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 2013 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 is the second administration of the survey, the first in 2012. Responses to the 2012 and 2013 surveys are compared when appropriate to identify areas of growth, change, or discrepancy.

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 592 usable responses from public schools across the state for a response rate of 44%. Survey respondents came from 242 of the 289 districts in Kansas, representing approximately 83.7% of all public school districts in the state.

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 a number of introductory questions, several additional multiple choice response items, and 12 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 two 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 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 2013 *MTSS School Survey of Effective Instructional Practices* yielded results that provide a snapshot of MTSS implementation in schools across Kansas. Overall, 71% of responding schools reported that they are currently implementing MTSS to some extent with another 13.3% planning to implement. The vast majority of currently implementing schools are focusing in reading (81.%) with another 14.5% planning

to implement in that area. Fifty-one percent of currently implementing schools are working on math and 31.5% are currently implementing in behavior.

Leadership
Leadership for MTSS was reported to be district-led in 51.3% of responding schools, while 48.7% were school-building led initiatives. Eighty-seven percent of responding schools reported that they had established a building-based Leadership Team which is a drop from the prior year at 93.7%. Eighty-four percent 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, building leadership was considered one of the most significant supports to MTSS implementation.

> *"Our leadership team was chosen with the idea of sustainability."*

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 appropriately trained in the use of assessments and assessments are being used, for the most part, for their intended purpose. Leadership Teams are analyzing universal screening data after each collection and progress monitoring is reportedly being conducted on a regular basis. Responding schools are using a combination of standard protocol and problem-solving to determine the use of interventions, with slightly more schools using the problem-solving approach. An increase was demonstrated in 2013 in terms of the percentage of responding schools that reported using a process or tool for progress monitoring in the core curriculum, in each content area. Parents are reportedly being informed of their child's progress, "usually" or "always" in 84.8% of responding schools. The majority of responding schools reported that their schedules include protected core instructional (92.4%) and intervention time (84.2%). Only 65.6%, however, reported that adequate collaborative team meeting time was provided during the school day.

> *"We continuously work as a leadership team and as a staff to sustain and continue to improve the implementation of MTSS through collaboration, professional development and analyzing data."*

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, the core curriculum, interventions, and evidence-based instructional practices. Eighty-five percent of responding schools reported that they had sufficient resources to provide ongoing professional development to "some" or "to a great extent." However, only 56.6% reported having a Recognized MTSS Facilitators to provide ongoing support and coaching in the school, while 41% reported no facilitator support.

> *"Another key piece…is evaluating staff and knowing strengths and weaknesses so we have the right teachers in the right positions to most benefit student learning."*

The narrative responses to the open-ended questions showed that the availability of ongoing professional development, coaching, and consultation for staff was one of the most important supports to sustainability of MTSS implementation.

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 (87.2%); (2) an increase in students scoring as proficient or higher on the state assessment (81.1%); (3) a decrease in office discipline referrals (75.7%); and (4) a decrease in referrals to special education (66.9%). (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 skill development, student empowerment, and overall achievement.

> *"The MTSS process is a welcome support for keeping our students empowered with their skills."*
>
> *"The use of MTSS practices in our building has had a direct and positive impact on student achievement."*

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) building leadership support (91.2%); (2) its impact on student academic outcomes (90.3%); (3) support from the district level (86.1%); and (4) alignment of the MTSS Framework with the school's current needs, status, and interests (77.9%). Interestingly, only 58.1% of respondents reported the quality of the MTSS facilitator(s) used by their school as a support to implementation, while 29.3% marked the item "not applicable."

Barriers to ongoing implementation reported by responding schools as a "somewhat" or "major" barrier included: (1) the complexity of implementing MTSS (57.7%); (2) the time to fully implement MTSS (69.1%); and (3) the staff skill level required (45.6%).

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 (93.4%); (2) MTSS frameworks, principles and practices were "institutionalized" (95.1%); (3) MTSS is integrated with other school improvement efforts (96.2%); (4) the necessary ongoing professional development (88.5%) is available; and (5) the leadership and support needed overtime (97.2%) 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 (86.2%) and (2) time to implement the model with fidelity during the school day (89.5%).

> *"MTSS has become the way our school functions. Much of our day is structured around the MTSS Framework."*
>
> *"The MTSS implementation has become the core of our building culture."*

Respondents reported that, to "some" or "to a great extent," KSDE has established the necessary infrastructure to sustain and extend MTSS implementation over time (79.3%), that there are sufficient resources (78.2%), and that MTSS is clearly aligned with other state and local improvement initiatives (83.4%). A lower percentage (64.5%) agreed that there are sufficient MTSS Facilitators to support MTSS statewide.

Qualitative survey responses elaborated on factors perceived to be either barriers or supports to MTSS implementation. Barriers to sustainability mentioned frequently by respondents included: (1) time; (2) resources/funding/budget cuts; and (3) weak or frequent turnover in leadership. One respondent noted that the school lacked a "clear vision" of what MTSS should/could be. Interestingly, one respondent saw "MTSS' insistence on fidelity as a major barrier." Another noted that it was difficult to "maintain focus" given the multiple initiatives that were being implemented all at once.

Facilitators to ensuring ongoing sustainability included: (1) strong and consistent leadership; (2) the availability of ongoing professional development, coaching, and consultation for staff: (3) flexibility in the use of funds/resources; (4) a district-wide approach; (5) schoolwide ownership that withstands turnover; (6) opportunities for sharing with other schools; and (7) technology (that works).

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 four stages of implementation based on their survey responses. Among the current respondents, 49 schools or 8.3% scored at the "full implementation" stage and have institutionalized the practices of MTSS to a high degree of self-reported fidelity, slightly higher than in 2012. Another 67.9% were at the "initial implementation" stage. This is a substantial increase over 2012 when only 32.8% of schools scored in the "initial implementation" category. This suggests that more schools are implementing the MTSS Framework in 2013 to a greater degree than they were a year ago. Over time, the WestEd will track changes in the stage of implementation of responding schools based on future administrations of the survey.

	2012		2013	
Stage of Implementation	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
No stage	77	11.7	55	9.3
Exploration	266	40.5	70	11.8
Installation	58	8.8	16	2.7
Initial Implementation	215	32.8	402	67.9
Full Implementation	40	6.1	49	8.3
Total Implementers	579	88.2	537	90.7
Total	656	99.9%	592	100.0%

Conclusion

Survey data taken as a whole indicate that MTSS is being implemented to some degree in 90.7% of responding schools. This is an increase from 88.2% for 2012. Survey responses of 67.9% of the schools indicated that they are in the "initial implementation" stage, with 49 schools (8.3%) in the "fully implementing" stage. Compared to 2012, responding schools demonstrated an increase in the percentage that scored at both the "initial" and "fully implementing" stages.

The survey revealed ongoing barriers and challenges to implementation and sustainability. Common themes across respondents included the persistent barriers of money/resources, time, and leadership turnover. The survey also helped to identify factors that facilitate implementation. These included

strong leadership, professional development, flexibility in the use of funds, the support of a district-wide approach, schoolwide buy-in, opportunities for sharing with other schools, and technology.

In terms of the degree to which MTSS has been "scaled-up" across the state as a whole, Fixsen et al. (2013) estimate that the threshold for scaling an evidence-based program is the point at which at least 60% of the "service units" (in this case schools) in a system are using the program (in this case MTSS) with fidelity and positive outcomes. They hypothesize that "at the 60% point the system itself would need to have changed to accommodate, support, and sustain the outcomes of the evidence-based program and demonstrate the promised benefits to society" (p. 214). Given the Fixsen et al. standard, MTSS has met the scaling-up threshold for responding schools. What we do not know is whether or not non-responding schools are implementing MTSS. To the degree that we are able to increase the overall response rate to the survey, we will be able to more accurately estimate the degree to which MTSS has met the scaling-up threshold across Kansas.

References

Fixsen, D., Blase, K., Metz A. & VanDyke, M. (2013). Statewide implementation of evidence-based programs. *Exceptional Children, 79* (2), 213-230.

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.