An Abstract Regarding

Multi-Tiered System of Supports  
(MTSS) and Michigan’s Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (MiBLSi)

As the federal government has shifted its terminology away from “Response to Intervention” (RtI), the term “Multi-Tier System of Supports” (MTSS) is being used more frequently throughout educational establishments to reflect their attempts to meet the educational and behavioral needs of all students. MTSS has become the focus in many states and is being included in the improvement plans of districts and schools throughout the country. Many educators will say, “We do MTSS.” Despite its frequent mention, variable practice would suggest that a common understanding is elusive or at the very least not translating to consistent application and implementation. The first purpose of this abstract is to provide a clear and concise summary of the key elements of an effective MTSS framework.

The second purpose of this abstract is to provide clarity of what is meant to partner with MiBLSi in an MTSS initiative focused on developing sustainable practice. Michigan’s Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (MiBLSi) is funded by the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education. This project is designed to help schools develop school-wide support systems in reading and behavior. MiBLSi is the State Personnel Development Grant from U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs. MiBLSi has worked closely with the National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports (PBIS.org) and the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN). MiBLSi has embraced the MTSS logic and framework and is using it to guide the work of supporting intermediate and local districts, as well as schools, in increasing the academic and behavioral success of their students. Given its mission and grant requirements, MiBLSi provides a specific focus on MTSS that attends to the sciences of effective instruction and sustainable implementation. As a result clarity of what is meant by a MiBLSi supported MTSS framework is necessary for those participating in this scale-up initiative.

A Working Definition of MTSS

A Multi-Tiered System of Support framework must be designed so as to provide educational equity for all students. This framework must include high quality instructional and assessment elements implemented with fidelity and driven by data that accurately represent the effectiveness of instruction and the responsiveness of students. These critical elements as identified by Dr. George Sugai (2008) are:

* **Universal Screening**
* **Data-Based Decision Making and Problem Solving**
* **Continuous Progress Monitoring**
* **Continuum of Evidence-Based Practices**
  + A core curriculum is provided for all students
  + A modification of the core is arranged for students who are identified as nonresponsive
  + A specialized and intensive curriculum is provided for students who are intensive in need.
* **Focus on Fidelity of Implementation**

Provided below is a brief description of each of these elements.

**Universal Screening**

* Use of semi-annual or tri-annual assessments that are predictive, efficient, valid, and reliable to identify student need for level, intensity, and duration of instruction

**Data-Based Decision Making and Problem Solving**

* The hallmark of an effective MTSS framework is the use of a data-based decision making process.
* Assessments and data used should be timely, matched to the learning targets, valid, and reliable
* The cycle of screening, validating, planning, implementing, progress monitoring and adjusting should be faithfully adhered to in each tier of instruction.

**Continuous Progress Monitoring**

* In order to adjust instruction in a timely manner and not lose or waste instructional time, monitoring that matches instruction and increases in frequency with student need is essential in maximizing student progress.

**Continuum of Evidence-Based Practices**

Use of a continuum of practices and programs with proven effectiveness to meet the learning goals for the population being served is critical to minimizing the number of students who are “curricular-impaired.” The Components of this continuum include:

* High Quality Tier 1 (Core) Instruction
  + Clear learning expectations along with brief reviews of previous learning
  + Overt modeling
  + High student engagement and opportunities to respond
  + Frequent incremental and descriptive feedback
  + Follow-up instruction
  + Distributed practice
  + Differentiation
* Targeted Instruction that increases in terms of intensity and duration as progress monitoring of student progress determines need
  + Based on student data, instruction should increase in focus, intensity and duration until student has reached mastery.
  + Programs, procedures, and routines should be proven in terms of efficiency and effectiveness for the skills needed
  + Increased academic need of student should be matched by increased teacher skill
  + Frequent progress monitoring should direct ongoing instruction and feedback

**Focus on Fidelity of Implementation**

* Strong initial training and periodic fidelity checks of instructional implementation are critical because…
  + Drift happens
  + Inadequate training and modeling happens
  + Even the best evidence-based programs and practices lose their impact when implementation falters

For a school or district to continue to make the claim that they are “doing MTSS,” attention to and progress concerning each of these elements should be ongoing.

A MiBLSi-Supported MTSS Framework

The mission of a MiBLSi-supported MTSS framework is to improve academic and behavioral outcomes for students by providing educators with access to evidence-based practices in a multi-tier, integrated behavior and academic model while establishing the conditions necessary for educators to implement these practices with fidelity. The goals of the funded initiative that drive the MiBLSi work are as follows:

* Goal 1 – Participating Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) will increase fidelity of implementation of MiBLSi supported MTSS
* Goal 2 – Participating Local Education Associations (LEAs) will increase fidelity of implementation of MiBLSi supported MTSS
* Goal 3 – Participating Schools will demonstrate improved fidelity and student outcomes in behavior and literacy
* Goal 4 – Increase ISD/LEA/School participation in the initiative
* Goal 5 – Develop 3 pilot districts to reduce disproportionality
* Goal 6 – Collaborate with Michigan Alliance for Families (PTI)
* Goal 7 – Collaborate with Higher Education Learning Partnership (HELP) to advance implementation of MiBLSi supported MTSS through pre-service and in-service content and research.

Based on these funded mandates, there are required key components of this framework that are important for partners to understand. The components that define this work are:

* An Integrated Model of Behavior and Literacy
* Use of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model
* Adherence to and application of Scientifically-Based Reading Research (SBRR)
* Use of Specific Universal Screening, Process, and Outcome Measures
* Incorporation of Implementation Science through ISD/RESA and District Leadership and Implementation Teams

The measures that are required by the grant to determine the effectiveness of this effort include the following:

* Intermediate Unit Capacity Assessment (IUCA)
* District MTSS Capacity Assessment (DMCA)
* Process Measures
  + Behavior: Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ), Self-Evaluation Survey (SAS)
  + Literacy: Planning and Evaluation Tool (PET) or Schoolwide Evaluation and Planning Tool (SWEPT)
* Outcome Measures
  + Behavior: Schoolwide Information System (SWIS)
  + Literacy: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) or AIMSWeb

The “Big Ideas” of this work include the concepts of alignment, capacity development, sustainability, and durability.

*Alignment*

*MiBSLi-Supported MTSS promotes and structures the work to develop continuity of the goals, priorities, resources, and use of personnel between the ISD, LEA, and the School using the State School Improvement ASSIST platform*.

*Capacity Development*

* *By considering the alignment of priorities and resources of the ISD, LEA, and the schools, required materials, training, and personnel are identified and developed before implementation begins.*

*Sustainability*

* *Through adherence to implementation science, attention is given to the stages of implementation and the implementation drivers. As a result, sustainable success is a much more likely occurrence than current practice, because energy and efforts compliment each other and are moving in the same direction.*

*Durability*

* *Alignment between the entities and a development of redundancy in capacity help create durability to weather the factors that tend to render educational initiatives ineffective, inefficient, or short-lived.*

Through this focus, MiBLSi has gained visibility and notoriety within the state and nation as an exemplary initiative. The value that MiBLSi brings includes:

* Experience: 14 years of successful building-based implementation of an integrated behavior and literacy initiative impacting over 600 schools.
* Effectiveness: Over 20 highly trained and experienced educators, researchers, and implementers statewide involved in content development, technical assistance, professional development, and evaluation of systems and outcomes.
* Exposure: Partnerships with key implementers and researchers around the country
* Extended Learning Opportunities: A growing network of ISDs, LEAs, and Schools with opportunities to learn from each other

Finally, as this work has progressed and the value of the structures and practices has become evident to those involved, questions have surfaced regarding MiBLSi’s support of other academic areas such as Mathematics, High School Literacy, and Early Childhood. Unlike behavior and K-8 literacy, the research and validated instructional and assessment bases in secondary literacy, math, and early childhood are in their infancy. MiBLSi is actively working with researchers and practitioners on both a state and national level to define good practice. The good news is that implementation science translates across subject matter and settings. Attending to the drivers and the stages of implementation will help promote the success and sustainability of any initiative. ISDs, LEAs, and schools may pursue these areas but the support provided by MiBLSi is limited at this time to the implementation process and to the principles of effective instruction. Training tools and guidance around the assessments and subject-specific instruction are not at a point where reliable and valid information can be disseminated.

It is hoped that this abstract has provided the desired clarity regarding both the key elements of an effective MTSS framework and the parameters of partnership with MiBLSi in this effort. More specific questions should be directed to your MiBLSi Technical Assistance Partner or any one of the other MiBLSi project staff.

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