Kansas MTSS School Survey of Effective Instructional Practices

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Executive Summary presents a summary of responses received from the *MTSS School Survey of Effective Instructional Practices*. The survey was conducted in February and March 2012 by WestEd as part of the external evaluation of the Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS). The purpose of the survey was to gather school-level data about the implementation of MTSS and the effective instructional practices being used in schools across the state.

This was an online survey sent to all principals in the state, representing a total of 1,346 school buildings. After cleaning the data for multiple and blank responses, there were 656 usable responses from public schools across the state for a response rate of 48.7%. Survey respondents came from 233 of the 289 districts in Kansas, representing approximately 80.6% of all public school districts.

The survey was organized by the following topic areas:

- Introductory Questions
- Leadership and Empowerment
- Assessment Practices
- Curricular and Instructional Practices
- Data-based Decision-making
- Tiered Interventions
- Student Outcomes
- Professional Development
- Barriers and Supports to Implementation
- Integration and Sustainability

The survey included eight introductory questions, 10 additional multiple choice response items, and 13 Likert-scaled items where respondents were asked to rate their degree of agreement with a descriptive statement about MTSS implementation on a three or four point scale. In addition, the survey included six open-ended questions where respondents were able to provide a narrative response. A summary of the results of both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the survey is provided below.

The survey was designed to categorize responding schools by stage of implementation based on their responses. Scoring criteria were developed based largely on the Kansas *MTSS Innovation Configuration Matrix*. Fixsen et al. (2005) conceptualize the implementation of an innovation along a continuum of six implementation stages: Exploration, Installation, Initial Implementation, Full Implementation, Innovation, and Sustainability. The survey categorized schools by four of the six stages, ending with Full Implementation.

Summary of Survey Results

The *MTSS School Survey of Effective Instructional Practices* yielded results that provide a snapshot of MTSS implementation in schools across Kansas. Overall, 73.2% of responding schools reported that they are currently implementing MTSS to some extent. The vast majority of schools are implementing in reading (90.4%), while a lesser percentage are implementing in math (63.2%). Forty-two percent of responding schools reported that they are implementing in the area of behavior, the newest MTSS focus area.

Leadership

Leadership for MTSS was reported to be district-led in 58.3% of responding schools, while 41.7% were school-building led initiatives. Ninety-three percent of responding schools reported that they had established a building-based Leadership Team while 85.8% reported that they had also established collaborative teacher teams or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

Responses to the open-ended questions were consistent with the quantitative results, emphasizing the critical importance of district and school leadership and administrative support as facilitators of implementation. Specifically, the knowledge, expertise, and commitment of the principal were noted as vital to the implementation of MTSS.

> *"We had a principal that was willing to jump into this with both feet and make sure that we were doing best practices for students."*

Implementation

Implementation practices, for the most part, adhered to the MTSS guidance offered by the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE). Universal screening is reportedly being conducted at least three times per year in the majority of responding schools in the academic areas of reading and math. Staff are trained in the use of assessments and assessments are being used, for the most part, for their intended purpose. School-wide academic data is reviewed consistently and progress monitoring is reportedly being conducted on a regular basis. Responding schools are using a combination of standard protocol and problem-solving approaches to determining the use of interventions. Parents are reportedly being informed of their child's progress, "usually" or "always" in 86.6% of responding schools. The majority of responding schools reported that their schedules include protected core instructional (96.6%) and intervention time (89.4%). Only 67.8%, however, reported that adequate collaborative team meeting time was provided during the school day.

> *"Using data to drive instruction through differentiated intervention practices on an individualized basis for students with the addition of progress monitoring has truly been a positive change."*

Open-ended survey responses noted changes to practice in three main areas: (1) use of differentiated instruction and tiered interventions; (2) increased use of data to drive instruction and interventions; and (3) increased consistency and focus across the entire school.

Professional Development

Professional development for all staff is an essential feature of MTSS. Responding schools reported high levels of professional development in overall MTSS implementation, interventions, and evidence-based instructional practices. Eighty-six percent of responding schools reported that they had sufficient resources to provide ongoing professional development to "some" or "to a great extent."

> "*Having the scheduled MTSS trainers coming throughout the year is much more helpful than trying to get all of the information in a two day workshop."*

The narrative responses to the open-ended questions showed that the most commonly reported factors related to support for implementation were training and professional development.

Student Outcomes

In terms of student results, the following positive outcomes were reported by the majority of responding schools: (1) an increase in students scoring at benchmark on universal screening (90.2%); (2) an increase in students scoring as proficient or higher on the state assessment (79.1%); (3) a decrease in

office discipline referrals (80.7%); and (4) a decrease in referrals to special education (63.5%). (Note percentages represent the combined total of "to some extent" and "to a great extent" responses.)

Open-ended narrative responses reported positive changes in student outcomes such as increased academic performance on standardized tests and on progress monitoring assessments, improved behavior, and decreased office discipline referrals. However, some respondents noted that "It's too early to tell" in terms of evidence that MTSS implementation was having a positive impact on student results.

> *"We have experienced a tremendous increase in student scores on the state assessments in both reading and math in the last few years."*
>
> *"Our students have learned to exhibit positive behaviors to enhance their relationships with all students."*

Barriers and Supports to Implementation

Regarding barriers and supports to implementation, the majority of responding schools reported that the following were "somewhat" or a "major support" to implementation: (1) the quality of MTSS training materials (85.1%); (2) the quality of Recognized MTSS Facilitators (69.5%); (3) the quality of MTSS training sessions (81%); (4) the Structuring process (77.6%); (5) the quality of MTSS Tools (85%); and (6) building leadership support (95.4%). Barriers to ongoing implementation reported by responding schools as a "somewhat" or "major" barrier included: (1) the complexity of implementing MTSS (54.5%); (2) the time to fully implement MTSS (63.8%); and (3) the staff skill level required (39.8%).

Qualitative survey responses elaborated on factors perceived to be either barriers or supports to MTSS implementation. Overall, the factor that contributed the most to implementation was staff training and professional development. In contrast, time, finances/funding, and the need for staff training were listed most frequently as the biggest barriers. In addition, lack of buy-in and resistance were greater barriers for schools at the "exploration" stage of implementation, as well as the identification of resources and tools. At the "installation" stage, ongoing mentoring and training were identified as a need while at the "initial implementation" stage the greatest additional barriers were scheduling and time.

> *"Since we are not a Title I school, we struggle with MTSS implementation with fidelity due to the limited number of staff…that can devote their time to providing interventions."*

Integration and Sustainability

MTSS is reportedly being integrated with overall school practices. Responding schools reported either to "some" or "to a great extent" that (1) resources were aligned (91.2%); (2) MTSS frameworks, principles and practices were "institutionalized" (94.3%); (3) MTSS is integrated with other school improvement efforts (94.6%); (4) the necessary ongoing professional development (90.2%) is provided; and (5) the leadership and support needed overtime (97.1%) are available. Ninety-seven percent of responding schools reported that staff support the ongoing implementation of MTSS.

The most commonly reported barriers to sustaining MTSS over time to "some" or "to a great extent" included: (1) lack of fiscal resources (90%) and (2) time to implement the model with fidelity during the school day (90.5%). The open-ended question regarding barriers to sustainability showed that respondents are primarily concerned about time constraints, funding, adequate staffing, and both leadership and staff turnover.

> *"Staff turnover would be the one I am most concerned with; there is a definite learning curve in doing business this way…."*

Respondents reported that, to "some" or "to a great extent," KSDE has established the necessary infrastructure to sustain and extend MTSS implementation over time (78%), that there are sufficient resources (78%), and that MTSS is clearly aligned with other state and local improvement initiatives (88.6%).

Stage of Implementation

Using the essential features and required practices of MTSS, as outlined in KSDE's *MTSS Innovation Configuration Matrix*, each responding school was categorized into one of five stages of implementation based on their survey responses. Among the current respondents, 40 schools or 6.1% scored at the "full implementation" stage and have institutionalized the practices of MTSS to a high degree of self-reported fidelity. Another 32.8% were at the "initial implementation" stage. Over time, the WestEd will track changes in the stage of implementation of responding schools based on future administrations of the survey.

Stage of Implementation	Number	Percent
No stage	77	11.7
Exploration	266	40.5
Installation	58	8.8
Initial Implementation	215	32.8
Full Implementation	40	6.1
Total Implementers	579	88.2
Total	656	99.9

Conclusion

Quantitative and qualitative survey data taken as a whole indicate that MTSS is being implemented to some degree in 88.2% of responding schools. The survey responses of 32.8% of the schools indicated that they are in the "initial implementation" stage, with 40 schools (6.1%) scoring in the "full implementation" stage. There are barriers and challenges to implementation and sustainability, but the survey also helped to identify factors that facilitate implementation. Based upon what research shows are the key ingredients of sustainability of implementation (Fixsen et al., 2005) the *MTSS School Survey of Effective Instructional Practices* results suggest that MTSS has the potential to become a statewide, fully implemented school improvement initiative.

References

Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M. & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida.