ALN
ASSESSMENT LEARNING NETWORK

LEARNING POINT

The role of assessment in support of a multi-tiered system of support

Introduction

In July 2020, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) released its Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Practice Profile. The document was created to ensure that MTSS was clearly defined and to provide guidance for MTSS implementation as indicated in Michigan state law. The MTSS Practice Profile identifies five essential components of MTSS (see sidebar) as well as the underlying philosophy, expected outcomes, and research base for MTSS. This Learning Point will help to explain the critical role of a balanced assessment system and personnel that are highly skilled in the use of this assessment system to support effective implementation of MTSS.

Guiding Principles of MTSS

As delineated in the MTSS Practice Profile, MTSS is guided by these principles:

- A collective responsibility to ensuring growth and success for all learners is assumed by each person within the system.
- A proactive approach to ensuring that each and every learner experiences a quality education designed to expand learners' potential.
- A commitment to use a systematic problem-solving process to improve outcomes of all learners.
- A commitment to ongoing, effective support of educators and leaders including professional learning, feedback, and coaching.
- A commitment to use data as a basis for information gathering

and decision-making to avoid making unsupported assumptions.
- Attention to fidelity of implementation, honoring both qualitative, and quantitative measures.
- An investment in systems to promote durability and the scaling up of MTSS.

Given these guiding principles and the five essential components, it is easy to see the need for the effective use of data to inform the work within a multi-tiered system of support.

More specifically, to successfully implement a multi-tiered system of support, personnel need to fully understand the role of data within this system and have the knowledge and skills needed to create a balanced assessment system to support MTSS implementation. As part of the MTSS component describing a Comprehensive Screening and Assessment System, the MTSS Practice Profile indicates the need for an assessment system that is coordinated and includes multiple assessments and measures, each of which is reliable and valid for its specified purpose for the population in which it will be used.

The outcome of a high quality balanced assessment system is to help educators to make informed instructional and programmatic decisions, and to provide information about the needs and assets of each and every learner. The data from this **balanced assessment** system would be used to systematically evaluate the quality, equity, and efficiency of instruction, interventions, and supports to enhance individual student outcomes.

Five components of MTSS

- **Team-Based Leadership**
- **Tiered Delivery System**
- **Selection and Implementation of Instruction, Intervention and Supports**
- **Comprehensive Screening and Assessment System**
- **Continuous Data-Based Decision Making**

Citation: *MDE MTSS Practice Profile*

The balanced assessment system would include assessments both **for** learning and **of** learning using a variety of tools and processes.

Implementation Guidance for a Balanced Assessment System

The MDE's MTSS Practice Profile provides additional guidance for the successful implementation of this component by defining some of the expected actions in practice. These actions are clearly delineated and align well with information contained in the Michigan Assessment

Consortium's (MAC) *Strategy Implementation Guide for a High Quality Balanced Assessment System* defining the critical components of a high-quality balanced assessment system as well as MAC's *Assessment Literacy Standards* (see also *To learn more*).

Expected use in practice, as delineated in the MTSS Practice Profile, stresses the need for reliable and valid measures, used for the purpose for which they were intended. Assessment literacy in the use of these assessments for the intended purpose, supported with ongoing coaching and professional learning, is also paramount. Clear intent during the selection and implementation process as to how each of these assessments coordinates with other assessments within the assessment system helps to create a *coordinated assessment system* to support MTSS implementation.

District-level support for these expected uses in the form of funding, time, professional learning, and ongoing monitoring to ensure effective use and to correct misuse is critical. The correct use/implementation of the measures would be consistently monitored through the use of various fidelity measures that have been created as part of the MTSS system.

Effective implementation of the comprehensive assessment system supports the component of Continuous Data-Based Decision Making as part of the multi-tiered system of support. Each assessment should serve the purpose of informing decisions in the pursuit of continuous improvement at different levels within the system. Typically, districts will make use of universal screeners within MTSS in order to determine the students who may be in need of additional support. *Diagnostic assessments* are then administered to these students to identify specific skill deficits to determine appropriate differ-

entiation and/or interventions that are needed to support the student.

S*ummative assessments* provide aggregate data across larger groups of students to look for overarching trends in data and/or subgroup differences. This data can provide information as to system-wide strengths or challenges that could be analyzed further through other data types and sources. This analysis, conducted as part of a needs assessment, would help to determine action steps for future improvement planning.

Interim/benchmark assessments should help to provide monitoring data throughout the year to help to determine the impact of differentiated core instruction (Tier 1), Supplemental Support (Tier 2), and Intensive Supports (Tier 3) on student outcomes at the building and/or district level. Making use of this data to help monitor and adjust the various tiers within the MTSS is an ongoing process and can inform building-level and district-level changes that may be needed in the instructional system.

Perhaps most important is the use of the *formative assessment process* as part of the data system to support MTSS. The use of the formative assessment process for students during the implementation of the different levels of instruction is essential to assure effective instructional methods are being used and whether adjustments are needed. This formative assessment process, used on an ongoing basis each day, provides feedback to instructional staff and students to make adjustments quickly. At the student level, this "short cycle" data collection informs the continuous improvement process for each student and helps to identify and deliver ongoing instructional support.

Summary

In summary, effective implementation of a multi-tiered system of support for all students is not possible without the effective use of a balanced assessment system to inform the work. Ongoing use of the evidence of learning from various types of assessments, used for the purposes intended, provides the information needed to continually monitor and adjust

Layering of Support
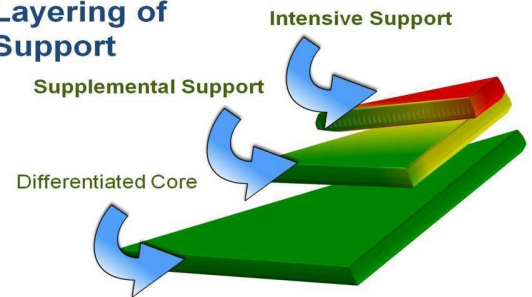
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instructional systems in each tier of the overall system including core instruction, interventions and intensive interventions. Ongoing use of the formative assessment process as part of this balanced assessment system is critical to provide timely feedback to instructional staff in order to implement or modify instruction and interventions to the benefit of students. Effective integration and coordination of the multi-tiered system of support with the balanced assessment system, both implemented by informed and knowledgeable adults, will help to create an equitable and effective instructional system for all students.

References

Michigan Department of Education, (2020). Michigan Department of Education Multi-Tiered System of Supports Practice Profile vs 5.0, Lansing, Michigan