the change.
- Secure and execute the training, resources, and environmental needs that were identified as roadblocks to clear the path for implementation.
- Identify the measures that will be used to monitor the progress of implementation.
- Identify the measures that will be used to monitor the desired outcomes of implementation (outcome assessment).
- Share findings with stakeholders.

### Initial Implementation

- Identify a small cohort to pilot the change.
- Use the outcomes assessment to establish a current baseline measure of the desired outcome. (It may be useful to give this assessment to both pilot and non-pilot stakeholders to compare outcomes.)

- Provide training, support, and resources identified in the installation stage.
- Begin implementation.
- Monitor throughout using the measure identified in the installation stage.
- Engage in protocols to analyze outcomes and progress of implementation with all stakeholders.
- Make adjustments as needed and determined by the data.
- Repeat the execution of implementation and outcome assessments and analysis as needed.
- Share findings with stakeholders.

### **Full Implementation**

- Once it is determined using initial implementation findings that the change is beneficial, replicate implementation with additional stakeholders.
- Repeat measuring implementation and outcomes. According to the National Implementation Research Network, full “implementation” has been established when 50% or more of the intended stakeholders are implementing the change as intended while demonstrating the desired outcomes (see <https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/module-4/topic-6-full-implementation>).

### **Checklist for Creating Teams**

- Evaluate the level of trust within your team and work to establish and maintain a “safe space.”
- Establish a mission and vision for your team.
- Create the roles needed to achieve the mission and vision.
- Set ground rules and norms for team meetings and the team’s work.
- Establish structures for agendas, notetaking, and action planning for the team.
- Plot out data routines.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of team structures frequently.

### **Checklist for Communication**

- List and evaluate current communication formats/designs.
- Determine and understand your audience and their needs.
- Evaluate your own biases and how they relate to the biases of your audience.
- Determine the content of your communication and how/if/when it will vary.
- Design your communication.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of your communication.
- Evaluate if your process is “fair.”
  - Meaningfully consider all input
  - Share the reasoning behind the ultimate decision
  - Ensure everyone affected understands the decisions and expectations are clear

### **Checklist for Aligning Practices with Goals**

- Begin by taking inventory on all current initiatives/programs/strategies/systems used.
  - Include stakeholders across groups
  - Use a graphic organizer to display all the initiatives/programs/strategies listed
- Evaluate which initiatives/programs/strategies you will keep and eliminate the rest.
  - Determine three “must have” and three “good to have” criteria for all initiatives/programs/strategies
  - Eliminate initiatives/programs/strategies that don’t align with school goals and/or that don’t have at least three “must have” and two “good to have” criteria
  - Use equity protocols and/or mindset – how do these initiatives impact our under-represented students?
  - Use a rating system and/or protocol

### **Checklist for Aligning Roles with Practices**

- Reflect on current distributive leadership.
- Determine what knowledge and/or skills are needed to achieve your goals – write a description.
- Once these roles are created, THEN figure out who will fill those roles.
- Fill rolls with equity in mind. Representation matters.
- Don’t forget community members, parents, and organizations as resources!
- Do not overextend the same small group of people.
- Find gaps in the knowledge/expertise of your stakeholders.
- Create your “who you gonna call” list (organizational chart).
- Create thorough hiring processes that help you to fill gaps when bringing on new hires.

### **Checklist for Using Fidelity Data**

- Review current tools used to check for the participation responsiveness and engagement, efficiency and sustainability of what you are implementing, the quality of the delivery, the adherence to procedure, and the frequency/duration of prescribed implementation.
- Decide how the new fidelity data will be collected: expert rating, school community self-assessment, leadership team self-assessment, random sample of representation.
- Select a tool for collection (i.e. SurveyMonkey, observation tool, etc.).
- Develop an action plan based on the data collected.

### **Using Data to Monitor Systems and Target Interventions**

- Create a matrix or list of all the data your school already gathers.
- Look for patterns that relate to some of the “early warning systems” of secondary schools.
- Sort your data by demographics and analyze patterns.
- Make a “big picture” plan that has actionable tasks, goals, and timelines.
- The same structure/system can be used to make smaller (individual student or smaller student groups) plans.
- Stick to deadlines. Set calendars in advance and monitor outcomes using protocols on a pre-determined schedule.
- Don't forget to check fidelity data (don't blame the intervention for not working if you aren't doing it with fidelity).
- Make adjustments based on your data reviews.

### **Structure for Your Setting**

- Reflect on expectations established for non-classroom settings. How are these communal areas arranged, monitored, and addressed? Has a common language been defined to prevent misunderstandings and misconceptions?
- Review attendance data to determine trends that can be addressed. Assign staff to address trends as well as individual cases through tiered, evidence-based actions.
- Get students to class on time by defining what “on time” means (in your seat? In the doorway?) as well as tiered strategies for students with more frequent tardies.
- Set clear academic and behavioral expectations within classrooms with a syllabus that explicitly addresses common questions. Review and revisit

the syllabus by acting out scenarios, discussing specific components, providing models and checklists, and having the students self-rate and monitor their progress.

- Facilitate student engagement using Universal Design strategies.
  - Recruit student interest using creative methods to introduce topics, present information, and assess student knowledge and growth
  - Teach students how to sustain efforts and persevere through challenging activities
  - Teach students self-regulation strategies and provide opportunities for students to monitor and reflect on their self-regulation
- List instructional routines used within each classroom. Maximize effectiveness by utilizing a few high-leverage practices within each classroom and across multiple settings.

### **Being Clear on What's Expected**

- Identify current expectations in your setting and how they are taught/communicated.
- Use the following principles to establish universal expectations for your setting:
  - Set a goal for identifying three to five expectations
  - Identify the typical types of issues your school needs to address with students
  - Decide on who will be involved in developing your expectations
  - Identify a process for getting input from your community
  - Organize the general expectations into three to five major themes
- Be intentional about how and where you post your expectations.
- Determine what skills need to be explicitly taught in order for students to be able to meet the expectations selected (consider all settings within the environment).
- Teach the expectations by modeling and practicing what the expectations look like in practice.
- Create a timeline for when you plan on teaching and re-teaching the expectations. This “rhythm” of instruction will help you address trends such as increases in behavior referrals before or after long breaks, etc.

### **Increasing Student Engagement**

- Model and teach academic growth mindsets to help students value comprehension and effort as a path to achievement, scores, and grades.
- Take strides (trainings, book clubs, etc.) to ensure your instruction is culturally relevant.

- Strengthen teacher to student interactions. This can be addressed through protocols and self-reflection. Professional development around providing praise and feedback can help to improve these interactions.
- Instructional strategies can help to increase student engagement. Teachers can use thinking routines, protocols, and technology to increase opportunities for response, participation, discussion, and feedback.

### **Improving Academic and Behavioral Performance Through Feedback and Acknowledgement**

- Remember that feedback is not always given intentionally. Our reactions, whether direct, indirect, verbal, nonverbal, etc., reinforce whether a behavior is repeated.
- Learn about how your students' families view feedback and acknowledgement from a "cultural" perspective and address this in your plans.
- Positive acknowledgement of desired behaviors is proven to be more effective than many other methods used to correct behaviors.
- Establish a strong growth mindset climate and culture to help students value and use feedback effectively.
- Consider the functions of the behaviors you want to address in order to select the feedback and/or acknowledgement that will be most effective.
- Make sure to have a 5:1 ratio of positive interactions to corrective statements.
- If you are going to use extrinsic rewards, use natural and meaningful consequences that align with the desired outcome.
- Review school, class, or lesson goals to plan ways to make feedback specific to skill development and learning targets.
- Consider the various methods in which individuals prefer acknowledgement and use accordingly.
- Feedback should be timely, specific, genuine, age appropriate, and frequent.
- Frame acknowledgement and rewards as models for life skills like self-regulation and goal setting.
- Plan strategies schoolwide to ensure consistency and familiarity with the routines.
- Use data to reflect and to establish cycles of improvement in implementation and effectiveness.
- Don't forget the adults in your setting!

### **Responding to Academic and Behavioral Needs**

- How are you identifying students that are not responding to core curriculum?
- Evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of high-leverage tier one instructional strategies in classrooms (both academic and behavior).
- What is your instructional response cycle for groups of students that need more?
- What is your instructional response cycle for individual students that need more?
- Develop your staff's "toolbox" of strategies that can be implemented.



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## **PART 1**

# Organize Systems for Implementation

Find Your Purpose, Find Your Direction



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# 1

## WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL?

### **In a Nutshell**

- Schools have a variety of needs that should be taken into account when designing effective systems.
- Safety, physical environment, teaching and learning, and interpersonal relationships are the factors that make up an effective school culture and climate.
- Develop and maintain explicit systems that are monitored and driven by data.
- Provide tiers of support that are proactive, and then responsive according to data-identified needs.
- Tiered support systems include common academic and social-emotional/behavioral strategies that are implemented for all students, with additional supports added to benefit those who don't respond.

### **Introduction**

While some people really enjoyed their educational experiences, not everyone has fond memories about their schooling. When Winston Churchill was told he would begin his education, he said: "I did what so many oppressed people have done in similar circumstances: I took to the woods." Much of his perception of school life did not improve over time. He was criticized for his lack of academic performance by his teachers. Later he commented that when his interests and imagination were not engaged in school, he could not or would not learn. Rather than be punished for his lack of progress in

Latin and Greek, he wished he could have done something that would have connected more with his interests.

Like Churchill, some students have similar frustrations in school. When a student demonstrates a lack of progress, sometimes they are neglected due to low expectations, criticized, or punished. Coercion and neglect are certainly not the experiences for all students, nor do all teachers respond with harshness when students are not successful. However, there are circumstances where well-meaning people unintentionally create environments where students have negative experiences. This purpose of this chapter is to help educators think about the ingredients that go into a productive environment for all students that prevents as much failure as possible.

### **BOX 1.1 PONDERING ON PURPOSE**

- Use the Pondering on Purpose boxes to guide your thinking, deepen your understanding, and to emphasize essential information.
- Ask them in professional learning teams to drive discussion, develop consensus, and identify intrinsic biases.

### **Connection – Components of an Effective School**

As you think back to your own secondary school experiences, what were the things that made the environment work for you? Or, perhaps you did not have a very good experience. Why was this the case? I (Lisa) went to school in a highly rated district and always considered myself a pretty good student. Surrounded by academic reputation and competitive peers, I watched as my classmates were quickly judged and sorted into classes of the “haves” and “have nots” based on their performance. The classes that were perceived as “most rigorous” were usually lecture style, and though I did fine in those classes, the teachers that I learned the most from were those that thought outside of the box in their instructional methods. They assigned us roles tapping into the strengths of each individual student and had us work together to achieve a common goal. One science teacher created an entire “Living in Space” program that taught us about project management, hydroponics, robotics, and fish farming, culminating in a “mission” that required all our efforts to succeed. Classes based on lectures, memorization of facts, and tests provided little opportunity to apply information to real life. In addition to content, classes like Living in Space focused on connections, collaboration, and problem solving with peers. Some criticized these non-traditional methods. However, the content of classes like this “stuck” with me the most. They also taught me about my learning style so that I could



do a better job of accessing knowledge for the rest of my life. Sometimes we don't realize all the factors that need to be in place for instruction and learning to be effective.

### Point/Principle – Components of an Effective School

Although the components of an “effective” school will vary depending on the community it serves, the State of Vermont (based on the work of the National School Climate Center) has done a nice job of describing the kinds of environments that help students be successful and feel safe. Table 1.1 provides an illustration of the key components. The four major areas include safety, the physical environment, teaching and learning, and interpersonal relationships.

### Application – Components of an Effective School

#### **BOX 1.2 PONDERING ON PURPOSE**

- Take time to review the domains in Table 1.1 to establish your roadmap to a highly effective school.
- Do you have predictions as to which areas will come back as strengths? Areas of need? How do these biases impact your daily practices?
- Once you gather some evidence to help you determine where you stand in each area, that will get you one step closer to understanding your next steps. How will you gather data for this table? From who?

### Connection – Multi-tiered Systems of Support and School Improvement

We should not underestimate the importance of prevention. Since you were a child, your parents have told you to wash your hands. There was a good reason for encouraging this behavior. Far more children die from hygiene-related illnesses that could have been prevented with a little soap and water (<https://usa.soapaid.org/what-we-do/>) than from “scary” diseases like cancer, that tend to get more attention. In a society that values “go big or go home,” we often put far too much emphasis on grand gestures, and forget that the small, manageable actions that are preventative in nature can often have the biggest impact. Further, it is far easier to prevent catching a cold in the first place than attempting to make it go away once we've caught it. We can think about prevention and intervention on a continuum across tiers of support. Effective schools have a well-supported, tiered prevention and intervention system.

Table 1.1 Vermont’s Domains of Safe and Successful School Climates

Safety	Physical Environment	Teaching and Learning	Interpersonal Relationships
__ Behavioral expectations __ Health & wellness expectations __ Sense of physical security __ Sense of social-emotional security	__ School connectedness & community engagement __ Physical surrounding	__ Support for learning __ Social skills development __ Student engagement & self-direction	__ Respect for diversity __ Social supports for students __ Leadership __ Professional relationships

## **Point/Principle – Multi-tiered Systems of Support and School Improvement**

You may already be familiar with many of the components of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), which shares a considerable amount of overlap with school improvement efforts. You can use MTSS and school improvement approaches to analyze and meet the needs of all of your students, in the same way you address needs for individual students. For example, when we make individualized behavior plans for a specific student, we gather information about the current strengths and concerns, and define the problem in measurable, objective terms. Next, we select from a continuum of strategies for intervention that addresses the expected or problem performance, set a goal and outline how it will be measured, and create a plan that explicitly outlines what each stakeholder involved will do. Both school improvement and MTSS look at the entire school through a similar process. A key difference is that MTSS focuses on prevention and providing supports across a continuum of tiers. Table 1.2 cross-references key components of MTSS with examples from school improvement, as most schools have participated in some form of a school improvement process over the years.

## **Application – MTSS and School Improvement**

Review a copy of your school's "school improvement plan." Consider how it connects to your current MTSS (or other tiered systems used to address student needs). The school improvement plan has goals that you would like your school to accomplish, just as in MTSS you set goals for your student(s). Neither can reach the goal without an intervention. What "interventions" have you selected to reach your schoolwide goals? Consider ways to synthesize efforts between the systems in your school. For example, what behaviors or academic issues consume the deans, administrators, or clinicians (counselors, social workers, etc.), time? What factors, strategies, or approaches do they use that could be implemented across settings such as the classrooms? How would having these supports built into their day impact all students? Developing successful systems for academics and social-emotional/behavioral needs involves identifying common practices that work well for a variety of students and using those strategies in all settings.

## **Connection – Systems, Practices, Data, and Outcomes**

I (Hank) have a friend who is a pilot for a private jet. He was in town (Chicago) getting ready to fly one of the final guests for the Oprah Winfrey show. He let me go on board the plane as he was preparing everything for his return flight. During his preparation, he was using a checklist. He said there

Table 1.2 Comparing MTSS and School Improvement

Focus area	Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)	School improvement
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Systems in place to ensure interventions are implemented correctly</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leadership roles distributed</li><li>• Community and parent partners included</li><li>• Staff provided sufficient resources and time</li><li>• Support obtained from school staff</li><li>• External support procured for technical assistance</li></ul>
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assessments used to determine which students need support</li><li>• Student performance data collected, guides programming and improvement efforts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student progress monitored using data</li><li>• Program evaluation conducted</li><li>• Measurable goals and benchmarks identified</li></ul>
Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interventions organized across tiered continuum of support</li><li>• Interventions selected, implemented, and monitored</li><li>• Supports begin with effective core curriculum</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Programs designed comprehensively</li><li>• Core instruction standardized</li><li>• Research-based strategies selected</li></ul>

(Adapted from Goodman & Bohanon, 2018; Slavin, 2007; Slegers, Thoonen, Oort, & Peetsma, 2014)

were certain requirements that had to be met before the plane could take off. These factors included how long it had been since the plane had maintenance, and how many hours the pilot has slept the night before. He said that if the preparation requirements were not met, the plane could not take off. I told him that I wished schools had pre-flight checklists prior to taking off with a new program!

### **Point/Principle – Systems, Practices, Data, and Outcomes**

Interestingly, if you look across MTSS approaches for academics, behavior, social and emotional learning, and school mental health, there are common components that must be in place. These features are designed to ensure that implementation will be as successful as possible. Regardless of the model, the **systems** components typically include these features:

- Administration actively supports and is involved
- Staff support is obtained prior to roll out
- The intervention is aligned with one of the top three goals for the building
- A team is established to guide the work
- An audit is conducted of current practices related to the intervention
- A self-assessment is conducted related to the key features of the intervention
- A data system related to the intervention is established
- An action plan is developed to guide the overall process and encourage accountability, which includes specific plans for staff training

According to Anna Harms and her colleagues in the State of Michigan, data systems should allow teams to accomplish four tasks:

1. Identify the problems in your setting
2. Analyze the problems in your setting
3. Develop a plan for addressing the problem
4. Implement and evaluate the plan

### **Application – Systems, Practices, Data, and Outcomes**

Practice setting some desired outcomes and thinking about how you could measure your impact. Try choosing an academic goal and a social-emotional learning/behavioral goal for your school and determine what types of data (quantitative or qualitative information) you would use to determine if you had met that goal. For example, in the area of social and emotional learning or behavior, if you want 90% of students to consistently participate actively

and respectfully during groupwork, you might create a common rating scale or rubric for teachers to use throughout the year and track each progress report along with grades. Look back at Table 1.2 (under systems). As you review these two tables, what systems are already in place that will support implementation of your schoolwide effort? What systems are needed to increase success?

### **Connection – Tiered Supports**

A key component of MTSS is the organization of supports for students based on tiers of intervention. The idea of tiers of intervention originally comes from public health. It typically involves organizing treatment that all students (universal supports) are exposed to, some students receive (secondary supports), and those that only a few students experience (primary supports). For example, according to the prevention researcher Mark Greenberg, tiered interventions to reduce heart attacks have included banning smoking in public places (universal or tier one), daily aspirin for men over 50 (secondary or tier two), and cholesterol-lowering drugs for those most at risk (tertiary or tier three). From an MTSS perspective, universal supports (designed for all students), include ensuring access to effective instructional strategies, standards-aligned curriculum, creating an effective and engaging learning environment, mitigating systemic bias, the selection and use of social and emotional curriculum as necessary, and ensuring staff are aware of the impact of trauma on students.

### **Point/Principle – Tiered Supports**

#### ***Tier One***

A theme that goes across all MTSS approaches is to select or develop a core curriculum and common practices that can improve outcomes for all students. Next, you provide increasing intensive supports for students who do not respond to your core interventions alone. Within this logic, you would expect a least 80% of the students in your school setting to respond to the core instruction with success, if the curriculum and practices are implemented effectively. Another theme across most tier one approaches is the systematic teaching of the curriculum. Academics, behavior, and social and emotional learning all call for explicit instruction in areas of focus. This means that students are provided:

- A breakdown of the components of the skill
- A rationale for the need for the skill
- Modeling of the skill

- Guided practice (with the instructor or peers)
- Independent practice
- Feedback

### **Tier One Standards Aligned Core Curriculum**

Most secondary teams are at least aware of the need to align curriculum to academic standards, and most educators are familiar with the academic learning standards required by their state. An MTSS lens would guide teams to ensure that common standards, objectives, skills, and competencies truly drive instruction, rather than being slapped onto the top of a lesson plan, or “retrofitted” to favored activities even though it’s a stretch to see the connection. You might think that aligning your core curriculum to standards only involves academic areas, however, you can also align your core curriculum to behavioral, emotional, and social skills. Several states have begun, in some cases with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), to develop core standards for social and emotional learning (SEL). Illinois, for example, has developed goals, learning standards, benchmarks, and performance descriptors to help teach and assess student growth in SEL. These standards provide an opportunity to help schools identify areas that can be taught and evaluated that support academic learning (e.g., self-management, goal setting). As new federal guidelines call for states to assess areas outside of academics alone, aligning your schoolwide efforts to these standards will be useful.

Additionally, schools that have taught behavioral expectations through schoolwide approaches have sometimes aligned their expectations and lessons with Common Core State Standards. In one example, a high school aligned their behavioral expectation of being responsible with two Common Core State Standards for literacy: being able to express oneself effectively (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9–10.1) and develop and evaluate a plan (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9–10.5).

Also, Jennifer Freeman and her colleagues at the University of Connecticut recommend that social skills, when taught through schoolwide behavioral expectations, can be aligned with College Readiness Standards. These include areas of critical thinking, academic engagement, mindsets, learning processes, interpersonal engagement, and transitions competencies. For example, critical thinking can involve giving and receiving feedback effectively. Schools are encouraged to align their expectations for students to these standards. Or in some cases, these standards can help drive the expectation that the students are directly taught.

Post-secondary planning is an area of tier one that is particularly pertinent for secondary students. Schools may design expectations, lessons,

and/or experiences that all students experience. Some schools provide lessons for students help them fill out college applications or financial aid forms. Others have every student complete a personalized learning plan to weave their interests and needs into their course selection process. Others may assist all students in completing at least one career exploration activity during high school. Regardless of the area, if it is systematically provided to all students, it's tier one!

**BOX 1.3 PONDERING ON PURPOSE**

What are the tier one evidence-based practices you implement as a school?

- How do stakeholders know to implement these practices?
- What evidence do you have that they are implemented consistently across all classrooms?

***Tier One Common Practices***

While having common objectives for academics and/or behaviors is a key feature of MTSS, common practices related to instruction and response to learning needs are also a key feature. Some examples include shared graphic organizers across content areas to guide students through the writing or notetaking process, common lesson plan templates to ensure research-based features are included in plans, or universal use of an evidence-based instructional strategy (like increasing opportunities for students to respond, or cooperative learning). Universal response strategies also align well with MTSS, such as establishing clear steps for responding to common problem behaviors that all staff understand and follow.

***Tiers Two and Three***

When around 80% of students are successfully responding to the core curriculum and strategies that are put into place at tier one, groups of students with more intensive needs may emerge. Within MTSS, added layers of intervention and support are provided, based on needs identified with data. Often, I (Kelly) run into walls in conversations about MTSS because staff members become too focused on which tier a specific program, practice, or intervention falls into. To avoid these debates or cyclical conversations, it may initially be more helpful to think of MTSS as a continuum of increasing intensity of support, more so than discrete tiers. By intensity, we mean time, ratio of staff to students, and resources required. Tier one

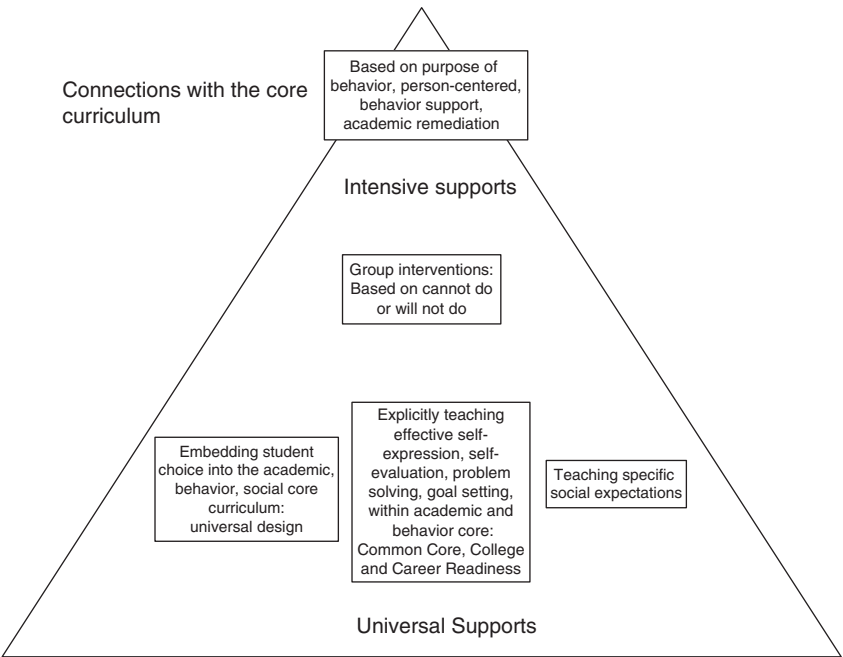


should require the “whole village to lighten the load” so it works efficiently, tier two should be systematic with decision rules and quick response times, and somewhat fewer staff delivering somewhat more intense support. Tier three is often one-to-one, or multiple staff members supporting one student regularly.

Three key factors to be mindful of in conversations about tiers two and three will help schools achieve a more equitable model of support. First, tier one, described above, is for everyone. Students who are provided with tier two supports should continue to have access to tier one interventions. Second, students should not need an IEP or other special label or funding to access tiers two and three supports. MTSS evolved in large part due to a need to provide more intensive interventions to students outside of special education. Even tier three is not meant to be synonymous with special education, programs for English Learners, etc. Any student, regardless of labels, should be able to access these supports if needed. Accomplishing this “access for anyone” to increasing tiers of support, and doing so without removing learners from tier one, can be very challenging due to the intersection of needs, time, staffing, schedules, legal requirements, and allocation of resources. The helpful aspect of MTSS is that there are many different ways to provide evidence-based interventions, so schools can be creative and flexible. Finally, students may have specific tier two needs in one area (such as reading fluency) but not others (such as social skills, reading comprehension, and mathematical problem solving), and not always. Added levels of support can be temporary and targeted.

So what could this look like in a secondary school? At tier one, all students regularly access a standards-based curriculum with consistent evidence-based instructional routines (such as common graphic organizers and academic vocabulary instruction). Some students may also have an added course or flex time support where they utilized a research-based reading intervention program to boost fluency and comprehension. For a few identified students who aren’t responding to the program, it may be determined that they need an additional dose of reading intervention with one-on-one targeted decoding instruction.

In the behavioral realm, at tier one, all students are taught clear behavioral expectations and acknowledged regularly for meeting those expectations. Some identified students may participate in a tier two check in/check out system where they receive targeted feedback and positive attention throughout the day, and quickly touch base with a mentor at the start and end of the day. For a few students, a team may review data sources and identify whether the student likely needs a group curriculum to develop prosocial skills, an individualized behavior plan, or perhaps a wraparound-style team approach to addressing the student’s social-emotional, behavioral, academic, and family/community-based needs. Regardless of the realm (academic skills, SEL



**Figure 1.1** Continuum of Supports Across Tiers

Adapted from Bohanon, H., Castillo, J., & Afton, M. (2015).

needs, etc.) data are used throughout the process to determine that practices and interventions are being delivered with fidelity. If the student is not making adequate progress, a team gathers more detailed data to determine the next appropriate step. Figure 1.1 provides an example of what a continuum of tiered support can look like within a secondary setting.

### Application – Tiered Supports

Think of a student who struggles with reading comprehension. What would be some logical supports that she could access in every classroom she encounters (tier one)? For example, the Main Idea Strategy from the University of Kansas Strategic Instruction Model, or the Reading for Meaning instructional routine from the *Core Six* text (Silver, Dewing, & Perini, 2012) could be implemented for all learners, across content areas. If you had a group of students you could pull together for a common intervention time outside of class, what is an intervention she could access within that group (tier two)? If she still struggled with some specific skills, or wasn't making her progress goals in reading, what could she receive one-on-one in addition to that intervention (tier three)? What are of some the evidence-based strategies/

programs/interventions you are familiar with that you could “layer up” to support this student in your setting?

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have provided an overview of some big ideas and concepts related to effective secondary schools, which will be fleshed out in more detail throughout the rest of the book. Be sure to spend time thinking about what an effective secondary school looks like to your own community, as it will drive the systems you build together. These carefully planned, data-driven systems will ensure effective practices are implemented for all learners. In the next few chapters, more attention will be paid to identifying and promoting readiness and planning of systems.

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