

School Structures, Systems, & Functions

School and behavioral/mental health partnerships are best implemented as part of a Multi-Tier System of Support (MTSS). A multi-tiered system of support is a whole school, prevention-based framework for improving learning outcomes for every student. MTSS represents a collection of practices, including behavior and academic screening and progress monitoring; data-based problem solving and decision-making; delivery of evidence-based interventions across a continuum of intensity; and family-school-community partnerships.

Missouri School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (MO-SW-PBS) provides a well-defined process for establishing a viable MTSS. It is a joint initiative between the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the University of Missouri-Columbia (MU) Center for School-Wide Positive Behavior Support, and the federal Office of Special Education Programs. A wealth of guidance materials and data tools have been developed and made available through this partnership. In particular, the [Team Workbooks](#) for Tiers 1, 2 and 3 (Missouripbis.org) provide detailed systematic and explicit guidance regarding school-wide preventative practices and instruction, identification of students in need of early intervention, a functional approach to behavior intervention, setting behavior goals with data-based targets, progress monitoring, and data decision making rules. MO-SW-PBS processes and resources are used widely in Missouri schools. It is recommended that Missouri schools and districts entering into partnerships with community behavioral mental health agencies and providers do so within the context of an MTSS that is aligned with MO-SW-PBS.

Triggers for Action

With a preventative structure in place students may be identified who need additional support and intervention. This can occur through review of student data such as discipline records, attendance, and academic progress. Students might also be nominated by individual teachers, problem solving teams or parent/guardians due to specific behavioral concerns.

Schools should also consider the use of school-wide screening for early identification of students who may have unmet social-emotional or behavioral health needs. Screening data can serve as a needs assessment in evaluating the necessity of both broad level universal interventions (e.g., school- or classroom-wide social-emotional learning curricula, positive behavior supports) as well as more student-specific needs at the targeted or intensive level (e.g., social skills groups, individual counseling).

Multiple sources of data help ensure the reliability and validity of the process. It is important that the data source not be limited to “acting out” or externalizing behaviors but also include indicators of internalizing behaviors.

A behavior goal with a data-based target should be established for students who are identified for intervention (Tier 2). Progress is monitored frequently, with comparison of the trend line to the goal line. Ensure that the planned intervention is implemented with fidelity. If little progress toward the goal is evident after a designated period (generally 3 – 7 weeks) consideration should be given to changing or intensifying the intervention (Tier 3). A data review to reconsider the

function of the behavior should be part of the process. This may also be a trigger to consider involvement of the mental health partner as part of the intervention.

Access to Community Behavioral Mental Health Services

School behavioral mental health partnerships can be established as a referral arrangement, an on-site clinic, or with behavioral mental health professionals as ongoing collaborative members of the school team. In the first two models, mental health involvement with designated students occurs through a school referral, typically as part of Tier 3 in the MTSS process and structure. With the third example, mental health professionals would be involved at every step of the process.

IDEA/504 Considerations

If school staff suspect that a student has a disability a referral should be made for an evaluation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (504). Disability is a term that indicates the school district or charter school has completed a process to determine that a student has a condition that substantially limits a major life activity. Students identified as having a disability are protected from discrimination and are entitled to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) which includes provision of necessary support and services to allow access, participation and progress in the school curriculum. Under the IDEA the condition must also be determined to adversely affect (significantly impact) educational progress and result in a need for special education (specialized instruction). School districts should provide guidance for staff about information that would trigger reason to suspect a disability. It should be based on observable evidence and more than, "I wonder if...". Lack of appropriate social skills and observed behavior problems alone are not cause to suspect disability. Screening which indicates such should trigger instruction and targeted intervention as part of the general education program. Lack of sufficient response to increasing intensity of intervention, or determination that the student requires ongoing specialized instruction to progress in the curriculum is reason to suspect disability.