



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018-19, the Dallas Independent School District (ISD) replaced the Response to Intervention (RTI) system with the widely used Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework. The goal of the MTSS framework is to utilize available resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral development of all students (Carta & Young, 2019; NASP, 2009). This framework provides students with high-quality support by (a) identifying the needs of each student as early as possible, (b) designing interventions based on evidence-based practices, (c) providing appropriate instruction based on student needs, and (d) continually monitoring student progress (Carta & Young, 2019).

In Dallas ISD, MTSS program staff members provide campus personnel with procedures and guidelines for identifying students early who are struggling in the areas of academics¹, language², and/or engagement.³ Support for these students is provided in a tiered manner depending on the needs of each student. All students automatically receive Tier 1 support,⁴ which consists of core instructional curricula and programs (i.e., no intervention or special instruction is provided). Tier 1 support is the foundation for all other supports and optimizes the likelihood that all students will achieve school success. If students exhibit problems that could impact long-term success, they are placed in Tier 2, which provides additional intervention and specialized instruction. The Tier 2 interventions are directly aligned with areas identified through universal screening⁵ and are provided to students in addition to the Tier 1 support. While students who respond favorably to Tier 2 interventions are returned to Tier 1, students who do not achieve desired outcomes in Tier 2 may be moved to Tier 3. Tier 3 interventions are intended for fewer students than Tier 2 and include more intensive, frequent, and individualized interventions that may be offered in addition to the core and Tier 2 interventions. Students who continue to struggle in Tier 3 may be referred by the campus Student Support Team (SST) for specialized services outside MTSS. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, MTSS program leadership intended Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions to be administered either online or in-person during the 2020-21 school year with as little disruption as possible.

In 2019-20, the Dallas ISD began using the *Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Reading and Mathematics Growth* assessments as universal screeners to measure academic achievement and growth in reading and mathematics. These nationally normed, standardized computer adaptive achievement tests are administered three times per year to students in grades one to 11. The *MAP* assessments and progress monitoring are used by MTSS to strengthen Tier 1 instruction and were partial determinants of which tier of support students receive.⁶

The purpose of this evaluation was to describe MTSS implementation with respect to program development in 2020-21 and MTSS-related training and to examine student assessment outcomes. The 2020-21 budget for the MTSS program totaled \$577,626 in Title II funding, an increase from \$565,626 in 2019-20.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS/OUTCOMES

What MTSS-related training was provided to 2020-21 Dallas ISD staff members?

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all MTSS-related training activities provided to Dallas ISD staff members in 2020-21 were conducted virtually. Between July 20, 2020 and June 30, 2021, 3,822 Dallas ISD staff members attended one or more MTSS-related trainings. The most frequently attended workshops were related to *MAP Growth* (60 virtual sessions; 3,407 participants), and 7,773 participants completed at least one of the new self-paced online sessions related to *MAP Growth*.

What Dallas ISD students were served by the MTSS program in 2020-21?

Districtwide Use of *MAP Growth* Assessments

The rates of students for whom *MAP Growth* score data were available varied by grade level, testing window (BOY, MOY, and EOY), and assessment. For reading, between 66 percent (grades 9 and 11) and 86 percent (grade 1) were tested at BOY, between 59 percent (grade 11) to 89 percent (grades 1 and 2) were tested at MOY, and between 45 percent (grade 11) to 87 percent (grades 1 and 2) were

¹ Academics include issues related to reading and mathematics.

² Language includes issues related to listening, speaking, reading, and writing across all content areas.

³ Engagement includes issues related to academic disengagement, aggression, attendance, bullying, disruption to the classroom environment, and personally destructive behavior.

⁴ Students receiving specialized services (e.g., special education and dyslexia) also receive Tier 1 support.

⁵ Universal screening is the process of assessing all students to identify those who exhibit lower than expected academic outcomes.

⁶ Other factors used to determine tier placement include existing assessments (e.g., *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness*), and teacher observations.

tested at EOY. For mathematics, between 65 percent (grades 9 and 10) and 90 percent (grade 4) were tested at BOY, between 58 percent (grade 11) and 91 percent (grades 1 and 2) of students were tested at MOY, and between 47 percent (grade 11) to 89 percent (grades 1 and 2) of students were tested at EOY.

Tier 2 and Tier 3 Interventions

In 2020-21, 13,326 Tier 2 intervention plans were created in the PowerSchool, and of these, 4,901 (37%) plans were at least partially implemented and monitored⁷ for 3,633 students. In addition, 269 Tier 3 intervention plans were created in PowerSchool, and 106 (39%) of the plans were at least implemented and monitored for 91 students.

Students for whom an intervention plan was created, most commonly had one plan (Tier 2: 76%; Tier 3: 92%). A greater proportion of academic intervention plans focused on reading (73% for Tier 2 and 83% for Tier 3) than mathematics (27% for Tier 2 and 17% for Tier 3).

Consistent with districtwide demographics, each tier included more Hispanic students than African American students, and more African American students than White students. However, compared to districtwide demographics (71% Hispanic and 21% African American), proportionally fewer Hispanics students (65% Tier 2 and 62% Tier 3) and proportionally more African American students (29% Tier 2 and 35% Tier 3) received a tier plan.

How were trends in 2020-21 *MAP Growth* related to MTSS implementation?

The relationship between *MAP Growth* scores and MTSS implementation of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions⁸ was explored by means of three *MAP Growth* variables.

First, the Rasch Unit (RIT) is a standardized, equal-interval score that represents the level at which a student is ready to learn at the time of assessment. It can be compared to other RIT scores regardless of student age or grade.⁹

Second, the Conditional Growth Percentile (CGP) represents the extent to which student achievement changed 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 windows. The evaluators used the following quintiles to measure achievement for each testing window (i.e., achievement quintile) and to track growth across testing windows (i.e., growth quintiles): Low (up to 20th percentile), Low Average (21st to 40th percentile), Average (41st to 60th percentile), High Average (61st to 80th percentile) or High (81st percentile and above).

Third, the RIT score threshold was used to analyze Spanish *MAP Growth* reading data. Because national norms were unavailable for the 2020-21 *MAP Growth* Spanish reading assessments, the evaluators used thresholds provided by the vendor to identify grade one through grade six students who were at risk for future reading difficulties (i.e., scoring below the 40th percentile).

RIT Scores

For English reading and mathematics, the mean RIT scores for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students were lower than Tier 1 students at each *MAP* administration window; however, Tier 2 and Tier 3 students experienced more gains from BOY to EOY at each achievement quintile (+5 to +15 points for English reading and +9 to +14 points for mathematics) than Tier 1 students (+3 to +4 points for English reading and +5 to +12 points for mathematics).

For Spanish reading, the mean RIT scores for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students were generally higher than Tier 1 students at each *MAP* administration window, but the gains for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students (+4 to +12 points) were slightly lower than Tier 1 students (+6 to +13 points) at each achievement quintile except one.

The smaller numbers of Tier 2 and Tier 3 students compared to Tier 1 students preclude firm conclusions.

CGP Scores

Overall, Tier 2 and Tier 3 students in the two lowest performing achievement quintiles experienced similar growth (<5% difference) from BOY to EOY in English reading and mathematics as Tier 1 students in the same achievement quintiles.

However, for English reading, 41 percent of Tier 2 and Tier 3 students in the low achievement quintile exceeded (high average or high growth) *MAP Growth* targets from BOY to EOY, compared to 35 percent of Tier 1 students.

- In particular, 30 percent of Tier 2 and Tier 3 students in the low achievement quintile experienced high growth compared to 25 percent of Tier 1 students.
- Likewise, the percentage of Tier 2 and Tier 3 students in the low achievement quintile that experienced low growth (32%) was smaller than Tier 1 students (40%).

These results indicate that students with the greatest needs (i.e., Tier 2 and Tier 3 students in lowest performing achievement quintiles) benefited from the additional tiered support from the MTSS program, as measured by *MAP Growth* scores.

⁷ An intervention plan was considered at least partially implemented and monitored if the student completed the assessment chosen by the teacher for the intervention at least once.

⁸ 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.

⁹ In 2020-21, Tier 1 students included Grades 1-11, and Tier 2 and Tier 3 students included Grades 1-9.

It should be noted that due to the significantly smaller sample size of Tier 2 and Tier 3 students compared to Tier 1 students, especially for those in the average and higher performing achievement quintiles, findings in this section should be interpreted with caution.

RIT Score Thresholds

The percentage of Tier 2 and Tier 3 students who met the NWEA stated threshold of scoring above the 40th percentile on the Spanish *MAP Growth* reading assessment (i.e., not considered at risk for later reading difficulties) increased from 41 percent at BOY to 47 percent at EOY, whereas the percentage of Tier 1 students remained consistent from BOY to EOY (62%).

What were Dallas ISD campus-based staff member perceptions regarding the procedures, training, and support from the MTSS department in 2020-21?

To assess perceptions regarding the procedures, training, and support from the MTSS department, the 2020-21 MTSS Feedback Survey (20 items) was administered to district staff members who had participated in at least one MTSS-related training during the 2020-21 school year. The purpose of the survey was to solicit respondents' feedback regarding the quality and usefulness of MTSS training they received as well as their perceived ability to implement the MTSS framework. Of the 3,753 individuals who received an email invitation to complete the survey, 1,252 (33%) provided at least partial responses.

The highest percentage of respondents (57%) reported participating in one or two MTSS training sessions in 2020-21. Twelve percent reported participating in zero trainings, potentially indicating that 1) participants forgot they attended a MTSS-related training and/or 2) training content focused on specific skills that did not prominently include broader discussion of the MTSS framework.

MTSS Knowledge

Between 53 percent and 73 percent of respondents reported having at least some knowledge about the PowerSchool MTSS Intervention Module, the purpose of MTSS, and using *MAP* as a universal screener. Between 49 percent and 59 percent reported at least some knowledge of academic, engagement, and language interventions.

Implementation of MTSS

Between 21 percent and 29 percent indicated that they used academic, engagement, and language interventions at least a moderate amount. While the majority of respondents (65% to 69%) reported that support from the MTSS department prepared them (well or very well) to implement elements of MTSS, lower percentages (58% to 66%) reported that they implemented these elements sometimes or often.

MTSS Training Usefulness

A high percentage of respondents indicated that the MTSS trainings they attended were at least somewhat useful (71%). These ratings were higher for respondents who had attended two or more MTSS-related training sessions (76%).

For the 374 participants (30% of sample) who answered what improvements could be made to the support they received from the MTSS department, the most commonly articulated themes were (a) the desire for additional MTSS trainings throughout the year (38%); (b) providing additional hands-on activities (14%); (c) need for more user-friendly trainings (9%); and (d) trainings with additional content on existing topics related to MTSS (9%).

I'm not sure if they already have this but step-by-step videos of creating a plan, monitoring the plan, and finalizing the intervention plan. I feel this would be beneficial for new teachers. [Teacher]

Perceptions about MTSS Implementation

Over a quarter of respondents (28%) indicated that they thought MTSS was implemented very or extremely effectively on their campuses in 2020-21.

For the 336 participants (27% of sample) who answered how the implementation of MTSS can be improved on their campus, the most common themes were the need for additional training (32%), additional MTSS resources (16%), and more feedback and guidance after interventions are implemented (14%).

We can improve the implementation of MTSS on our campus by providing more follow-up training for teachers regarding how to create a plan and training on how to effectively choose the right interventions to meet student needs. [Assistant Principal]

Tier 2 and Tier 3 Interventions

Between 56 percent and 63 percent of survey respondents reported giving students virtual Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions. Of these respondents, a quarter or more reported that academic (29%), language (25%), and engagement (30%) interventions were very or extremely effective.

For the 264 participants (21% of sample) who responded about the challenges implementing virtual Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions, the most common themes were inconsistent student engagement (26%), not having enough training or knowledge to effectively implement virtual Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions (15%), and limited time to implement the interventions (13%).

Most of the challenges are due to students at home on a virtual plan. They do not have adequate support at home; therefore, I have no control over what a student does from home. I am very tech savvy; however, recreating ways to support kids in need of interventions was more challenging this year. Thankfully, my teammates and reading coach helped a lot. [Teacher]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue improving documentation and tracking related to MTSS implementation. While over 13,326 Tier 2 and 269 Tier 3 intervention plans were created in the PowerSchool MTSS Intervention Module, less than 40 percent of these plans were at least partially implemented and monitored in 2020-21. Because some survey respondents reported that they did not have enough training, knowledge, or time to implement the virtual interventions, MTSS program staff members should continue their efforts to support teachers and improve student tracking when interventions are implemented. Evaluators and stakeholders should also work together to elevate systems and processes to allow more rigorous and complete future analyses. This could provide additional insight into the effectiveness of the MTSS platform.

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 the second year of implementation rarely exceeded 90 percent for any grade or either subject. On average, the percentage of students tested also trended downward as grade level increased. As more students return to in-person learning for the 2021-22 school year, 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 Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. In 2020-21, students with the greatest needs (i.e., Tier 2 and Tier 3 students in lowest performing achievement quintiles) benefited from the additional tiered support from the MTSS program, as measured by *MAP Growth* scores, compared to their Tier 1 peers. Stakeholders should use lessons learned from this second year of *MAP Growth* implementation to improve assessment processes and necessary assignment to Tier 2 and Tier 3 plans to ensure at-risk students receive the extra help they need.

Improve frequency and content of MTSS training. While the number of Dallas ISD staff members who completed at least one MTSS-related training increased in 2020-21, some survey respondents expressed the need for additional trainings, hands-on activities, and resources for creating, implementing, and monitoring intervention plans. Because the usefulness ratings for MTSS training sessions were higher for participants who had completed two or more

trainings, it is likely that participants viewed the content as more useful as exposure to the content increased beyond a single training session. MTSS program staff members should continue to survey stakeholders to determine the topics and resources that would be most beneficial and offer trainings as frequently as possible.

Improve ease and understanding of MTSS Implementation. Survey respondents expressed concerns about the user-friendliness of MTSS tools because some trainings felt rushed or included too much information in a short period of time. To improve the learning experience, some teachers may benefit from (a) receiving information over a longer period of time, (b) having additional opportunities to practice using the MTSS platform, (c) having access to additional resources at trainings (e.g., exemplar intervention plans), and (d) having access to more campus-level support from MTSS experts or central staff members. This could provide teachers with critical guidance and feedback as interventions are implemented throughout the school year.

Provide additional support for implementing Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions in various learning environments. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to at-home learning, many Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions were implemented virtually in 2020-21. This presented teachers with many challenges related to inconsistent student engagement (e.g., students turning off cameras or not attending sessions). Because survey respondents described that actively engaged students responded well to Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, were more confident, progressed faster than before the interventions, and improved their *MAP Growth* scores, MTSS program staff members should explore how additional resources and strategies can be used to actively engage Tier 2 and Tier 3 students across remote, hybrid, and in-person settings.

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