



Office of the Commissioner

785-296-3202
785-291-3791 (fax)

120 SE 10th Avenue • Topeka, KS 66612-1182 • 785-296-6338 (TTY) • www.ksde.org

To: All Kansas Educators
From: Alexa Posny, Commissioner of Education
Date: December 14, 2007
Subject: Partners in Change

Over the past year, staff at KSDE along with representative district and school staff, have met to discuss ways to bring together teams of educators and parents who are focused on improving the academic performance of all learners, especially struggling learners. Additionally, a national summit was held in Washington D.C. last week to wrestle with how to ensure all students are being provided the assistance they need. Kansas was well represented with a team consisting of representatives from the state department including Title I, Title III, Reading First, Special Education, and School Improvement (QPA), and representatives from the field including superintendents, principals, teachers and parents. As part of both of these efforts, it has been determined that education must be approached in an integrated and systemic manner to ensure all children, who are struggling to learn, receive the support and interventions they need as early as they are needed.

Your help is needed to make this systemic approach to education in Kansas possible.

What We Know

- The earlier school staff can assess students' needs and identify those with difficulties, the quicker and less expensive the task is to help those struggling learners catch up
- The longer a student goes without assistance, the longer the remediation time and the more intense the services must be
- There is emerging evidence many students who struggle in the early grades cannot catch up if we wait until 3rd or 4th grade to deliver intensive remediation

A number of educational researchers have long advocated for a system of prevention and intervention for all students. In Kansas, we refer to this systemic approach to helping all students learn, as the Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS). Simply put, MTSS is a continuum of increasingly intense research-based interventions provided to students that respond to their academic and/or behavioral needs. It includes ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of the interventions provided. The outcome is to ensure that each Kansas student achieves to high standards.

There are two other initiatives that are often confused with, yet are part of, MTSS. These are Response to Intervention (RtI) and Early Intervening Services (EIS). Many times, reference to RtI and/or EIS reflects a much narrower focus than the broader and more systemic meaning that applies to MTSS. In Kansas, MTSS encompasses both of these approaches and more.

- RtI refers to a means of identifying a student with specific learning disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). RtI is a systematic process of screening all students for academic difficulty, implementing instructional/interventions that have evidence to support their efficacy, monitoring student progress in these interventions, and applying more intense levels or “tiers” of interventions as needed. Data from this process is used to help inform the possible identification of a disability.
- EIS is sometimes viewed as an individual student problem solving approach or a standard protocol approach to interventions. Under IDEA, a local education agency may use up to 15 percent of its IDEA Part B funds to develop and implement the provision of early intervening services for students who have not yet been identified as needing special education but who need additional academic and behavioral support to succeed in general education. These services are designed for students in grades Kindergarten through 3rd grade; however, it can be used to provide services for children through 12th grade. Additionally, the funds can be used to provide professional development, screening of children, monitoring progress, delivering scientifically-based instruction, and/or ensuring fidelity of implementation.

What are the goals of MTSS?

The main goal of MTSS is to provide an integrated systemic approach to meeting the needs of all students and to use resources in the most effective and efficient way enabling every child to be successful. This is accomplished by:

- Being prevention oriented by knowing who needs support early and putting those supports in place
- Implementing evidence-based interventions for all students and tailoring interventions based on a student's needs
- Using progress monitoring data to know when to make a change

These practices set up a system to provide students at-risk of or already experiencing school difficulties with interventions that prevent additional problems. What makes this different, is that the assessment and instructional practices are integrated into an objective data-based system with built-in decision stages.

What is Needed?

In order for districts and schools to plan for and implement MTSS, everyone must understand its potential and align implementation activities with already existing initiatives. For example, individuals involved with Reading First programs have been supporting the use of evidence-based practices and tiered interventions for many years. Additionally, many schools have implemented Positive Behavior Supports which also uses a tiered approach to deliver interventions. Importantly, MTSS does not necessarily require “adding on” to what is already effectively being done in your school. Instead, it involves reviewing current practices to identify those that yield evidence of effectiveness as well as those that do not. MTSS calls for us to replace practices that do not result in student improvement with those that do.

We know that we have the most important work still ahead of us. Collaboration with all stakeholder groups within our state is imperative to the success of this initiative. To begin with, we will create opportunities for meaningful dialogue with all of you including both general and special educators, about ways we can work together to support students within a multi-tiered system of support. Information regarding progress made toward this end will be shared with you

over the next few months. Additionally, representatives from various constituent groups (e.g., Superintendents, Principals, Parents, and Teachers) will be sharing information with you about MTSS as part of various upcoming meetings. It is also anticipated that an MTSS Summit will be held within the next 6 months, which will be similar in format and outcomes to the summit we attended in Washington DC. Teams from schools will be invited to share information, develop tools, discuss resources, create a shared vision, assess capacity to implement MTSS, and begin to develop an action plan that is consistent with already existing school improvement efforts across general and special education.

We are excited about this collaborative approach to helping all students succeed. We look forward to working with you in this important endeavor; e.g., a statewide systemic approach to help all students learn, especially struggling learners.

For more information, please access the following link: www.kansasmtss.org