

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018-19, the Dallas Independent School District (ISD) began to implement the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework to help students succeed in school. MTSS is a widely used framework for early identification of students who are struggling in the areas of academics, language, and/or engagement. MTSS support for these students is provided in a tiered manner. All general education students automatically receive Tier 1 support through core instruction. Students who are not performing as desired in Tier 1 receive greater support through Tier 2 interventions, while a smaller number of students who do not succeed in Tier 2 receive the most intensive level of support in Tier 3. Students who continue to struggle in Tier 3 may receive referrals for services outside MTSS.

In 2019-20, the second year the MTSS framework was implemented in Dallas ISD, the district began to use the *Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Reading* and *Mathematics Growth* assessments as universal screeners. The intent was to administer the MAP assessments three times during the school year to students in grades two to nine to strengthen Tier 1 instruction and to help identify students in need of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Specific interventions provided to each student were aligned with individual MAP Growth data. Progress monitoring was used to evaluate student progress and to inform Student Support Team (SST) decisions about whether to shift the student among tiers.

The purpose of this report was to examine the scope and reach of MTSS-related training in the Dallas ISD during 2019-20, and to describe MTSS implementation within the district. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the district transitioned to at-home learning after spring break beginning on March 23, 2020. This transition impacted the MTSS program with respect to training, implementation, and assessment, as noted in sections of this summary.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS/OUTCOMES

How were MTSS operations in the Dallas ISD funded in 2019-20?

The 2019-20 budget for the MTSS program totaled \$565,626 in Title II funding, an increase from \$472,163 in 2018-19.

How was the MTSS framework administered in the Dallas ISD in 2019-20?

In 2019-20, the MTSS framework was administered by one manager and three additional central staff members.

Training was the primary activity conducted by the MTSS administrative team. The MTSS team provided training to Dallas ISD staff members that focused on various aspects of MTSS implementation. Throughout the school year, the program manager examined intervention plans posted to PowerSchool to create additional trainings. In addition, the program manager organized ad hoc trainings for campus staff members who expressed specific training needs.

How was the MTSS framework implemented on Dallas ISD campuses in 2019-20?

In 2018-19, the MTSS framework replaced the Response to Intervention (RTI) system that functioned in a comparable but more limited way within the district. While RTI and MTSS both address academic challenges, the MTSS framework also supports student development in the areas of language and engagement.

An additional innovation in 2018-19 that continued in 2019-20 was the introduction of PowerSchool to maintain districtwide tracking of intervention plans developed for students assigned to Tiers 2 and 3. PowerSchool stores student-level descriptions of intervention plans and progress monitoring results, as well as resources that campus staff members can use to support students.

A key innovation in 2019-20 was the districtwide use of MAP Growth assessments as universal screeners and partial determinants of which tier of support each student received. MAP Growth reading and mathematics assessments were administered at the beginning and middle of the school year. Plans for an end-of-year administration were canceled because of the spring 2020 transition to at-home learning.

What MTSS-related training was provided to 2019-20 Dallas ISD staff members?

During 2019-20, the MTSS department offered 99 MTSS-related training sessions to over 2,153 Dallas ISD staff members. Attendance rates per session ranged from 1 to 395 staff members. The shortest and most frequently provided type of training session consisted of one-hour workshops (33 virtual; 11 face-to-face). The longest training sessions, eight-hour symposia, were presented once per semester and were the most well attended. Topics covered in training sessions included an overview of the MTSS framework, Root Cause Analysis, use of MAP Growth data, PowerSchool, as well as the creation, progress monitoring and closing of implementation plans. Following the transition to at-home learning, all training sessions were conducted virtually (36 in summer 2020).

What were Dallas ISD staff member perceptions about MTSS in 2019-20?

The evaluators created and administered the 2019-20 MTSS Feedback Survey, a brief online survey for district staff members who had participated in at least one MTSS-related training during 2019-20. Survey questions focused on knowledge of the MTSS framework, preparedness to implement elements of this framework, and beliefs about the effectiveness of MTSS-related training.

To determine potential survey respondents, sign-in sheets for all MTSS trainings offered to district staff members from August 1, 2019 through February 14, 2020 were used to identify 1,324 potential participants. The evaluators emailed invitations to complete the survey on March 6, 2020, and the survey remained open until March 24, 2020. The evaluators then re-opened the survey on April 27, 2020 with three new questions on MTSS-related changes resulting from the transition to at-home learning and closed the survey on May 13, 2020. A total of 657 staff members (49.6%) completed the survey.

Forty-three percent of respondents attended one training session during 2019-20, while 42 percent attended two or more trainings. At least 69 percent of respondents felt well prepared to implement elements of the MTSS framework. Most (83%) respondents stated that the MTSS training sessions they attended were at least somewhat useful, and many (62%) felt the MTSS framework was implemented well on campuses. When asked how MTSS training could improve, respondents most often reported wanting more frequent training, more content or depth of training, and/or more user-friendly training.

Over half (56%) of respondents were working with one or more students on a Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention before the transition to at-home learning. Of these respondents, 70 percent continued working with at least one student on a Tier 2 or 3 intervention during at-home learning.

Which Dallas ISD students were served by the MTSS framework in 2019-20?

Dallas ISD students served by MTSS in 2019-20 were examined by reviewing 1) the number and characteristics of students with Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions documented in the PowerSchool MTSS Intervention Module, and 2) the number and characteristics of students for whom *MAP Growth* score data were available.

Out of 11,525 plans, 9,898 Tier 2 intervention plans were recorded for 6,058 students and 1,627 Tier 3 intervention plans were recorded for 1,178 students. Students who received interventions most commonly received one plan in each tier (Tier 2: 60%; Tier 3: 73%). Proportionally more Hispanic students than white students received an intervention plan, while proportionally more African American than Hispanic students received a plan. Table 1 shows the breakdown of tier plans by area.

Table 1: 2019-20 Dallas ISD Tier 2 and Tier 3 Intervention Plans by Area

Tier	Total	Academics	Language	Engagement
	N	%	%	%
Tier 2	9,898	80.7	4.8	14.5
Tier 3	1,627	72.0	9.0	19.0

Source: PowerSchool MTSS Intervention Module database, 06/15/20.

Note: Data represent the number of plans. Because students could have multiple plans in each tier for an area, students could be represented in multiple cells.

2019-20 *MAP Growth* data were available for the beginning-of-year (BOY) and middle-of-year (MOY) administrations. The end-of-year administration was cancelled because of the spring 2020 transition to at-home learning. Because of these missing data, all *MAP Growth* results are provided for informational purposes only.

As shown in Table 2, testing rates for reading ranged from 54 percent (grade 9) to 85 percent (grade 2) of enrolled students at BOY, and from 50 percent (grade 9) to 90 percent (grade 2) at MOY. Testing rates for mathematics ranged from 50 percent (grade 9) to 90 percent (grades 2 and 3) of enrolled students at BOY, and from 43 percent (grade 9) to 92 percent (grade 2) at MOY.

Table 2: 2019-20 Dallas ISD *MAP Growth* Testing for Reading and Mathematics by Grade Level and Assessment Window

Grade Level	BOY		MOY		EOY	
	Enr N	Test %	Enr N	Test %	Enr N	Test %
Reading						
2	11,063	85.9	11,049	89.8		
3	11,135	84.7	11,099	86.3		
4	11,364	80.8	11,323	82.6		
5	11,974	80.9	11,943	79.4		
6	11,089	68.5	11,063	73.9		
7	10,974	68.1	10,977	71.4		
8	10,300	70.9	10,292	67.9		
9	12,860	54.2	12,677	49.7		
2-9	90,759	74.0	90,423	74.8		
Mathematics						
2	11,063	89.9	11,049	92.0		
3	11,135	90.2	11,099	90.8		
4	11,364	88.1	11,323	88.1		
5	11,974	88.0	11,943	87.5		
6	11,089	71.6	11,063	70.3		
7	10,974	67.6	10,977	64.8		
8	10,300	67.0	10,292	66.0		
9	12,860	50.1	12,677	43.3		
2-9	90,759	76.3	90,423	75.0		

Source: District *MAP* files dated 02/11/20 (BOY and MOY). District PEIMS snapshot demographic file dated 10/28/19 (BOY), district demographic data files dated 12/16/19 (MOY).

Note: *MAP Growth* reading rates include the English- and Spanish-language versions. EOY *MAP Growth* assessments were cancelled in 2019-20 because of the COVID-19-related transition to at-home learning. Enr = enrolled. Test = Tested.

For both BOY and MOY, white students were tested at higher rates than Hispanic students, and Hispanic students were tested at higher rates than African American students.

How were trends in 2019-20 MAP Growth related to MTSS implementation?

The relationship between *MAP Growth* scores and MTSS implementation of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions was explored by means of three *MAP Growth* variables.

First, the Rasch Unit (RIT) score represents the level at which students are ready to learn at the time of assessment. The RIT score is a standardized, equal-interval score that can be compared to other RIT scores regardless of student age or grade.

Second, the Conditional Growth Percentile (CGP) captures change in student achievement from one testing window to the next, relative to change for other students who are similar in starting achievement level, grade, and number of instructional weeks between testing. For each subject assessed, CGPs for each student are calculated with respect to a large, nationally-normed sample. A CGP at the 50th percentile indicates, relative to other test-takers at that grade level, a median amount of RIT score increase from the prior testing window. To measure growth across testing periods, the evaluators divided CGP scores into three categories: 1) failed to meet projected growth (failed to meet; < 45th percentile), 2) met projected growth (met; >=45th to <=55th percentiles), or 3) exceeded projected growth (exceeded; > 55th percentile).

The third *MAP Growth* variable used specifically for analyses of Spanish *Map Growth* reading data is the RIT score threshold. Because norms were unavailable for the 2019-20 *MAP Growth* Spanish reading assessments, CGP scores representing growth across testing windows could not be generated. Instead, the evaluators used thresholds provided by the vendor to indicate grade two and three students at or above the 25th percentile, and, therefore not considered at-risk for future reading difficulties.

For the purposes of growth-related analyses, student scores were divided into quintiles based on BOY *MAP Growth* scores. In this case, a quintile is a division of scores into five equal groups according to a 1 (highest performing) to 5 (lowest performing) distribution. Quintiles were determined separately for reading and mathematics scores. For reading, mean RIT scores ranged from 164 (Quintile 5) to 226 (Quintile 1) at BOY and from 173 to 226 at MOY, while mean RIT scores for mathematics ranged from 169 to 234 at BOY and from 178 to 236 at MOY. Ideally, students who fall into higher BOY quintiles (i.e., lower performing students) catch up academically to what is expected for peers at their grade level. One way to measure the impact of the MTSS framework is to examine the rates of students at higher quintiles who have exceeded growth thresholds across assessment windows.

Table 3 shows the rates of students who failed to meet, met, or exceeded threshold growth rates from BOY to MOY, grouped by BOY quintile and tier. The rates of students who met or exceeded growth thresholds were not clearly related to quintile for either subject area. Among the highest two BOY quintiles for mathematics, the percentages of Tier 2 or 3 students who exceeded growth thresholds ranged from 35 percent (Quintile 4, Tier 3) to 44 percent (Quintile 5, Tier 2), indicating that these students may have started to catch up to their peers nationally. Small numbers of students in Tiers 2 and 3 for reading resulted in no discernable pattern of results.

Table 3: 2019-20 Dallas ISD MAP Growth Reading and Mathematics Growth Threshold Rates by Quintile and Tier: BOY to MOY

BOY Quintile	Tier	N	Failed to Meet %	Met %	Exceeded %
Reading					
1	1	8,737	51.8	9.2	39.0
	2	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	3	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
2	1	6,837	53.4	8.4	38.2
	2	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	3	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
3	1	5,887	51.2	7.7	41.1
	2	6	83.3	0.0	16.7
	3	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
4	1	5,356	50.1	6.9	43.0
	2	2	50.0	0.0	50.0
	3	1	0.0	0.0	100.0
5	1	4,994	53.1	6.7	40.2
	2	3	100.0	0.0	0.0
	3	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mathematics					
1	1	10,053	50.8	9.5	39.7
	2	35	54.3	17.1	28.6
	3	1	0.0	0.0	100.0
2	1	10,764	54.0	10.3	35.7
	2	136	65.4	11.8	22.8
	3	1	100.0	0.0	0.0
3	1	9,740	48.0	8.5	43.6
	2	305	62.6	6.9	30.5
	3	22	63.6	4.5	31.8
4	1	9,285	46.3	7.6	46.1
	2	541	50.5	7.4	42.1
	3	74	44.6	20.3	35.1
5	1	8,871	48.3	9.0	42.7
	2	670	47.6	8.7	43.7
	3	133	56.4	7.5	36.1

Source: District BOY and MOY MAP Growth data file dated 02/11/20. District PEIMS snapshot demographic file dated 10/28/19.

Note: Includes data for students enrolled on the PEIMS snapshot date of 10/28/19 who also had valid MAP scores. Tier was defined as the highest tier attained by a student during the entire year for a subject, regardless of how long or how many times the student remained at any one tier. Failed to Meet: student percentile < 45th percentile. Met: 45th percentile <= student percentile <= 55th percentile. Exceeded: student percentile > 55th percentile. For each assessment and quintile, percentages of students in the Failed to Meet vs. Met vs. Exceeded categories may not sum to 100 percent because of rounding. Spanish reading MAP Growth data could not be included in this table because of the absence of national norms. Data exclude SPED students, who are not categorized into tiers for either subject. Students with tier plans may not have been assessed at BOY and MOY; therefore, every student with a plan in 2019-20 may not be represented in this table.

Mean RIT scores increased from BOY to MOY at all grade levels for reading (English) and mathematics except for grade eight mathematics (same at BOY and MOY). For each assessment and testing period, mean RIT scores were higher at higher grade levels, as expected, except for a one-point lower average score in BOY mathematics in grade nine as compared to grade eight.

Finally, the rates of grade two and three students who met or exceeded thresholds (only grades available) for the *MAP Growth* Spanish reading assessment ranged from 88 percent (grade 3, BOY Tier 3) to 94 percent (grade 2, BOY Tier 2). These rates decreased slightly from BOY to MOY for both Tier 2 and 3 students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improve frequency and content of MTSS training.

Although survey response was favorable for MTSS-related training and implementation, some respondents reported concerns about 2019-20 training, including a desire for more frequent and more in-depth training. Users of MTSS would benefit from training meeting their evolving needs. Stakeholders should regularly poll staff members to determine the topics that would be most beneficial and offer training on those topics as frequently as possible.

Improve ease and understanding of MTSS Implementation.

Survey respondents expressed concerns about the user-friendliness of MTSS tools, especially with respect to *MAP Growth* data and PowerSchool. Stakeholders should review and evaluate systems and processes to remove this barrier to implementation.

Improve documentation related to MTSS training and implementation.

Attendance for MTSS training sessions in 2019-20 could not be calculated accurately because of incomplete records and partial reliance on hand-written attendance sheets. In addition, language-related plans were

clearly coded for Tier 2 but not Tier 3 interventions. Evaluators and stakeholders should work together to elevate systems and processes that will maintain more accurate records to allow more rigorous and complete future analyses.

Continue to improve consistency in *MAP Growth* implementation.

Although the Dallas ISD has committed to using *MAP Growth* as universal screeners for reading and mathematics, the percentage of students screened in this first year of implementation rarely exceeded 90 percent for any grade or either subject. Further, inconsistencies in implementation were revealed, such as some students testing outside of grade level or issued the wrong test. Stakeholders should work to improve communication and training with respect to *MAP Growth* administration to continually improve the process.

Continue monitoring *MAP Growth* progress among at-risk students.

Although data were incomplete and of limited use for conclusions in 2019-20, the desired pattern of higher rates of struggling students exceeding expected growth from BOY to MOY generally was not found. Although EOY *MAP Growth* data were unavailable, findings suggest students with the greatest needs (i.e., students in the lowest BOY quintiles and students who received a Tier 2 or 3 plan) were not catching up to peers. Stakeholders should use lessons learned from this first year of *MAP Growth* implementation to improve assessment processes and necessary assignment to Tier 2 and 3 plans to ensure that at-risk students receive the extra help they need.

REFERENCE

Mejan, M. (2019) 2018-19 Evaluation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). Dallas, TX. Dallas Independent School District.

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