

# Reconceptualizing Educational Systems in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Leveraging UDL, MTSS, and Technology to Create a Universal Education System

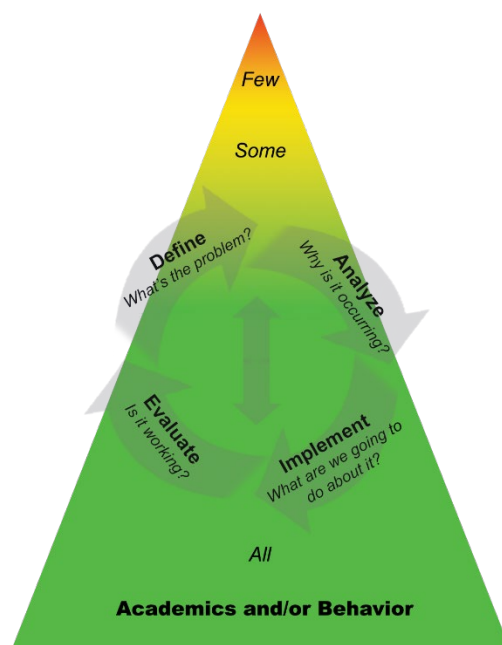
Educators today in the United States find themselves at a crossroads. For more than 100 years, school largely has been a physical place that children go to learn the academic and social skills needed for the workforce and to contribute to society. However, increasing diversity among the student population, societal events and crises, and rapidly advancing technologies provide a critical opportunity to rethink our educational system. Today's students attend school with more diverse backgrounds, experiences, strengths, and needs than ever before. The use of printed and other physical materials (e.g., manipulatives) to teach students what they need to know and be able to do remain important; however, delivery of instruction through this medium alone limits educators' capacity to plan for and deliver instruction that works for ALL students. Differentiation of instruction and providing intervention can accelerate knowledge and skill growth when done well, but the range of student strengths and needs, the number of students educators instruct, and finite time are among issues that prevent educators' from helping every student succeed with these strategies alone.

Now is the time for leaders at all levels of the educational system to work together to move beyond the constraints of thinking of school as a physical place only. Rather, leaders must work together to leverage the potentials of both brick-and-mortar and virtual learning to create a universal education system that works for ALL students. The *purpose of this series of documents* is to help educational leaders think through how to maximize both brick-and-mortar and virtual learning through their Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). However, prior to unpacking key questions and considerations focused on MTSS in these learning environments, leaders must consider a few big ideas regarding what universal education means, Universal Design for Learning as the foundation of universal education, and how MTSS builds upon that foundation.

## ***Universal Education Means Designing with All Students in Mind***

Universal education means that educators proactively design experiences that promote students' access to and success with grade-level standards and instruction. Regardless of a student's race and ethnicity, gender identification, economic status, primary language, or abilities, and regardless of their experiences to-date, universal education is designed for and responsive to the student (<https://www.flsenate.gov/laws/statutes/2013/1003.57>). Realization of this vision requires educators to plan for and deliver instruction using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. UDL calls educators to *represent* content in multiple ways, to provide multiple ways for students to *act* upon content and to *express* their learning, and to facilitate multiple ways for students to *engage* during instruction (<https://psrtitechnology.weebly.com/udl-resources.html>). Technologies today provides numerous opportunities to enact these principles. Specifically, educators can create both physical and distance learning spaces through which students have multiple opportunities to access and engage with content, and to acquire and demonstrate knowledge and skills. These spaces can be created in a way that integrates brick-and-mortar instruction and virtual learning to create an educational system that leverages what works from both approaches. Despite the promise of designing educational opportunities that utilize UDL principles and integrating technology, educators still will need a way to reliably assess student strengths and needs and to accelerate student growth. Florida's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) provides that mechanism.

## **MTSS Builds Upon the Foundation of UDL**

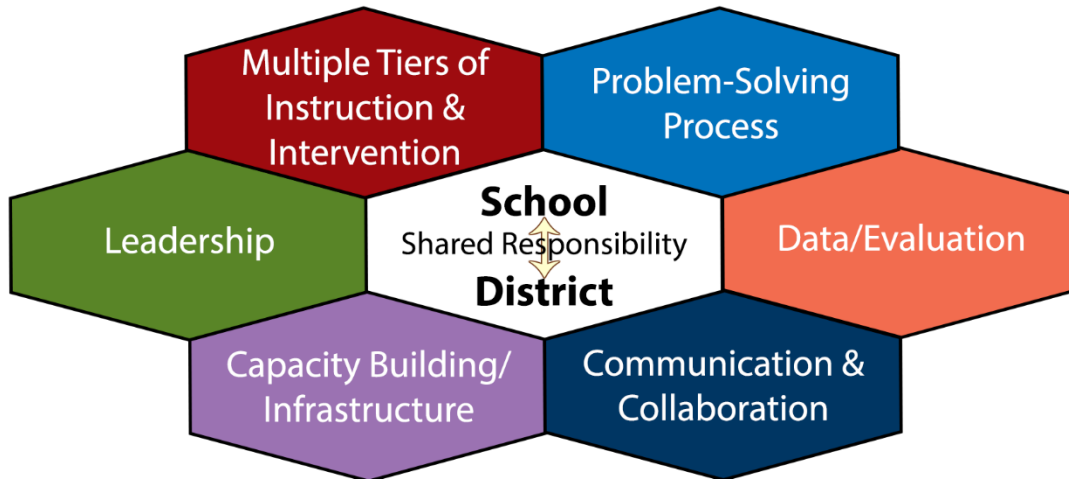


If UDL provides the foundation for a universal education system, then MTSS represents the structure built upon that foundation. MTSS involves matching instruction to student needs based on data (<https://www.livebinders.com/b/2785147?tabid=662aa658-21d4-6211-ebbd-4e08eaa18d20>). Educators use assessments administered to all students to continuously evaluate and improve the effectiveness of Tier 1 instruction, and to identify students who need more intensive instruction. Students identified as needing more intensive instruction are matched to supplemental (Tier 2) and/or intensive (Tier 3) interventions or strategies. Students' progress is monitored using data to determine whether what is being provided is accelerating growth toward grade-level performance (<https://www.livebinders.com/b/2785147?tabid=4895acff-bf99-3e64-ac93-de366378537d>). Educators use a problem-solving process to drive decisions about accelerating learning (<https://www.livebinders.com/b/2785147?tabid=f3640391-4a24-1ad1-211b-4a2c7dc920ea>). Specifically, educators use this process to identify learning goals, determine likely barriers to student success, develop and implement instruction and intervention strategies to address identified barriers, and to evaluate whether instruction and intervention results in accelerated learning growth. The structures and processes MTSS provides are why MTSS and its critical components are emphasized in federal (<https://www.ed.gov/ESSA/>, <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>) and Florida educational policies (<https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ruleNo.asp?id=6A-6.0331>, <https://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-5586/dps-2009-177.pdf>) designed to accelerate learning growth.

### ***Rethinking MTSS in a Universal Education System: Brick-and-Mortar and Virtual Learning***

Educators must rethink how they conceptualize and implement instruction and intervention, assessment, and decision-making processes when they aim to leverage MTSS to create a universal education system. Educators must not only think about processes and procedures for MTSS when teaching students in a brick-and-mortar setting but also how to integrate instruction, intervention, and assessment delivered through virtual learning spaces. More substantial evidence exists about effectively leveraging an MTSS to improve student outcomes in a physical school building than exists for how to incorporate distance learning resources into a school district's MTSS. Therefore, this series of documents provide educational leaders with information needed to effectively plan for their MTSS when incorporating different learning environments.

Each document in this series contains important questions that state, district, and school leaders will need to discuss and to answer to better utilize their MTSS for universal education. Following each question, key considerations, information, and resources are provided. The documents are divided by critical components that comprise MTSS (Tiered Instruction and Intervention, Data/Evaluation, Problem-Solving Process).



### **Critical Components of MTSS**

[Tiered Instruction and Intervention](#) involves clearly defined instruction and intervention processes and procedures at each Tier of an MTSS. Leaders interested in addressing questions related to what comprises Tiers 1, 2, and 3 instruction and intervention when considering brick-and-mortar and virtual learning should read this document.

Effective tiered instruction and intervention requires data and evaluation to respond to student need. The [Data/Evaluation](#) document contains important questions for leaders to consider when collecting, analyzing, and interpreting assessments from both brick-and-mortar and virtual platforms.

Finally, facilitating sound decisions using data from both face-to-face and distance platforms should be facilitated through problem-solving. The [Problem-Solving Process](#) document raises questions and provides considerations about utilizing the steps of the process when bringing educators and their stakeholders.

The transformations discussed thus far cannot occur without leadership. *Leadership* must continuously and urgently communicate a vision for MTSS promoting a universal education system, engage in *capacity building* to empower educators to understand and leverage their MTSS, and facilitate *communication and collaboration* among educators, families, and community members. These important functions of school, district, and state leaders will be evident throughout the questions, considerations, and resources provided. Only through purposeful and strategic questioning, discussion, and action will the vision of universal education be realized.