

*Florida's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is an educational framework designed to promote successful outcomes for **all** students. It uses a data-based problem-solving process to inform multiple tiers of standards-aligned instruction and intervention, delivered in increasing intensities, designed to increase the academic, behavioral, emotional and life skills of students. This document dispels some myths surrounding MTSS.*

## What is MTSS?

**Myth: MTSS and RtI are the same thing.**

**Truth:** A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is the overarching, comprehensive framework that guides service delivery in a school, district, or state. Student response to instruction/intervention (RtI) is part of the fourth step of the problem-solving process, a key practice within an MTSS framework.

**Myth: MTSS is a program.**

**Truth:** MTSS is not a program. MTSS is a way of work that results in continuous improvement of student learning. Within an effective MTSS framework, evidence-based programs are used to provide instruction/interventions and supports for students.

**Myth: MTSS has a starting point and a stopping point.**

**Truth:** A [multi-tiered system of supports \(MTSS\)](#) is a framework or approach that optimizes how resources are organized and allocated, for improved student outcomes. It is comprised of six domains: Multiple Tiers of Instruction/Intervention, Problem Solving, Leadership, Data/Evaluation, Capacity/Infrastructure, and Communication/Collaboration. Because of this, it doesn't have a starting or stopping point, it's simply a way of work.

**Myth: MTSS is about one student at a time.**

**Truth:** The benefit of working as a multi-tiered system of support is that it allows schools to address the needs of the whole group, small groups, and individual students. Student data are used throughout the problem-solving process to ensure that the curriculum and instruction provided to students, whether in large or small groups, are effective and an efficient use of resources.

**Myth: The tiers describe students (Tier 2 students/Tier 3 students).**

**Truth:** As part of an MTSS implementation, instruction/interventions and/or supports are labeled Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3 to communicate the level of intensity of supports; students are not labeled with tiers. For example, a Tier 3 intervention is the most intensive kind of help a student receives. Students receive Tier 3 interventions but are not referred to as Tier 3 students.

**Myth: Tier 3 means the student will be tested for ESE.**

**Truth:** Tier 3 is the most intensive and individualized support available within Florida's three-tiered model; however, not all students needing Tier 3 level of supports have a disability, nor will all students with a disability need Tier 3 level of supports. Within an MTSS, additional support is provided to students based on data demonstrating a need for more intensive instruction/intervention regardless of potential future evaluation considerations. Schools collect and use a variety of data, including a student's response to intervention, to make decisions regarding eligibility for ESE.

**Myth: Exceptional Student Education (ESE) is Tier 4 in MTSS.**

**Truth:** The Multiple Tiers of Instruction and Intervention domain, within Florida’s model of MTSS, consists of three tiers. There is no Tier 4. Students who meet eligibility criteria for ESE receive specially designed instruction (SDI) which enables them to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum. SDI is always provided and integrated throughout *all* tiers of instruction and intervention.

**Myth: The purpose of MTSS is to exclude students from ESE.**

**Truth:** The purpose of an MTSS is to provide the level of supports needed to ensure success, regardless of whether the student is identified as a student with a disability. If the additional supports are not effective, or if students require sustained and substantial resources to maintain progress towards achieving their educational goals, then exceptional student education (ESE) services may be considered. The student’s RTI data are used for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of the students’ instruction/interventions and supports, *and* can be used as a required part of the evaluation procedures if an evaluation is initiated. The initiation of formal evaluation procedures for a student suspected of having a disability can and should occur at *any* time that the parent(s) or educator(s) express their suspicion.

## Who benefits from MTSS?

**Myth: MTSS is just Tier 2 & Tier 3 interventions for students who struggle.**

**Truth:** Tier 2 and 3 interventions are part of an effective multi-tiered system of supports. In an efficient system, Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are delivered to approximately 20% of students; however, a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) includes a structured problem-solving process which drives the delivery of multiple tiers of instruction and intervention. This includes ensuring the effectiveness of Tier 1, which is the foundation of a multi-tiered system of supports.

**Myth: Teachers only provide MTSS interventions to students they think may need special education.**

**Truth:** The goal of providing interventions is not to find students eligible for Exceptional Student Education (ESE) services but to increase successful educational outcomes by matching interventions to student needs. Interventions should be provided at the first sign of need and should be provided at increasing intensity regardless of potential future eligibility considerations.

**Myth: Students have to get through Tier 1 and Tier 2 before they can get Tier 3.**

**Truth:** Within an MTSS, students are provided interventions based on their identified need. If a student is receiving only Tier 1 instruction and is identified as performing significantly below where he or she would be expected to be performing based on his or her grade level, the student does not need to first receive Tier 2 interventions for a period of time before they receiving Tier 3 intervention supports. A team may also decide that a student be provided Tier 2 (small group interventions) and Tier 3 (individualized interventions) supports immediately and simultaneously. Students are monitored frequently, and if they are progressing, the level of supports provided to students is gradually reduced so that he or she can maintain success given the general education instruction and supports (Tier 1). In other words, it is the degree of student need that drives the level of supports provided to a student.

**Myth: We don't have a lot of students who need Tier 2, but we do have a lot of students who need Tier 3.**

**Truth:** Within an MTSS, some students will need additional or supplemental Tier 2 interventions to achieve successful outcomes. Even with the additional support provided, there would still be a small number (about 5%) of students who need intensive, individualized supports (Tier 3). A school does not have enough resources to provide large numbers of students with effective Tier 3 interventions and supports; therefore, it is important for schools to ensure they are providing varying intensities of supports that match student need. If too many students in a system need Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports, the focus of planning and problem solving should address the effectiveness of instruction in Tier 1.

**Myth: Students who are already receiving ESE services do not get help through MTSS.**

**Truth:** All students within a school, including students with disabilities, are provided Tier 1 academic and behavioral instruction, including evidence-based instructional routines, differentiated small group instruction, and curriculum materials aligned to standards, etc. In addition, all students, including students with disabilities, have access to Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention supports that are matched to their needs. A student receiving ESE services will benefit from the schoolwide MTSS, wherein they will be provided supports at all tiers, and their progress will be monitored to ensure the supports they are receiving are effective.

## How is MTSS implemented?

**Myth: Because PBIS is for behavior, MTSS is only for academics.**

**Truth:** A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) encompasses all aspects of what a student needs to be successful, including academic, behavior, and life skills. MTSS is a framework to help *all* students be successful in school. Within this framework, a data-based problem-solving process is used to implement behavioral and academic supports to improve student outcomes. Because a student's academic, behavioral, and mental health *needs* are interdependent, they should be addressed by one integrated system.

**Myth: MTSS requires too much paperwork and data collection.**

**Truth:** Both documentation and data collection are necessary to make accurate data-based decisions. As the intensity of student need increases, so does the frequency of documentation and data collection. In an effective multi-tiered system of supports, this level of need would be limited to a small portion of the school. District and school systems should ensure that documentation and data collection procedures are efficient and that support is provided.

**Myth: MTSS is "one more thing" our district/school must do.**

**Truth:** A multi-tiered system of supports organizes and aligns *all* initiatives present in a school or district. In a highly efficient system, all efforts and resources are coordinated and integrated within one unified system, aligning the many things for which educators are responsible (e.g., K-12 Reading Plan, School Improvement Plan, District Mental Health Plan).

**Myth: Teachers are responsible for the problem solving, planning, and delivery of instruction and intervention, at all tiers, for their own students.**

**Truth:** Within a multi-tiered system of supports, problem solving is a team effort, and teachers and support staff share the responsibility of planning and/or delivering all tiers of support for students. Time for engaging in problem solving and delivering interventions is ensured through the master schedule. When the system is operating optimally, addressing the needs of all students is manageable — as Tier 1 is effective for almost all students, and only some students will require Tier 2 — and just a few students will require Tier 3.

**Myth: Schools or districts can implement MTSS without changing current practices.**

**Truth:** All schools and districts have a system of supports in place. If that system is not resulting in the achievement of school and district goals, then aspects of the system should be evaluated to determine where changes in current practices need to occur. The [\*Self-Assessment of MTSS Implementation \(SAM\)\*](#) serves as a valuable tool for school-based leadership teams to examine their practices across the six domains of MTSS. By utilizing the SAM, schools can assess the effectiveness of their current implementation of MTSS and identify areas that require improvement. It is important to note that MTSS is not a new concept and has been in practice for approximately twenty years. Rather than viewing changes in practice as a complete overhaul, it should be seen as a continuous improvement effort, building upon the existing framework present in most schools and districts.

**Myth: MTSS can be successfully implemented without administrator leadership.**

**Truth:** Organized and effective leadership is critical to successful implementation of MTSS. School and district leaders must communicate a consistent and clear vision of the purpose of MTSS as a framework for improving student outcomes. It's important for a school principal to support the school-based leadership team and staff to build capacity for implementation, including data-based problem solving. The administrator should oversee the development of an MTSS implementation plan that is aligned to the school improvement plan and is updated based on student outcome and implementation fidelity data.

**Myth: Families do not need to be involved in MTSS.**

**Truth:** Families play a critical role in a child's education. When schools and families collaborate to support student learning, student outcomes are improved. Whether a student is meeting grade-level expectations, working on an accelerated curriculum, or receiving additional support, families' understanding of MTSS in their child's school is beneficial.

**Myth: Schools need parent permission to provide Tier 2 or Tier 3 services.**

**Truth:** Within an MTSS, families should be provided with information regarding their child's progress in Tier 1. If data indicate a student needs additional support, engaging families in the supports students receive is important. Families should be given information about the supports their child is receiving and be provided an opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process. Student progress monitoring data should be shared with families frequently. Often, additional assessment data is needed to determine the appropriate targeted support. When the sole purpose of obtaining assessment data is to inform instruction or intervention, obtaining formal parental consent is not required ([Rule 6A-6.0331\(1\), F.A.C.](#)). It is the purpose for which assessment data are used, not the nature of the assessment procedures, which drives consent. If assessment and data collection procedures are conducted for the purpose of determining eligibility for exceptional student education, then consent is required ([Rule 6A-6.0331\(4\), F.A.C.](#)).

**Myth: Specific criteria must be met (e.g., teachers must try two different interventions/provide intervention for 8 weeks/have 12 data points) before a student can be evaluated for ESE eligibility.**

**Truth:** The General Education Intervention Procedures, Evaluation, Determination of Eligibility, Reevaluation and the Provision of Exceptional Student Education Services ([Rule 6A-6.0331, F.A.C.](#)) indicates that an evaluation for ESE eligibility may be initiated if:

1. Multi-tiered instruction/interventions have been provided, and data indicate that the student may be a student with a disability;
2. The parent has requested an evaluation; or
3. The nature or severity of the student's areas of concern make the general education intervention procedures inappropriate in addressing the immediate needs of the student.

No specific criteria are provided regarding the number or length of interventions as it is essential for interventions to be personalized, implemented according to their intended design, and continued for a duration that allows for the assessment of their effectiveness. The intensity of interventions should align with the specific needs of each student, ensuring a tailored approach to their support.

**Myth: I've been in education a long time, and I just know when a student needs special education.**

**Truth:** While many teachers possess a wealth of invaluable experience, it is crucial that decisions concerning students are made by considering multiple sources of student data and assessing their response to evidence-based interventions. By diligently monitoring students' progress and engaging in systematic problem solving, teams are empowered to make defensible, data-driven decisions that prioritize students' success.

**Myth: The tiers are a series of steps to get to ESE.**

**Truth:** The three-tiered instruction and intervention model, delivered in varying intensities matched to student need, is a core component of a multi-tiered system of supports. These tiered supports are intensified or faded based on students' response to instruction and are planned and monitored through a structured problem-solving process. It benefits all students, regardless of potential future eligibility considerations. If a student is suspected of being a student with a disability, data measuring response to instruction and intervention is used as part of the comprehensive evaluation procedures and determination for Exceptional Student Education (ESE) eligibility. The initiation of formal evaluation procedures for a student suspected of having a disability can and should occur at *any* time that the parent(s) or educator(s) express their suspicion.