



The Complete MTSS eBook

Strategies for School
Leaders and Educators

What’s in This eBook?

The [Multi-Tiered System of Supports \(MTSS\)](#) is not just another educational buzzword—it's a transformative approach that can significantly enhance the success and well-being of students. Whether you're just starting out with MTSS or looking to refine your school district's current practices, this comprehensive eBook has something for everyone.

In the following chapters, you'll find detailed information on the foundational principles of MTSS and its core components, as well as practical steps for implementation at various tiers of intervention. We'll cover universal, targeted, and intensive interventions, and provide strategies for data-driven decision-making, behavior and social-emotional support. We'll also share how to engage families and communities in the process.

Each chapter is designed to equip you with the knowledge and tools necessary to ensure all students are on a trajectory to achieve their full potential. By the end of this eBook, you'll have a clear understanding of how to create a supportive and effective learning environment for every student in your school.

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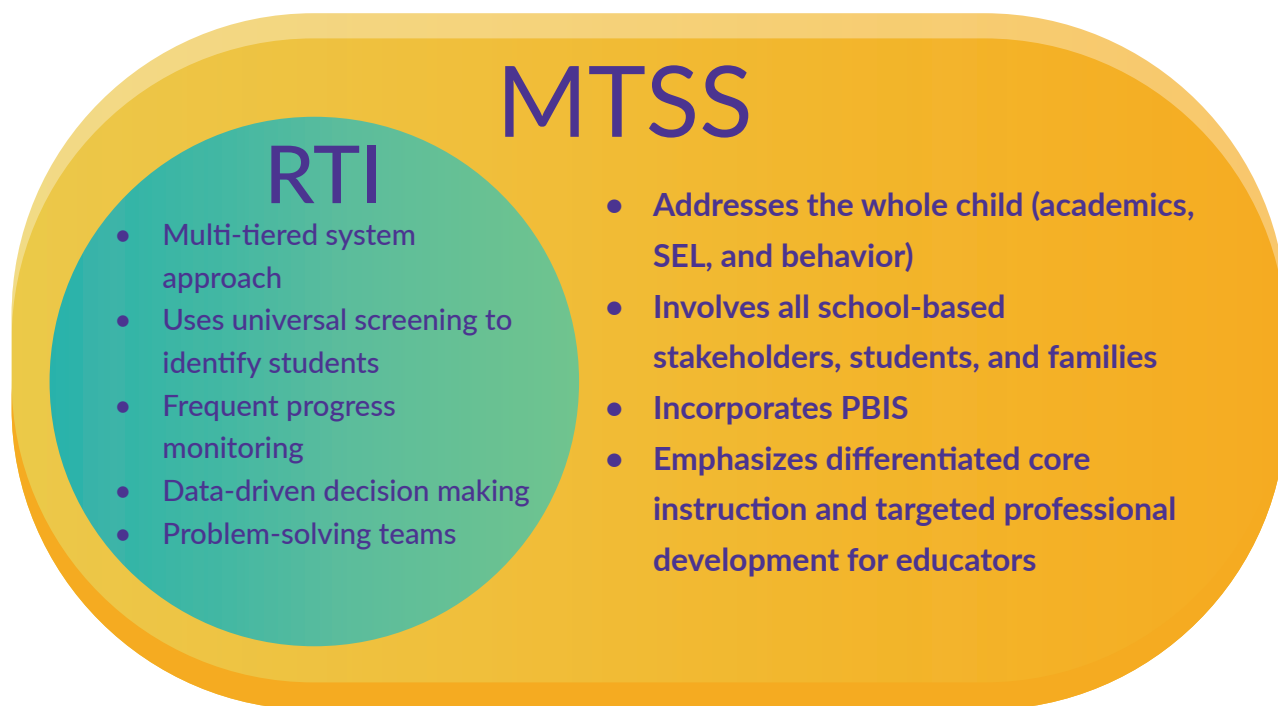
Chapter 1: Introduction to MTSS

What is MTSS?

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) is a proactive and systematic approach to providing high-quality instruction and interventions that are matched to students' needs. It integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavioral issues.

What's the difference between RTI and MTSS?

Response to Intervention (RTI) is excellent for addressing academic challenges, but it typically doesn't cover behavioral and social-emotional needs—this is where MTSS comes in. MTSS encompasses both academic and behavioral supports, integrating RTI and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) into a comprehensive framework for addressing the diverse needs of all students.



Why is MTSS essential in K-12 education?

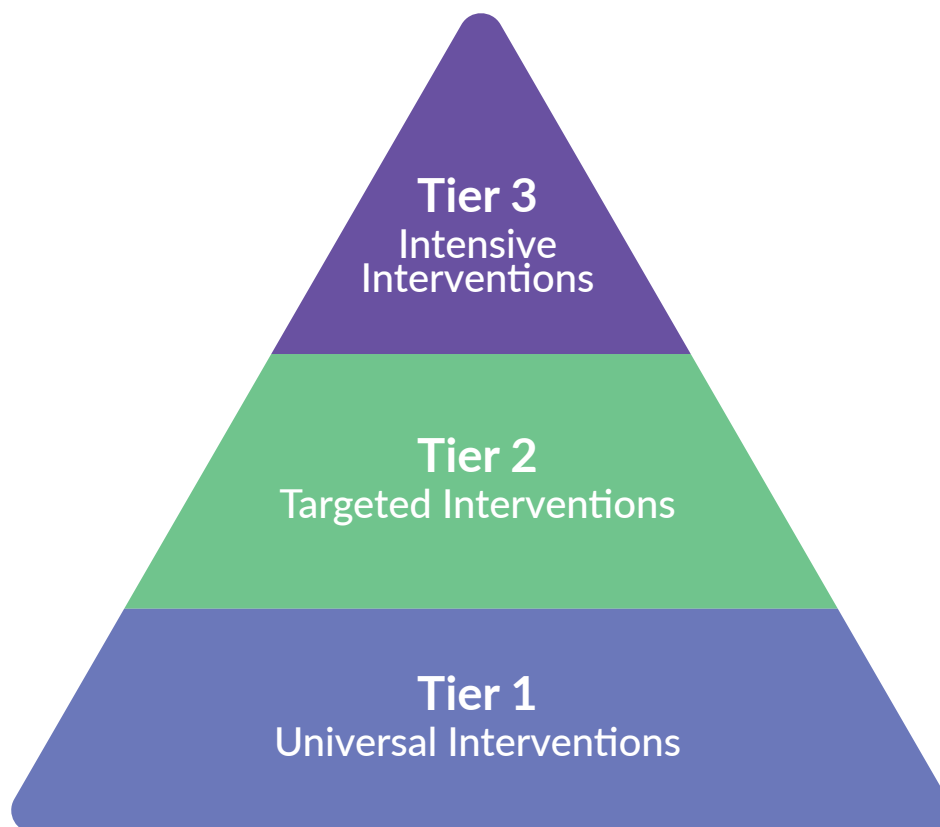
Imagine a school where every student gets exactly the support they need to thrive—this is the promise of MTSS. MTSS ensures that **all students** receive the appropriate level of support based on their individual needs. It promotes early identification of learning and behavioral challenges, allowing for timely interventions. This systematic approach helps improve student outcomes, reduces the need for special education services, and fosters a positive school environment.

Chapter 2: Core Components of MTSS in K-12 Schools

At the heart of MTSS is a framework that ensures every student receives the right level of help at the right time. This framework consists of several core components that guide the implementation and effectiveness of MTSS in schools. These components include a tiered system of support, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making.

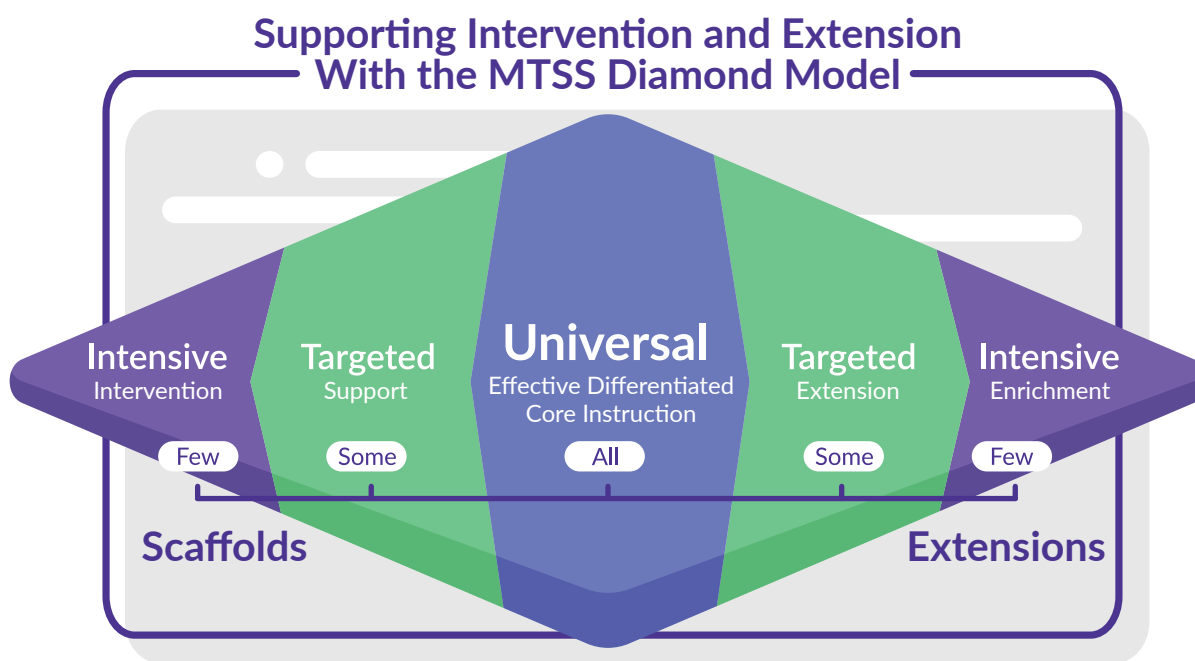
Tiers of Support

- **Tier 1:** Universal interventions provide high-quality instruction and support for all students. This is the foundation, where effective teaching practices and a positive school climate benefit everyone.
- **Tier 2:** Targeted interventions are designed for students who need a bit more support beyond the universal interventions in Tier 1. These might include small group instruction, targeted tutoring sessions, or additional academic resources to help catch them up.
- **Tier 3:** Intensive, individualized interventions are for students with significant needs. These are personalized plans that address specific academic or behavioral challenges, ensuring every student gets what they need to succeed.



The MTSS Triangle vs Diamond Model

You've likely seen the MTSS triangle, which illustrates three levels of support. But have you considered the diamond model? This approach not only highlights support for struggling students but also emphasizes the importance of extending learning for those who have already mastered the content. It underscores the significance of addressing needs at both ends of the academic spectrum, ensuring every student is challenged and supported.



Progress Monitoring

Regular progress monitoring is like a GPS for student achievement. It involves assessments that track student progress and the effectiveness of interventions. These tools are essential for making informed adjustments to instruction and support, ensuring that each student stays on the right path to success. For example, teachers might use weekly quizzes or monthly benchmark tests to evaluate student progress in specific areas, adjusting their instructional strategies based on the results to better support each student's learning journey.

Data-Based Decision Making

Data-based decision making is the backbone of MTSS. To put it plainly, educators need concrete data to inform decisions and interventions. Strategies like [Professional Learning Communities \(PLCs\)](#), root cause analysis (e.g., [the 5 Whys method](#)), and [multi-source data triangulation](#) help educators make informed, effective decisions that truly meet student needs. For instance, a school might analyze data from multiple sources, such as state tests, student attendance, and behavioral records, to identify trends and develop targeted interventions that address the root causes of student challenges.

Chapter 3: Implementing MTSS in a K-12 Setting

Getting Started

Starting with MTSS can feel overwhelming, but breaking it down into clear steps makes it much more manageable for all involved. You can begin by establishing a clear vision, setting specific goals, and developing a detailed action plan. Be sure to engage stakeholders from the outset – teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, students, and community members – to ensure everyone understands the purpose and benefits of MTSS. By following these steps, you can create a strong foundation for successful implementation.

Roles and Responsibilities

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are key to MTSS success. Administrators, teachers, and support staff each play a critical part:



Administrators

Provide leadership and allocate the necessary resources to support MTSS implementation. This includes setting aside a budget for professional development and acquiring tools for data collection and analysis. Administrators also ensure adherence to the MTSS framework by regularly reviewing implementation practices to maintain consistency across the school.



Teachers

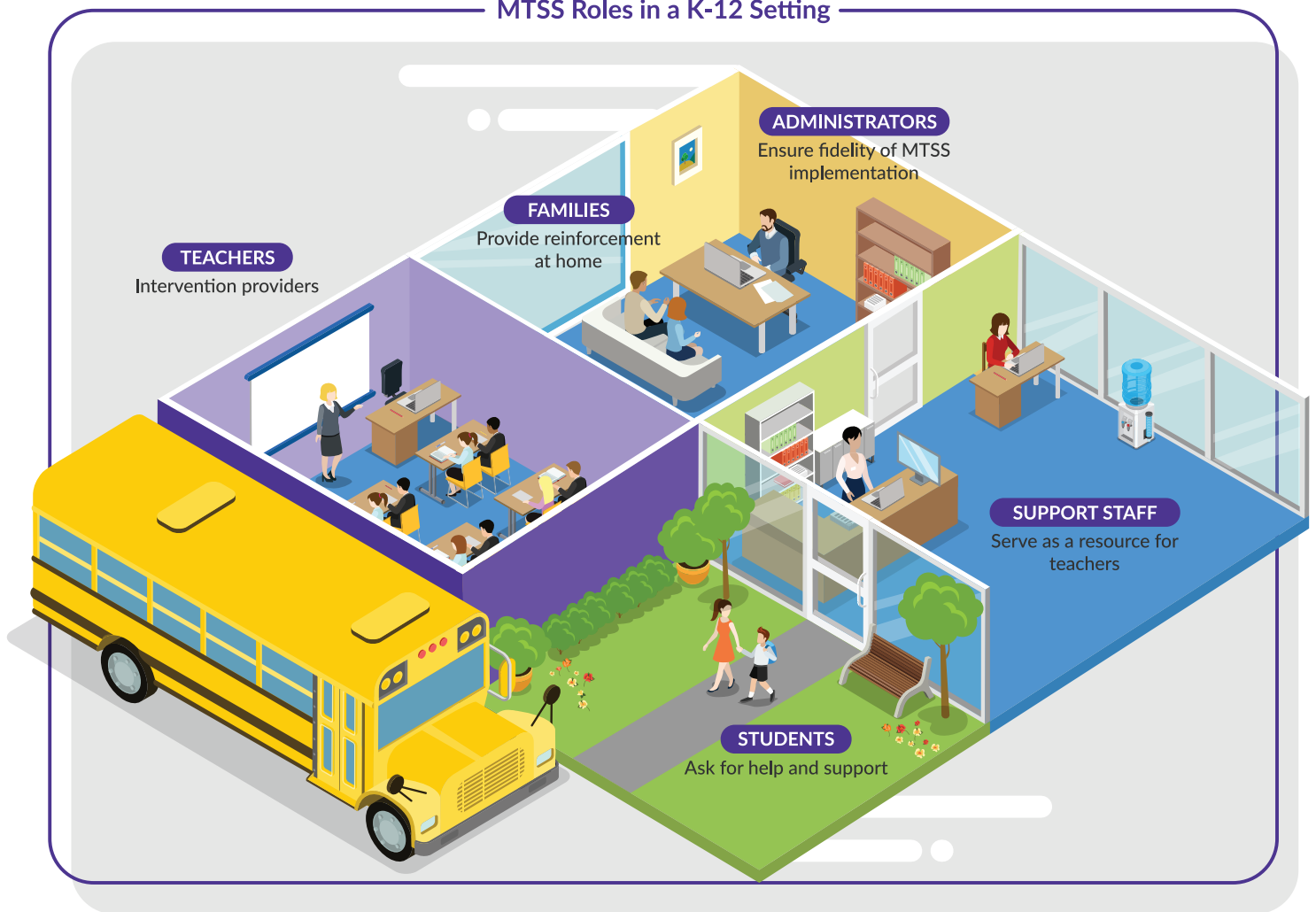
Implement tiered interventions and monitor student progress. A teacher will be on the frontlines, using differentiated instruction techniques in the classroom, and using progress monitoring tools to track student performance, adjusting interventions as needed based on the data collected.



Support Staff

Assist with data collection, intervention implementation, and providing additional resources, such as instructional materials, technology tools, and access to specialized programs. Oftentimes, a school counselor will help administer behavioral assessments, work with teachers to implement social-emotional learning programs, and coordinate with external specialists to support students with intensive needs.

MTSS Roles in a K-12 Setting



Building a Team

An [effective MTSS team](#) brings together various school staff who collaborate to support school-wide implementation. This team works on planning, monitoring, and evaluating MTSS practices, ensuring a cohesive approach that benefits all students. Typically, an MTSS team includes administrators, teachers, support staff, and specialists such as school psychologists and counselors. Once you've assembled a team, the group might meet bi-weekly or monthly to review student progress data, discuss the effectiveness of current interventions, and plan professional development sessions. By pooling their diverse expertise, the team can create more comprehensive and effective strategies to address student needs at all levels.

Chapter 3: Implementing MTSS in a K-12 Setting

Professional Development

Ongoing professional development is essential for equipping staff with the skills and knowledge needed to implement and sustain MTSS. A well-structured professional development plan should include multi-day training sessions and continuous learning opportunities to ensure staff are prepared for both initial and ongoing implementation.

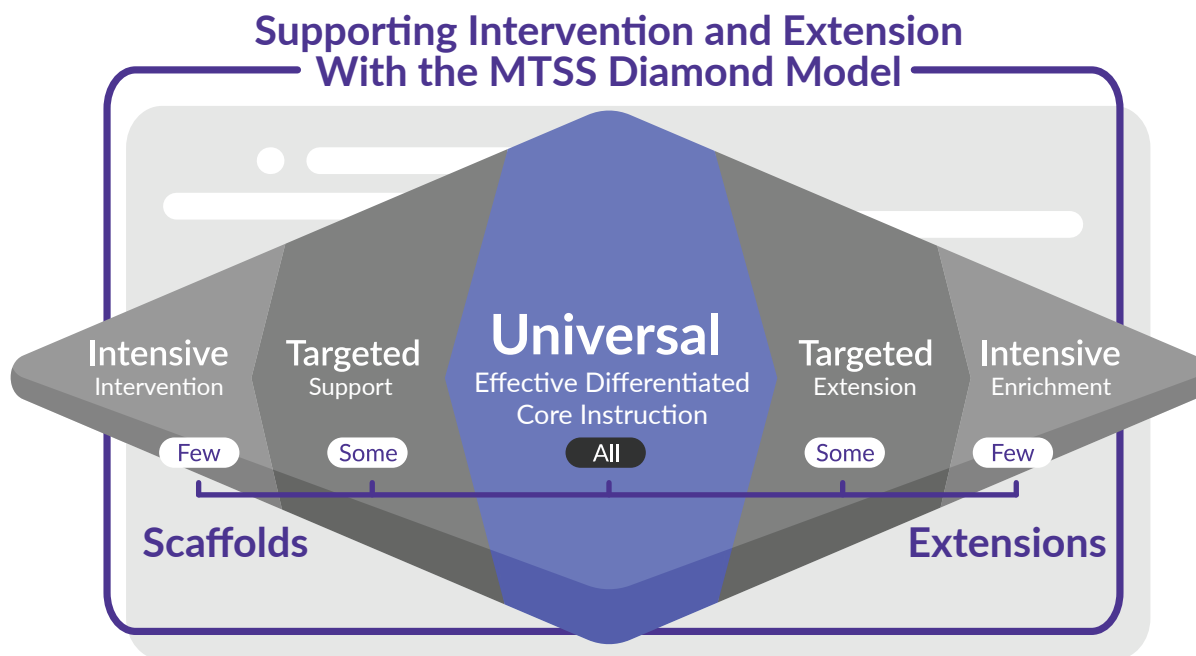
For successful professional development, schools should consider:

- **MTSS Coaches:** Facilitate the development of tiered support models, establish the necessary infrastructure, and assist with implementation efforts.
- **Continuous Training:** Provide annual training opportunities for all staff, including new hires, to ensure everyone is up-to-date with MTSS practices.
- **External Expertise:** Partner with third-party organizations, like [RethinkEd](#) or [First Educational Resources](#), to provide specialized training and resources that enhance staff knowledge and implementation strategies.



Chapter 4: Universal Interventions (Tier 1)

Laying a strong foundation is crucial for any successful educational framework, and universal interventions provide that through the high-quality instruction and support that every student needs. With a robust Tier 1, educators can ensure that all students have the best possible start.



Core Instruction

The foundation of Tier 1 is high-quality classroom instruction for all students. This includes effective teaching practices that engage and support every learner. Teachers should use evidence-based instructional strategies that cater to students' diverse learning styles, ensuring that each child has the opportunity to succeed. For example, incorporating [interactive activities](#) and technology can make lessons much more engaging and accessible to a wide range of learners.

Universal Screening

A universal screening tool answers the question, "Is this student performing at benchmark levels on key skills?" Therefore, it's important to utilize [tools and processes](#) to screen all students regularly, identifying those who may need additional support. Universal screening helps catch potential issues early on, allowing for timely interventions. For example, schools might regularly assess students on reading to identify those who struggle with literacy skills, in turn enabling teachers to provide targeted support before the gap widens.

Differentiated Instruction

Every student is unique, and [differentiated instruction](#) embraces this diversity. It’s important for teachers to implement strategies that meet diverse learning needs within their classrooms. This might involve varying teaching methods, materials, and assessments. For instance, teachers can use [flexible grouping](#), where students work in different groups based on their skill levels and/or learning preferences, to ensure that all students receive instruction tailored to their needs.

Classroom Management

Creating a welcoming and orderly classroom sets the stage for student success. It’s important to establish a positive classroom environment that promotes learning and minimizes disruptions. [Effective classroom management](#) is essential for successful Tier 1 interventions. Teachers can implement clear rules and routines, use positive reinforcement to encourage good behavior, and employ strategies such as seating arrangements to reduce distractions and foster a collaborative, productive learning environment.

Tier 1 Foundational Practices

Practice	Description
Alternate Seating in Own Space	Changing seating positions can help improve focus and productivity by reducing feelings of confinement. This is useful for easily distracted or fidgety students. Allow options like standing, kneeling, or using the floor as a workspace. Mark a perimeter around the desk to give freedom of movement within that space.
Acknowledging Positive Behavior	Recognizing positive behavior is highly effective for promoting and managing classroom conduct. Aim for a 5:1 ratio of praise to criticism, offering specific acknowledgments like “Great job” or “I like what you’re doing” when students follow rules or show kindness.
Use Calm, Neutral Tone	Using a calm, neutral tone helps deescalate students and keeps you in control. It’s effective when addressing problems, giving directives, or handling tense situations. This approach reduces tension, sets a positive example, and helps students remain calm and attentive.
Review PBIS Expectations and Tone	Regularly reviewing PBIS expectations helps reinforce school rules and procedures. This is effective when students are not following expectations, or as a mid-year refresher. Use a calm, neutral tone and incorporate short lessons, demonstrations, and discussions.

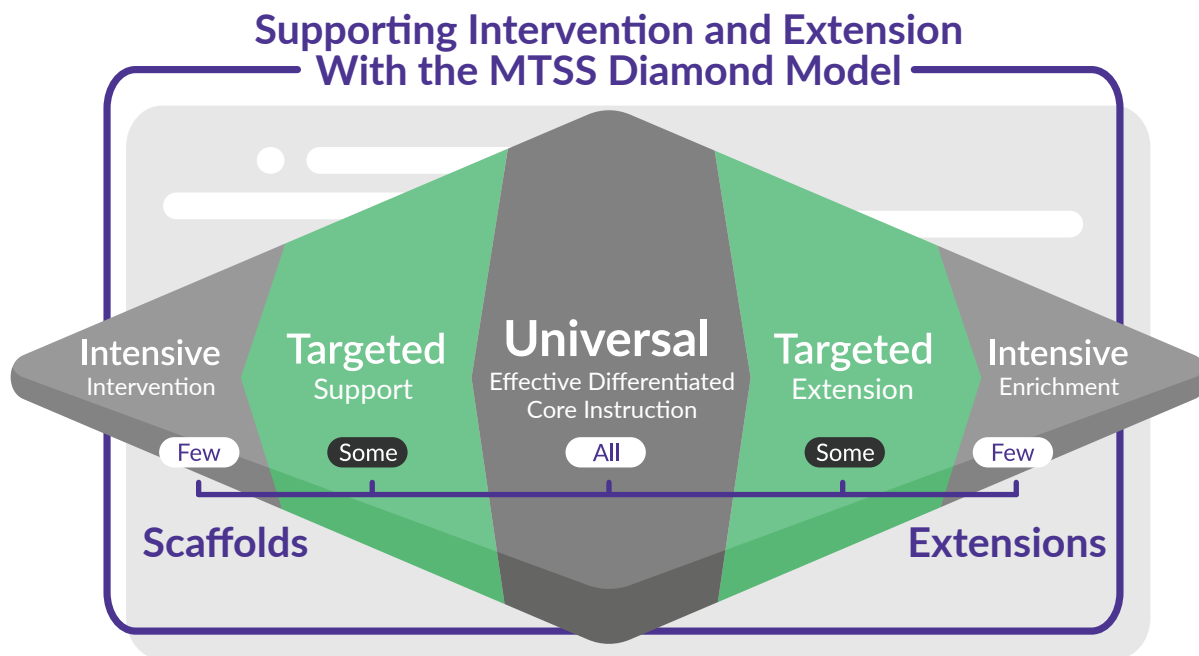
Tier 1 Foundational Practices Continued >

Practice	Description
Assign a Buddy or Partner	Pairing students can help manage time, model positive behaviors, and increase responsibility. It's effective for students who are easily distracted, need extra help, or struggle with organization. Choose a good role model, discuss expectations with both students privately, and then explain the purpose and expectations with them together.
Give Choices	Offering students choices can prevent power struggles and engage them in the decision-making process. This is useful when giving directions, managing reluctant behavior, and assigning tasks. For example, you might say "You can do your work at your desk or at the table – you get to decide."
Daily Planner	A daily planner helps students get organized, stay on top of assignments, and manage their responsibilities. It's useful for students who frequently lose work, struggle with transitions, or feel overwhelmed. Teach each student how to use the planner and regularly check to make sure they're keeping track of their tasks.
Have Student Repeat Directions Back	Having students repeat directions back helps ensure they understand and can follow through with tasks. To implement, read the directions to the students or class, simplify language, and have students repeat each part in their own words to confirm comprehension.
Stand While Working	Standing while working can benefit students who struggle to focus, providing a way to expend nervous energy and increase attention. It's especially helpful after long periods of sitting, offering a change of posture that can feel refreshing. Set clear boundaries, such as staying within a step of their desk.
Use a Timer	Using a timer helps students who struggle with time management and self-regulation. It provides structure and can motivate students to complete tasks by challenging them to "beat the clock." Place a small timer on your desk and set specific time limits for assignments or portions of assignments.

Source: [PBISWorld](#)

Chapter 5: Targeted Interventions (Tier 2)

When some students need a bit more help, targeted interventions come into play. These strategies provide additional support to ensure every student can thrive.



Identifying Students for Tier 2

Recognizing which students need extra support is crucial for effective intervention. Teachers will need to use criteria and processes to identify students who need additional support beyond Tier 1, including those who do not respond adequately to universal interventions. For example, students who continue to struggle with reading comprehension despite Tier 1 instruction might be [flagged for Tier 2 interventions](#) after a series of assessments and teacher observations.

Types of Interventions

To effectively support students who need additional help beyond Tier 1, teachers should implement various academic, behavioral, and social-emotional [interventions tailored](#) to each student's specific needs.

Progress Monitoring

Monitoring student progress in Tier 2 is essential for adjusting interventions. Teachers should regularly track the effectiveness of Tier 2 interventions and adjust them as needed based on student progress. Say, for example, a student is not showing improvement in their reading skills; the intervention strategy might be adjusted to incorporate different instructional methods or more frequent practice sessions.

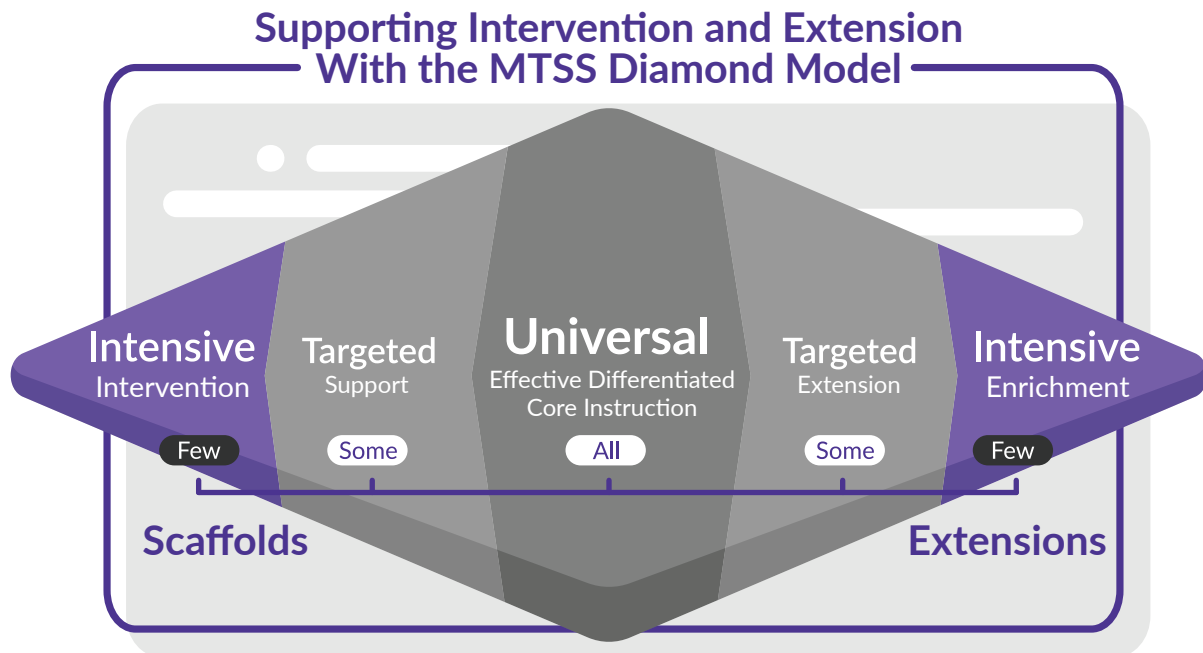
Tier 2 Intervention Practices

Practice	Description
Check-In/Check-Out	This activity improves student behavior and engagement by establishing a structured routine of morning check-ins and end-of-day check-outs with a staff member. Have the student check in each morning, receive feedback throughout the day from teachers, and then check out at the end of the day with the same staff member.
Check and Connect	This practice builds a strong connection with the school and enhances student support through periodic meetings with a school mentor. Assign a mentor who will meet regularly with the student, providing guidance and encouragement to foster a sense of belonging and accountability.
Check, Connect, and Expect	Integrating structured daily procedures with ongoing mentorship promotes better behavior and academic performance. This practice combines elements of Check In/Check Out with the added support of a dedicated mentor. Assign a mentor who will meet with the student periodically, while also having the student follow a daily check-in and check-out routine, ensuring continuous guidance and reinforcement throughout the day.
Mentoring	Assigning students a mentor, often from outside the school, provides a positive role model and promotes a strong attachment to the school. The mentor should meet regularly with the student, offering support and encouragement to improve behavior and academic outcomes.
Service Learning Programs	Participating in community work tied to academic learning can enhance academic skills and foster a sense of civic responsibility. Have students engage in community service activities that also connect to their academic curriculum.
Setting-Based Interventions	Modifying a student's environment can help manage undesired behaviors. Use structured recesses or specific strategies to help students manage behavior and adapt to different situations.
Social Skills/Social-Emotional Learning Interventions	To help students navigate social interactions and manage emotions, provide group instruction on social skills and social-emotional learning. Organize regular group sessions focusing on specific social skills or emotional regulation techniques.

Source: [Colorado Department of Education](#)

Chapter 6: Intensive Interventions (Tier 3)

For students with significant needs, intensive interventions offer the personalized support necessary to help them succeed. Using Tier 3, educators can address the most challenging academic and behavioral issues, ensuring every student can move forward.



Identifying Students for Tier 3

[Pinpointing students](#) who need the most intensive support is vital for this success. Teachers should develop specific criteria and processes to identify students requiring intensive, individualized support. For instance, students who have simply not responded to Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions, despite consistent efforts, might be candidates

Individualized Interventions

Every student is unique, and individualized interventions are designed to meet those unique needs. That's why it's important to design and implement [personalized interventions](#) that address each student's specific challenges. One example is offering one-on-one tutoring sessions using a specialized literacy program tailored to students with severe [reading difficulties](#).

Collaboration with Specialists

Teamwork is essential for effective Tier 3 interventions. Teachers should work closely with special education and mental health professionals to provide comprehensive support to these students. For example, a school psychologist might conduct detailed assessments, while a special education teacher collaborates with classroom teachers to develop and implement a tailored intervention plan. This holistic approach ensures that all aspects of a student's needs are addressed.

Monitoring Progress and Adjusting Interventions

Continuous monitoring and adjustments are essential for any effective support system. Regularly monitor the effectiveness of interventions and make necessary adjustments to ensure student success. For instance, if a student’s progress plateaus, the intervention team might revise the approach, incorporating new strategies or increasing the intensity of support to better meet the student’s needs.

Tier 3 Intervention Practices

Note: Students receiving Tier 3 support typically continue to receive Tier 2 interventions listed on page 12. In many cases, a combination of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions is used to provide the most comprehensive support.

Practice	Description
Alternatives to Suspension	This strategy is effective for students who get into trouble frequently and involves offering various alternatives to suspension such as community or school service, mentoring, alternative programming, and more. Examples of school service could be assisting custodial staff with tasks such as lunch clean-up.
Behavior Contract	Utilize a daily behavior form, chart, or report card that includes the main problem behaviors. The student is rated each period or hour. The student’s behavior is reviewed daily with them, discussing how they did and what they might want to change for the next day.
Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)	A tailored plan to address significant behavior problems, involving teachers, support staff, student, and families. It includes tracking behavior patterns, possibly conducting a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA), and implementing specific interventions. Regularly review and adjust the plan as needed.
Behavior Meetings	Regular meetings to ensure consistent communication between home and school, involving all relevant parties to update and adjust behavior plans. These meetings help keep everyone aligned and keep families engaged. For Tier 3 students, these meetings are crucial. They follow a structured agenda, and focus on discussing and refining behavior strategies while maintaining a calm and positive atmosphere.

Tier 3 Intervention Practices Continued >

Practice	Description
Structured Breaks	These breaks provide students with time to cool down, away from stressful situations, and help avoid power struggles. They are especially beneficial for students with poor attention, focus, or those needing sensory input. To implement, create a “BREAK” card and use a timer for up to five minutes. Identify a safe area for the break, and thank students for cooperating. Students or teachers can initiate breaks, with limits set to prevent abuse.
Forced Choice Reinforcement Survey	Provides valuable insights into what types of rewards and incentives motivate a student, making it easier to develop behavior plans. It is quick, easy to administer, and simple to score. For instance, if a student shows disinterest in schoolwork or doesn’t respond to typical rewards, this survey can help identify their preferred incentives, guiding the creation of a personalized reward system.
Individual & Visual Schedules	These schedules provide students with clear routines and instructions, helping them stay organized and focused throughout the day. Particularly useful for students who are disorganized, on the autism spectrum, or strong visual learners. For example, creating a laminated daily schedule that the student can mark off as they complete tasks helps them stay on track. This schedule can be taped to the student’s desk or placed in their planner.
Non-Verbal Cues & Signals	Use discrete gestures to communicate with students without calling attention to them in a negative manner. These signals can refocus attention, redirect behavior, and encourage participation without disrupting the class. Examples include using a thumbs up for encouragement, a gentle tap on the desk to regain attention, or a finger on the lips to signal quiet.
Reward System	These systems provide positive reinforcement to encourage desired behaviors and academic performance. They offer students tangible incentives for meeting goals, such as tokens, praise, or privileges. For example, a token economy where students earn tokens that can be exchanged for small prizes or free time.

Tier 3 Intervention Practices Continued >

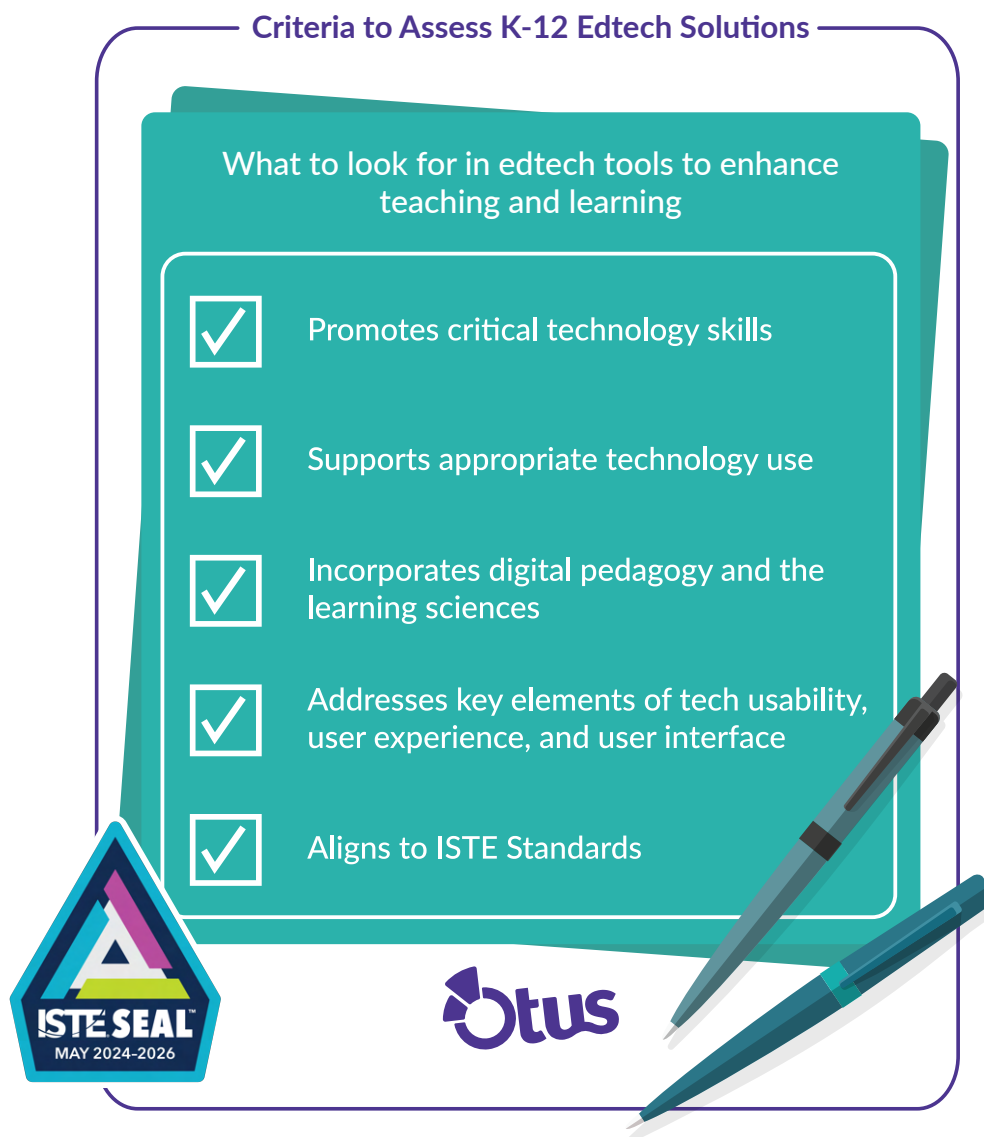
Practice	Description
Sensory Tools	Sensory tools can improve student focus, behavior, and overall contentment by addressing sensory needs. These tools are especially helpful for students with sensory sensitivities, ADD/ADHD, or those on the autism spectrum. Examples include using headphones to block out noise, weighted objects for calming pressure, textured items like Velcro strips, and fidget toys.
Social Stories	Social stories are effective for teaching students routines, expectations, and behavioral standards through a personalized and visual format. They provide visual examples and reinforce correct behavior, making it easier for students to grasp social norms, routines, and expectations. To create, outline the steps of a routine, develop simple explanatory sentences for each step, and pair them with relevant pictures.
Structured Time Out	A quick and effective method for managing frequent behavioral issues. They provide a consistent consequence that helps students clam down and return to learning. Examples include sending a student to a designated area of the classroom ("in-class break") or another space outside the classroom ("out-of-class break") for a set period of time.
The Praise Game	A classroom intervention designed to reinforce positive behaviors and support the needs of Tier 2 and 3 students without singling them out. Simply divide your students into teams and write each team's name on the board. Teach them three key expectations, such as following instructions and participating. Every five minutes, award points to teams meeting all expectations. At the end of class, teams with at least 80% of the possible points receive a prize.

Source: [PBISWorld](#)

Chapter 7: Data Systems and Tools

Selecting Data Systems

Choosing the right data system is a foundational step in supporting MTSS implementation. Look for data systems that meet the specific needs of your school or district, focusing on essential features such as ease of use, data integration, and robust reporting capabilities. A user-friendly interface can help teachers quickly access student data, while strong data integration ensures that information from various sources is consolidated into a single platform. You might consider creating a checklist to evaluate software options, ensuring they meet all of your requirements.



The ISTE Seal is an example of a product certification that school leaders can trust when searching for platforms that support teaching practices backed by research and learning sciences. The complete ISTE Seal Findings Report for Otus can be found [here](#).

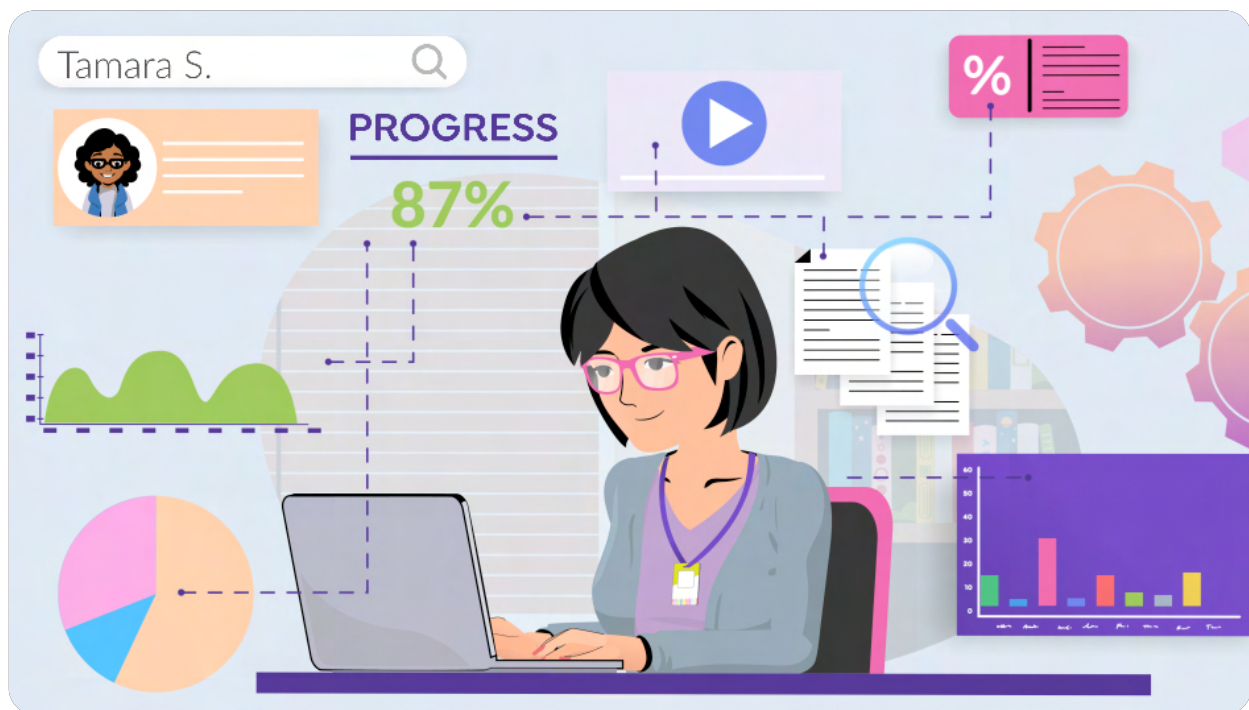
Using Data Effectively

Data is **powerful** when used effectively to [drive instructional decisions and interventions](#). It's absolutely necessary to analyze and interpret data to identify trends, monitor student progress, and adjust strategies as needed. If data reveals that a particular intervention is not yielding the expected results, educators can swiftly adjust their approach. Regular data reviews in team meetings ([see Chapter 3](#)) can facilitate collaborative problem-solving and ensure that interventions are tailored to student needs.

Technology Integration

Integrating technology with your data systems can significantly enhance [MTSS implementation](#). Leverage technology to streamline processes and improve the effectiveness of interventions. For example, integrating assessment tools with your data system can automate progress monitoring, providing real-time insights into student performance. This seamless integration allows educators to quickly identify students who need additional support and adjust interventions accordingly, ensuring that every student receives timely and appropriate help.

Click below to see how Otus supports progress monitoring and MTSS:



Chapter 8: MTSS for Behavior and Social-Emotional Support

Behavioral Interventions

Effective behavioral [interventions](#) are key to creating a positive learning environment. Implement strategies to address behavioral issues, such as positive reinforcement and [behavior contracts](#). Teachers might use a [token economy system](#) to reward positive behavior, encouraging students to follow classroom rules and improve their conduct over time.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Supporting students' [emotional well-being](#) is essential for their overall success, both inside and outside the classroom. Integrate into MTSS to teach skills like empathy, self-regulation, and social interaction. One idea is to incorporate [daily mindfulness exercises](#) or [regular classroom meetings](#) that help students develop these skills, ultimately fostering a more supportive and connected classroom community.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Aligning PBIS with MTSS creates a comprehensive framework for supporting student behavior and social-emotional development. For example, schools can implement [school-wide PBIS strategies](#), such as setting clear behavioral expectations and recognizing positive behaviors, to enhance the overall school climate and support student success.

10 Essential Elements of PBIS

1. **Proactive Approach to Behavior:** Schools establish clear behavioral expectations and emphasize preventive measures.
2. **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Schools collect and analyze behavioral data to make informed decisions.
3. **Tiered Support System:** Implementation of school-wide strategies (Tier 1), targeted interventions (Tier 2), and intensive interventions (Tier 3).
4. **Consistency and Fidelity:** All staff implement PBIS strategies and teams regularly check-in to ensure practices are implemented as intended.
5. **Positive Reinforcement:** Positive reinforcement is used when students are meeting behavioral expectations.
6. **Ongoing Professional Development:** Staff are trained on PBIS principles and strategies and have access to coaches who can assist with implementation.
7. **Family and Community Involvement:** Families are actively involved and receive regular communication about behavioral expectations.
8. **Inclusive Practices:** The school climate is conducive to learning and all students feel valued and included.
9. **Leadership and Team-Based Approach:** Administrators demonstrate a strong support for PBIS and have a dedicated team overseeing the implementation.
10. **Sustainability:** Teams adapt and refine practices based on data and feedback.

Chapter 9: Family and Community Engagement

Involving Families

For MTSS to succeed in your school, it is a must that families are engaged in the implementation process. This can be achieved through regular communication and involvement in decision-making. School leaders should adopt strategies for effective family engagement, such as hosting informational meetings and workshops, sending regular updates via school newsletters, and involving parents in intervention planning.

Community Resources

Leveraging community resources can provide additional support for students. [Form partnerships](#) with local organizations, agencies, and businesses to enhance the resources available to students. For example, a school might collaborate with a local mental health agency to provide counseling services or with a business to offer mentorship programs.

Communications Strategies

As mentioned above, it's important for schools to develop effective communication strategies to keep families informed and involved in their child's progress and the school's MTSS efforts. Examples of communication strategies include:

- Using [digital platforms](#) for regular updates
- Adding an MTSS focus to parent-teacher conferences
- Creating a parent advisory board
- Hosting informational webinars and workshops
- Sending home regular progress reports
- Sharing MTSS successes during school open houses and community events



Chapter 10: Evaluating and Sustaining MTSS

Continuous Improvement

Regular evaluation of your school's MTSS program is essential to its success. Assess the effectiveness of MTSS implementation and use data to drive your decisions. Schools should conduct regular – typically annual or quarterly – reviews of intervention outcomes and adjust their strategies based on the findings to drive continuous improvement.

Sustaining MTSS Efforts

Ensuring the long-term success of MTSS requires embedding these new practices not only into each classroom but throughout the entire school culture. School leaders must provide ongoing training and support for staff to maintain a high level of implementation fidelity. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this might include regular professional development sessions, coaching, and peer collaboration opportunities.

Scaling Up

Now that MTSS has been successfully implemented in one school site and staff and students are seeing positive results, what's next? Expanding MTSS to additional schools or even neighboring districts can amplify its impact! Schools that have successfully implemented MTSS might serve as model sites, offering tours and mentorship to other schools in the district looking to adopt similar practices.