



MCIE
Maryland Coalition for
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



**LEADING FOR EQUITY
AND INCLUSION
THROUGH MTSS**

INTRODUCTION

As many states, school districts, and schools work to provide effective and evidence-based instruction to all learners who live in their jurisdiction, they are also working to implement a tiered system of interventions for those learners who are at risk for not achieving grade level standards. Across the United States there are various ways that states and local education agencies are establishing their instructional improvement priorities with a focus on implementing a multi-tiered system of interventions and supports. Any systemic improvement or change requires organizational leadership to define the vision for effective and evidence-based instructional practice and provide opportunities for learning by practitioners expected to implement the targeted practices. States and districts focusing on instructional improvement will need to provide the resources for implementing the practices with fidelity and data systems to measure learner growth and educator implementation.

In a “Multi-Tiered System of Supports,” commonly referred to as MTSS, each and every child in the school system participates in effective, evidence-based instruction by general educators, with the support of specialized educators (Speech/Language therapists, special educators, social workers, English Speakers of Other Languages [ESOL] teachers, or other specialists). This requires cross-disciplinary collaboration, and results in an equity-based approach to including all learners in the regular education system.

This document offers clarity related to instructional terms in frameworks, it defines MTSS and defines the responsibilities of an inclusive school leader in implementing a school-wide MTSS model with evidence-based practices.

WHAT IS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?

Inclusion is not placement. Some educators define “inclusion” as a location: the general education class. It is increasingly accepted in states across the U.S. that inclusive education begins with an assumption that all children in the school community belong in the school and class that they would attend if they did not have a disability, and that all services are designed to be delivered as embedded and direct services within general education academic and social activities. The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#), IDEA, reauthorized in 2004, reinforces this expectation. The only “removals” from general education allowed are for behavior that has a negative impact on the child or others in the class; children may not be removed due to disability label, severity of disability, or the need for

dramatic or extensive modifications to the curriculum. Further, both ESSA and IDEA require children with the most significant cognitive disabilities to have goals that are directly aligned to grade level standards.

Inclusion recognizes that each and every child, regardless of their difference from the majority school population, has a right to legitimate participation in, and access to high quality general education with their peers, with specialized services incorporated into their general instruction and school day.

With an increasing recognition that placement is insufficient to characterize inclusion and that there are groups of children who may be “placed” with their peers but socially excluded or prevented from accessing the same quality educational experience as their peers, the term inclusion has come to stand for equity in access, participation, and outcomes for all learners who may experience differential treatment due to race, ethnicity, wealth, gender identify, or other characteristic. The focus here is on the extension of rights and privileges to populations and individuals whose educational access and opportunity is compromised. Consequently, inclusion is commonly defined by terms such as “meaningful participation,” “sense of belonging,” and “membership” in the school community (see, for example, [Jones & Gallus, 2021](#)).

A more powerful view of inclusion recognizes that every child, regardless of their differences, has the right to fully participate in and access high-quality general education with their peers. Specialized services should be integrated into their general instruction and school day. In an inclusive school, educators intentionally promote a sense of belonging as the foundation for successful learning. This is achieved through collaborative learning and teamwork, culturally responsive instruction, and fostering social-emotional competency. Inclusive schools focus not only on children with disabilities, but also English learners, and others who may experience inequitable access, opportunity, or outcomes. Some features of inclusive schools include are:

- ✓ scheduling learners who receive specialized services across grade level classes (elementary) or subject area classes (secondary) in “natural proportion” to their population in the school,
- ✓ a focus on creating a sense of belonging,
- ✓ collaborative planning and teaching between general and specialized educators,

- ✓ implementing a universal design for learning approach with differentiation based on class interests and skills,
- ✓ adapting general education lessons for each learner who needs it, and
- ✓ ensuring that all learners have a voice and are able and encouraged to socialize with peers and communicate their opinions as well as knowledge.

EVIDENCE-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

District leaders and school principals promote effective, inclusive instruction when they assess the capacity and delivery of evidence-based practices by their teachers and service staff, and when school principals put in place organizational practices that promote collaboration to use data to make instructional decisions as well as design the specialized services that promote learner success.

These include:

◆ **A Universal Design for Learning framework (UDL)**

UDL is a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, how students engage in learning, and options for expressing knowledge and skills. A UDL approach intentionally identifies and reduces barriers in the curriculum content, learning activities, and environment to increase access for diverse learners. The teacher arranges the physical environment and instructional methods with consideration expecting the range of student variability: those with disabilities, those who speak other languages and are learning English, those who have experienced trauma, etc. UDL is not simple, but an inclusive principal will strategically engage educators to become proficient in their approach to universally design instruction.

◆ **Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)**

[Zaretta Hammond](#) (2020) defines CRT as:

An educator's ability to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the students knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing. All the while, the educator understands the importance of being in a relationship and having a

social-emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning (pg. 15).

Prerequisites to culturally responsive teaching are strategies for teachers to critically examine the programs, their own teaching practices, and the research on effective methods leading to success with students who are racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse. As teachers learn about their students' past and current life experiences, they can build relationships and use these experiences in the context of teaching and planning to remove barriers to learning. As the school leader, the principal must model this practice, reinforce these practices across all educators, and promote family engagement and participation through community activities.

◆ **Differentiated instruction (DI)**

While UDL aims to ensure that all learners have full access to the curriculum, regardless of their abilities or learning needs, differentiated instruction is a response to address each individual learner's levels of readiness, interests, and abilities. DI uses this information to establish the learning environment and design lessons that offer a variety of ways to access curriculum content, engage in learning the content, and demonstrating what they have learned. The intent of differentiating instruction is to maximize each learner's growth and success by meeting them where they are in the learning process.

◆ **Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)**

MTSS is grounded in equitable access to supports and interventions driven by data to align and flexibly adjust to student progress. A critical component is the alignment of data, interventions, and resources to effectively and efficiently support learners who "need more." Attendance, family circumstances, a particular disability, culture of the school, primary language, and educator capacity are all contributing factors to an individual learner's educational experience. Consequently, the importance of *integrating* data and bringing in a variety of specialists to consider the factors affecting instruction and learner performance are critical to customized decision-making. A MTSS framework serves as the foundation for inclusion, ensuring that all children have equitable access to achieve grade level standards and expectations. The success of implementing a MTSS approach to preventing school failure or removals is directly affected by the knowledge, skill, and support of the school leaders who create the conditions for success.

SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION (SDI)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines special education for children and youth with disabilities as specially designed instruction (SDI) to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Specially designed instruction is further defined as adapting the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction

- ✓ To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and
- ✓ To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children.

While over 40 years of research clearly demonstrates the academic and social benefit of receiving specially designed instruction alongside nondisabled peers in general education settings as well as the benefits to learners without disabilities (e.g., [TIES Center](#), 2018–2019; Oh-Young & Filler, 2015; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Kart & Kart, 2021), the placement and teaching of learners with disabilities varies greatly across the United States and is influenced more by zip code and demographic factors than the child's actual disability (Kurth, 2015; Kurth, Mastergeorge & Paschall, 2016). This calls for states and their local education agencies to create expectations, share knowledge, and build the capacity of school leaders to create the conditions in their schools to successfully include all children as a way to do business, not only reducing the exclusion and segregation of learners with disabilities but creating school communities where “all” really does mean “all.”

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a proactive and preventive structure that combines data and research-based interventions and customized supports to enhance success for all learners while addressing their social, emotional, and behavioral needs through a strengths-oriented approach. MTSS purposefully links together education, health, and human services to improve instruction and services based on individualized needs emerging in comprehensive data systems. The framework equips schools and districts with a streamlined method to allocate resources, aiding educators in implementing successful practices consistently. Most descriptions and definitions of MTSS define the framework into 3 “Tiers” that represent increasing time and focus on specific skills or supports to develop those

skills. However, separating out supplemental instruction and interventions into two additional “tiers” is an artificial divide; students who need more do not all fit into a single category or two. Rather, anything that is extra (beyond core, encore, and elective course instruction) is by definition “supplemental” instruction, intervention, or support. It may be for specific targeted skills in academic areas, self-regulation, social-emotional well-being, etc.

GENERAL EDUCATION INSTRUCTION AND SUPPORT FOR ALL

Strong general education instruction that is demonstrated by current research to be effective for teaching academic content and social-emotional skills is the goal for all schools.

Frameworks such as UDL and CRT provide a sound foundation for implementing evidence-based teaching strategies. Teachers further differentiate instruction for learners based on progress towards and mastery of grade level standards and use effective strategies such as cooperative learning, peer mentoring, and flexible group station teaching to address diverse learning needs. Teaching and learning expectations are well articulated within grade levels so that learners have highly similar experiences, regardless of their assigned teacher. Supports may be designed such as pre-teaching, re-teaching, and scaffolding instruction to address the immediate learning needs of individual children. These have historically been considered “Tier 1 instruction and interventions,” meaning the general instructional strategies for all learners in the class.

SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTION AND SUPPORT FOR SOME

Additional instruction, interventions, and customized supports may be designed or selected to develop or improve specific skills that are missing and important for advancing toward grade level academic standards and/or demonstrating age-appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral skills. These may be offered within the class in small groups, during small group rotations or during independent work time within the general education class. They may also be provided during a school-wide “intervention” period. In an inclusive school, **all** learners – including English learners and those with extensive or complex disabilities – will access interventions if they need them. Some learners will need **targeted skill development** only until that skill is acquired. Targeted skill development has traditionally been considered a “Tier 2” intervention, with criteria set for determining the need for an intervention and when it is no longer needed.

As schools create and implement a school-wide MTSS framework, and teachers become proficient at using data to make instructional decisions, the need for additional intervention or supports becomes more fluid and increasing or decreasing the intensity of intervention does not necessarily mean moving into or out of a particular intervention. It means that teachers respond to children and youth according to their learning needs. More information can be found on the website for the [National Center on Intensive Intervention](#).

A few learners will need **uniquely designed and customized Intervention and/or supports** that are created for that individual learner. Intensive skill development may also be designed for learners who have knowledge and skill beyond their grade level, and who would benefit from additional instruction to enrich or extend their learning. These interventions may be provided within regular class instruction by a trained interventionist or specialist in collaboration with the classroom teacher or may be provided in small group or one-one tutorial in another school location during independent work or an elective period or school-wide time designated in the master schedule for individualized instruction and interventions.

This MTSS model adopts a more fluid approach such that supplemental and intensive interventions represent a systematic method to increase the intensity of interventions or supports for learners who persistently show an academic, social-emotional, or behavioral need for them and decreasing those supports based on performance data. The process is a [solution-finding approach](#) that uses data to determine the type of intervention or support and when those strategies are no longer needed.

MTSS is not Response to Intervention (RTI). [Both](#) are intended to be proactive general education frameworks to identify learners who need additional interventions to learn grade level standards. RTI models focus on academics and place an emphasis on a learner's responsiveness to the selected intervention. In contrast, MTSS is much broader in scope; it seeks to integrate academic, social-emotional, and behavioral data and design the interventions and supports through a system-wide approach for comprehensive solutions to promote a sense of belonging, meaningful engagement, and learning grade level standards.

REQUIREMENTS OF ESSA FOR IMPLEMENTING MTSS

The [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) represents the nation’s long-standing commitment to equal opportunity for all students. It prioritizes access to comprehensive and integrated intervention service delivery models under a multi-tiered system of supports, defined as “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision making.” ([PL 114-95](#), section 2103. Local Use of Funds). It provides [financial incentives for local education agencies](#) through funds that “address the learning needs of all students including children with disabilities, English learners, and gifted and talented students.” ESSA requires School Districts to:

1. Provide “for a multi-tier system of support (MTSS) for literacy services,” as well as for specific groups of students such as at-risk, disengaged, unmotivated, unresponsive, underperforming, or consistently unsuccessful students.
2. Provide “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systematic practices to support a rapid response to a student’s needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision making.”
3. Institute “positive behavioral interventions and supports.”
4. Provide services, programs, strategies, and interventions to ensure that students with disabilities, developmental delays, who are English learners, and who are struggling with literacy can meet state academic standards.
5. Provide school-level targeted support and improvement plan to improve student outcomes” through evidence-based interventions.

ESSA prioritizes the need for expanded access to comprehensive school services within an MTSS that addresses social, emotional, and behavioral performance as well as academic proficiency. It is notable that throughout ESSA, there is specific mention of the inclusion of children with disabilities, specifically identifying the need for [students with the most significant cognitive disabilities](#) to be involved in all aspects of school improvement and a multi-tier system of supports.

COMPONENTS OF A SCHOOLWIDE MTSS FRAMEWORK

Full implementation of a schoolwide MTSS requires district level guidance and resources for data systems, professional competencies, organizational structures, and collaborative

teaming. Without this guidance, schools are reliant on the leadership of the individual principal, and subject to the resources at hand. Rather, the principal will be most effective in implementing an integrated MTSS when supported by district leadership with clear messages, capacity building through professional learning, and the resources and structures for success. Similarly, LEAs will benefit from SEA guidance, increasing the likelihood of fidelity of implementation and consistency across the state with state leadership. The components of a schoolwide MTSS framework are described in several national and state efforts, including the [Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports](#), [Reading Rockets](#), the [National Center on Intensive Intervention](#), [Loyola eCommons](#) (Goodman and Bohanon, 2018) [Michigan Department of Education MTSS Practice Profile](#), and the [Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports](#).

Components of an integrated MTSS generally include:

- ◆ **Comprehensive data system** that integrates academic data (universal screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic assessment), behavioral data, social-emotional data, attendance, etc. Valid and reliable tools for universal screening, progress monitoring for grade-wide and school-wide performance are supplemented by customized data related to individual learner skills. A process for data-informed decision making by teams is based on validated methods and operationalized with decision rules and determinations for the need for intervention and exit from interventions.
- ◆ **Collaborative teaming** (school administrator; regular educators in the targeted grades/subjects; specialized educators such as special educators, related service providers English learner specialists; and other specialists such as psychologists, mental health providers). An active, organized, knowledgeable and representative group exists to provide whole child support, remove barriers, coordinate services, and evaluate activities for the school in alignment with the broader education system. In some schools the team will focus on individual learners who have been identified through the school data system to benefit from additional or customized intensive support to participate and learn alongside peers in the regular classroom.
- ◆ **Evidence-based and research-informed core curriculum and instruction as well as selection of interventions and design of group and individualized supports** for learners who have a similar academic and/or behavioral profile, as well as more intensive and customized strategies for individual learners who need a specific integrated intensive intervention plan. Instruction and interventions are integrated to consider the whole child; have increasing intensities to match learner needs, and participation in interventions is decided through the collaborative teaming process. The interventions or supports that are selected or designed have been demonstrated

through research to have a positive impact on learners of similar age and profile. [Specially Designed Instruction](#) and English learner services are provided to any child who receives those services within tiered interventions and not as a separate, segregated service.

- ◆ **Organizational support through ongoing professional learning and coaching for fidelity and schedules for adequate time for planning and implementation** are provided both school wide and for content that is targeted to improve specific educator competencies. Practice profiles define implementation competencies are created with input from experts and implementers; a system for teaching and coaching implementation is developed; implementation data is collected and reviewed by a leadership team to provide just-in-time coaching to support accuracy, consistency, and quality; and leadership ensures that time for implementer planning, and delivery of interventions is available.

CURRENT STATE OF MTSS IMPLEMENTATION

MTSS policy and practice across the United States varies widely and appears to be linked to the varied definitions of MTSS, local control, the extent of current placement practices for children with disabilities, and guidance and legal requirements put forth by State Education Agencies (SEAs). In a survey of the State of MTSS in education, [Panorama Education](#) found that MTSS implementation has significantly evolved between 2019 and 2023, with an increase in including social-emotional learning (SEL) in their MTSS frameworks. A primary organizational need for districts is a robust, integrated data system that can be used by schools for decision making and evaluation of impact. Implementation challenges highlighted fidelity of implementation and making data-based decisions; and leadership recommendations included:

- ◆ Build alignment and buy-in across stakeholder groups
- ◆ Provide ongoing professional learning for clear expectations
- ◆ Form strong collaborative teams with diverse stakeholders
- ◆ Develop a systematic data collection and decision-making plan
- ◆ Provide an intervention library based on research and evidence of effectiveness
- ◆ Focus on strong Tier 1 supports and interventions within core instruction
- ◆ Provide adequate time for change with a clear adoption process
- ◆ Focus on the whole child and multiple data sources for making instructional decisions

In a [brief](#) from the Institute on Community Inclusion and the TIES Center, the status of MTSS policy and practice across the United States is discussed with reference to a study on the extent to which states implemented MTSS as a framework for inclusion found that there is:

- ◆ A need for SEA offices (e.g., offices responsible for special education, general education curriculum, assessment, district improvement, and so on) to collaborate in their efforts to frame and implement inclusive MTSS models.
- ◆ A linkage between the use of broader definitions of MTSS and the inclusion of more diverse students under the MTSS umbrella.
- ◆ Inclusive models of MTSS reinforce fundamental tenets of the least restrictive environment (LRE) principle, namely that (a) all students are general education students, (b) all educators need to take responsibility for all students, and (c) high-quality instruction and intervention obviate the need to exclude students with disabilities, including those with significant cognitive disabilities.
- ◆ States in early stages of inclusive MTSS work used more rhetoric (especially superficial rhetoric) referencing “all means all” than those in later stages raised questions about how rhetoric might precede, intersect with, or possibly obscure focused action.

INCLUSIVE PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AND MTSS

The school principal is responsible for communicating a vision and values of the school community, and for enacting that vision through guidance and support to the educators and staff of their school. Competencies are standards that indicate areas of performance for effective principal practices. Principal practices are the behaviors that represent their competencies in various areas of leadership; with a research-based connection between the practice and outcomes for school improvement or school implementation of an area of interest. [Hitt and Tucker \(2016\)](#) reviewed 56 studies and three (3) leadership frameworks to develop a [unified model of effective principal practices](#). They identified five (5) major areas:

1. **Establish and convey the school’s vision, goals, and expectations:** set performance expectations, model aspirational practices, promote data use for continuous improvement)
 - ✓ Communicate a clear vision for including each and every learner who belongs in the school community.

- ✓ Link collaborative teaming to systematically plan, teach, and assess learning for all students in the general education classroom.
 - ✓ Define connections between tiered interventions and supports and the core instruction and school wide social, emotional, and behavioral support systems.
 - ✓ Build alignment with current strategic plans and buy-in to MTSS to achieve desired outcomes.
2. **Build professional capacity** by leading teacher learning and development (targeted and job-embedded professional learning, building relationships, supporting effective use of time to learn and collaborate, hiring staff who “fit” with the implementation of MTSS and including all learners in general education instruction and interventions.
- ✓ Identify and support ongoing professional learning through a variety of voluntary and paid options (e.g., book study, professional learning communities, structured and facilitated planning sessions, etc.).
 - ✓ Identify and support a coaching system of mentorship for new teachers, peer coaching in grade-wide teams and/or educators who need to build their core instruction and tiered intervention capacity.
 - ✓ Match educators and support staff with positions that are the “right fit” to the skills required.
3. **Create a supportive organization** for implementation such as distributed leadership by fostering diversity and cultural responsiveness, and the strategic acquisition and use of resources. One of the most impactful levers for MTSS is whether stakeholders have the time and opportunity to collaboratively develop the system and solve problems as they arise.
- ✓ Form strong collaborative teams with time in the school day for transdisciplinary planning.
 - ✓ Advocate for and ensure the use of data systems to support instructional decisions.
 - ✓ Promote culturally responsive practices across the school, with community input.
 - ✓ Acquire and allocate resources strategically to build staff capacity and promote fidelity of implementation.
 - ✓ Build time into the master schedule to enable cross-discipline and departmental or grade-wide collaboration.
 - ✓ Communicate in a transparent and clear manner that values the input of all stakeholders, fosters resolution of conflicts, and promotes trust.
4. **Facilitate a high-quality learning experience** for students (effective curriculum and instruction and assessment, safe and personalized learning environment)

- ✓ Advocate for and ensure research-based curricula are used with flexibility for differentiating core instruction in response to learner interests, culture, abilities, and strengths.
- ✓ Monitor use and utility of curricula, assessments, and learning outcomes across grades/subjects in the school.
- ✓ Demonstrate how data is pivotal to evaluating student progress, promoting equity in access and outcomes across learner groups, and defining the need for a change in operations.
- ✓ Create an environment that leads to psychological and physical safety and opportunities to share leadership.
- ✓ Foster collaborative planning

5. **Connect with external partners** (productive and collaborative relationships with families and community partners)

- ✓ Establish strong connections with families and community partners.
- ✓ Communicate expectations with a trusting and culturally responsive approach to families and community members.
- ✓ Include families in school-wide decisions and information dissemination.
- ✓ Provide linkages for families with community support systems and development opportunities.

INCLUSIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTING A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS

DOMAINS	DATA-BASED DECISION SYSTEMS	COLLABORATIVE TEAMS	EVIDENCE-BASED INSTRUCTION, INTERVENTION, SUPPORTS	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT	INCLUSION FOR ALL: EACH AND EVERY CHILD PARTICIPATES IN MTSS
SCHOOL VISION, GOALS, EXPECTATIONS	<p>Emphasize to school staff the importance of using disaggregated data to develop a plan to support school staff as they implement, sustain, and continuously improve inclusive tiered interventions to prevent failure and improve outcomes for each and every learner who belongs to the school.</p> <p>Model strength-based approach to schoolwide goal setting for improved systemic practices that address equity in access, opportunity, participation, and outcomes using learner data.</p>	<p>Creates and maintains a master schedule that allows time for educators to collaborate on curriculum, instruction, assessment, and individualized supports and services.</p> <p>Foster and hold high expectations for shared accountability for all learners.</p> <p>Model a strengths-based approach to problem-solving, identify learning needs of staff and children, and expectations for adult collaboration.</p>	<p>Develops a master scheduling process prioritizing the needs of learners with disabilities, multilingual learners, and others who need tiered interventions and/or specialized services or supports.</p> <p>Create buy-in for use of strong core instruction including differentiation, flexible grouping, peer learning, and scaffolding for diverse learners as well as a system to provide supplemental instruction, and intensive, individualized instruction.</p>	<p>Create a culture of open communication, respect, and trust as the school and community develop a sense of collective responsibility for improving the learning of all learners.</p> <p>Engage stakeholders at all levels to promote a shared vision for the equitable participation of all learners in instructional interventions as appropriate to promote learning grade level standards.</p>	<p>Fosters a sense of belonging by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing a clear and consistent vision of quality inclusive practices with opportunities for the cultures and languages in the community to be represented in learning and extracurricular activities. • modeling and encouraging language that does not label children and school spaces by ability or service. • ensuring that there are no spaces that segregate children into groups based on label and/or service.

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PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY	<p>Foster a culture of continuous improvement through action research, and professional growth.</p> <p>Model use of data for determining instructional interventions and evaluation of learner progress</p>	<p>Distribute leadership and empower teachers to contribute to decisions that affect school-wide practices.</p> <p>Ensure that teams (grade-level, subject area, intervention, etc.) use effective collaborative planning and decision-making structures.</p> <p>Clarify and make changes as needed to the roles and responsibilities of general educators and support services staff (certified and classified) for instructional and service planning, teaching, and assessment in relation to integrated interventions.</p>	<p>Recruit and hire staff with an eye toward promoting the knowledge and skills to include all learners, implement an MTSS that addresses the needs of all learners, especially those at highest risk of exclusion.</p> <p>Assess the strengths and learning needs of all educators to provide evidence-based core instruction for English learners and learners with disabilities.</p> <p>Acquire professional learning and coaching that will support the development of knowledge, skill, and disposition for teachers to create learning environments and activities that advance learners' proficiency in grade level standards.</p>	<p>Ensure that all professional development opportunities are culturally sensitive and inclusive.</p> <p>Develop/implement a system for coaching teachers to build their implementation of academic curricula, behavioral supports, and tiered interventions.</p> <p>Visibly promote the delivery of instruction and interventions with fidelity to ensure all students are successful.</p>	<p>Build a professional community that shares responsibility for improving the learning of all children/youth.</p> <p>Assess the strengths and learning needs of educators to adapt instruction for English learners and learners with disabilities.</p> <p>Acquire professional learning and coaching that will support the development of knowledge, skill, and disposition for teachers to provide adaptations and modifications to the curriculum.</p> <p>Empowers staff contributions to the effective implementation of inclusive practices within a tiered framework.</p>

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ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT	<p>Examine and monitor disaggregated school data to discover <u>trends</u> in attendance, family engagement, discipline, and academic performance to make organizational decisions, reduce performance <u>gaps</u>, and develop practices to promote <u>progress</u> toward grade level standards.</p> <p>Ensure timely access to relevant, disaggregated data that is usable and actionable</p> <p>Support a process to remove barriers to the effective use of data for decision making.</p> <p>Ensure data are regularly and appropriately used to monitor learner progress and improve instruction for all learners.</p>	<p>Ensure that specialized educators have the resources they need (such as common planning time, ongoing professional learning, coaching) to collaborate to provide quality, effective services and supports.</p> <p>Foster the development and use of systems of communication among teams, such as departmental teams, grade-wide planning teams, intervention teams, professional learning communities, etc.</p>	<p>Design the overall school environment to be psychologically and physically safe and validating of all cultures, identities, and backgrounds.</p> <p>Ensure the use of a process for selecting instructional practices and interventions that considers (at minimum) the needs of all students, fit within a culture of inclusion, embedded supports for staff and students to be successful, and how well defined the core features are for students of different abilities.</p> <p>Ensure that selected interventions are accessible for all learners, including learners with disabilities and English learners.</p>	<p>Advocate for staffing that enables school staff to meet the learning and support needs of unique student populations.</p> <p>Create an environment that prioritizes collaboration in professional development by creating opportunities for staff and stakeholders to learn and design solutions together to support full inclusion.</p> <p>Allocates funds to support professional learning, collaborative planning, and resources for tiered interventions to build educator capacity for implementation.</p>	<p>Assign and schedule learners with disabilities and those who need enrichment in natural proportions across grades and subjects.</p> <p>Ensure that interventions are available to all learners and are not considered “special education;” specially designed instruction is specific ONLY to children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).</p> <p>Ensure all facilities are accessible and create a physical school environment that does not label or segregate any member of the school community based on ability or specialized service.</p>

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HIGH QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING	<p>Promote assessment literacy and data-informed instructional decisions for differentiating and scaffolding instruction and determining the need for supplemental interventions.</p>	<p>Support teams use a structured learner-centered planning process to plan academic and social participation and learning for learners with more complex and specialized support needs.</p> <p>Ensure that educators collaborate to vertically align the curriculum with state standards and make it accessible to all learners.</p> <p>Ensures that collaborative teams develop individualized participation plans for children with extensive support needs, to learn in the general education class and engage with peers.</p>	<p>Ensure the use of universal design for learning (UDL), culturally responsive instruction, differentiation, flexible grouping, and other evidence-based core (Tier 1) instructional and assessment practices.</p> <p>Promote peer-assisted learning as natural supports for learners with specialized learning needs.</p>	<p>Provide safe opportunities for staff to identify their strengths and skill/professional development needs to successfully include all children and youth in academic and social activities.</p> <p>Ensure paraeducators are trained and assume instructional support roles under certified educator supervision.</p> <p>Supervise and evaluate educators' skills in universal design for learning, culturally competent instruction, differentiation, language acquisition for English Learners, and other evidence-based instructional practices.</p>	<p>Ensures that all learners in the school community participate in the same research-based curricula, with accommodations and adaptation for learners with disabilities and English Learners.</p> <p>Ensures teachers provide general and specialized instruction to learners who receive specialized service, with their peers in the general education classroom.</p> <p>Supports specialized educators to serve in multiple roles in collaboration with classroom teachers; their roles are not defined by a room or learners' disability category.</p>

DOMAINS	DATA-BASED DECISION SYSTEMS	COLLABORATIVE TEAMS	EVIDENCE-BASED INSTRUCTION, INTERVENTION, SUPPORTS	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT	INCLUSION FOR ALL: EACH AND EVERY CHILD PARTICIPATES IN MTSS
CONNECTION WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY	<p>Support the community to understand what, why, and how children and youth with additional service and support needs can and should be included.</p> <p>Proactively educate families and community members on research, rationale, evidence-based practices, legal requirements, and national best practices that inform school decisions.</p> <p>Encourage families to participate in leadership through culturally and linguistically responsive opportunities for decision-making on current and potential initiatives.</p>	<p>Collaborate with the school community to design and implement a schoolwide support system that results in a positive and supportive learning environment for all learners.</p> <p>Creates a culture of open communication, respect, and trust by creating adaptations and accommodations for families considering culture, language, economics, transportation, and other factors that may impact family engagement.</p>	<p>Establish and reinforce a shared understanding of expectations concerning learner academic and social outcomes across all learner populations.</p> <p>Ensure that learners with specialized service needs and their families are proactively engaged in before-, during-, and after-school activities and decisions.</p> <p>Shares successes and challenges of inclusive education and integrated tiered interventions with the larger community, district office, and Board of Education.</p>	<p>Build authentic relationships with families through two-way, reciprocal conversations that acknowledge families' cultures and native language and engage families in co-creating a culturally responsive learning environment. Oral and written translation is provided in the native language.</p>	<p>Involve community stakeholders in preventing and addressing bullying and other behaviors that threaten the well-being of all learners.</p> <p>Creates methods for families to receive information and/or provide input regarding what, why and how children and youth with additional service and support needs can and should be included in general education learning and tiered interventions alongside their peers.</p>

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Culturally Competent Approaches recognize the cultural grounding of teachers' and service providers' views, behaviors, and methods; acknowledge the power of language and the diverse communication styles of students and their families; address culturally based definitions of family networks and of showing respect; view family and community as critical parts of a student's support system; and demonstrate a willingness and ability to draw on community-based values, traditions, customs, and resources (Frances & Osher, 2018).

Data-based Decision-making, within an MTSS framework, occurs at all levels of MTSS implementation, from individual students to the district level. MTSS teams use screening and progress monitoring data to make decisions about instruction, movement within the multi-level prevention system, intensification of instruction and supports, and identification of students with disabilities (in accordance with state law). Teams use implementation data to evaluate the extent to which their assessments, interventions, and supports have been implemented as intended and identify areas of improvement (MTSS Center, 2021a).

Educational Equity means that every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income (Aspen Education and Society Program & CCSSO, 2017).

Progress Monitoring, within an MTSS framework, is used to assess students' performance, to quantify students' rate of improvement or responsiveness to instruction or intervention, and to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction using valid and reliable measures. In addition, across all levels of the system, sites monitor progress to provide feedback for improvement. With progress monitoring, MTSS teams use valid and reliable tools and focus on fidelity of implementation for interventions, with consideration for cultural and linguistic responsiveness and recognition of students' strengths (MTSS Center, 2021e).

Professional Learning

The [Standards for Professional Learning](#), revised by Learning Forward, comprise a framework to outline a system for professional learning that is high quality and results in improved educator practices and student results. The three (3) categories within the framework are:

1. Rigorous content: the essential content of adult learning that leads to improved student outcomes.

2. Transformational processes: the elements of professional learning, explaining how educators learn in ways that sustain significant changes in their knowledge, practices, and mindsets.
3. Conditions for Success: aspects of the professional learning context, structures, and cultures that undergird high-quality professional learning.

Key roles for principals are described on page 5 of the Standards for Professional Learning [Action Guide for the Principal](#).

Coaching

Coaches work closely with the educational system to provide job-embedded support, feedback, and growth opportunities for implementing educators, in this case, school principals. They are key to supporting the vision of the initial and successive professional learning events. Through close connections with participating principals, coaches provide strength-based guidance and feedback, acquire resources, demonstrate methods for implementing practices and/or assist with school-wide systemic change toward inclusive schooling within a MTSS framework. A high quality and effective coaching model will have a coaching cycle/looping procedure grounded in specific criteria for evaluating fidelity of implementing the principal practices and determining areas for further development. An [Action Guide for the Coach](#) includes information that can be applied to principal learning and support.

Fidelity of Implementation Measures

Implementation fidelity refers to the degree to which a program or set of innovations are delivered as intended. There may be barriers to implementation that result from systemic policies or procedures, organizational structures, mindset or belief system, or other factors unrelated to implementer skills. Or implementer skill may be in the process of development and not yet fully in place. A measure of fidelity will enable the professional learning leaders and coaches to identify areas for job-embedded support and may also identify organizational solutions that need to be put in place. One [rubric to assess fidelity](#) of implementing school-wide MTSS has been developed by the Center on MTSS another ([DBI Implementation Rubric](#)) has been developed by the National Center on Intensive Intervention as well as other tools on team practices, the delivery of student interventions, etc.

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The Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education is a non-profit organization, incorporated in the state of Maryland and working with states, local education agencies, schools, and with local and national educational organizations. MCIE's mission is to be the catalyst for the meaningful and successful inclusion of all learners in their neighborhood or choice schools.

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