

NH System of Care Project-end Evaluation

MTSS-B Tier 2 takes off in White Mountains Regional School District

In 2016, the NH Department of Education Office of Student Wellness awarded a New Hampshire System of Care (NHSOC) subgrant to the White Mountains Regional School District (WMRSD) to implement 1) the Multi-Tiered System of Supports for Behavioral Health and Wellness (MTSS-B) framework and 2) wraparound, a team-based form of care coordination for students with the most serious/complex behavioral health needs.

MTSS-B, New Hampshire's student wellness framework, blends research-based school mental health practices and social-emotional learning with a tiered behavioral health prevention model. MTSS-B offers schoolwide social-emotional and behavioral programs and supports at the universal level (Tier 1), targeted group supports for at-risk students (Tier 2), and intensive, individualized services for the highest-need students (Tier 3).

The initial thrust of WMRSD's NHSOC effort was to stand up wraparound, a Tier 3 service. WMRSD transferred responsibility for wraparound to the statewide FAST Forward program for the final year of the grant. This strategic move allowed the district to prioritize other elements of MTSS-B, setting off an explosion of interest and activity in Tier 2 systems and services.

Refocusing on Tier 2 leadership, systems, and data

A district-wide MTSS-B fidelity assessment conducted at the end of the 2018-19 school year confirmed Kelly Dussault's (NHSOC project manager) suspicions: WMRSD Tier 2 systems and services were languishing relative to the other tiers. Dussault hired a district-wide Tier 2 coordinator, Serena Webster, to unify Tier 2 efforts across schools. Webster worked with school wellness center coordinators to reimagine and invigorate WMRSD Tier 2 services.

WMRSD next turned to enhancing their "Advanced Tier" (i.e., Tiers 2 and 3) Educational Support Team (EST) structures and functioning. Previously, WMRSD ESTs focused exclusively on triaging and problem-solving individual student needs, neglecting the system/process functions most critical to MTSS-B, such as using data to identify common needs and gaps in supports, identifying high-leverage interventions, and overseeing high quality implementation. The ESTs increased their meeting time while shifting to a hybrid student- and system-focused model, adding in the missing layer of systems and process thinking.

"We discovered that we don't need separate teams for Tier 2 and Tier 3, but we do need separate functions. Now we spend one meeting a month looking at data, seeing trends, developing themes, identifying resources. We're far from perfect, but we're on track,"

-- Project manager

Responding to student needs

By early 2020, WMRSD expanded its array of Tier 2 offerings to 10 small-group, skill-based services, based on identified student needs. Webster co-facilitates all Tier 2 intervention groups, pulling in curricula from a growing Tier 2 resource library. For example, “Wheel of Emotion,” a curriculum on managing emotions, provides key material for a range of interventions.

Dussault described how *both* data and personal connections drove ESTs’ identification of at-risk student needs and the resulting development of interventions. One EST developed a “Managing Emotions” intervention for students struggling with emotional regulation and peer relationships, based on school office discipline referral data and staff observation. Another EST identified and addressed the need for a grief support group for a small group of students confronting loss.

“We have a definite need for Tier 2 services. Previously, kids were jumping straight to individualized Tier 3 services.”

-- White Mountains Assistant Principal

Striving for consistency

As experience and confidence with Tier 2 increased, Webster and the ESTs turned to systematizing their efforts by pursuing the use of a universal screener to identify students that were at-risk and in need of Tier 2 supports and services, establishing criteria for accessing services, and developing a tracking tool for monitoring student progress. “We want data to inform us at the front end in understanding common needs and also later in the process in assessing how the interventions are going. Are students getting what they need?” explained Dussault.

An EST in one WMRSD elementary school is developing a data-based risk index to systematically identify students who might benefit from Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention. By catching and addressing student social-emotional needs earlier and more effectively, WMRSD hopes to diminish the need for Tier 3 services.

MTSS-B asks districts and school to recognize patterns – the forest for the trees – in their data to shape implementation. As this fidelity chart from an elementary school indicates, WMRSD school teams have embraced the charge to align Tier 2 systems and services with identified student needs.

MTSS-B Tier 2 Fidelity

