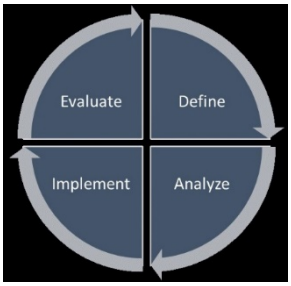
MTSS Essential Component: DBPSDM

Data-Based Problem Solving and Decision-Making is one of the five Essential Components of the MTSS framework. The Component is defined as:

> A consistent process is used by stakeholder teams and applied at multiple levels to analyze and evaluate relevant information to plan and implement strategies that support sustainable improved student and system outcomes. (CDE, 2016)



When effectively implementing this component, schools engage in **Data-Based Problem Solving and Decision-Making (DBPSDM)** at various levels. For example, schools can write a School Unified Improvement Plan (SUIP). Or the problem solving process can be applied for students and may take place: across grade levels, within the same grade level, for groups of students, or for individual students.

So, the same process can be used for multiple impacts – for Universal, Targeted, and Intensive supports. Systems-level problem solving can result in significant changes for rapid improvement or long-term scale-up of change. And student-level problem solving can assure that schools are differentiating strategically, matching supports to needs, and securing accurate evaluation and identification practices.

Prevention, Intervention, and Intention

This component aims to improve learning conditions. Analyzing information is conducted to make various decisions for the system and its stakeholders.

> A school that values PREVENTION will create positive learning environments that should enable student success. But there may be times that the school will need to be RESPONSIVE. When needs are explored, it may be discovered that supplemental supports should be provided beyond Universal (Tier 1) supports. And systems should be in place to help clarify what the needs are and how to best plan to address them.

This component is most-frequently cited when Response to Intervention (RtI) is discussed. Many people have exclusively associated RtI with problem solving for individualized student supports, and although that does not follow the original state of Colorado guidance about RtI, the student-level focus for RtI has become the interpretation typically adopted in CO. *Responding to Intervention* continues to exist in law in Colorado, and it lives within the DBPSDM component and has visibility in other MTSS components.

But one common misconception is that DBPSDM is only about that one level of application: *problem solving for individual student needs*. This component does not *only* apply to student-specific supports.

Instead, it should be noted that the same 4-step process (of Define, Analyze, Implement, and Evaluate) can and should be applied to all levels: individual student, groups of students or other stakeholders, classroom, school-wide, staffing, programs, systems, and district-wide. And the process can and should be implemented for students who are performing at different levels, not just struggling learners.

This component also has an expectation that adults will actively collaborate so that each student is adequately-supported.

- Responsive, team-based approaches should be defined and developed for consistency and predictability. Effective teaming structures and meeting foundations are important to clarify.
- Performance (or outcome) data and fidelity (or "process", "service delivery" or "implementation") data should be considered during planning and checking on progress.

Student Supports

In addition to leadership teams, professional learning communities (PLCs), grade-level or department-level teams, and other teams that engage in DBPSDM, there are teams in schools that are specifically-dedicated to using team-based problem solving for students who may need intensive levels of support.

> These teams, typically referred to as **Student Support Teams (SSTs) in TSD**, exist to ensure individualized student supports are *adequately and accurately-provided* for students who have identified needs beyond those that are well-managed and supported through the systems created for universal and targeted layers of support.

Because SSTs are intended for more-intensive support levels, it must be noted that each student should receive best first instruction and access to meaningful learning experiences, with adult systems monitoring and supplementing supports as needed, prior to an SST engaging in the DBPSDM process for an individual student. That requires that the collaborative efforts of adults are strategic and ongoing.

To ensure confidence in school-based efforts, each school should:

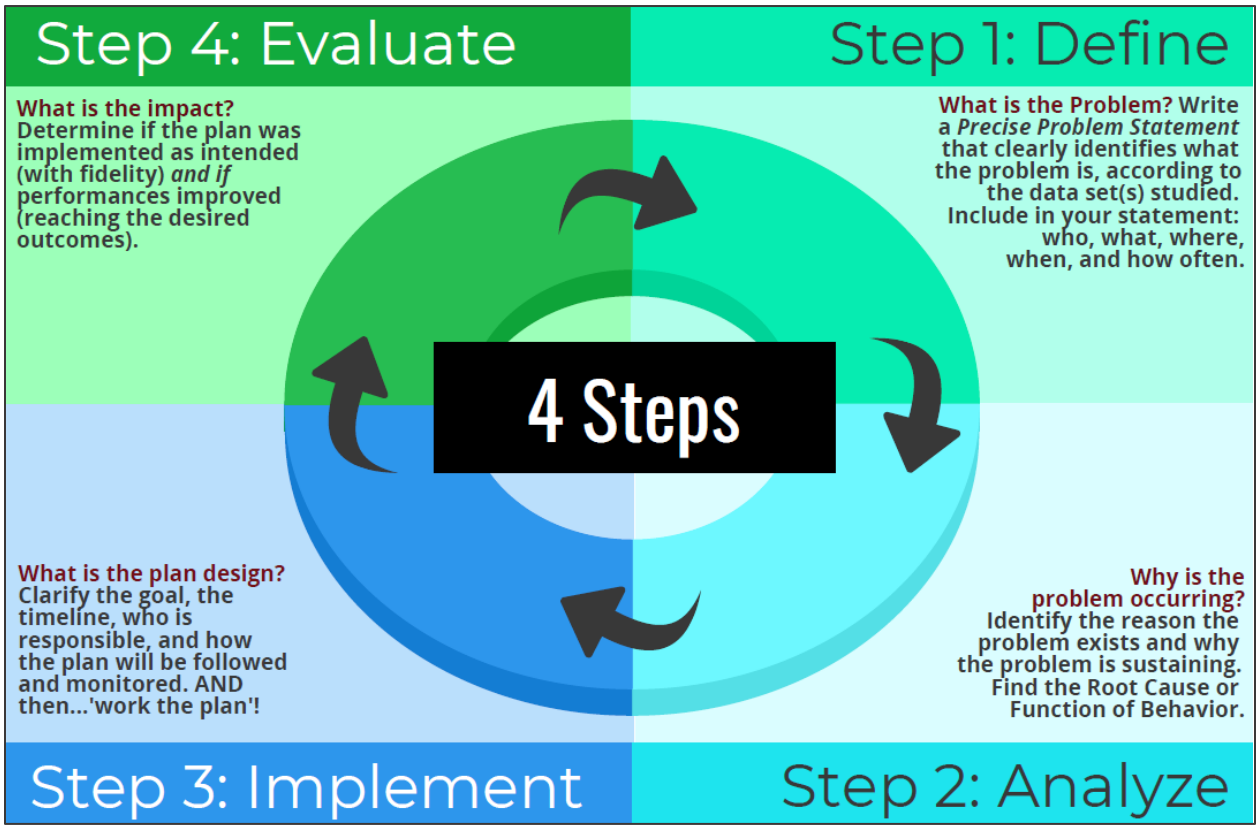
a. use strengths-based, preventative approaches,
b. implement and evaluate its programming and service delivery, and
c. aim to minimize learning challenges and prevent challenges from intensifying.

Each student will have access to the general education curriculum. And in a responsive, agile system, supplemental supports *will be available and provided* when a team, in reflecting on data, indicates that adding supports would improve learning outcomes. But if a student's needs persist - after various strategies have been provided to support the student, it may be determined that the student could benefit from even more intensive supports. The SST would then engage in a process to clarify what might best meet the student's needs.

Note: This is not a referral to special education; the 4-Step MTSS DBPSDM process and the use of the process by SSTs is not "the pathway to special education". It is a strategic, protocoled method of planning and implementing supports. But the process to determine if eligibility for additional services should be provided should begin whenever it is recognized that there is a need: before, during, or after SST interventions have been put it in place.

The 4-Step Process for Problem Solving

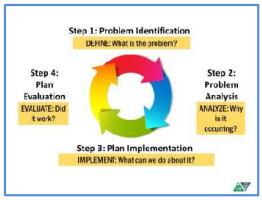
The process for problem solving is a positive, collaborative experience. Below is an image from an infographic available online that gives some over-arching considerations for the DBPSDM component.



As is suggested in the online handout, to engage in problem solving, there is a "Step Zero." That would be to establish the "pre-conditions" to have a productive DBPSDM experience – whether the focus is on systems-level or student-level reflection and plan development. For "Step Zero" (pre-conditions), effective Teaming and Data to inform the process will be required. Establish teaming practices and meeting procedures, and have the "right information, at the right time, in the right format."

Supports for student success and Student Support Team (SST) procedures follow a process that was created by the TSD MTSS Leadership Team (MLT). The Supporting Student Success Process Flow Map and the SST Process Flow Map, that follow, detail the processes. (The PDFs are on the website.)

MTSS in TSD



Supporting Individual Student Success

1) Define

Educational staff or Family has identified an academic or behavioral need for an individual student based on specific data or observation.

2) Analyze

Educational staff collaborate to match accommodation(s) or intervention(s) with the defined need. Families are active partners in selecting strategies that may help the student succeed at expected levels. Documentation* (of approach, timeline, and progress) begins.

3) Implement

Educational staff implements the plan with fidelity. Multiple data points are collected over a scheduled time that fits the intervention (i.e., approximately 3-6 weeks, allowing for adjustments to intensity, especially if notable or rapid response is demonstrated with data).

4) Evaluate

Interventions are successful.

Continue with intervention support (including maintaining documentation) OR begin to fade the intervention.

Need Persists.

Assess intervention fidelity to adjust intervention if necessary. OR Plan to attempt a different intervention. Educational staff and families provide student information for Alpine entry.

Educational staff prepares necessary data for the first Student Support Team (SST) meeting that will help clarify need and next steps. (See Flow Map 2)

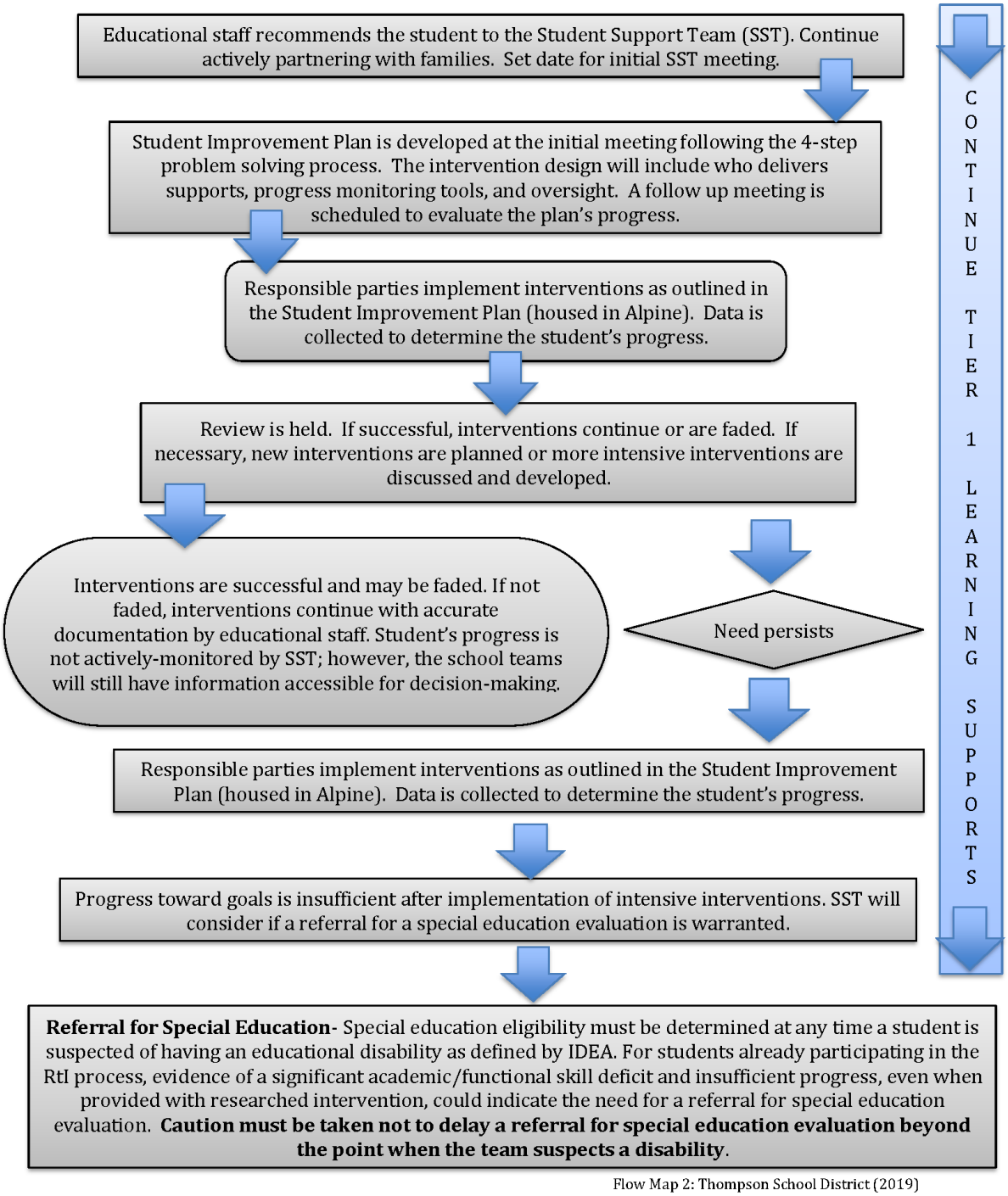
CONTINUE TIER 1 LEARNING SUPPORTS

*Documentation may be conducted on a hyperlinked form.

Flow Map 1: Thompson School District, 2019

You should have consulted/completed Flow Map 1*: Supporting Individual Student Success* prior to this process.

Student Support Team (SST) Process



Referral for Special Education- Special education eligibility must be determined at any time a student is suspected of having an educational disability as defined by IDEA. For students already participating in the RtI process, evidence of a significant academic/functional skill deficit and insufficient progress, even when provided with researched intervention, could indicate the need for a referral for special education evaluation. **Caution must be taken not to delay a referral for special education evaluation beyond the point when the team suspects a disability**.

Flow Map 2: Thompson School District (2019)

Elaboration on Steps to Problem Solving (to be used for any application)

This section describes the first two steps of problem solving, with space to practice each element. This guidance could be used for any problem and any level, not exclusive for use with individual student problem solving practices. Questions & additional tools that correspond to each step are also available.

Primary Problem Statement

Data is necessary to figure out if there is a problem. ***Consider which*** *data/trends are most-relevant to investigate. Bring the information forward to assess it and to DEFINE the problem.*

Primary statements *help to answer the first question of the problem-solving process:*

Do we have a problem?

To write a primary statement, consider: *What is the information telling us?*

State clearly what you see/notice. *This is your "first go" (attempt) at a description of the problem. Is there a (notable) difference between the desired state ("where we should be") and the current state ("where we are now")? Name what you see as that gap between the "desired" and the "current". Use broad terms…it is okay if you are not specific…yet.*

Example Primary Statement: Students are under-performing in reading.

Defining from Data

The ***Primary Problem Statement*** is:

Precise Problem Statement

This is where you have a chance to refine your primary problem statement for more ***precision****.*

You are not yet declaring the "origin" of the problem. Avoid the temptation to end your statement with "because of…" Instead, include the answers to the following questions within your statement, and (NOW!) *aim at specificity and clarity about what the problem is.* These questions should be answered:

- ***What*** *is the problem?*
- ***How often*** *is it occurring?*
- ***Where*** *is the problem occurring?*
- ***Who*** *is engaged in the problem?*
- ***When*** *is the problem occurring?*

Example: During the 1st semester of this academic year, 7th grade students at our school are well below district average in the area of reading comprehension, as assessed by our district common assessment – administered quarterly.

Refining our Statement

The ***Precise Problem Statement*** is:

Root Cause Analysis
Determine the root cause. You may use the 5 Whys, Fishbone, or other Root Cause Analysis (RCA) techniques to clarify why the problem exists. (Note: Some example tools are available for use.) Seek out the true "cause", not just symptoms or causal factors. The process may take time OR the "why" may reveal itself quickly; regardless, always aim for accuracy! The accuracy of this step affects quality, coherence, and effectiveness in the next step/s. ***Why the problem is occurring…and sustaining…*** will be an issue with ***adult*** action, the systems, etc. *Disposition ('beliefs' or 'mindsets') are more-difficult to identity accurately; therefore, stating that someone "doesn't believe…" is not yet the root cause. Ask "why" again, and you may uncover* a deeper root cause. *For example*, a possible root cause of the earlier example could be: The school has not provided training on instructional strategies for "reading for meaning" in multiple content areas. ***Considerations:*** ● *Is/are the root cause(s) under the control of the system.* That means, we should know if they are **alterable variables** – areas or domains that adults ***can*** alter or impact for change. *These areas include instruction or process, curriculum or content, and environment or context. Operations and procedures fit into this category, as well. So, a lack of systems may be a root cause of a challenge.* ○ Non-examples: Family income, student health, educators' years in the profession. ○ Although there may be realities that are acknowledged, the true root cause to try to address will focus on what is available to be changed (e.g., communication with families, scheduling or learning/working conditions, and clarity for educators regarding guidance, training, or expectation). ● If **these are not alterable variables**, verification of the root cause(s) may not have been conducted. Reconsider root cause(s) until you have identified what ***is*** within your "sphere of influence". Recall that the innate traits of individuals (*adults or children*) are **not** alterable variables.
RC
The **Root Cause**(s) is/are:
Goal
*What **measurable outcome(s)** do you want to see? Be sure to include the "metric" (or unit) of measure.* • Specify what your vision is (what success will look like). This would be your Desired State. *Setting attainable, but reasonably ambitious **targets*** will support "reaching those destinations."
Aim
Goal (outcome/ target):

Note: Steps 3-4 of the process consist of planning and evaluation. Documentation of a well-designed plan with measurement (along the way *and* at a review date – to check fidelity *and* growth – is necessary).