Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports

🔵 Structuring Guide: Module 3
Empowering Culture

August 2013

www.kansasmtss.org

Introduction to Document

The *Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports: Structuring Guide* has been created to assist schools in creating the structures necessary to begin the implementation of a Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS). This document serves as a workbook for either schools working with Recognized MTSS Trainers (a current list can be found at www.kansasmtss.org) or as a do-it-yourself guide for schools taking on the challenge themselves. This document provides an explanation of why each component is important as well as suggests steps that have helped other schools successfully complete the tasks and decision making necessary for creating structures that support a sustainable system. Content area specific documents for reading, mathematics, and behavior are companion documents to this one, providing information specific to each content area. All Kansas MTSS documents are aligned with the *Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports: Innovation Configuration Matrix (ICM)*, which describes the critical components of a MTSS and what each looks like when fully implemented, and the *Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports: Research Base*, which provides a basic overview of the research support for a MTSS.

Acknowledgements

A significant commitment of time and energy from numerous Kansas educators, their districts, organizations and partners made this document possible. Their efforts to learn and help others understand what it takes to make a MTSS a reality within schools is reflected in this document. This grassroots effort on the part of Kansas educators indicates a commitment to meeting the needs of every student and sharing wisdom from the field and the research. As the list of individuals and districts that have contributed to this effort over the past 10 years has become too long to detail, a collective expression of gratitude is offered here to everyone who has contributed to the concepts, ideas, and knowledge that are reflected in all Kansas MTSS documents.

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Introduction

In order for the Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) framework to be successful, the leadership team must create and sustain an organizational culture that supports and empowers all of its members, including those both inside and outside the organization (e.g., administration, staff, families, students, and the broader community). Creating a culture conducive to Kansas MTSS is different for every building; leadership teams must understand that activities to create such a culture are rarely easy and quick, and they are continual. As challenging as it may seem at times, the creation and nurturing of an empowering culture are essential to the successful implementation of Kansas MTSS and as such are the primary ongoing responsibilities of the Building Leadership Team.

Introduction

Every building is comprised of a group of individuals (both staff and patrons) who share a collective set of attitudes, experiences, and behaviors that affect the way they interact with one another. This *school culture* "affects the way staff and patrons act, how they dress, what they talk about or never speak of, and whether or not they seek out colleagues for help" (Peterson, 1994, p. 2). The school culture is a complex web of norms, values, beliefs, assumptions, and traditions or rituals that emerge over time (Peterson, 1994) and include interaction expectations developed by teachers, students, parents, and administrators in their daily work or when dealing with crises (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Schein, 1983). When the culture of a building is empowering, leaders, staff, and patrons understand and value their individual contributions to the overall organization while simultaneously feeling a part of the collective whole. Therefore, culture has a great deal of effect on the changes educators create with Kansas MTSS. Yet not all stakeholders will immediately agree to use the Kansas MTSS framework. It takes time to educate and actively include stakeholders in the process of change, and it takes varying amounts of time for all stakeholders to understand the benefits and desire to support a shift in building culture.

Successful buildings share characteristics such as strong instructional leadership, a clear and focused mission, high expectations for students, a climate conducive to learning, opportunities to learn, regular monitoring of students and classrooms, and positive home-school relations (Levine & Lezotte, 1990). Research into school culture, change, and improvement has found that success is more likely when teachers are collegial and work collaboratively (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Levine & Lezotte, 1990). This collaboration can increase the level of commitment and momentum of all staff. With collaboration, change efforts are more easily implemented and better structured for success. Now is the time to begin building a positive collaborative culture. This guide is written with the characteristics of successful

buildings in mind. Leadership teams will go through steps to ensure that the Kansas MTSS model is being implemented as planned. In addition, this guide directs the leadership team to evaluate the system as a whole.

School Connectedness and Student Success

A growing body of research indicates that students are more successful, both academically and socially, when they feel connected to their school. School connection has been defined as "the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals" (Wingspread, 2004, p. 233).

Research indicates that when students report feeling connected to school, educational motivation, classroom engagement, and attendance all improve (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Because motivation, engagement, and attendance—individually and in combination—directly impact student academic success, ensuring students' connectedness to school becomes less "optional" and a much more vital aspect of education for all children. Furthermore, students who feel connected to school are less likely to engage in "risky" behaviors such as drug use, early sex, and suicide attempts (Blum, 2005).

Although the task of fostering school connectedness may seem daunting, Blum (2005) outlines the following strategies for increasing students' connection to school:

- Implement high standards and expectations, and provide academic support to all students.
- Apply fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced.
- Create trusting relationships among students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families.
- Hire and support capable teachers who are skilled at content-teaching techniques and classroom management to meet each learner's need.
- Foster high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion.
- Ensure that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school.

Elements of an Empowering Culture

Culture is defined as the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular group. Culture affects how people act on what they believe. Culture is a blend of the group's vision, mission, beliefs, and values. Definitions of these terms vary in the literature. For the purposes of this document, the terms *vision* and *mission* have been collapsed into a single understanding. The definitions used to describe the elements

Empowering Culture Promotes School Connectedness

Elements of An Empowering Culture

of an empowering culture within the Kansas MTSS framework are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Elements of an Empowering Culture
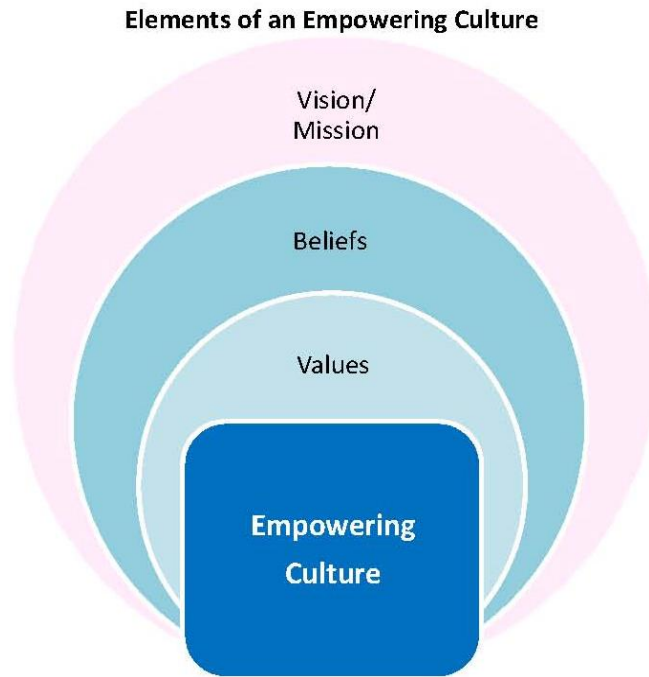
Vision/Mission: Vision/mission directs the system toward what it aspires to become. The vision/mission is future-focused and answers the question "What do we want to create?" It may also include information defining the purpose of the organization, answering the question "Why do we exist?"

Beliefs: Beliefs refer to shared convictions that are held to be true. Beliefs influence values. This element answers the question "What do we as an organization believe in?"

Shared Vision/Mission

A vision/mission is a statement about what the organization wants to become, speaking in terms of possibilities, not probabilities. A vision/mission should stretch the organization's capabilities and image of itself, giving shape and direction to the organization's future. It is a guiding image of success. Vision/mission statements often include information related to the mission of the organization, providing a "blueprint" for the work that will be conducted. The vision/mission statement should be something that resonates with all members of the organization and helps them feel proud, excited, and part of something much bigger than themselves.

When creating a shared vision/mission, it is essential that the leadership team work with all staff to cultivate the shared picture of an idyllic future. Such a shared vision/mission captures the collective

Vision/Mission

imagination of everyone in the school. It is a vivid picture of a place that could be very different because the school community collectively committed to creating it (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2001).

A well-crafted vision/mission has many benefits and will generate commitment, create meaning in the work being done, establish a standard of excellence, and bridge the present to the future for all stakeholders (Nanus, 1992). The vision/mission motivates stakeholders to act and create, as well as change, what is not working for students. Stakeholders should be able to easily identify their roles in assisting the school to fulfill the vision/mission.

A shared vision/mission ultimately helps schools answer these questions:

- Where do we want to be in the future?
- How great can we become?
- What do we want to create together?

Often a school already has a vision and/or mission statement in place. If that is the case, a review of the statement is necessary to ensure it is still accurate in representing the vision of the staff and is successful in establishing a culture of commitment and change. During the review of the current statement, if any sections are determined to be in conflict with MTSS practices and principles, the leadership team will need to make the appropriate revisions.

Creating
Shared
Vision/Mission

If a school currently does not have a vision/mission statement, it is imperative that the leadership team work together to create one. The tool "Creating a Shared Vision/Mission" (see appendix) can assist the leadership team in focusing on creating a common vision/mission for the building. This tool provides the Building Leadership Team with an activity to use with the entire staff to construct a common vision/mission for the building, focusing on carrying out the work of educating students.

As the building moves forward with Kansas MTSS, practices that support regularly scheduled reviews of the vision/mission will be taught. It is critical that the vision/mission be projected as the inspiration or ideal for which the team is striving. Identifying measurable objectives or goals that will aid in moving the building forward toward the vision/mission based on the data being collected is an important way for teams to gauge their progress. For example, a building may have created a vision/mission that states, "All students will graduate with 21st-century skills." One commitment that might be identified to attain this vision/mission is "We will improve attendance by 20% by the end of this school year." This is a small step in moving closer to the vision/mission. Indeed, students cannot graduate with 21st-century skills if they do not attend school.

The challenge is to create a vision/mission that is grand enough to inspire people while also being sufficiently grounded in reality so that people can start to believe that it can and will happen. No Olympic athlete ever got to the Olympics by accident; a compelling vision/mission of his or her stellar performance helped surmount all of the sweat and frustrations for many years. Without that powerful, attractive, valuable vision/mission, why bother? Sometimes organizations far surpass their initial visions/missions; as progress happens, what is possible expands. Nonetheless, the projected picture of success is a reminder of why we are working so hard and will continue to inspire success.

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs are the internal shared convictions and related actions by which the staff wants to live, as seen by those external to the system. They are operating principles and, as such, serve as the standard against which all decisions are measured. For example, one of the Kansas MTSS Core Beliefs is: "Every member of the education community continues to grow, learn and reflect." If, as a leadership team, it is determined that instructional aides and paraprofessionals will not be included in professional development, this core belief is not truly being reflected in practice.

The Kansas MTSS Core Beliefs, discussed in Module 1, were created by stakeholders from across the state. This list is helpful in providing a frame of reference about the intention of Kansas MTSS as a whole; however, ultimately, each building must agree to and adopt core beliefs that are contextually meaningful and relevant in guiding local decision-making.

The ultimate success of Kansas MTSS within a building depends on the agreement of all stakeholders about their shared beliefs. Therefore, to build a Kansas MTSS that is supportive of all students, it is necessary to ensure that the beliefs are explicit and that they drive the decision-making process. If a plan, decision, or set of actions conflicts with the beliefs, then it is likely that dissatisfaction, conflict, and indecision will occur. When plans, decisions, and actions are aligned with the beliefs, then there is focus, commitment, and energy to complete the tasks at hand.

Examples of belief statements:

- We believe each student can learn; thus, we must set and support clear and high expectations.
- We believe that school connectedness is vital to the success of all students; thus, all employees have a role and responsibility in each student's success.
- We believe that schools belong to the community and, as a result, we must be accountable.

Core Beliefs

Core Beliefs of Kansas MTSS

- We believe that we must provide a quality learning environment for each student; thus, we must establish a welcoming, safe, and well maintained school.

TEAM DISCUSSION
Reflect on Vision/Mission, and Core Beliefs
1. What kind of assistance and support will I and other staff members need?
2. What barriers are we facing at this point, and how will we address them?
3. What are the likely obstacles that we foresee needing to be addressed?
4. How will we address obstacles that we have not anticipated?
5. What are we as a team/school struggling with most?
6. What can we eliminate, reduce, or stop doing to make room for what matters most?
7. What would staff members benefit from us not doing?
8. What can we leave unfinished without resulting in a loss of impact upon our students?
9. Are there any policies (rules/guidelines) that would impact the ability of the leadership team to enact change and develop an empowering culture?
10. Are there common practices (routines/traditions) that would impact the ability of the leadership team to enact change and develop an empowering culture?

TEAM DISCUSSION
11. Knowing that it takes time to develop an empowering culture; did anything come up for which the team needs to create an action plan at this time?
12. What policies or practices specific to the building's culture may need an action plan or may need to be included on a Stop-Doing List?

Working with Stakeholders

Working with
Stakeholders

In the previous sections the leadership team was directed to address the culture of the building. Of equal importance to successful Kansas MTSS implementation is how the leadership team works with all stakeholders. The following sections will look at several items, including the roles and responsibilities of collaborative teams; the process and responsibility of the leadership team with parents, families, and the community; and communication involving all stakeholders as a key aspect of achieving buy-in and sustained change.

Our Stakeholders

Collaborative Teams

Collaborative
Teams

During structuring for Kansas MTSS, many buildings find that for years significant amounts of data have been collected. However, in some cases, data have not been used effectively for school and student improvement. Within Kansas MTSS, the structures and procedures for systematic collection and analysis of formative and summative data ensure that all data are used appropriately. The Self-Correcting Feedback Loop introduced in Module 1 demonstrates how information is used at multiple levels to improve both instruction and the system. Since the Building Leadership Team cannot be responsible for everything, staff must be empowered to share in the responsibility for using data to ensure that each student is challenged and is learning. In a learner-centered environment, leaders foster collaborative opportunities for shared learning, dialogue, and reflection among all members of the organization.

Not coincidentally, a data initiative is most useful when it is characterized by widespread involvement among teachers and staff (Wayman, 2005; Wayman & Stringfield, 2006). Therefore, it is important to identify methods that help leaders promote widespread collaboration among staff involved in the inquiry into student data. The use of data to improve educational practices is new to most educators; consequently, the support and motivation that result from such group efforts serve staff well. Wayman (2005) noted that the relationship between data use and collaboration is reciprocal; data

initiatives are more likely to be successful if teachers are allowed to learn and work collaboratively. The use of data conversely helps foster constructive collaboration. In addition, analyzing data within a collaborative framework affords educators further opportunities to interact and share ideas across disciplines.

Within Kansas MTSS, data are constantly reviewed and shared within the Self-Correcting Feedback Loop. Collaborative teams review data related to student improvement, share data and ideas, and collaborate with other teams in order to refine instructional methods. The communication and collaboration opportunities with the Self-Correcting Feedback Loop result in teachers and support staff naturally assuming roles that further facilitate the shared use of data for decision making. The shared responsibility and action allow the Self-Correcting Feedback Loop to function effectively.

Self-Correcting Feedback Loop
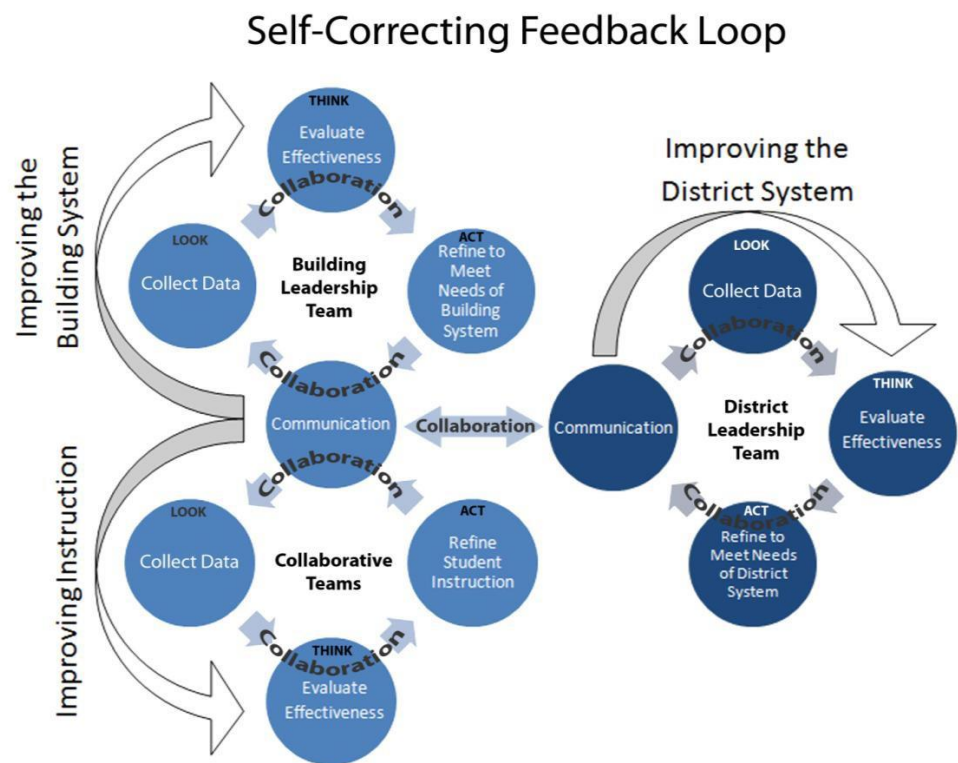
It is the responsibility of the Building Leadership Team to create and train the building's collaborative teams. Collaborative teams are comprised of teachers and support staff and are in charge of analyzing data (screening, diagnostic analysis, and progress monitoring) at the grade, classroom, small group, and individual student levels. The collaborative teams use data to group students, identify the instructional focus of the groups, match protocol interventions to student need for Supplemental and Intensive instruction, and evaluate the effectiveness of the supports being provided. In

identifying collaborative teams, it is important to keep in mind the responsibilities of the team. Simply renaming an existing team does not make the team a true collaborative team; it must also change practices so as to fulfill the new responsibilities.

Important considerations for determining the structure of collaborative teams include involving staff from each grade level and establishing regular meetings. In large elementary buildings, collaborative teams are often grade-level teams, while in smaller elementary buildings there may be a primary team and an intermediate team. In secondary buildings, collaborative teams are often departmental or inter-departmental teams or professional learning communities (PLCs). As collaborative teams and leadership teams engage in the steps of Kansas MTSS implementation, they carry out the steps of a problem-solving process.

The student improvement team approach is typically used in buildings that are not implementing Kansas MTSS. Student Improvement Teams (SITs) carry out the steps of a problem-solving sequence, which results in the development of an intervention plan that documents the child's area of concern, interventions implemented, data reflecting the child's response to the interventions, and recommendations based on the child's response to the interventions. When buildings start to transition to the Kansas MTSS framework, the SIT team may continue to function as a single separate team. However, once the building is fully implementing Kansas MTSS, the collaborative teams within the building carry out the functions of the SIT and general education interventions (GEI) teams.

It is important to remember that if, at any time, the collaborative team suspects that a student may have an exceptionality and/or a need for special education services, the team must refer the student for an initial evaluation. The Kansas MTSS process should not delay a student from receiving a special education evaluation, and parents must be informed of the nature of student performance data being collected, the general education services being provided, strategies for increasing the student's rate of learning, and their right to request an evaluation. For further clarification on this issue, refer to the brief entitled "Student Improvement Teams and the Multi-Tier System of Supports" (April 2011), which can be accessed on the Kansas MTSS web site.

Although the specific steps of implementation vary for reading, math, and behavior implementation, the steps for all the content areas of Kansas MTSS constitute a problem-solving process that meets GEI requirements. The collaborative teams use progress monitoring and other data to engage in problem solving so that changes can be made:

- To intensify instruction for students not making sufficient progress.
- To increase the difficulty of materials or reduce intervention time for students exceeding the expected rate of growth.

Collaborative teams may use individual student problem-solving efforts to customize intensive intervention based on individual students' needs. At some point a collaborative team may ask certain specialists in the building (e.g., behavior specialist, reading specialist, special education teacher, school psychologist, speech/language pathologist) to assist with individual student problem-solving efforts to design a customized intervention. However, for all tiers of intervention, the protocol intervention must be taught with fidelity before adjustments are made by the collaborative team to customize the intervention (KSDE, 2011).

The Building Leadership Team establishes and provides dedicated time for collaborative teams to meet, review data, and refine instruction. Collaborative teams, in turn, share with leadership teams the effectiveness and efficiency of instruction and intervention being provided and monitored.

As shown in the Self-Correcting Feedback Loop, the Building Leadership Team is responsible for improving the system. For this to occur effectively there must be collaborative teams that are focused on improving instruction and communicating information. This exchange ensures that decisions about the system are well informed by the data. Collaborative teams have three primary responsibilities:

Primary Responsibilities of Collaborative Teams

1. Conducting group problem solving using universal screening data at the grade, classroom, and individual student levels. This leads to additional diagnostic assessment procedures being conducted, as necessary, to establish effective instructional groups. This responsibility is carried out three times a year immediately following the universal screening data collection.
2. Reviewing progress-monitoring data on a regular basis to determine what instructional adjustments are needed for students receiving supplemental and intensive instruction. This responsibility is carried out continuously throughout the year.
3. Conducting individual student problem solving when students are not making sufficient progress from protocol interventions. This responsibility is carried out continuously throughout the year.

The challenge buildings face when adapting SIT groups is the need to have a larger representation of single grade levels when fulfilling responsibilities related to group problem solving and reviewing progress-monitoring data. Such broad representation makes scheduling frequent meetings difficult. Buildings that have had the most success in restructuring SITs have created collaborative teams at

each grade level. Buildings that have PLCs in place adapt these groups to function as collaborative teams without much difficulty. Many PLCs already exist as grade-level teams. Even in instances where this is not the case, the structure easily allows for such an adjustment.

For example, PLCs meet regularly, so increasing scheduling for collaborative teams is a minor modification. Buildings with functioning SITs and PLCs sometimes divide the three primary responsibilities. The PLCs are responsible for addressing group problem solving and reviewing progress-monitoring data to determine necessary changes to instruction. The SIT structure remains in place, but is accessed much less often, only in situations when the grade-level collaborative team is unable to design interventions that enable a student to make sufficient progress. In the blended structure, all SIT members participate in at least one collaborative team. It is beneficial to keep members engaged and practicing the process of data analysis for instructional planning. With this regular experience, members of SIT are able to more effectively use the data brought from collaborative teams. This will ultimately support the process as a continuum in a collaborative process.

When considering functional structures, the Building Leadership Team needs to consider the policies and practices that support and hinder collaboration time as well as the experience and expertise of specific staff. The goals are to support regularly scheduled time for collaboration, focusing on student data, and to leverage the knowledge and skills that exist within the building.

It is important to document the structure, along with each team's responsibilities, including what data and actions are expected. This documentation aids the Building Leadership Team in providing professional development to the teams in order to ensure that a clear understanding of expectations exists. When planning time for collaborative teams to meet, the policies and practices should be revisited. Policies and practices that encourage and support collaboration time should be identified. In addition, further discussions about changes in policies may be beneficial to student learning. Some of the numerous options for providing time for collaboration and professional development include:

- Using part or all of faculty, department, or team meetings.
- Lengthening the school day for a specific number of minutes four days per week to allow for an early release on the fifth day to provide an extended time of professional development.
- Regularly engaging students in alternative activities, such as community service, that are supervised by parents, community members, or noninstructional staff.

- Providing a common scheduled lunch and planning periods (Raywid, 1993).

TEAM DISCUSSION
1. Are there any policies (rules/guidelines) that promote or inhibit when or how staff collaborate and work together?
2. Are there common practices (routines or traditions) that promote or inhibit when or how staff collaborate or work together?
3. How would collaborative teams best be organized: by grade level, across grade levels, by departments, or in another way?
4. How frequently will collaborative time be scheduled?
5. What policies or practices specific to collaborative teams and collaboration time may need an action plan or need to be included on a Stop Doing List?

Family Engagement

Engaging families in their child's educational experience is critical for improving the culture of the building and improving student performance. Research in this area shows a convincing relationship between positive parent involvement and student success. This correlation has been proven to be valid, regardless of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic or educational background for students of all ages. According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), students whose parents and families are actively engaged in their education have better attendance and higher graduation rates, obtain higher achievement (including grades and test scores), exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior, and have increased participation in higher-level courses and enrollment in postsecondary education.

Preschool Programs

For young children, meaningful family engagement has been identified as an important contributor to school readiness and, therefore, is something all preschool programs should strive to achieve (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Unlike previous parent involvement models, family engagement has been identified as a strength-based reciprocal relationship between program staff and family members (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark & Moodie, 2009). Within this relationship, families and programs jointly participate in educational

Student Benefits

decision making and collaborate and exchange knowledge related to the well-being of the individual child.

Families and programs that are meaningfully engaged emphasize the importance of creating and sustaining learning activities within the preschool program, the home, and the larger community (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark & Moodie, 2009). The following recommendations (similar to the PTA standards listed below) were identified by the preschool National Association for the Education of Young Children and PreK Now for enhancing family engagement efforts in preschool programs:

- Integrate culture and community.
- Provide a welcoming environment.
- Strive for program-family partnerships.
- Make a commitment to outreach.
- Provide family resources and referrals.
- Set and reinforce program standards.
      (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark & Moodie, 2009)

Partnerships

4 Types of Partnerships

Before buildings can improve their family engagement practices, they must first assess their current reality. Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007) identified four approaches commonly found in schools when it comes to family-school partnerships: Partnership School, Open-Door School, Come-If-We-Call School, and the Fortress School. These four partnerships are described as follows:

Partnership School: All families and communities have something great to offer—we do whatever it takes to work closely together to ensure that every single student succeeds.

Open-Door School: Parents can be involved at our school in many ways—we are working hard to get an even bigger turnout for our activities. When we ask the community to help, people often respond.

Come-If-We-Call School: Parents are welcome when we ask them, but there is only so much they can offer. The most important thing they can do is help their kids at home. We know where to get help in the community if we need it.

Fortress School: Parents belong at home, not at school. If students do not do well, it is because their families do not give them enough support. We are already doing all we can. Our school is an oasis in a troubled community. We want to keep it that way (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007, pp. 15-18).

What's Your Reality?

Buildings must honestly examine their current practices and beliefs before improving their reality. The time and energy buildings invest in

making a concerted effort to involve and empower families in their children's education as early as possible pays dividends with respect to the benefits students reap.

The PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships focus on what families, schools, and communities can do together to support positive student outcomes. The Kansas State Board of Education endorsed these standards in January 2008. Each of the six standards includes quality indicators for successful partnerships.

The PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

Standard 1: Welcoming all families into the school community— Families are active participants in the life of the school and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

Standard 2: Communicating effectively—Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.

Standard 3: Supporting student success—Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

PTA National Standards for Family – School Partnerships

Standard 4: Speaking up for every child—Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

Standard 5: Sharing power—Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

Standard 6: Collaborating with community—Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation (National PTA).

Within Kansas MTSS, an empowering culture is a key component for both supporting the effective instruction of students and making families feel welcomed and valued. Therefore, families should be involved while a building initially creates an empowering culture to support implementation of Kansas MTSS. Families need information on how Kansas MTSS will impact their children, including understanding what data will be collected, how the data will be used, and what supports will be provided to their children. Parents and guardians should also be informed that the supports provided

through Kansas MTSS do not replace their right to request assessment of their children for special education or any other entitlement services offered by the school.

The Building Leadership Team considers how to establish strong family-school partnerships throughout the systems. Building strong family-school partnerships is not accomplished by simply hosting a series of events for families. True family-school partnerships are built by focusing on family engagement as part of a school's coherent plan. The PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships provides a plan for schools to implement programs, practices, and policies that encourage partnerships among families, schools, and communities in order to promote student success.

The Building Leadership Team must reflect on these six standards while revisiting the taking-stock work that has been completed around the policies and practices that support and hinder family engagement. The following discussion section will guide the Building Leadership Team's reflection.

TEAM DISCUSSION

Complete the entire Family Engagement Tool depicted below. Teams should identify a) how the standard is supported by the school, b) how work around the standard is evaluated, and c) the next steps needed to increase support and awareness.

Family Engagement

Standard	How do we support the standard?	How do we evaluate our practices of support?	What are our next steps to increase our support through practice?
Standard 1: Welcoming all Families into the School Community			
Standard 2: Communicating Effectively			
Standard 3: Supporting Student Success			

Tool is located in the Decision Notebook.

1. Are there any policies (rules/guidelines) that require, prevent, or otherwise influence how families are engaged?

2. Are there common practices (routines or traditions) that require, prevent, or otherwise influence how families are engaged?

3. What policies or practices specific to family engagement may need an action plan or need to be included on a Stop Doing List?

If no formal evaluation of family engagement has been completed, the leadership team may consider using The *PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnership: Implementation Guide* which includes assessments that allow buildings to assess current practices for engaging families and the community in improving building climate and student success (can be downloaded free of charge at

www.kpirc.org). After completing the assessments, the guide leads buildings through the planning process to improve the policies and practices related to family engagement. Using the assessment of the PTA National Standards is an excellent way to collect information to assess needs that address family engagement and the culture of the building.

Kansas Parent Information Resource Center

Another resource available to buildings wanting assistance in strengthening their family engagement policies and practices comes from the Kansas Parent Information Resource Center (KPIRC). KPIRC provides technical assistance and professional development to educators on the topic of family engagement. Many family resources have been developed and disseminated through KPIRC regarding Kansas MTSS. The resources are available free of charge on the KPIRC website (www.kpirc.org).

Conclusion

The Building Leadership Team makes the building's plan for the implementation of Kansas MTSS visible in both form and action. It is imperative to keep the communication plan visible, ensuring that communication remains a focus of the leadership team's work. One way to do so is to begin and end each Building Leadership Team meeting by reviewing the communication plan.

At the beginning of the meeting, communications that occurred and the feedback received should be reviewed. At the end of the meeting, decisions and progress made during the meeting should be summarized and the feedback and current progress to refine the message should be reviewed. This practice ensures consistent communication between the Building Leadership Team and stakeholders.

The importance of creating, cultivating, and nurturing an empowering culture may not be realized by the Building Leadership Team until it is well into the structuring process—or possibly even into implementation. However, the ease or difficulty of the leadership team's experiences during the change process is directly related to the team's attention and commitment to a well-functioning Kansas MTSS adopted by all members of the organization. Even after the vision/mission is created, it will be necessary for the leadership team to routinely revisit, review, and—if necessary—refine these statements.

In addition to addressing the building culture, the Building Leadership Team is responsible for ongoing, bidirectional communication with stakeholders, including collaborative teams, district teams (or district administration), families, and community members. Finally, but equally important, is the leadership team's

Kansas Parent
Information
Resource
Center
www.kpirc.org

To Do List for
Module 3

Where Do We
Go From Here?

responsibility to create a culture that promotes and supports family engagement.

Reflect on the decisions and work completed in this module. Use the following questions to ensure that the Building Leadership Team is ready to engage in these discussions with the entire staff. Upon completion of this reflection, review and update the communication plan in the Decision Notebook, as needed.

TEAM DISCUSSION
1. Are there any policies or procedures that are going to cause conflict? If so, how can they be resolved?
2. Are there any policies or procedures that need to be developed?
3. Are there specific supports that can be provided to accomplish the goal of an empowering culture?
4. What new ways of thinking and acting do we believe are needed to sustain the changes we need to make?
5. What new perceptions, values, and experiences will be critical for creating success?
6. What opportunities exist to further strengthen our plan for new direction? How can we ensure that staff members are aware of them?
7. In what areas can we improve the most?
8. Can any of the issues identified above be addressed in the professional development plan? If so, how?

References

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Appendices

Creating a Shared Vision/Mission

Purpose:	The purpose of this exercise is to assist teams in thinking about their school's vision related to providing MTSS. Creating a vision statement will encourage unity, create energy, provide purpose, foster appropriate risk taking, enhance leadership, promote excellence and help to sustain the organization and its work. Vision statements should be future oriented, describe the future in images or mental images, be about possibilities and not just probabilities, and explain what is unique about the organization.
Features of Effective Vision Statement:	Clear with lack of ambiguity, vivid, clear, descriptive of bright future, memorable, and engaging wording, realistic but challenging aspirations, alignment with organizational core beliefs and culture.
Materials Needed:	Sticky post-it notes, pencils, tape, questions printed on pieces of paper (laminated) to tape on wall, large sheets of paper or white board. Questions: 1. What makes your organization unique or distinctive? 2. What excellence or special expertise does your organization offer? 3. What do you see as your organization's greatest opportunity for growth? 4. What values should be stressed in your organization's daily work? 5. What is your organization's measure of success? 6. What do you see as the key to the future for your organization? 7. What unique contribution to children's education should your organization be making in the future? 8. What would make you excited about being a part of your organization in the future? 9. What will be your organization's position on things such as student learning, teaching, technology, quality, etc.? 10. What will your organization look like three to five years from now?
Time Needed:	30 minutes to 1 hour depending on size of the group.
Instructions:	1. Each group member writes a short, concise answer to each question (above). One answer per post-it note—done individually and silently! 2. Place post-it notes in designated area when finished. Designated area will be identified by each question being taped on the wall—individually and silently! 3. Have participants group post-it note answers while talking about them. Answers may be moved to under another question if appropriate. Give 10 minutes. 4. Put group into small groups of 2-4. Questions and answers (post it notes) are divided among the small groups. 5. Small groups are charged with creating one main focus from all answers (post it notes) for each question. 6. Trainer records each main focus on large sheet or white board. 7. Trainer leads discussion about all main focus statements while massaging the main focus into a vision statement. 8. Trainer leads discussion related to refining the vision statement wording/meaning so as to capture everything the group wants captured. 9. Finalize post-it note groups with discussion. 10. Record key words from each post-it note group. 11. Massage key words into final vision statement.

Vision/Mission Statement

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Developing Core Beliefs

Purpose:	The purpose of the activity is to reflect and come to agreement on leadership team core beliefs. The activity will be repeated by leadership team with faculty to develop building wide core beliefs.
Materials Needed:	Post-it notes, writing utensils.
Time Needed:	30 min.

Instructions:	1. Begin by reviewing the Kansas MTSS Core Beliefs.
	2. Use the following questions to reflect on what your core beliefs are. Have staff write their answers on a sticky note in short phrases, be concise. Groups work best if they consist of 5-6 people.
	• When your students leave you, how do you want them to be different, as people, as a result of being with you all year long?
	• What promises are you willing to make to your colleagues that will support your school's success in achieving its mission?
	• What are your fundamental, bedrock beliefs about how children learn and your role in making that happen? (Jon Saphier and John D'Auria,1993)
	3. After the brainstorming have teams post notes randomly on a large sheet of paper.
	4. Instruct people to start sorting their notes into groups or categories.
	   a. This is a silent activity, so there shouldn't be any talking during the categorization process.
	   b. Anyone can move a note into any category. It's okay to move them around several times until a category emerges to the whole group.
	   c. Place "outliers" (single notes unlike any others) off to the side.
	   d. Once there is agreement among all participants in the group, allow them to start discussion.
	   e. Finalize the category. It's okay to make changes because of the discussion.
	   f. As a group, write a clear, concrete belief statement that captures a central idea for each cluster of ideas. Write this theme on a header card and place it above the cluster of ideas.
	   g. Share core beliefs with each other as an entire team.
	5. Document core beliefs on the following page and be sure to discuss what beliefs *mean* and *don't mean*.

Documenting Core Beliefs

These are the core beliefs of:		
We believe:	This means:	This does not mean:
Value(s) Related to this Core Belief:		
Commitment Related to this Core Belief:		
We believe:	This means:	This does not mean:
Value(s) Related to this Core Belief:		
Commitment Related to this Core Belief:		
We believe:	This means:	This does not mean:
Value(s) Related to this Core Belief:		
Commitment Related to this Core Belief:		

We believe:	This means:	This does not mean:
Value(s) Related to this Core Belief:		
Commitment Related to this Core Belief:		
We believe:	This means:	This does not mean:
Value(s) Related to this Core Belief:		
Commitment Related to this Core Belief:		
We believe:	This means:	This does not mean:
Value(s) Related to this Core Belief:		
Commitment Related to this Core Belief:		

4 Versions of Family-School Partnerships

Check the boxes that have the most statements under them marked or circled. Check only 1 box in each row.

Fortress School	*Come-If-We-Call School*	*Open-Door School*	*Partnership School*
Parents belong at home, not at school. If students don't do well, it's because their families don't give them enough support. We're already doing all we can. Our school is an oasis in a troubled community. We want to keep it that way.	Parents are welcome when we ask them, but there's only so much they can offer. The most important thing they can do is help their kids at home. We know where to get community help if we need it.	Parents can be involved at our school in many ways—we're working hard to get an even bigger turnout for our activities. When we ask the community to help, people often respond.	All families & communities have something great to offer—we do whatever it takes to work closely together to make sure every single student succeeds.
Building Relationships • Families do not "bother" school staff • "Minority families don't value education" • Parents need security clearance to come in • It is important to keep community influences out of the school	**Building Relationships** • Better-educated parents are more involved • "Many immigrant parents don't have time to come or contribute" • Staff are very selective about who comes into the school	**Building Relationships** • Teachers contact families once a year • Parent coordinator is available if families have questions or need help • Office staff are friendly • Staff contact community agencies & organizations when help is needed	**Building Relationships** • Family center is always open, full of interesting materials to borrow • Home visits are made to every new family • Activities honor families' contributions • Building is open to community use & social services are available to families
Linking to Learning • Curriculum & standards are considered too complex for parents to understand • "If parents want more information, they can ask for it" • "We're teachers, not social workers"	**Linking to Learning** • Parents are told what students will be learning at the fall open house • Parents can call the office to get teacher-recorded messages about homework • Workshops are offered on parenting	**Linking to Learning** • Teachers explain test scores if asked • Folders of student work go home occasionally • School holds curriculum nights 3 or 4 times a year • Staff let families know about out-of-school classes in the community	**Linking to Learning** • All family activities connect to what students are learning • Parents & teachers look at student work & test results together • Community groups offer tutoring & homework programs at the school • Students' work goes home every week, with a scoring guide
Addressing Differences • "Those parents need to learn English" • "We teach about our country—that's what those parents need to know" • "This neighborhood is going downhill"	**Addressing Differences** • "We can't deal with 20 different languages" • "Parents can bring a translator with them" • "This school just isn't the same as it used to be"	**Addressing Differences** • Office staff will find a translator if parents ask in advance • Multicultural nights are held once a year • "Minority" parents have their own group	**Addressing Differences** • Translators are readily available • Teachers use books & materials about families' cultures • PTA/PTO includes all families • Local groups help staff reach families
Supporting Advocacy • Parents don't come to conferences • Problems are dealt with by the professional staff • Teachers don't feel safe with parents	**Supporting Advocacy** • School calls families when children have problems • Families visit school on report card pick up day & can see a teacher if they call first	**Supporting Advocacy** • Principal will meet with parents to discuss a problem • Regular progress reports go to parents, but test data can be hard to understand • Parent-teacher conferences are held twice a year	**Supporting Advocacy** • There is a clear, open process for resolving problems • Teachers contact families each month to discuss student progress • Student-led parent-teacher conferences are held 3 times a year for 30 minutes
Sharing Power • Principal picks a small group of "cooperative parents" to help out • Families are afraid to complain. "They might take it out on my kid" • "Community groups should mind their own business; they don't know about education."	**Sharing Power** • Principal sets agenda for parent meetings • PTA/PTO gets the school's message out • "Parents are not experts in education" • Community groups can address the school board if they have concerns	**Sharing Power** • Parents can raise issues at PTA/PTO meetings or see the principal • Parent group sets its own agenda & raises money for the school • Resource center for low-income families is housed in a portable classroom next to the school • PTA/PTO officers can use the school office • A community representative sits on the school council	**Sharing Power** • Parents & teachers research issues such as prejudice & tracking • Parent group is focused on improving student achievement • Families are involved in all major decisions • Parents can use the school's phone, copier, fax, & computers • Staff work with local organizers to improve the school & the neighborhood

—FROM "Beyond the Bake Sale—The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships" (2007) by Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies.

Family Engagement: Standards Idea Handout

This document is the compilation of ideas and strategies that educators across the state shared during family engagement sessions at the MTSS Symposium and KSDE Annual Conference during the 2010-2011 academic year. This list is not exhaustive. It is provided as a resource from which you can select specific ideas or be creative and think of others you may want to consider implementing. You are encouraged to reflect on the practices your school currently employs for each standard. Remember the most engaging activities are those with direct links to learning.

Standard 1: Welcoming All Families into the School Community
Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued and connected to each other, to school staff and to what students are learning and doing in class.

- 2nd Cup of Coffee – When parents drop off their students they are invited to share a cup of coffee with staff members. This takes place quarterly and is an informal way to meet and greet families.
- Open House Ice Cream Social – This is an event that kicks off our school year. STUCO and teachers serve and meet and great parents that come. It is held on the front lawn of our school so people driving by will wonder what is going on, or are reminded to stop in.
- Assign one adult to welcome parents at the front door when they are coming to a planned "team" (SIT, 504, IEP, etc.) meeting. This "greeter" escorts them to the meeting place and at the meeting's conclusion; everyone stands up and leaves the room. The greeter walks the parents to the door and says good-bye.
- At our school the teachers (and other staff) go to the student's house to meet the student before the first day of school.
- Open House (Aug./Sept.) – Parents are invited to come meet their child's teachers.
- Sandwiches and drinks are provided for families. Our student leadership team also provides free babysitting services for younger kids.
- Porch Visits – staff members from child's school make a visit to introduce themselves to the family and share general information about communications, programs, and expectations.
- School Display Case – Students get to be "Student of the Day" and bring items to put inside the display case to share with the whole school. The child's family members are invited to eat lunch and have recess with the student.
- PTO provides treats for all elementary events.
- Parent tours for new families and during our kindergarten round up.
- "Walk in Your Shoes" Night – parents are invited in the first few weeks of school. They sit at their child's desk and are walked through their child's day and expectations.
- New families are provided with a "Welcome" packet full of information about the school, community events, procedures, hospitals, coupons, etc.

Family Engagement: Standards Idea Handout

Standard 2: Communicating Effectively

Families and staff engage in regular, meaningful communication about student learning.

- Have students make their own invitation to give to parents as a reminder about parent-teacher conference.
- School develops a "Hot List" of parents that need phone calls as reminders to attend special events.
- Transition Nights – Elementary to middle and middle to high school. One for parents and students–further opportunities for students – i.e. visit new school, tour, meet teachers.
- Staff is asked to communicate positive experiences with families – they don't just call when student is in trouble.
- Translating documents for languages present in the district.
- Student-led parent conferences 2x per year. Student needs time to practice prior to the parent conference.
- Monthly newsletter with calendar on the back. PTO news and news from the principal are highlighted articles.
- We, counselors, use the Skyward messaging feature frequently to notify parents of new posting on our counselor web pages such as the latest college and scholarship updates. We post our presentations and forms so that parents are informed.

Standard 3: Support Student Success

Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

- Red Chair – Red metal chairs are in classrooms as an invitation for parents to observe their student's lessons.
- "A Trip Around the World": Having displays and/or stations at the school (e.g. in gymnasium) that provide information about the cultures represented in the building for healthy development and learning of each other.
- Drive in Night – after state testing we show an outside movie on our playground for students, families, and teachers to enjoy together.
- All staff members and parents write encouraging letters to students to encourage them to do their best on state assessments. Students are given them before taking tests.
- Math Game Night – parents learn a math game that their child has learned and are introduced to a new one for following year.
- Snuggle up and Read (American Education Week) – We invite parents to come read with their child and then enjoy lunch together in the cafeteria.
- To help new students to our school adjust they are assigned a welcoming buddy: greet new student, tour the building, eat first lunch/recess with them, answer questions, gift at end of the week!

Standard 4: Speaking Up For Every Child

Families are empowered to be advocates for their own children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

- We have athletic meetings with students and parents before every season to review the rules of the school, league, and state and to get any questions answered.
- Give parents surveys on a variety of topics such as school policies, bullying, school programs, and finances. This allows families another opportunity to speak up.
- A system is in place and formalized for families to resolve concerns and file complaints if needed.
- Our school makes available when other community organizations provide advocacy trainings.
- Our school provides a link about current legislation that would affect children or education for our school website.
- A Suggestion Box is provided at our school to voice concerns and offer suggestions.
- School staff ensures every student has a parent or another adult who advocates for him or her (e.g., Advocate, Court Appointed Special Advocate, etc.).
- The school and parent group create a school handbook with academic resources that is available in all languages spoken in the community.

Standard 5: Sharing Power

Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices and programs.

- Involving parents in SIT meetings and explaining the process to them.
- Our district uses program based budgeting where community members, parents, and district employees all prioritize the district's budget.
- We use Power School to give information about students' grades, attendance, and teacher comments with parents online.
- We have a parent on most of our committees (Site Council, Title I Leadership committee, PTT, PTA, etc. We want their input on most decisions.
- Student and parent handbooks contain information that invites parents to become involved in their children's education.
- Decisions at Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meetings are made together.
- Back to School Nights invite parents to partner in their children's education.

Standard 6: Collaborating with Community

Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

- Principal for a Day – invite business/community members and/or parents to shadow the principal for a day to get a better understanding of how the school operates.
- Partnering with a nursing facility for volunteers for each teacher.
- Students visit with VFW members and interview them on their experiences.
- Business fieldtrips – educational.
- Readers from Kiwanas come to read with our kindergarteners.
- Fact Sheets on Community Agencies (mental health services, health services, free food and clothing, etc.) are compiled and made available to families in our parent resource area.

Action Plans

Goal/Outcome:			
Tasks	**Person Responsible**	**Begin Date**	**Completion Date**

Goal/Outcome:			
Tasks	**Person Responsible**	**Begin Date**	**Completion Date**

Goal/Outcome:			
Tasks	**Person Responsible**	**Begin Date**	**Completion Date**

Planning for Communication

Communicate What	To Which Stakeholders	When and How Often	By Whom and How	Feedback Requested