# Considerations for Multi-Tiered System of Supports Implementation—Middle School Settings

A decade of research and lessons learned from local implementers suggest that although the essential components of multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) are consistent across grade spans, how they are translated into effective practice and integrated into middle school processes differ from traditional elementary school MTSS models. The following resource identifies considerations for teams as they design and implement MTSS in middle school settings. Guiding questions are provided for each consideration to facilitate team conversations and action planning. For additional support in completing this tool, visit <https://mtss4success.org/request-support>.

## Tips for Use

This resource should be used as part of a collaborative process in which all members of the team share their experiences, vision, and ideas to respond to the guiding questions and establish action steps. Depending on the depth of the conversations, teams may schedule 1–2 hours to engage in the process. To use this resource, consider the following.

* Identify a facilitator, timer, and notetaker to ensure the team stays focused and the action steps are documented.
* Read and briefly discuss the description under each consideration to ensure that all members of the team understand the definition.
* Review and respond to the relevant guiding questions to help the team consider the current context and changes needed for successful MTSS implementation.
* Use the answers from the guiding questions to develop concrete action steps. Consider including in the action steps the time frame for completion and the name of the person who will follow up.

## Considerations for MTSS Implementation—Middle School Settings

| **MIDDLE SCHOOL MTSS CONSIDERATIONS** | **GUIDING QUESTIONS** | **ACTION STEPS** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **FOCUS** |  |  |
| The design and implementation of all the essential components are dependent on a school’s focus forMTSS. At the middle school level, this focus may not always include all students or all content areas. Each school must determine its purpose and scope of MTSS, keeping in mind that no standard application of the framework exists for secondary schools. Schools may already have in place some initiatives that support MTSS implementation. | * What is the purpose and scope of MTSS in the school?
* How do existing initiatives fit into the MTSS framework?
* How do current special education and instructional support practices align with MTSS?
* Do other initiatives hinder the implementation of MTSS?
* To what extent will sixth-grade tiered supports differ from seventh- through eighth-grade tiered supports given our focus?
 | Click or tap here to enter text. |
| **SCHOOL CULTURE** |  |  |
| School culture plays an integral role in the adoption and implementation of any initiative. A school’s culture provides implicit (and sometimes explicit) guidance about beliefs, behaviors, and what is acceptable. Adopting an MTSS framework may require a significant shift in a school’s culture. For example, staff members may need to collaborate in new ways, examine data together regularly and think about implications for practice, and agree that the success of all students is the responsibility of all staff members. | * In what ways do current practices, beliefs, and behaviors align with the goals and purposes of the MTSS framework?
* Where did the motivation for adopting the framework originate, and how might that affect staff buy-in?
* What are our current prevention efforts and how do they map onto the MTSS framework?
* What changes might be required for staff members to collaborate, examine student data, and act on what they learn?
* What changes might be required to ensure that all students’ needs are addressed?
 | Click or tap here to enter text. |
| **IMPLEMENTATION AND ALIGNMENT** |  |  |
| With the numerous initiatives and activities that occur in middle schools simultaneously, it is critical to align efforts to support and accelerate the implementation of MTSS. A detailed scaling-up plan may be useful for incrementally expanding the focus and scope of MTSS. | * What current or planned instructional and student support initiatives does the school integrate to support the focus of MTSS?
* How do these efforts align with the MTSS, especially in Tiers 2 and 3?
* What options exist for scaling up the implementation of MTSS over time to broaden the number of students, content areas, or interventions?
* How does the school leverage existing human and fiscal resources to facilitate the implementation and scaling up of MTSS?
* How are district departments (Curriculum and Instruction, Title I, etc.) involved in school-level implementation of MTSS?
 | Click or tap here to enter text. |
| **INSTRUCTIONAL ORGANIZATION** |  |  |
| Organizing instruction in middle schools can create challenges and require flexibility in the scheduling and delivery of interventions and collaborative time for teachers. The master schedule, as well as the school calendar, should be addressed when implementing tiered interventions. | * How does the staff create or adapt a master schedule that addresses the needs of the students and the school?
* What scheduling options best support the focus and delivery of interventions?
* Does the current infrastructure present obstacles?
* Does the school provide additional instructional interventions through extended days and summer programs?
* How does the school support teachers in designating time to collaboratively make data-based decisions?
 | Click or tap here to enter text. |
| **STAFF ROLES** |  |  |
| Determining which staff member is best qualified to deliver the additional interventions and how to train teachers to deliver effective instruction in all of the tiers depends on a school’s available staff and its purpose for implementing MTSS. Middle school content teachers may not be prepared to teach struggling students, students with disabilities, or English learners (ELs). Small schools may have less access to instructional specialists. | * Who provides the additional interventions? How does the school support this new role?
* How do special education, EL, or behavioral specialists support the implementation of MTSS?
* If interventions are implemented in more than one content area, how does the school support content teachers in becoming more than “teachers of content?”
* What supports, if any, do teachers need to deliver Tiers 1–3 instruction?
 | Click or tap here to enter text. |
| **STUDENT INVOLVEMENT** |  |  |
| With assistance, middle students could help to select or design appropriate interventions and monitor their progress, resulting in students feeling more involved in their educational experience. | * How are students involved in the design/selection and implementation of interventions?
* How do students monitor their own progress?
* What role do students play in determining movement among the tiers?
* How do students learn about the MTSS framework and its supports?
 | Click or tap here to enter text. |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **MIDDLE SCHOOL MTSS CONSIDERATIONS** | **GUIDING QUESTIONS** | **ACTION STEPS** |
| **PROMOTION REQUIREMENTS** |  |  |
| A goal of middle school is to ensure students are prepared for the rigor of college and career pathways provided in high schools. Participation in interventions may result in students missing classes and content necessary for promotion and success in upper grades, including high school. | * How does participation in supplemental interventions affect students' promotion to next grade or transition to high school?
* How is participation in intervention classes documented or reflected on transcripts?
* How does the MTSS framework support career and education pathways?
 | Click or tap here to enter text. |
| **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT** |  |  |
| Middle schools frequently engage a variety of external stakeholders, including parents and family members, community and business partners, tutors, and volunteers, in supporting instructional and extracurricular activities. Some students also receive “wraparound” services from social service agencies. These various stakeholders can provide valuable support for a school’s MTSS framework. | * How does the school involve stakeholders in the design and implementation of interventions?
* How does the school disseminate information and communicate with stakeholders about the implementation of MTSS?
* How does the school engage the appropriate stakeholders early enough to ensure buy-in for MTSS?
* Do in-school and wraparound services for students with disabilities align and coordinate with one another?
* What types of training and support are needed to engage and prepare stakeholders?
 | Click or tap here to enter text. |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **MIDDLE SCHOOL MTSS CONSIDERATIONS** | **GUIDING QUESTIONS** | **ACTION STEPS** |
| **INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT RESOURCES** |  |  |
| A paucity of research on the efficacy of core, Tier 2, and intensive instruction at Tier 3 for struggling learners in grades 6 - 8 exists. Similarly, fewer measures appropriate for screening or progress monitoring in academics and behavior have been validated for use with middle school students. | * How do school leaders and teachers determine the quality of Tier I instruction?
* How do school leaders select/design interventions?
* What data support the use of these interventions?
* What evidence informs the selection of data sources for screening and progress monitoring?
* How does the school determine whether selected measures are reliable and valid?
* How is educational technology used in assessment or interventions?
 | Click or tap here to enter text. |

Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports at the American Institutes for Research® May 2021
mtss4success.org

Notice of Trademark: “American Institutes for Research” and “AIR” are registered trademarks. All other brand, product, or company names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners.

Copyright © 2020 American Institutes for Research®. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, website display, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the American Institutes for Research. For permission requests, please use the Contact Us form on [www.air.org](http://www.air.org).