Overview

NAVIGATING DATA FOR MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

A collection of research-to-impact practices developed with the Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities

COLLECTION OVERVIEW

Navigating Data for Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Introduction

The Challenge

America's public schools fall short in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities consistently perform at levels below their peers without disabilities. On the most recent administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, **8th grade students with disabilities performed 39–41 points lower than their peers without disabilities in reading and math**,[1] illustrating just how deeply schools are failing students with disabilities. These disparities persist long after graduation, as students with disabilities are less likely than their peers to enroll in postsecondary school, to be productively engaged in community activities, to live independently, and to achieve financial independence.[2]

Implementation of MTSS is inconsistent in secondary schools.

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) have been associated with improved academic achievement and reduced incidents of suspension and other punitive disciplinary actions for students.[3] Students with disabilities who attend schools with strong MTSS implementations also experience improved academic and behavioral outcomes and increased graduation rates.[4] These findings indicate one way to improve the poor outcomes of students with disabilities is to implement MTSS at scale. MTSS implementation at the secondary level, however, still lags behind elementary schools, meaning that students with disabilities in middle and high schools do not consistently receive a benefit from this structured approach to data-based decision-making and intervention planning.[5] Using data-driven early warning systems that identify students who need additional support, and then responding to that data and implementing appropriate interventions, is likely a key strategy for using MTSS to improve outcomes for secondary students.[6]

What is MTSS?

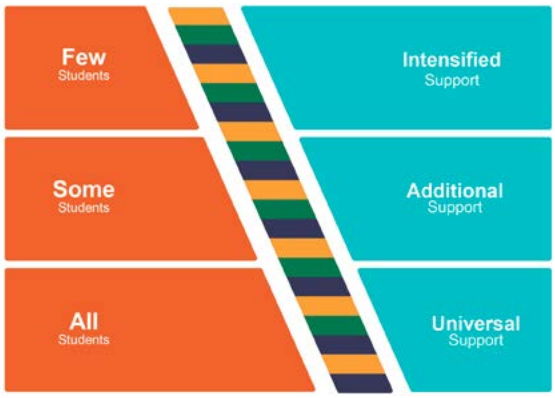
DEFINITION

A multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) is a preventative framework that leverages data to organize instruction and intervention to improve academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes for students.[7]

COMPONENTS

The MTSS framework is composed of four essential components:[8]

1. **Screening** — regularly administered assessments to identify students at risk for poor academic, social-emotional, or behavioral outcomes
2. **Progress monitoring** — the ongoing, frequent collection and use of data to:
   A. assess students' performance
   B. quantify a student's rate of improvement or responsiveness to instruction or intervention
   C. evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and intervention using valid and reliable measures[9]
3. **A multi-level prevention system** — increasingly intensive instruction and intervention organized across three tiers, with "Tier 1" referring to evidence-based, high-quality schoolwide academic, social-emotional, and behavioral supports for **all students**, "Tier 2" referring to small-group, standardized interventions aligned with identified student needs **for some students**, and "Tier 3" referring to intensive and individualized supports for **few students** with ongoing, intensive needs
4. **Data-based decision-making** — the use of data to make decisions about instruction, movement within the multi-level prevention system, allocation of resources, and identification of students with disabilities



Equity-Based MTSS Model by Swift Schools

HOW IT HELPS STUDENTS

Implementation of multi-tiered systems of support results in improved academic, social-emotional, and behavioral outcomes for students.[10] The features of MTSS that contribute to improved and more equitable outcomes for students include the following:

- **Decisions made within an MTSS framework are driven by data.**
- **MTSS emphasizes high-quality, evidence-based instruction at all tiers.**
- **Collaborative, data-driven decision-making and strong leadership are core to effective MTSS.**
- **MTSS represents a systematic approach to pursuing equitable student outcomes.**

Benefits of consistent MTSS implementation include the following:

- It allows for all students to receive timely support for their unique student needs, including academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs.[11]
- Educators can more efficiently identify student needs and respond to them in a timely manner.[12]
- Fewer students "fall through the cracks."[13]
- Students with disabilities are less stigmatized for receiving additional supports and services.[14]

Many schools lack the resources to build robust data systems for instructional decision-making.

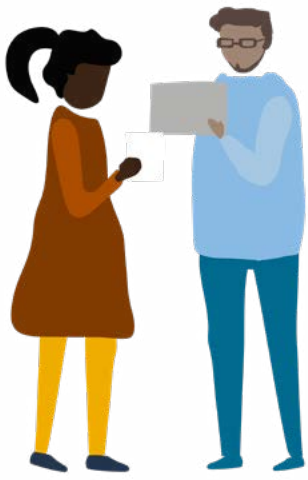
Unfortunately, many schools lack access to or funding for data systems and infrastructure that are key to implementing MTSS well, such as progress-monitoring tools, aligned curriculum, and intervention programs based on evidence-based practices that would support cycles of instructional improvement as part of an MTSS.[15] Building or having another company build these custom solutions in ways that enable effective and efficient instructional decision-making requires capacity or money that most schools do not have available. The staff training and planning time necessary to use these tools effectively also requires additional funds. Without preplanning for the allocation of resources toward data systems aligned to their instructional needs, schools cannot make changes that will have marked effects on student learning and achievement.[16]

Existing data infrastructures are not designed to support data-driven decision-making.

Over the last 30 years, student information systems have evolved from simply reporting student enrollment data to including data from state standardized assessments, diagnostic and interim assessments, and student course and assignment grades. These evolutions have not always accounted for the different ways in which educators interact with data, making it challenging for schools to use the data they have collected for their decision-making. As schools more regularly use data in structured ways to reflect on practice and drive instructional decisions as part of their MTSS, they need ways to look at data at multiple levels and disaggregate results by subgroups — that is, they need tools designed to drive instructional change. To make the development of these tools possible for educators to effectively review student data and monitor their progress, system-wide support for data infrastructure, systems, structures, and training are essential.[17]

Effective use of data requires change to systems and culture.

Schools often train educators to interpret data from student information systems in a single professional development but fail to build regular, structured time for educators to make use of these skills.[18] To avoid this, school leaders can reinforce a culture of continuous improvement by devoting time for educators to participate in cycles of reviewing data, identifying students who need additional support, creating action plans, and assessing the effectiveness of those action plans.[19] However, building these data routines into existing systems and structures — such as coaching sessions, regular professional development, or collaborative time between educators — can be difficult. As a result, data routines fail to become habits or part of the educator workflow, and knowledge built in training is lost over time.



Our Approach

MTSS involves a host of essential components to ensure schools have a system for responding to students' individual needs. Keenly aware of the power of data to drive decision-making, schools within the NIC embraced a commitment to developing the tools, routines, and systems needed to leverage data effectively within an MTSS approach. The NIC's commitment to focusing on data does not ignore the other aspects of successful MTSS approaches, but it highlights how the collection and use of data is fundamental to the other pieces of an MTSS system. This work was guided by the following principles:

- **EFFECTIVE DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING RELIES ON TOOLS AND INFRASTRUCTURE.**
- **DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING IS BEST FACILITATED IN COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURES THAT ENGAGE THE RIGHT PEOPLE.**
- **CLEARLY ARTICULATED AND CONSISTENTLY IMPLEMENTED ROUTINES FACILITATE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING.**

Together these principles help educators implementing MTSS address gaps at all levels of the school system, from the network all the way to teachers. In turn, this pushes them to prioritize student groups positioned furthest from opportunity, like students with disabilities who are Black, Latinx, and living in poverty. As educators continuously review data and assess their practices to adjust instruction to meet the needs of priority groups, improved teacher practices and new instructional strategies benefit all students.

Data Tools and Infrastructure

To effectively implement an MTSS framework, schools need system-wide support for data collection, analysis, and decision-making. Data infrastructure should facilitate the efficient collection of data describing a range of student outcomes,[20] allow for monitoring student responsiveness to instruction and intervention, and support educators in analyzing data to make informed decisions about planning content and instructional strategies.[21] **STEM Prep** and **Collegiate Academies** built their own systems to enable educators to transfer data from existing student information systems into more usable formats for regular analysis and instructional decision-making. The experience of both networks and existing research on MTSS demonstrate that school leaders and educators also needed training, protected time, and resources to learn how to use data and make informed decisions about planning content and instructional strategies to meet all students' needs.[22]

Teams that Bring the Right People Together

To meet the needs of students successfully within an MTSS approach, diverse teams of educators need to collaboratively and routinely analyze trends in student performance, including data on student subgroups. This needs to happen at the classroom, school, and district level. To have the greatest impact at the school level, site leaders need to bring together teams of educators with diverse perspectives, create time and space for different types of school teams to regularly review and respond

to data, and support the use of collaborative problem-solving to find the best strategies to meet students' needs. **Summit Public Schools** and **STEM Prep** engaged grade-level teams to regularly analyze student data in order to collaboratively identify potential interventions to address specific student needs. **Mastery Schools** created an interdisciplinary team to address students' postsecondary readiness needs using data on a biweekly basis.

Central office teams also need to gather leaders across the district to collaboratively take an MTSS approach to thinking about how they use data to individualize the different levels of support they are providing to schools. **Green Dot Public Schools** realized that they needed to individualize the types and intensity of supports they gave schools rather than looking only at aggregated data and making network-wide decisions for all schools through a one-size-fits-all lens. Their team of network-level leaders looked at disaggregated data by school as well as by student groups so they could devise strategies to support school leaders' work to improve outcomes at their schools.

Bringing the right people together also includes regularly engaging students and families in routines that teach them how to analyze their own data, develop goals using data, and create plans that help them meet those goals. For example, **STRIVE Prep** engaged families using text messaging to give families information about students' grades and a channel to communicate with schools about their students' academic progress. Additionally, **KIPP Northern California** and **STRIVE Prep** created 1:1 student-conferencing structures to teach students how to use their data from course and assignment grades to set goals and make plans to achieve them. These types of engagement are particularly important for families who are Latinx, Black, and living in poverty because they have historically been disenfranchised by the education system and disempowered from accessing student grades, communicating with educators, or advocating for their students' needs.

Routines and Regular Data Analysis

By creating regular, dedicated time for teams to engage in data routines, educators can respond to students' needs more quickly and effectively, improving student outcomes. Teams should meet at regular intervals with clear agendas and meeting protocols that guide educators to:

1. Identify which students or disaggregated student groups need additional support on which skills
2. Choose the best strategy to address needs
3. Make a plan for how to implement the strategy
4. Reassess to determine the effectiveness of the strategy used
5. Choose to continue to use the strategy, adapt the strategy, or discontinue using the strategy

The NIC, as a community, found it necessary to develop and refine strategies for integrating the use of data into educators' workflow to ensure the timely response to students' needs. Routines were developed at the individual teacher, team, school, and network levels to support system-wide use of data. **Collegiate Academies, STEM Prep, Summit Public Schools,** and **Green Dot Public Schools** all created structures that provide educators with regular, dedicated time to engage in data routines. **Collegiate Academies** built these routines into their co-teachers' co-planning meetings. **Green Dot**

Public Schools instituted quarterly co-planning days during which co-teachers review data and create longer-term plans together. **STEM Prep** and **Summit Public Schools** built data routines into their existing grade-level team meetings so that teams of educators can collaborate to find potential solutions to meet students' needs.

For these data routines to be effective, school leaders need to consider the types of training necessary to help educators develop the skills and then habits around using data for daily instructional planning. It cannot be overlooked that staff need training in analyzing data and identifying appropriate interventions for students. In particular, data for subgroups of students, such as our priority population, should be disaggregated so that their unique data trends and needs are not obscured by overall averages. **Collegiate Academies** and **Summit Public Schools** found that initial professional development is best supported with regular coaching to ensure that educators can analyze and respond to data with confidence. Coaches can also help educators learn how to build their own regular practice of reviewing and responding to data to ensure that all learners are mastering content and that their teaching practice improves over time.

Data-driven decision-making processes within an MTSS can be implemented from the district level down to the student level so that every stakeholder uses data to guide decisions in the interest of improved student outcomes. **This collection of practices highlights the ways that data is essential to meeting the needs of students who are furthest from opportunity so that educators can address their needs as responsively and efficiently as possible.**



STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

Student Conferencing for Life and Academic Skills

How to Improve Family Engagement with Text Messaging



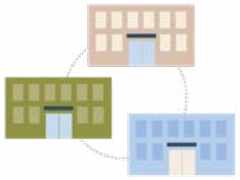
CLASSROOM

Implementing Routine Data Cycles to Rapidly Address Student Needs



SCHOOL

Establishing Effective Data Routines in School-Based Teams



NETWORK

How Network Leaders Use Data to Respond to School-Based Needs

Enabling Conditions

Each chapter within the collection identifies the prerequisites needed to implement each specific practice. However, a set of overarching prerequisites is shared across all practices:

- Dedicated and protected collaboration time for teachers, grade-level teams, and instructional coaches to collect and analyze student-level data by class, course, and grade levels
- Accessible data readily available in a data tool or dashboard
- A school-wide commitment to collaborative problem-solving that is supported by a defined set of strategies that faculty can choose from to respond to a variety of needs

Dedicated Time

Educators need dedicated time to analyze data, design interventions, and monitor the progress of those interventions. Scheduling time in the school week for data analysis, problem-solving concerns in the data, planning, and implementing tiered supports is a key requirement for MTSS to be successful.[23] Although individuals and teams may meet at different cadences based on their purposes, protecting time for data analysis and planning is essential, and schools must account for all stakeholders when building schedules.

The table below describes different purposes and cadences that various stakeholder groups may employ.

GROUP	DATA VIEW	PURPOSE	CADENCE
Individual Teachers	Student-level by class and/or course	• Interventions based on course and school goals • Instructional adaptations for tomorrow's class/course	Daily/Weekly
Grade-Level and/or Content Area Teams	Student-level and subgroups by grade level and course	• Interventions based on school goals • Instructional adaptations for next week • Family communications • Celebrations (e.g., awards for progress)	Weekly
Instructional Coaching	Student-level and subgroups by class and/or course	• Shared problem-solving for meeting students' needs • Curricular adaptations • Orchestrating support that may require additional staff, space, or time	Weekly/ Biweekly

Accessible Data Systems

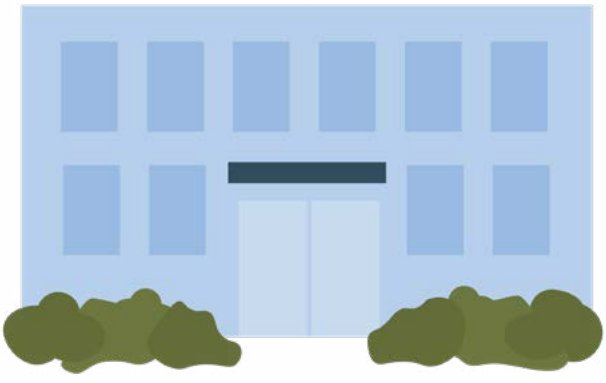
Most school systems have one or more data or student information systems that house student data. Many of these tools are simply gradebooks that do not allow educators to see patterns across assignments or standards, while others report standardized test scores but do not provide visibility into students' specific errors. While in the NIC, **Collegiate Academies** and **STEM Prep** found that their existing data systems did not always facilitate targeted data analysis and intervention planning for educators. In response, both networks built alternative data systems that gave educators different ways to look at their student data to more easily make instructional decisions. Some tools are more adaptable than others (i.e., they allow for individual school or network customization) or better fit the purpose a school or team has for the data. Much of the usefulness of a data system comes down to the accessibility of the data tool (e.g., user experience, ease of navigation, and ability to see a range of data) and the ease with which educators can sort or filter data. When selecting a data system, feedback from a variety of educators is essential to understanding whether a given data tool will work for a given purpose or not.

Schools may discover a need for custom dashboards to facilitate data protocols. Excel, Google Sheets, and Tableau are examples of platforms that can be leveraged for this purpose. To learn more about the process for creating a data dashboard, see **How-To: Design and Prototype a Data Dashboard**.

Schoolwide Commitment to Problem-Solving

While it is important that schools or networks create structures and resources that help educators determine the best strategy to meet identified needs, an underlying commitment to collaborative problem-solving is likely to yield stronger results than problem-solving by individual stakeholders. Educators who work together to find new solutions, especially to the most challenging situations, can build their toolbox of strategies (**a list of interventions, for example**) more quickly. In addition, schools that foster a commitment to collaborative problem-solving are likely to have teachers who engage in informal activities to solve problems without waiting for formal structures such as grade-level or departmental meetings.

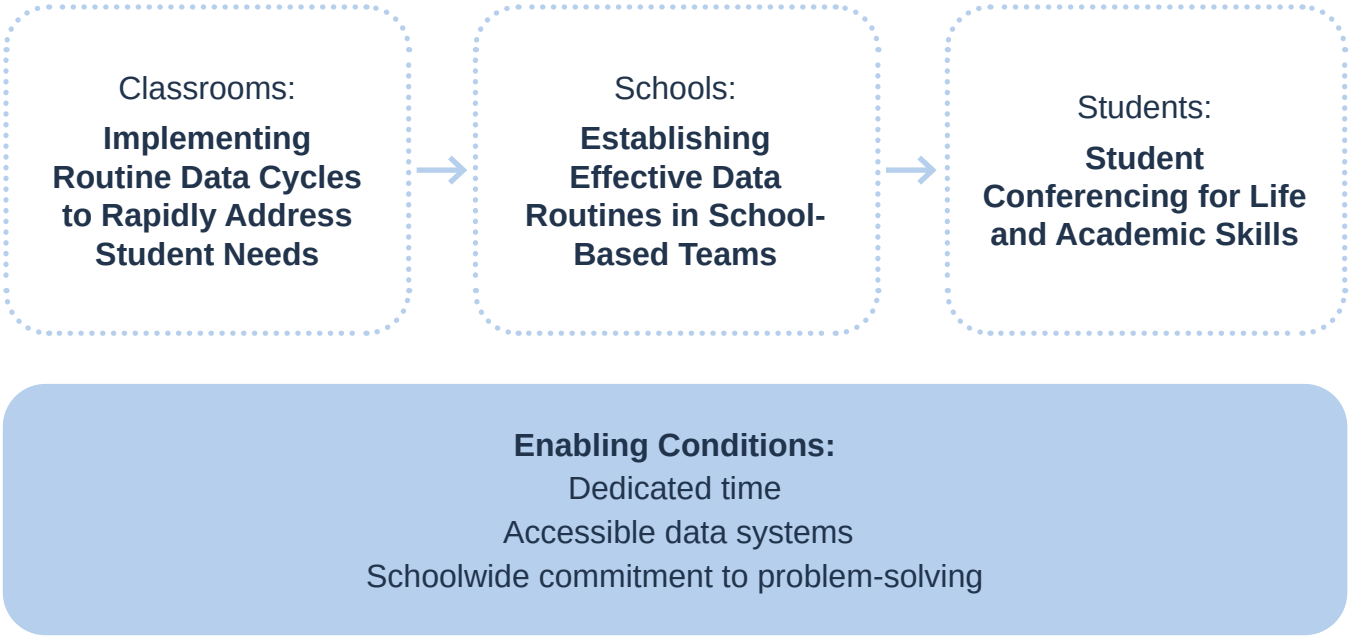
Schools will benefit from developing a set of easily accessible resources that educators can draw on when problem-solving. Networks or schools can use intranets, websites, or cloud storage systems that allow educators to access resources and information from anywhere. This repository should be regularly updated so that new resources and strategies can be added and older ones updated to include adaptations. When relevant, resources should indicate that they are only recommended for specific populations. A protocol for vetting resources and strategies can ensure that they are high-quality and effective.



The Collection

This collection includes **three best practices** and **two case studies** essential to the work of improving the use of data to devise tiered levels of support for schools, students, and families on behalf of improving learning outcomes for all students, as well as a **guidance document** to use when considering how to set up and improve data tools to put these practices into action.

Each of the practices detailed in this collection is an independently strong and valuable practice for improving the use of data by educators and teams within an MTSS model to make gains for our priority population. However, when implemented layer by layer, the steps described in this collection strengthen data practices at all levels of an education system. Through these practices, schools in the NIC embedded MTSS within every level of their school systems, with each level benefitting from the levels above. The combined effect helped NIC schools to address the needs of students in order to improve their outcomes.



The audience for this collection is educators, schools, and networks who believe that all students are capable of increasing their academic achievement, who fundamentally believe that it is the system's responsibility to ensure this is a reality for all students it serves, and who are looking for ideas on how to initiate or refine their approach to this work. While many research papers, reports, and technical assistance centers provide guidance on the implementation of an MTSS framework, this collection is unique in that, rather than providing a comprehensive explanation of all aspects of MTSS, it offers unique guidance about improving data-driven decision-making and teaming practices within the MTSS model to serve our priority population:

- It ties together multiple elements critical to addressing the needs of all students, specifically for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty, within an MTSS framework.

- It emphasizes the importance of using data at all levels of the school system along with the engagement of individuals from all levels of the school system.
- It grounds each practice in both foundational and current research while emphasizing (1) detailed, real-world examples of the practice as implemented in secondary schools and classrooms within the NIC and (2) a step-by-step guide to the implementation of the practice.

Chapter 1: Implementing Routine Data Cycles to Rapidly Address Student Needs

System-wide data routines are necessary to support educators to review classroom-level data at least biweekly to determine student needs and drive instructional decision-making and interventions. In addition, educators benefit from accessible data systems that allow them to sort student data in meaningful ways and disaggregate data by subgroups. This chapter details the steps a network or school can take to design regular data routines so educators can respond in a timely manner to students' needs. The chapter also describes how data systems and professional development can help strengthen these data routines for schools.

Chapter 2: Establishing Effective Data Routines in School-Based Teams

While educators need to individually analyze data and make instructional decisions based on the individual student needs shown in that data, school-based teams also need to gather and use data to coordinate timely, targeted support for students across grade-, department-, or other site-level teams. This chapter describes different types of school-based teams and their purposes. It also discusses how teams can create useful structures to ensure efficient meetings and create accountability for the resulting action items. Strong data routines used by teams of educators can help supplement the individual and regular use of data for decision-making in schools.

Chapter 3: Student Conferencing for Life and Academic Skills

Student conferencing is a regular, consistent time during class for teachers to coach students 1:1 on how to set goals, make plans to achieve their goals, enact their plans, and reflect on their progress. Any school staff member can conduct conferencing with students, but the schools in the NIC that implemented this practice piloted conferencing with special educators and students with disabilities. This chapter explains how 1:1 student conferencing can be implemented in a variety of configurations based on individual school capacity and student needs. The steps outline the skills students need in order to begin conferencing as well as those they can gain by participating in conferencing.

Case Study: How Network Leaders Use Data to Respond to School-Based Needs: Green Dot Public Schools

The use of MTSS is not confined within the walls of each school building. It can also be used at a system level when network leaders consider how to best support each of their schools. Green Dot Public Schools built a team of network-level leaders who meet monthly to analyze data and identify tiered supports for schools based on their needs. This case study describes the journey that Green Dot's leaders went through to consistently review data through an equity lens and devise strategies to best support the schools within their own locus of control.

Case Study: How to Improve Family Engagement with Text Messaging: STRIVE Prep

The COVID-19 pandemic physically disconnected students and families from their schools — sometimes for multiple years — forcing school and network leaders to consider new ways to re-engage families in the education system. STRIVE Prep developed a routine of using a text-messaging intervention to help ensure that all families could stay informed about their students' academic progress and communicate with their school in a new way. This case study details how STRIVE Prep piloted their text messaging strategy with the families of students with disabilities before expanding it to all students at one of their schools. The case study also includes the steps a school can take to implement a similar text messaging intervention.

How to Approach this Collection

We recommend readers begin with chapter 1, as this chapter provides foundational guidance on how classroom teachers can best use data to identify student needs, design interventions, and plan interventions. After chapter 1, readers are encouraged to explore chapters 2 and 3 for insights on how to use data within site-based teams and for 1:1 student conferencing to support all learners effectively.

Next, readers can explore a compelling case study about how a network used a data protocol to help its leaders collaboratively analyze data and design actionable supports for schools in their network. The final case study describes how one school used a text-messaging intervention to ensure that all families were informed about their students' progress.

RELATED AND SUPPORTING PRACTICES

Guiding Literacy Interventions Through Tiered Assessment

Strengthening Timely Interventions Through Goal Setting and Progress Monitoring

A Collaborative Approach to Student Work Analysis

Building School-Based Transition Teams to Accelerate Student Progress Toward Postsecondary Goals

Maximizing Student Progress Through Data-Informed Systems

FURTHER READING

Multi-Tiered System of Support: Blueprint for MA
from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Appendix

Notes

1 US Department of Education, “Focus on NAEP: Students With Disabilities”

2 Sanford et al, *Post-High School Outcomes*

3 Rangel-Pacheco and Witte, A Brief Review of MTSS Evaluation Measures

4 American Institutes for Research, “Special Education”

5 Vaughn and Fletcher, “Response to Intervention”

6 American Institutes for Research, “Secondary Schools”

7 American Institutes for Research, “Essential Components of MTSS”

8 Ibid.

9 American Institutes for Research. “What is Progress Monitoring?”

10 Rangel-Pacheco and Witte, *A Brief Review of MTSS Evaluation Measures*

11 McIntosh and Goodman, *Integrated Multi-tiered Systems of Support*

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Giangreco and Suter, “Precarious or Purposeful?”

15 Mason et al., “From Professional Development to Implementation”; Minnesota Department of Education, “Using Multi-Tiered Systems of Support”

16 Ibid.

17 McIntosh and Goodman, *Integrated Multi-tiered Systems of Support*

18 Drury et al., “Educational Leaders Perspectives”

19 SWIFT Education Center, “Professional Learning Community”

20 McIntosh and Goodman, *Integrated Multi-tiered Systems of Support*

21 Gersten et al., “Mathematics Instruction”; McIntosh and Goodman, *Integrated Multi-tiered Systems of Support*

22 Drury et al., “Educational Leaders Perspectives”

23 Mason et al., “From Professional Development to Implementation”

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