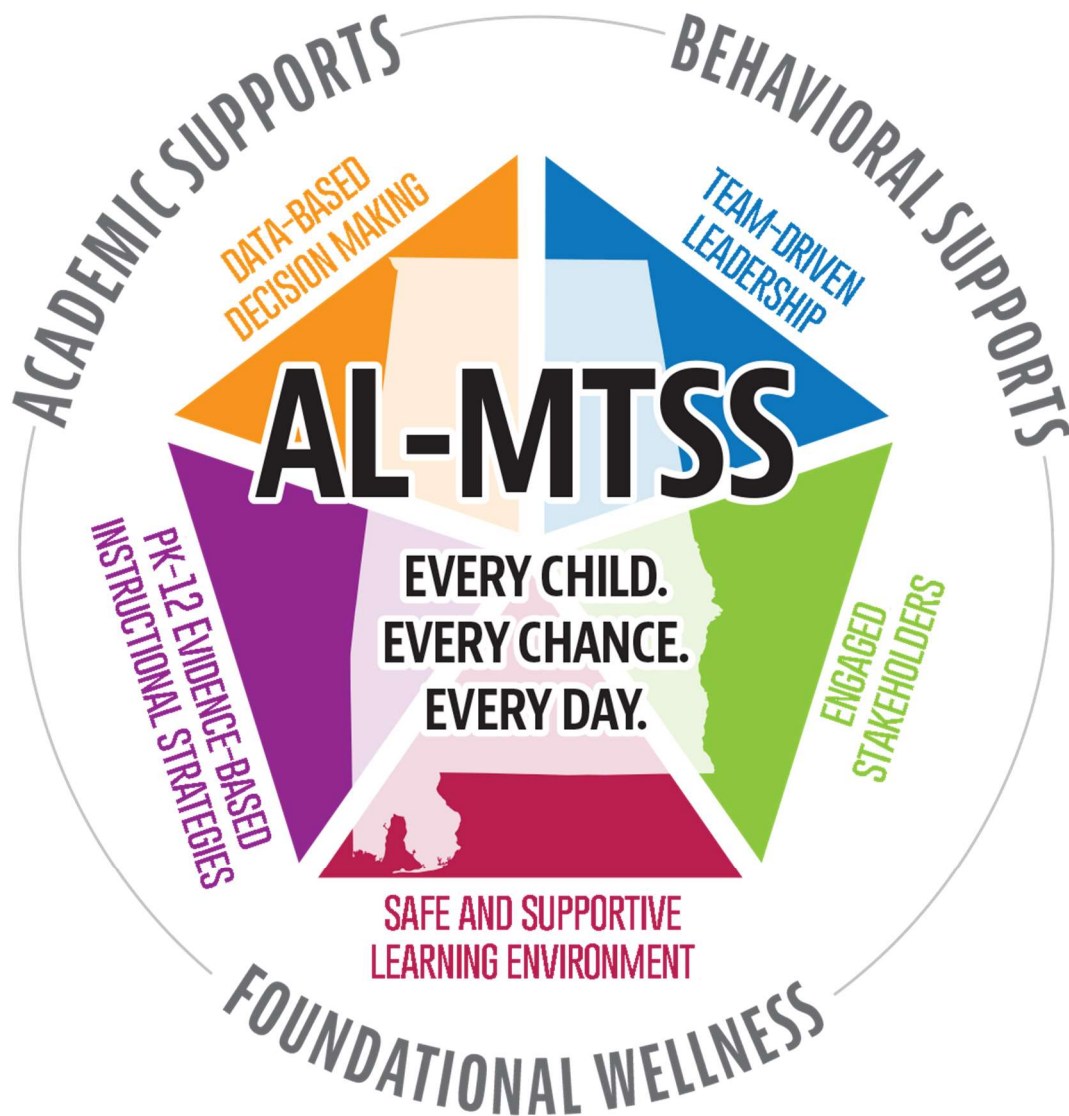


ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Alabama Multi-Tier System of Supports



In careful alignment with *Alabama Achieves: A New Plan for a New Decade*, this document is intended to convey the vision:

“In the knowledge-based economy of the future, a dynamic, healthy, and prosperous Alabama will increasingly rely on the education of its population. The first step to realizing that vision is a high-performing system of public schools that challenges all children with a world-class expectation for understanding English and its rich literature, mathematics, history, and the requirements of a democracy, the sciences, and the arts. Such a system demands educators with a deep understanding of the subject being taught, a personal allegiance to continuous self-improvement, and a commitment to helping all children find success in school and in their lives thereafter. It is our collective vision and plan to promote and support such an equitable, accountable, and just system.”

It is intended to support accomplishing the mission:

“It is the Mission of the Alabama State Department of Education to be an agency of innovation, creativity, and accountability in order to support local schools and school systems as they undertake the important work of educating children in communities across the state.”

And it is intended to embody the charge to improve outcomes for **EVERY CHILD, EVERY CHANCE, EVERY DAY.**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document was developed in collaboration with the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI), with additional considerations from the Public Consulting Group.

A special thank you to the state, regional, district, and local stakeholders and school leaders who provided input to the development and design of the Alabama Multi-Tier System of Support.

Alabama Multi-Tier System of Supports Development Advisory Committee

Dr. Elisabeth Davis, Student Learning	Dr. Angie Pelton, Professional Learning
Sean J. Stevens, Instructional Services	Dr. Melissa Shields, School Improvement
Reeda Betts, Alabama Reading Initiative	Gwen Preston, Special Education Services
Cristin Dillard, Instructional Services	Kesha Hooks, Educational Technology
Hailey Ridgeway, Educational Technology	Amanda Rylant, Federal Programs
Jessica Morton, Instructional Services	Dr. Tracye Strichik, Alabama Reading Initiative
Eric Dickson, Special Education Services	Celeste Minor, Special Education Services
Jason Issacs, Federal Programs	Katrina Todd, Alabama Reading Initiative
Maria Franco, AMSTI	Keven Culpepper, Child Nutrition Programs
Michele Lee, Alabama Reading Initiative	Jennifer Ventress, Prevention and Support Services
Shaundalyn Elliot, Prevention and Support Services	Dr. Scherrie Banks Pickett, Educational Technology
Dr. Karen Anderson, School Improvement	Dr. Carolyn Jones, Instructional Services
Jonathan Thompson, Instructional Services	Elizabeth Green, Special Education Services
Cathy Lankford, Instructional Services	Dr. Kay Warfield, Prevention and Support Services
Julie Crockett, Career and Technical Education	Dr. Paul Bonner, Accountability
Andy Chamness, Career and Technical Education	Theresa Farmer, Special Education Services
Wendy Arnold, School Improvement	Elizabeth Hammonds, Instructional Services
Kennita Betts, Educator Certification	Dr. Molly Killingsworth, Federal Programs
Dr. Monica Mack, Instructional Services	Dr. Amy Murphy, AMSTI
Meg Lowry, School Improvement	Susan Goldthwaite, Special Education Services
Dr. Sandy Ledwell, AMSTI	Dr. Telenia Madison, Professional Learning

INTRODUCTION

What is Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS)?

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) refers to MTSS as a systematic, data-based approach for increasing student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Section 2103 of ESSA states regarding local uses of funds that programs and activities may include:

Developing programs and activities that increase the ability of teachers to effectively teach children with disabilities, including children with significant cognitive disabilities, and English learners, which may include the use of multi-tier systems of support and positive behavioral intervention and supports, so that such children with disabilities and English learners can meet the challenging State academic standards; (Sec 2103(b)(3)(F))

Further, *ESSA* provides a definition of “multi-tier system of supports” as:

A comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data based instructional decision-making. (Sec 8101(33))

MTSS is defined by the IRIS Center (2019) as:

A model or approach to instruction that provides increasingly intensive and individualized levels of support for academics and for behavior.

As MTSS was initially conceived, it was a school-wide framework with a focus on general education students who were not identified as qualifying for special education services. Rtl and problem-solving models that were designed both to provide interventions to students at risk for failure in one or more subject areas, with pre-referral information for students who might need special education services (particularly those with learning disabilities), and to determine the interventions that might address their individual needs.

Alabama Multi-Tier System of Supports

Alabama Multi-Tier System of Supports (AL-MTSS) is a comprehensive framework comprised of a collection of research-based strategies designed to meet the individual needs and strengths of the whole child. AL-MTSS intentionally interconnects the academic, behavioral, physical, mental health and wellness, and social-emotional needs to support the whole child while aligning to the *Alabama Achieves Strategic Plan*. AL-MTSS uses a proactive, team-driven approach that engages all stakeholders (education, health, and human service systems at all levels) to ensure equitable access to opportunities that will improve outcomes for every Alabama child.

The purpose of AL-MTSS is to implement and sustain a continuum of evidence-based practices, instruction, supports, and intervention that align with the individualized and varied needs of all students while eliminating barriers to help children find success in academic and nonacademic settings. The AL-MTSS Framework provides schools and districts efficient means to analyze data and organize resources. Data is utilized throughout the framework to ensure equitable and personalized supports that assists all students along their educational journey.

AL-MTSS is based upon a growth mindset; a proactive approach to ensuring each learner experiences a quality education designed to expand their potential. Thus, it is not just a framework for addressing remedial needs, but also for extending the strengths of gifted and talented learners.

To fully realize the impact AL-MTSS will have on student achievement, school and local leaders must be aware of the following considerations:

- A collective responsibility for ensuring growth and success for all learners is assumed by each person within the system (educators, learners, families, and community).
- The utilization of a proactive approach to ensuring every learner experiences a quality education designed to expand a learner's potential is critical.
- Rather than a standalone initiative, AL-MTSS is a systemic approach to improving instruction and support at all levels.
- AL-MTSS will align with the school district's continuous and ongoing improvement efforts.

AL-MTSS Core Principles and Non-negotiables

- Every child is capable of learning with adequate support.
- Systemic and systematic alignment of all systems of support, decisions, and procedures driven by district, school, community, and student data.
- Universal screening and progress monitoring are the basis for data-driven instructional decisions and continuous improvement.
- Team-driven, data-informed decision making is a collaborative approach by the Problem-Solving Team (PST) and guides decisions about the core instruction and universal supports and the continuum of tiered supports for each student. The level of support given to each student is based on their needs.
- School systems assure every child has equitable access to high-quality, evidence-based core instruction and universal supports provided by highly effective educators in a general education setting and in addition a continuum of tiered supports that is evidence-based early intervening services to ensure success for every child, every chance, every day.

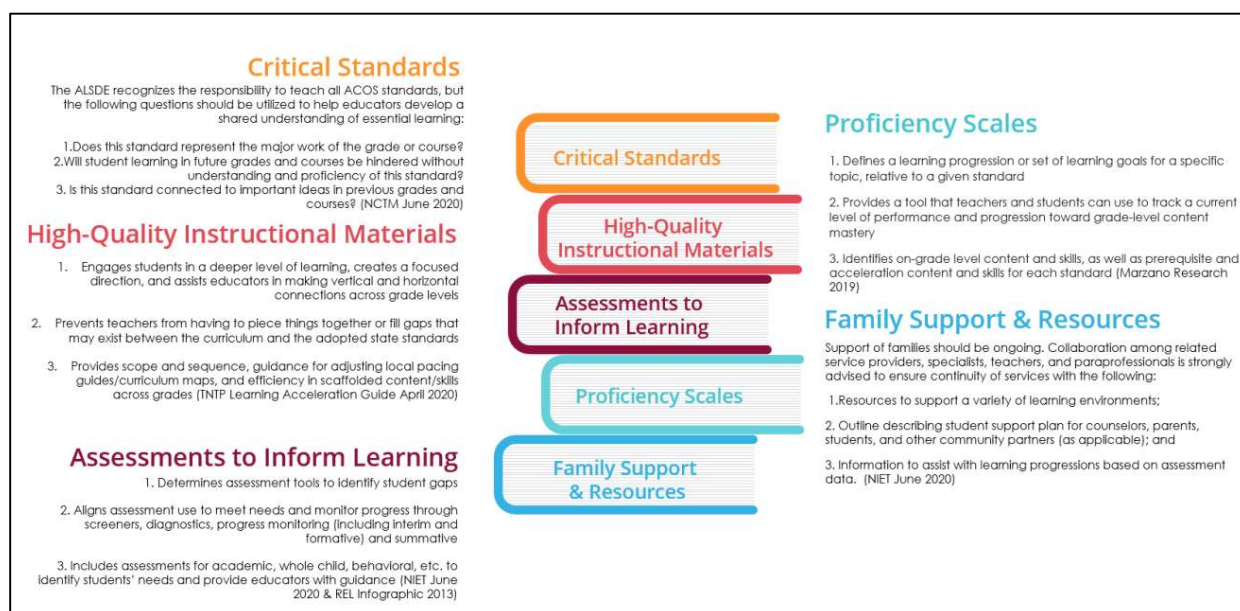
Equitable Access

Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day

All Alabama students receive challenging and developmentally appropriate Tier I core instruction in which universal instruction and differentiation delivered by highly effective teachers is intended to meet the needs of all students. Districts should equitably allocate resources (fiscal, personnel, time, curricular materials, etc.) to provide all learners access to Tier I instruction, regardless of disability, English language proficiency status, income, race, or academic performance.

Alabama Teaching and Learning Framework

The *Alabama Teaching and Learning Framework* includes five components: critical standards, high-quality instructional materials, assessments to inform learning, proficiency scales, and resources for family support. The framework serves as a foundation for the instructional planning and design as well as the implementation of local curricula.

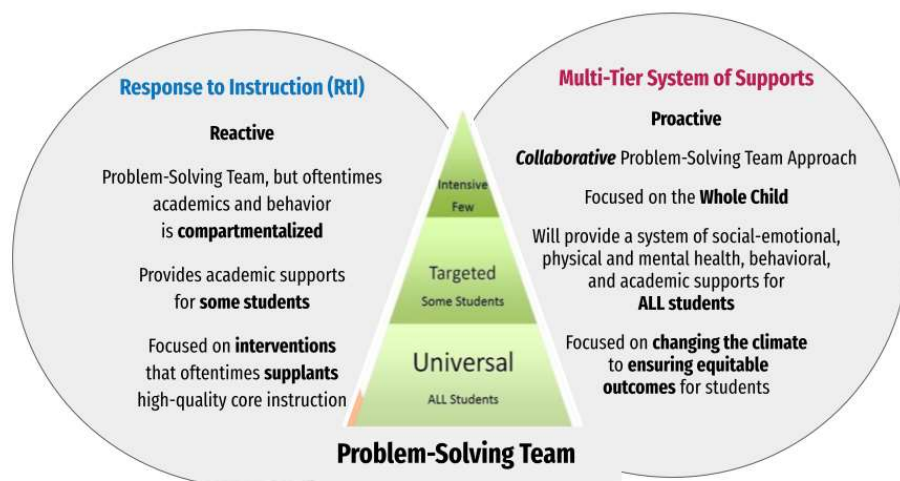


Model Instructional Framework

Effective instructional planning has four parts: goals, methods, materials, and assessments (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon, 2014). The *Alabama Teaching and Learning Instructional Framework* is intended to assist educators to plan standards-based instruction and design instruction that allows all students to have equitable access to grade-level standards in learning experiences that are engaging and personalized to their needs. Integrating universal design for learning (UDL) principles, educators can reduce barriers in instruction, proactively provide appropriate accommodations and supports, and allow for high-achievement expectations for all children, regardless of their unique strengths and challenges. This is done by educators providing options and choices for students to personalize their learning and develops a flexible learning environment that can accommodate learner variability. Educational organizations strive to create curriculum that provides:

- **Multiple means of engagement** to tap into learners' interest, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.
- **Multiple means of representation** to give learners numerous ways of acquiring information and knowledge; and
- **Multiple means of expression** to provide learners with options for demonstrating knowledge and skills.

Key differences between Alabama Response to Instruction (Rtl) and Alabama Multi-Tier System of Supports (AL-MTSS)



(Novak, 2019)

Alabama's Rtl multi-tiered model was adopted for identifying and addressing the specific academic needs of struggling students. Alabama's Rtl model places the emphasis on high-quality and effective instructional practices for targeted academic intervention. While Rtl focuses on direct services, supports, and interventions for students at-risk, AL-MTSS is a systematic approach that creates successful and sustainable change to address whole child needs and assets, both academic and nonacademic. As opposed to a reactive Rtl approach that responds to declines in student achievement as a determinant for dedicating resources and services, AL-MTSS places the onus on the systems established to be proactive in providing support for all students.

AL-MTSS has a much broader scope and proactive focus in providing preventative supports within the tiered model. AL-MTSS strives to target the system of supports at all levels in addressing the physical and mental health, social-emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of all students; it also works to improve school culture, educator professional development, and family and community engagement.

Previous approaches required the intentional redesign of programs and supports to address needs. Due to the comprehensive nature of AL-MTSS, school-wide and district-wide systematic changes are accomplished in accordance with an in-depth analysis of current programming and initiatives; thereby making leadership, effective communication, and cooperative effort amongst all stakeholder groups essential to its success.

TIERED CONTINUUM OF SUPPORTS

All students must have equitable access to a tiered continuum of support, regardless of achievement level. Effective instruction and meaningful interactions, such as positive student-teacher relationships, are key elements across all tiers. A layered continuum of supports ensures that ALL students receive equitable access to foundational wellness, behavioral, and academic supports that are culturally and linguistically responsive, matched to individual student need, and are developmentally appropriate. Each layer of support increases with intensity from universal (ALL students) to targeted (SOME students) to the most intensive supports (FEW students).

This systematic, tiered model approach supports struggling learners, as well as advanced learners, through the selection of evidence-based instruction and intervention in response to both academic and behavioral needs, based on universal screening methods for early identification. The system includes on-going progress monitoring of the effectiveness of instruction to ensure that all Alabama students graduate from high school ready for college and career ready success.

The purpose of a tiered system of support is to provide a framework for an adaptive, responsive continuum of integrated supports for all students that vary in the level of intensity. A layered continuum of support is designed to address a student's academic, physical, social, behavioral, and emotional needs by mitigating barriers to learning and development both in and outside of the classroom setting.

No student should be labeled by an intervention tier. For example, a child is not a "Tier II student" but a student requiring Tier II supports in a specific skill/content area(s). In addition, when a student receives interventions in Tier II, it should not replace Tier I supports. These supports build upon one another. Moreover, students can move fluidly through Tier I, II, and III supports as needed. For example, if data suggests that students are not meeting the standards, what additional support(s) may they need? Similarly, if students significantly exceed the standards, what Tier II supports may be necessary to optimize challenge and promote growth? It is also important to note that students may need Tier II support in one area (e.g., math standards) but may need only Tier I support in another area (e.g., relationship-building).

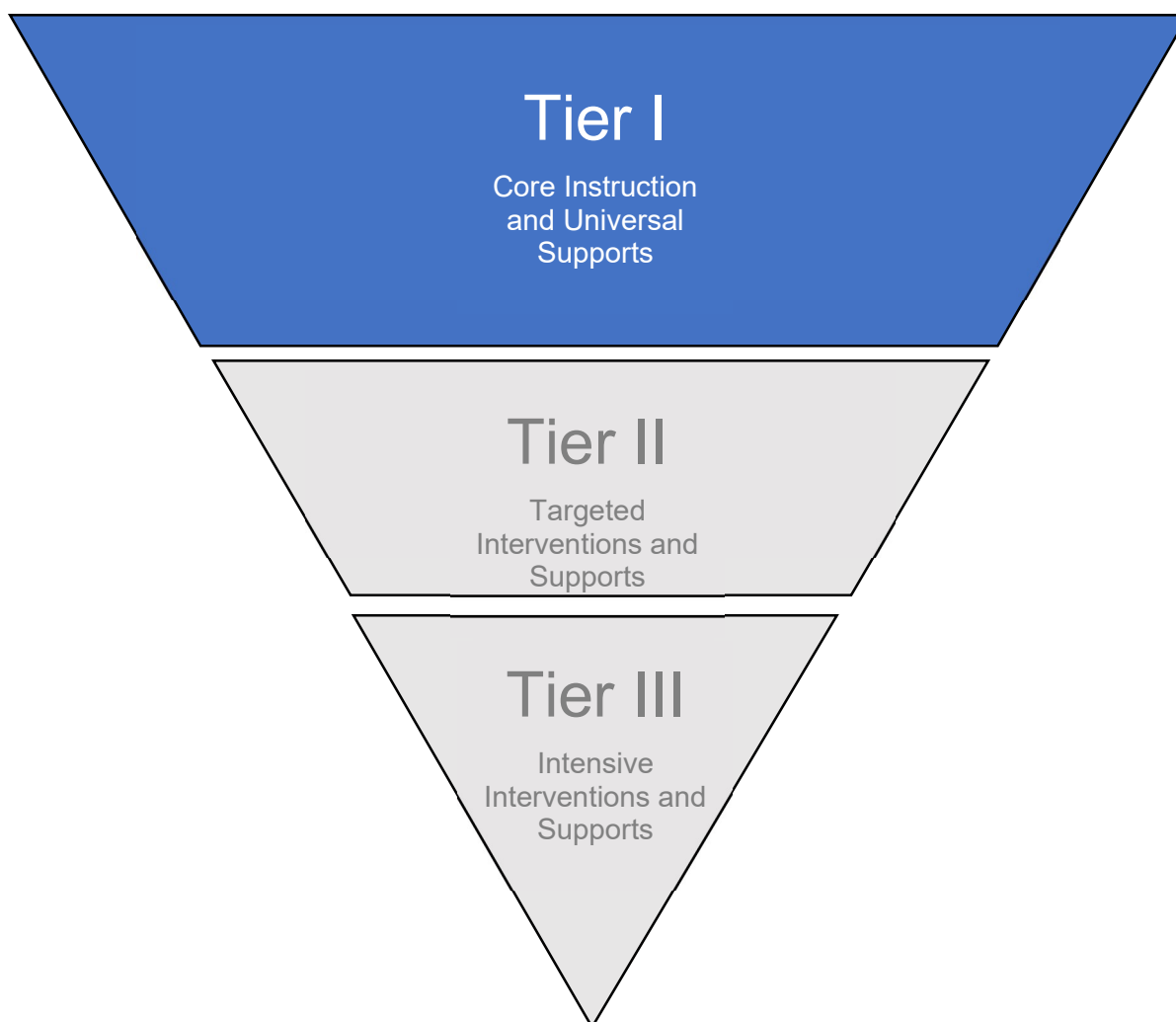
ALL students should have access to supports when they need it. In addition, obtaining services at one point does not mean that students will always need that level of support. The MTSS process is not always linear, but oriented around problem solving. When data suggests that students require intensive supports to aid either remediation or enrichment, they will move throughout the tiers based on that need. Movement amongst the three tiers is fluid and is not determined or defined by specific designations, such as diagnosed disabilities. Rather, movement is supported by data from universal screeners, diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring, and how a student responds to one level of intervention.

Tier I Supports: Core Instruction and Universal Support

Tier I is the **CORE INSTRUCTION** and **UNIVERSAL SUPPORT** for ALL students and consists of high-quality, standards-based, instruction in the classroom setting provided by highly trained and effective personnel using evidence-based strategies differentiated to meet student needs. It does not include special education services, enrichment for gifted students or intervention programs. Data from screening and progress monitoring is used to differentiate instruction within Tier I.

For example, providing students with a high-quality, coherent curriculum that provides options and choices for how they learn (i.e., access to books, videos, or direct teacher instruction), what materials, scaffolds and supports they need to learn (i.e., visuals, exemplars, graphic organizers, rubrics, etc.), how they can determine what they have learned, and the incorporation of small and whole group instruction will allow more students to access rigorous, standards-based instruction. Tier I supports are proactive and work to prevent consistent deficiencies and skills gaps.

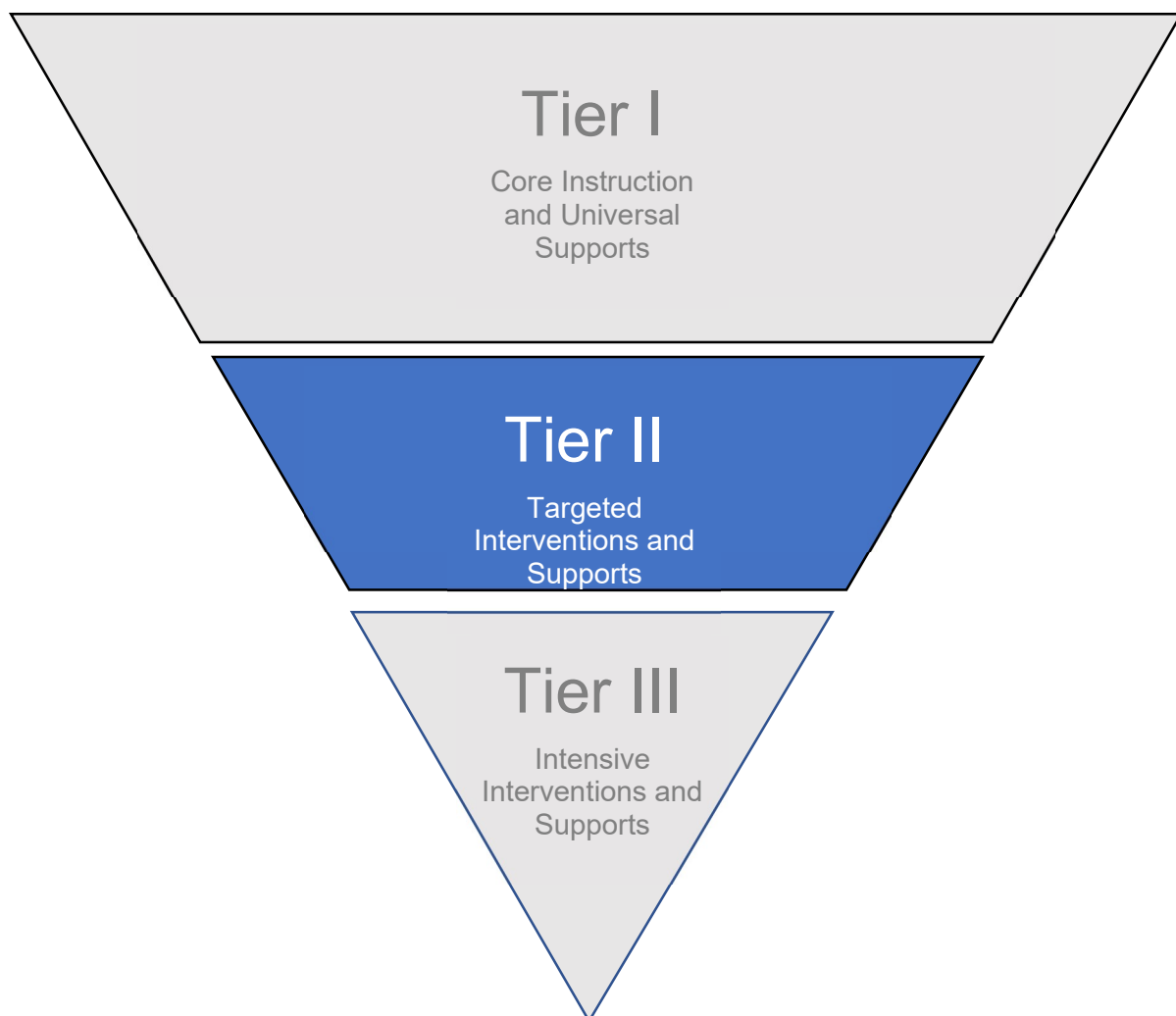
Tier I instruction occurs in whole groups, small groups, and in individual settings. Tier I should be considered the key component in successful tiered instruction. Inclusive practice is a cornerstone of Tier I. Inclusive practice is defined as “instructional and behavioral strategies that improve academic and social emotional outcomes for all students, with and without disabilities, in general education settings” (Educator Effectiveness Guidebook for Inclusive Practice, 2017).



Tier II Supports: Targeted Support and Intervention

Tier II is **TARGETED** support and intervention for SOME students that consists of supplemental academic and behavioral supports provided in addition to core high-quality instruction.

It is critical to understand Tier II supports are in **addition** to Tier I instruction. These supports occur in addition to the core instruction and universal supports that are provided in Tier I. Students must continue to receive high-quality, core instruction with their peers. Data is analyzed from screeners, formative assessments, student artifacts, and other evidence to determine if a consistent deficiency exists; in addition to, ascertaining if a general education teacher can provide interventions to bring the student on grade-level, then Tier II supports can be selected by the teacher or through collaboration with the Problem-Solving Team. These supports are provided in small groups and include additional opportunities to practice the skills necessary for core instruction or strategies for enrichment. Tier II support provides opportunities for frequent progress monitoring; thereby, adjusting intervention based on the needs of the student and his or her response to the intervention.

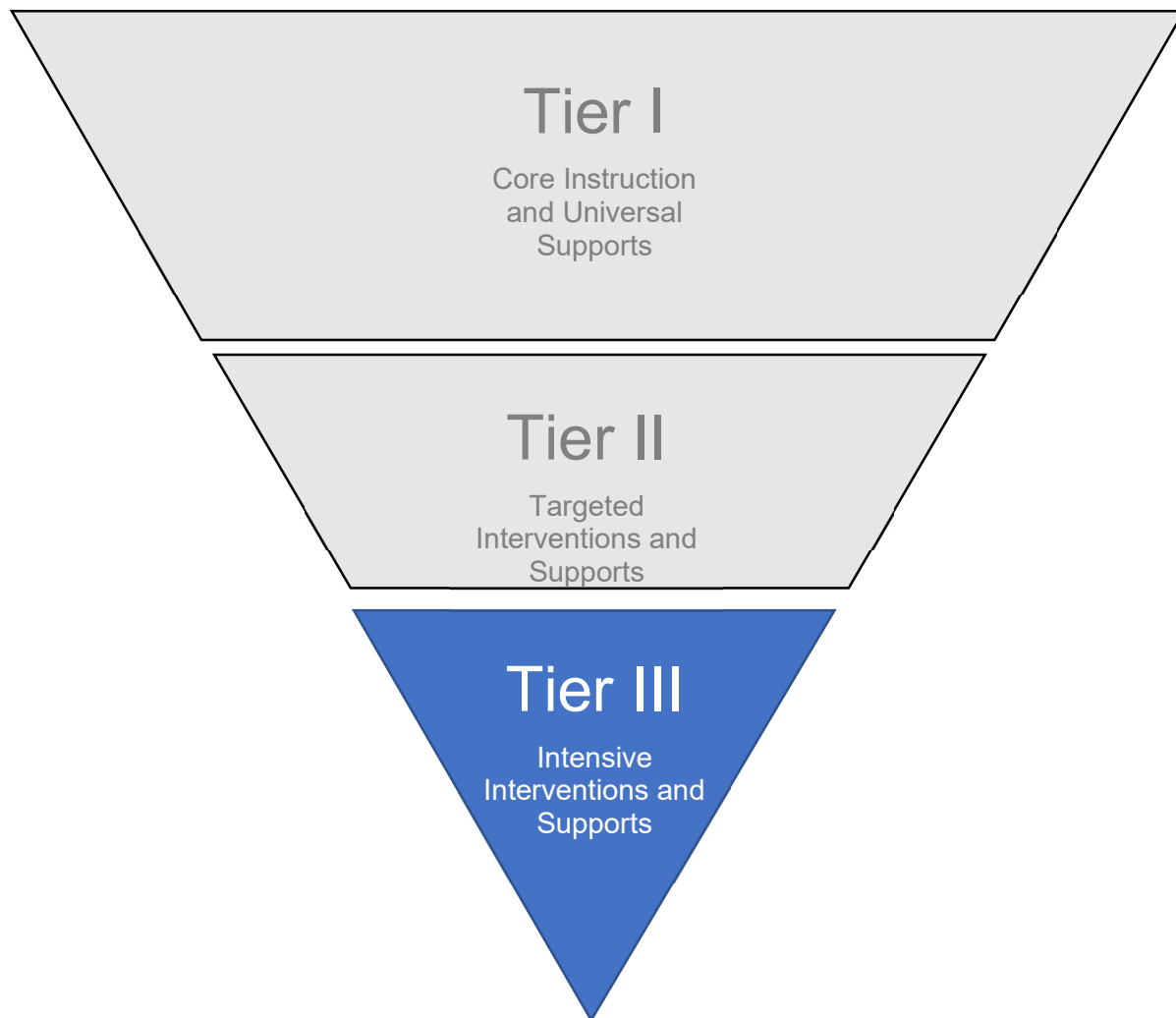


Tier III Supports: Intensive Support and Intervention

Tier III is the most **INTENSIVE** support and intervention for FEW students and consists of the most aggressive, targeted, explicit instruction and intervention specifically designed to meet the individual academic and behavioral needs of students.

Tier III supports the use of diagnostic assessments to identify consistent deficiencies and skills gaps. It is critical to understand Tier III supports are in **addition** to Tier I core instruction and universal supports, as well as Tier II instruction. Tier III supports and interventions must not supplant core instruction and universal supports. Students must continue to receive high-quality, core instruction with their peers.

Root causes for Tier III intensive instruction or intervention are determined by the analysis of universal screeners or consistent deficiency in a prerequisite foundational skill, then the response indicates the potential need for Tier III intervention. These are often explicit, focused interventions that occur individually or in exceedingly small groups. It is important to note that Tier III is not synonymous with special education. Students with disabilities may not need Tier III support and students not identified with a disability may in fact need Tier III supports.



ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF AL-MTSS

The essential elements of AL-MTSS become the drivers of a successful AL-MTSS implementation in that it is how education organizations at all levels ensure the academic achievement and success of every child, every chance, every day.



DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING

Data-based decision making refers to the ongoing process of gathering and analyzing several types and multiple sources of data to make decisions needed toward improving the educational environment and instructional approaches to ensure success for the whole child. Data-based decision making is also necessary to assist all educators in identifying areas of need or focus when designing on-going professional learning and development of essential content knowledge.

Data-based decision making is a critical component of AL-MTSS as it drives instruction, supports, and intervention. District and school staff should collaborate to create an integrated data collection system consisting of foundational wellness (e.g., physical health, mental health, and social-emotional), academic, and behavioral data such as results of state assessments, universal screeners, diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring, formative and summative assessments, attendance, office discipline referrals, and observations provided by school personnel as well as parents/guardians. Data should be collected and analyzed throughout the year on ALL students, regardless of subgroup.

TEAM-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

Team-driven, shared leadership is part of a whole school model of governing that expands the decision making related to a school's organization, operation, and instructional design by creating leadership roles or decision-making opportunities for teachers, staff members, students, parents, and community members. Team-driven leadership makes it possible for schools to enlist a larger pool of talent, expertise, and experience beyond traditional school leadership. Through this practice, all involved may focus their attention, energy, skills, and time on what they do best, and as a result, the whole organization, and the students, reap the benefits. By sharing leadership responsibilities, school decision-making becomes more collaborative, comprehensive, and self-reflective because additional people are committed to every child's success. This practice fosters personal investment and creates a shared responsibility for the performance and results of a school. Effective leadership is key to impacting student success. Within AL-MTSS, shared leadership allows for distribution of responsibilities and promotes shared decision making among a diverse group of individuals with a common vision and purpose to achieve desired outcomes. For successful implementation of AL-MTSS, it is critical that leadership teams at both the district and school level ensure effective implementation within the district, schools, classrooms, and the community using a data-based problem solving and decision-making process to include the responsibilities of:

- Making data-informed decisions
- Engaging all stakeholders in the problem-solving process
- Creating an engaging and safe learning environment
- Improving outcomes through collaboration and communication
- Allocating and distributing available resources
- Coordinating and providing professional development
- Supporting fidelity and sustainability

SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A **safe and supportive learning environment** is one that recognizes that every child needs and deserves a safe, supportive, and healthy learning environment in which they feel respected and free from physical harm, intimidation, harassment, and bullying. Educators develop a safe, secure school environment that enables the whole child to learn and grow in dynamic ways through the elimination of systemic barriers to teaching and learning, while promoting high expectations, encouraging innovation, and supporting positive academic risk-taking. Educators create learning environments that continually pursues ways to cultivate positive relationships that are kind, caring, and respectful among all stakeholders; nurtures self-awareness, identity development, and sense of purpose for every child; and emphasizes strategies for academic, social, and emotional growth.

PK-12 EVIDENCE- BASED STRATEGIES

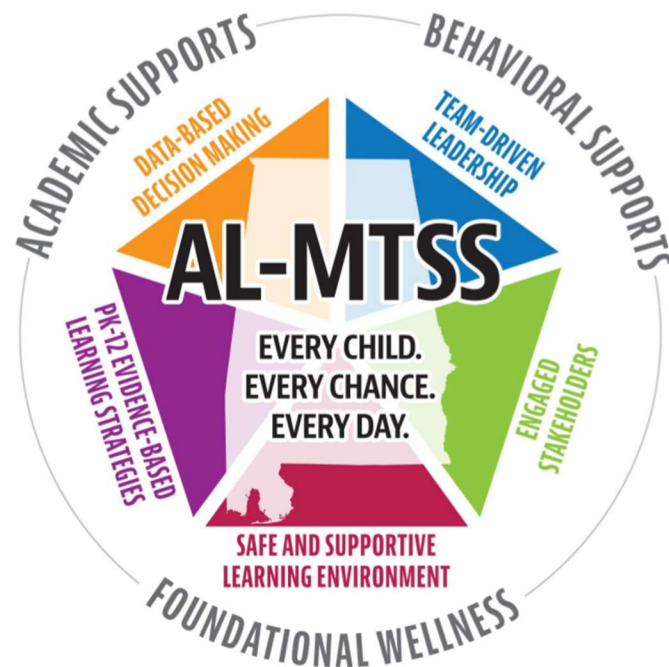
PK-12 evidence-based instructional strategies are practices, techniques, and teaching strategies proven to work through experimental research studies or large-scale research field studies/meta-analyses. Scientifically based research shows that evidence-based strategies have far more impact than others on student outcomes. When teachers and leaders are reviewing and selecting instructional strategies, educators must consider those academic and behavioral practices and programs, grounded in empirical evidence, which leads to improved educational outcomes. Educators must also consider the unique characteristics of the child being served, the setting in which the program or practice will be implemented, and the diverse learning needs of every child. Leaders must understand the gap between current practices and prioritized outcomes, work to identify the practices that show a positive impact on student outcome goals, match resources to student need, and then apply formative and summative measures to ensure individual student success.

ENGAGED STAKEHOLDERS

Engaged stakeholders are those individuals, internally and externally, who have an equitable interest in the school to provide a positive school experience for all students. Engaged stakeholders include staff who have a direct responsibility in creating the conditions necessary for students to learn and grow, families vested in the long-term success of a child, and community leaders who have a stake in the development of a well-prepared workforce. Engaged stakeholders actively work to improve educational excellence and equity, particularly regarding the most vulnerable students and families. They engage in open and authentic partnerships that ensure that the voice, ideas, and concerns of the school and community are well represented. The collaboration of families, schools, and communities as equal partners increases student, classroom, school, and district outcomes through the promotion of equity for all. With effective partnerships in place, families are empowered to ensure that students have access to learning opportunities that will support their success. Partnership among all stakeholders is critical for the successful implementation of AL-MTSS to achieve outcomes that promote student achievement and success for every child.

FOCUS AREAS OF SUPPORT

To optimize student success, schools must address the foundational wellness, behavioral, and academic needs of students through tiered support. All three areas are mutually reinforcing and should be at the core of our AL-MTSS work. The focus areas of support are what all systems develop, implement, and sustain to ensure the achievement and success of every child, every chance, every day.



Foundational Wellness Supports

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) believes the needs of every child are not left to chance but are in the hands of highly effective, compassionate education professionals and strong caring communities every day. The ALSDE is committed to a multi-tier system of supports to collaborate with districts, schools, and communities to meet the needs of the whole child. The commitment is to provide for the wellness needs of every child, every chance, every day by ensuring equitable access to a learning community that promotes a healthy lifestyle and provides a mentally, socially, and emotionally safe and supportive educational environment that equips them with the self-awareness skills necessary to understand and manage emotions; the social awareness and relationship skills necessary to feel and show empathy for others while maintaining positive relationships; the skills for responsible decision making in and out of schools; and where the wellness needs of all are respected and nurtured.

Addressing the foundational wellness needs of the whole child includes physical, mental, social, and emotional health and wellbeing. Building a foundation of wellness supports should include not only basic human needs such as secure and adequate access to healthy food provisions, clothing, and shelter combined with an environment that fosters student health, safety, and wellbeing; but in addition, empowers the child to thrive academically and behaviorally, make responsible decisions, demonstrate social-emotional wellness, and develop self-awareness and self-management competencies (CASEL, 2021).

Developing foundational wellness skills improves student capacity to engage in academic learning and prepares them to meet academic benchmarks, achieve reading and math proficiency, and attain college and career readiness indicators. To meet rigorous learning standards, students must be able to regulate their emotions, collaborate with their peers, communicate their ideas, and take the perspective of others (Yoder, 2013). A major review of 213 studies evaluating SEL programs in schools found that students who participated in SEL programs, compared with students who did not, demonstrated the following attributes:

- increased academic achievement,
- increased social and emotional skills,
- improved attitude toward self and others,
- improved positive social behaviors, and
- decreased conduct problems and emotional distress.

These results were consistent across grade level (elementary, middle, and high school); location (urban, rural, and suburban); and school type (serving a range of ethnically and racially diverse student populations) (Durlak et al., 2011).

Educators expect to teach academic skills, but when it comes to the physical, social-emotional, mental health, and foundational wellness of children, often these skills are not intentionally interwoven into the instructional planning, daily practices, and school culture. By intentionally braiding foundational wellness skills, all stakeholders (e.g., certified staff, classified staff, students, community, and families) begin the process of building positive relationships within the school culture and environment. It is crucial all stakeholders understand and commit to their role in the development of a culture and environment that fosters each child's physical, social-emotional, mental health, interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships among peers, educators, and child advocates. The environment should look and feel welcoming for all

children and reflect the diverse environment in which children live and interact. Every effort should be made to create a setting that is rich in possibilities for exploring diversity. A learning environment that respects diversity sets the scene for fostering children's positive self-concept and attitudes. Such an environment assists children to acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions; establish and maintain positive relationships; develop positive ideas about themselves and others; set and achieve positive goals; feel and show empathy for others; and make responsible decisions.

Students who are engaged and feel connected to their education, school, and community are more likely to experience academic achievement and behavioral success. When students receive social emotional supports that are aligned with academic and behavioral efforts, they fare better on many indicators including academic achievement metrics, positive social behaviors and attitudes, skills such as self-regulation and teamwork, and graduation rates. They also have fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and lower drug use, among many other benefits. When students' foundational wellness needs are not met, students are disengaged, and/or disconnected from their education, school, and community, which can lead to chronic absenteeism. Alabama defines chronic absenteeism as missing 15 or more days of school for any reason – including excused or unexcused absences. More than seven million students nationwide are chronically absent from school, putting them at risk academically. Starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, chronic absence erodes students' ability to learn and achieve in school (Leong et. al., 2017). Chronic absenteeism is multi-faceted and includes many data points, some of which do include absences due to chronic and preventable illnesses with high prevalence in Alabama such as asthma, diabetes, and obesity; children facing situations of adverse childhood experiences; and/or mental illness or mental health concerns. Without a system of universal and tiered foundational wellness supports to proactively meet the needs of students the increased likelihood of chronic absenteeism may occur. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2016) outlines the negative impacts of chronic absenteeism:

- Students who are chronically absent in preschool, Kindergarten, and Grade 1 are much less likely to read at grade level by third grade -- which would make them four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.
- More than 10% of kindergarteners and first graders are chronically absent.
- A student who is chronically absent any year between Grades 8 and 12 is more than 7 times more likely to drop out.
- On average, a college graduate is likely to live about 9 years longer than someone who has not completed high school.

Foundational wellness needs are to be embedded in school and district strategic plans, staffing, professional learning, and budgets. Curriculum choices and classroom instruction –both direct practice as well as integrated instruction and enrichment opportunities must align with foundational wellness needs. Foundational wellness should help to drive schoolwide practices and policies to create a welcoming, participatory, and caring climate for learning. Integrating physical and mental health and social-emotional learning into an effective multi-tier system of supports shapes partnerships with families and community members, highlighting engagement, trust, and collaboration.

Behavioral Supports

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) believes the needs of every child are not left to chance but are in the hands of highly effective, compassionate education professionals and strong caring communities every day. The ALSDE is committed to a multi-tier system of supports to collaborate with districts, schools, and communities to meet the needs of the whole child. The commitment is to provide for the behavioral needs of every child, every chance, every day by ensuring equitable access to opportunities that build success, confidence, skills, while communicating a high level of expectations so that every child feels valued and accepted for what they bring to the learning environment and what they will take into the world.

Educators expect to teach academic skills, but when it comes to behavior, often the response is a simple set of rules that students are expected to follow and a series of negative consequences if they fail to do so. However, in schools implementing MTSS, educators understand that behavior, like academics, is learned. As a result, those skills must be explicitly taught, modeled, while being positively and consistently reinforced. For success, students must be given ample feedback and opportunities for practice.

Tiered behavioral systems use primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of support to provide a proactive and preventative approach to behavior for all students. The use of a multi-tiered model provides students with supports built into daily routines where staff and students review expected behavior and consistently teach that behavior across the school building. In addition, coherent school-wide systems are in place to support frequent opportunities and strategies to provide both positive and corrective feedback to students. It is important that data is incorporated to both identify needs across these tiers, as well as provide feedback on the on-going effectiveness of various individual, classroom, and school level efforts. Due to the systematic and comprehensive nature of MTSS, tiered behavioral systems allow schools to implement screening to identify students who may be at risk, and provide increasingly intensive support for those who need it (Menziez & Lane, 2011).

Behavioral approaches should support all students, and school teams should work with families and the community to determine how to contextualize support so that it is reflective of the values and norms of the community in which the school is located. Similarly, data should be reviewed regularly to examine how behavioral systems and supports differentially impact specific student groups (e.g., disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, etc.).

Effective classroom management and positive behavior supports are essential for supporting teaching and learning. Schools can maximize success for all students when they:

- develop tiered behavioral systems that are data-driven and responsive to student needs,
- emphasize that classroom management and positive behavioral supports must be integrated and aligned with effective academic instruction, and
- establish a positive, safe, and supportive school climate that is culturally sustaining.

Academic Supports

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) believes the needs of every child are not left to chance but are in the hands of highly effective, compassionate education professionals and strong caring communities every day. The ALSDE is committed to a multi-tier system of supports to collaborate with districts, schools, and communities to meet the needs of the whole child. The commitment is to provide for the academic needs of every child, every chance, every day. All educators are prepared to meet the academic needs of every child in Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 so that each child is intellectually challenged and academically prepared for success in school and their lives thereafter: college, career, and globally.

Every child has equitable access to high-quality, evidence-based core instruction and universal supports provided by highly effective educators along a continuum of tiered evidence-based supports and early intervening services to ensure success. The design and delivery of academic instruction should allow all students equitable access to grade-level standards, or entry points, with learning experiences that are engaging and personalized to meet their needs. Academic instruction integrates evidence-based practices in all content areas so students can make effective and sustained progress.

Modeled after the *Alabama Instructional Framework* and UDL (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon, 2014), effective instructional planning has four parts:

- goals,
- methods,
- materials, and
- assessments.

Instructional planning begins with the school leadership ensuring instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments are:

- aligned to the Alabama Courses of Study standards.
- of the highest quality.
- evidence-based; and
- taught by a highly effective educator.

Students are to be actively involved in the learning process using evidence-based curriculum and instructional strategies to foster engagement. The vision is that educators are to provide options and choices for students to set goals for their improvement as they work toward standards, choose the appropriate level of challenge by selecting the methods and materials that will increase motivation, select the scaffolds, and supports that best meet their learning needs. When implementing the Alabama Teaching and Learning Instructional Framework, rooted in the principles of UDL, all students have opportunities to engage in rigorous academic work, as this access is a primary predictor of student achievement (Council of the Great City Schools, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Sustainable AL-MTSS Implementation and Systemic Improvement

The vision is that the implementation of AL-MTSS is the methodology that ALSDE, school systems, and schools use to pursue educational excellence in Alabama and approach continuous improvement that focuses on increasing student achievement and success. The question is, “How do educators at all levels proactively and equitably ensure increased student success and positive outcomes for every child?” Implementation of AL-MTSS works to improve the system at all levels to break down systemic barriers to learning, achieving, and succeeding for students that may exist in an educational system. One of the biggest hurdles and goals is to breakdown the “process” of the Problem-Solving Team and empowering educators, especially classroom teachers, to informally problem-solve for students in their classrooms to inform Tier II instruction and interventions; in addition to, empowering the classroom teacher to lead the formal problem-solving process for their student.

The purpose and responsibilities of **the Problem-Solving Team** (PST) as outlined by the Alabama Administrative Code (290-3-1-.02) are:

- review data-based documentation regarding students’ progress regularly.
- advise teachers on specific interventions matched to student needs.
- communicate with parents regarding student intervention needs being provided; and
- analyze screening and progress-monitoring data to assist teachers in planning and implementing appropriate instruction and evidence-based interventions for all students with academic and/or behavioral difficulties.

Shared-Leadership, Data-Based Decision Making, and the Problem-Solving Process

One of the biggest impacts on a child’s academic achievement and success is the educators’ ability to work “together to have appropriately high, challenging expectations of what a year’s growth for a year’s input looks like” and to embody the idea that it is educators that cause learning, not just the students (Marzano, 2017). This shared belief is the collective teacher efficacy that is fundamental to the “capabilities of the educators to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of academic attainment” and “the positive impact of collective teacher efficacy on student academic performance more than outweighs the negative effects of low socioeconomic status” (Bandura, 1993, 1997). With that said, the positive impact of collective teacher efficacy can impact student achievement and success with a hinge point of 1.72 thus equating to more than one year’s worth of academic growth (Marzano, 2017).

AL-MTSS seeks to emphasize the impact of collective teacher efficacy and to empower the collaborative problem-solving process. Successful implementation of AL-MTSS requires the involvement and engagement of ALL stakeholders (e.g., classroom teachers, parents, students, instructional leaders, academic coaches, and specialists (e.g., special education teachers, ELL teachers, counselors, gifted teachers, speech therapists) and community service providers) during the problem-solving process to ensure the academic achievement and success every child. The purpose of AL-MTSS is to enhance the success of students of which display a variety of needs, rather than solely a means to determine whether a student qualifies for special education services. The effectiveness of AL-MTSS is maximized through a collaborative problem-solving

approach that engages all stakeholders to use data to identify student needs, select the most appropriate supports, and implement supports.

The problem-solving process includes all members of an educational team—from administration to all educators—will be seeking to not only deliver high-quality individualized instruction, but to use data-driven decision-making to select and implement research-based interventions for struggling students. AL-MTSS gives Alabama educators a mechanism in which to address the academic and non-academic needs of students, both of which are critical components for student growth and achievement. Data are utilized to measure student progress resulting from instruction and/or supports, as well as to monitor the implementation fidelity of the selected supports. The goal is to empower educators and stakeholders to embrace the idea of always asking, “Who else needs a seat at the table to ensure the success of this child?” This questioning illustrates the concept of the empty chair in which a team-driven approach to problem-solving actively pursues opportunities to seamlessly engage stakeholders during the problem-solving process and become unwavering child-advocates always seeking to eliminate barriers to student achievement and success in school and a child’s life thereafter.

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