



## MTSS Summary Guidance Document

### Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide schools with the common understanding of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). MTSS supports the implementation of the priority areas outlined in our MMSD Strategic Framework and articulates the MMSD core values of

- clear and sustained focus
- great teaching and leadership
- schools at the center
- continuous improvement aimed at results
- creating a culture of excellence and equity

### Description

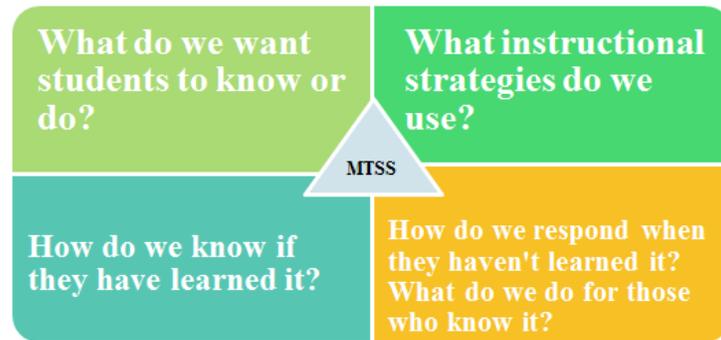
Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is the integration of evidence based instruction, interventions, and assessments to address the full range of student academic and behavioral needs present in today's classroom. In MTSS, the needs of all learners are identified and supported early through increasing levels of instructional time and intensity. By using performance data and monitoring learning rates and social-emotional-behavioral development of students, schools make important instructional decisions to meet the needs of *ALL* of our learners (e.g., students from different backgrounds, levels of language proficiency, and levels of attainment).

**Previously referred to as Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI<sup>2</sup>),** the shift to MTSS is important. MTSS encompasses both the academic and social-emotional-behavioral demands of learning. Some educators think of RtI<sup>2</sup> as applying to academics only; while others consider Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) as RtI<sup>2</sup> applying to only behavior. Still other educators use RtI<sup>2</sup> in the context of both. MMSD has made an intentional shift in terminology to a "multi-tiered system" from RtI<sup>2</sup> to emphasize the integration of both academics and behavior as uniformly critical to student success. MTSS also encourages focus to be on the systems of support, rather than just intervention.

MTSS is a key part of the broader MMSD strategic framework to support *all* learners and ensure equitable access to a robust, high quality education. MTSS provides the structure for the MMSD community to prioritize the academic and behavioral instructional needs of all students, including our Students with Disabilities (SWDs), students with advanced learning needs, and English Language (EL) and Bilingual Learners.

**MTSS implementation is a shared responsibility and ownership of all MMSD educators, staff, families, and communities.**

MTSS provides the structure and process to address these key questions in data-based decision making:



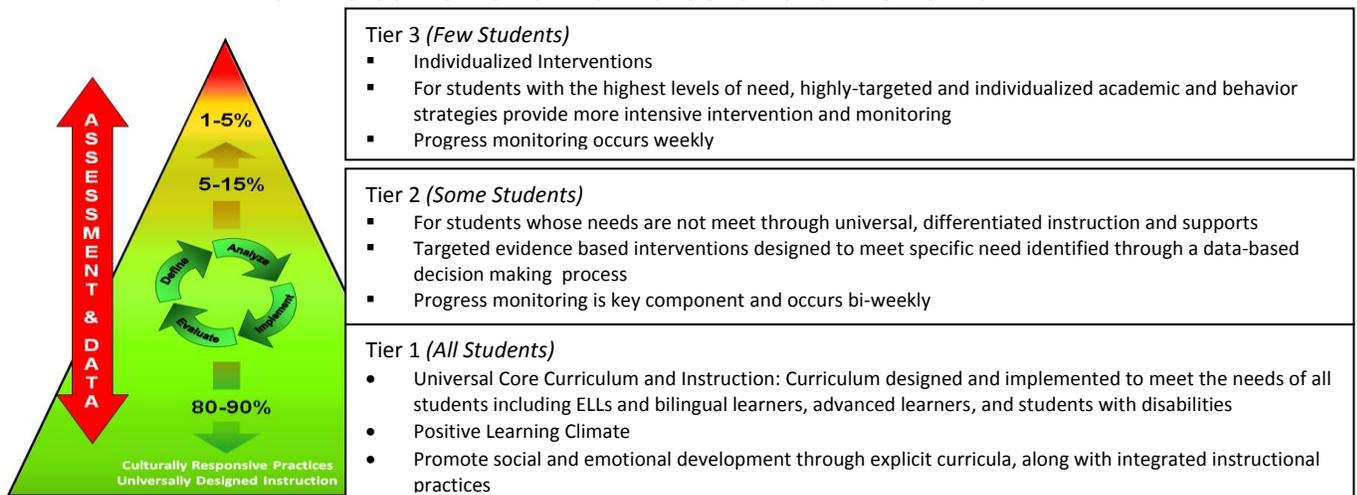
## Core Components

At the core of MTSS are three essential elements: (1) A Multi-Tiered Framework for Instruction and Intervention, (2) Academic Engaged Time, (3) Data-Based Decision Making, (4) Professional learning. Each essential area is briefly defined below.

### 1. Multi-tiered Framework for Instruction and Intervention

In a multi-tiered system of instruction and support, teachers provide quality instruction across three tiers that is universally designed, differentiated, culturally and linguistically responsive, and aligned to grade-level content standards. MTSS is a framework that provides equitable access to high-quality, grade-level academic and behavioral instruction and supports for all students.

#### Multi-Tiered Framework for Instruction and Intervention



## Tier 1: Core Instruction and Systems of Support-Great Teaching for All

**Tier 1** is Core instruction aligned to content standards. Core instruction is linguistically appropriate for English Language Learners (ELLs) and Bilingual Learners, and is universally designed for all students. All students, including students with disabilities, ELLs/bilingual learners, students in early childhood programs, and advanced learners, are expected to reach grade-level academic standards goals and beyond, develop positive social-emotional skills, and proficiencies for healthy living. We expect that the majority (e.g., 80%) of students receiving core instruction will achieve mastery of the content standards. For behavior, this also means all schools have structures in place to support positive academic behavior and social-emotional learning in all settings. For ELLs and Bilingual learners this means achieving mastery in the standards at a rate that is commensurate to their language proficiency. For students in 4K and early childhood, this means progress across developmental areas with developmentally appropriate instruction and activities.

Differentiation of behavior and academic instruction begins in Tier I and continues across the tiers. Differentiation requires teachers to recognize students' varying levels of readiness, interests, background knowledge, language, culture, and learning preferences. When teachers differentiate they respond and proactively plan for differing abilities in the same classroom. Differentiation can occur through modifications to the content (what is taught), process (how it is taught), product (how learning is shown), and/or resources available in the classroom (core curriculum or supplementary materials). To differentiate instruction to maximize student growth, teachers can add depth and complexity to the curriculum, scaffold lessons, pre-assess students to form flexible groupings, implement interest and/or learning centers, employ questioning strategies, allow for independent study, preview, review, reteach, and frontload content. Differentiation in the core curriculum is supportive of students in 4K classes. When assessment measures indicate that a student needs more instruction and intervention to access the core curriculum, then educators provide Tier 2 supports.

Schools have in place systems to identify the needs of all students throughout the school year, based on multiple measures. Teacher teams analyze data related to academic, behavior, attendance, and language proficiency, and differentiate instruction. . Teacher teams also regularly review and monitor student progress through interim and formative assessments to determine learning trends and patterns to reinforce or emphasize in subsequent instruction. School based leadership teams (SBLTs) regularly review systems level data (e.g., whole school and grade level summative and interim data) to make decisions about overall effectiveness of instruction. When assessment measures indicate that a student needs more instruction and intervention to access the core curriculum, then educators provide Tier 2 supplemental supports.

## Tier 1 Instruction is about:

- Aligning high quality core instruction to standards (See MMSD's [Great Teaching](#) and [Behavior Education Plan](#))
- Implementing instructional practices that support all learners
- Maximizing student growth by using differentiation strategies such as
  - adding depth and complexity to the curriculum
  - scaffolding lessons,
  - pre-assessing students to form flexible groupings,
  - implementing interest and/or learning centers,
  - employing questioning strategies,
  - facilitating independent study that emphasizes students' areas of interest,
  - previewing, reviewing, re-teaching, and frontloading.
- Providing structures and systems for creating a positive school/classroom climate as well as explicit and integrated instruction of social-emotional skills (SEL)
- Collaborating among teachers (e.g., general educators, BRT, CC teachers, IRTs, interventionists, AL IRTs, etc.) to ensure that all students needs are met.
- Providing sufficient time and language attentive instruction for our EL and bilingual learners which includes strategies such as use of visuals, repetition, use of home language (when possible), and grouping strategies.
- Implementing developmentally appropriate 4K practices for students, such as play-based learning and routine-based instruction that support all areas of development.

## Tier 2: Strategic Intervention – Supplemental Support

**Educators provide Tier 2 interventions**, known as “Strategic or Supplemental Intervention,” **in addition to** high quality Tier 1 core instruction. Strategic Intervention is for approximately 10-15% of students that need additional time, intensity, and/or type of instruction to achieve desired grade level benchmarks. Staff provide strategic interventions to give students more time to learn by using an instructional strategy used in the core instruction (Tier 1) or a different instructional pedagogy - whichever benefits the student more. Strategic interventions include more intensive (time and focus), immediate instruction aligned to students' instructional needs based on data from multiple measures including ongoing progress monitoring. Students in 4K may receive differentiated support within the classroom that is developmentally appropriate. Fluent and ongoing use of data allows teacher(s) to determine if the student is making expected rate of progress and growth to make decisions around current supports.

## **Tier 2 Strategic Intervention and Support is about:**

- Aligning and integrating Core instruction, school-wide academic and behavioral supports, which means:

**In addition to** Core instruction (Tier1), teachers provide supports that include intensifying evidence-based core strategies or use other evidence-based instructional strategies and/or programs.

- Providing Tier 2 interventions to ELLs and bilingual learners in the language of their instruction, differentiated to meet the students' language proficiency.
- Using data to provide more time and intensity of instruction and support (e.g., preview, review, frontload academic or other content, and provide more opportunities to learn) while regularly monitoring student(s) progress bi-weekly.

## **Tier 3: Intensive Intervention**

**Tier 3**, known as “Intensive Intervention, is targeted intervention provided in language(s) of instruction for a few (1-5%) students who, after receiving high quality, language attentive core instruction (Tier 1) and strategic intervention (Tier 2), still need increased time and intensity of instruction and/or behavioral supports. Tier 3 instruction focuses on a more narrow set of academic and behavioral skills. Tier 3 **is not** special education.

Progress monitoring at Tier 3 is more frequent; typically data is collected weekly. These assessments provide in-depth information about a student's instructional needs and are used to identify academic skills gaps. In addition, close monitoring allows for the adjustment of curricula and instruction/intervention. Within the District's tiered approach to instruction and intervention, the intensity, frequency, and duration of support increases and student-teacher ratio decreases as students move up the tiers. Student performance is monitored closely to evaluate progress and the effectiveness of all instruction and intervention. Intensity, frequency, duration of support, and student-teacher ratio changes as the students move through the tiers, as does the frequency of progress monitoring.

### **Tier 3 Intensive Instruction and Intervention is about:**

- Extending beyond Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction and/or behavioral supports
- Increasing time and instructional intensity on a narrowly focused set of skills for academics and/or behavior
- Integrating Tier 3 instruction and supports with Core (Tier 1) classroom instruction.
- Using data in collaboration with a team to regularly monitoring student progress (weekly)
- Collaborating among all adults involved in the student's learning (parents, classroom teacher, interventionist, BRT, AL IRT, IRT, etc.)

Given the individualized nature of Tier 3, schools identify teachers who are highly trained and have demonstrated expertise to support our most vulnerable learners. It is a best practice for Tier 3 support to include interventionists in addition to the classroom teacher.

### **Other Considerations**

This multi- tiered framework is a continuum of instruction and intervention where an individual student may simultaneously receive differentiated instruction in varying intensity in Tiers 1, 2, and 3 in order to match learning supports to both academic and behavioral/social-emotional needs.

For ELLs and bilingual learners, it is essential that the teacher team consider the expected rate of language acquisition (i.e. typically 5-7 years to reach academic language in English on par with monolingual learners) for our language learners as they assess their progress.

For advanced learners, it is accelerating the student through subject or grade level changes. This may mean that a student's "academic" level peers may not be their "grade" level peers when looking at instruction. For more information on MTSS and Advanced Learners, see the [AL Plan](#).

Tier 3 supports are **not** synonymous with special education services nor an automatic placement for ELLs or bilingual learners, but rather a critical step in providing intensive intervention so that students have an additional opportunity to meet expected grade level benchmarks and language proficiencies.

For more information on special education, see the [Continuum of Special Education document](#).

For students in 4K and early childhood programs, a strong core curriculum should be the primary area of focus for skill development. Research-based **and** developmentally appropriate practices are utilized to support students.

## 2. Academic Engaged Time

**Academic Engaged Time (AET)** is an essential aspect of a robust MTSS and is the highest priority for every school and every student. AET is the number of minutes each day/week that students receive quality academic instruction and demonstrate academic and social-emotional behaviors that reflect active engagement in instruction. Effective use of instructional time, specifically, academic engaged time, is one of the strongest predictors of student achievement at all levels. Instructional leadership and guidance can help ensure that teachers have time to collaboratively plan how to spend instructional time, minimize transition time, and maximize student engagement. Effective instruction and high-quality teacher-student interaction are key elements in this work across all tiers. Academic engagement is supported by clearly defining behavioral expectation, teaching and reinforcing appropriate student behavior, and correcting students calmly and efficiently. Creating schedules based on student needs and maximizing AET is a critical component to an effective MTSS.

For scheduling guidance,  
[Click here](#)

## 3. Problem Solving & Data-Based Decision-Making Process

### Problem-Solving Overview

The problem solving process is an important vehicle to continuous school improvement. With access to relevant data, teams can use the problem solving process to examine large groups of students (district or school-wide), smaller groups of students (grade level or classroom), or individual students (SSIT). The purpose of the problem solving process is to ensure that data are used to inform decision-making and action planning at these different levels. For example, data analysis and problem solving may inform school improvement planning, flexible grouping of students across classrooms, small student group core instructional or intervention decisions, or whether to refer a student to SSIT. Success hinges on true collaboration among a multi-disciplinary team of professionals that use data to identify the problem, think about why the problem is occurring, identify research-based instruction/interventions that address the specific problem, and evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction/intervention.

The process also provides the structure to monitor fidelity of instruction/interventions as well as monitor the progress of students' responses. The problem solving process is ongoing and cyclical; it recycles in order to achieve the best outcomes for all students. This process is strongly supported by both No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), legislative actions that support learning of all students regardless of their status in general or special education.

## Problem-Solving within the Context of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports

An essential component of the multi-tiered framework for instruction and intervention is consistent, step-by-step problem solving that occurs within the context of SIP planning, during teacher team meetings when teachers reflect and adjust, and within the context of individualized problem solving. The problem solving process within a MTSS helps to ensure that all factors [Instruction, Curriculum, Environment, Learner (ICEL)] have been thoroughly examined [using Review, Interview, Observation, Test (RIOT), to inform strategies and modifications to instruction/intervention. A student's failure to learn should not be automatically attributed to a disability or within-child problem. It is imperative to collect and analyze robust data on instruction, intervention, and supports to help determine why a student(s) is not progressing at the same rate as peers. Family engagement is an important aspect of this process as it will likely increase success for student outcomes (see related section).

The problem-solving process is used systematically throughout the school year at multiple levels (e.g., school, grade, class, and individual) and across all tiers to determine the appropriate level of intensity and service necessary for individual students to be successful in achieving grade level standards.

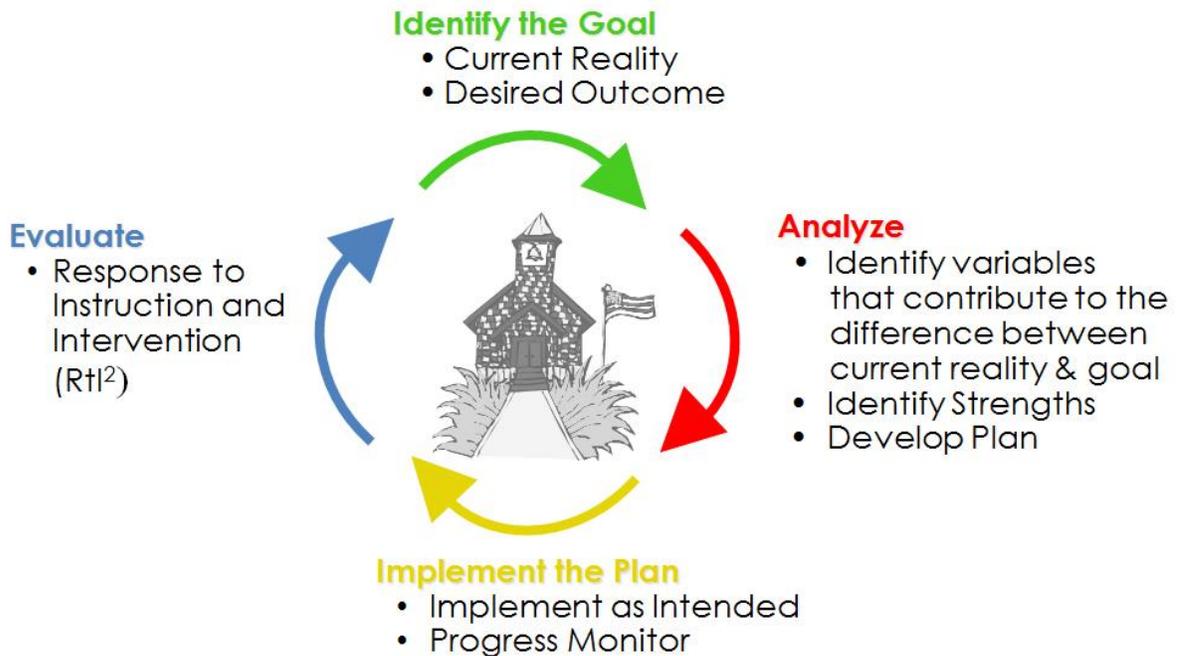
The basic problem-solving process utilizes the following four phases and questions:

1. **Problem Identification/Desired Goal:** Is there a discrepancy between expected and current performance?
2. **Problem Analysis:** Why is the student(s) not achieving the academic and/or behavioral benchmark?
3. **Plan Implementation:** What are we going to do about it?
4. **Evaluation:** Did our instruction/intervention work? What is the response to instruction and intervention?

Data based decision making through the use of systematic problem solving is an essential component of the multi-tiered framework for instruction and intervention that is consistently and continually used throughout the school year to determine the appropriate frequency, time, and intensity of instruction and support necessary for student success. The process is based on the careful analysis of multiple measures of academic, behavioral, and language proficiency data including: formal district-wide assessments, informal local measures, office discipline referrals, and attendance. It is imperative to collect and analyze robust data on language, instruction, intervention, and behavior supports to help determine why a student is not progressing at the same rate as peers.

[Data Use Toolkit](#)

**The four step problem-solving and data-based decision making process in MTSS:**



**1. Identify the Desired Goal: What is it we want student(s) to achieve?**

In the area of academics, the “what we expect students to know and do” is driven by the Common Core State Standards and English language development standards for ELLs and bilingual learners, both of which guide instruction at each grade and relevant subject area.

In the area of behavior, what we expect students to know and do is guided by social-emotional learning standards, age-appropriate student engagement behaviors and the pro-social behaviors that support a positive school climate.

At this stage, it is important for the team to articulate whether they are identifying a problem for the school, grade/department level, small group of students, or an individual student. This identification is important since it will lead to different types of instructional or intervention decisions. For example, if the team is working with school level data, the intervention may be school-wide such as re-teaching hallway expectations and behaviors. These data may also inform additional problem solving at Tier 2 or Tier 3 (i.e., is there a small group of students who needs additional intervention?).

## **2. Analyze: Why is there a gap between current and expected achievement?**

This analysis phase, often referred to as problem analysis, gap analysis, or root cause analysis, is an essential phase that deserves processing time. Effective analysis provides the foundation for the rest of the data-based decision making process.

The goal of this analysis is to answer the questions:

- *Why is the gap occurring?*
- *Why are student(s) not achieving the desired academic or behavioral outcomes?*
- *What are the **strengths** that can be used to leverage?*
- *What are the possible barriers to the student(s) doing and/or knowing what is expected?*

During this analysis, the team uses data to generate hypotheses, or possible root causes, that are grounded in evidence and focus on alterable variables related to the domains of Instruction, Curriculum, Environment or Learner (ICEL). Additional data [Review, Observation, Interviews, Tests (RIOT)] may be gathered to either confirm or disprove the hypotheses. From this, the team selects an instruction/intervention strategy that is best matched to the student(s) needs identified through this phase.

## **3. Implement the plan**

During this step of the process, the team develops a plan to enable the school, grade, small group, or individual student to reach the goal. During this step, details are essential as the team must outline the specifics of the plan including data collection on how the student(s) will be monitored (progress monitoring) as well as a plan for monitoring the fidelity of the instruction/intervention.

A good plan:

- Incorporates the strengths of the system and the student(s)
- Explicitly states what will be taught/focus of instruction/intervention
- Focuses on measurable objectives
- Defines specifically who is responsible for each action and a timeline
- Describes a plan for measuring and monitoring the effects of the instruction/intervention; a quantifiable baseline and target goal is identified
- Describes a plan for monitoring/ensuring fidelity to the plan
- Identifies resources available for implementing the plan

## **4. Evaluate the plan: How have student(s) responded to our plan?**

This last step in the data based decision making process requires the team to use data gathered from progress monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of the planned instruction or intervention.

The team meets on previously determined, regular intervals to ask:

- *Is the plan reaching out intended goal/desired outcomes?*
- *If not, how will the planned instruction/intervention be adjusted to better support the student, group of students, or whole class progress? Do we need to consider fidelity?*
- *If yes, should the plan continue? Should we fade the instruction/intervention? (e.g., systematically withdraw the intervention while planning for generalization and maintenance of the newly acquired skills or knowledge).*

A key feature in the evaluation phase is collecting data that can be administered frequently and are sensitive to small changes in skill levels. By plotting skill levels on a graph, trends in student performance can be visualized more easily.

If instruction/intervention is not producing the desired results, a first step is to evaluate whether the instruction/intervention is being implemented as designed. If not, adjustments should be made to ensure fidelity. Teams should also consider whether the intensity of an intervention needs to be increased by either; 1) reducing the size of the group; 2) increasing the amount of time/frequency that the intervention is delivered or 3) narrowing the focus of the instruction.

Through this process, teachers and Teacher Teams make decisions regarding appropriate and necessary instructional practices and targeted interventions for **individual students**.

**Remember:** Be aware of the appropriate purpose and level of analysis. Ask yourself, “What is the purpose of the analysis?” If the team is analyzing data to make decisions regarding appropriate and necessary instructional practices and targeted interventions for **individual or groups of students**, the appropriate group for this level of data-based decision making is the Teacher Team, individual teacher, or SSIT. If the question is more about **systems level effectiveness** then the School Based Leadership Team (SBLT) is the appropriate group. Grade level, behavior, content area trends are analyzed at the SBLT level. The SBLT should examine and analyze the percent and distribution of students receiving tiered support across classrooms and grade levels as well as the frequency, length of time, and types of intervention, and outcomes to make school-wide decisions about MTSS effectiveness.

[SBLT Toolkit](#)  
[Teacher Team Toolkit](#)

Within data-based decision making is the strategic use of **assessment**. It is critical that instruction and/or behavior decisions are based on *multiple and varied* assessment measures. Early identification of student needs can prevent learning gaps, provide additional time for instruction/intervention, and promote student potential.

Data are first collected early in the year and utilized to inform teacher and support staff decisions at each tier of support. Fluent and ongoing use of assessment data allows teacher(s) and support staff to determine if the student should remain with current program supports, modify current supports within a tier, lessen supports by moving to a lower tier or intensify supports by moving up a tier.

The effective use of formative assessments within the context of problem solving is crucial to help educators determine the appropriate intervention for students. Technically adequate (i.e., reliable and valid) progress monitoring assessments can be administered frequently and are sensitive to small increments of growth over time. These assessment results provide guidance in making decisions that promote student achievement and achieving grade level benchmarks and beyond.

## 4. Professional Learning

The fundamental purpose of MTSS is to improve the educational outcomes for each student in all content and behavior areas. Students must have equitable access to the highest level of instructional expertise and pedagogy in all tiers of support. For this to occur, ongoing professional learning is essential to ensure that teachers are prepared and supported to meet the needs of all students, through a system of assessment, instruction, and intervention.

It is critical that when any professional development is delivered, it is embedded within the framework of MTSS ensuring that differentiated teaching strategies are developed for content across the tiers.

The responsibility for professional learning is shared across MMSD and must be aligned among Central Office, schools, SBLTs, and Teacher Teams. District and school-based resources must be dedicated to building the capacity of teachers and leaders to effectively reach all students.

### **Summary**

MTSS is a student-centered, evidenced based framework that maintains an intentional focus on the needs of all learners, especially those populations of students who have traditionally been underserved, and unsuccessful, in our educational system. MTSS ensures consistent and systemic articulation of student needs and strengths, the alignment of instruction and resources, and improved academic and behavioral outcomes for all students.

For additional information, visit [mmsd.org/intervention](https://mmsd.org/intervention).