Multi-Tiered System of Supports in TSD

Often referred to as the “way we do business” in schools, MTSS is an organizational framework intended to improve outcomes through the effective collaboration of adults. But a school or a district isn't "the way we do business," it IS the business. A school or a district is a Multi-Tiered System of Supports.

A constant focus with MTSS is to support each and every stakeholder within the system. A system may be: a classroom, a school, a program, or a district. A Multi-Tiered System of Supports is a comprehensive, continuous-improvement framework. In any system - in any field or industry - there are many parts that make up the system. The same is true for schools and districts.

Educational systems include many different roles and responsibilities, activities, projects, grades, programs, etc. With MTSS thinking in mind, schools and districts integrate and align academic standards, behavioral expectations, and adult activities to accelerate growth and reinforce progress.

You may recognize that MTSS is used in a couple of different ways. You will notice that sometimes we use "MTSS" as an adjective or a descriptor, as in the phrase: "MTSS framework."

The MTSS framework consists of many elements, such as different support levels or "tiers". We are not talking about the whole framework when we talk about the "tiers", which we refer to as a layered continuum of supports. We use tiers, or layers of support, to help match the right supports to the identified need and the readiness of the individual(s) involved. But the layered continuum of supports is only one Component of MTSS.

And although MTSS may be used as an adjective - to describe the framework, MTSS is also used as a noun. We will say that our district is ONE system - ONE "Multi-Tiered" System of Supports. And each school within our district is its own "Multi-Tiered SYSTEM of Supports". Just like other nouns, it has an identity. The Thompson School District is a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and these webpages will explore the meaning of MTSS and its Essential Components.

Within Colorado, there has been an evolution over time to reach the current understanding of MTSS. The Thompson School District (TSD) aligns its MTSS implementation with the following description from the state.

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) defines MTSS as:

   a prevention-based framework of team-driven data-based problem solving for improving the outcomes of every student through family, school, and community partnering and a layered continuum of evidence-based practices applied at the classroom, school, district, region, and state level. (CDE, 2016)

This definition asks that the district functions as one system, with many "sub-systems" (or smaller systems) within it and many supports (such as evidence-based practices) also included. That means that a school district's resources, personnel, and operations should all be connected to contribute to the success of each school and each student.

Resources: The district's various resources (like time/scheduling, funding, materials, etc.) should be used strategically. By setting up systems and structures that reduce or remove learning challenges or barriers, MTSS enables each stakeholder to benefit from safe and supportive learning environments. When we say MTSS is prevention-based, we are talking about how it focuses on the "before" and pre-conditions instead of waiting for losses or failures. We want to support each stakeholder from the start, to avoid feeling "reactive".

TSD MTSS website: https://www.thompsonschools.org/mtss

Revised: June 2020, p. 1
**MTSS Overview**

**Personnel:** Our school district employs high-quality staff and collaborates with families and community partners to provide services. The people (staff, family, and community) are all personnel that have an effect on our schools.

> **We need to be sure that all personnel (staff, family, and community members) feel they have the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to contribute to our system. Each individual adds value and should feel valued.**

**Operations:** That means we need efficient and effective "operations" so that we have faith in our procedures and how we function. The "way we do things" are our Operations. That includes how we run transportation routes, how technology is updated, how we write policies, how meetings are scheduled and conducted, or how we create and execute plans.

> **A primary goal in education is to secure access, opportunity, and educational benefit in each learning experience.**

We will need to work together to make that happen. In TSD, the plan is to implement MTSS with intentionality and to sustain MTSS implementation over time, making it the way we "do business" and "who we are". The ideas behind MTSS are represented in **Strive 2025** (the TSD strategic plan). Through the use of **implementation science** and the **active engagement of each stakeholder**, TSD will prepare students for any pathway in life.

Because there have been varied understandings about MTSS across the country, some confusions may exist about what MTSS is and what value it can offer. For example, MTSS has been described as replacing **Response to Intervention** (RtI) or **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports** (PBIS). Or it has been said that MTSS serves as the combination of the two - without clarity about what that means or how things are connected.

In Colorado, schools and districts have had different interpretations about how to think about RtI and PBIS in relation to MTSS. Historically, both have had strong identities as responsive and supportive frameworks. Current definitions of MTSS note that MTSS is not just the coming together of RtI and PBIS. In the past, some people have said that "RtI + PBIS = MTSS", but in TSD, we identify MTSS as being more than that.

> **In many ways, it is simple and clear; MTSS is the what and the how.**

1. There are core features of MTSS that we can recognize. That means it is the WHAT - as in, it is a batch of puzzle pieces, each with its own curves, colors, and connectors - those are the parts of the system.

2. And MTSS is also the HOW - as in, MTSS helps make sense of each puzzle piece, linking them all together in a pattern where each piece contributes to a complete picture. If we don't think of the process for how to complete the puzzle, we may not ever connect the pieces correctly. Putting together all the core features (or 'puzzle pieces') so that they fit is the "how".

So, MTSS is the parts (of the puzzle) AND the whole!...and it is the "assembly" or implementation that gives it strength and stability. We see the what as the features (or the "parts") that we call **MTSS Essential Components** and the how is **implementation science** -both help create the **MTSS framework** "as a whole"!

The chart (below) provides further clarification. Additional TSD webpages provide more details about MTSS in TSD. This PDF or MS Word brief overview handout includes basic definitions and the chart below. Complete this form to request Technical Assistance (TA) regarding MTSS in TSD.

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TSD MTSS website: [https://www.thompsonschools.org/mtss](https://www.thompsonschools.org/mtss)
MTSS Overview

What is MTSS? | What MTSS is not...
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A framework | A process, program, model, or initiative
Preventative and Responsive | Punitive and Reactive
Team-Oriented and collaborative | Person-dependent or Individual-specific
System-level, adult-level, and student-level supports | Student interventions only
Applies tiered logic to improve outcomes for each stakeholder | Assigning students to three divided tiers
Implemented across all levels (EC, classroom, school, district) | Implemented at schools only
Culturally-responsive & inclusive across all domains | Exclusionary or only focused on Academics or Behavior
Systems change/maintenance, educational reform, & "how we operate" | Isolated to certain activities (e.g., special education identification)
Builds the individual & collective capacity of each (adult & student) stakeholder | Focuses only on student capacity-building
Creates and assumes a culture of Data-Based Problem Solving & Decision-Making | Limited to conducting individual problem solving with students who struggle
Informed by Implementation Science (principles and practices) | Incoherent or lacking intentional approaches

Includes RtI & PBIS, with additional focus on: (a) change processes and project management, (b) infrastructure (i.e., systems) development, and (c) capacity-building (or competency development) | “RtI + PBIS...” or “RtI 2.0...” or “Replaced by or Replacing PBIS or RtI...”

Definitions for CO-MTSS Essential Components (Colorado Department of Education, 2016)

- **Team-Driven Shared Leadership**: Teaming structures and expectations distribute responsibility and shared decision-making across school, district, and community members (e.g. students, families, generalists, specialists, district administrators, etc.) to organize coordinated systems of training, coaching, resources, implementation, and evaluation for adult activities.

- **Data-Based Problem Solving and Decision-Making**: A consistent process is used by stakeholder teams and applied at multiple levels to analyze and evaluate relevant information to plan and implement strategies that support sustainable improved student and system outcomes.

- **Family, School, and Community Partnering**: The collaboration of families, schools, and communities as active partners in improving learner, classroom, school, district, and state outcomes.

- **Layered Continuum of Supports**: Ensuring that every student receives equitable academic and behavioral support that is culturally responsive, matched to need, and developmentally appropriate, through layers that increase in intensity from universal (every student) to targeted (some students) to intensive (few students).

- **Evidence-Based Practices**: Approaches to instruction, intervention, and assessment that have been proven effective through research indicating improved outcomes for students.