

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK

The goal of this book is to provide detailed guidance for educators who seek to establish integrated multiple tiers of academic and behavior supports for students in their schools. The phrase “multi-tiered system of supports” (MTSS) refers to structures and procedures that schools offer to help each and every student be successful. Other phrases for an MTSS include “response to intervention” (RTI) and “positive behavioral interventions and supports” (PBIS). Both RTI and PBIS are types of tiered supports, and there are others as well. The term RTI most often refers to academic supports and PBIS is often interpreted to refer to behavior supports. It is important to understand that this book uses “behavior” as an umbrella term to encompass a range of student outcomes across social, emotional, mental health, and attendance domains. In the first edition of this book we chose to use the umbrella term “MTSS” to help readers learn about and use a comprehensive framework that can apply to all the students in a school. Since the first edition was published, schools have experienced many changes. Certainly the global COVID-19 pandemic influenced schools in ways that we are still trying to understand. In particular, various types of educational technology, unexpected before the pandemic, have become the norm in schools.

Another change that wraps around the pandemic is the integration of tiered supports for academics and behavior. At about the same time the first edition of this book was published, Kent McIntosh and Steve Goodman (2016) authored another book that is a major contribution to how schools understand how best to provide all students with timely learning supports. Their book, *Integrated Multi-Tiered Systems of Support: Blending RTI and PBIS*, provided the first comprehensive review and analysis of methods to provide tiered supports within one coordinated system instead of as parallel efforts. As will be clear in this revised edition, we value and use their suggestions as the next generation of tiered supports. Connecting and integrating student supports across academic and behavior needs is essential because students do

not have separate “academic” and “behavior” lives (Simonsen et al., 2024). Students experience school simultaneously as one unified academic and behavioral experience, and when educators create supports for their unified encounters, we expect that students will both rejoice and find more enjoyment in school. Emerging research suggests that integrating tiered supports is more effective across all tiers (Duble Moore et al., 2024; Melton et al., 2024; O’Donnell et al., 2024).

Due to the expansion of integrated supports, the second edition of this book has a small—but significant—name change. Specifically, we recommend that schools work to implement an *integrated* system of supports that provides both academic and behavior interventions for all students who need them. By fully integrating the supports for academics and behavior, schools will offer a holistic experience for students while reducing demands on teachers. Note that we refer to such a *system* of supports in the singular, not plural. The reason for this is that the entire system needs to be integrated and universal, rather than separate mini-systems operating in parallel to one another. We refer to specific PBIS or RTI practices and research in places, but in all cases the larger framework of one *integrated* MTSS is the goal. We use the acronym iMTSS to reflect this integrated model of supports.

The book is organized into six parts, each with several chapters designed to give practical and detailed guidance about how to set up and run an iMTSS in your school. This book focuses on how to set up general schoolwide practices that are available to all students. The reason for the broader approach here is to offer educators the knowledge and skills to adopt as a mindset and ethos rather than a set of isolated steps. Although details about specific procedures are provided, the first chapters in particular focus on prevention science and why all school personnel must learn and embrace a mindset of prevention science as part of an iMTSS in order for it to be successful over the long term. When first introduced, some educators thought that RTI and PBIS were passing fads that would eventually disappear. Instead, they now have lasted and been used in schools for over 20 years (Fien et al., 2021a). Those schools that have taken the time to set up the structures needed to support long-term implementation have observed improvements in student learning and staff engagement (Scott et al., 2019). We hope that this book will support educators in making schools successful for all students. Although the major goal of an iMTSS is to provide support when needed by any student, the book includes some information about how iMTSS data can be used if a student is referred for special education.

PART I: PREVENTION SCIENCE IN SCHOOLS

Schools are complex social environments that face the challenge of providing effective instruction for students from diverse backgrounds. U.S. public schools have the responsibility to provide such instruction for any and all students who are eligible to attend. In addition, children ages 6 to 16 (and in some states 5 to 18) are required to attend school. Bringing about effective learning outcomes for all students on a daily basis is not easy, yet it is what educators do. The first part of the book (Chapters 2–5) explains the historical background and recent trends in U.S. public school policy that affect the daily work of teachers. Chapter 2 provides a history of the concept

of prevention and how it has not historically been applied to public education. Following from an analogy made by Keith Stanovich (1986), Chapter 3 describes how important attention to detail is in all aspects of an iMTSS. Chapter 4 explains the many types of risk factors that public school students face and how such factors can influence school outcomes if not addressed. In part thanks to iMTSS practices, core instruction provided for all students in the general education setting has become an area of instructional focus. Due to other policy efforts, the term “core” has developed dual meanings in education. Specifically the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which were developed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of State School Officers (2010), provide one meaning for core alongside a different meaning within an iMTSS. Chapter 5 explains the history of both the CCSS and the importance of general education core instruction within an iMTSS.

PART II: THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION AND TEAMS

The second part (Chapters 6–9) focuses on the importance of collaboration in making an iMTSS work. Like any major systems-level project, an iMTSS cannot happen if only one person directs it. It must be developed and implemented by teams of educators who work together with common goals. These chapters explain how to set up and maintain effective school teams to support an iMTSS, as well as how to collaborate to support attendance. Part II begins with Chapter 6, in which the important roles and functions of specific types of teams are described. Chapter 7 offers guidance on how to set up the specific types of teams needed to support an iMTSS. Chapter 8 then explores what is necessary for teams to be effective, including how to develop a team’s identity and routines. This chapter is important for all readers, regardless of whether their school has many existing teams or is just getting started. Chapter 9 is new to this edition and focuses on how team collaboration can address a significant postpandemic concern: student attendance. This chapter is in this part because the first step to effective student outcomes requires students to be in school, and there are important collaborative steps that school teams can use to improve student attendance and engagement.

PART III: MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

An iMTSS is very much a *systems* approach to effective school outcomes. Such systems include the complementary and balanced integration of procedures that are activated when certain conditions are present. In order to understand and use an iMTSS, it is important for educators to know how complex social support systems operate and what it takes to bring about change within them. Built from the research about the steps needed for effective change in schools (e.g., Fixsen et al., 2005), the chapters in this part (Chapters 10–13) draw from this research. First, in Chapter 10, there is an overview about the existing research on the science of change. Using initial findings from Fixsen et al. (2005), as well as more recent research, this chapter gives an

overview of the stages of change in organizations. Chapter 11 then describes the first three of these stages—exploration, adoption, and installation—as well as how such stages need to be addressed to set up an effective iMTSS. In Chapter 12 we detail the two levels of implementation and how careful planning is needed at both. Chapter 13 explains how innovation is an inevitable part of an ongoing iMTSS, but needs to be anticipated so that it will be effective (Buckman et al., 2024). It also describes what is necessary to sustain an iMTSS as a permanent approach to student academic and behavioral success in schools.

PART IV: EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION WITHIN AN iMTSS

As noted, this book focuses heavily on the “big picture” of system-level support for all students. Part IV (Chapters 14–19) examines essential research on effective instruction and how educators must use evidence-based instruction as the foundation for all parts of an iMTSS. This part begins with a chapter (14) about the critical role of school schedules in successful iMTSS implementation. Chapter 15 provides an updated review of the most recent research about the most effective, research-based instructional practices for all grades and subjects. These practices are then juxtaposed in Chapter 16 with information about how all students benefit from instruction that utilizes an instructional hierarchy that pinpoints each student’s current learning stage. Recognizing that U.S. schools are now more diverse than ever and expected to become even more so, Chapter 17 reviews the research base on how to support students who are English learners (ELs). Chapter 18 provides a conceptual foundation as well as details about an evaluation tool designed specifically for an iMTSS. Finally, a new chapter (19) provides information about the role of online instruction within an iMTSS. Informed by research during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, this chapter suggests how online learning tools could be incorporated into effective iMTSS practices.

PART V: iMTSS ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

In Part V (Chapters 20–24), the key organizational elements of an iMTSS are explained. Some of the content of this part might be familiar to educators who have used certain components of an iMTSS, but the descriptions in these chapters are designed to show how each step requires a comprehensive and well-designed infrastructure to be truly effective. There are five chapters in this part, starting with Chapter 20 which explains why effective Tier 1 core instruction matters. The conceptual foundations, importance, and practical requirements of universal screening are covered in Chapter 21. Using a cornerstone method pioneered by the late Stan Deno (1985, 2002) and colleagues, Chapter 22 explains why a detailed problem-solving process is a necessary component of an iMTSS, while Chapter 23 explains how progress monitoring is the essential pathway by which informative student data are collected in an iMTSS. Chapter 24, the last one in this part, then gives detailed guidance on how to understand student progress data.

PART VI: CONNECTING AN iMTSS WITH OTHER SUPPORTS

The final part of the book addresses the ways an iMTSS connects to other student supports already existing in schools. Chapter 25 is new and explains how students who start out behind their grade-level peers must have opportunities for accelerated learning so that they can make catch-up growth. Building on the importance of providing accelerated instruction, Chapter 26 reviews the key components of Tier 2 supplemental intervention and how it offers the best pathway for students to make that catch-up growth. Chapter 27 explains how the final tier of an iMTSS is a transition point where consideration of a student's long-term educational needs is the focus. Chapter 28 returns to the foundations of the book by discussing how prevention science can benefit all students and prevent the need for some special education placements. This chapter also explains how an iMTSS does not replace special education but instead is an important complement to such services. Next, Chapter 29 offers a discussion of the continuum of services for students who have a disability, including both Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act. Specifically, it identifies how students who are supported by an iMTSS but who do not make expected gains might also benefit from other supports as well. This chapter concludes with information about how an iMTSS complements, rather than competes with, special education as a system to help all students access effective education.

The book ends with a case example that describes how all of the components can be combined to develop, implement, and evaluate an iMTSS at the district level. Using examples from schools and districts in which we have worked, Chapter 30 seeks to explain the process of setting up an iMTSS as it unfolds. This case example will not match the exact experience of all readers, but it will provide an idea of the level of detail required to make an iMTSS successful.

SUMMARY

This book is designed to provide educators at all grade levels and career stages with an understanding of the infrastructure and system components needed to support effective academic and behavior learning outcomes for all students. Starting with a review of some historical foundations and emerging trends, the chapters offer information about the importance of developing strong teams of educators to implement and sustain an iMTSS. The key details of an iMTSS, including evidence-based instruction, screening, problem solving, progress monitoring, and decision making, are explained through the lens of comprehensive and integrated system-level supports for all students.