

Getting Ready for MTSS-B

High-fidelity MTSS-B requires commitment and resources. During an initial Exploration phase, districts will need to weigh whether implementing MTSS-B is a good fit before diving in. The steps below will help you determine if your district and community are ready for MTSS-B.

Establish a shared understanding of MTSS-B

- With the help of an expert MTSS-B coach, bring district, school, and key youth-serving community partner leadership (e.g., your local community mental health agency) together to learn about MTSS-B and how it can address student social-emotional and behavioral (SEB) needs.

Identify your students' needs

- Examine data – such as office discipline referrals, suspensions, absenteeism, academic achievement, substance misuse, demographic and environmental risk factors, universal social emotional screening scores – to point you toward some of the SEB needs of your students.

Assess existing social-emotional and behavioral structures

- Identify whether your students' needs are currently being met with your existing SEB programs, practices, and systems. Identify gaps and specific areas of need.

Examine your values and culture

- Assess whether the values that underly MTSS-B align with your local school district and community context and culture. Consider that high-fidelity MTSS-B is based on:

A **student wellness lens** that recognizes the intersection between social-emotional health & engagement in learning

Locally defined, **community-driven** efforts to enhance youth social-emotional & behavioral health needs

A **trauma-responsive** approach that addresses the needs underlying student behavior

Student voice incorporated into MTSS-B implementation & selection of supports across tiers

Family engagement that is strengths-based, values parent/caregiver voice, and promotes 2-way communication

An **equity** focus infused throughout the district's vision, goals & strategies that examines root causes of disparities

Determine whether MTSS-B fits with other district priorities

- Consider your other district and community initiatives. Determine whether MTSS-B will align well with these, allowing you to streamline and integrate efforts – or whether MTSS-B might interfere with other priorities. Think about whether you have too many other things you're committed to or need to do first.

Inventory your capacity and resources

- Consider whether you currently have, or could reasonably acquire:

Financial resources: funds for training, ongoing coaching, curricula, stipends/release time for MTSS-B team

Human resources/staffing: adequate staff education, credentials, content knowledge

Administrative practices/policies: An enabling environment for successful MTSS-B implementation

Data: comfort with data, adequate systems to monitor relevant indicators, strong student privacy policies

Assess and build buy-in at all levels

- Have a conversation about whether district and community leadership understand and support MTSS-B. Support and engagement from leaders with decision-making authority is essential.
- Ask teachers what they need. Highlight that MTSS-B will address staff burnout and wellness, improve their relationships with students, and help them regain educational time.
- Talk with community mental health partners – early and often – about how MTSS-B’s integrated service delivery system differs from traditional co-located models of school mental health.
- Engage families early. Tell them about MTSS-B and ask them to be involved. Get their feedback, include them in planning where appropriate, and clarify common misunderstandings about MTSS-B.
- Recruit and include student voice where appropriate. Encourage the development of peer leadership and support.

Plan for sustainability from the start

- Prepare for a marathon, not a sprint. Systems take time to implement and even longer to show impact. A high-functioning and sustainable MTSS-B system can take 5 years or longer to achieve.
- Create a district administrator-level position with decision-making authority to drive MTSS-B implementation. When “student wellness coordinators” don’t have authority, MTSS-B moves slow and piecemeal.
- Invest in the development of internal MTSS-B expertise and coaching capacity—someone (e.g., your student wellness coordinator) who can work with school teams on-the-ground and provide system- and practice-level coaching.
- Embed MTSS-B routines and practices in your schools – make it part of your culture. Administrative turnover can disrupt MTSS-B implementation. Develop roles and functions for team members rather than depending on specific people.
- Start with schoolwide Tier 1 implementation. Resist the temptation to focus only on advanced tiers, where the most intense needs are flaring up. MTSS-B is designed to be preventative, meeting the needs of students early to reduce the need for Advanced Tier services when possible.
- Budget financial resources to support MTSS-B-related positions, stipends, universal screener costs, and other materials early. While grants can help jumpstart the work, you will need reliable funds to keep MTSS-B going.