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MTSS in action: How to build coherent systems of support

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In the movie "Moneyball," the Oakland A's couldn't compete by spending more, so they got smarter. They analyzed data, rethought their systems and built a model that made every dollar count.

Schools today are facing a similar moment. Budgets are tight, needs are high, and success depends on doing more with what we already have. Multi-Tiered System of Supports is public education's version of Moneyball: a smarter, data-driven framework that ensures every student receives the right level of support to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

Lead the system, not the program

Every district faces the same challenge: too many initiatives, too many silos and too little coherence. Leaders aren't short on programs; they're short on systems that make those programs work together.

MTSS provides that missing structure. It's not a compliance mechanism or a special education framework; it's a way of organizing how an entire school system delivers instruction, intervention and wellness support in a coherent, data-driven way.

When leaders approach MTSS as an operating system for continuous improvement, not a set of forms or meetings, it changes everything. Decisions about staffing, scheduling and professional learning become aligned.

Conversations between principals and central office teams become strategic instead of reactive. And every teacher, regardless of grade or content area, can see how their work connects to the broader system of student success.

Report issue

That's why MTSS is public education's version of Moneyball: it's not about spending more, but about getting smarter—using data, collaboration and clarity to make every resource count.

As education leaders know, MTSS isn't another program or a new name for Response to Intervention. It's a single, integrated framework that connects instruction, intervention and wellness across an entire district.

The system rests on three levels of support: high-quality teaching for all students (Tier 1), targeted small-group interventions for those who need more (Tier 2), and intensive, individualized supports for students with significant or persistent challenges (Tier 3).

When implemented with fidelity, MTSS improves efficiency. Schools that align academic, behavioral and social supports under one structure eliminate duplication, reduce costs and use data to deploy resources where they have the greatest impact.

Here are examples of a few districts that are realizing student gains, while saving money:

Cambridge Public Schools

Cambridge Public Schools recognized that effective MTSS requires both structure and culture. The district conducted a full inventory and analysis of academic and behavioral supports to identify gaps in alignment.

The result was a districtwide MTSS guidebook that outlined evidence-based practices across key focus areas: literacy, math, on-track graduation, and school climate. By creating shared language and clear metrics, CPS positioned itself to provide equitable, consistent supports to all learners.

La Joya Independent School District

In La Joya, Texas, district leaders designed a comprehensive MTSS framework aligned to their strategic plan and focused on academic improvement, attendance and behavior. Their work unfolded in four phases that emphasized readiness, communication, field testing and sustainability.

The district clarified service delivery roles, developed a communication toolkit for consistent messaging, piloted interventions across diverse campuses and created performance dashboards to monitor fidelity and impact.

By streamlining systems and embedding reflection checkpoints, La Joya reduced redundancy, improved cross-department collaboration and used data to target supports more effectively. The approach proved both effective and cost-saving, demonstrating that strong systems are not about spending more; they're about spending smarter.

From framework to flourishing

Across districts and states, the story of MTSS is one of coherence, collaboration, and cost-efficiency. When schools integrate their academic, behavioral and wellness supports into one system, they reduce waste, strengthen outcomes and create environments where every student can thrive.

MTSS works because it transforms how schools think about support. It's not something leaders "add on," it's how we do business. Like the best teams in Moneyball, successful schools know that smart systems, not just more spending, win the long game.

Lead the system, not just the supports

MTSS isn't a special education initiative; it's a leadership framework for how your district functions. Every decision about curriculum, staffing and professional learning signals whether your system believes all students can succeed and is willing to do the work to get them there.

Now is the time to look across your organization and ask:

1. Are our supports coherent and connected across departments, or fragmented by funding streams?
2. Do our data systems drive action, or simply compliance?
3. Are we helping teachers intervene early, or react too late?

MTSS gives you the structure to unify academic, behavioral and student wellness efforts with the mindset to lead with both compassion and precision. Align your teams now so every resource— money, time, staff—works toward the shared goal of success for all learners.

Your next step: Convene your leadership team to map your existing supports against the three tiers of MTSS. Identify where alignment, ownership and data flow break down and commit to building coherence across the system.

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