

Improving the Academic Performance of Underachieving Students Through a Multi-tiered System of Early Intervention and Instructional Support

Legislative Charge to the Commissioner:

“The commissioner of education must develop recommendations, consistent with Minnesota Statutes, section 125A.56 for improving the academic performance of underachieving students through a multi-tiered system of early intervention and instructional support.”

Introduction:

The Multi-tiered System of Early Intervention and Instructional Support (MTSS) Work Group was charged with the task of reviewing Minnesota Statutes, section 125A.56 and current practice under this statute, and making recommendations on how to improve achievement using MTSS.

During discussions at five meetings coordinated by the Minnesota Department of Education, the Work Group developed consensus around an understanding of what a multi-tiered system was, reviewed research on current practice in Minnesota, discussed its impact as a process to benefit all students, studied its relationship to special education identification and listened to perspectives of districts with regard to current state of implementation.

Through discussion on the issues, the general consensus of the Work Group was to find ways to strengthen districts' fidelity to implementation by integrating the process into current functions taking place in the district in a more systematic way. There was strong agreement that a districtwide approach was necessary to assure fidelity from school to school and level to level, beginning with early learning programs.

Embedding the process into current district initiatives and functions is essential to its success in addressing student needs. These include establishing a clear process for identifying underachieving students, using data to identify specific areas for interventions, providing alternative instructional strategies, supporting opportunities for staff consultations and professional development and communicating with parents.

In addition, the process needs to become integral to other district programs such as the World's Best Workforce, Reading Well by 3rd Grade, Alternative Delivery of Specialized Instructional Services (ADSIS), principal and teacher evaluation, integration plans, and professional development.

These recommendations are targeted at assuring fidelity and integrity of the current law, but do suggest some revisions to that law to offer more detail and clarity.

Although resources that are currently available should be utilized to support the process, additional resources may be needed to strengthen and assure a quality program.

As co-chairs of the work group, we are available, along with MDE staff, to answer your questions about the work group's recommendations. Members of the work group, materials and documents used may be found here: <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Welcome/AdvBCT/Multi-tiered/index.htm>.

Sincerely,

Julia Espe, Superintendent
Princeton Public Schools

Lee Carlson, SIG Coordinator
St. James Public Schools

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Definition of MTSS: MTSS is a framework to improve outcomes for all students that organizes district-level resources to address each individual student's needs such as academic and/or behavior needs using research-based instruction and interventions that vary in intensity. An MTSS framework includes (a) screening of all students using valid and reliable measures, (b) tiers of instruction that vary in intensity, (c) collaborative teams that review data, problem solve, and organize instruction, (d) frequent progress monitoring using valid and reliable measures to determine the impact of evidence-based interventions, and (e) a system to ensure that instruction including interventions are evidence-based and implemented with fidelity.

1. **Systems Recommendation:** Every district should have a defined MTSS model that includes the following systemic components:
 - a. Districts need to identify their MTSS model, and establish an implementation plan that is systemic and adjusts to changes in leadership and personnel. The MTSS model should be used for: literacy, mathematics and/or social/emotional support, as well as other areas determined by a site, and for students in E-12. It should clearly articulate how it supports achieving the goals outlined in Read Well by Third Grade and the World's Best Work Force legislation.
 - b. Districts should be granted greater flexibility with current funding, and additional funding may be needed to support MTSS model design, implementation, staffing, professional development, assessment collection systems and parent engagement to ensure fidelity of results.
 - c. Regional Centers of Excellence, or other entities, should be available to provide technical assistance and support to districts.

2. **Leadership Recommendation:**
 - a. MDE should identify and inform all districts how the various funding sources from federal, state and other funding (such as Minnesota Reading and Math Corps) can be used to support the MTSS model; and
 - Develop ways to replicate and share MTSS models with proven success.
 - Support collaboration among educational stakeholders.
 - b. The MTSS law should be aligned with other statutes that support improved student outcomes and provide students with high-quality learning experiences.

- c. Minnesota's current rule needs further study to ensure that practices identifying students with specific learning disabilities are consistent with research-based practices.
- 3. **Fidelity Recommendation:** Accountability systems within districts and schools should ensure that practices are evidence-based, culturally relevant, implemented with fidelity and used to improve student outcomes including closing the achievement gap.
- 4. **Professional Development Recommendation:**
 - a. A district's professional development plan should support the district's MTSS model framework, include leadership team training and be incorporated as part of the teacher development and evaluation process.
 - b. Districts should be given the flexibility to support a variety of professional development models with funds allocated for direct instruction (ADSIS) for teacher support such as coaching and modeling appropriate interventions.
 - c. The Minnesota Board of Teaching, Minnesota Board of Administrators and applicable colleges and universities should include appropriate instruction in multi-tier frameworks as part of the pre-service programs in the teacher and administrative licensure programs.
- 5. **Parent Engagement Recommendation:** Parent and guardian engagement will enhance student outcomes.
 - a. Parents should be provided with resources and strategies on how to support their child's learning at home.
 - b. Parents should be engaged as active participants in the problem-solving process for students and districts should include details of its parental outreach as part of its MTSS plan, specifically if a student's intervention is outside of core instruction.
 - c. Parents should be made aware of their right to request an evaluation for special education as protected under IDEA.

The report passed the committee on February 13, 2015, with one member asking to be recorded as abstaining. This member represented the Minnesota School Boards Association. Attached are letters from the MSBA and from other members representing organizations who also wished to be on record about the recommendations.



February 13, 2015

The Minnesota School Boards Association abstained in regards the vote on the Multi-tiered System Work Group recommendations.

At MSBA, we support the charge the of the work group to improve academic performance of underachieving students through a multi-tiered system of early education and instructional support.

Our concern stems from the expansion of the original focus on early education and underachieving students to all students, E-12.

If these recommendations would become law this would mandate the Multi-tiered System framework, process and procedures in every school district, all schools and for all students. At this point in time, we are not able to support a recommendation that has the potential to mandate a massive change in the delivery system of education in Minnesota.

This framework would be added on to or replace the existing education delivery models in school districts across the state. This is major shift in the way we currently execute teaching and learning in the Minnesota and require extensive resources and training statewide.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve on the Multi-tiered System Work Group. We look forward further discussions as to how this framework can benefit our students.

Sincerely,
Denise Dittrich
MN School Boards Association



Association of Metropolitan School Districts

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February 13, 2015

To: MTSS Work Group Members
From: Superintendent Karen Orcutt
AMSD Work Group Representative
Re: Work Group Recommendations

As the Association of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD) representative to the Multi-tiered System of Early Intervention and Instructional Support Work Group, I support the proposed recommendations as guidelines/suggestions of technical support to school districts. The current AMSD platform clearly supports local control and does not support new mandates. It is our belief that references in the current statute, M.S. 125A.56, Read Well by Third Grade and World's Best Workforce define the need for multi-tiered systems of intervention and that local districts can define frameworks to meet these mandates. The work by MTSS Work Group was necessary and helpful work that can guide best practice and technical support for schools.

AMSD Members: Anoka Hennepin School District, Bloomington Public Schools, Brooklyn Center Community Schools, Burnsville-Eagan-Savage, Columbia Heights Public Schools, East Metro Integration District, Eastern Carver County Schools, Eden Prairie Schools, Edina Public Schools, Elk River Area School District, Farmington Area Public Schools, Fridley Public Schools, Hopkins Public Schools, Intermediate School District 287, Intermediate School District 917 (Associate Member), Inver Grove Heights Community Schools, Lakeville Area Public Schools, Mahtomedi Public Schools, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnetonka Public Schools, Mounds View Public Schools, Northeast Metro Intermediate School District 916 (Associate Member), North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale School District, Northwest Suburban Integration School District (Associate Member), Orono Schools, Osseo Area Schools, Richfield Public Schools, Robbinsdale Area Schools, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools, Roseville Area Schools, Shakopee Public Schools, South St. Paul Public Schools, South Washington County Schools, Spring Lake Park Schools, St. Anthony-New Brighton Independent School District, St. Cloud Area School District 742, St. Louis Park Public Schools, St. Paul Public Schools, Stillwater Area Public Schools, TIES (Associate Member), Wayzata Public Schools, West Metro Education Program, West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools, and White Bear Lake Area Schools

February 13, 2015

Rose Hermodson
Assistant Commissioner, Office of Innovation
Minnesota Department of Education
1500 West County Road 36
Roseville, MN 55113

Dear Commissioner Hermodson:

Thank you for allowing Schools for Equity in Education (SEE) to participate in the Multi-tiered System of Early Intervention and Support Working Group convened by the Minnesota Department of Education last fall and which has recently completed its work. Dr. Jane Berenz, superintendent of the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan school district was our representative on the working group and I am certain she represented the sentiments of the organization accurately and effectively.

We are pleased to offer our support for the recommendations of the Working Group, especially as they relate to the promotion of local control by which school districts can best determine the most appropriate methods to achieve the learning goals set out numerous places in Minnesota statutes. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support will likely be an integral part of districts' strategies to guide decisions made at the local level and while technical support is always welcome, it is refreshing that these recommendations come without any mandates emanating from the state that would hamstring local autonomy.

Feel free to contact me with any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

Brad Lundell
Executive Director, Schools for Equity in Education



February 13, 2015

RE: MTSS Taskforce

To whom it may concern,

I support the recommendations presented by the Multi-tiered System of Early Intervention and Instructional Support (MTSS) Workgroup.

I am concerned with a late addition to the recommendations stating the need to review current practices to identify SLD (Specific Learning Disability).

It is LDA Minnesota's position that both interventions within the MTSS framework along with current practices for SLD identification will benefit the child, their parents and their teachers in understanding the diagnosis of their learning disability. We would support the notion that the more data and information gathered on a student, the better schools will be able to individualize the student's instruction within special education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martha Moriarty". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Martha Moriarty
Executive Director

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To: Rose Hermodson, Assistant Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Education
From: Cory McIntyre and Kim Gibbons, MTSS Work Group Members Representing the Minnesota Administrators of Special Education (MASE)
Re: MTSS Task Force
Date: February 13, 2015

The purpose of this letter is to comment on two recommendations of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Task Force. While we supported the recommendations of the work group, as representatives of the Minnesota Administrators of Special Education (MASE) there are two areas we would like offer additional input. We ask that our letter be included with the report to the legislature. We are very appreciative of the opportunity to represent MASE as a part of this Work Group.

First, we strongly support the MTSS definition that has been developed by the Task Force, and recommend that it be seriously considered for legislative action in the form of statute or rule. We believe that having legislative action supporting an MTSS definition will support the implementation of MTSS systems resulting in more effectively closing the achievement gap and increasing the achievement of all students and will be integral to other districts programs such as the World's Best Workforce, Readyng Well by 3rd Grade, Alternative Delivery of Specialized Instructional Services (ADSIS), principal and teacher evaluation, integration plans, and professional development.

Second, we also advocate for the sunset of the current IQ/Achievement model still available for use in determining Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and full implementation of the use of an MTSS model for determining SLD eligibility. While the task force opted to include recommendations that the severe discrepancy model be further studied, the Minnesota Administrators of Special Educators (MASE) do not believe that further study is necessary. The IQ/Achievement discrepancy option is not supported by research, and in fact research indicates that this approach lacks validity and reliability in identifying students with SLD. Further, this wait to fail model does not accurately identify students of color and student in poverty and does not lead to increased achievement. Implementation of the MTSS practices recommended by the Work Group along with the sunset of the IQ/Achievement discrepancy model would provide appropriate levels of intervention to respond to student needs more quickly and providing them with intensive intervention that would support higher levels of achievement. In addition, there would be reduced rates of inappropriate referrals to and reduced costs of special education services in the area of SLD as student needs would be met in a more immediate and effective fashion. Abolishing the IQ/Achievement discrepancy option will require professional development and technical assistance to districts by MTSS experts; thus, we are very supportive of any efforts to establish a technical assistance center.

Thank you once again for having MASE representation on the Work Group and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Cory McIntyre
Director of Student Services
ISD 622 - North St. Paul/Maplewood/Oakdale
MTSS Work Group MASE Representative

Kim Gibbons
Executive Director of Student Services
St. Croix Valley Education District
MTSS Work Group MASE Representative