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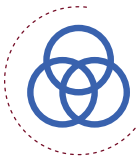
PBIS

Positive Behavioral
Interventions & Supports

EFFECTIVE DISTRICT SUPPORTS FOR ADVANCED TIERS IMPLEMENTATION

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Effective District Supports for Advanced Tiers Implementation

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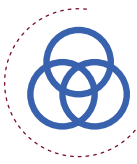
SPS = Southbridge Public Schools; UCONN = University of Connecticut

Purpose

The third in a series of three evaluation briefs (Derian-Toth et al., April 2025; Aug 2025; & Sept 2025), this brief describes how a district in receivership (state takeover) invested in PBIS to (a) enhance their **systems** to support staff, (b) implement evidence-based **practices** to support students, (c) use **data** to guide their implementation, and (d) ensure equitable supports for all students, including students with disabilities, to experience improved **outcomes**.¹

In this brief, we introduce Southbridge Public Schools, describe districtwide systems and data developed to support **Tier 2 and 3 PBIS**, and highlight how these efforts improved access to interventions and student outcomes in the district's elementary and middle schools.

1. Descriptions of purpose repeat across briefs to provide consistent information.



Introduction

In a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework, like PBIS, Tier 2 and 3 systems provide targeted and intensive support to students who are not successful with Tier 1 supports alone. Effective implementation of Tier 2 and 3 systems depends on a solid foundation of Tier 1 supports, so as not to overburden available resources (Kittelman et al., 2025).

- **Tier 2** supports often involve targeted, skill-based interventions that are efficient to implement (e.g., build on Tier 1, standardized implementation across students), readily accessible to students, and time-limited (see [Tier 2 Topic Page](#)¹ for more details).
- **Tier 3** supports are intensive and individualized to the needs of the student. They are coordinated across settings by a multidisciplinary team to support consistency and monitor progress (see [Tier 3 Topic Page](#)² for more details).

With support from the Center on PBIS, Southbridge Public Schools scaled implementation of Tiers 2 and 3 across four schools. In this brief, we examine the impact of their efforts and address a key **evaluation question**: Does districtwide training and coaching on Advanced Tiers PBIS systems and interventions result in (a) improved fidelity of implementation and (b) improved student outcomes?

The District Context³

Southbridge Public Schools (SPS) serves about 2,000 students, grades PreK through 12, across six schools in Massachusetts. Southbridge is fairly racially diverse

Key Takeaways

- A strong foundation in Tier 1 PBIS facilitates implementation of advanced tier systems, data, and practices.
- District teams are pivotal in developing and supporting advanced tier systems (e.g., data systems, procedures and routines, standardized templates) and consistently implementing across schools.
- Building capacity at the school and district levels through training and coaching structures supports implementation of advanced tiers with fidelity.

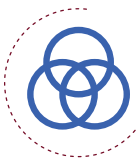
with 66% of the student population identifying as Latino/a, 26.5% as White, 4% as Black or African American, 2% as multiracial, 1.2% as Asian, and 0.3% as American Indian. The district is classified as “high needs” by the state. District data from the 2024-2025 school year indicate:

- 80.6% of students qualify for state support (e.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Department of Children and Families Foster Care Program, MassHealth/Medicaid)
- 27.5% of students are identified as having a disability
- 20% of students transferred into or out of the district after the start of the school year
- 34.6% speak a first language that is not English, and 19.9% are considered English-Language Learners

1. <https://www.pbis.org/pbis/tier-2>

2. <https://www.pbis.org/pbis/tier-3>

3. Descriptions of district context repeat across briefs to provide consistent information.



In 2016, SPS was designated as underperforming and placed under receivership due to a poor accountability rating from the state, based on low rates of graduation, attendance, percentage of students meeting or exceeding academic standards, and other indicators. For example, in 2014-2015, the four-year graduation rate was 63% overall (24% students with IEPs).

Beginning in 2018, SPS partnered with the Center on PBIS to demonstrate the effects of Center technical assistance on the district's (a) **local capacity** to support sustained and scaled PBIS implementation districtwide, (b) **implementation fidelity** of a full continuum of PBIS practices across tiers, and (c) **student outcomes** for all students (Freeman et al., 2020; [Derian-Toth et al., August 2025¹](#)), including those with disabilities ([Derian-Toth et al., April 2025²](#)).

Advanced Tiers PBIS Implementation in Southbridge

District Systems to Support Advanced Tiers PBIS

School teams received training in Check In Check Out (CICO) and Tier 2 referral and progress monitoring procedures in 2019-2020. Training in Advanced Tiers systems and procedures was provided to the district team and teams from the elementary schools over the 2022-2023 school year and expanded to the middle school the following year. All schools had a solid

foundation in Tier 1 PBIS (as demonstrated by scores of 70% or higher on the TFI) and had internal capacity to implement Tiers 2 and 3 (e.g., district personnel with FTE to support implementation, student problem-solving teams in each school).

Consistent with recommendations from the Center on PBIS (2022b, 2025), the district formed an Advanced Tiers Leadership Team in fall 2022 to steer implementation. Members included the director of elementary education, the special education director, and representatives from each school's student support team (SST). This team coordinated and aligned existing teams and resources and clarified roles and procedures. For example, the district team clarified the process for identifying and providing support to students across all three tiers of PBIS by developing and training staff on a "tiered support flowchart" to support consistent and data informed implementation of Tier 2 and 3 supports. The district team clarified the roles and responsibilities of the school teams supporting students' social, emotional, behavioral and academic outcomes (see **Table 1** for a description of each school team). The district Advanced Tiers team also reviewed and revised common documents used across the district, such as the staff Request for Assistance Form and Safety Plan template.

1. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/coaching-classroom-pbis-to-support-educators-and-students>

2. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/scaling-pbis-districtwide-to-support-all-students-including-students-with-disabilities>

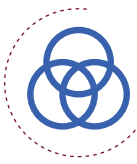


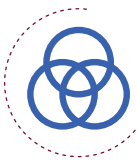
Table 1. SPS Roles and Responsibilities Across School Teams

School Team	Purpose	Outcome	Target Group	Team Membership
Tier 1 (Universal) Team	Provide a foundation of Tier 1, schoolwide, student support using the PBIS Framework that benefits all students	All schools see improvements in classroom management skills, school culture, academics, and attendance, as well as a reduction in student discipline referrals.	All students and staff of SPS	• Administrator • Tier I Coaches • Gen Ed Teacher • Special Ed Teacher • Parent/Guardian Student • Unified Arts Teacher
Student Support Team	Identify and problem solve for students not responding to Tier 1 supports, either academic, behavior, social, or emotional	Teams effectively support student achievement using Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports	Students not effectively progressing with Tier 1 supports	• Administrator • School Psychologist • Teacher • BCBA • School Counselor • Interventionists
Advanced Tiers Systems Team	Analyze Tier 2 and 3 systems for fidelity of implementation, outcomes, and access	Improved student outcomes and implementation fidelity and equal access	Students receiving Tier 2 or 3 supports and staff providing those supports	• Administrator • School Psychologist • BCBA • School Counselor
Special Education Team	Assess and address suspected and identified disabilities	Eligible or ineligible for specialized instruction	Students with suspected disabilities as identified through the SST process	• Special education professionals

The Advanced Tiers District Team developed and implemented a districtwide plan for providing training, coaching, and technical assistance to ensure (a) all staff received training and coaching in advanced tier systems, practices, and data collection; (b) advanced tier teams received additional training and technical assistance in team roles and responsibilities, behavioral theory, advanced tier systems and procedures, integration with other tiers, Advanced Tiers interventions, student identification and matching to

intervention, data-based decision-making, and progress monitoring; and (c) Advanced Tiers coaches received more in-depth training and technical assistance in their role, and advanced tier systems, data, and practices, including problem-solving challenges.

Over the years, SPS leaders have refined and enhanced their approaches by (a) routinely collecting and reviewing data on the fidelity and outcomes of advanced tiers PBIS and (b) engaging in team problem solving at the school and district level.



District Advanced Tiers PBIS Practices

The elementary and middle schools were already implementing a number of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions prior to 2022-2023, but many practices were not formalized, varied across schools in number and fidelity of implementation, and lacked a data-driven process for matching students to interventions and monitoring their progress. To address these inconsistencies, the Advanced Tiers District Leadership team outlined interventions elementary schools and the middle school should minimally have in place across all three tiers in Tiered Intervention Maps (See **Table 2**). This provided a way to ensure practices were evidence based and clarify entry criteria, outcome data, and fidelity data to be collected. The Tiered Intervention Map is a living document that is updated annually and used by (a) the SST to match students to interventions, (b) the Advanced Tiers Systems Team to monitor utilization and effectiveness of interventions, and (c) the district team to plan staff training on interventions.

Through the process of developing the Tiered Intervention Maps, the district team identified a need



for a basic function-based assessment and support process. At the time, function-based assessments and supports were accessible only through Special Education referral, which was resource intensive. The district trained school counselors and school-based BCBAs on a team-based, Basic FBA to BSP (Center on PBIS, 2022a; Loman et al., 2019) process.

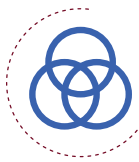
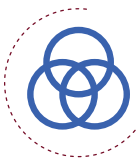


Table 2. Simplified Elementary Tiered Intervention Map

Area	Intervention	Evidence Based	Coordinator	Entry Criteria	Outcome Measure	Fidelity Measure
Tier 1	SEB	Tier 1 PBIS	Yes	Tier 1 Coaches	Everyone	- SWIS data - Attendance - DESSA - TFI - CMOT
		Second Step	Yes	- Teachers - SACs	Everyone	- SWIS data - DESSA
	Literacy	Enhanced Core Reading Instruction (ECRI)	Yes	- Teachers - Intervention Teachers	Everyone	DIBELS
	Math	Ready Math Curriculum	Yes	Teachers	Everyone	i-Ready
Tier 2	SEB	Check In Check Out (CICO)	Yes	SST Teams	Refer to decision grid	- CICO-SWIS - TFI - CICO Data Sheets
		Early Interventions in Reading (EIR)	Yes	- Reading Specialists - Intervention Teachers	Prescribed Instructional Focus Area (K-2)	DIBELS Progress Monitoring
	Literacy	Corrective Reading	Yes	- Teachers - Reading Specialists - Intervention Teachers	Prescribed Instructional Focus Area (3-5)	- DIBELS - i-Ready Placement Data
	Math	Ready Classroom Differentiated Lessons	Yes	Teachers	Analysis of student work and formative assessment data	- Unit Assessment - Checks for Understanding
Tier 3	SEB	Basic FBA/BIP	Yes	SAC's	Frequent, minor behavior that occurs in one or more settings	- Individualized per student - TFI - Fidelity checklist of key components
		Comprehensive FBA/BIP	Yes	BCBAs	Dangerous or high intensity behavior that occurs across settings	- Individualized per student - TFI - Fidelity checklist of key components
	Literacy	Lexia Wilson	Yes	Special education teachers	Data showing a lack of response to Tier 2 interventions	- Individualized per student - Usage checks - Lesson completion

SEB=Social, Emotional, Behavioral; CMOT=Classroom Management Observation Tool (Simonsen et al., 2020)



District Data to Support Advanced Tiers PBIS

The district uses a variety of data to identify students who may benefit from additional (i.e., Tier 2 or 3) support. Data sources include a social, emotional, and behavioral screener, the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA; Naglieri et al., 2011); office discipline referrals; attendance data; time out of class; academic data; and referrals by teachers or parents. To monitor implementation and outcomes of advanced tier PBIS practices, SPS district leaders built (a) routines for collecting and (b) data systems for examining Advanced Tiers practices and outcomes. Specifically, the district developed a way to collect data on the number of students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions across schools and their response to those interventions. These were organized into the district's data management system (Open Architects) and student problem-solving teams were trained in how to enter and update data on student utilization and response to Advanced Tiers interventions during regularly scheduled meetings. These data can be disaggregated by student, grade level, school, and tier of support to inform student, school- and district-level decision-making. Families were notified if their child was referred for additional supports and provided information on the intervention their child is enrolled in. Families were provided information on the intervention, how they could support skill development at home, and student progress.

SPS Schools

There are three elementary schools and one middle school in SPS. Elementary and middle schools began implementation of Tier 1 PBIS in 2018-2019 and were trained in Tier 2 PBIS in 2019-2020. The Advanced Tiers District Team was formed and trained in 2022-2023. Elementary schools received training in Tier 3 PBIS that same year (2022-2023), and the middle school was trained the following year in 2023-2024.

SPS experiences high turnover among principals and teachers. Over the last eight years (2017-18 to 2024-25) approximately one third of principals and teachers left and two thirds were retained across the district. For comparison, 84% of principals and 90% of teachers are retained, on average, across the state of MA. Despite high turnover, schools have strengthened their implementation fidelity of Tier 2 and 3 PBIS over time, as measured by the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI), though changes in team composition and implementation contributed to variability in scoring (see **Figure 1**). At the end of the first year of the District Advanced Tiers Team training (2022-2023), Tier 2 implementation improved by an average of 19 percentage points and Tier 3 implementation improved by an average of 21 percentage point from the prior year across schools. The middle school made additional gains in both Tier 2 and Tier 3 implementation the following year after receiving training in Tier 3 supports.

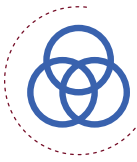
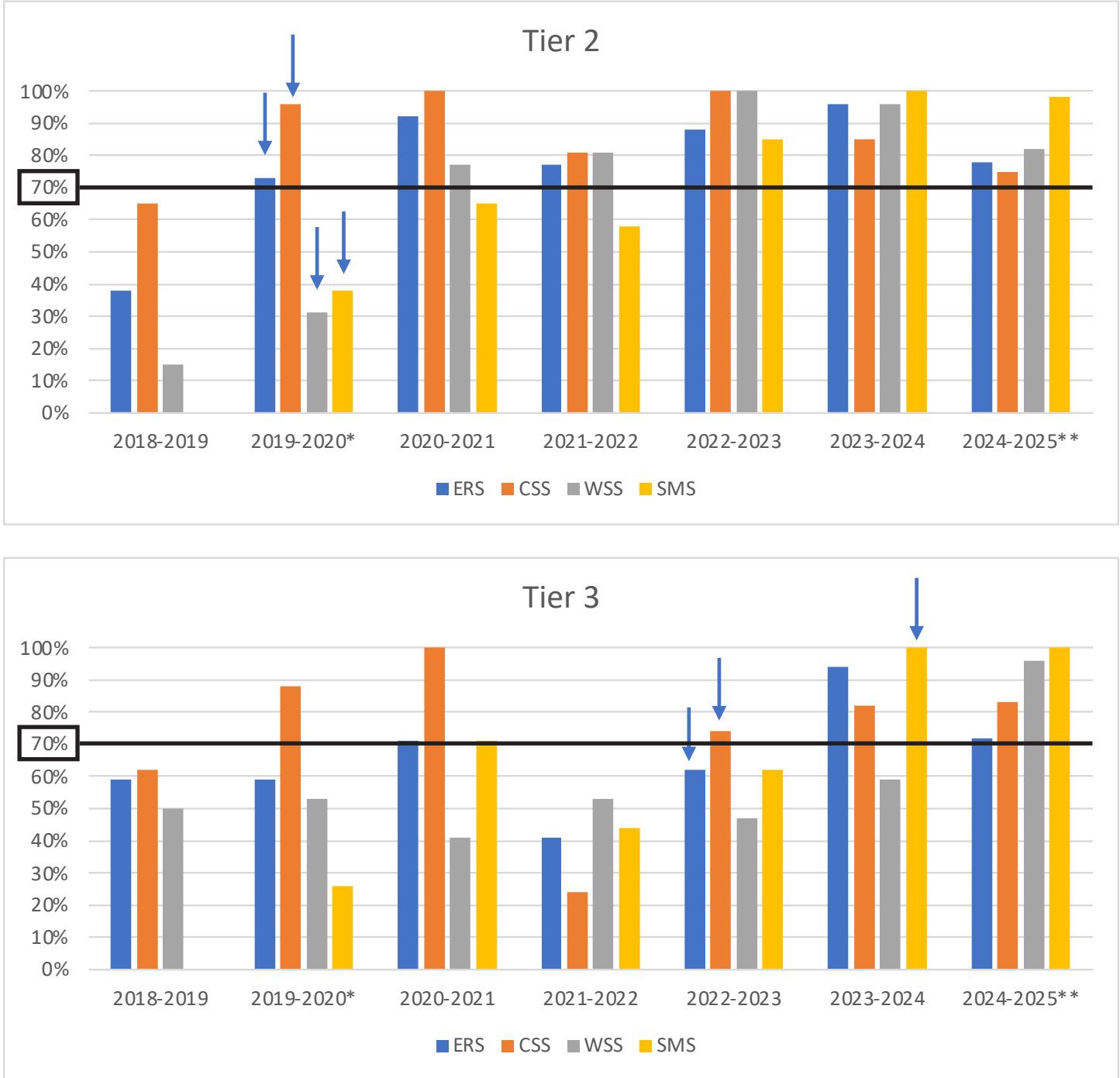
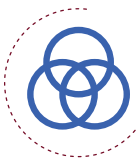


Figure 1. Tiered Fidelity Inventory by Year Across Schools: Tiers 2 and 3



Note: Arrows indicate the year in which each school received Tier 2 or Tier 3 team training, respectively; *The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted planned data collection in Spring 2020; teams completed the TFI for the prior school year in November 2020; **The TFI 3.0 was used to assess fidelity in the 2024-2025 school year.



Implementation Outcomes

In this section, we share initial outcomes of advanced tier implementation in SPS.

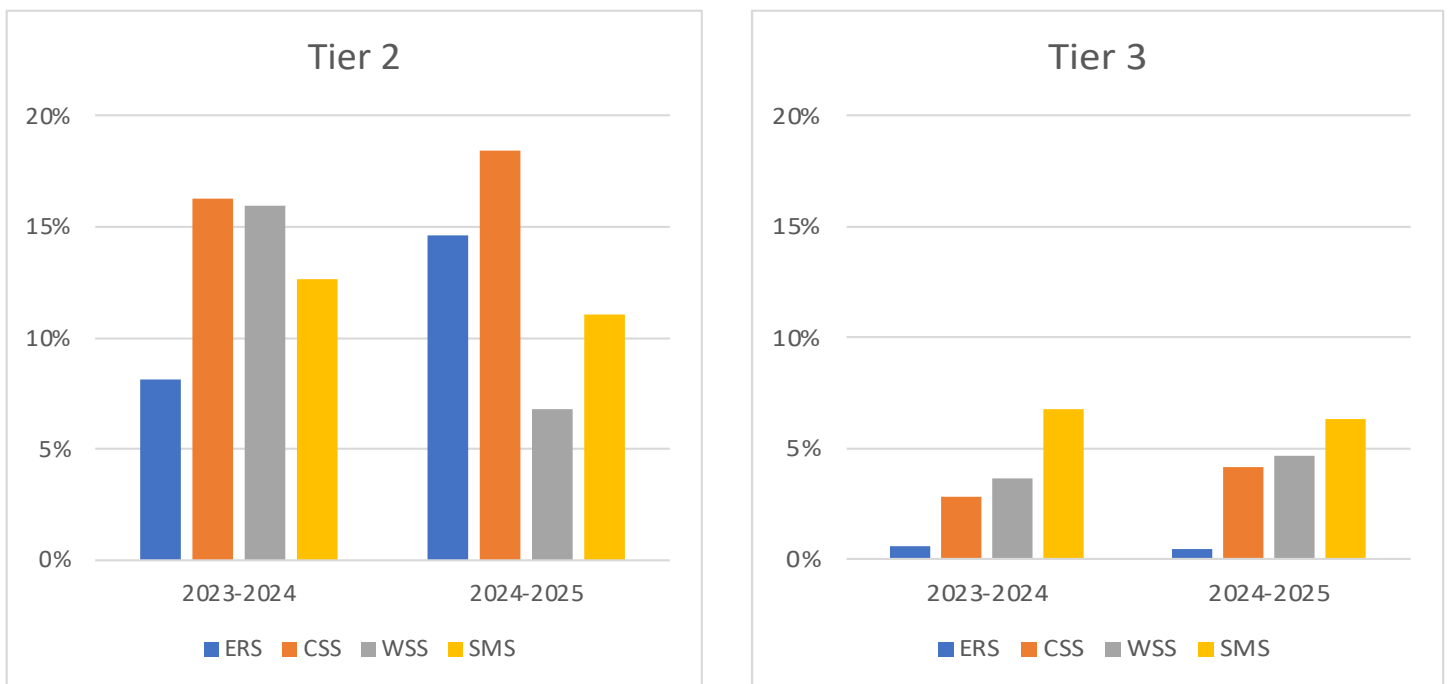
Student Outcomes

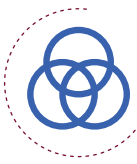
LEVEL OF USE

Before 2023, there was no centralized way to collect data on the number of students receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions, making it difficult to answer questions about proportionate access and effectiveness. Tier 2 is designed to support 10-15% of students with targeted interventions, whereas Tier 3 is designed to support

1-5% of students with individualized interventions at any given time. **Figure 2** illustrates the percent of students each school supported with Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions across the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years, indicating the schools' capacity to support students within advanced tiers. Though some schools appear to be supporting more than 15% of students at Tier 2 or 5% of students at Tier 3, these numbers reflect all students supported over the course of a school year, which is greater than the number of students receiving support at any given time.

FIGURE 2. PERCENT OF STUDENTS RECEIVING TIER 2 AND TIER 3 INTERVENTIONS OVER TIME



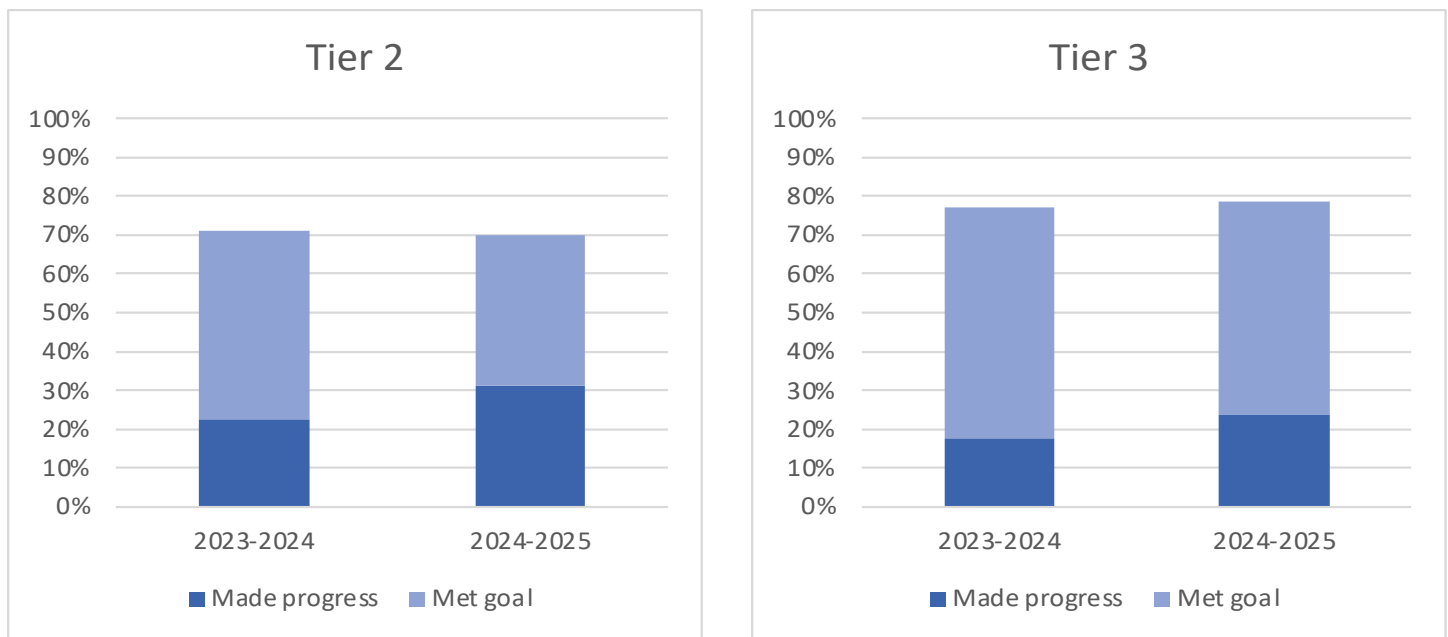


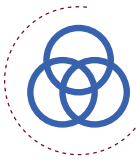
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Student Progress. Starting in the 2023-2024 school year, the district developed a way for Student Support Teams (SST) to track student progress in Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions using their data management system. The SST sets and monitors progress on goals to determine students' response to intervention. Each time SST meets on a student, they review data

and update progress recording either (a) no progress, (b) making progress, or (c) met goal (see **Figure 3**). Adjustments are made to students' interventions if they are not making progress. Data indicate that across schools, at least 70% of students have made progress or met their goal since data collection began, indicating the general effectiveness of interventions.

FIGURE 3. STUDENT RESPONSE TO TIER 2 AND TIER 3 INTERVENTIONS AGGREGATED ACROSS SCHOOLS

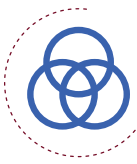




Summary

This evaluation brief summarizes the process used by one district to systematically implement and scale advanced tiers PBIS across schools, and the outcomes of those efforts. The district invested in systems to implement and sustain advanced tiers PBIS such as (a) forming an Advanced Tiers District Leadership team to steer implementation, (b) leveraging existing teaming structures in schools, (c) enhancing their existing data collection system to monitor student progress, and (d) building capacity to provide Advanced Tiers training and coaching to schools. As a result, fidelity of implementation of Tiers 2 and 3 has increased and students are accessing and making progress in Tier 2 and 3 supports.





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