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Inconsistent Implementation and Continuous Improvement of Elementary School-Based Multi-Tiered System of Supports

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Cheryl Holbrook Barnett

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Inconsistent Implementation and Continuous Improvement
of Elementary School-Based Multi-Tiered System of Supports

by

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MA, University of West GA, 2005

BS, University of West GA, 1998

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

November 2024

Abstract

In a rural Georgia school district, the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework has been formally implemented and facilitated by system-level coordinators for a 4-year period. As the 2021–2022 school year started, the district began the process of transitioning the leadership of the MTSS process to individual school-level teams and administrators. The problem that was addressed through this study is the inconsistent implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework along with the supports that are needed as the transition is made from system facilitation to school-based teams. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teacher and administrator perceptions of the supports and resources needed for school-based implementation. The 13 interviews with MTSS team members for this basic qualitative study were centered around the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric. Using NVivo coding, the following three themes emerged: inconsistent understanding, inconsistent implementation, and lack of consistent support. Based on these results an MTSS handbook and 3-day professional learning workshop to guide consistent implementation and continuous improvement of the framework were developed. Consistent implementation of the five essential components of the MTSS framework can help reduce the discrepancies with students and support continued improvement whereby all students, regardless of race, ability level, or socioeconomic background, can achieve at the highest level.

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Dedication

This basic qualitative study is dedicated to my wonderfully supportive husband, parents, sister, sons, and their families, who have stood beside me as I fought through the motivation to get this lifelong dream completed. Your unwavering love and encouragement have been my greatest source of strength.

I also dedicate this work to the many committed and determined educators I have had the privilege of working with over the past 25 years. Your passion and drive to meet the needs of a diverse group of students are a pleasure to be a part of and have continually inspired me.

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To my esteemed faculty members, your wisdom, patience, and dedication have provided me with the knowledge and skills necessary to reach this milestone. Your mentorship has been instrumental in shaping my academic and professional growth.

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Section 1: The Problem

The tiered support system was first mentioned in legislation in 2015. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which allocated federal money to states and districts to improve student achievement, requires the use of evidence-based interventions and makes suggestions that systems and schools implement a tiered system of support. At the same time, ESSA allows systems and states the use of flexibility in how this framework is implemented (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) uses the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to meet the requirements of this legislation. In a recent workshop, GaDOE stated that the MTSS provides the data needed for effective decision making, provides a continuum of supports, addresses the needs of the whole child by aligning support systems, and integrates data, instruction, and intervention to maximize student achievement and reduce student behaviors (GaDOE, 2023).

In a rural Georgia School district, a MTSS framework was formally implemented and facilitated by system-level coordinators for a 4-year period of time. As the 2021–2022 school year started, the district began the process of transitioning the leadership of the MTSS process to individual school-level teams and administrators. Even as response to intervention (RTI) has been in place for a significant period of time, rural schools in particular still struggle with the implementation of the program (Barton et al., 2020). In order for this transition process to be implemented successfully, the administration and teaching staff at the 19 elementary schools in the district will need clear direction and understanding of the alignment and processes for the framework of MTSS.

American Institutes for Research (AIR, n.d.) has stated that understanding the essential components of MTSS is an important part of program implementation and that research shows that implementation is a major challenge for educators. The problem addressed in this basic qualitative project study was the inconsistent implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework, along with the supports that are needed as the transition is made from system facilitation to school-based teams.

Rationale

The rationale for this qualitative project study was based on personal communication with county-level MTSS administrators. The following responses to the question of “What are the challenges and supports needed as the transition to school implementation of the MTSS framework continues this school year?” were shared:

- Feedback shared at an administrative workshop held on June 5–6, 2023 indicated discontent on the effectiveness of MTSS and its inconsistent implementation across the county.
- Conversation at an assistant principals’ (AP) meeting on March 31, 2022 was centered around the transition to school facilitation, with APs taking the lead role in implementation. Issues of staffing, time, training, understanding of the framework, and resources to effectively implement the MTSS framework were discussed.
- In a conversation on August 4, 2022, an assistant principal stated “As we continue the transition to school facilitation, the issues of supports and

resources for the school-based teams with less system-level accountability is a great concern.”

- The greatest challenge noted by the MTSS coordinator on June 11, 2022, will be the fidelity of implementation across the buildings without system facilitator oversight.
- Conversation at an MTSS meeting on August 25, 2022 centered around the struggles of transition, the levels of staff understanding of the MTSS program, and the varying levels of support that will be needed for each individual school site.
- At an MTSS meeting on January 24, 2023, streamlining the level of paperwork and addressing the repetition of shared data between documents and departments were seen as problem areas in the transition process.

RTI has been in place for a significant period of time; rural schools in particular still struggle with the implementation of the program (Barton et al., 2020). In order for this transition process to be implemented successfully, the administration, school leadership teams, and teaching staff at the 19 elementary schools in the district will need clear direction and thorough understanding of the alignment and processes for the framework of MTSS.

AIR (n.d.) stated that understanding the essential components of MTSS is an important part of program implementation and that research shows that implementation is a major challenge for educators.

Definition of Terms

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):

Signed into law in 2015. ESSA, which earned bipartisan approval in Congress, freed states from their No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver agreements and entrusted them with the responsibility to develop their own state plans to support education. ESSA significantly scaled back the authority of the U.S. Secretary of Education and U.S. Department of Education. That said, though ESSA gave states additional authority and flexibility over their education systems, complete flexibility was not granted. The requirements of the law vary in specificity from issue to issue, with significant flexibility granted in some areas, while in others (such as testing), many of the federal requirements introduced in No Child Left Behind remain (Woods, 2017).

Fidelity: Defined as the consistent implementation of evidence-based instructional practices (interventions), it also includes quality of the intervention, responsiveness of the participant, and dosage. It is the effectiveness of MTSS. Fidelity is a measure of how consistently the critical components of MTSS are implemented in the school setting. It is the extent to which programs, assessments, or components are implemented as intended (AIR, n.d.).

Intervention: Evidence-based instructional practice (AIR, n.d.).

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS): As defined by the GaDOE, a statewide plan to provide a tiered system of supports to benefit districts, schools, and students. The tiered system includes evidence-based interventions and screenings that will provide the

differentiated levels of instructional support needed to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems (GaDOE, 2022).

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS): As defined by the GaDOE (2022), PBIS is an evidence-based, data-driven framework proven to help reduce disciplinary incidents, increase a school's sense of safety, and support improved academic outcomes for students.

Progress monitoring: Monitoring the progress of student performance at all levels of the MTSS framework. Progress monitoring is used to determine rates of improvement, identify students who are making acceptable progress with interventions, determine when instructional interventions need to be changed, and determine the effectiveness of academic and behavioral interventions (GaDOE, 2022).

Rigor: The result of combining all elements of schooling to help students achieve higher levels of learning. Creating an environment in which all students are expected to learn at high levels, providing scaffolding support throughout instruction to support students, and providing every student with opportunities to demonstrate learning at high levels are the three essential elements to assure rigor (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018).

Response to intervention (RTI): Combines assessment and intervention within a multilevel prevention system to maximize student achievement and to address behavioral problems. With RTI, schools use data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions, adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions in correlation to a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities (AIR, n.d.).

Universal screener: The purpose of screening is to determine which students need enrichment/remediation or which students are at risk of poor behavior or poor learning outcomes and to provide an indicator of system effectiveness (GaDOE, 2022).

Significance of the Study

This basic qualitative project study is significant in that it addresses the gap in practice related to what practices best support ongoing implementation and continuous improvement as the district transitions from a system-facilitated MTSS framework to a school-facilitated MTSS framework under the leadership of school-based teams and the APs at each location. As MTSS serves our most at-risk and marginalized students, assuring that the MTSS framework is implemented with fidelity and the needs of the students are addressed will have a positive social impact within the system.

In a recent review of the system MTSS elementary data, as described at an MTSS meeting on January 24, 2023, it could be seen that although as a system the MTSS framework appears to be effective, there is an imbalance of the suggested RTI pyramid (80 % Tier I, 15% Tier II, 5 % Tier III) at several of the elementary locations. System-level discussion and research continues, with the focus revolving around the issues of collective efficacy at individual locations and fidelity of intervention implementation, along with effective guidelines for communication and collaboration of the MTSS teams at individual locations, as noted at a school psychologist meeting on April 20, 2023.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this basic qualitative project study were the following:

RQ1: What are the primary support issues with the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework moving from system facilitation to school-based teams?

RQ2: How do these support issues affect the MTSS implementation and continuous improvement at school sites?

Review of the Literature

The ESSA, which allocated federal money to states and districts to improve student achievement, requires the use of evidence-based interventions and makes suggestions that systems and schools implement a tiered system of support. At the same time, ESSA allows systems and states the use of flexibility in how this framework is implemented (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The MTSS is a tiered system geared toward supporting all students in their learning and must be implemented in a consistent manner across the curriculum. The MTSS framework, along with the effective implementation of the process, presents a persistent challenge for educators across the country. In a 2022 coaching workshop, the GaDOE stated that implementing the components of the MTSS framework with consistency is pivotal if educators wish to connect the student outcomes to the instructional interventions that have been provided (GaDOE, 2022). In addition, Kearney and Childs (2021) stated that a clear plan of actions such as the MTSS framework is needed so that parents, school officials, and community partners can effectively and efficiently collaborate and communicate for the benefit of the student. Similarly, Berkeley et al. (2020) shared that there is great inconsistency, a lack of clarity, and variation in how states implement their MTSS models, which indicate that

state education departments are still determining their own best approach when implementing the framework. Looking at how the MTSS framework is implemented with consistency and fidelity of practice is essential for the success of all students. Using the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric, the following areas have been identified as pivotal components for consistent implementation: universal screening, progress monitoring, data-decision making, multilevel intervention, and school infrastructure support and implementation (AIR, n.d.). Assisting our educators by providing consistent clarification on implementation guidelines for the MTSS framework is essential for the success of the program.

Universal Screening

Universal screening is an essential component of an effective MTSS framework. To broadly define universal screening is to determine a systematic process that utilizes a short assessment tool to quickly assess all students across a specific domain (Brann et al., 2020). The screener must produce valid data to determine students' skill level and identify those students who could be at risk for inferior learning outcomes. These outcomes can include school readiness, academic needs, and behavioral needs, along with social and emotional learning (AIR, n.d.). Verlenden et al. (2020) explained that universal screening is effective as a method to identify students who might be at risk for emotional, behavioral, or academic challenges (Verlenden et al., 2021). Furthermore, Brann et al. (2020) stated that schools using a universal screener can identify at-risk students earlier and more effectively use a tiered intervention system. From the universal screener process, many decisions to better serve the at-risk students can be made.

Universal screening is just one of the needed elements for a successful tiered intervention process to be implemented.

Choosing a Reliable Screener

For the universal screening process to be effective, educators must choose a reliable screener for their population. Researchers have agreed that a reliable and efficient tool for screening is an essential piece for MTSS implementation. Brann et al. (2020) discussed how a reliable screener can quickly identify students in need of intervention and monitor their process over a specified period of time. Jenkins and Johnson (n.d.) identified three qualities of an effective screener: (a) ability to accurately classify the risk factor for the student; (b) time, ease of implementation, and monetary efficiency; and (c) positive consequences for the students. The desired outcome of an effective screener is to predict student achievement in advance. This can be seen as a three-step process: The first step is to identify what is being assessed, the second step is to identify early predictors of successful outcomes, and the third step is to develop a screener with benchmark scores that are applicable to the criterion measure (Jenkins, n.d.). Choosing a screener that meets the needs of a specific student population is a fundamental piece in an effective MTSS framework.

Frequency of Administration

An additional point of discussion for the topic of universal screening is how often these assessments should be administered. Missall et al. (2021) defined an effective screener as one that is administered multiple times each school year and where scores emerge that specifically identify students at risk. In support of Missall et al.'s research,

Jenkins and Johnson (n.d.) discussed how screening should happen each year in an elementary setting and went further to state that once a year is not enough. Additionally, Blackburn and Witzel (2018) agreed that in the MTSS framework, a universal screener should be administered to each student no less than twice a year as best to identify students who may be exceeding or struggling academically. As the goal of the universal screening process in MTSS is to accurately identify those students who are in need of acceleration/enrichment while at the same time recognizing those at risk for inferior learning or behavioral outcomes, it is agreed that screening should occur multiple times each academic school year.

Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring is another essential component to an effective MTSS framework. When educators repeatedly measure student performance on a regular basis and data are collected, analyzed, and shared with all stakeholders, progress monitoring has taken place. From their guidance documents, the GaDOE shares that progress monitoring and universal screening differ in that the data collected from progress monitoring helps to determine the effectiveness of evidence-based interventions and to determine if instructional adjustments are needed (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). Progress monitoring has been shown to be an effective method to assist in making decisions on instructional changes and to determine responsiveness to interventions (Reister & Blanchard, 2020). The data collected from progress monitoring instruments is important for many reasons. It can help to identify students who are at risk and not making adequate progress, it can help to determine the effectiveness of

instruction or programming, and it can provide needed input to determine if/when instructional accommodations or modifications are needed (GaDOE, 2022).

Gathering data and monitoring the progress of students are helpful in supporting communication with parents and students. The data collected from progress monitoring can give the MTSS team a clear idea of students' progress in core academic areas at the same time as they make it possible to gauge progress on intervention performance (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018).

Choosing the Instrument

Choosing the instruments or assessment to be used for progress monitoring is an important step in an effective MTSS framework. Researchers agree that there are a few things that should be considered when choosing the measure that will be used to monitor students' progress. When systems or schools are looking for effective progress monitoring instruments, they should determine if the assessment is a good measure of what is considered important; the assessment should be a good predictor of student performance, be able to measure small increments of growth, and be culturally and linguistically accommodating. The tool should be efficient and help to maximize instructional time at the same time as it provides needed data in a time-sensitive and user-friendly platform (Hyson et al., 2020). The GaDOE documentation states that progress monitoring tools should be evidence-based, valid, reliable, and brief assessments used at regular intervals and based on the intensity of the tiered support provided (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). Some key elements to consider when choosing a progress monitoring platform are the instruments' ease of use, its sensitivity to

change or progress, its availability for both behavioral and academic interventions, and its evidence-based reliability (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.).

To assist with decision making where progress monitoring is concerned, specific questions should be answered: Does the team want student outcomes to be general or specific, and are these outcomes to be standard and trackable or sequential and skill based (Filderman & Toste, 2018)? Using the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric, the following four criteria are used to judge the effectiveness of a progress monitoring instrument:

1. Does the instrument have alternate forms of equal and controlled difficulty to allow for progress monitoring based on intervention level?
2. Does the instrument specifically define acceptable growth?
3. Does the instrument provide minimally acceptable benchmarks for end-of-year performance?
4. Is the instrument reliable, and is the information for performance-level score validity available? (AIR, n.d.)

Although incorporating all of the suggested components for effective progress monitoring can be seen as a challenging task, it is an essential factor in effective implementation of an MTSS framework.

Suggestions and Tools

Beyond choosing the instrument, researchers agree on some suggestions and tools for effective progress monitoring. Research indicates that developing a plan for progress monitoring that includes frequency of monitoring, length of time for collecting the data,

and how the data will be used to make decisions is an important step in gauging the effectiveness of interventions (Hyson et al., 2020). Engaging students with their own progress monitoring and mapping out that progress are good practices (Reister & Blanchard, 2020). Two criteria used in the MTSS Progress Monitoring Fidelity Rubric are regularly occurring progress monitoring and procedures for implementation accuracy (AIR, n.d.). To further support implementation accuracy, a few procedures to keep in mind are using the same instrument for each data point, being consistent in administration of the instrument (setting, format, instructions, time, encouragement), and using consistent scoring procedures (National Center on Intensive Intervention, n.d.). In its implementation guidance, the GaDOE shared that progress monitoring instrument should be on the students' instructional level to assure growth in closing the achievement gap between the student and their peer, and that monitoring should occur frequently enough to make informed and student-centered decisions about how students are responding to interventions (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). Effective progress monitoring gives the MTSS Team a clear means of communicating the students' progress with core instruction and growth from intervention (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018). Using the comprehensive list of tips and tool for progress monitoring can help to ensure that the MTSS framework is implemented consistently.

Data-Based Decision Making

Data-based decision making occurs at all times and levels in an effective MTSS framework. Data from universal screeners and progress monitoring are shared, analyzed, and utilized to identify students who are exceeding or at risk. The data are also

used for making decisions about the intensity of intervention, movement within the MTSS prevention system, and the identification of students with learning disabilities (AIR, n.d.). Similarly, Blackburn and Witzel (2018) explained that data should be used to drive the decision making process sharing a three-step method of collecting data, analyzing data, and modifying instruction, which begins at the teacher level. The GaDOE shared that data-based decision making is a process for making informed decisions about the instructional needs of students and is a shared responsibility of the MTSS team. The GaDOE further to state that teams should use the data to help make professional learning decisions and develop clear and established decision-making rules (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.).

Using Data Effectively Requires Training

Implementing an effective data-based decision-making process is a shared responsibility of the MTSS team. Educators tell us that they feel inadequately prepared to properly synthesize these data, as most have not received professional development or training in the process (Filderman & Toste, 2018). Furthermore, it has been shown that educators struggle and are overwhelmed with amount of data available. They struggle with collecting the data, making sense of the data, and using the data to set clear and measurable goals (Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2021). Research shows that many teachers feel that they are inadequately trained to read, review, and make decisions based on the data at hand (Oslund et al., 2021). Other researchers go further to share that often school systems do not provide enough time in the MTSS process for initial or refresher training to support educators' knowledge base for data-based decision making (Systems and

Processes to Support Data-Based Decision Making Within an MTSS Model, n.d.).

Likewise, it has been reported that special education and general education teachers alike find it difficult to make data-based decisions due to the lack of formal training and practice opportunities (Arden & Pentimonti, 2017).

Teachers and leaders are the first tier of implementation for an effective MTSS framework. The GaDOE provided guidance that district and school leadership should provide support and needed resources to implement a data-based decision making process (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). To effectively implement data-based decision-making processes, teachers need to be able to track universal screening and progress monitoring data for students. Teachers must also have the ability to analyze data from multiple instruments to make instructional decisions. Educators must be able to responsibly and effectively work with the data and translate the results into an action plan (Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2021). Professional learning opportunities should include initial training for new staff or staff joining the team with new roles, as well as refresher and practice courses to help maintain fidelity (Hyson et al., 2020). In addition, research shows that continued professional training for all members of the MTSS team is essential to help support and validate the effects of the MTSS framework (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018). To further validate the strength of professional learning, research shows that there is an effect size of .51 in regard to professional development for educators to optimize student learning (Hattie, 2017). Effective and continued professional learning coupled with time for collaboration between members of the MTSS team can greatly affect the success of the framework.

Explicit Protocols for Effective Decision Making

In order to close the gap concerning what is shown to be true about the need for professional learning in data-based decision making, effective decision-making protocols need to be in place to assure that correct implementation occurs with fidelity. The National Center on Intensive Intervention indicates that teams of three or more that use a consistent process are always better for engaging in data-based problem solving. They go further to share that establishing clear and consistent processes enhances communication between the team members, ensures that team members understand their roles, and provides clear documentation to support implementation (Teaming: Using Teaming to Implement DBI, n.d.). The structures of these decision-making teams traditionally take on grade-level composition consisting of teachers, administrators, and other educational specialists. While these traditional team structures appear regularly, the teams can and do reflect a variety of organizational make-ups depending on the size or level of the school or system represented (Hyson et al., 2020). Team collaboration is imperative when it comes to data-based decision making. Data teams make informed decisions for intervention selection, tier placement, and disability identification where appropriate (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018). Effective MTSS teams are essential an essential element for implementation of the framework.

To further assist with implementation, clear guidelines for decision making are needed. From the MTSS Data – Decision Making Fidelity Rubric a decision-making process that includes a team of stakeholders and a data system needs to be in place for effective implementation to occur (AIR, n.d.). Effective procedures for decision making

can occur with use of the PAIR model. This model uses the acronym PAIR to identify four steps; Problem Identification, Analysis of the Problem, Intervention Design, and Responding to the Data (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018). Further guidance from GaDOE stated that the decision making process should involve a broad base of stakeholders, be clear with established rules for movement within the tiers and determining appropriate instruction levels, the system should allow users to document and access student-level data, and there should be a process for setting and evaluating goals (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). Effective decision making is an essential component of an MTSS process and is greatly enhanced when a team approach with clear procedures is implemented.

Multilevel Intervention

By definition, an effective MTSS framework uses a multi-level framework geared to meet the enrichment and/or remediation needs of all students. Intervention can be defined as instruction in an area that has the intention of resulting in improvement. Interventions can create improvement by influencing a students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills. As defined by the study site, an MTSS framework is a data-driven, whole school, prevention-based framework for improving the outcomes for every student through the use of evidence-based practice. A multi-level intervention system is categorized as having three tiers. Each tier provides a greater level of instructional intervention, increased intensity of intervention, and additional instructional supports. In their Family Guide to MTSS, the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) described multi-level intervention as simply the layers of support available to all students in order

for them to successfully meet the grade level expectations (Solodev, 2022). Using guidance from the GaDOE Tier One is described as primary-level instruction or Core Curriculum presented to all students. Tier Two is classified as secondary level intervention geared toward grade level standards for specifically identified groups of students while Tier Three, Tertiary level, is characterized by intense individualized intervention provided on the instructional level of identified students (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). The MTSS Multi-level Prevention System Fidelity Rubric provides the following indicators to judge the effectiveness of the tiered process: Curriculum materials that are research based, well defined and standards based teaching and learning objectives across the curriculum, instruction that is differentiated to meet the needs of students, and enrichment opportunities for students exceeding the benchmark (AIR, n.d.).

Effective Intervention

The research of John Hattie (2017) stated that an effective Response to Intervention framework has an effect size of 1.07 which is highly significant. Following data from universal screeners and progress monitoring, the MTSS team makes decisions about movement within the tiers and chooses appropriate interventions to meet the needs of the student. Using the taxonomy of interventions principles help educators to set up systematic intervention process. The seven principles are intensity and strength, dosage, alignment, attention to transfer, behavioral support, and individualization (Fuchs et al., 2017). Decisions made about the level of intervention support needed is made on a case-by-case basis and in accordance to student need. The level of intervention is continually

adjusted to meet the need of each student (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students Implementation Step-By-Step Guidance, 2019) Providing intervention for students is quite different than providing remediation. Remediation is seen as the re-teaching of the same skills, while intervention is seen as addressing the foundational skills that are preventing students from learning the core material (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018). Implementing interventions is a process of support that is sustained and ongoing. Intervention are data based and individualized to address the needs of the student.

Intensity of Intervention

In a tiered system of support, moving up the continuum from Tier II to Tier III shows an increase in the intensity or dosage of intervention. Only about three to five percent of students who do not respond to secondary levels of support need intensive intervention to meet standards (*Intro to Intensive Intervention: Introduction to Intensive Intervention*, n.d.). As students move through the tiers of intervention the prescription for intervention dosages increase to meet the needs of individual students. Looking at the pyramid of intervention shared by GaDOE, 80% of students typically benefit from core instruction at Tier I, with 15% of students needing secondary intervention support at Tier II, and only 5% of students requiring focused individualized intervention support at Tier III. Effective Tier III support is evident when there is a change in the evidence based intervention, a change in the instructional delivery, and increase in the duration or frequency, and a change in the size of the instructional grouping (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). To further guide the intensity of effective interventions certain conditions should be met. Equally important, as noted by the

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE, 2022), the increase in intervention intensity is signified by near daily sessions, increasing the time per session for feedback and instruction, a narrowed focus along with explicit, systematic and frequent progress monitoring (What Is “Special” about Special Education? | Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.) Intervention staff should be trained on the process and procedures of data usage when implementing evidence based interventions. Interventions should be adapted to meet student needs, and the interventions should address the general education curriculum appropriately for students (*Home - National School Climate Center, n.d.*).

School Infrastructure Support and Implementation

In simple terms an infrastructure is the elemental structures needed for a system to function at an optimal level. Schools are in the unique position of taking state and federal structures and applying them equitably across the organization. In an educational setting these structures can vary based on the size, level, and needs of the student population. According to the MTSS School Infrastructure and Support Mechanisms Rubric, an effective infrastructure necessary to support MTSS includes the knowledge, resources, and organizational supports in place to meet the goals of the framework (AIR, n.d.). Furthermore, the GaDOE stated that school are organizations where all systems are connected and these systems together impact each student (Georgia’s Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). MODESE (2022) shared that an effective MTSS framework should have a common focus of providing instructional support designed and implemented with a team approach to matching student needs and problem solving. The

MTSS framework should be in alignment with the curricular standards and goals with expectations that span the full continuum of students (What Is “Special” about Special Education? | Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.) Two primary tools for effective infrastructure in MTSS are program specificity and leadership for implementation (*What Is “Special” about Special Education?* | Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).

Program Specificity

MTSS is an educational framework that is developed to help ensure success in education for all students. Teaming is an important part of the MTSS framework. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE/COMTSS) has practice profiles listed for district and school MTSS teams. They shared that the teams should share a common vision for the framework, resources and time should be allocated to implement the framework effectively, high quality professional learning should be available to support ongoing effectiveness of the framework, and that the team use a communication plan to promote MTSS (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], n.d.). Collaborative teams share ideas and concerns, use effective problem solving, use data to identify student needs, align instructional practices to meet academic standards, and allow teachers to communicate the impact of their teaching to improve the outcome for all students (Lindsay, n.d.).

Beyond teaming there are common program specifics noted that help to assure effective implementation of an MTSS framework. COMTSS lists family and school partnerships, team-driven shared leadership, a comprehensive screening process, data-

based problem solving and decision making, and a layered continuum of supports as the components of an effective MTSS framework (CDE, n.d.). FLDOE has identified the following critical elements for successful implementation of MTSS; curriculum standards, assessments used to inform instruction, multiple tiers of instruction and intervention, and data based problem solving used to make decisions (Program Evaluation, n.d.). Correspondingly, the GaDOE shares that the MTSS framework incorporates five essential components (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports PBIS, Response to Intervention RTI, Student Support Team SST, Student Mental Health SMH, Wraparound Services WRAP), is data drive, includes a team approach, supports all students learning, and is considered best practice for teaching and learning (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.) Additionally, in their implementation guidance, GaDOE (2019) explains that their framework infrastructure has the sub-components of Leadership, Effective Teaming, Professional Learning, and Family and Community Engagement. Tying all of these components together is a big challenge for today's educators.

Leadership for Implementation

The FLDOE (2022) shared in their guidance the primary functions for leadership when implementing an effective MTSS framework. First, leadership should ensure that a common language and understanding of the intended purpose exists. Second, responsibilities should be defined, who has responsibility for what and how accountability will be measured. Third, leadership is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the policies are supportive of and not detrimental to the intended purpose of

the framework.; and finally, leadership should provide the needed support and resources to assure that implementation and timelines are met in a timely manner (Solodev, 2022). Additionally, the GaDOE listed performance indicators for MTSS leadership. These indicators for leaders include purposeful decision making, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities for all staff who are involved in the implementation process, setting a clear vision and gaining buy-in to assure the elements of MTSS for all students is implemented with fidelity (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). Correspondingly, research has defined a list of core competencies for leaders who are leading implementation plans. Tailoring support, developing teams, growing and sustaining relationships, assessing needs and assets, along with facilitation and communication are of few of the competencies that have been determined (Metz et al., 2020). The MTSS School Infrastructure and Support Mechanism Rubric gives clear guidance that effective leadership is evident when the decisions and actions of the leadership support the essential components of the MTSS framework at high levels, which will develop the framework into a more effective process (AIR, n.d.).

Based on the requirements of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which states that systems and schools implement a tiered system of support that uses evidence-based interventions, many systems are implementing the MTSS framework. The MTSS is a tiered system geared to supporting all students in their learning and must be implemented in a consistent manner across the curriculum. The MTSS framework, along with the effective implementation of the process, presents a persistent challenge for educators across the country. In their 2022 coaching workshop, the Georgia Department of

Education (GaDOE) stated that implementing the components of the MTSS framework with consistency is pivotal if educators wish to connect the student outcomes to the instructional interventions that have been provided (GaDOE, 2022). Kearney and Childs' (2021) also stated that a clear plan of actions such as the MTSS framework is needed so that parents, school officials, and community partners can effectively and efficiently collaborate and communicate for the benefit of the student. The research of Berkeley et al. (2020) similarly shared that there is great inconsistency, a lack of clarity, and variation in how states implement their MTSS models which indicates that state education departments are still determining their own best approach when implementing the framework. Looking at how the MTSS framework is implemented with consistency and fidelity of practice is essential for the success of all students.

Using the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric, the following areas have been identified as pivotal components for consistent implementation; Universal Screening, Progress Monitoring, Data-Decision Making, Multi-level Intervention, and School Infrastructure Support and Implementation (AIR, n.d.). Assisting our educators by providing consistent clarification on implementation guidelines for the MTSS framework is pivotal for the success of the program which address the remediation and acceleration of all students.

Implications

The implications that guide this basic qualitative project study are as follows. In a recent review of the system MTSS elementary data, it can be seen that although as a system the MTSS framework appears to be effective, there is an imbalance of the RTI

pyramid (80 % Tier I, 15% Tier II, 5 % Tier III) at several of the elementary locations (MTSS meeting, personal communication, January 24, 2023). System level discussion and research continues with the focus revolving around the issues of collective efficacy at individual locations, fidelity of intervention implementation, along with effective guidelines for communication and collaboration of the MTSS teams at individual locations (School Psychologist meeting, personal communication, April 20, 2023).

Potential deliverables from the project study would be the development of system protocols for effective data-based decision making, team structures, and further professional learning modules to help build collective efficacy to support the MTSS framework.

Summary

Tiered interventions of support were first mentioned in federal legislation in 2015. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which allocates federal money to states and districts to improve student achievement, requires the use of evidence-based interventions and suggests that systems and schools implement a tiered system of support. At the same time ESSA allows systems and states the use of flexibility in how this framework is implemented (Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) | U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The MTSS is a tiered system geared to supporting all students in their learning and must be implemented in a consistent manner across the curriculum. The MTSS framework, along with the effective implementation of the process, presents a persistent challenge for educators across the country. In their 2022 coaching workshop, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) stated that implementing the components of the MTSS

framework with consistency is pivotal if educators wish to connect the student outcomes to the instructional interventions that have been provided (GaDOE, 2022). In addition, Kearney and Childs (2021) stated that a clear plan of actions such as the MTSS framework is needed so that parents, school officials, and community partners can effectively and efficiently collaborate and communicate for the benefit of the student. Similarly, Berkeley et al. (2020), shared that there is great inconsistency, a lack of clarity, and variation in how states implement their MTSS models which indicates that state education departments are still determining their own best approach when implementing the framework. Looking at how the MTSS framework is implemented with consistency and fidelity of practice is essential for the success of all students. Using the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric, the following areas have been identified as pivotal components for consistent implementation; Universal Screening, Progress Monitoring, Data-Decision Making, Multi-level Intervention, and School Infrastructure Support and Implementation (AIR, n.d.). Assisting our educators by providing consistent clarification on implementation guidelines for the MTSS framework is essential for the success of the program.

At the January MTSS meeting a review of the system MTSS elementary data, show that although as a system the MTSS framework appears to be effective, there is an imbalance of the RTI pyramid (80 % Tier I, 15% Tier II, 5 % Tier III) at several of the elementary locations (MTSS meeting, personal communication, January 24, 2023). Several schools have Tier II percentages closing in on 17%, and Tier III percentages exceeding the suggested five percent. System level discussion as to the potential impact

Covid 19 could have had on student achievement. Problem solving continues with the focus revolving around the issues of collective efficacy at individual locations, fidelity of intervention implementation, along with effective guidelines for communication and collaboration of the MTSS teams at individual locations (School Psychologist meeting, personal communication, April 20, 2023).

This basic qualitative project study is significant in that it addresses the gap in practice related to what practices best support ongoing implementation and continuous improvement as the district transitions from a system facilitated MTSS framework to a school facilitated MTSS framework under the leadership of school-based teams and the Assistant Principals at each location. As MTSS serves our most at risk and marginalized students, assuring that the MTSS framework is implemented with fidelity and the needs of the students are addressed will have a positive social impact within the system.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative project study was to explore the inconsistent implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework along with the supports that are needed as the transition is made from system facilitation to school-based teams. Through interviews, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the implementation process at each of five different elementary schools within the district. The information learned from this study may lead to further collaboration and problem solving between schools and MTSS teams, professional learning opportunities to better support the implementation process, and/or coaching opportunities to develop a common language/understanding of the framework.

To gain a better understanding of the implementation process and the perceptions of the team, the following research questions were used to develop interview questions and assess the implementation process at each site:

Research Question 1: What are the primary support issues with the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework moving from system facilitation to school-based teams?

Research Question 2: How do these support issues affect the MTSS implementation and continuous improvement at school sites?

Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated that qualitative research focuses on how people perceive their worlds and interpret their experiences and that qualitative interviewers talk to those who have knowledge of or experience with the problem or interest. All 13

interviews began with the demographic and professional experience of each participant. To develop a better understanding of the MTSS framework at each site, I developed interview questions to focus the discussion on the MTSS implementation process. Questions were designed to address the five categories described in the AIR Fidelity of Implementation Rubric—universal screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, multilevel prevention, and school infrastructure (AIR, n.d.). It was necessary for me to understand the participants' level of knowledge, participation in the team, and how the framework is implemented at each site in order to develop a better understanding of the inconsistent implementation across the district.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The concepts that support this basic qualitative study were centered around the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (AIR, n.d.). The essential components that are contained within the rubric are universal screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, and multilevel prevention system. These essential components were derived from extensive research for intervening for student success and will help frame the necessary elements needed for successful MTSS programs. Second, the competencies for supporting implementation and continuous improvement from the National Implementation Research Network (Metz et al., 2020) will help frame the process needed for school-based implementation and continuous improvement.

The MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (AIR, n.d.) provided a conceptual framework for this basic qualitative study by facilitating the creation of a responsive interview document to collect perception data of APs and teachers responsible for the

implementation of transitioning from system facilitation to school facilitation of an framework for MTSS at the elementary (prekindergarten through fifth grade) level. The competencies for supporting implementation and continuous improvement from the National Implementation Research Network (Metz et al., 2020) helped inform the research problem and purpose as these competencies helped frame the knowledge and skills that MTSS teams need to have to promote continuous improvement and to deepen implementation.

Participants

In this basic qualitative project study, the participants were MTSS teams from across the district. These teams consisted of elementary APs and certified educators who were implementing the MTSS framework at the individual school locations. There are 19 elementary schools in this rural Georgia district. Fourteen of these elementary schools receive Title I funding due to the socioeconomic status of the student population, with five schools receiving no additional federal funding.

The interview participants were selected using purposeful sampling from MTSS teams across the 19 individual schools. The participants for the interviews were volunteer teams chosen from across the district. The 13 interview participants consisted of seven school building level leaders and seven certified educators, having a range of eight to 30 years, with an average of 18 years' experience in the field of education and leadership. These educators were actively involved in the implementation of the MTSS framework at their individual schools and participated in the system-level feedback process.

There was an existing professional relationship between myself and the participants that I did establish before the interview process began. My position within the district was AP at one of the 19 elementary schools; I had no supervisory relationship with any of the participants. Before taking my role as AP, I taught first grade for 11 years, taught third grade for 5 years, and served as a teacher coach for 1 year, for a total of 25 years' experience in the field of education.

Before I began participant recruitment, I requested research permission through the district-level protocols in place and gained Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. I chose to recruit participants from various elementary schools within the district that would give a clear representation of Title I and non-Title I schools. The invitation and informed consent form were sent to all potential participants, informing them of their role as interview participants. Once they gave consent to participate via email, the interviews were scheduled through Google Calendar, where an electronic link for a recorded and transcribed Google Meet was sent.

All interview participant teams were informed of the intent of the study and assured of the level of confidentiality contained within the study. It was explained to each participant that their personal identity, the identities of their schools, and the identity of the district would be masked for confidentiality. The names of the individuals and the names of the schools were coded using an alphanumeric code of I1 for Interview 1, I2 for Interview 2, and so on to provide confidentiality and protection from harm. Interview participants were given information that they would receive an electronic copy of the interview via email following the completion of the interview. Participants were also

informed that the data collected from the interviews and the interview transcripts would be secured and properly destroyed 5 years from the completion of the study.

Data Collection

For this basic qualitative project study, data collection included individual interviews in a semi structured format where the research questions were addressed and follow-up questions for clarification were included. The initial part of the interview process consisted of a questionnaire that was shared with participants, followed by a more in-depth question-and-answer session to clarify question and concerns. These interviews were held via telephone, or virtually. They were recorded for transcription and coding. The participants' identities were masked for confidentiality.

Data analysis for this basic qualitative project study was coding of the interviews based on the study of *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Saldana, 2021). Due to the small number of interview participants, no coding software was used. I created spreadsheets and assigned alphanumeric codes as the overarching themes became apparent. The coding of perception data is not an exact science; it can be seen as an interpretive act (Saldana, 2021).

Possible limitations for this basic qualitative project study were based around researcher and participant bias or personal connection. As the participants and I were active MTSS team members, our personal connection to the MTSS process could have affected the study's authenticity and legitimacy. By collecting data from a purposeful sample across 19 educational facilities, I worked to assure that all points of bias were addressed and presented in a factual manner.

Data Analysis Results

Process for Data Collection

Qualitative research is a process to interpret the way humans view and make meaning of their experience; it is not a linear process, but is concerned with human experiences, feelings, and values (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The purpose of this basic qualitative project study was to explore the inconsistent implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework along with the supports that are needed as the transition is made from system facilitation to school-based teams. The data collection for this study included semiformal interviews with 13 certified educators in a rural Georgia school district.

To gather my study participants, upon receiving Walden University IRB approval (approval # is 11-13-23-1061862), I emailed invitations for voluntary participation in the study. After volunteers agreed to participate, a consent form was sent to each participant. The consent form explained the role of the participants, the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and the interview process and procedures. The invitation and informed consent form were sent to all potential participants, informing them of their role as interview participant. Once they gave consent to participate via email, the interviews were scheduled through Google Calendar, where an electronic link for a recorded and transcribed Google Meet was sent.

To assure confidentiality, the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis via Google Meet. The interviews were recorded and transcribed directly from Google Meet's software. During each interview session, notes were taken to help assure accuracy and

understanding of the responses provided by each participant. The interview questions were centered around the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (AIR, n.d.). The essential components that are contained within the rubric are universal screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, and multilevel prevention system. Many of the interview questions were open-ended to give participants the opportunity to fully express their experiences, feelings, and values.

Interview questions were developed by me and reviewed by the committee chair prior to the interview sessions. The questions contained in the interview were aligned to the conceptual framework and research questions and guided by the literature review of the study problem and purpose. Each interview lasted between 20 and 45 minutes; this time frame was appropriate, as the participants were provided the questions in advance of the interview to allow for the most efficient use of their time. Each interview was video recorded using Google Meet's platform for ongoing review, analysis, and documentation. After each interview, participants were provided a confidential and transcribed copy of their statements for accuracy and reliability assurance.

After each interview was completed, the process of organizing the data began using open coding throughout the data analysis process. As the interviews were transcribed, I reviewed each multiple times during the coding process. All participants were emailed a transcribed copy of the interview via the Google platform. Descriptive coding takes repetition, time, and effort to effectively relate accurately the participant's experiences, feelings, and values. Coding is not a precise process, it is a cyclical and interpretive act (Saldana, 2021).

Findings

Findings from this basic qualitative study were derived from conducting 13 one-on-one interviews with elementary APs and certified educators in a rural Georgia school district. Basic demographic information was gathered from each of the 13 interviewees at the beginning of the interview. Participants were asked about their position in the school, their participation on the MTSS team, and their experience level in education. The 13 interview participants represented seven schools from within the district; two of the schools were non-Title I, with five of the schools representing the Title I population. The experience level of the teachers and administrators who were interviewed ranged as follows: 0–10 years' experience (2) 15%, 11–20 years' experience (7) 54%, and 21–30 years' experience (4) 31%.

The main goal of the interview process was to answer the research questions:

RQ1: What are the primary support issues with the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework moving from system facilitation to school-based teams?

RQ2: How do these support issues affect the MTSS implementation and continuous improvement at school sites?

The interview questions and the process of the interviews were used to develop a more thorough understanding of support issues associated with the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework at the project site. Over the 3-month period that the data were collected, they were consistently analyzed throughout the process. Codes using alphanumeric characters were assigned to each interview response.

The codes were developed as follows: Interview 1: I1, Interview 2; I2, Interview 3: I3, and so on until the 13th interview was reached and to assure confidentiality in the study.

After the interview took place, the responses were emailed to the interviewee for member checking and reviewing. Minimal changes were made to the responses, each having to do with the deletion of a name of a person or the school that had inadvertently remained in the transcript. Data from the responses were reviewed multiple times with a concentrated intent to identify themes related to the research questions. The interview data were developed from in vivo coding and open coding; categorizing followed, and themes emerged from the responses (Table 1). As the researcher, I was better able to comprehend the interviewee's perceptions of the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework based on their responses to the interview questions. The purpose of this basic qualitative study aligned with the perceptions shared by the 13 administrators and teachers.

After data collection and analysis, the following themes emerged from the 13 interview responses. Three overarching themes that aligned to the two basic qualitative research questions were identified.

Table 1*Research Question Themes*

Research question	Themes
RQ1: What are the primary support issues with the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework moving from system facilitation to school-based teams?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inconsistent understanding of the MTSS framework 2. Inconsistent implementation of the 5 pillars of the MTSS framework
RQ2: How do these support issues affect the MTSS implementation and continuous improvement at school sites?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Lack of consistent support to further develop understanding/implementation of the MTSS framework.

Theme 1: Inconsistent Understanding of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports**Framework**

The first theme comes from responses to Questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the interview questions I developed. Question 2 asked the participants; What is your knowledge/understanding level with the MTSS? (minimal knowledge or understanding; novice, basic knowledge although still an unclear understanding; developing, basic knowledge and understanding; proficient, well developed knowledge and clear understanding; expert). The responses to this inquiry ranged from *developing* (2) to *proficient* (10) to *expert* (1). Although the interview participants all felt that they had a working knowledge of the MTSS process, they each had differing responses as to how they perceived their knowledge. I1 stated that she had a “basic understanding as do most classroom teachers who are impacted by the student in the tiers. I am not the person who

analyzes the data or provides and developing.” I3 perceived herself to have a proficient knowledge of MTSS: “I am always learning, but in terms of the different tiers and expectations of what should be done, I feel like I have a proficient understanding.” In response to her knowledge level, I7 explained, “I would say proficient.” When asked to clarify why she perceived herself in that manner, she stated, “I am also writing a dissertation on it so I would like to think I know what I am talking about.” In addition, I6 perceived herself to be somewhat of an expert: “I would qualify myself in some way of an expert, as I helped to create a program for the system within the state department.”

To further illustrate the inconsistencies in understanding of the interview participants, even with 77% of them stating that they had a proficient knowledge base, multiple themes emerged as the data for question 3 and 4 was analyzed. Questions 3 and 4 asked: In your own words, explain the purpose/goals of MTSS framework? The theme of Supporting Students appeared in eight (61.5%) responses. I2 stated that “the role of MTSS is to support all students.” With I4 further stating that the purpose is to “support both behaviorally, academically, and attendance. Providing support for all students by breaking down the need in a way that is easy to understand helps provide a map for success for those students.” The response from I5 takes it a touch further by explaining “The purpose of MTSS framework is to support students basically on their individual levels and at grade level, I don’t see it as a road to special education.”

A second sub-theme of closing gaps appeared in five (38%) responses. In her response to the question of purpose and goals I8 explains “I feel like the goal is to make sure that we are not letting students get further and further behind. I’ve seen it work

where we've closed the gaps and we've had kids go back to tier II and the back to tier I."

Participant nine (I9) tells that "This is a system to ensure that students who need additional assistance are receiving it. It is not a way to get kids into special education."

With I13 going on to explain that the MTSS framework is to "develop a strategy or intervention that can help them bridge those learning needs and close those gaps." I1 sums up her response to the goals/purpose by saying "it is the process to try and close some learning gaps and help provides some extra support for students who are not working on grade level."

The final sub-theme coming from question five of the interview was where the educators were asked *Do you feel that all students can or do benefit from the MTSS framework?* The majority of responses (77%) stated that Yes, they felt like all students regardless of academic, social, emotional, or economic do benefit from the framework. Three (23%) of the respondents stated that they feel the framework's intentions are to meet the needs of all students. I2 explains that she feels the framework "Absolutely, I mean it definitely takes time and intention to ensure that you are implementing the framework for all students, really backing up to tier one, but we have seen the benefits of this for sure." In her response to this question, I3 says

theoretically yes, but for some of the more advanced learners that depends on the school and the available personnel. I work at a very small school and personnel is an issue. We have not had some of the additional support for advanced learners simply because we have not had the staff to support those students in that area.

Participant (I13) 13 goes further to explain

“I do believe that all students can benefit from the MTSS process, since it is a tiered system beginning with tier one students, which would be the whole student population. I don’t know that in implementation or reality that I feel like all students do benefit. In the past, the process was not clearly defined so I don’t know that I think in reality, it is consistently beneficial for all students.”

Theme 2: Inconsistent Implementation of the Five Pillars of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports Framework

To gather the educators’ perception of the implementation of the MTSS framework they were asked five questions. Questions 6,7,8,9 and 10 of the interview protocol were centered around the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (AIR, n.d.). The educators who are active members of their schools’ MTSS teams were first asked to explain how the framework was implemented at their individual school sites. Looking at the 5 pillars of the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric which are Universal Screening, Progress Monitoring, Data Based Decision making, Multi-level Prevention System, and School Infrastructure, the process at the school sites seemed to vary greatly. In only one of the 13 interviews, did the participant include all 5 pillars when describing the process. Participant 12 (I2) states:

Universal Screening is relatively straightforward as these guidelines and resources are shared at the county level. We use progress monitoring to determine if changes need to be made, and we’ll look at risk factors and outline the factors before we make intervention changes. Data based decision making has been the most challenging to me, everyone has their own interpretation and understanding

of what the process means. There is so much groundwork that I feel like has to be laid in just a common understanding of this is what the numbers mean. Our multi-level system is run through our EIP team. We meet and discuss the Universal Screener data and determine appropriate interventions for the students we then set up appropriate progress monitoring biweekly for tier II and weekly for tier III students. The infrastructure encompasses everything but has really played a huge part in any success we have had this year. Figuring out what role and responsibility each team member is gonna manage and we are gonna work those things together, not just on paper, but in the real world.

Inconsistencies are seen in the first pillar of the MTSS framework which is Universal Screening. Interview 1 explains that “Universal screeners are problematic as children don’t see the value or purpose and results may not be accurate on many screeners.” The inconsistencies in the process are further defined with the response from Interview 2 “Universal screeners should be done with all fidelity – meaning that all accommodations and modification for our students should take place. We do everything possible to assure that the data was accurate.” The discrepancies in process across the system becomes even more apparent with Interview 11 comment of “I think Universal Screeners can give a true picture if everyone used them with fidelity. I feel like it is basically a check box that people do. I feel our Universal Screeners can be very effective if we had more training all the way down to the teacher level.”

A pattern of fluctuating consistency continues to be shown in another of the pillars in the MTSS framework. Multi-Level Intervention is mentioned in 10 of the 13

interviews. In interview 3 they state “We have pretty standard interventions that we use. We do repeated reading for fluency and Elkonian boxes for Phonics; our homeroom teachers are doing the interventions and do what we have trained them to do.” “Implementation for my school this year is primarily done through our Early Intervention Program. The students are assigned to a specific teacher and they are doing the interventions” is the comment heard from Interview 6. An even different approach is taken by interview 9 as they state that interventions are a very “collaborative effort” at their school. They go further to explain that while the general education teacher is ultimately responsible, they are given assistance from the “EIP teacher and paraprofessionals, especially with the paperwork.” Interviewee 5 wraps up interventions by saying that they feel “interventions are the least problematic to implement.” When asked to defend that comment, they stated “teachers are going to teach regardless. They are going to teach what they think the students need to know.”

The variations in the implementation of the process are repeated when one other pillar, Data Based Decision Making is examined. The responses from the 13 interviewees included nine comments about Data Based Decision making. Interviewee 5 (I5) comments that they feel data based decision making is the most problematic to implement because “we have to have the time to sit down and really look at the data and determine the direction we need to go. Sometimes we think we’ve got it and sometimes we think we don’t.” Participant 8 (I8) states that they feel their school has the data based decision making down solid. They explain “we can make good data based decisions because we kind of analyzed it and looked at it beforehand and also that goes with

choosing and making sure we're on the right interventions needing to change." Another variation for data based decision making is shown by participant 12 (I12). They state they feel like they "have a really good handle on the data, that they keep consistent data, and that the staff knows how to look at that data." When asked to further elaborate they go on to add "we're problem solving, and making those decisions as a school team."

Looking at another of the pillars, Infrastructure, was commented on in six of the 13 interview responses. Participant 2 (I2) specifically wanted to discuss infrastructure. They commented that infrastructure "encompasses everything and has played a huge part in any success that their school has had this year." They go further to say, "it is figuring out what role and responsibility each team member is going to manage, and how we are going to work those things together." Interviewee 7 (I7) states that they feel infrastructure is the most problematic to implement. When they explained further it was said "scheduling and staffing is always an issue. I mean there are only so many hours in the day, and having the staff in the right place, and the professional learning tuned in exactly where it needs to be so everyone understands the framework." The illustration of the inconsistencies in implementation are further defined by interviewee 13 when they state "the infrastructure was extremely problematic in years' past." To further illustrate the point, they go on to say "teachers were documenting that they were doing things that were not being done because they did not have the time or resources to do it." A contrasting view is offered by Interviewee 9 when they state that they feel "the infrastructure has been built to where the process and procedures are seamless." Further

explaining by saying “Our assistant principal has worked hard to make it very easy for us to implement because then it is consistent and beneficial.”

Theme 3: Lack of Consistent Support to Further Develop Understanding/

Implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports Framework

To gather the perceptions of the participants on the supports currently in place to support the MTSS framework and to also determine what supports the educators deem necessary to continue the implementation of the framework, two questions were asked.

Questions 11 and 12 were:

11. What supports does your school have in place to guide the teachers and staff to a deeper level of knowledge and understanding of the implementation process?
12. What supports would your school find most helpful to guide them to a deeper level of knowledge and understanding of the implementation process?

Participant responses to these questions further validate the contradiction in consistency. When asked about the supports that were currently in place to move their school based teams to a deeper understanding, reactions ranged from five responses (38%) of “professional learning”, to four responses (30%) of “common understanding”, and finally to one response (7%) of “monthly meetings” “knowledgeable personnel” to “not a lot.” Participant one (I1) says “We have monthly meetings with our instructional coach and as a grade level; we also have professional development usually twice a year.” A view shared by participant five (I5) is that the best support their team has in place is “conversation; the communication piece and that is the reason we work together as a

team.” Additionally, participant six (I6) shares their perspective by expressing “we have a very knowledgeable assistant principal and a principal who was the MTSS coordinator at his previous school, and our school psychologist is a big resource.” When presented with the question of supports in place, participant eight (I8) reacts with the following response “I would say, currently not as much as in the past 5 years. Previous professional learning helped guide our process.”

Examining the interview participant’s perception of what supports are needed to move the teams to a deeper level of understanding of the framework the researcher found the following remarks beneficial to the study. The teams of educators revealed in seven of the 13 interviews (53%) that they felt professional learning is what is needed to move the teams. Following that response, it is noticeable that “a better understanding” and “more personnel” are feedback that is gathered in two of the 13 (15%) remarks, with replies of “peer observations” and an “organizational framework” coming from one (7%) of the 13 participants. From participant eight (I8) the response for what is needed to take their team to a deeper level of understanding is “ongoing professional learning, they need to hear it from a new voice.” Another perspective shared by participant three (I3) when asked about needed supports, they share that “staff, time, and a well- developed structure” would be the most beneficial support for their team. Continuing with the question of needed supports participant four (I4) state that “they would love to see a person at each building whose entire day was dedicated to MTSS” they feel this would provide fidelity and consistency at the highest level. Participant seven has the perspective that their team would need

an honest understanding of what instruction looks like at the different levels of support. I think it would be very helpful for them to know what constitutes as needed tier II and tier III support than just to say this kid needs support. I don't feel like our teachers truly understand when a kid needs to be receiving what level of support.

Participant one (I1) offers a unique perspective by adding "you never know what someone else is doing until you walk in their shoes. I think that walking in their shoes (peer observations) gives you an appreciation, more respect, and a better understanding of the process."

Summary

The problem addressed in this basic qualitative project study is the inconsistent implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework along with the supports that are needed, as the transition is made from system facilitation to school-based teams. To gain a better understanding of the issues stemming from the problem and to determine possible solutions, data was required to determine the level of knowledge of the school based teams, the implementation process used by the school based teams, and resources used and needed by teams as they implement the MTSS framework. In summary, the data from 13 interviews showed the hypothesis of the researcher to be true. Many inconsistencies were discovered from the data collection (interviews).

In further detail, it was shown that the teams have inconsistencies in understanding of the MTSS framework. With 77% of the educators stating that they had a proficient knowledge base, multiple themes emerged as the data was analyzed. The theme

of Supporting Students appeared in eight (61.5%) responses, the next sub-theme of closing gaps appeared in five (38%) responses, with final sub-theme show the majority of responses (77%) stated that yes, they felt like all students regardless of academic, social, emotional, or economic do benefit from the framework.

Looking at the 5 pillars of the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric which are Universal Screening mentioned in eight of 13 interview responses (61%), Progress Monitoring mentioned in one of 13 interview responses (7%), Data Based Decision making (69%), Multi-level Prevention System mentioned 10 times (77%), and School Infrastructure mentioned in 7 remarks (53%), the process at the school sites seemed to vary greatly. In only one of the 13 interviews, did the participant include all 5 pillars when describing their team's implementation process.

Participant responses to questions about supports in place further validate the contradiction in consistency. When asked about the supports in place to move their school based teams to a deeper understanding, reactions ranged from five responses (38%) of "professional learning", to four responses (30%) of "common understanding", and finally to one response (7%) of "monthly meetings" "knowledgeable personnel" to "not a lot." Further examination of participant's perception of what supports are needed to move the teams to a deeper level of understanding of the framework the following remarks were found beneficial to the study. The teams of educators revealed in seven of the 13 interviews (53%) that they felt professional learning is what is needed to move the teams, followed by "a better understanding" and "more personnel" gathered from two of

the 13 (15%) remarks, finally, with replies of “peer observations” and an “organizational framework” coming from one (7%) of the 13 participants.

Project Deliverable

In a rural Georgia School district, a MTSS framework was formally implemented and facilitated by system level coordinators for a 4-year period of time. As the 2021-22 school year started, the district began the process of transitioning the leadership of the MTSS process to individual school level teams and administrators. The problem examined by this basic qualitative project study is inconsistent implementation of the MTSS program as the leadership is transitioned from system level oversight to individual school level. The purpose of the study was to explore and examine the perceived needs of school based teams as they work to be more consistent with the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework.

To gain the perspective of the MTSS teams, 13 team members from 5 different school were interviewed. Section 2 of the study details, in depth, the design of the research study along with the data analysis and interview procedures. The analysis of the interviews shows, with clarity, that an organizational framework and further professional learning is needed to clarify the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework.

Three themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data: Theme 1: Inconsistent understanding of the MTSS framework, Theme 2: Inconsistent implementation of the 5 pillars of the MTSS framework, and Theme 3: Lack of consistent support to further develop understanding/implementation of the MTSS framework. The

data analysis of the interviews resulted in the development of an MTSS handbook and professional learning to guide consistent implementation and continuous improvement of the framework. The project will contain a handbook outlining an organizational framework and professional learning specifically designed to examine and explain the handbook and its components. The handbook will be developed around the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (AIR, n.d.). The essential components that are contained within the rubric are Universal Screening, Progress Monitoring, Data Based Decision Making, Multi-level Prevention System, and Infrastructure. In order to provide MTSS teams with a better understanding of what is expected, the professional learning sessions will include research evidence, the findings of my interviews, along with guidelines from the district and state department.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore and examine the perceived needs of school-based teams as they work to be more consistent with the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework. With 13 interviews completed and the data analyzed, three themes were identified, and an MTSS handbook to serve as an organizational framework along with a 3-day professional learning collaborative workshop was developed. The workshop components were derived from the reoccurring themes identified from the data collection as well as the research discovered in the literature reviews presented in Sections 1 and 3. To clarify the rationale for the genre of this study, this introduction was developed. Also included in this section is a literature review, an overall description of the project, the goals and objectives of the study, evaluation plans, and the implications for social change.

The analysis of the interviews shows, with clarity, that an organizational framework and further professional learning are needed to clarify the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework. Through the MTSS handbook, professional learning workshop, and continuous collaboration the teams will gain clarity around the five pillars of the MTSS framework, implementation of the five pillars of the framework, and the supports that are needed and available for continuous improvement of the framework across the district.

This project is designed to address the statements and concerns expressed by the 13 team members who were interviewed. These concerns range from lack of consistent

understanding and implementation of the five pillars of MTSS to scheduling, staffing, and other supports that are needed and available. This project study will further provide team administrators and teachers with a common language and more consistent understanding of the MTSS as a complete framework.

Description of Project and Goals

The data analysis of the 13 interviews provided feedback that the MTSS teams across the district need clarification on how to consistently implement the framework. Based on this information, an MTSS handbook was developed to be used at the organization. To coincide with the handbook, a collaborative professional learning workshop along with monthly follow-up coaching and data collection sessions has been designed. The objective of the handbook and professional learning is to guide the teams in collaboration and problem solving as they endeavor to consistently implement the five pillars of the MTSS framework (universal screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, multilevel interventions, school infrastructure).

The purpose of the handbook and professional learning is to provide concentrated guidance aimed at the themes identified in the study: Theme 1: inconsistent understanding of the MTSS framework; Theme 2: inconsistent implementation of the five pillars of the MTSS framework; and Theme 3: lack of consistent support to further develop understanding/implementation of the MTSS framework. Through the collaborative nature of the professional learning, the teams of elementary educators will gain a more cohesive understanding of the framework, be provided clear guidelines on the framework, and receive opportunities over the course of the school year for further

collaboration and problem solving as they work to consistently implement and continuously improve the MTSS framework to serve the students.

The goals for implementation have been designed to be applicable and actionable in an elementary setting. The following goals were used to develop the MTSS handbook and to drive the professional learning and follow-up sessions:

- Goal 1: To clearly communicate the goals and expectations for consistent implementation of the MTSS framework
- Goal 2: To provide elementary teams with a common understanding/language of the MTSS framework as provided by the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (AIR, n.d.)
- Goal 3: To provide collaborative and reflective practices for the MTSS teams
- Goal 4: To enhance implementation consistency and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework

Rationale

In view of the results from this basic qualitative study, it was determined that an MTSS handbook and professional learning workshop for the MTSS teams was a well-suited project for this study. The results of the interviews showed that teams need clarity on implementation of the MTSS framework. This project, built around the handbook and continuous professional learning, will confront the gap in practice as the district moves from system facilitation to school team facilitation of implementation. Along with the interviews conducted in this study, discussions in system-level meetings also indicated that teams need further guidance on the five pillars of MTSS and the implementation of

the process. As MTSS teams across the system work diligently to implement the framework, there is a need for an organizational framework and ongoing professional learning across the district.

The design of the MTSS handbook and organizational framework from this basic qualitative study focused on the needs that were identified in the interview responses. The findings of the 13 interviews demonstrated that the MTSS teams across the district had an inconsistent understanding of how to implement the MTSS framework while at the same time they had different understandings of the five pillars of the framework: universal screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, multilevel interventions, and school infrastructure. The individuals who contributed to the study shared that they each implemented the framework in a different manner. In only one of the 13 interviews did the participant include all five essential components when describing their team's implementation process. Of the five components of the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric, universal screening was mentioned in eight of 13 interview responses (61%), progress monitoring was mentioned in one of 13 interview responses (7%), data-based decision making was mentioned nine times (69%), multilevel prevention system was mentioned 10 times (77%), and school infrastructure was mentioned in seven remarks (53%). The process at the school sites seemed to vary greatly.

Continuous professional learning will be another design of the project, which will address the themes identified from the interview respondents. When respondents were questioned about the supports that were in place to move their school-based teams to a deeper understanding, their reactions varied greatly. Five responses (38%) included

“professional learning,” four responses (30%) addressed “common understanding,” and one response (7%) included “monthly meetings”, “knowledgeable personnel”, to “not a lot.” Further analysis of participants’ perceptions of what supports are needed to move the teams to a deeper level of understanding of the framework these remarks were found beneficial to the study. The teams of educators revealed in seven of the 13 interviews (53%) that they felt professional learning was what was needed to move the teams, followed by “a better understanding” and “more personnel,” gathered from two of the 13 (15%) remarks. Finally, there were replies of “peer observations” and an “organizational framework” coming from 7% of the 13 participants.

To address the issue of the gap in practice in the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework in this rural school district, a continuous and collaborative professional learning workshop along with a MTSS Handbook was developed. The overarching goal of the handbook and professional learning will be to provide a clear and consistent set of guidelines and explanations for MTSS teams across the district. In a February 2022 brief, the Research Partnership for Professional Learning (RPPL) stated that professional learning opportunities have been shown to support teacher development at all levels: Professional learning that aims directly at instructional practices is more likely to shift student learning, and professional learning programs can have a positive effect across a wide range of schools (RPPL, 2022).

Review of Literature

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain further insight as to the needs of the MTSS teams across this rural Georgia district as they work to effectively

implement the MTSS framework. The review of the literature for this part of my study provides the research support for the handbook and professional learning. Title II, Part A of the current ESSA (2015) provides funds to support professional learning with a focus on training and developing teachers and school leaders through research-based activities (Good & Handler, 2021). Strong, continuous, and collaborative professional learning with clear and consistent guidelines, provided by the handbook, will give the MTSS teams the training they have asked for to gain a better understanding and guide their continuous improvement efforts as they work to implement the MTSS framework consistently.

Literature Search Method

To justify the development of strong, continuous, and collaborative professional learning with clear and consistent guidelines, provided by the handbook for MTSS, a literature review was conducted. The method used to gather literature on professional learning was a Boolean search, which assisted in narrowing my search to peer-reviewed articles dated between 2020 and 2024. For this research, I used the Walden University Library, Google Scholar, and professional sites to gather appropriate and current literature on professional learning. The following key words or phrases were used to drive the searches that were conducted: *effective professional learning, implementation practices, professional learning for teachers, adult learning theory or andragogy, online professional learning, professional learning for elementary teacher, professional learning for MTSS, professional learning communities, and implementation programs for elementary teachers.*

In 2015, the tiered support system was first mentioned in legislation, which was emphasized further by ESSA. ESSA allocates federal funds to states and districts to enhance student achievement, mandating the use of evidence-based interventions and recommending the implementation of a tiered support system. It also allows flexibility in how this framework is applied by systems and states (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The GaDOE utilizes the MTSS to fulfill ESSA's requirements. According to a recent GaDOE workshop, MTSS equips educators with essential data for effective decision-making, offers a continuum of supports, addresses the whole child's needs by aligning support systems, and integrates data, instruction, and intervention to maximize student achievement and mitigate student behavior issues (GaDOE, 2023). The Center on MTSS highlights the importance of understanding the essential components of MTSS for effective program implementation. It also indicates that effective and consistent implementation poses significant challenges for educators.

Based on the outcomes of this basic qualitative study, it was determined that creating an MTSS handbook and a professional learning workshop for MTSS teams was a well-suited project. Interview results revealed that teams need clarity on the implementation of the MTSS framework. This project, centered around the handbook and continuous professional learning, was developed to bridge the gap in practice as the rural district transitions from system-level facilitation to school-based team facilitation of implementation. Discussions in system-level meetings and interview findings indicated that teams need further guidance on the essential elements of MTSS and the overall implementation process. The findings from the 13 interviews demonstrated that MTSS

teams across the district had an inconsistent understanding of how to implement the MTSS framework and varied understandings of the essential elements of the framework: universal screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, multilevel interventions, and school infrastructure. Participants shared that each team implemented the framework differently, with only one out of the 13 interviews including all essential elements in their implementation process. According to the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric, the pillars were mentioned with varying frequency: universal screening in 61% of responses, progress monitoring in 7%, data-based decision making in 69%, multilevel prevention system in 77%, and school infrastructure in 53%. This variation underscores the need for a consistent organizational framework and ongoing professional learning to ensure uniformity and effectiveness in MTSS implementation across the district.

In the ever-changing and increasingly demanding field of education, it is now more than ever vital for teachers and school leaders to actively participate in professional learning as they seek improve their teaching methods, skills, and student outcomes. Professional learning consists of various activities and formats designed to enhance educators' knowledge, abilities, and approaches. Effective professional learning along with clear and consistent guidelines for implementation is especially important within the MTSS framework. Drawing from principles of adult learning, this process of professional growth recognizes the many diverse needs, background knowledge, and wide range of skill sets of adult learners, creating a more interactive and meaningful learning environment. Developing successful professional learning requires careful planning, use

of research-supported methods, and ongoing evaluation to ensure effectiveness and relevance. Additionally, professional learning communities (PLCs) play a crucial role by offering continuous support, sharing effective strategies, and fostering a culture of ongoing improvement. This review of literature examines the varied aspects of professional learning for school leader and teacher teams within the MTSS framework, covering its definition, underlying adult learning principles, methods of development, and the important role of PLCs.

Definition of Professional Learning

The teams of educators revealed in seven of the 13 interviews (53%) that they felt that professional learning is what is needed to move the teams to the next level. When seeking to find a clear and concise definition of professional learning, it is difficult to narrow down the terms. The RPPL outlines six truths for professional learning:

1. Professional learning can lead to shifts in teachers' skills and instructional practices and significantly improve student learning.
2. Professional learning opportunities have been shown to support teacher development at all levels of experience.
3. Professional learning of varying lengths and formats can produce wide-ranging effects depending on how time gets used.
4. Professional learning that aims directly at instructional practices is more likely to shift student learning.
5. Programs can have positive effects across a wide range of schools, but strong implementation can help sustain effects at scale.

6. Practice fidelity first and adaptation with guardrails second. (Hill et al., 2022)

Simply stated, professional learning is understood to be any activity or activities that cause, or are intended to cause, teacher learning (McChesney & Cross, 2023). It can be said that professional learning that allows educators to design and customize their learning experiences will best meet their individual needs and experiences (Handler et al., 2021). Huang et al. (2024) explained that professional learning can be defined as teaching and learning experiences that are transactional and designed to support the acquisition of professional knowledge. Islami et al. (2022) summed up the definition as stating that professional development is activities that support teachers in meeting their needs as related to their work as teachers. These combined definitions emphasize that professional learning for teachers should be experiences where the educators have support, can share ideas, and gear the learning to their specific content needs.

Professional learning can take many differing forms. Islami et al. (2022) shared that the different types of professional learning are based on the functions of activities which include coaching, collaborating, and assessment. Effective professional learning has many characteristics. Content focus, active learning, coherent collective participation, and duration are characteristics described by Poekeret et al. (2020). Further explaining professional learning, Salmeron Aroca et al. (2022) shared that professional development for teachers is a continuous process for improving skills by participating in training and the implementation of innovative and effective approaches in the classroom. Professional learning activities that provide opportunities for teachers to explore new instructional strategies and ideas in the context of their classrooms, that meet the needs of teachers,

that are collaborative and sustained, and that are relevant are among the most effective for promoting and supporting teacher change (University of Tasmania et al., 2021).

Adult Learning

The data from this research showed that teams of educators expressed their desire for “peer observations” and an “organizational framework” in 7% of the 13 participant responses. The research of adult learners as it applies to professional learning for teachers is an interesting topic. Much is said about Malcolm Knowles (2019) adult learning theory. One author stated that according to Knowles there are essential differences between adult learners and child learners. One difference is that adults view themselves as independent learners where child learners are dependent on the teacher, with another difference being that adults bring much life experience to their learning whereas a child learner must rely on the experience of the instructor (Machynska & Boiko, n.d.).

Scholtz (2023), shared more on Knowles theory by saying the need to know and understand is a natural part of human nature; adult learning occurs more easily when situations are viewed as problems in need of a solution and where both the subject and learning material are viewed as relevant to the learner’s purpose. Livingston and Clay (2023) expounded on this by stating that Knowles is widely known for his work popularizing the term andragogy; adult learner focused education. They go further to define Knowles’ five assumptions of adult learners that differ from child learners; Self-concept, Experience, Readiness to learn, Orientation to learning, and Motivation to learn (Livingston & Cummings-Clay, 2023).

When developing effective professional learning, adult learners require specialized training to meet their needs. According to the RPPL (Hill & Papay, 2022), taking into account how the teachers learn leads to effective professional learning. RPPL states that formats which are particularly effective are those that build in time for peer-to-peer collaboration, have coaching where feedback is offered, and provide follow-up to address teacher's questions. Evidence supporting this comes from Boiko and Machynska, 2020, as they further stated that adults have trouble being motivated to study that which has little relevance to their life and that adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact on their job or personal life. While adult learners are self-motivated learners, they need to see the relevance to avoid demotivation (Van Der Stap et al., 2024). Further stated in the same article, van der Stap et al. (2024) adds that adult learners should be met with an approach to learning that includes higher order thinking, content activities that have meaning and relevance, along with self-directed learning and autonomy. Respecting diversity among learners, and creating an environment where learners are free to explore, share and continue to grow is key to success with adult learners (Hill et al., 2022).

Developing Professional Learning

Creating effective professional learning opportunities for teachers is critical for fostering educational excellence, ensuring that educators are equipped with the latest strategies and knowledge, while improving teacher practices and effectiveness for students (rppl, 2024). Strengthening professional learning for teachers goes beyond traditional workshops and embraces a more dynamic approach that takes into account

many aspects of adult learning theory. Educational scholars contend that traditional “one-off” professional learning opportunities have limited success in bringing about effective and sustained changes in practice (University of Tasmania et al., 2021) Collaboration, Coaching, and Continuous over time are three evidence-based practices which lead to effective professional development (Hill & Papay, 2022). Ultimately, well-developed programs for professional learning not only benefit teachers but also lead to improved student outcomes, creating a more effective and efficient system of education.

Collaboration

Research data, collected in this study indicates that 7% of the 13 participants highlighted the need for “peer observations”. In their 2022 article, RPPL shared that peer collaboration works to support the ongoing learning and development for teachers. Hadler et al. (2021), supported collaboration by sharing that of their 496 study participants, 211 of them mentioned that collaborating with colleagues was vital to their success in obtaining National Board Certification. Ungar (2023) added from their study participants that many educators feel that through collaboration they learned from other teachers and that the collaboration positively affected their self-perception as a teacher (Avidov-Ungar, 2023). Knowles (1990; as cited by Scholtz, 2023) shares that collaborative learning, the sharing of accumulated experiences, is an optimal piece of how adults learn. Further validation for collaboration is provided by Islami et al. (2022), in their article on Professional Development Strategies, when they say that the more effective professional learning programs have a collaborative and collegial learning environment. Collaboration, collective participation, and team work, where each

contributes their experience, shared skills, and problems of practice can lead to higher integration and sustainability of the professional learning experience (Smith et al., 2020).

Hill and Papay (2022) communicate that collaborative practices provide a sort of social accountability that motivates teachers to try new practices. Collaboration and teamwork are essential to ensure that teachers are ready to take on the challenges of 21 century education (Salmeron Aroca et al., 2023). When collaborating, teacher's felt like they were on a shared journey, and therefore classroom implementation is more likely to occur (McChesney & Cross, 2023).

Coaching

Comments of “a better understanding” and “more personnel” were gathered from two of the 13 (15%) respondents in this study. Schools and districts are increasingly using Coaches as a method of professional learning. The term Coach can be used to mean – building trust, whereby the Coach provides feedback on instructional practices, supports teachers with new materials, and supports teachers at all career stages with a wide variety of needs (Boguslav, 2024). Mentoring and Coaching is an integral part of developing effective and sustainable professional learning. Professional development opportunities which have coaching and mentoring are more effective programs. Professional development is important for all teachers to improve the quality of teaching. This study is aimed to investigate the trends of professional development strategy and learning outcome in 2015-2019. A systematic review was used in analyzing 267 articles published between 2015 and 2019 in the Teaching and Teacher Education. The findings showed that the trend of professional development strategy is more collaborative and

using collegial learning environment, and the trend of learning outcomes which developed through PD programs is more focused on the ability to teach, ability to manage the classroom, and ability to understand the subject field. These findings suggest future studies to develop professional development programs with collaborative and collegial learning environments to develop learning outcomes on practicing new instructional strategies. (El Islami et al., 2022). One of the longest running and most durable forms of teacher professional learning is Coaching (Hill & Papay, 2022). Hill and Papay (2022) went more in depth to say that coaching offers built in accountability, supports teacher's day to day, while at the same time celebrating areas of excellence and identifying areas for improvement. Adults can integrate new and existing knowledge during one to one coaching sessions which are supported by reflection and journaling (Scholtz, 2023).

Coaching, where a teacher works with an expert to learn new practices, is a promising method of Professional Learning (Poulou et al., 2023). Poulou (2023) stated, that the goal of coaching is a non-evaluative, emphasizes the teacher's awareness of their practices, and provides opportunities for feedback and reflection. Instructional Coaching, as a method of professional learning, has shown positive improvement in the achievement of students (Poulou et al., 2023). Finally, while successful coaching programs can be time intensive and cyclical in nature, knowing that the coach will return to their classrooms over time, the teachers may be more attentive to the implementation of the content. Professional Learning programs where coaching was included, showed improvement in both average classroom instructional quality and student outcomes (Hill & Papay, 2022)

Continuous Over Time

Gupta and Lee (2022), stated that the consensus view in the literature is that for professional learning to be effective, it must be on-going, content-specific, and teacher inquiry based. Professional learning programs of varying formats and lengths can produce wide-ranging effects depending on how the time is used (Hill et al., 2022). Their study demonstrated positive results of long term teacher training on enhancing teacher knowledge, the quality of skill for teachers, and student learning outcomes were improved (Gupta & Lee, 2022). Professional learning that improves teacher's skills and knowledge is a continuous process (Salmeron Aroca et al., 2023). The elements for effective professional learning include active learning, content focused, coherence, collective participation, and duration (Poekert et al., 2020). Teacher feedback from one study on professional learning and the duration (which refers to the cyclical extended nature) was positive as the teachers had time for reflection and collegial feedback (Smith et al., 2020). There is evidence that effective professional learning supports teacher's day-to-day practices and provides opportunities for follow-up meetings to address questions and fine-tune implementation (Hill et al., 2022). Sustained professional development can effectively improve teacher instruction, and teachers who participated in sustained professional learning rated themselves more positively on self-efficacy and mindset (Kelly et al., 2022).

The professional learning developed for this basic qualitative study will be continued each school year with monthly sessions. These monthly sessions will be guided by a well-developed agenda focused on the essential elements of MTSS. These

continuous learning opportunities will address the perceived needs of study participants by providing time for peer observations, giving time for questions and feedback to address a better understanding of the framework, and finally, while budgetary constraints may not allow for more personnel, the collaboration within these sessions will allow teams to work together to pool knowledge and resources.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities, built around the essential elements of MTSS, will be developed to continue the work of Professional Learning. The implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in education has emerged as a potentially powerful approach to professional development. In their 2022 brief, the RPPL stated that there is widespread and rigorous evidence that teachers can and do learn from each other and that they improve their practice more in schools that are more collaborative workplaces.

Fostering collaboration, PLC activities often involve sharing lesson plans and examining artifacts, researchers have found that PLCs are essential in lessening the feeling of isolation felt by many teachers (Liu et al., 2020). PLCs provide structured yet flexible networks with collaboration and collegial practice where teachers can collectively engage in practices that can motivate each other (Islami et al., 2022). This collaborative model encourages the sharing of joint accountability for students, collective problem-solving centered on learning, along with reciprocal trust, respect, and support (Liu & Tong, 2023). A collaborative and collegial team approach to professional learning

includes many effective traits and often includes student and teacher focus goals (Smith et al., 2020).

By promoting characteristics of shared goals and/or product and support, PLCs contribute to effective professional development and teacher learning (Islami et al., 2022). Findings suggest that professional learning communities show a positive effect on teacher participation in the professional along with enhanced student achievement (Çopur & Demirel, 2022). In their 2021 study, Meesuk et al., discuss that in a study with 490 samples collected, the results reveal the PCLs are essential for teachers and education; they change the teaching and learning approaches as well as positive thinking skills, while also show and increase in student academic achievements (Meesuk et al., 2021).

Woodland et al., (2024) shared that PLCs are a powerful and widely implemented collaborative school improvement strategy that is designed to improve teacher professional learning. They report that some of the noted advantages of PLCs are increases in motivation and morale, decrease in isolation and workload, significant growth in teacher efficacy, reduction in teacher turnover, and have also been shown to have indirect effects on student performance (Woodland et al., 2024). RPPL states that there is growing evidence that well-structured collaboration, whether formal or informal, can support the continuing development of instructional skills for teachers (Hill & Papay, 2022)

Project Description

The data gathered from teams of educators, revealed in seven of the 13 interviews (53%) that they felt professional learning is what is needed to move the teams, followed

by “a better understanding” and “more personnel” gathered from two of the 13 (15%) remarks, finally, with replies of “peer observations” and an “organizational framework” coming from 7% of the 13 participants. To address all needs expressed from the respondents, an MTSS handbook to serve as an organizational framework, along with a 3-day professional learning workshop to follow the handbook will be developed.

The project will be presented to the MTSS teams during time already designed by the district for continued professional learning opportunities. The data gathered in this study definitively shows that clarification is needed to solidify consistent implementation of the MTSS framework. The handbook and professional learning workshop will cover the essential elements of MTSS (universal screeners, data based decision making, researched based interventions, progress monitoring, and infrastructure (AIR, n.d.).

The professional learning workshop will be conducted in a live face-to-face situation and will be recorded for ease of review, scheduling, and to provide opportunities for collaboration among teams. Collaboration, Coaching, and Continuous over time are three evidence-based practices which lead to effective professional development (rppl, 2022). Continuous professional learning opportunities, guided by a well-developed agenda, will be provided monthly for teams and Professional Learning Communities will be designed to further solidify consistent implementation and continuous improvement. Finally, coaching sessions will be set up on an as needed basis to further support and assist the MTSS teams in this rural district.

Supports and Resources

Consistent implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework will need full support of district and school wide leadership teams. McChesney and Cross (2023) shared leaders play an important role in teacher implementation of new learning by providing resources, structures, and systems. It is further stated that leaders who are supportive of the new changes foster a culture of trust and safety where teachers feel confident to learn, experiment, and take risks (McChesney & Cross, 2023).

Many of the resources needed for consistent implementation and continuous growth are already in place in this rural district. Resources such as school psychologists, curriculum programs, access to current technology, and on site MTSS teams form the basic structure of the framework. As the research indicates, what is needed is further clarification and explanation of the organizational framework which will be addressed with the MTSS Handbook. The most needed resource for the professional learning is teacher buy-in as they collaborate with each other to form Professional Learning Groups to make better use of their time and energy. Unfortunately, one of the items the respondents asked for was more personnel. Currently, that ask for is beyond the scope and abilities of this project.

Potential Barriers

Barriers that could potentially prohibit consistent implementation and continuous growth are that of time, attitude, and scheduling. “We are relying on our nation’s teachers to take on a dizzying array of challenges (rppl, 2024).” Teachers have so many demands and expectations now with changing state standards, social and emotional demands of the

students and families, along with the challenge of meeting the students' varying academic needs. Asking teachers to re-learn the essential components of MTSS, which may or may not be contradictory of previously learned material, may lead to more frustration.

In order for the MTSS framework to be consistently implemented across the district we will need the support of district and school - based leadership teams. Monthly and weekly grade level meetings, faculty meetings, school and system leadership meetings, in addition to other professional learning opportunities across the district make scheduling a potential barrier. For the district to see a close to the gap in practice noticed by this research, the MTSS teams will need to commit to participation in the 3-day professional learning workshop, the use of the MTSS handbook to provide the organizational framework, and the development of professional learning communities with coaching opportunities.

Proposal for Implementation and Timeline

The proposal for the time line would begin to take place during the 2024-2025 school year and continue into the 2025-2026 school year. The problem, purpose, and findings from this study will be presented to system key stakeholders (lead psychologist, curriculum directors, and content specialists) within the MTSS and curriculum departments at the completion of the project. This presentation will be a review of the handbook and the three-day professional learning workshop. A final timeline consisting of date ranges and participatory audiences will be determined by consensus of the MTSS and curriculum departments.

Upon determination of the time line, the organizational framework, or handbook, will be presented at the MTSS Coordinators meeting. At this meeting the handbook will be shared and reviewed with MTSS coordinators from across the system. Feedback along with questions will be addressed at this time before it is fully implemented with Elementary teams within the district.

The three-day professional learning workshop, development of PLCs, and implementation of the coaching calendar will be presented following the handbook. Once date ranges and participatory audiences are chosen, teams will be allowed to register for the training via email or google form. Further opportunities for participation in the professional learning workshop will be offered as needed, over the summer and into the 2025-2026 school year, for any newly added team members or those that were unable to attend the first offering.

Table 2*Proposed Timeline for Implementation*

Date range	Project	Participants	Product
January/ February 2025	Gather stakeholders for input, timeline, and participatory audience	MTSS Coordinators, Curriculum leaders, Content Specialists, Lead Psychologist, Researcher	Handbook and Professional Learning Workshop presentation
February/March 2025	Develop master list of MTSS teams across the district to create a list of participants	MTSS Coordinators and Researcher	Email or google form
March/April 2025	Choose date ranges for implementation of professional learning that coordinate with system calendar	MTSS Coordinators, curriculum leaders, Researcher	System Calendar and Email
April/May 2025	Begin to develop professional learning as per chosen dates	Researcher	Handbook and Professional Learning Workshop presentation
May/June 2025	Develop PLCs from the list of participants	Researcher	Google Form
May 2025 and beyond	Develop Coaching Calendar and implement coaching sessions	Researcher	Google Form

Roles and Responsibilities

The key stakeholders in the implementation of this projects are myself, the researcher, the MTSS Coordinators, and the MTSS team members which will be teachers of multiple grade levels. As the researcher, the responsibility of clear and consistent implementation falls mainly with me. Communication at all levels, providing support to MTSS teams and Coordinators, obtaining permission and developing the calendar for implementation, as well as collaborating with district leaders to meet the needs and schedules of the teachers are further responsibilities that will be met by the researcher.

For success of this project, participants will also need to assume some small responsibility. It is hoped that participants will come with a willingness to learn, an openness to discover a deeper understanding, receptiveness to adapt to the needs of the framework, and most importantly the flexibility and inclusiveness to meet the needs of the students who are served by the MTSS program. Curriculum leaders, Content Specialists, Lead Psychologist, and MTSS Coordinators will be asked to attend professional learning sessions and support the MTSS teams by allowing time and resources for continued learning, development of PLC, and coaching sessions.

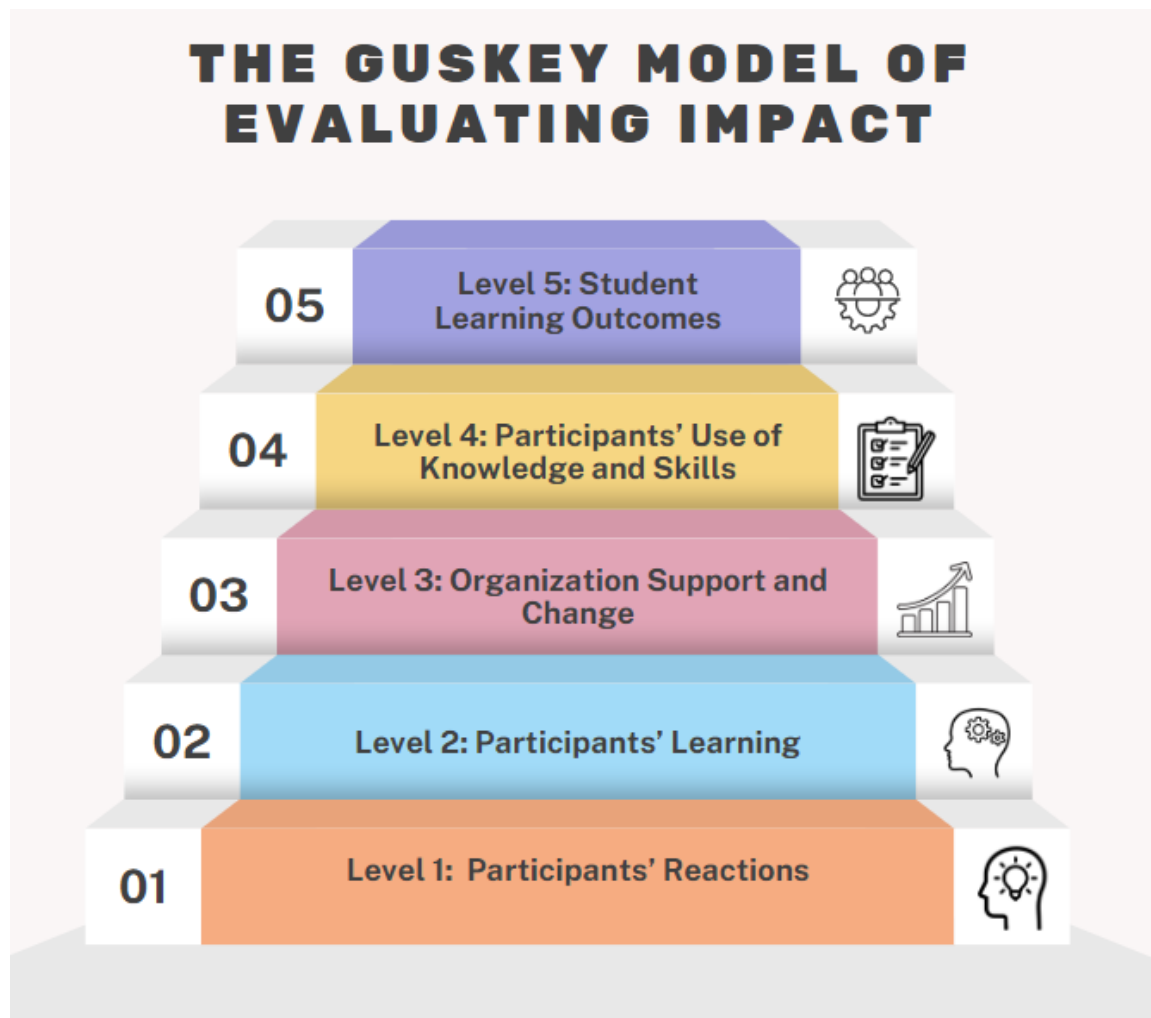
Project Evaluation

The terms assessment and evaluation are many times used to mean the same thing. While the term assessment is typically used to judge learning or performance, evaluation is used to judge all other areas of academic endeavors (Bin Mubayrik, 2020). The goal of an assessment is formative or for learning, while evaluation is summative and is used after the program is complete to judge the quality (Bin Mubayrik, 2020).

In their 2023, article, The RPPL share that the Guskey Framework is a useful tool for organizations who want to begin developing their own evaluation plan. The use of surveys and informal assessments can effectively address the first 4 aspects of the Guskey Framework which are participant perceptions, knowledge, mindset, and enabling conditions (Alicea et al., 2023). The RPPL further states that developing practical measures for evaluation have three main properties; they are useful, in that they yield meaningful data, they are easy in that they are minimally burdensome to create, collect, and analyze, and that they are consequential, or connected to experiences that matter for learning (Alicea et al., 2023).

Figure 1

The Guskey Model of Evaluating Impact



Note. Recreated from (Alicea et al., 2023)

Formative Assessment

During the course of the three-day professional learning workshop informal formative assessments will be used to gauge participant understanding and increase engagement. Informal assessment can be described as unplanned activities integrated into

the class activities to assess growth and comprehension (Bin Mubayrik, 2020). These informal assessments will be 60 second shared checkpoints strategically placed in the training to judge comprehension and engagement. Exit tickets, used at the end of each day's session, created through google forms will be used as more formal Formative assessments during the workshop. The exit tickets will consist of the following three questions:

1. What is the clearest part of today's presentation?
2. What is the muddiest (least clear) part of today's presentation?
3. What do you feel would make today's presentation more meaningful?
4. Which piece of today's presentation would you like to quickly review tomorrow?

Exit tickets, used to assess participant learning, will address level one and two of the Guskey Model. The data gathered from these exit tickets will be used to guide the direction and instruction of the next day's presentation along with clarification of any misconceptions or misunderstandings.

Summative Assessment

At the conclusion of the three-day workshop, teams will be asked to complete a summative evaluation of the event. A summative evaluation covers the full topic of the course and judges the outcome of the new knowledge (Bin Mubayrik, 2020). Participants will be asked five open ended questions directly related to the training. The summative evaluation will be developed using google forms and containing the following questions:

1. Share a short statement about your new learning relative to the 5 Essential Elements of MTSS.
2. As a result of the professional learning, which of the 5 Essential Elements do you feel you have a clearer understanding (or need more clarification)?
3. As a result of the professional learning, did you and your team gain clarity in your knowledge/understanding of the MTSS framework and implementation?
In which of the 5 elements did you experience the most growth?
4. As a result of this professional learning, do you feel that there is a more consistent organizational framework for implementing the MTSS framework?
5. As a result of this professional learning, how do you see continuous improvement occurring for MTSS implementation?

Referring to the proposed timeline, once the PLCs and Coaching calendar have been implemented there will be follow-up assessments and evaluations to judge the teams' learning and effectiveness of the training. These evaluations will address the remaining three levels of the Guskey Model of Evaluating Impact.

Goals of Evaluation

The goals for the evaluation of the project are to leverage the data collected as the MTSS teams work collectively to consistently implement and continuously improve our elementary based MTSS. The use of formative assessments will give immediate data as to the effectiveness of the workshop daily, at the same time guiding the researcher towards any modifications that are needed. The implementation of the summative evaluation will be used to judge the effectiveness of the training in its entirety. Being that

one of the main goals is continuous improvement, the lessons gleaned from the data collected for this training will also be used to help assure the usefulness of future trainings offered on this and other topics.

Curriculum leaders, Content Specialists, Lead Psychologist, and MTSS Coordinators, as major stakeholders in the system, will be asked to assist with the responsibility of implementing the coaching sessions and developing the PLC as best meets their staff needs. As with any professional learning in the elementary educational setting, the ultimate goal is that of improving student outcomes.

Project Implications

Local Stakeholders

MTSS is a framework designed to be an equitable process for all students regardless of socioeconomic background or level of need. Consistent implementation of the five essential elements of the MTSS framework can help reduce the discrepancies with our students and support the continued improvement where all students regardless of race, ability level, or socioeconomic background can achieve at the highest level.

The possible social changes implications of this project are far reaching. As the framework of the MTSS addresses the needs of the whole child, the framework is strengthened by examining teacher and leader perceptions of the process. The Georgia Department of Education states that “integrating academics, behavior, and wellbeing data, systems and practices, teams can align efforts to address barriers to learning and improve outcomes (GaDOE, 2024).”

From the results of the survey it is seen that MTSS teams across the district have inconsistent understanding of the MTSS framework and its implementation. With the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes, providing a handbook to serve as an organizational framework along with three-day professional learning workshop will provide teams across the district with some clarity as they collaborate to implement the framework in an equitable manner. The inclusion of PLCs and coaching opportunities will give educators across the district the desired opportunities to work together and advocate for the needs of their students at a system level, with the eventual conclusion of developing students who are ready to meet the diverse challenges of today's society.

Larger Context

As this project was designed to address the gap in practice at one Georgia district, the findings could possibly be applied across other similar districts. It is my belief and desire, that the results of this basic qualitative study be used in the larger context to solidify consistent implementation and continuous growth of the MTSS at local, private, state, and other levels. The five essential elements of the MTSS framework can guide educators to making conclusive data-informed decisions, implementing interventions to meet the needs of the whole child, monitoring the progress of students, and working within a strong infrastructure to support teams as the work to meet the needs of all students. In the context of providing support for the whole child, addressing issues of social emotional learning, academic learning, and determining the root causes of these issues can only serve to build a stronger and more supportive educational environment

that benefits all and results in positive social change for our local and global communities.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths

The purpose of this basic qualitative project study was to explore the inconsistent implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework, along with the resources needed, as the transition is made from system facilitation to school-based teams. RTI has been in place for a significant period of time; rural schools in particular still struggle with the implementation of the program (Barton et al., 2020). AIR (n.d.) stated that understanding the essential components of MTSS is an important part of program implementation, and research shows that implementation is a major challenge for educators.

The perceptions gathered from the 13 interviews with MTSS teams are the strength of this project. The data gathered from teams of educators revealed in seven of the 13 interviews (53%) that they felt professional learning is what is needed to move the teams, followed by “a better understanding” and “more personnel,” gathered from two of the 13 (15%) remarks. Finally, replies of “peer observations” and an “organizational framework” came from 7% of the participants. To address all needs expressed from the respondents, an MTSS handbook to serve as an organizational framework, along with a 3-day professional learning workshop to follow the handbook, was developed. With the ultimate goal of the project being consistent implementation and continuous growth, PLCs and coaching opportunities will be the culminating piece of the project. To assure that the comments of “better understanding,” “organizational framework,” along with “peer observations and more personnel” are met, the collaboration provided by this

professional learning opportunity is an added strength of the project. The final strength of this project lies in the collaborative nature of the study participants. They willingly gave honest responses to the questions that were presented and articulately shared their perceptions of the MTSS framework and its benefits to the students they serve.

Project Limitation

The limitation of this project lies within the same parameters as the strengths. The data gathered from the interviews are perceptual data and are therefore derived from human interaction and opinion. The goal of this project is to identify the gap in practice as the MTSS framework is implemented across the district. To solidify the consistency of practice, some MTSS teams will need to change their practices. Change is not always welcome. To address the suspected hesitation to change, the use of PLCs and coaching opportunities will be essential.

Another perceived limitation of the project is time. “We are relying on our nation’s teachers to take on a dizzying array of challenges” (*Transforming Teacher Professional Learning Together*, n.d.). Teachers have many more expectations and demands on their time now with changing state standards, social and emotional demands of the students and families, along with the challenge of meeting the students’ varying academic needs. Asking teachers to relearn the essential components of MTSS, which may or may not be contradictory with previously learned material, may lead to more frustration. It will be very important to make this training available to teachers in a manner that makes the best use of their time without creating undue hardships. As with any undertaking, this project is not without its own limitations, but I feel that the

strengths of consistent implementation and continuous improvement far outweigh the limitations.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The RPPL states that evidence shows that professional learning can lead to shifts in teachers' practices and supports teachers development at all levels, and that programs of varying formats can produce a wide range of effects (Hill et al., 2022). Alternative approaches to professional learning are limitless.

The purpose of this basic qualitative project study was to explore the perceptions of inconsistent implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework from MTSS teams across the district. Based on the perception data received and supported by the literature, a handbook and a 3-day workshop was developed. Alternate approaches could include online webinars using Google Meets to allow participants to engage in professional learning and collaboration remotely while still having the opportunity to engage in real-time interactions and opportunities for question-and-answer sessions. The development of self-paced courses where participants can access content at their time convenience would provide opportunities for learning flexibility. Small learning modules are another alternate approach. With these modules, school and district leaders could include them in weekly/monthly newsletters, monthly system update videos, and other methods for sharing information. Finally, a blended learning approach taking pieces and parts of all suggestions could offer many benefits to meet the differentiation and flexibility teachers need today.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

As I returned to college at the age of 27 and began what would be a 25-year journey to my doctorate degree, I became the definition of lifelong learner. The experience of having studied at two different universities has helped me develop into a broader minded individual, a more scholarly writer, and a quality researcher. During this journey of my quantitative project study, several things have become apparent. First and foremost, in my position as a school leader, the process of continued learning and research has fed my natural desire to stay current in educational trends and programs, support our teachers, and coach the next generation of educational leaders. Secondly, as an active member of the MTSS team for our school and district, I have the genuine desire to see the program implemented consistently so that our system and the students we serve can and will experience continued growth and achievement. Finally, during this process, the desire to share this knowledge with the greater community has developed. I am looking toward the area of educational advocacy as “next steps” opportunity for myself in the area of leadership and change.

Project Development

The perceptions of MTSS teams relative to the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework were the basis for the development of the basic qualitative project study. My role as a school leader, active member of the MTSS team, and a graduate student at Walden University was the impetus to develop a project that would benefit and support our system leaders, our school leaders and teachers, and the students we serve. It is my belief that this project will lead to improved practices across

the district and within the school. Implementing the MTSS framework with consistency and an eye towards continuous improvement can lead to a more collaborative, supportive, and productive environment for our teachers, our students, and our community at large.

Developing a project of this size is not without its difficulties. Developing skills as a researcher, understanding the process of alignment for the study, and narrowing down the study topic were not uncomplicated tasks. Using resources available such as the Walden University library, Google Scholar search engine, feedback from professors, and input from colleagues was integral in the final project development. The course work, research, and personal experiences throughout this project have led me to become a more self-directed reflective learner, a stronger and more informed leader, and a proactive and engaged colleague.

Leadership and Change

As a school leader, one is responsible for implementing change regularly. Change is not always easy, but it can be seen as a constant in the field of education. Leading change takes support, encouragement, and trust from colleagues. My goal as a leader is to ask teachers to change with and for a purpose. It is my belief that this project will help to lead change in the field of MTSS with a specific purpose. With the use of the handbook and professional learning workshop, along with PLCs and coaching opportunities, MTSS teams across the district will see an improvement in practice, understanding, and implementation to better meet the needs of our students. MTSS is an important framework in today's educational arsenal, and consistent implementation and continuous improvement will lead to improved student outcomes.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The importance of the work comes from the topic and process of research. The perceptions of MTSS teams relative to the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework is the basis for the development of the basic qualitative project study. As an active member of the MTSS team for our school and district, it is my genuine desire to see the program implemented consistently so that our system and the students we serve can and will experience continued growth and achievement. To address all needs expressed from the respondents, an MTSS handbook to serve as an organizational framework, along with a 3-day professional learning workshop to follow the handbook was developed. With the ultimate goal of the project being consistent implementation and continuous growth, PLCs and coaching opportunities will be the culminating piece of the project. To assure that the comments of “better understanding,” “organizational framework,” and “peer observations and more personnel” are met, the collaboration provided by this professional learning opportunity is an added strength of the project. Importance comes from the actual doing of a project; the handbook, professional learning workshop, PLCs, and coaching opportunities have been developed to meet the needs of the local district and beyond.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The data collected in the process of this study identified the need to clarify the implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework. The study identified the gap in practice of the local district and the guidelines for implementation as outlined in the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (AIR, n.d.) Development of the

handbook, professional learning workshop, PLCs, and coaching opportunities will provide multiple levels of support for the MTSS teams. The following goals were addressed in the training:

- Goal 1: To clearly communicate the goals and expectation for consistent implementation of the MTSS framework.
- Goal 2: To provide elementary teams with a common understanding/language of the MTSS framework as provided by the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (AIR, n.d.).
- Goal 3: To provide collaborative and reflective practices for the MTSS teams.
- Goal 4: To enhance implementation consistency and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework.

The application of this research is directly related to this particular school district. The handbook and professional learning will be implemented in the researched district, with future opportunities to present to surrounding districts and potentially at the state level. The professional learning and handbook could be reconfigured to address alternate processes. It could be developed into online workshops or a webinar; additionally, it could be transformed into a self-paced course addressing each of the five essential elements of the MTSS framework. In another approach, the content of the workshop and handbook could be broken into small learning modules and presented as micro learning bites on an as-needed basis.

The teams of elementary educators were asked to rate their perceived knowledge of the MTSS framework/process (What is your knowledge/understanding level with the

MTSS? [minimal knowledge or understanding; novice, basic knowledge although still an unclear understanding; developing, basic knowledge and understanding; proficient, well developed knowledge and clear understanding; expert]) The responses to this inquiry ranged from *developing* (2) to *proficient* (10) to *expert* (1). Although the interview participants all felt that they had a working knowledge of the MTSS process, they each had differing responses as to how they perceived their knowledge. I1 stated that she had a “basic understanding as do most classroom teachers who are impacted by the student in the tiers. I am not the person who analyzes the data or provides the interventions” I3 perceived herself to have a proficient knowledge of MTSS: “I am always learning, but in terms of the different tiers and expectations of what should be done, I feel like I have a proficient understanding.” These findings of inconsistency in this basic qualitative project illustrate the need for further research on the MTSS framework. Additionally, the research could be expanded to include a larger sample size and broadened to include the secondary levels of education.

Conclusion

The problem addressed in this basic qualitative project study was the inconsistent implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework along with the supports that are needed as the transition is made from system facilitation to school-based teams. The research focused on the perceptions that MTSS school-based teams had of the MTSS framework. The result of this study was the development of a handbook to serve as an organizational framework along with a 3-day professional learning workshop, with PLCs and coaching opportunities. The ultimate goal of this project is to support teachers

and leaders in this district in the consistent implementation and continuous improvement of the MTSS framework, as they work tirelessly to equitably serve our students.

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[Policy/communications/Documents/ESSA%2011-28-18.pdf](https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/ESSA%2011-28-18.pdf)

Appendix A: The Project



MTSS Handbook

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

UNIVERSAL SCREENING
 Universal Screening is a systematic process using short assessments to evaluate all students across specific domains (Brann et al., 2020).

PROGRESS MONITORING
 Progress Monitoring involves regular assessment of student performance to collect, analyze, and share data with stakeholders (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).

DATA BASED DECISION MAKING
 Data-based decision making is ongoing and occurs at all levels within MTSS (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.).

MULTI LEVEL PREVENTION SYSTEM
 Interventions broken down into three tiers with increasing intensity and support.

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE
 Infrastructure in an educational context refers to the fundamental structures necessary for optimal system functioning (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.).

WHAT IS MTSS ?
 A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is a proactive and preventative framework that integrates data and instruction within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and support students' social, emotional, and behavior needs from a strengths-based practice. (Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports - 2023)

GADOE - DEFINITION
 A Multi-Tiered System of Supports is a framework that:

- incorporates 5 essential components;
 - is data driven;
 - includes a team approach;
- supports ALL students in learning and behavior;
- is considered best practice for teaching and learning.

MTSS Handbook

Universal Screening

Definition and Purpose

*Universal Screening is a systematic process using short assessments to evaluate all students across specific domains (Braun et al., 2020).

*Its primary purpose is to provide valid data to determine students' skill levels and identify those at risk for poor learning outcomes, including academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.).

Effectiveness

*Verlenden et al. (2020) affirm that universal screening effectively identifies students at risk for emotional, behavioral, or academic challenges.
* Braun et al. (2020) state that schools using Universal Screeners can identify at-risk students earlier, facilitating more effective use of tiered intervention systems.

Decision-Making and Interventions

* The data from universal screening informs decisions to implement tiered interventions tailored to the needs of at-risk students.
* It enables educators to allocate resources more effectively and provide timely support to students who need it most.

Integration into MTSS

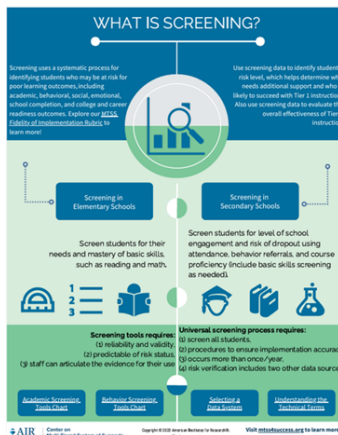
* Universal Screening is a critical component of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), ensuring that all students receive appropriate levels of intervention based on their needs.

* It helps schools create a proactive approach to student support, aiming to prevent academic failure and promote overall well-being.

Continuous Improvement

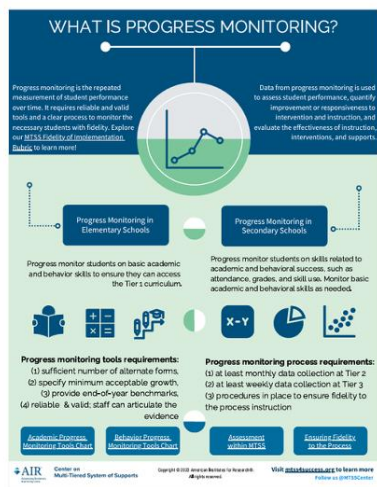
* Schools using Universal Screeners often engage in continuous improvement efforts to refine screening processes, enhance data interpretation, and improve intervention outcomes.

* Regular review of screening results allows for adjustments in strategies and resources to better meet evolving student needs.



MTSS Handbook

Progress Monitoring



Definition and Purpose:

- Progress Monitoring involves regular assessment of student performance to collect, analyze, and share data with stakeholders (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).
- It differs from Universal Screening as it focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and identifying the need for instructional adjustments (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.).

Effectiveness and Decision-Making:

- Progress Monitoring helps educators determine the responsiveness of interventions and make informed decisions about instructional changes (Reister & Blanchard, 2020).
- It provides crucial data to identify students not making sufficient progress and assess the effectiveness of instructional strategies (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).

Data Importance:

- Data from Progress Monitoring informs decisions about the need for instructional accommodations or modifications (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).
- It supports effective communication with parents and students by providing clear insights into academic progress (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018).

Integration into MTSS:

- Progress Monitoring is integral to the MTSS framework, ensuring ongoing assessment of student progress in both core academic areas and intervention performance (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018).

MTSS Handbook

Data Based Decision Making

Continuous Process:

Data-based decision making is ongoing and occurs at all levels within MTSS (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.). It involves sharing, analyzing, and utilizing data from Universal Screeners and Progress Monitoring to identify students' needs and progress.

Purpose and Utilization:

Data from Universal Screeners and Progress Monitoring informs decisions about students who are exceeding expectations or at risk (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.). Decisions are made regarding the intensity of interventions, movement within the MTSS prevention system, and identification of students with learning disabilities.

Implementation Steps:

Blackburn and Witzel (2018) emphasize a structured approach to data-based decision making, involving data collection, analysis, and modification of instruction, starting at the teacher level.

Shared Responsibility:

According to the GaDOE, data-based decision making is a shared responsibility among the MTSS team (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). The team uses data to inform professional learning decisions and establish clear decision-making rules for effective implementation.

The infographic explains that data-based decision making is the use of data to make decisions that benefit students, occurring at all levels of MTSS implementation. It includes a clear process for movement between tiers, an accessible data system that graphs data, and use of data-based decision rules implemented with fidelity. It features three main pillars: Responsiveness (Are decisions about responsiveness based on reliable and valid data that reflect progress toward key goals?), Decision-Making Process (Is the process data-driven? Is there a broad base of key personnel involved? Is the process operationalized with clear decision rules?), and Data System (Can users document and access individual student level data? Are data entered in a timely manner? Are data represented appropriately? Is there a process for setting and evaluating goals?).

MTSS Handbook

Multi-Level Prevention System

The infographic defines the multi-level prevention system as one that provides increasingly intense levels of instruction and support to address student need. It lists characteristics such as being more intensive than Tier 2, individualized to address student need, aligned with core instruction, and led by well-trained staff. It details three tiers: Tier 1 (Universal supports provided to all students), Tier 2 (Targeted supports provided to 10-15% of students), and Tier 3 (Intensive supports provided to 3-5% of students). It also lists essential components like standardized and evidence-based intervention, vertical and horizontal alignment of lesson objectives, and data-driven differentiated instruction.

Definition and Purpose:

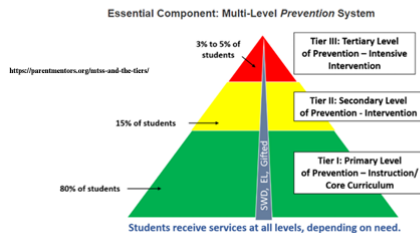
MTSS is a multi-level framework designed to address the enrichment and/or remediation needs of all students through evidence-based practices (Coveta County School System, n.d.). It aims to improve student outcomes by providing interventions that target knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Coveta County School System, n.d.).

Multi-Level Intervention System:

MTSS categorizes interventions into three tiers: Tier One: Core Curriculum delivered to all students (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). Tier Two: Secondary interventions for groups of students identified as needing additional support to meet grade-level standards (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). Tier Three: Intensive, individualized interventions for students who require significant support to succeed (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.).

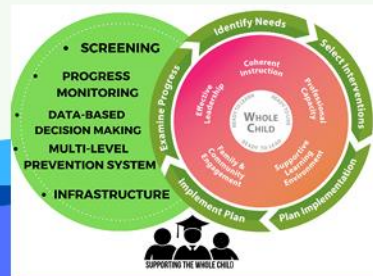
Characteristics and Components:

Each tier of intervention offers progressively greater levels of instructional support, intensity, and additional instructional resources (Florida Department of Education, Solodev, 2022). The effectiveness of MTSS is assessed using indicators such as research-based curriculum materials, well-defined teaching objectives aligned with standards, differentiated instruction, and enrichment opportunities (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.).



MTSS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Consistent Implementation
and Continuous Improvement



DAY ONE AGENDA

- 8:00- 8:30: Welcome and introductions
- 8:30 - 9:30 : Review Website and Rubric
- 9:30 - 10:30: 1st Element (Screening)
- 10:30 - 10:45: Checkpoint/Break
- 10:45 - 11:30: Collaborate on Scenario and share out with group
- 11:30 - 1:00: Lunch On Your Own
- 1:00 - 2:00: 2nd Element (Progress Monitoring)
- 2:00 - 2:15: Checkpoint/Break
- 2:15 - 3:00: Collaborate on Scenario and share out with group
- 3:00 - 3:15: Exit Ticket

PROTOCOLS

- Silence Phone
- Stay Engaged
- Take Breaks as needed
- Actively Participate
- Share what you know
- Ask Clarifying questions
- Give honest and respectful feedback



CHERI BARNETT **WALDEN UNIVERSITY**

Cheri Barnett is a doctoral student at Walden University, an 8 year Assistant Principal at a local elementary school, and a 25 year veteran educator. Her interest and knowledge in MTSS comes from daily interaction with implementation practices and experiencing the inconsistencies from across the local district. It is her ultimate goal that clarifying the processes of the MTSS framework and addressing the needs of the schools, will in essence better meet the needs of the students.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is a proactive and preventative framework that integrates data and instruction within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and support students' social, emotional, and behavior needs from a strengths-based practice. (Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports - 2023)

UNIVERSAL SCREENING

Universal Screening is a systematic process using short assessments to evaluate all students across specific domains (Brann et al., 2020).

PROGRESS MONITORING

Progress Monitoring involves regular assessment of student performance to collect, analyze, and share data with stakeholders (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).

DATA BASED DECISION MAKING

Data-based decision making is ongoing and occurs at all levels within MTSS (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.).

MULTI LEVEL PREVENTION SYSTEM

Interventions broken down into three tiers with increasing intensity and support.

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure in an educational context refers to the fundamental structures necessary for optimal system functioning (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.).

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*Its primary purpose is to provide valid data to determine students' skill levels and identify those at risk for poor learning outcomes, including academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.).

Effectiveness

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* Brann et al. (2020) state that schools using Universal Screeners can identify at-risk students earlier, facilitating more effective use of tiered intervention systems.

Decision-Making and Interventions

* The data from universal screening informs decisions to implement tiered interventions tailored to the needs of at-risk students.

*It enables educators to allocate resources more effectively and provide timely support to students who need it most.

Integration into MTSS

* Universal Screening is a critical component of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), ensuring that all students receive appropriate levels of intervention based on their needs.

* It helps schools create a proactive approach to student support, aiming to prevent academic failure and promote overall well-being.

Continuous Improvement

*Schools using Universal Screeners often engage in continuous improvement efforts to refine screening processes, enhance data interpretation, and improve intervention outcomes.

* Regular review of screening results allows for adjustments in strategies and resources to better meet evolving student needs.

WHAT IS SCREENING?

Screening uses a systematic process for identifying students who may be at risk for poor learning outcomes, including academic, behavioral, social, emotional, school completion, and college and career readiness outcomes. Explore our [MTSS, Fidelity of Implementation Rubric](#) to learn more!

Use screening data to identify students' risk level, which helps determine who needs additional support and who is likely to succeed with Tier 1 instruction. Also use screening data to evaluate the overall effectiveness of Tier 1 instruction.

Screening in Elementary Schools

Screen students for their needs and mastery of basic skills, such as reading and math.

Screening in Secondary Schools

Screen students for level of school engagement and risk of dropout using attendance, behavior referrals, and course proficiency (include basic skills screening as needed).

Screening tools require:

- (1) reliability and validity
- (2) predictable of risk status
- (3) staff can articulate the evidence for their use

Universal screening process requires:

- (1) screen all students.
- (2) procedures to ensure implementation accuracy.
- (3) occurs more than once/year.
- (4) risk verification includes two other data sources

[Academic Screening Tools Chart](#)

[Behavior Screening Tools Chart](#)

[Selecting a RTI System](#)

[Understanding the Technical Items](#)

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60 second Checkpoint

TURN TO YOUR RIGHT SHOULDER PARTNER AND SHARE
THREE SALIENT POINTS



Scenario

Using classtools.net participants will be split into equal groups, working with [MTSS4success.org](https://mtss4success.org) and the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric, teams will discuss and review the scenario, lastly all teams will share with the collective group

CONTEXT:

Barnett Elementary School, a Title I school with a diverse student population of about 560 students, has been using the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework for several years. Universal Screening is defined as an essential element of this framework, helping to identify students who may need additional academic or behavioral support. However, over the past few years, the implementation of Universal Screening has become inconsistent due to various challenges such as staff turnover, lack of training, and insufficient time allocation.

PROBLEM:

The inconsistent implementation of Universal Screening has led to gaps in identifying students who need additional support. As a result, some students who require Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions are not being identified until late in the school year, when their academic or behavioral challenges have already become more pronounced and difficult to manage. This has created a reactive, rather than proactive, approach to student support, with teachers and interventionists often scrambling to address issues that could have been more easily managed earlier.

OBJECTIVE:

The goal is to address the inconsistencies in the implementation of Universal Screening, ensuring that all students are screened effectively and consistently, and that the data is used to inform timely and appropriate interventions within the MTSS framework.

1. Recognize/Define the issue
2. Identify the barriers
3. Develop and action plan

PROGRESS MONITORING

Definition and Purpose:

- Progress Monitoring involves regular assessment of student performance to collect, analyze, and share data with stakeholders (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).
- It differs from Universal Screening as it focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and identifying the need for instructional adjustments (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.).

Effectiveness and Decision-Making:

- Progress Monitoring helps educators determine the responsiveness of interventions and make informed decisions about instructional changes (Reister & Blanchard, 2020).
- It provides crucial data to identify students not making sufficient progress and assess the effectiveness of instructional strategies (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).

Data Importance:

- Data from Progress Monitoring informs decisions about the need for instructional accommodations or modifications (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).
- It supports effective communication with parents and students by providing clear insights into academic progress (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018).

Integration into MTSS:

- Progress Monitoring is integral to the MTSS framework, ensuring ongoing assessment of student progress in both core academic areas and intervention performance (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018).

WHAT IS PROGRESS MONITORING?

Progress monitoring is the repeated measurement of student performance over time. It requires reliable and valid tools and a clear process to monitor the necessary students with fidelity. Explore our [MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Guide](#) to learn more!

Data from progress monitoring is used to assess student performance, quantify improvement or responsiveness to intervention and instruction, and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction, interventions, and supports.

Progress Monitoring in Elementary Schools

Progress monitor students on basic academic and behavior skills to ensure they can access the Tier 1 curriculum.

Progress Monitoring in Secondary Schools

Progress monitor students on skills related to academic and behavioral success, such as attendance, grades, and skill use. Monitor basic academic and behavioral skills as needed.

Progress monitoring tools requirements:

- (1) sufficient number of alternate forms
- (2) specify minimum acceptable growth
- (3) provide end-of-year benchmarks
- (4) reliable & valid; staff can articulate the evidence

Progress monitoring process requirements:

- (1) at least monthly data collection at Tier 2
- (2) at least weekly data collection at Tier 3
- (3) procedures in place to ensure fidelity to the process instruction

[Academic Progress Monitoring Tools Chart](#)

[Behavior Progress Monitoring Tools Chart](#)

[Assessment within MTSS](#)

[Ensuring Fidelity in the Process](#)

Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports

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60 second Checkpoint

TURN TO YOUR LEFT SHOULDER PARTNER AND ASK THREE SALIENT QUESTIONS

Scenario

Using classtools.net participants will be split into equal groups , working with MTSS4success.org and the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric , teams will discuss and review the scenario, lastly all teams will share with the collective group

CONTEXT:

Barnett Elementary School, a Title 1 elementary school with approximately 560 students, has been utilizing the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework to provide academic and behavioral support to all of its students. Progress monitoring, a critical component of MTSS, is intended to regularly assess students' progress toward their learning goals, ensuring that interventions are effective and adjustments are made as necessary. However, over the past academic year, progress monitoring has been inconsistently implemented across different grade levels and subject areas.

PROBLEM:

The inconsistent implementation of progress monitoring has led to several issues, including delays in identifying when interventions are or are not working, difficulties in making data-driven decisions, and a lack of timely adjustments to instructional strategies to assure success. As a result, some students who were receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions did not make the expected progress, teachers were left uncertain about the effectiveness of their interventions, and causing undue stress on MTSS teams.

OBJECTIVE:

The goal is to address the inconsistencies in progress monitoring within the MTSS framework to ensure that all students receiving interventions are consistently monitored, and that the data collected is used effectively to guide instructional decisions and improve student outcomes.

Recognize/Define the issue:

Identify the barriers:

Develop and action plan:

Exit Ticket

EXIT



DAY TWO AGENDA

- 8:00- 8:30: Welcome, Review Day One and answer questions
- 8:30 - 9:30 : Review GaDOE Website
- 9:30 - 10:30: 3rd Element (Data-Based Decision Making)
- 10:30 - 10:45: Checkpoint/Break
- 10:45 - 11:30: Collaborate on Scenario and share out with group
- 11:30 - 1:00: Lunch On Your Own
- 1:00 - 2:00: 4th Element (Multi-Level Intervention)
- 2:00 - 2:15: Checkpoint/Break
- 2:15 - 3:00: Collaborate on Scenario and share out with group
- 3:00 - 3:15: Exit Ticket

Georgia Department of Education



DATA BASED DECISION MAKING

Continuous Process:

Data-based decision making is ongoing and occurs at all levels within MTSS (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.). It involves sharing, analyzing, and utilizing data from Universal Screeners and Progress Monitoring to identify students' needs and progress.

Purpose and Utilization:

Data from Universal Screeners and Progress Monitoring informs decisions about students who are exceeding expectations or at risk (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.). Decisions are made regarding the intensity of interventions, movement within the MTSS prevention system, and identification of students with learning disabilities.

Implementation Steps:

Blackburn and Witzel (2018) emphasize a structured approach to data-based decision making, involving data collection, analysis, and modification of instruction, starting at the teacher level.

Shared Responsibility:

According to the GaDOE, data-based decision making is a shared responsibility among the MTSS team (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.).

The team uses data to inform professional learning decisions and establish clear decision-making rules for effective implementation.

Data-based decision making is the use of data to make decisions that benefit students. It occurs at all levels of MTSS implementation, from individual students to the district level.

Be sure you have the right teams by using our [Teams Tin Sheet!](#)

Avoid being "data rich, information poor" by watching this [webinar!](#)

What is Data-Based Decision Making?

It includes a clear process for movement between the tiers, an accessible data system that graphs data, and use of data-based decision rules implemented with fidelity. Explore our [MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric](#) to learn more!

Responsiveness

Are decisions about responsiveness based on reliable and valid data that reflect progress toward key goals?

Are decision-making criteria implemented accurately?

Decision-Making Process

Is the process data-driven?

Is there a broad base of key personnel involved?

Is the process operationalized with clear decision rules?

Data System

Can users document and access individual student-level data?

Are data entered in a timely manner?

Are data represented graphically?

Is there a process for setting and evaluating goals?

Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports

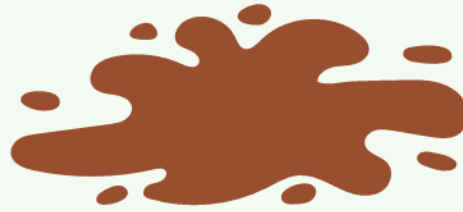
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60 second Checkpoint

WITH YOUR FACE PARTNER, QUICKLY ILLUSTRATE YOUR
UNDERSTANDING OF THE 3 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
WE HAVE COVERED



Scenario

Using classtools.net participants will be split into equal groups, working with [MTSS4success.org](https://mtss4success.org), gadoe.org, and the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric, teams will discuss and review the scenario, lastly all teams will share with the collective group

Context:

Barnett Elementary School, a school serving a diverse Title I student body of approximately 560 students, has integrated the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework to provide tailored academic and behavioral interventions. A critical component of MTSS is Data-Based Decision Making (DBDM), where teams of educators use data to guide instructional strategies, intervention decisions, and resource allocation. However, over the past year, the school has faced challenges in consistently implementing DBDM, resulting in inequitable application of interventions and missed opportunities to offer consistent support to their at-risk students.

Problem:

The inconsistent implementation of Data-Based Decision Making has led to several issues, including delayed interventions and additional support for these Title I students, ineffective use and distribution of resources, and a lack of clarity among teachers about how to use data to inform their differentiated instructional practices. Some teachers are relying on intuition or anecdotal evidence rather than systematically analyzing data, which has led to inconsistencies in the application of the MTSS framework across the school.

Objective:

The goal is to standardize and improve the implementation of Data-Based Decision Making across the school, ensuring that all instructional and intervention decisions are informed by accurate, timely, and relevant data, thereby enhancing student outcomes and the overall effectiveness of the MTSS framework.

Recognize/Define the issue:

Identify the barriers:

Develop and action plan:

MULTI-LEVEL PREVENTION SYSTEM

Definition and Purpose:

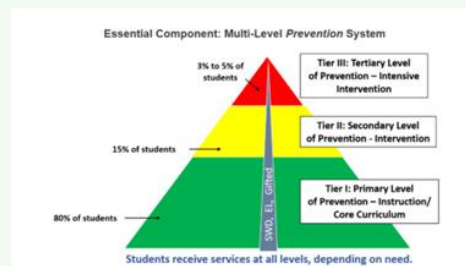
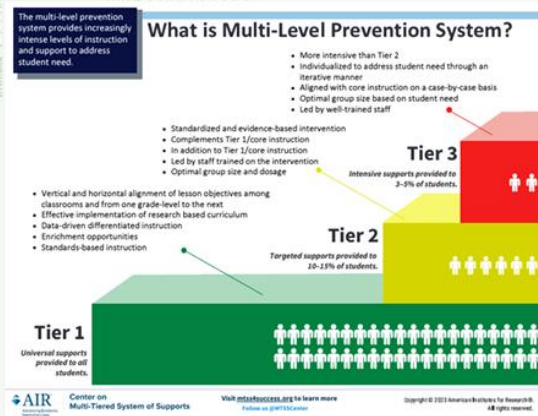
MTSS is a multi-level framework designed to address the enrichment and/or remediation needs of all students through evidence-based practices (Georgia School System, n.d.). It aims to improve student outcomes by providing interventions that target knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Georgia School System, n.d.).

Multi-Level Intervention System:

MTSS categorizes interventions into three tiers: Tier One: Core Curriculum delivered to all students (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). Tier Two: Secondary interventions for groups of students identified as needing additional support to meet grade-level standards (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.). Tier Three: Intensive, individualized interventions for students who require significant support to succeed (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.).

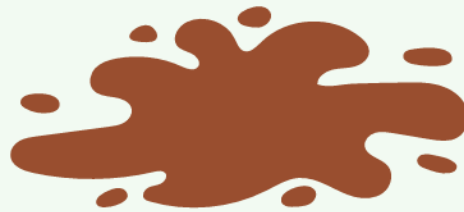
Characteristics and Components:

Each tier of intervention offers progressively greater levels of instructional support, intensity, and additional instructional resources (Florida Department of Education, Solodev, 2022). The effectiveness of MTSS is assessed using indicators such as research-based curriculum materials, well-defined teaching objectives aligned with standards, differentiated instruction, and enrichment opportunities (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.).



60 second Checkpoint

WITH A PARTNER OF YOUR CHOICE, LIST AND DISCUSS
YOUR 3 "AH-HA" MOMENTS



Scenario

Using classrooms.net participants will be split into equal groups, working with MTSS4success.org, gadoe.org, and the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric, teams will discuss and review the scenario, lastly all teams will share with the collective group

Context:

Barnett Elementary School, a Title I school with approximately 560 students, has implemented the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework to provide a structured approach to supporting all students' academic and behavioral needs. A key element of MTSS is the Multi-Tiered Intervention System, which provides increasing levels of support based on student needs: Tier 1 (universal support for all students), Tier 2 (targeted interventions for some students - 13-15%), and Tier 3 (intensive interventions for a few students - 3-5%). However, the school has encountered challenges with the consistent implementation of this tiered intervention system.

Problem:

The inconsistent implementation of the Multi-Tiered Intervention System has resulted in several issues, including some students receiving inappropriate levels of support, a lack of clarity about when to move students between tiers, and uneven application of interventions across classrooms. These inconsistencies have led to delays in providing necessary support, student frustration, and ineffective use of resources.

Objective:

The goal is to address the inconsistencies in the implementation of the Multi-Tiered Intervention System within the MTSS framework, ensuring that all students receive the appropriate level of support based on their needs, and that the process for moving students between tiers is clear, data-driven, and applied uniformly across the school.

Recognize/Define the issue:

Identify the barriers:

Develop and action plan:

Exit Ticket



EXIT



DAY THREE AGENDA

- 8:00- 8:30: Welcome, Review Day Two and answer questions
- 8:30 - 9:30 : 5th Element (School Infrastructure)
- 9:30 - 9:45: Checkpoint/break
- 10:30 - 11:30: Collaborate on Scenario and share out with group
- 11:30 - 1:00: Lunch On Your Own
- 1:00 - 2:00: Implementation Process
- 2:00 - 2:15: Checkpoint/break
- 2:15 - 3:00: Share Links and Best Practices from other schools
- 3:00 - 3:15: Final Evaluation

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT

Definition and Application:

Infrastructure in an educational context refers to the fundamental structures necessary for optimal system functioning (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.).
Schools adapt state and federal structures to ensure equitable application across their organization, tailored to student population size, level, and needs.

Components of Effective Infrastructure:

Effective MTSS infrastructure includes knowledge, resources, and organizational supports aligned with MTSS goals (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.).
It integrates interconnected systems within schools to collectively impact each student's educational experience (Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, n.d.).

Framework Alignment and Focus:

MTSS frameworks should focus on providing instructional support through collaborative team approaches to address student needs and problem-solving (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).
Alignment with curricular standards and goals ensures comprehensive support across all student learning levels (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).

Tools for Effective Implementation:

Program specificity and leadership are key tools for implementing and sustaining effective MTSS infrastructure within schools (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).



60 second Checkpoint

WITH A PARTNER OF YOUR CHOICE, LIST AND DISCUSS
3 PROBLEM AREAS THAT YOU SEE IN YOUR SCHOOL



Scenario

Using classtools.net participants will be split into equal groups, working with MTSS4success.org, gadoe.org, and the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric, teams will discuss and review the scenario, lastly all teams will share with the collective group

Context:

Barnett Elementary School, a PreK-5 Title I elementary school with around 560 students, has embraced the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework to address the diverse academic and behavioral needs of its students. A critical component of the MTSS framework is the school-based infrastructure, which includes the systems, resources, and processes that support the consistent and effective implementation of MTSS. However, Barnett Elementary has encountered challenges with the consistent implementation of its school-based infrastructure, leading to gaps in support and uneven application of the MTSS framework.

Problem:

The inconsistent implementation of school-based infrastructure has resulted in several issues, including confusion among staff about roles and responsibilities, inadequate resource allocation, and disjointed communication between teams. These challenges have led to delays in identifying and addressing student needs, inefficiencies in delivering interventions, and frustration among educators who feel unsupported in their efforts to implement MTSS effectively.

Objective:

The goal is to strengthen and standardize the school-based infrastructure at Barnett Elementary, ensuring that all systems, resources, and processes are aligned and consistently implemented to support the MTSS framework. This will enable the school to deliver timely, effective interventions and support for all students.

Recognize/Define the issue:

Identify the barriers:

Develop and action plan:



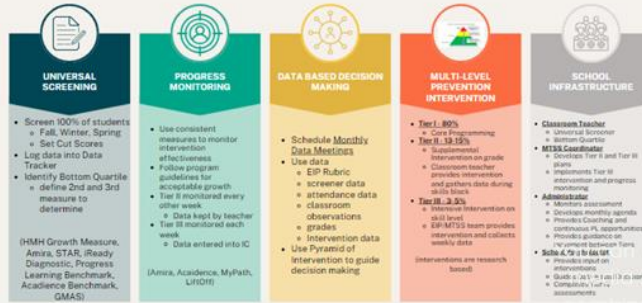
Organizational Framework



IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

MTSS IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

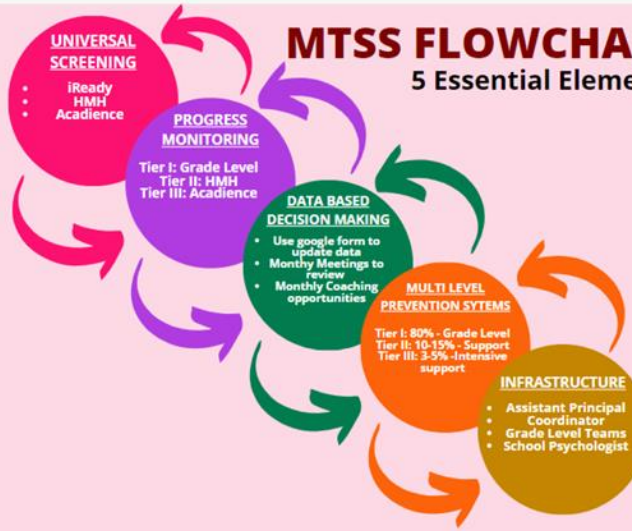
FOR CONSISTENT IMPLEMENTATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT



MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric

MTSS FLOWCHART

5 Essential Elements



Document Links

**2024 MTSS HANDBOOK
STUDENT DATA TRACKERS
MTSS TIER MOVEMENT
TIER II STUDENTS
TIER III STUDENTS
COACHING OPPORTUNITIES
DATA BASED AGENDAS**

Final Evaluation



Student Data Tracker

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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
1	Spring 2024 Math Universal Screener													2024-25 Universal Screener			
2	Student	Homeroom	Scale Score	Overall Placement	5-Level Overall Relative Placement	Number & Operations Placement	Number & Operations Relative Placement	Algebra & Algebraic Thinking Placement	Algebra & Algebraic Thinking Relative Placement	Measurement & Data Placement	Measurement & Data Relative Placement	Geometry Placement	Geometry Relative Placement	August	November	February	
3																	
4																	
5																	
6																	
7																	
8																	
9																	
10																	
11																	
12																	
13																	
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20																	

MTSS Tier Movement

Please complete this form one week prior to our Data Meeting. This form will be used to make data informed decisions on tier movement. When completing this form, please log your contact with the parent in the 'contacts' log of IC.

Not shared

* Indicates required question

Student Name: *

Your answer: _____

Student Grade: *

PreK
 K
 1
 2
 3
 4
 5

Has the student been retained? *

Yes, Grade level
 No

Attendance Data: (Absence/Tardies): *

Your answer: _____

Movement Options: *

Tier I to Tier II
 Tier II to Tier III
 Tier III to File Review
 Back to Tier II
 Dismiss

What 3 strategies have been tried at the Tier I/Tier II level?

Your answer: _____

Area of Struggle and What that looks like: *

Your answer: _____



Classroom Grades: *


Your answer: _____

Submit Clear form

Coaching Opportunities

Please complete this form to request assistance with any of the 5 essential elements of MTSS.

 Not shared

Teacher Name

Your answer _____

Which of the 5 Essential Elements are you struggling with?

Universal Screening

Progress Monitoring

Data-Based Decision Making

Multi-Tiered Prevention/Intervention

School Infrastructure

What can we help you with?

Your answer _____

Submit Clear form

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Data Based Agendas ☆ 📄 🔄

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:D1 | fx Agenda

Agenda				E	F	G	H	I
Date								
Subject	Link	Notes						
MTSS Handbook		Organizational Framework						
PL Topic		MTSS Rubric						
Universal Screener		All students Assessed						
Student Data Trackers	5th Grade Student Tracker 4th Grade Student Tracker 3rd Grade Student Tracker 2nd Grade Student Tracker 1st Grade Student Tracker	Assessment data included for all students						
Data Review	Tier Movement Spreadsheet	Data for movement between tiers must be entered into spreadsheet 1 week prior to meeting date						
Tier II Progress	Tier II Students	Tier II placement 10 -15%						
Tier III Progress	Tier III Students	Tier III placement 3-5%						
Coaching Opportunities	Coaching	Assistance with Interventions, reviewing data, tier placement						
GaDOE	GaDOE - MTSS							
MTSS Rubric	Implementation Rubric							
Questions/Comments								
Next Meeting Date:								

+ ☰ August ▾ September ▾ October ▾ November ▾ December ▾ January ▾ February ▾ March ▾ April ▾ May ▾

Exit Ticket #1

Please complete this form to give the presenter your feedback on day one.



Not shared

What was the clearest part of today's presentation?

Your answer

What was the muddiest (most unclear) part of today's presentation?

Your answer

What do you feel would make today's presentation more meaningful?

Your answer

Which piece of today's presentation would you like to quickly review on day two?

- Universal Screeners
- Progress Monitoring
- Group Presentations

Submit


Clear form

Exit Ticket #2

Please complete this form to give the presenter your feedback on day one.

 [Switch account](#)



 Not shared

What was the clearest part of today's presentation?

Your answer

What was the muddiest (most unclear) part of today's presentation?

Your answer

What do you feel would make todays presentation more meaningful?

Your answer

Which piece of today's presentation would you like to quickly review on day three?

- Data Based Decision Making
- Multi Level Prevention/Intervention System
- Group Presentations

Submit

Clear form



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Final Evaluation

Please complete

 Not shared

Share a short statement about your new learning relative to the 5 Essential Elements of MTSS.

Your answer _____

As a result of the professional learning, which of the 5 Essential Elements do you feel you have a clearer understanding (or need more clarification)?

Universal Screening
 Progress Monitoring
 Data Based Decision Making
 Multi-Tiered Prevention/Intervention System
 School Infrastructure

As a result of the professional learning, did you and your team gain clarity in your knowledge/understanding of the MTSS framework and Implementation?

Your answer _____

In which of the 5 elements did you experience the most growth? and how/why?

Your answer _____

As a result of this professional learning, do you feel that there is a more consistent organizational framework for implementing the MTSS framework?

Yes
 No
 Would like additional training for my team to clarify some points

As a result of this professional learning, how do you see continuous improvement occurring for MTSS Implementation?

Your answer _____

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Appendix B: The Questionnaire

The Inconsistent Implementation and Continuous Improvement of Elementary School-
Based Multi-Tiered System of Support

by

Cheryl Holbrook Barnett

Interview Questions

1. To get us started let's get some basic information; What is your position in the school organization, MTSS Team, and what is your experience level in education?
2. What is your knowledge/understanding level with the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)? (minimal knowledge or understanding; **novice**, basic knowledge although still an unclear understanding; **developing**, basic knowledge and understanding; **proficient**, well developed knowledge and clear understanding; **expert**)
3. In your own words, explain the purpose of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework?
4. In your own words, explain the goal(s) of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework?
5. Do you feel that all students can or do benefit from the MTSS framework?
6. Can you explain how the MTSS framework is implemented at your school?

7. Referring to the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (Home | Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.), which of the 5 implementation steps are the most problematic to implement?
8. Referring to the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (Home | Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.), of the 5 implementation steps that were mentioned, why are they problematic to implement?
9. Referring to the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (Home | Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.), which of the 5 implementation steps are the least problematic to implement?
10. Referring to the MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (Home | Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.), of the 5 implementation steps that were mentioned, what makes them easier to implement?
11. What supports does your school have in place to guide the teachers and staff to a deeper level of knowledge and understanding of the implementation process?
12. What supports would your school find most helpful to guide them to a deeper level of knowledge and understanding of the implementation process?
13. Are there any other components of the MTSS framework or the implementation of the MTSS framework that you would like to discuss further?
14. Applying your level of understanding of the MTSS framework, how do you see MTSS contributing to social change in the educational field?

To extend the interview use the following prompts:

Tell me more...

Can you expand on that?

Could you elaborate?

Is there anything else you would like to add?