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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MTSS PROCESS IN KEARNEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

Chelsea Feusner

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Educational Administrator

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Professor Nicholas J. Pace

Lincoln, Nebraska

November, 2020

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MTSS PROCESS IN KEARNEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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University of Nebraska, 2020

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To support multiple needs, districts have worked to enrich or remediate students through differentiated objectives, programs, and initiatives. The goal of a Multi Tiered System of Supports framework is to create a system that supports all students and provides robust interventions and programs at all levels, in multiple areas of education. This cross sectional study will investigate MTSS implementation through a self-assessment survey of school principals and teachers in Kearney Public Schools (KPS). The information collected and analyzed to support the administrative team's planning, implementation, and measurement of effectiveness. The research will also be able to support the continued implementation of MTSS in the state of Nebraska.

Acknowledgements

I have many individuals who have guided and supported my educational journey who deserve to be recognized. My advisor, Dr. Nick Pace, has encouraged and mentored me in educational leadership and research. Along with Dr. Pace, my committee members have been patient, supportive, and encouraging during this process. Dr. Nick Pace, Dr. Renee Hyde, Dr. Dick Meyer, and Dr. Matt Bice have been willing to share my enthusiasm for my research and have guided me down this path with professionalism and compassion.

I am truly blessed to have a husband who is my best friend and rock. Jeremy is beyond supportive, patient, and understanding. My young sons, Carter and Callen, have watched and encouraged me as I have worked to finish my coursework and research. I hope to model for them the importance of education, research, and continuing to learn every day.

Both of my parents have always been an advocate for education and have supported me along my path in life. My father continued to push and challenge me to pursue additional degrees and programs. His love for learning, education, and work ethic is something that I hope to continue to reflect in my own life.

I have many colleagues and friends who have helped me along this journey. Dave Everston and Beth Ericson are two fellow students that have been there every step of the way. Jen Turman and Tim Gaskill also deserve special mention as friends and professionals that have been particularly supportive and encouraging during my writing and research.

I also want to thank all of the teachers, principals, and administration in Kearney Public Schools for their support and encouragement during this study. This work will continue to validate their work and dedication to their students.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the Problem

Students enter school systems with a myriad of academic diversity, physical disparity, behavioral challenges, and social-emotional variance. Factors including school violence, mental health, trauma, and poverty impact student achievement and success, and yet schools are responsible for adequately educating every student, regardless of their realities, experiences, or situations (Clark & Dockweiler, 2020). To support multiple needs, districts have worked to enrich or remediate students through differentiated objectives, programs, and initiatives. Regardless of the complexity of the situation or concern, schools are expected to holistically support all students. The increase in student behaviors, social-emotional needs, and academic demands have resulted in a need for a more comprehensive approach to organize systems and train and assist educators and principals (DePaoli, 2017).

In this chapter, the background of the problem will be reviewed, as well as the problem statement. The purpose of the study, theoretical framework, research hypotheses, and the importance of the study will be detailed. The end of the chapter will offer definitions of major terms associated with the research.

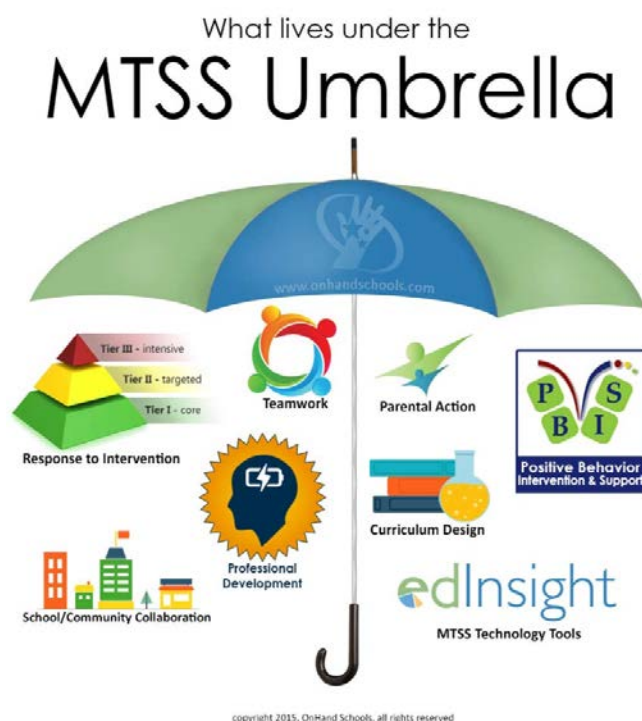
While many different models claim to support students, the Multi Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is elegantly designed to address the myriad of issues students present within contemporary education. Simply stated, MTSS is a tiered system that supports student academic and behavioral needs. This approach offers multidisciplinary support

and approaches to develop strategies for all students. These enhancements include student services, professional development, guaranteed consistent curriculum, student interventions, assessment and decision making. While other systems have been established, MTSS is a more inclusive strategy for success. The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) defined MTSS as a framework for integrating levels, or tiers, of academic and behavior support to promote the success of all students (Barrett et al., 2018).

MTSS is currently underway in the Kearney Public Schools System located in Kearney, Nebraska. This initiative reframes educators' perceptions regarding the instruction and intervention to support all students and promote early identification for students needing additional academic or behavioral support. By adopting this mindset, MTSS provides a framework for identifying students who may need special education, but this is not the primary focus. The focus is on support for all students, not just one subgroup or population. MTSS is a conceptual model to address student needs that includes multiple tiers for academic and behavioral support services.

Perhaps the best way to define MTSS is to establish what it is not. It is not refurbishing current support systems or processes or assigning students to a special class or adding extra help or something we "do" to students. It is not something schools have been doing already with just a new title or acronym. The MTSS innovative approach is an umbrella that could encompass current processes and expand these systems for all students. The umbrella graphic by edInstight, an instructional management system software company that offers support in MTSS, offers an overview of the concept of

MTSS forming an umbrella for all programs and initiatives. As indicated in Figure 1, all things fit the umbrella of MTSS. Examples from the graphic include: professional development, response to intervention, positive behavior intervention and support, curriculum, parental action, teamwork, and school/community collaboration.



Source: MTSS Umbrella from Onhand Schools: What is the Difference Between RTI and MTSS?

Figure 1. MTSS Umbrella from Onhand Schools: What is the Difference Between RTI and MTSS?

Misconception regarding current practices in education include the idea that these systems are already in place to support student outcomes. An example of two highly implemented systems in education include Positive Behavior Intervention Supports

(PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI). PBIS is defined as a positive behavior intervention support that offers evidence-based practices and serves as a response to intervention for social and emotional behavior. Alternatively, RTI is a response to intervention that serves as a preventative approach to support student academic achievement and student need. A misconception is that these tiered models PBIS and RTI are interchangeable with MTSS. However, McIntosh and Goodman (2016) define MTSS as the integration of a number of multi-tiered systems into one coherent, strategically combined system meant to address multiple domains or content areas in education.

The MTSS framework models combined, unified, and simplified academic and behavioral support using multi-tiered approaches, including response to intervention and positive behavior supports (*ESSA and MTSS for School Psychologists*, 2019). MTSS is a more thorough model because of the combination of approaches.

Problem Statement

The possible lack of understanding of MTSS in the Kearney Public School district and other Nebraska districts may be impacting the successful implementation. There is minimal research on MTSS implementation in Nebraska. This quantitative study will investigate the implementation through a self-assessment survey of school principals and teachers.

Nebraska is taking current cues from other states to make MTSS a priority. In Nebraska, stakeholders have made a distinction between a MTSS and RTI. Because MTSS is a service delivery system that is becoming more prevalent across the country, it makes sense that Nebraska has increased awareness of the concept that all students

require early and powerful academic and behavioral core instruction with potential high-quality interventions of increasing intensity (Nebraska Department of Education, 2018c). Alternatively, RTI supports only specific student needs. Thus, while there is an abundance of literature and studies on the RTI and PBIS models, studies are still being conducted and developed on the MTSS system nationally, state-wide and locally.

This cross sectional study will review the degree to which Kearney Public Schools teachers and principals have implemented MTSS. The research will support Kearney Public School leaders charged with implementing MTSS to determine the degree to which MTSS implementation is currently perceived by teachers and administrators. MTSS is not a special education program nor a general education program. It is a system that involves and wraps around both programs to offer all students opportunities to be successful. Without a solid understanding of what MTSS is and how it affects our students and schools, the implementation outcomes may vary dramatically from haphazard, to ineffective, to excellent.

A misconception many leaders and administrators may experience is that MTSS is already established in their buildings and districts. In Nebraska, MTSS was supported by the Nebraska Department of Education Special Education Department. In the original MTSS frameworks document, special education is encompassed within the MTSS process with RTI, decision making rules, and special education eligibility determination. This leads to the possible notion that MTSS is a special education program. Implementation clarity is needed for leaders to understand and define MTSS. Clearly defining the process and having a vision is essential for teachers, principals, and districts

to “buy in” to the MTSS process. Articulating the essential elements and eliminating any confusion that MTSS is not RTI, PBIS, or even special education, will support the teachers and principals’ capacity to implement the process and impact students. A clear distinction that MTSS is for all students, needs to be defined during implementation.

Purpose of Study

This study will review the degree to which Kearney Public Schools teachers and principals have implemented MTSS through a cross sectional study. To personalize the adoption of MTSS in the state, the process has been entitled Nebraska Multi-Tiered System of Supports (NeMTSS). Nebraska does not *require* districts to adopt the NeMTSS model; however, the framework is promoted as an option for a continuous improvement platform.

The study will examine the understanding of the current implementation of MTSS by collecting survey data from KPS teachers and principals on their self-assessment of MTSS and the implementation. The survey results will provide a means to analyze their understanding of the implementation from the position in the district (teacher or principal), level (preschool, elementary, middle, or high school), gender, years of experience, years of experience in Kearney Public Schools, and level of education. The study will identify potential differences in the understanding and implementation of MTSS. The goal of the study will be to inform decision makers about the strengths and weaknesses and to document implementation history to support continued development.

The survey to be used is the self-assessment survey created by NDE and available on the NeMTSS website (Appendix F). The survey will be administered electronically to

the target group of respondents in the Kearney Public Schools district. Additional qualitative questions will be added at the end of survey to gather further information.

The central question of this study is to what degree of implementation is MTSS in Kearney Public Schools.

S1: What differences in implementation of MTSS exist relative to the different demographics (i.e. position, years of experience, gender, level, years in education, or education)?

S2: What difference in implementation of MTSS exist relative to the six components of MTSS? (a) Shared Leadership, (b) Communication, collaboration and partnerships, (c) Evidence-based practices curriculum, instruction, intervention and assessments, (d) Building capacity and infrastructure for implementation, (e) Layered continuum of support, and (f) Data based problem-solving and decision making.

Researcher Positionality

My goal as a teacher, principal, and central office director is to help inspire lifelong learning, leadership and success, while providing a safe, supportive learning community that empowers students to become problem-solvers and engaged citizens. As a leader in education, I am constantly reading and researching how to better support students, parents, teachers, and principals. During my teaching career, I have had the opportunity to work in different sized school systems and teach preschool through post-secondary. Each school had disparate processes and supports in place to serve students.

Four years ago, KPS began the implementation of MTSS. I became interested in how this model would help support my goals and students' academic, behavioral and social-emotional needs. I was skeptical at first and believed this was just a new acronym for protocols we already had established. An Educational Service Unit (ESU) professional developer provided the initial MTSS training. She explained that MTSS is a model for all students that includes multiple-tiers for academic and support services. The model emphasizes data collection and continuing, ongoing assessment. The outcome of this process will establish a structure for academic, behavior and social-emotional supports for students. The MTSS process for social, emotional and behavioral support marriages PBIS, RTI, and special education.

In the summer of 2019, I transitioned to the Kearney Public Schools Central Office as the Director of PK-5 Education. Our Associate Superintendent and MTSS Coordinator oversee the implementation of MTSS in our district and are supported by myself and other district directors. Gathering information on the MTSS process and implementation will support future decision-making efforts. Ensuring a solid implementation will allow for further research to be completed on the academic progress, data and achievement in multiple areas. The survey will allow for reflection on whether a specific demographic area or components needs to be revisited to support the understanding of MTSS. The identification of any gaps in implementation will identify opportunities for improvement in KPS staff training and will provide a framework for other Nebraska districts for their future implementation of the system.

Theoretical Framework

During the research process, the concept of implementation science was mentioned in several NeMTSS presentations and interviews. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) state that “theoretical frameworks represent a combination or aggregation of formal theories in such a way as to illuminate some aspects of your conceptual framework” (p. 12). This study is guided by Implementation Science Theory. Implementation Science is the study of variables and conditions impact changes at practice, organization, and systems levels; changes that are required to promote the systematic uptake, sustainability and effective use of evidence-based programs and practices in typical service and social settings (Blase & Fixsen, 2011). The survey will require careful awareness of any variables and conditions that could create an obstacle to the study.

Practical changes to school processes require awareness of obstacles. To support a systematic change in an organization, the implementation theory framework encompasses the importance of drivers, stages, teams, and cycles (Blase et al., 2015). This study will focus on if there is a difference in understanding of MTSS that exists relative to different demographics in the KPS district.

A contributor to implementation is a driver and the infrastructure needed to develop and support system change. The drivers for this study included shifts in federal legislation, strategic planning by the Nebraska Department of Education, and the mechanism established to facilitate the MTSS process in Kearney Public Schools. The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) emphasizes that implementation is not a one-time event, it is a continuous process.

Implementation stages do not have a specific start and end date and often develop over time. The background and history of this study will review the intentional stages that supported the development of MTSS, but as the implementation stage suggests, not every aspect is linear and time stamped. Moreover, the transition of MTSS happened over time.

Implementation science also includes the concept of actionable teams. Theoretically, these are the groups or individuals that are supporting and implementing the programs and innovations. NIRN defines teams as an internal support and structure that supports the program through the stages and ensures the implementation as detailed by the drivers. This study will discuss the involvement of multiple teams and stakeholders from the federal, state, and local level. The implementation teams of this study will be the respondents.

The continuous review and cycle is an important part of the implementation process. The NIRN discusses the concept of plan, do, study, act (PDSA). As this acronym indicates, the process includes identifying and planning innovations, planning and establishing strategies, using data to study and assess progress, and acting on change for improvement. This study will support the information as the MTSS process evolves and the data will support a continuous implementation cycle. The foundation and understanding of the theory of implementation cycle supported this study on MTSS.

In addition to implementation theory, loose coupling theory was reviewed during this investigation. Loose coupling theory focuses on the different parts of an organization and how these are related and “coupled” to each other (UKEssays, 2018). This theory

has been used to understand the different components in education and how they are connected. The MTSS model offers a loose coupling of multiple departments and components, all focused on supporting students. The implementation of MTSS supports a consistent model to intentionally connect students, teachers, principals, and leaders within all departments in a tiered approach. In an educational system, the people are the most important elements. In this study, the teachers and principals will offer feedback on the MTSS model and the implementation of the components.

The essential elements of the MTSS are coupled together within the model to support a strong implementation. This study will review the six components and their level of implementation: (a) Shared Leadership, (b) Communication, collaboration and partnerships, (c) Evidence-based practices curriculum, instruction, intervention and assessments, (d) Building capacity and infrastructure for implementation, (e) Layered continuum of support, and (f) Data based problem-solving and decision making.

According to Karl E. Weick (1976), if all of the elements in the system are loosely coupled to one another, then any component can be modified without impacting the whole system. During this research the connection and coupling of the people and components will be reviewed to support the analysis of implementation.

Research Hypotheses

The hypothesis of this study is that there is a significant difference in implementation of MTSS at various demographic areas within KPS. The null hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in means between demographics. The alternative hypothesis is that there is at least one demographic that is significantly different in the

implementation based on the self-assessment.

Importance of Study

Given the growth of MTSS in Nebraska and other states, a deeper understanding of educator knowledge of the program is important. Despite the popularity of MTSS in Nebraska and across the United States, few studies have examined educators' understanding of the program and how that may impact implementation. Kearney's review of the implementation of MTSS will benefit and support continued internal district growth, as well as other districts and local ESUs beginning or continuing to adopt MTSS.

This study will also offer feedback to the Nebraska Department of Education with their implementation of the MTSS system throughout the state. KPS has invested significant time and resources into the MTSS framework, as has the state. Reviewing the understanding in Kearney Public Schools and the implementation will provide support to other districts and the state as they make adjustments to implementation efforts and establish or refine their systems.

Measuring the implementation after four years in Kearney Public Schools provides a clearer picture of how MTSS operates within our schools and therefore support the holistic success of students. If implemented effectively, MTSS is a framework that will support teachers and principals, which in turn impacts student learning and growth.

Definitions

AqUESTT—Accountability for a Quality Education System, Today and Tomorrow: the statewide accountability system in Nebraska

ESSA—Every Student Succeeds Act: the current federal education law

ESU—Educational Service Units that support areas of Nebraska

GOLD—Assessment for preschool students

GVC—Guaranteed Viable Curriculum: Opportunity for all students to have access to high standards curriculum

IDEA—Individual Disability Education Act: the national law that guides special education

IEP—Individual Education Plan: plans for students that qualify for special education

KPS—Kearney Public Schools

MAP—Measures of Academic Progress: adaptive test that measures academics

MANOVA—Multivariate Analysis of Variance

MTSS—Multi-Tiered System of Supports: system that supports all students

NCLB—No Child Left Behind: the previous federal education law

NDE—Nebraska Department of Education: department that guides and supports schools in the state of Nebraska

NeMTSS—Nebraska Multiple Tiered System of Supports: Nebraska’s version of MTSS

NWEA—Northwest Evaluation Association: a testing company that includes MAP

PBIS—Positive Behavior Intervention Supports: a positive and proactive intervention for behaviors

RDA—Results Driven Accountability committee

RTI—Response To Intervention: a proactive approach to support students that maybe struggling academically

SAT—Student Assistance Team: a team that meets to support students, these team may include teachers, parents, counselors, or other school specialists

SSIP—State Systemic Improvement: Student Success

Qualitative—A study that explores personal perceptions, reasoning, and opinions to provide insight into an area of research

Quantitative—A study focused on measurement of survey information or quantities

Summary

The goal of MTSS is to create a system that supports all students and provides robust interventions and programs at all levels, in multiple areas of education. This study will review the degree to which Kearney Public Schools teachers and principals have implemented MTSS. Measuring implementation of MTSS is a necessary step in efficiently supporting the process of MTSS in KPS and this information is vital to the administrative team in planning the implementation and measuring its effectiveness. The research will also be able to support the continued implementation of MTSS in the state of Nebraska. The central question of this study is to what degree has MTSS been

implemented in Kearney Public Schools. The study will review if there is a difference relative to the respondent's demographics and the different components.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to investigate the implementation of the MTSS model in Kearney Public Schools. This chapter is organized by (a) outlining the research process and overview of MTSS, its conceptual origins and its implementation across other states; (b) examining the national history for MTSS; (c) discussing the history of MTSS in Nebraska; and d) reviewing MTSS implementation within Kearney Public Schools.

Research Process

The inquiry began with precursory searches of any online information about the Nebraska Multi-tiered System of Supports (NeMTSS). The most promising search results identify online resources through the Nebraska Department of Education and the Nebraska MTSS website. No other research studies on NeMTSS have been published as of January 2020. A lack of relevant content indicates not enough comprehensive data about the issue of MTSS in Nebraska. To remedy the scarcity of information the examination of various sources will enhance the narrative. These sources include newsletters, presentations from state conferences, interviews, state meeting agendas, and documents on the Nebraska Department of Education website. To focus the search beyond the primary online inquiry, an education database search of this topic exposes a better understanding of the MTSS process.

The search included targeted educational search engines, PsychINFO, ERIC (Education Resource Information Center), and Sage publishing databases (a leading

publisher in education of textbooks, journals and other educational research). Recalling a June 2019 search, the outcome provided a mere 212 items on PsychINFO searching for a Multi-Tiered System of Support. Articles and studies varied; some supplied specific MTSS information, while others applied relevance to the areas of special education, early childhood, behavior, bullying, science or academics. In addition, ERIC provided 64 results, with 27 published since 2018. An online search of Sage publishing in February 2020, referenced 37 journals and 87 academic books.

These searches indicate that though there has not been substantial research conducted about MTSS, the interest is growing and MTSS will continue to be an innovative strategy in education. The culmination of these searches leads to corresponding textbooks and academic publications. The sustained interest in MTSS means that books and studies continue to be published focusing on MTSS, even as recent as March 2020.

Having established the ongoing narrative of this topic, the next step was to discern the history of educational legislation and policy. This research included a review of educational acts and how these impact the process that evolved into MTSS. Documents on the US Department of Education, as well as documents and minutes from the Nebraska Department of Education, articulate the progression of MTSS into Nebraska schools.

To clearly define the MTSS system, studies from several other states in the nation provide clarity. Adjacent searches regarding two established systems, Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) should not be

overlooked. As noted in Chapter 1, these two systems are often associated with MTSS, though MTSS is a broader program. Both RTI and PBIS are frequently mentioned within studies published examining MTSS. There is an abundance of literature and studies dedicated to RTI and PBIS, however, few focusing on the MTSS system specifically have been conducted to date. As noted, this has not occurred in Nebraska.

Overview of MTSS

Undeniably, caring administrations strive to support, promote, and increase student achievement. The concern, however, is that new initiatives are frequently suggested, new initiatives are frequently recommended for meeting the needs of all students and offering support to teachers. These new initiatives purpose to support schools, yet initiative fatigue often causes unnecessary stress and puts pressure on schools that is unreasonable. On top of teaching core curriculum such as reading, writing, math, science and social studies, schools must manage student behaviors and social-emotional needs. Ultimately, however, it is student test scores and rankings that are published and analyzed, not the result of all the minutiae of daily vagaries. The scrutiny of schools continues to be a national phenomenon (Hayes & Lillenstein, 2015). Schools are challenged to respond to the rise in student needs by offering more support for academics, behavior, and social-emotional needs. Student academic diversity, school violence, poverty, and student mental health are impacting student growth. Education is the equalizer of opportunities and MTSS can offer this support for all students (Clark & Dockweiler, 2020).

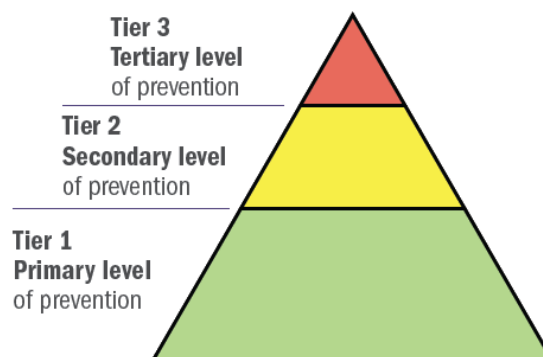
New initiatives are frequently recommended for meeting the needs of all students and offering support to teachers. These new initiatives cause unnecessary stress and pressure on schools. MTSS conceptualized is a system that encompasses all processes and initiatives, thereby mitigating the intended purposes of the initiatives (Hayes & Lillenstein, 2015). The MTSS process combines initiatives for social, emotional and behavioral support unifies PBIS, RTI, special education and general education.

Mandates have served as a catalyst for educational reform, resulting in the emergence of school-wide problem-solving frameworks such as RTI and PBIS. However, these approaches have been delivered in “silos” in which one system was devoted to academic difficulties and another to behavioral concerns. (Eagle, John W., Dowd-Eagle, S. E., Snyder, A., & Gibbons Holtzman, E. 2015, p.161)

Though RTI and PBIS are the more well-known and established tiered academic and behavior systems, MTSS integrates any tiered process and encompasses multiple processes to support a unified system. States including Oregon, Kansas, Florida, and Michigan transitioned to the MTSS model to minimize the difficulty of implementing multiple initiatives and instead focus all efforts on a common program. Instead of causing burn out with multiple plans, agendas, and reports, MTSS integrates all efforts for student academic, social-emotional, and student behavior under one initiative (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016).

Pyramid structure. It is difficult to identify the specific origin of MTSS. The official blog of the United States Department of Special Education recognizes Hill M. Walker, Ph.D, a special education professor at the University of Oregon, as a foundational contributor to the idea of a tiered model to support students (Swenson, Horner, Bradley, & Calkins, 2017). In 1995, Walker and colleagues worked with a

school district on addressing and supporting interventions for students with behaviors. Walker et al. focused his system on tiered prevention similar to a 3-tiered approach from the Institute of Medicine. The 1996 article about his work with students with behaviors, referenced the United States Public Health Service conceptual model and supported a three-approach tiered model of support (Walker et al., 1996). The model included a main Tier 1 support for all students, Tier 2 offered more intensive support, and Tier 3 the most intensified assistance. This model was specific for behavior and has been pivotal to the development of MTSS (see Figure 2). To fully understand the concept, it's important to highlight the notion of a layered model of support. A triangle or pyramid graphic is frequently used to conceptualize MTSS.



Source: Hayes & Lillenstein (2015)

Figure 2. Tiered Model of MTSS.

Respectively with MTSS, the base of the pyramid or Tier 1 supports the core foundation for the school system, including the processes, curriculum, and policies offered to all students. Tier 1 focuses on offering strategies and materials for equality for

every student. This tier focuses on high quality instruction and best practices. Generally, 80% to 90% of students respond to Tier 1 general instruction.

As the pyramid narrows, Tier 2 and Tier 3 target students, teachers, and processes that need more intensive support. Tier 2 strategies and interventions are often implemented in small group settings for review and reteaching. The Nebraska MTSS website identifies Tier 2 as the intervention stage that is targeted to support students needing additional support, in addition to the core supports provided in Tier 1. Typically, districts may serve 5% to 15% of students in Tier 2.

Tier 3 is the most intensive and individual support needed for student success. These students most often make up 1% to 5% of the student population. Students may need specialized services or support through special education or other supports due to a variety of needs. Tier 3 supports could receive special education or other intensified specialized academic or behavior supports. The significance of the pyramid approach is that the Tier 1 supports must remain in place as a foundation for students. The tiers do not stand alone, but are a continuum of layered support for students.

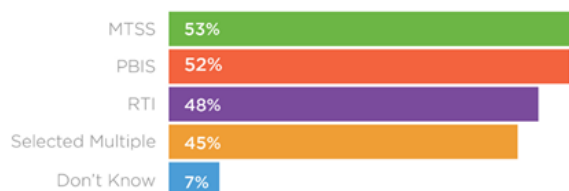
Why MTSS? The United States Department of Education, starting in 2014, published a series entitled *My Brother's Keeper*. MTSS was a focus of the first online volume of the My Brother's Keeper Promising Practices Series. This series focused on initiatives to provide educators and administrators information about approaches to support literacy and behavior for all students. The first volume used various studies to identify why MTSS positive behavior interventions and supports are utilized in schools. A summary of these findings include: (a) decrease in problem behaviors as measured by

office discipline referrals (Sherrod et al., 2009); (b) reduction in suspensions (Bradshaw et al., 2010); (c) increases in reading and math achievement as measured by standardized tests (Menendez et al., 2008); (d) improved proportion of students at 3rd grade who met the state reading standards (Horner et al., 2009); (e) improved 5th grade academic performance (Bradshaw et al., 2010); and (f) improved “organizational health” within schools (Bradshaw et al., 2008).

Recent studies have been conducted identifying MTSS as an effective way to support student achievement and support of students with disabilities. Additional research investigates the MTSS implementation. In February 2019, a survey was conducted by Panorama Education on MTSS. The respondents ranged from public to charter K-12 schools across the country. The survey reflected 400 educators and administrators, 29% district administrators, 18% school administration, 44% in school-based staff, and 9% other. The survey results indicated that many schools are implementing a MTSS framework and that there are opportunities for improving the coordination and implementation (see Figure 3).

Which student support framework(s) does your school or district use?

Respondents were able to select multiple answers. MTSS came out on top, followed closely by PBIS.



Source: Panorama Education (n.d.)

Figure 3. Visual of the survey from Panorama Education's report on The State of MTSS in Education: Infographic.

The Panorama Education survey indicated that many schools are in the beginning stages of MTSS. The report identified that the biggest benefits of a Tiered support system include: improving learning, data based decision making, and supporting all students.

Studies continue to support the importance of research on Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) and the importance of continuing to learn about how this implementation supports student success. This study will offer the opportunity to review and examine the implementation and application of MTSS through perceptual data.

History of MTSS

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s ushered in a shift in the understanding of education in the United States. Education was now understood as a fundamental human right that meant education became the primary responsibility of the state and local government. All children in the United States have the right to a free public education and equal opportunities regardless of race, ethnicity, income, religion, or gender. The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act was supported and signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The goal and purpose was to provide resources and support programs for schools and low-income students. New funding and grants were provided to support elementary and secondary education (Brenchley & Brechley, 2015).

No Child Left Behind in 2002. In 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law No Child Left Behind, also known as NCLB. With this act, school accountability for academic achievement increased. Examination of standardized test scores and adequate yearly progress were required to ensure all children received a quality education and were proficient on high standards (No Child Left Behind, 2008. Whitney & Candelaria, 2017). With each of these bills, the expectations increased for teachers, students, and schools. States adopted curriculum, established different programming, and implemented more assessments to analyze student and school performance (McMurrer, 2007).

IDEA reauthorized. The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law, passed in 1975, that supports special education. IDEA makes available free and appropriate public education for children who are identified with disabilities being eligible for services. These services vary depending on the student's unique needs. Support could include speech language, special education resource, or occupational therapy. When IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, the practice of "response to intervention" was introduced (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). The law didn't specify RTI, but notes included the requirement that schools track intervention methods when identifying students with specific learning disabilities.

Every Student Succeeds Act. When President Barack Obama took office in 2009, the administration worked with educators, administrators, and stakeholders to make revisions and update the original NCLB act. This led to the approval of the Every Student Succeeds Act (n.d.), which was officially signed in 2015. ESSA offered flexibility that the rigid NCLB act did not allow. Federal adoption of ESSA in 2015

represented a significant moment in the development of MTSS, as the law directly mentioned development of a multi-tiered system of support. The language of ESSA directly points to the development of a multi-tier system of supports (MTSS). It states, “multitier system of support” means a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision-making” (ESSA, 2015, p. 295). To continue to articulate the importance of this system, ESSA mentions this process again when discussing reading support and programming for students with disabilities.

ESSA utilized the term multi-tier system of support five times in the legislation, but each time multi-tiered is spelled out with lowercase letters. The capital MTSS acronym is not utilized in the act, indicating that the framework of MTSS is not specifically required by the law. Because the federal law indicates that a scaffolded approach for support is necessary for schools, but does not specify an actual system, it becomes the responsibility of the states and local schools to develop and establish their specific systems of support. Each state then has the flexibility to support and create a system that is customizable for their unique students and system (Knoff, 2018).

ESSA requires that all states submit and develop a plan as evidence of meeting the objectives of the law. The Nebraska plan to comply with ESSA was submitted on May 22, 2018 by the Nebraska Commissioner of Education Dr. Matthew Blomstedt. The plan, entitled Nebraska's Consolidated State Plan, supports the ESSA Act and is indicated as a driver for the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG). In the plan, MTSS is mentioned along with PBIS and RTI (NDE, 2018).

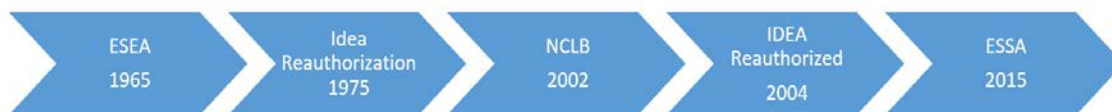


Figure 4. Conceptual Framework of the history of MTSS nationally.

Not just Nebraska. Though relatively new to Nebraska, several states have already implemented and customized a MTSS structure. Members of the National Center of Systematic Improvement (NCSI) examined three studies that utilized MTSS data to improve graduation rates. This report reviewed graduation rates for students with disabilities in the framework of a MTSS model. The research indicated that Pennsylvania met the graduation rate goals in 2016-2017 by using their MTSS system to identify students that were not on track for graduation and supporting students with strategies to meet their needs (National Center for Systematic Improvement, 2018).

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction is in the implementation stage of a data and tracking system to provide information to the state, districts, and schools. This system collects data as part of the state's MTSS framework. The 2018 report, from the NCSI, states that North Carolina is seeing evidence of infrastructure alignment and improvements in graduation rates with the development of the data system. The NCSI also reported that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) improved graduation rates for students with disabilities by aligning multiple MTSS-related state initiatives. The VDOE data showed an increase in graduation rates from 54.9% in 2014 to 63.7% in 2016 (National Center for Systematic Improvement, 2018).

McIntosh and Goodman published studies from Oregon, Florida, and Michigan. The Oregon study reviewed the state and district history, implementation, and evaluations of outcomes. As in many states, Oregon's model is unique to support their state. The MTSS model is entitled Effective Behavior and Instructional Support Systems (EBISS). The case study indicated that "school districts participating in the state-level EBISS initiative have experienced improvements in both adult behavior change and student literacy outcomes" (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016, p. 281).

Similarly, in the state of Florida, the 2010 state needs assessment survey indicated the need for a RTI model to support students. This led to the merging of PBIS with RTI and the implementation of MTSS in 2011. The study indicated that the outcomes are in the early stages. The results did indicate the impact on multiple state-level initiatives with the adoption of the Florida standards and conducting needs assessments and problem solving at the district and school levels (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016).

In the state of Michigan, the MTSS process is entitled Michigan's Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (MiBLSi). Michigan's participation dates back to the model demonstration in schools in 2000. As of 2013, Michigan indicated participation from 440 elementary schools and 41 middle schools. At that time, the state had 7 districts participating in the cohort. The research from Cohort 7 indicated a decrease in office referrals and an increase in the number of students at benchmark on the reading assessment DIBELS Next Composite (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016).

As noted, while no studies of MTSS have been conducted in Nebraska, in the neighboring state of Kansas, the MTSS initiative has been well established. In an

evaluation published by the Kansas State Education Department, the researchers indicated that MTSS is substantially contributing to improved student outcomes at the local level as well as the district and state level. As of the 2014 report, more than a third of all public schools were implementing MTSS. The researchers found that Kansas MTSS is substantially contributing to improved student outcomes, and additionally benefiting teachers, improving instruction, and supporting better school functioning (Riley, 2015).

History of MTSS in Nebraska

Like many states, Nebraska has customized MTSS to support the uniqueness of the state. Nebraska has a long tradition of local control of state curriculum and assessments. RTI was established in Nebraska but has more recently been transitioned to NeMTSS in the state. While other states have adopted a MTSS system, Nebraska is in the inception stage. MTSS is a contemporary acronym in education in the state of Nebraska. The history of MTSS in Nebraska was collected from documents on the NeMTSS website and through conversations with leaders in the state. Though previous information and discussion may have occurred, this historic overview begins from the inclusion of MTSS in the State Systemic Improvement Plan Phase I, published in 2015. As indicated in the timeline in Figure 5, this section will review the SSIP Phase I, SSIP Phase II, stakeholder progress, and the NeMTSS Framework.



Figure 5. Timeline of the history of MTSS from SSIP through the Frameworks Document.

State Systemic Improvement Plan. The inception of MTSS in Nebraska can be found in the Nebraska State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). This plan is part of the State Performance Report (SPR) and Annual Performance Report (APR) completed by states as a requirement for federal funds under the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) programs. The goal of the SSIP is to help states develop their practices and programs using data to make decisions and to help students with disabilities achieve better results. This process details a specific timeline for implementation in three phases.

- Phase I is the analysis of the state and was required to be submitted in 2015. This section discusses the state achievement and demographic data and reviews current infrastructure and initial goal setting.
- The Phase II plan identifies the steps and plans for accomplishing the implementation of the state determined goal.
- Phase III is the evaluation stage.

Nebraska State Systemic Improvement Plan Phase I. The Nebraska State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) Phase I was published in March of 2015. The plan reviewed the goals of the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and Office of

Special Education, NDE's State Board of Education, Office of Special Education, the Commissioner and State Director of Special Education. The indicated focus was on supporting and improving results for all students in the state through school improvement activities. The goal was also to support districts in their implementation of evidenced-based practices, including the SSIP.

The SSIP Phase I introduced the stakeholder committee that supported the initiative. This group was organized by the Nebraska Office of Special Education in 2014. The stakeholder group and Results Driven Accountability (RDA) committee, included representatives from NDE, parents, special education directors and staff, principals, superintendents, institutions of higher education, representatives of community agencies, nonpublic schools, and representatives from the Nebraska State Education Association and the Nebraska Association of Special Education Supervisors. The RDA committee worked to establish the targets and performance of the SSIP. This group also obtained input from two long standing stakeholder groups- the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) and the State Results Matter Task Force.

The RDA committee began by conducting a broad analysis of academic, demographic, and other data. After reviewing the data, the group determined that a gap in reading skills was evident across multiple measures. Therefore, it was decided to focus on the entire population for the State Identified Measurable Results (SIMR). The committee determined that the SIMR to support school age students with disabilities would be to narrow the gap between the reading proficiency rates of students with disabilities and the general education students at third grade (Nebraska Part B State

Systemic Improvement Plan Phase I, 2015). The focus on narrowing this gap aligned with the Nebraska State Board of Education continuous improvement initiative.

The first mention of MTSS in the SSIP was in the professional development section and identified Educational Service Units (ESU) and partnership with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the latter being the stakeholders that contributes to processes and supports the state. The SSIP (Nebraska Part B State Systemic Improvement Plan Phase I, 2015) document identifies MTSS as a “sound, logical, coherent strategy” (p. 16) that is supported by NDE, the NDE Office of Special Education, and stakeholders. The stakeholder group defined and further discussed their reasoning for a MTSS model.

MTSS/RTI is a multi-tiered, evidence-based model of providing instruction and intervention support to ALL students based on needs identified through data. Student data and data on instructional delivery are used to make decisions about the effectiveness of support being provided for students. As students’ needs increase, the intensity of the instruction and intervention increases. The MTSS/RTI strategy addresses the need to improve reading performance as identified through the analysis of state data. First, MTSS/RTI provides a district/school-wide approach by building systems of support for all students (Nebraska Part B State Systemic Improvement Plan Phase I, 2015, p. 16).

This section detailed the MTSS professional development implementation and the plan for training on the frameworks of MTSS components. The professional development plan introduced Technical Assistance Providers that would support individual districts and teams on what is MTSS, why MTSS, system change and implementation science, core reading instruction, intervention systems, explicit instruction, and data-based decision making.

SIPP Phase I determined the design and implementation of NeMTSS would be a multi-year effort. To support the process NDE identified, they will take the following steps: (a) additional staff will be added to the MTSS/RTI Implementation team, (b) train staff at the intermediate ESUs, (c) train LEA staff, and (d) provide additional outreach at the state level to develop greater involvement by NDE teams to enhance the connection with general education initiatives (Nebraska Part B State Systemic Improvement Plan Phase I, 2015. p. 21). The SIPP Phase I document further discussed how NDE would support MTSS/RTI schools with data collection, universal screening and progress monitoring, and intervention selection that are evidence-based.

Nebraska State Systemic Improvement Plan Phase II. After the initial plan was established, the state continued the Phase II planning. Stakeholders continued conversations and reviewed infrastructures, systems, and data. Updates, edits, and progress were published in the March 30, 2016 Nebraska State Systemic Improvement Plan Phase II document (SSIP II). The SSIP II began by reviewing the original state identified measurable result to narrow the gap in reading proficiency rates of students with disabilities and the general education students in third grade. The stakeholder group decided that the data showed that when a MTSS model was implemented to fidelity with all students, all students increased their proficiency in reading. For districts that have been identified as “needs improvement” through the state accountability system known as Accountability for a Quality Education System, Today and Tomorrow (AQuESTT), the state found either no gap or a negative gap between students with disabilities and their peers.

The stakeholder group discussed the initial goal as MTSS is implemented, and core instruction for reading is strengthened and supported, the reading gap at the third grade minimizes. As a result, the stakeholder group modified the document with guidance from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI). The state identified measurable result was changed to increase reading proficiency for students with disabilities within the selected cohorts at the third grade level as measured by the statewide reading assessment. The NDE Office of Special Education stakeholder group agreed on the identified goal to improve reading proficiency in third grade districts with intensive evidence-based reading strategies through the use of the newly integrated MTSS framework.

Nebraska State Systemic Improvement Plan Phase II, Component #1. The first component of the Nebraska State Systemic Improvement Plan Phase II focused on the development of infrastructure. The expectation was for the state to specify the improvements in the state that will support local education agents (LEAs) to implement and support evidence-based practices (EBPs) to improve results for children with disabilities. To accomplish this goal, the state identified the need to create a framework document for the newly introduced MTSS in Nebraska that integrates PBiS into the current RTI model, as well as establishes an intensive implementation of evidence-based reading practices and strategies. The state also identified the need to continue to align the state's internal infrastructure.

The NDE Office of Special Education and stakeholders identified MTSS/RTI as the evidence-based framework for providing instruction and intervention support for all

students. NDE contracted with the University of Nebraska at Lincoln Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools to provide training and professional development of MTSS. Seventy (70) districts in Nebraska had volunteered to participate in the MTSS implementation process when the Phase II document was published. The districts that committed to the implementation began training in August of 2015. They were required to agree to a list of requirements to receive the training and assistance. Districts were not expected to have all items in place, but were committed to implementation in the future and in a timely manner.

The NDE Office of Special Education began work to support the state level professional development and training. The goal was to develop an organizational plan and merger of the current status of the Nebraska PBIS and MTSS to support both academic and behavioral support. A priority was to investigate and develop a coaching model for MTSS. To continue to support collaborations, the state identified the goal of aligning several initiatives including the Literacy Cadre, Data Cadre, AQuESTT, Strategic Planning Committee, MTSS, PBiS, and the Pyramid Model. Continued collaboration with other departments in NDE are mentioned including the Office of Accreditation and School Improvement, PBiS project manager, a member from the AQuESTT initiative, the Office of Federal Programs and Nutrition, and the Office of Teaching and Learning.

The expected outcomes of Phase II are that the integration of the MTSS framework would create a greater number of individuals and coaches needed to support increasing the reading performance of students with disabilities. The collaboration

between MTSS and PBiS would support evidence-based reading practices across Nebraska to enhance support for all students and support positive behavior to keep students in the classrooms. Additionally, the development of a MTSS framework will provide districts with a more comprehensive tiered system of support. The state commits to a systematic coaching model to build capacity and support the implementation and understanding of MTSS. The goal is to emphasize literacy and to support a comprehensive multi-tiered system of support across the state.

The timeline of MTSS was also included in Phase II. The goal was that by the end of 2018, NDE would work to increase the number of individuals/organizations that are able to provide professional development, training, and technical assistance with the newly integrated MTSS model.

Nebraska State Systemic Improvement Plan Phase II, Component #2. The second component of the Nebraska SSIP Phase II focused on the support for LEA implementation of evidence-based practices. To support this component, the state provided statewide trainers for the implementation of the MTSS frameworks. NDE provided an instructional support team for MTSS and offered multiple professional development opportunities.

This section also discussed and reviewed the PBiS initiative in the state of Nebraska. The report indicated that there are currently 67 schools in the state working with NDE to implement school-wide PBIS (SW-PBiS). Across Nebraska, 215 schools and districts across had participated in training. Nebraska received the Nebraska State Improvement Grant from 1999-2005 to implement PBiS in Nebraska and two additional

grants from 2006-2011 and 2011-2016. The SSIP Phase II document indicated the need to align NeMTSS and PBiS and committed to exploring options for increasing capacity at the local level with ESUs and districts.

Summary of SSIP goal. To summarize the SSIP, the main focus was to support students with disabilities growth and improvement of reading skills for students in third grade. To achieve the Nebraska State Systemic Improvement Plan, the state committed to a development of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports that promotes and supports all students in Nebraska schools. This commitment ignited the trend in Nebraska.

Funding

Funding and resources for MTSS in the state of Nebraska were also mentioned in the Phase II document. Resources that would be required to support the implementation included budget alignment of MTSS and PBiS and Special Education grants, as well as local funds.

In September of 2019, the Nebraska Department of Education provided guidance for funding for NeMTSS. The guidance provided an explanation of IDEA, Title, and discretionary grants to support finances. Additional funding sources could also include Nebraska Flex Funding project, State Personnel Development Grant, local/district/county, tribal, and medical funding for school-based mental health services, private foundations and donors, and early childhood grants.

Stakeholders in Nebraska

There are many individuals that have and will continue to support the implementation of MTSS in Nebraska. Simultaneously and in conjunction with the

SSIP timeline, stakeholders met to support the SSIP and the implementation of NeMTSS. The stakeholders group, as categorized by minutes from a NeMTSS frameworks meeting include:

- RDA Stakeholders: This group will be provided with the key information for implementation.
- MTSS Stakeholders: This group will provide feedback to the buildings.
- Builders' Team: This group will create MTSS systems.

Prior to the SSIP Phase II publication, the RDA Stakeholders met to support and discuss MTSS. The agenda for the October 15, 2015 RDA meeting reviewed the goal of narrowing the reading gap in third grade using MTSS as a strategy. The minutes offered a review of current MTSS systems, discussion and recommendations for scaling up MTSS, a discussion on a new way to calculate district determinations, and the plan for the future. The RDA Stakeholder group met again in October of 2016. The minutes included the implementation of a coherent improvement strategy, MTSS models, and recommendations for infrastructure, and evaluation of effectiveness.

Nearly concurrently, an integration meeting was held in September of 2016 with a small group of representatives from the state. This team began to review the integration of PBiS and RTI requirements from the SSIP and reviewed the foundational beliefs and core components of MTSS. The team met again in October of 2016 to review the MTSS foundational beliefs and core components. The group discussed a needs assessment and began reviewing frameworks from other states and brainstorming the development of the Nebraska Frameworks for MTSS. (Meeting Minutes)

A state RDA Stakeholder meeting was again held in March of 2017. The presentation slides of the meeting described the MTSS Workgroup goals for implementation. This group would work to develop the best MTSS framework for the state. The goal was to (a) develop a needs assessment to know exactly how to address LEAs needs, (b) identify anticipated challenges and offer possible solutions, taking into account both rural and urban school experiences, (c) develop a set of components that are considered to be MTSS Nebraska, (d) determine how NDE and ESUs will support the components, and (e) develop professional development around the components and discuss what currently is in place for support and how to expand supports (NDE, 2017, pp. 21-22). Additionally the 2017 meeting topics included: the identification of a monitoring implementation with fidelity checks, surveys, UNL evaluation of reading, stakeholder input, and documentation from training and coaching materials.

The next NDE Progress Report on the System of Support was presented in December of 2017. The priorities and goals for the 2017-2018 school year included:

- Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!
- Build, Study, and Implement MTSS Self-Assessment Tool
- Develop and Build Web-based Communication and Storage
- Inventory/Align Current Models and Trainings
- Complete crosswalk between AQuESTT and MTSS Essential Elements
- Design NeMTSS Coaching Model

During this meeting, the group discussed a MTSS brochure, newsletter, and website. The MTSS Builders' Team was identified and included individuals from NDE

Special Education, Curriculum, Continuous Improvement, and PBiS. School districts, ESUs, and consultants were also included. The NeMTSS Self-Assessment, which was in beta testing, was reviewed. Small groups also reviewed other states' MTSS sites including: Florida, Kansas, North Carolina, Colorado, Utah, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Michigan. There was also discussion on the crosswalk and review of AQuESTT and the MTSS Essential Elements.

Also during this meeting, the specifics of the why of MTSS were discussed. The reasons included: it is a new buzz word, support student outcomes, reduce language disorder verification, and to work to simplify life for highly burdened staff. (Nebraska Department of Education, 2017). MTSS was defined as a service delivery system based on the concept that some students require early and powerful general education interventions of increasing intensity as opposed to RTI.

NeMTSS Frameworks

The Nebraska MTSS framework document was first published in August of 2018 and the NeMTSS website launched in the fall of 2018. The individuals contributing to this publication included special-education directors, district administration, ESU leaders, UNL, and NDE leaders. According to the SSIP Part II document, NDE has contracted with UNL to support training and implementation of MTSS. To date, UNL has hired several staff members and a small team of graduate research assistants. These individuals work to support training, on-site coaching, and technical assistance. The UNL team also reviews interventions to identify strengths and weaknesses to ensure the use of evidence-

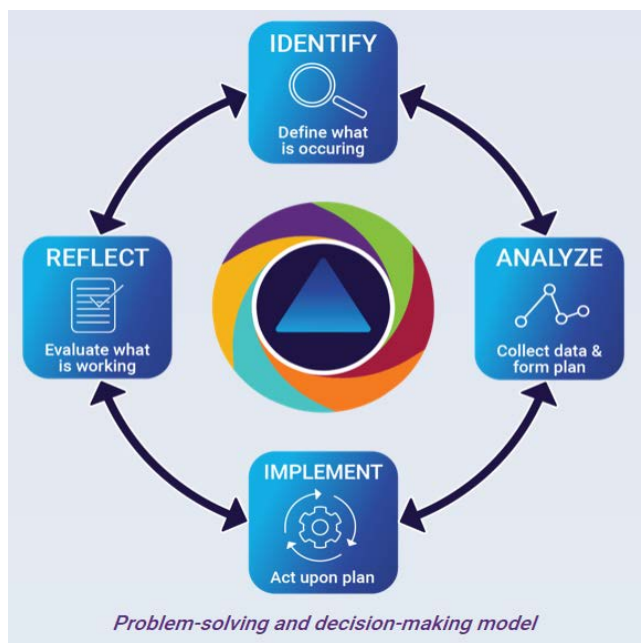
based materials. A summary of their review is officially on the NeMTSS website. It is designed to provide schools with information to help select evidence-based materials.

The NeMTSS framework team, also known as the “builders,” identified six essential elements for MTSS Nebraska. These include: (a) shared leadership; (b) communication, collaboration and partnership; (c) evidence-based practices; (d) building capacity/infrastructure for implementation; (e) layered continuum of support; and (f) database problem-solving and decision-making.

The NeMTSS model focuses on a strong problem solving and decision making framework. This is a continuous improvement model for all student levels that includes identifying, analyzing, implementing, and reflecting that (see Figure 6).

NeMTSS Newsletters

The MTSS builders group worked to provide common messaging across the state in the area of MTSS. To support the implementation, a framework tool was created, a website was launched, and a state conference was established. Quarterly newsletters were published to build capacity and support the understanding and implementation of MTSS. Much of the history and intentions behind MTSS in Nebraska can be understood by examining the content of the newsletters sent by NDE officials, beginning in 2017. The newsletters describe common language, purpose, and intent.



Source: Nebraska Department of Education (2018c)

Figure 6. NeMTSS framework for continuous improvement.

The first MTSS Nebraska newsletter rightfully established the purpose of MTSS in the state. According to this issue, published in December of 2017, the purpose of the MTSS newsletter is to inform educators and stakeholders about the process and development of the system. This first edition discussed the self-assessment beta testing, as well as indicating upcoming events, and the current priorities. This publication became the first widespread exposure outside of the initial stakeholders.

The second issue of the Nebraska MTSS newsletter was published in February of 2018. To help clarify the difference between MTSS and RTI, the newsletter described the difference of MTSS as focusing more on the core supports, early intervention and prevention, building capacity of teachers, and reviewing data. RTI is defined as practices

used to determine eligibility for special education. This edition argues that Nebraska has seen differing outcomes with the implementation of RTI in the state. The newsletter claims that

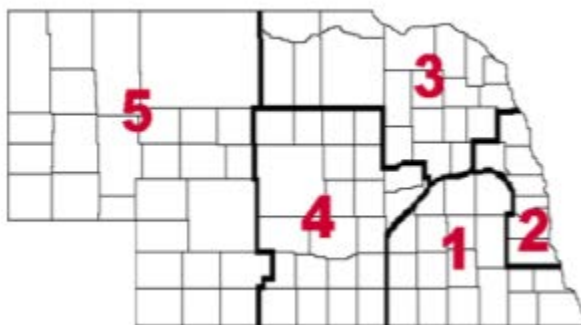
some schools show proven results for all students, including students with disabilities. Some schools saw improved results for general education students, but not for those with disabilities. Some schools saw decreased percentages of students identified for speech language disability, but not necessarily improvement in results for students with disability. (J. B., 2018a, p. 1)

For educators who were familiar with RTI, the distinction made in the newsletter was necessary for future transition to occur.

In retrospect, the additional newsletters are a documented timeline of the MTSS transition in Nebraska. The May 2018 edition focused on Special Education determination. The fourth newsletter, which was published in August of 2018, focused on discussing the NeMTSS framework document and how it was organized and divided into sections. The framework document was broken into two sections. The first is focused on all students and the second section focused on special-education and identifying students with a learning disability. In an effort to unify systems in the state, the MTSS builders and NDE officials created a crosswalk comparison between the state's AQuESTT expectations and the MTSS essential elements. The fifth issue of the NeMTSS newsletter was published in February of 2019. According to this issue, there were 175 districts that had participated in some level of training on MTSS through NDE.

The fall and winter 2019 newsletters introduced the state leadership team which included a NeMTSS Lead, UNL Co-lead, State Coordinator, Quality Assurance, NeMTSS Early Childhood Coordinator, and SSIP Coordinator. For the 2019-2020

school year, new state regional facilitators were hired to support the implementation process. The state has been divided into five regions as shown in Figure 7. The coordinators are challenged to support ESUs, schools, and districts with professional development and planning for NeMTSS. The NeMTSS winter newsletter was published in December of 2019. This edition announced plans for the third NeMTSS conference and discussed the topic of MTSS in secondary schools.



Source: J. B. (2020, January). *MTSS Nebraska Newsletter*, 7

Figure 7. NeMTSS Regional Coordinators.

Overview of Essential Elements of NeMTSS

The NeMTSS builders identified six essential elements that support the MTSS process. The focus is that all students deserve the opportunity for strong academic and behavioral core instruction and the potential for support through high-quality interventions. The essential elements were adapted from the Florida MTSS Implementation Components. The essential elements to implement and sustain the MTSS process include:

- Shared Leadership
- Communication, collaboration and partnerships
- Evidence-based practices curriculum, instruction, intervention and assessments,
- Building capacity and infrastructure for implementation
- Layered continuum of support
- Data based problem-solving and decision making.

Essential element: Shared leadership. The first essential element is shared leadership. These individuals could be identified as district, school, and classroom level teams. The focus of MTSS is to attempt to unify processes and create a collaboration between general and special education. “When a district has a system for shared leadership, these teams are highly effective, and communicate regularly with one another to ensure MTSS implementation occurs at all levels” (Barrett et al., 2018, p.7). This group must work together to create and establish a culture for collaboration and teamwork. The team must communicate and establish common goals and become comfortable with the decision making rules and problem solving.

Defining and establishing individual roles on the team can support the shared leadership process. The NeMTSS website has provided a resource and examples of potential roles for different team members. Teams vary from classroom, building, department, grade level, and district teams.

Essential element: Communication, collaboration and partnerships.

Communication, collaboration, and partnership represent the second element of MTSS.

Communication is essential for any successful organization. This element focuses on collaboration with all staff members, as well as parents and the community. The NeMTSS frameworks document references communication being clear and transparent for all partnerships and individuals involved.

To support the integration of NeMTSS, a system process must be in place for offering feedback, updating procedures, sharing information, brainstorming, and celebrating. The NeMTSS website stresses the importance of providing staff implementation data, communicating procedures and topics that need to be addressed, and developing a family engagement plan.

Essential elements: Evidence-based practices curriculum, instruction, intervention and assessments. The third essential element focuses on evidence-based practices which includes curriculum, instruction, interventions, and assessment. Also included is teaching practices and materials that are research based to improve student outcomes. The NeMTSS website states that “evidence-based practices increase the likelihood students will have positive outcomes. When schools do not consider the research supporting a practice, they are taking a chance that the time and resources put into the practice will be wasted on ineffective outcomes” (Nebraska Department of Education, 2018c).

Teams must have an understanding of the Nebraska content area standards. The state of Nebraska has adopted standards for core content areas including the subject areas and grade levels for reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies. The state also has development standards for fine arts, physical education, health education, world

language, and career and technical education. Establishing a consistent core curriculum and instructional materials that align with content standards is essential to a solid tier one implementation. To support the implementation, teams may consider reviewing materials being used for core instruction and intervention.

Also encompassed in this element is evidence-based interventions and assessments, as well as a focus on data driven decision making. This element supports an opportunity to adjust and offer modifications and interventions, to support individual students. Components of evidence-based assessments include universal screening process, diagnostic measures, progress monitoring measures and outcome measures.

Essential elements: Building capacity and infrastructure for implementation.

The fourth element supports leadership and professional development. Strong leadership is needed to support change and improve student achievement. Professional development and learning helps improve educators' effectiveness and impact student learning.

Establishing a strong standards-based professional development plan supports the sustainability of MTSS. Creating a systematic process for making decisions for teacher learning and growth through professional development, focused training on core instruction intervention, additional training for paraprofessionals, as well as special-education staff, are all considerations for implementation with MTSS.

Essential elements: Layered continuum of support. The layered continuum of support offers opportunities for all students to receive core instruction, as well as intervention if needed. This NeMTSS essential element focuses on academia, as well as social emotional support, offered school-wide. The NeMTSS website identifies 80-85%

of all students at the core level, which provides a strong foundation in all areas. Ten to fifteen percent (10-15%) of students are the targeted group for intervention. These students may need additional support and intervention to make academic progress.

Essential elements: Data based problem-solving and decision making. The final element of the NeMTSS model is data-based problem solving and decision making. This process is integrated into the MTSS frameworks by reviewing student information and data at the individual student level, classroom, building, and district levels. The frameworks document defines two types of data in the process: student data and implementation data. Student data is the information collected regarding academic, behavior, and social emotional data on the students in the class, building, or district. This data can be used to evaluate and improve student achievement and intervention. Implementation data focuses on information collected on what teachers or adults are doing and how the MTSS process is being carried out.

NeMTSS essential elements summary. Each of the elements is essential to a successful MTSS implementation. Leadership, communication, evidence-based decisions, building capacity, continual support, and data-based decisions are all components of a successful system.

Kearney, Nebraska

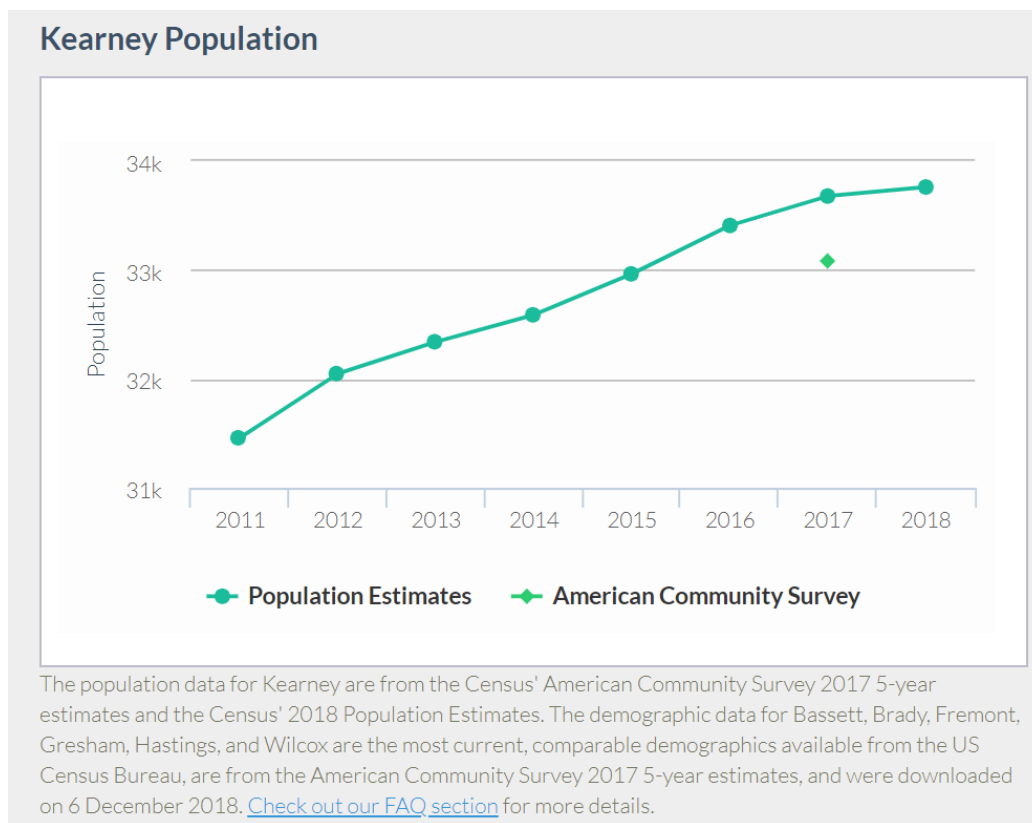
Kearney is located in south central Nebraska. An agricultural community, Kearney is the county seat for Buffalo County and is the hub supporting surrounding communities. According to the most recent US census, Kearney is the fifth largest city in Nebraska (see Figure 8).



Source: Kearney Visitors Bureau (2019)

Figure 8. Visual representation of Kearney, Nebraska.

With a population of over 30,000, the Kearney community has had steady population growth over the past few years. According to the Census' American Community Survey, the population increased from 30,787 in 2010 to 33,761 in 2018. Figures from the United States Census Bureau in 2018 indicated that 91.8% of residents identified as white and 8.8% other (US Census Bureau, 2018). The median income is \$48,433 (see Figure 9).



Source: Cubit (2020)

Figure 9. Population of Kearney, Nebraska, from the Census' American Community Survey.

Kearney is home of the University of Nebraska at Kearney, multiple cultural attractions, recreational amenities, two medical centers and multiple corporate headquarters. The Buckle Corporation, Cabela's, Baldwin Filters, Eatons and Expansion are a few of the larger companies and employers in the community. The Viaero Events center, which hosts regional conferences, trade shows, and other events, is home for the United States Hockey League team, the Tri-City Storm.

Located along the Platte River, Kearney draws visitors for outdoor activities, including the annual migration of hundreds of thousands of Sandhill Cranes. Kearney is accessible from Interstate 80 or the Lincoln Highway and is within driving distance to multiple larger communities.

Kearney Public Schools.

Demographics. Kearney Public Schools (KPS) serves the community of Kearney. Students attend classes in one preschool building, ten elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school, serving students from birth to age 21. According to the Nebraska Department of Education 2018-2019 report, enrollment was 5,905 with 40% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch (Nebraska Education Profile, 2018-2019). Students have the opportunity to participate in an after-school program at most elementary schools and one middle school. Programming also includes ELL (English Language Learners), reading support, special education, migrant education, and high ability opportunities.

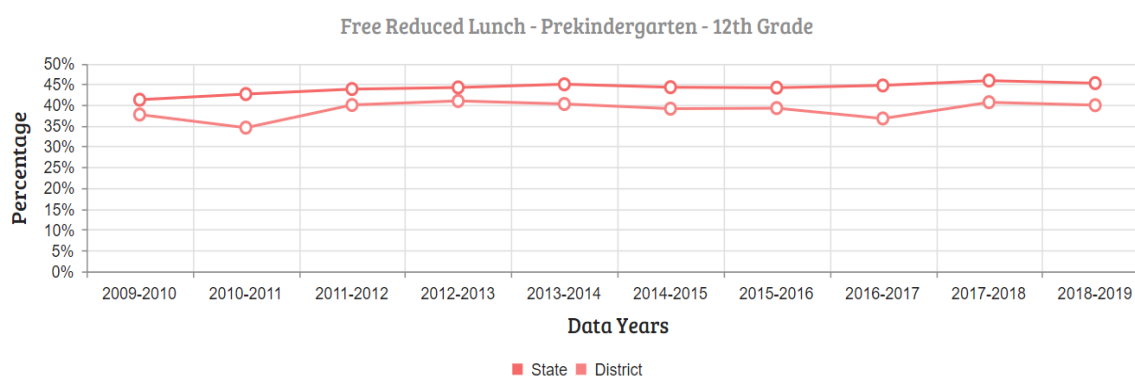
As the community population grows, schools are also seeing an increase in enrollment. From the 2016-2017 school year to the 2019-2020 school year, an additional 300 students enrolled. The 2009-2019 Nebraska Department of Education visualizes the increased population over the past 10 years (see Figure 10). In 2009, KPS enrollment included 5,199 students compared to 5,905 in 2019.



Source: Nebraska Department of Education (2018a).

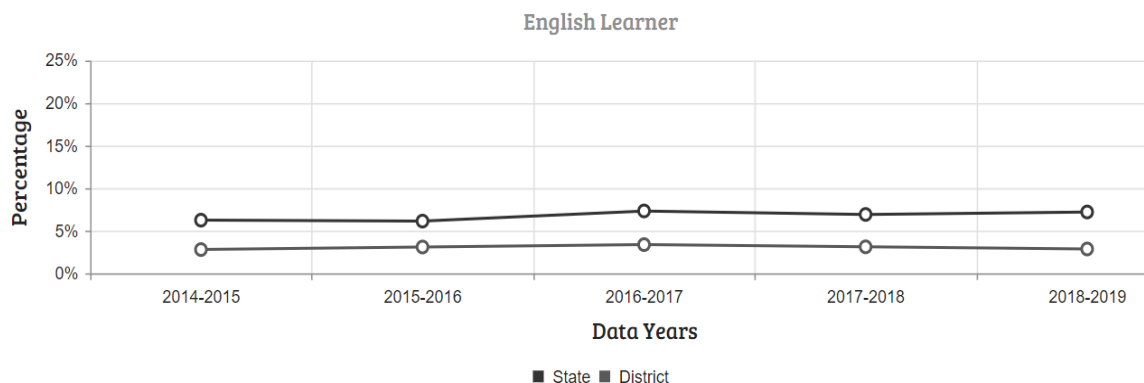
Figure 10. Student Membership of Kearney Public Schools from 2009-2019.

Free and reduced lunch percentages, on average in KPS, are below the state average. As indicated in Figure 11, the free and reduced lunch percentages for 2019 were 40%, compared to the state average of 45%. The English Language Learners (ELL) population is consistently below the state average. For the 2019 school year, ELL enrollment was 3%, compared to the state average of 7% (see Figure 12).



Source: Nebraska Department of Education (2018a).

Figure 11. Student free and reduced lunch percentages of Kearney Public Schools and the State of Nebraska from 2009-2019.

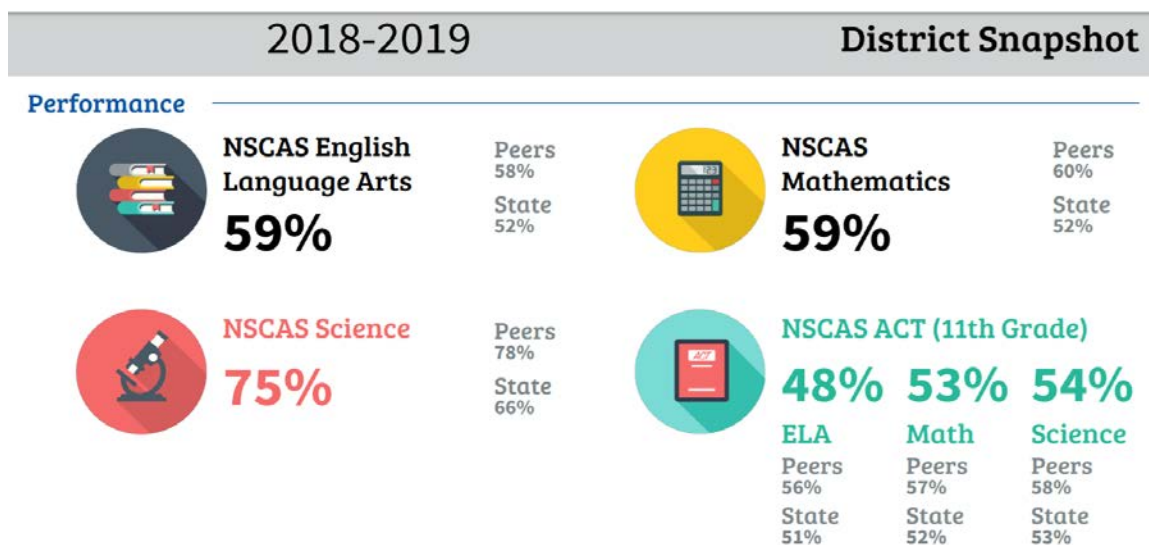


Source: Nebraska Department of Education (2018a).

Figure 12. English Language Learner percentages of Kearney Public Schools and the State of Nebraska from 2014-2019.

The NDE profile reported Kearney Public Schools employment of 363.52 certified staff. Of these, 59.89% of these teachers have Master's degrees. The average certified teacher has 14.98 years of experience.

KPS assessment. All grade 3-8 students are assessed using the Nebraska Student Centered Assessment System (NSCAS) in the areas of reading and mathematics. Students in 5th and 8th grade are assessed in science. All sophomores at Kearney High School are administered the Pre-ACT assessment. KPS has consistently, on average, tested slightly above the state and national averages on formative tests. During the 2018-2019 school year, Kearney scored above the state average on the NSCAS English language arts, math, and science (see Figure 13).



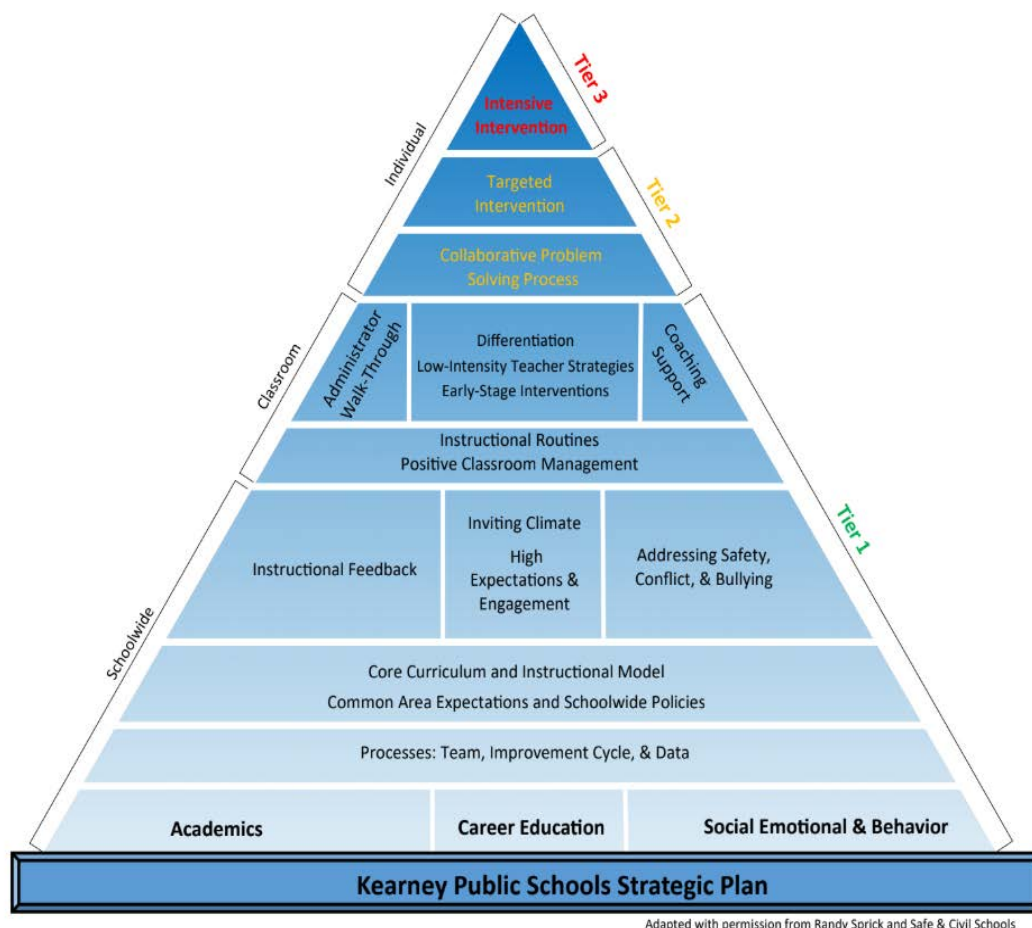
Source: Nebraska Department of Education (2018a).

Figure 13. Visual representation of Kearney Public Schools District Data Snapshot.

Additional assessments are utilized to monitor students' progress and support data driven decisions. The elementary and middle level students are benchmarked using the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) growth testing in grades 3-5. This is an adaptive test that allows teachers and parents to review student mathematics and reading progress. Another assessment utilized is the FastBridge Assessment platform for academic testing in grades K-2, with progress monitoring available in upper grades. This test is a curriculum based measurement that is also used to monitor and inform student progress.

Vision and mission. The KPS Vision and Mission statement was revised by the school board during the 2017-2018 school year to "Kearney Public Schools will provide a safe, supportive learning community that empowers students to become problem-solvers, engaged citizens, and compassionate people who own their future" (Kearney

Public Schools, 2017). The KPS Mission is to “Inspire & empower students to impact the world!” (Kearney Public Schools, 2017). The strategic plan in KPS concentrates on four major initiatives: guaranteed and viable curriculum, early education plans, career education, and social-emotional learning. The strategic plan was established independently from the MTSS process. However, the district leadership has implemented the strategic plan and philosophy into the expectations of the MTSS process at KPS. The board strategic plan is the foundation of the district decision making (see Figure 14).



Note: Modified from the ESU 10 pyramid and adapted with permission from Randy Sprick and Safe & Civil Schools (KPS Leadership MTSS Retreat, 2017).

Figure 14. Kearney Public Schools NEMTSS Pyramid.

Kearney Public Schools implementation of MTSS.

Teams. KPS began the implementation of the MTSS in 2016-2017. KPS is currently in the fifth year of the process. KPS partnered with the local Educational Service Unit (ESU) 10 to support the implementation and timeline for MTSS in 2016. KPS established a district executive team, which included the special education director, director of student services, and special education coordinator. The team expanded in

2017 to include the associate superintendent. As staffing changes occurred, the team transitioned members, but focused on inclusion of central office personnel.

Once the district team was established, collaboration and communication with a district leadership team was the next step in the implementation. The KPS district team was created and included special education staff, directors, school psychologists, principals, Title 1 reading teachers, counselors, and classroom teachers. This team began to meet to understand the components and elements of MTSS.

Next, building principals were asked to identify teacher leaders to serve on building level MTSS teams. Many buildings already had school improvement or PBIS teams established in buildings. The buildings transitioned to combine and unify teams and systems into the MTSS building team. While membership on these teams varies from building to building and level to level, on average, buildings have five to eight representatives each.

The district level team meets quarterly to review data and offer feedback to the MTSS executive team. The building level teams meet monthly during professional development and teacher planning days to discuss system processes, review building data, and school improvement.

Timeline. The KPS MTSS executive team worked with the ESU to create and establish an implementation timeline. The timeline follows the state school improvement cycle of five years. The executive MTSS team meets monthly to plan, review, and monitor processes. Figure 15 identifies the timeline following the years 2016-2021.

CIP 2016-2021	Year 1 2016-2017	Year 2 2017-2018	Year 3 2018-2019	Year 4 2019-2020	Year 5 2020-2021
Implementation Phase	Exploring, Adopting & Planning	Planning	Planning & Initially Implementing	Fully Implementing	Continuously Improving & Maintaining

Figure 15. KPS Implementation Planning from 2016-2021.

A detailed timeline of the plan for implementation can be located in Appendix B. The district team spent time reviewing the district vision, mission, core beliefs and goals. From there, the team focused on multiple data sources and analyzed student needs. Based on this data, KPS selected the growth targets of academic skills (math, reading, writing), social-emotional behavior, and career development.

The next area reviewed was curriculum and instruction to support the MTSS components of evidence-based practices curriculum, instruction, intervention and assessments. The district level team worked to establish and maintain a curriculum cycle that is aligned to the state standards. Teams worked with the building leaders to support and implement high quality materials to support all students learning in Tier 1. Tiered supports for reading and literacy, mathematics, and social-emotional are currently still in development. Instructional minutes for consistent delivery of instruction have been developed to support the implementation of curriculum. Teacher teams in subject areas have been developed to continue to review curriculum and align with standards.

The KPS implementation timeline identified assessment as a stand alone goal area. KPS developed an assessment calendar and timeline to support assessments. The district made changes in 2018-2019 for universal screeners. In 2019-2020 a screener for

social emotional behavior was introduced at the elementary level. Progress monitoring timelines and expectations have been developed. One of the challenges the district faced was not having an online data warehouse for information. The district technology department has worked to build reports and organize usable data for staff. At this time, KPS is still in the stages of providing training in data literacy and individual student problem solving teams.

Additionally, in the 2019-2020 school year, a MTSS website was created for the district to support and access information easier. Also in the 2019-2020 school year, the district determined the need to create a MTSS coordinator position. This position was implemented in the middle of the school year and the goals at this time are to support data and behavior support.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research process, and provided an overview of MTSS, the history of MTSS in the nation, other states, and in Nebraska. Kearney, Nebraska was described and specifically Kearney Public Schools. With the newness of MTSS and its growing interest in the state of Nebraska and the lack of research, this study will provide a foundation for future research. The purpose of this study is to research the initial implementation of MTSS in Kearney Public Schools. Studying the planning and implementation will help support district leaders, principals and teachers across the state to establish a successful system.

Chapter 3

Methods

Chapter 2 reviewed relevant literature related to the history and purpose of the MTSS system of support that formed the foundation of this dissertation. This chapter reviews the research question, research design, population, sample, participants, data collection instruments, variables, materials, and the data analysis procedures.

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to research the initial implementation of MTSS in Kearney Public Schools. The central question of this study is to what degree of implementation is MTSS in Kearney Public Schools.

- S1: What differences in implementation of MTSS exist relative to the different demographics (i.e. position, years of experience, gender, level, years in education, or education)?
- S2: What difference in implementation of MTSS exist relative to the six components of MTSS? (a) Shared Leadership, (b) Communication, collaboration and partnerships, (c) Evidence-based practices, curriculum, instruction, intervention and assessments, (d) Building capacity and infrastructure for implementation, (e) Layered continuum of support, and (f) Data based problem-solving and decision making.

Research Design

The study design used for this research is a cross sectional study design. The information was collected through a quantitative self-assessment survey on MTSS, with

additional qualitative questions embedded to allow participants to expand their answers.

Cross-sectional design is used to research one period of time in a specific population.

Unlike in case-control studies (participants selected based on the outcome status) or cohort studies (participants selected based on the exposure status), the participants in a cross-sectional study are just selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria set for the study. (Setia, 2016, p.1)

This study in particular will be used as a baseline study in Kearney Public Schools, allowing the researcher to review the current reality, outcomes, and exposures within the district and study the association between factors.

Data gathered for the research on the implementation of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports includes a quantitative survey. Quantitative research begins with an inquiry and a set of detailed questions that can be analyzed using statistical procedures. Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined quantitative research as an approach for testing objectives or theory by examining the relationship among the variables (p. 4). In quantitative research, the researcher seeks to identify causes and seek facts about the variables and any similarities or differences. In addition, three qualitative, open-ended questions have been added to allow participants to expand their responses.

For the purpose of this study, the different elements in the survey were reviewed. The survey data represented a self-assessment of the level of implementation of the MTSS components by participants' level, position within the district, years in education, and years of experience, gender, and level of education. The survey sought to reveal whether there are differences in implementation from teachers and principals within KPS. The hypothesis of this study is that there is a significant difference in implementation of MTSS at various demographic areas within KPS. The null hypothesis is that there is no

significant difference in means between demographics. The alternative hypothesis is that there is at least one demographic that is significantly different in the implementation based on the self-assessment.

To determine the participants' implementation, the survey compared the variables of position, level, gender, years of experience, years in Kearney Public Schools, and level of education. Reviewing the demographics allowed for an evaluation to gauge effectiveness of the process and give direction as MTSS expands. The goal of this study is to inform decision makers about the strengths and weaknesses of MTSS and plan for the future, while documenting historical implementation.

The use of the survey allowed for a convenient, yet accurate sample to gather and review specific questions on MTSS implementation. These targeted questions can then be analyzed, reviewed, and support future decisions. Individuals had the opportunity to be candid and open with their responses to the questions. Surveys are flexible, allowing participants to answer and reflect on their answers at a time that best works for their personal schedule.

Self-Assessment Survey

This research surveyed and gathered quantitative data on participants' perception of implementation of the MTSS implementation efforts. The survey used for this research was the recently designed and published self-assessment, located on the NDE NeMTSS website. The website states that this is a tool that is intended for use by school districts as a self-assessment of both the academics and behavioral core components of MTSS to identify areas of strength and areas that may need further analysis and planning

for improvement.

The survey was adapted from the Florida self-assessment with questions pertinent to Nebraska. The data and survey was confirmed as a reliable tool and validated through a beta project. The beta testing was initiated by the NDE and was administered to 32 districts within 4 Educational Service Unit areas. Two formats were used for completion, Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and GoogleDocs spreadsheet, during a one-day workshop. Following the self-assessment survey, a feedback form was given to each of the participants to evaluate the MTSS organization. The survey was reviewed for ease-of-use, clarity, and usefulness, along with providing a section for comments at the end. For the purpose of this study, the survey will be administered to the target group of respondents in the KPS school district.

The survey questions are divided into the six components of NeMTSS, creating subcategories of the following:

- Shared Leadership
- Communication, collaboration and partnerships
- Evidence-based practices curriculum, instruction, intervention and assessments,
- Building capacity and infrastructure for implementation
- Layered continuum of support
- Data based problem-solving and decision making.

There are a total of 36 questions. The beginning of the survey focused on demographic questions including:

- Position
- Level
- Gender
- Years of experience in education
- Years of experience in KPS
- Level of Education
- Current School Placement

The 25 questions of the NDE MTSS self-assessment follow, with the number of questions focused on each component varying from three to six questions. These questions can be reviewed in Figure 16. Respondents were asked to respond to each item on a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating a lack of MTSS implementation and the 4 a stronger understanding of the degree of implementation. The survey was scaled and allow participants to measure the MTSS implementation efforts in their individual settings. The rating of 1 to 4 will be categorized as 1 = no implementation, 2 = low level of implementation, 3 = moderate level of implementation, and 4 = high level of implementation.

1	2	3	4
no implementation	low level of implementation	moderate level of implementation	high level of implementation.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communication, Collaboration ● Evidence Based Practices ● Data Based Problem Solving ● Building Capacity <i>KPS Implementation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shared Leadership ● Layered Continuum of Support 	

Figure 16. Levels of implementation.

The survey items are categorized in Table 1. The topic of each question is listed in the table and divided into the six components.

Table 1

Survey Questions for NeMTSS Perceptual Survey

Item Number	Item
1	There is a representative MTSS leadership team
2	Staff have consensus and engage in MTSS Implementation
3	Resources available to support MTSS implementation are identified and allocated
4	A plan for MTSS implementation is developed and aligned with the school improvement plan
5	Staff are provided data on implementation fidelity in addition to aggregated student level data to ensure improved student learning
6	Staff are provided with information on MTSS procedures and a process for communicating implementation issues with the MTSS team for problem solving
7	Families engagement with MTSS is planned and feedback on engagement is used for continuous improvement
8	Evidence-based programs and practices are implemented with fidelity.
9	Most teachers are consistently implementing effective instructional practices (as outlined in district instructional model) to teach critical content
10	School schedules aligned to support multiple levels of intervention are consistently implemented
11	There is a systematic screening process and staff engage in ongoing professional learning for administration of assessments and use of data within the screening process
12	Student progress specific to academic, behavior and social-emotional goals specified in intervention plans are monitored
13	Professional development and coaching are provided for all staff members on data-based problem solving relative to their job roles/ responsibilities
14	Coaching is used to support MTSS implementation (systems level coaching)
15	Fidelity data are collected and used to inform decision making (e.g., identifying additional professional learning needs for staff; determining effectiveness of interventions)
16	Core academic practices exist that clearly identify learning standards, school-wide expectations for instruction that engages students, and school-wide assessments
17	Core behavior and social-emotional practices exist that clearly identify school-wide expectations, social-emotional skills instruction, classroom management practices, and school-wide behavior and social-emotional data

Table 1 continues

Item Number	Item
18	Supplemental academic intervention practices exist that include strategies addressing integrated common student needs, are linked to core instruction, and are monitored using assessments/data sources tied directly to the academic, behavior and social-emotional skills taught
19	Supplemental behavior and social-emotional intervention practices exist that address integrated common student needs, are linked to core instruction, and are monitored using assessments/data sources tied directly to the skills taught
20	Support teams use a systematic problem-solving process to plan interventions for students
21	Interventions are intensified, as appropriate for select students, using evidence-based programs, practices, or strategies
22	Integrated data-based problem solving for student academic, behavior and social-emotional outcomes occurs across content areas, grade levels, and continuum.
23	MTSS Leadership Team uses student data and implementation data to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction
24	There are pre-established guidelines for decision making for identifying students to receive intervention support
25	There are pre-established decision guidelines for evaluating effectiveness of interventions for individual students

The last three questions offered open ended responses for participants to personalize and summarize any additional information about the implementation of MTSS.

- What could be done to better facilitate the implementation of the MTSS model?
- What strengths of the MTSS implementation specifically impact you?
- What weaknesses of the MTSS implementation specifically impact you?

In this research study, participants were asked to share basic demographics in the survey including their professional role as teacher or principal and their working level in education, such as preschool, elementary, middle school, or high school. Gender, years

of experience in education, years in Kearney Public Schools, and level of education information was also collected.

Population, Sample and Participants

An email solicitation was sent to the approximate 360 certified KPS teachers and the 20 building principals, with informed consent and information about the survey and asking for voluntary participation. The email explained the research project, consent to participate (Appendix D), and the direct link to the survey. When the survey began, participants were prompted again to review their understanding that this is a voluntary survey and by selecting “I Agree,” they are giving consent to participate. By completing and submitting the survey responses, participants gave consent to participate in this research.

The survey website used to collect data will be Qualtrics. Participation in this study require approximately 10-15 minutes. In order to complete the survey, participants must be 19 years of age or older and be a teacher or principal in Kearney Public Schools. The survey consists of 25 questions on the implementation of MTSS with a scale of 1 to 4. The level of risk for the participants is minimal, as no names will be collected through the survey process. The only identifier was basic demographic information. The initial email for participation was sent on July 19, 2020. A follow-up email was sent two weeks following the initial. There was no compensation for participation and no cost to participate in this study.

The data from Qualtrics was accessible only with my username and password. The saved information is on my computer and I am the only one with the password to

gain access. Printed data is kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office in Kearney, Nebraska for a maximal period of three years. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the research proposal on July 24, 2019.

Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis for this study was a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). This test allowed for the review of differences in two or more variables. The MANOVA study is an Analysis of Variance Analysis (ANOVA) with several dependent variables. Similar to an ANOVA analysis, a MANOVA allows for the differences to be studied between two or more groups.

The MANOVA analysis is appropriate when the analysis includes (a) a single nominal or ordinal predictor variable that defines groups, and (b) multiple numeric continuous response variables (Lehman, O'Rourke, Hatcher, & Stepanski, 2013). The benefit of the MANOVA test is that it allowed for the study and review of the difference in means between multiple variables.

Additional benefits of using a MANOVA versus other statistical measures includes the ability to measure several dependent variables in a single experiment, as well as the likelihood of discovering which factor is truly important, and protection from possible errors that might occur if multiple independent ANOVA were conducted (French, Macedo, Poulsen, Waterson, & Yu, 2008). Utilizing the MANOVA analysis will also allow for more differences and discoveries than in a simple ANOVA. In this study, the independent variables are the position (teacher or principal), level, gender, years in education, years in Kearney Public Schools, and level of education. The dependent

variables are the six components (a) shared leadership; (b) communication, collaboration and partnership; (c) evidence-based practices; (d) building capacity/infrastructure for implementation; (e) data based problem solving.

The qualitative survey questions embedded within the MTSS survey were analyzed with the researcher Creswell's five step process: (a) organize and prepare the data for analysis, (b) read or look at all the data, (c) start coding all the data, (d) generate a description and themes, and (e) representing the description and themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 193-195). The data will be hand coded and grouped into themes that represent the potential themes. Following the review of data a general summary and description of data will be provided as summary.

Assumptions

The assumptions of this study included that participants, when answering the quantitative NeMTSS self-assessment, answered all the questions in the survey honestly based on their understanding of MTSS. It is also assumed that teachers and principals responding to the NeMTSS questions provided honest answers based on their personal experience and background knowledge.

Summary

In summary, the analysis of the implementation of MTSS in KPS was examined through the use of the NDE MTSS self-assessment. The survey information was collected and the mean, median, mode and standard deviation calculated. A summary score of each element, as well as each item on the survey instrument will be obtained. The demographic information was reviewed. This information will help review the

understanding of MTSS by individuals in KPS and support future decision making in the district. It will also allow for other districts to review the implementation information and determine their steps if implementing MTSS.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the implementation of the MTSS model in Kearney Public Schools. This cross sectional study investigated MTSS implementation through a self-assessment survey of school principals and teachers. The central question of this study examined the degree to which MTSS has been implemented in Kearney Public Schools. This study also investigated different degrees of implementation by participant demographics (i.e. position, years of experience, level) and implementation between the components of MTSS.

Information was collected with Qualtrics and exported to SPSS. The analysis was completed in stages. Following the data preparation, MANOVA was used to analyze the MTSS implementation and participant demographics were analyzed descriptively.

Participants

The survey was sent to approximately 360 certified teachers and 20 building principals in the KPS district. The initial invitation was sent via email on July 19, 2020 and included the study description and informed consent. A second email was sent on August 2, with a final reminder on August 10, 2020. A total of 47 individuals completed the survey (12% response rate). The survey was sent prior to the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, however teachers and principals were still working to manage and cope with the Covid-19 global pandemic situation. Given the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, educators were inundated with planning and preparation priorities well after the KPS closure in March of 2020. This disruption likely explains the low response rate,

with survey participants including 38 teachers (11% response rate) and 9 principals (45% response rate). See table 2 for sample demographics.

Table 2

Sample Demographics

Demographic	N	Percent
Position		
1 Teacher	38	81%
2 Principal	9	19%
Level		
1 Preschool	1	2%
2 Elementary	28	60%
3 Middle School	7	15%
4 High School	11	23%
Gender		
1 Female	37	79%
2 Male	9	19%
3 Prefer not to answer	1	2%
Years of experience in education		
1 0-5 years	3	6%
2 5-10 years	12	26%
3 10-20 years	13	28%
4 Over 20 years	19	40%
Years of experience in Kearney Public Schools		
1 0-5 years	10	21%
2 5-10 years	16	34%
3 10-20 years	12	26%
4 Over 20 years	9	19%
Level of Education		
1 Bachelors	3	6%

2 Bachelors + additional courses/hours	2	4%
3 Masters	10	21%
4 Masters + additional courses/hours	31	66%
5 Other	1	2%

Given the small n in several of the categories, some demographic categories were combined for analysis purposes. The preschool and elementary (PK-5) and middle and high schools (6-12) were merged. Gender variables remained the same for the analysis. There were four times as many females as males that participated in the survey. Years of experience in education was reduced from four categories to three, merging 0-5 years with 5-10 years due to only three participants in the 0-5 category. Years in Kearney Public Schools was reduced from four to three categories as well, to mirror the years of experience. Education level of respondents was combined from four options to two for a review of Bachelors through Masters and Masters plus. The demographic details can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Information of the Participants Sample Combined

Demographic	N	Percent
Position		
1 Teacher	38	81%
2 Principal	9	19%
Level		
1 PK-5	29	62%
2 6-12	18	38%
Gender		
Female	37	79%

Male	9	19%
Prefer not to answer	1	2%
Years of experience in education		
1 0-10 years	15	32%
2 10-20 years	13	28%
3 Over 20 years	19	40%
Years of experience in Kearney Public Schools		
1 0-10 years	26	55%
2 10-20 years	12	26%
3 Over 20 years	9	19%
Level of Education		
1 Bachelors through Masters	15	32%
2 Masters + additional hours	32	68%

Demographic Results

Descriptive information and an analysis of the variance summary tables are listed for each of the demographic areas listed in table 4.

Table 4

Descriptive Information of the Participants Sample

		95% Confidence Interval for Mean							
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Min	Max
Position	1 Teacher	38	2.87	0.68	0.11	2.64	3.09	1.52	4.00
	2 Principal	9	3.02	0.54	0.18	2.60	3.43	2.16	3.80
Level	1 PK-5	29	3.06	0.63	0.12	2.82	3.30	1.52	3.80
	2 6-12	18	2.64	0.62	0.15	2.33	2.94	1.60	4.00
Gender	1 Female	37	2.92	0.67	0.11	2.70	3.15	1.52	4.00
	2 Male	9	2.90	0.56	0.19	2.47	3.33	2.16	3.76

	3 Prefer not	1	1.96					1.96	1.96
Years in Ed	1 0-10 years	15	2.90	0.70	0.18	2.51	3.29	1.52	3.76
	2 10-20 years	13	2.88	0.66	0.18	2.48	3.28	1.60	3.80
	3 Over 20 years	19	2.91	0.65	0.15	2.59	3.22	1.88	4.00
Years in KPS	1 0-10 years	26	2.95	0.69	0.13	2.67	3.22	1.52	3.80
	2 10-20 years	12	2.94	0.55	0.16	2.59	3.29	2.12	4.00
	3 Over 20 years	9	2.70	0.72	0.24	2.14	3.25	1.88	3.76
Level of Ed	1 Bachelors through Masters	15	2.96	0.59	0.15	2.63	3.29	1.76	3.76
	2 Masters + additional courses/hours and above	32	2.87	0.69	0.12	2.62	3.12	1.52	4.00

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated to compare the participants' position and overall implementation of MTSS. Participants were classified into two groups: teacher ($n = 38$) and principal ($n = 9$). Overall implementation mean scores were lower for teachers ($M = 2.87$, $SD = .68$) than principals ($M = 3.02$, $SD = .54$), but the differences between these two groups was not statistically significant, $F(1, 45) = 0.374$, $p = .54$. Overall, these results suggest that the position of teacher or principal does not have a significant difference on the self-assessment in implementation of MTSS.

The next demographic area reviewed was the participants' level. Participants were classified into two groups: PK-5 ($n = 29$) and 6-12 ($n = 18$). The overall implementation mean score 6-12 grade educators was significantly lower than ($M = 2.64$, $SD 0.62$) to PK-5 educator scores ($M = 3.04$, $SD = .0.63$), the differences between these two groups was statistically significant, $F(1, 45) = 4.978$, $p = .031$. Overall, these results

suggest a significant disparity between elementary and secondary education self-assessment.

In the demographic of gender, participants were classified into three groups: Female ($n = 37$), Male ($n = 9$), and Prefer not to answer ($n = 1$). The overall implementation increased from Male ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .56$) to Female ($M = 2.92$, $SD = .067$), Prefer not to answer ($n = 1.96$). The differences between these two groups was not statistically significant, $F(2, 44) = 1.056$, $p = .357$.

Participants' years of experience were classified into three groups: 0-10 years ($n = 15$), 10-20 years ($n = 13$), and over 20 years ($n = 19$). The overall implementation increased from 10-20 years ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.66$), 0-10 years ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.70$), and over 20 years ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.65$), but the differences between these three groups was not statistically significant, $F(2, 44) = .104$, $p = .996$. These results suggest that years of experience did not impact the implementation of MTSS.

In the demographic of years in Kearney Public Schools, participants were classified into three groups: 0-10 years ($n = 26$), 10-20 years ($n = 12$), and over 20 years ($n = 9$). The overall implementation increased from over 20 years ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.65$), 10-20 years ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.55$), and 0-10 years ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.69$), but the differences between these three groups was not statistically significant, $F(2, 44) = 1.506$, $p = .607$. These results suggest that years employed with Kearney Public Schools did not impact the implementation of MTSS.

Participants were grouped by level of completed education: bachelors through masters ($n = 15$) and masters plus additional coursework and hours ($n = 32$). The

overall implementation increased from masters plus ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.69$) to bachelors through masters ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.59$). The differences between these two groups was not statistically significant, $F(1, 45) = .509$, $p = .479$. These results suggest that level of education did not impact the implementation of MTSS.

In summary, a significant differences overall MTSS implementation scores were found between elementary and secondary respondents, with elementary participants reporting higher levels of implementation. No significant differences were found between other demographics.

Component Results

After the demographic analysis, each MTSS component was reviewed to determine if a difference existed relative to the following six pillars: (a) Shared Leadership, (b) Communication, collaboration and partnerships, (c) Evidence-based practices curriculum, instruction, intervention and assessments, (d) Building capacity and infrastructure for implementation, (e) Layered continuum of support, and (f) Data based problem-solving and decision making. The mean implementation score across all participants for Building Capacity was 2.55 ($SD = 0.80$), of Data Based Problem Solving and decision Making was 2.71, ($SD = 0.89$), Communication, Collaboration, and Partnerships ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.75$), Evidence Based ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.73$), Layered Continuum ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.66$), to Shared leadership ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.72$).

Table 5*Descriptive Information of MTSS Components*

Components of MTSS	Mean	Std. Deviation
Shared Leadership	3.1	0.72
Communication, Collaboration	2.74	0.75
Evidence Based Practices	2.98	0.73
Building Capacity	2.55	0.8
Layered Continuum of Support	3.07	0.66
Data Based Problem Solving	2.71	0.75

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance was applied to determine if the demographics (position, level, gender, years of experience, years in Kearney Public Schools, or level of education) effected the implementation of the MTSS components: (1) Shared Leadership, (2) Communication, Collaboration, and Partnerships, (3) Evidence Based Instruction, (4) Building Capacity, (5) Layered Continuum of Support, and (6) Data Based Problem Solving and Decision Making. The equality of covariance assumption was met using Box's M. Reference table 6 for the equality of covariance between the demographics. The assumption of normality of the data was violated in a few instances. However, MANOVA is known to be robust for violations of normality (Finch & French, 2013). The position variable normality was violated twice with shared leadership and communication. In the level variable, three violations occurred with PK-5 shared leadership, evidence based, and layered. Gender was violated twice with female and shared leadership, communication, and collaboration. Years of experience two violations with 0-10 years in shared leadership and over 20 years in databased decision making occurred. The component years in KPS 0-10 was violated once in shared

leadership. Level of education violations included shared leadership for ba+ma and communication for ma+.

Table 6

Equality of Covariance

	Box's M	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Position	28.256	0.938	21	768.689	0.541
Level	19.062	0.763	21	4839.189	0.768
Years in Ed	49.942	0.935	42	4520.225	0.590
Years in KPS	45.351	0.789	42	2001.909	0.832
Level of Ed	31.556	1.231	21	2964.384	0.214

A one-way MANOVA revealed no significant multivariate in any of the components by demographic, reference table 7.

Table 7

Multivariate Tests

	Wilks' Lambda	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Position	0.795	1.675 ^b	6.000	39.000	0.153	0.205
Level	0.808	1.547 ^b	6.000	39.000	0.189	0.192
Years in Ed	0.717	1.145 ^b	12.000	76.000	0.338	0.153
Years in KPS	0.620	1.709 ^b	12.000	76.000	0.081	0.212
Level of Ed	0.871	.966 ^b	6.000	39.000	0.461	0.129

Rating

The survey questions were then rated on a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating a lack of MTSS implementation and the 4 a stronger understanding of the degree of implementation. The rating of 1 to 4 categorized as 1=no implementation, 2= low level

of implementation, 3=moderate level of implementation, and 4=high level of implementation. The overall mean from the study of implementation for Kearney Public schools was 2.90. Indicating a low level of implementation across the district after four years.

1	2	3	4
no implementation	low level of implementation	moderate level of implementation	high level of implementation.

Figure 16: Levels of Implementation

In reviewing the different demographics and implementation of MTSS, the only significant difference in implementation was in the participants' level. There was a moderate level of implementation in the preschool and elementary schools (mean 3.0579) compared to the middle and high school level (mean 2.6378). The difference between principal and teacher level, gender, years in education, or years in KPS was not significant.

In reviewing the different components of MTSS, two of the six components are categorized as a moderate level of implementation: Shared Leadership (3.0957) and Layered Continuum (3.0709). This indicates that these areas are strengths in the district's implementation of MTSS. The other four components averaged a low level of implementation: Communication, Collaboration, and Partnerships (2.74), Evidence Based (2.98), Building Capacity (2.55), and Data Based (2.71). After four years of implementation, no component indicated a score of 1 = no implementation.

Qualitative Questions

The qualitative questions from the self-assessment survey included (1) What could be done to better facilitate the implementation of the MTSS model? (2) What strengths of the MTSS implementation specifically impact you? (3) What weaknesses of the MTSS implementation specifically impact you?

To analyze the qualitative survey questions embedded within the MTSS survey, Creswell's five step process was utilized. The steps include organization, reading and reviewing data, start coding, generating themes, and representing the themes (Creswell, 2018). The data was hand coded and grouped into categories that represented the potential themes. To capture the enormity of MTSS, one participant stated:

It's such a large concept and one more thing to consider in the overwhelming profession that teaching has become. It is important to prioritize MTSS, but there are some classes where I have very limited need for interventions, thankfully. Sometimes the interventions are not top of mind when I need them the next time. The addition of the KPS MTSS School Improvement website has been helpful because I can refer to that when I'm in need of assistance. The resources there help me realize that many times I am providing interventions already by addressing my individual student needs.

Qualitative Strengths

Survey results identified a number of strengths of the MTSS implementation. First and foremost, results revealed that a key strength of MTSS implementation included practical intervention strategies and the increased use of data and resources. One teacher noted that "having specific guidelines for supporting students at all levels allows me as an early career teacher to support my students effectively. I know what is expected for each student and I have data to inform me." Of the 28 written responses, six individuals referenced intervention and four participants noted data as a strength. "Through the implementation of MTSS, hopefully we are able to better screen and identify students who

may need more intensive interventions (Tier 2 & Tier 3), and as a classroom teacher, having more information about those students would be extremely helpful.” Overall, the participants appeared to have a positive perception of the supports and interventions for students within the MTSS implementation.

The MTSS pyramid supports an intentional focus on both students’ academic and social emotional needs. Specifically in the area of intervention a participant stated, “Many times I used various strategies for differentiation purposes, but I'm not sure what level they fit. MTSS implementation provides a list of approaches for me to try within a level if one is not working.” KPS has worked to identify and target interventions for academic, social emotional, and behavior supports with the tiered approach to support students’ levels of need.

Another teacher articulated the strength of the MTSS pyramid and interventions included having a clear path to take advantage of the services and identify who to talk to give the students the resources they need to succeed. Additional comments included having a specific time for intervention, intentional focus on what all students need to be successful, and a focused effort on consistent curriculum.

Data informed guided decision making was also mentioned by several participants. In the MTSS framework, the use of data happens at all levels, from the system and district level, to the building, classroom, and individual student. Teams use data to strategize and problem solve to support decisions. A participant shared, “I particularly like the district's work towards identifying a path to acquiring resources as well as implementing a process that weighs student needs and assigns resources accordingly.” The districts intentional focus on using data to make decisions was also articulated by a participant stating, “The use of data to provide resources and personnel to

our building will improve our ability to serve students' needs.” Continuing to use data to inform decision on resources and personnel supports the MTSS model. Using data at all levels supports the implementation of MTSS. The use of data in the classroom was also noted by a participant stating, “I like using the data we have to put plans in place to effectively reach our students right where they're at and find ways to progress them forward.” Research and data allows for teams to identify areas of need, allocate resources, and plan for supports at all levels.

The use of social emotional data, as well as academic data to support decisions was acknowledged as a strength in the commentary. KPS added a social emotional screener for K-5 starting in the 2019-2020 school year. Using social emotional and academic data together allow the district to determine and create appropriate supports for students, including counseling referrals, social worker interventions, or other strategies available in the district.

Other comments identified as strengths include the district becoming more organized in their processes and the efforts to support a consistent support for curriculum. “The systematic approach to improving student learning district wide. I think it is important that all students have access to the same curriculum regardless of the building they are attending. I think with a district our size that systems thinking is the only way we will be successful.” Continuing to use the framework of MTSS to support all students in KPS will continue to allow for a consistent efforts to support all students’ academic and social emotional success.

Qualitative Weaknesses

Areas of weakness that specifically impacted participants included training and communication. Several participants mentioned the time it takes for training and the size of the district impacting communication. For example, one respondent indicated, it can be hard to ensure understanding of MTSS among all staff members due to limitations on the time available to share the information. Participants mentioned the need for improved communication from the building and district MTSS teams. A respondent remarked, “many staff members do not understand the direction the MTSS Team is going and what is the timeline of getting students in the appropriate programs. Better communication of what programs are in which tiers.” Communication as a key component of MTSS is an area of deficit as noted by participants.

Another area that emerged as an area of concern was training and professional development. One participant noted, “our team members have changed and we will need to bring on board new team members with the understanding that they don't have the training or history of the model in their background.” The lack of clarity and defining MTSS was mentioned in conjunction with training on the model.

Qualitative Areas for Growth

The query regarding what could be done better to facilitate the model mirrored participant concerns. Numerous comments were directed toward insufficient communication. One participant mentioned the need to “continue to communicate MTSS model to all staff. Many times it is cited as a reason why. With staff turnover, I don't know if all realize we have it, what it means, and how we should use it.” Another participant acknowledged that MTSS is in its infancy within the district. “It is in its

beginning stages. Needs to be communicated about and further developed. MTSS teams rarely communicate with teachers. Few people know what is being done to really help students.” The necessity for improved communication across the district was apparent in the survey results. One participant complimented KPS, while offering a suggestion for facilitation:

MTSS is such an enormous system to put in place across the district, and each level (elementary, middle, high) is incredibly different from one another, which makes the implementation of MTSS even more difficult. I think that our district has done a good job with the leadership teams from each school, but we need to do a better job of disseminating information to our schools as well as doing more work on the back end to evaluate how we are doing as a school.

A few respondents indicated, at the time of the survey, they were content with the implementation and the current process was functioning. A respondent summarized, “KPS is on the right track. Things are becoming more aligned and a focus on being proactive rather than reactive is a welcomed.” Overall, the responses identified multiple strengths of the current MTSS implementation in KPS, including interventions and the increased use of data and resources, as well as areas for continued growth.

Summary

This chapter provided a summary of the analysis of the data collected for the study of MTSS implementation in Kearney Public Schools. Background and descriptive statistics of participants was reviewed. The survey was sent to all KPS teachers and principals. Participation was lower than anticipated. However, the current COVID19 pandemic may have affected the participation rate. The survey used for this study was

the NeMTSS self-assessment survey with three additional open ended questions. The survey reviewed the implementation of MTSS and if it was affected by the participant's demographics.

Overall, the qualitative results suggest that there is a significant MTSS implementation difference based on the respondent's level. Participants at the preschool and elementary level indicated a higher level of implementation of MTSS compared to the middle and high school level. All other demographic levels have no significant difference with MTSS implementation. The qualitative data suggested the strengths of MTSS implementation include availability of various interventions and data guided/informed/driven decision making. Areas of deficiency identified in the query are communication and professional training. Chapter 5 will provide a summary of implications for school leadership practice, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the implementation of the MTSS in Kearney Public Schools. The previous chapters reviewed the background for the study, literature review, methodology, and results from the analysis. This study investigated differences in overall MTSS implementation by participant demographic variables and differences in implementation of individual MTSS components. This chapter provides a summary of the study results and implications/recommendations for educational systems at multiple levels. The chapter also describes the limitations and context of the study, in addition to recommendations for future research.

Theoretical Framework Discussion

The study findings support the implementation strategies of the theoretical framework for this research. The theoretical framework for this study focused on implementation and loose coupling theory. To support a systematic change in an organization, the implementation theory framework encompasses the importance of drivers, stages, teams, and cycles (Blase, et al., 2015). This study focused on whether there is a difference in understanding of MTSS relative to different demographics in the KPS district. The information gathered from this study will support and guide the MTSS process as it evolves, and the data will support a continuous cycle of improvement for MTSS implementation.

In addition to implementation theory, loose coupling theory was reviewed during this investigation. Loose coupling theory focuses on the different parts of an organization

and how these are related and “coupled” to each other (UKEssays, 2018). This theory has been used by other educational studies to understand the different components in education and how they are connected. The MTSS model offers a loose coupling of multiple departments and components, all focused on supporting students. The implementation of MTSS supports a consistent model to intentionally connect students, teachers, principals, and leaders within all departments in a tiered approach. In this study, the teachers and principals offered feedback on the MTSS model and the implementation of the components.

The essential components of the MTSS are coupled together within the model to support implementation. This study reviewed the six components and their level of implementation as indicated by the participants: (a) Shared Leadership, (b) Communication, collaboration and partnerships, (c) Evidence-based practices curriculum, instruction, intervention and assessments, (d) Building capacity and infrastructure for implementation, (e) Layered continuum of support, and (f) Data based problem-solving and decision making. According to Weick (1976), if all of the elements in the system are loosely coupled to one another, then any component can be modified without impacting the whole system. Each of the components studied and the data gathered from each of the participants support improvements or changes in one or all of the MTSS components, without impacting the entire system.

KPS Demographics Implications

The central question of this study was to what degree is MTSS implemented in Kearney Public Schools. The survey indicated that after four years of implementation,

the district's overall implementation was slightly below a moderate implementation level. However, the preschool and elementary level had significantly higher overall implementation compared to the secondary level. For future MTSS development and planning, it is important for the KPS MTSS team to be cognizant of the difference between preschool and elementary and the secondary level.

This research indicates the need for the KPS team to refocus and strategize how to support the secondary teachers and principals with their understanding of MTSS and its implementation. Reviewing and defining MTSS and sharing the purpose with the secondary teachers and principals is supported by this research. Ensuring a tiered model of support for secondary teachers and students is essential as students enter the middle and high school. Students require tiered support through the progression in a system. Student needs do not end after elementary school, interventions and supports should not either.

This study did not indicate any statistical difference between other demographic areas. Often times, veteran teachers and principals have the advantage of years of experience or expertise, but with the newness of MTSS in the district, all teachers and principals are on the same playing field, creating a sense of commonality.

KPS Component Implications

After the four years of implementation, the data revealed the two components with the highest level of implementation included shared leadership and layered continuum. Participants did not indicate failure of implementation with any component. However, the four components that averaged a low level of implementation included: (1)

communication, collaboration, and partnerships, (2) evidence based, (3) building capacity, and (4) data based.

Shared Leadership. Collaboration and shared leadership is essential for a successful MTSS implementation. The MTSS process is not led by principals or central office, nor is it led by special education or general education. It is intentionally led by an MTSS team with representatives from administration, classroom teachers, and specialists. Notably, there was no difference in the teacher or principal implementation in KPS, which supports the goal of having shared leadership from faculty and administration. Principals are often more aware of system improvement and initiatives. It is commendable that the information shared by teacher participants is aligned with the principal survey feedback. The district's minimal statistical difference between teachers and principals demonstrates an intentional effort to ensure all staff members are informed of the MTSS framework and that leadership teams have been identified. Reported shared leadership indicates that there is alignment between the MTSS plan and the district strategic improvement plans. As a consideration, a continued effort to sustain practices and investigate additional collaboration will support the moderate level gaining momentum for a higher level of implementation.

Layered continuum of support. In the MTSS framework, a core curriculum for academics, social-emotional, and behavior is included in the layered continuum of supports. Layered continuum of support was also a successful component as indicated by the survey. As a students' needs intensify, the level of supports also enhances. The layered continuum data identifying a moderate level of implementation was repeated in

the qualitative feedback from the survey as a strength for the district. The district has worked to align supports for consistency with procedures, materials, and collaboration to support instructional practices. The concept that MTSS is a pyramid of tiered support has been defined and shared with the staff and appear moderately in place across KPS. Core practices and school wide expectations for curriculum, assessment, and instruction have been established. Responses indicate interventions have been identified for academics, behavior, and social emotional supports and a systematic problem-solving process for students is in place. KPS should continue efforts to refine the problem-solving processes within each MTSS tier. Practices should be reviewed to determine if the core materials in tier one are supporting the majority of students. Identified interventions and supports should be analyzed and reviewed to determine if strategies are effective. As teams continue to work with the MTSS processes, KPS should continue to evaluate and identify any missing supports or barriers to student success.

Communication. For successful implementation, all staff need to have a commitment and knowledge of the MTSS frameworks and the rational, resources, plans, and initiatives that are in place in the district. Communication was a concern in the qualitative feedback and an area of future growth indicated by the survey. Plans for communication need to be improved to share decisions and processes with all stakeholders. Staff want more information about MTSS goals, procedures, and implementation. From the school board and district level to the building and classroom level, a plan needs to be developed to engage stakeholders in the process and share decisions and receive feedback. Methods could include meetings, memos, emails,

websites, or presentations. Additionally, reviewing the district calendar, professional development dates, and schedule would allow for continued efforts to ensure sufficient time for professional learning and training opportunities. Strategies, processes, and communication methods for engagement with all stakeholders should be reviewed and identified.

Evidence based decision making. Decisions on curriculum, instruction, intervention, and assessment must be research-based and aligned to instructional practices that address the specific needs of KPS students. Evidence based decision making was another component with lower implementation scores. Decisions on curriculum, instruction, and assessment need to be communicated with stakeholders. A plan for professional learning that is aligned and developed to support implementation is important and needs to be clearly communicated. High quality, evidence based practices support positive student outcomes and academic achievement.

Building capacity. Professional development and learning was an area of shortcomings indicated in the quantitative and qualitative data. The component, building capacity, is focused on professional development for teachers and principals to help sustain the MTSS framework and continue to cultivate teacher and principal capacity. Targeted professional learning needs to be established and tailored for new teachers, veteran educators, and principals to support student achievement and growth for a future successful implementation of MTSS.

Data based problem solving. After four years, the survey indicated a low level of implementation of the data based problem solving component. Data based problem

solving and decision making is critical for a successful MTSS implementation. Data is needed to guide and make decisions at all levels, the district, building, classroom, and student level. MTSS teams need to review and examine data to identify problems and support the decision-making process. Data should be organized and accessible to all staff. KPS should continue to review the student information system and explore data programs to support and enhance report accessibility. Simplifying and organizing the data into a main student information system would allow for teachers to become more familiar with accessing and utilizing data and reports. Often, teachers and leaders are navigating multiple sites to look for information. Streamlining data would support the decision making process. Additional training for teachers and leaders on how to read and interpret data would also support teacher and leader data usage at all levels. Teachers, leaders, and teams need to be able to understand and interpret data to make decisions.

Summary of KPS Recommendations

KPS leaders need to intentionally focus on the secondary teachers and principals understanding of MTSS, and prepare a professional development and MTSS implementation plan targeting the middle and high school level. The areas of strength, especially at the elementary level, include shared leadership and layered continuum of support. The district needs to examine communication, evidence-based practices, building capacity, and data based problem solving. The district's implementation timeline (appendix B) should be reviewed and adjusted to strategically focus on the components with low implementation.

Stakeholders

Several stakeholder groups may benefit from the study's results, including the Nebraska Department of Education, Educational Service Units, and teacher and administrator preparation programs.

Nebraska Department of Education. NDE may consider reviewing this research when making suggestions and offering guidance on the implementation of MTSS in other Nebraska districts. An intentional focus on resources and research to support the secondary level should be considered through the Nebraska MTSS website or at the state level conferences. Targeted professional learning for principals and teachers in the middle and high school level on MTSS could support new districts working toward implementation or districts currently in the continuous improvement cycle. Additionally, intentional plans and resources for districts to support communication and stakeholder collaboration could be included on the state website or shared with districts.

Despite the goal of MTSS to not simply be categorized as a special education program, the majority of communications from NDE on MTSS continues to flow from the special education department. When searching on the state website, MTSS is listed under the Special Education link. Continued communication and efforts from the state to align departments and processes will support the MTSS model.

Educational Service Unit. As indicated by the survey, building capacity and professional learning continues to be an area for improvement for KPS. Educational Service Units in Nebraska offer professional learning for districts across the state. Including a focus on MTSS training for new teachers and principals, as well as veterans, will support building capacity for school districts. The ESUs in Nebraska offer many

trainings and professional learning opportunities. A recommendation to continue to identify how these trainings support a MTSS structure will support teacher and principal understanding of the model. As discussed in Chapter 2, during the 2019-2020 school year, new state regional facilitators were hired to support the implementation process across the state. Moving forward, these individuals can also offer training and support for teachers and administrators.

Teacher Education Preparation. MTSS continues to gain momentum in the state of Nebraska and teacher education preparation programs need to introduce MTSS and the different components of the framework to educators. A direct curriculum that covers the multiple tiers of support for students and how the educational framework supports problem-solving at the student, classroom, and building level should be included in the undergraduate programs. Teachers need to be prepared and educated on how to use data to make decisions and organize instruction and interventions to support varying student needs. Teacher education preparation programs need to continue to review their materials and content to reflect current practices in education.

Principal Preparation and Continued Development. As new leaders pursue degrees in educational administration, the colleges and university systems need to intentionally integrate the MTSS model into their programs. Administrators need to be aware of the MTSS efforts in Nebraska or the other their resident state. Understanding the framework as an administrator will help support future MTSS efforts in a building and district.

Principals are the guiding leader in a building MTSS team. As leaders, principals need to understand how to facilitate the different components of MTSS. New leaders need to have a background in reading and interpreting data and know how to communicate and share results. Using the information and data, principal leaders need to be able to understand how to allocate materials, personnel, and time to support the MTSS framework. Leaders should also have an imbedded understanding of a tiered approach for learning and how to create schedules, strategies, and interventions to support instruction for all tiers. Principals need to be proficient and aware of tier one supports for curriculum and social emotional learning and how these are implemented in their classrooms and building. Intentionally focusing on professional development and best practices is essential as an instructional building leader. Principals must work with teams to understand processes and have clear expectations and structures in place to support all students. The NCSA (Nebraska Council of School Administrators) has not had an active role in promoting or educating leaders on MTSS. Current and future leaders utilize NCSA for their professional learning. Future efforts to collaborate between NDE and NCSA may offer continued professional development for current and new leaders. Building and district leaders contribute to all components of MTSS through shared leadership, their efforts with communication to stakeholders, ensuring teachers are using evidence based practices and assessments, supporting professional development and building capacity, ensuring that all students have an opportunity for layered tiers of support, and how to use data to support decision making.

Districts. Each district is uniquely different and has its own set of circumstances and established processes. As districts consider implementing MTSS, the main recommendation lies in the results from this study. Regardless of the size or structure of a district, an intentional focus needs to be on the MTSS components and supporting the secondary teachers and administrators.

When reviewing the KPS implementation, each MTSS component has many tentacles that need to be communicated and organized for the process to be effectively implemented. Having a clear understanding and plan for each MTSS component will support the implementation process. Reviewing and analyzing what is currently in place and what needs to occur with shared leadership, layered continuums, communication, evidence-based practices, building capacity, and data based problem solving will support the MTSS model. Identifying the current practices and what the goals of each component will outline the timeline and steps for implementation. Schools should reflect on tier one strategies in academics and social emotional learning and ensure the impact on all students, then work to organize their interventions into the three tiers to structure student supports.

Districts can rely on the NeMTSS website to support implementation and they may also consider partnering with the local ESU for professional learning and development. Leaders need to establish a strong understanding of the MTSS model and work to strategically review their current processes, identifying how they are currently responding to all students.

As indicated in this study, an intentional plan for the secondary level should be considered. Throughout the implementation process using examples of secondary scenarios or ensuring secondary teachers and leaders understand the model, will support a consistent PK-12 implementation.

Limitations

This study examined MTSS implementation in Kearney Public Schools, and is not intended to be a generalizable to all districts implementing MTSS. All 360 KPS teachers and 20 principals were invited to participate, however, only 47 participants finished the survey in its entirety. This low response rate was almost certainly impacted by the current pandemic crisis. During the research, the Covid-19 pandemic challenged many educators. While the survey was sent a few weeks before school started with two reminders, the lower response rate may have been hindered by the stress of teachers and principals preparing for supporting students during a pandemic. The survey was sent at the end of July with reminders to teachers and principals the week before school started. At the same time, teachers and principals email inboxes were overwhelmed with messages about back-to-school safety measures, procedure changes, and how to manage staff absences.

The impact of Covid-19 was unlike anything educators have had to face. Schools across the country shut down in the spring of 2020. Kearney Public Schools closed the door for students and staff on March 13, 2020. Teachers and principals were faced with the enormous task of continuing to support academic progress and shift teaching practices from in person to remote learning, essentially overnight. While trying to figure out the

technology and systems to support student learning, schools were also struggling to connect with families and support student safety, physical wellbeing, and social emotional health.

As the pandemic situation continued across the country, Kearney Public Schools was determined to serve students in-person in the fall of 2020. This task meant increased protocols and procedures to fund and organize personal protective equipment for all staff and students. While, KPS acknowledged that a full return to in-classroom learning was the best-case scenario for students' educational advancement and for the social-emotional well-being of students, many principals and teachers were also worried about their own personal health and safety during a pandemic. As they prepared for the school year, teachers and principals had a considerable task in front of them to prepare for the required face coverings, additional hand washing precautions, social distancing measures, and temperature checks multiple times of day. The lack of participation in this survey could have been limited not only by the timing of the email, but by the stress of the pandemic.

Importance of MTSS in a pandemic

Despite the pandemic disruption and the minimal survey participation rate, the importance of MTSS has never been more critical for school systems. The 2020-2021 school year presents unique challenges for school districts across the country, with no textbook or playbook to follow. Supporting all students with a layered continuum of support is crucial after months away from the school environment. Students and families not only faced the health concerns of a global pandemic, they were forced to attempt to

teach and learn at home, while facing economic stress and instability. For many students, school is their haven, providing basic needs, food, shelter, and clothing. School is the place students felt safe, cared for, loved, and connected.

Relying on the MTSS model when returning to school, allows for a purposeful focus on tier one supports for social-emotional, behavioral, and academics for all students. An intentional focus on the social-emotional well-being of students is essential as students return to the classroom. The stress of wearing masks all day, coupled with the many unknowns, burdens all students. Deliberately focusing on social emotional learning, creating a calm environment, and building relationships with students has never been more important.

A strategic approach for instruction to support missed learning at the core classroom level also is supported by the MTSS model. A clear and intentional delivery of content and essential standards at the tier one level for all students may support the gap in academic classroom exposure. Using assessment data to adapt lessons, adjust instruction, and offer interventions will be necessary as the 2020-2021 school year continues. The deliberate reflection and utilization of a MTSS model will allow districts to continue to support all students, at all level, during the pandemic crisis.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study specifically investigated the implementation of MTSS in Kearney Public Schools after four years. Expanding the study to include a larger participant group in a regional or state level may serve to expand and identify the implementation barriers

and success. Replicating the study with other districts may also serve to determine if outcomes are similar after four years of implementation.

Additionally, focusing the study on administration and the school board may also expand the story of MTSS implementation and if it has been fully embraced from the board to classroom level. Expanded research on the implementation of MTSS in rural and urban districts would allow for additional information to be gathered about the implementation of this model. Continuing to evaluate and research the effectiveness of the new ESU regional coordinators support for districts may also support state level decision making.

Another potential area of future study is to compare the implementation of MTSS and the impact on student outcomes including attendance, graduation rates, behavior referrals, or academic achievement. Student data could be collected to review if the implementation process has had an effect on students.

Results from this study indicate that the MTSS implementation after four years demonstrates strengths from the implementation and areas that need improvement. This information will support the Kearney Public Schools district team to support continuous improvement. Repeating this study in a few years and using this study as a baseline would offer continued research on the longevity of the implementation of MTSS.

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Appendix A

KPS Letter to Dr. Kent Edwards about the research project



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND
HUMAN SCIENCES

Department of
Educational
Administration

|

Dear Dr. Kent Edwards,

As you know, I am a doctoral student enrollment at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. I am asking you to consider participating in a research study I am conducting to fulfill my requirements for my doctoral degree. The goal of this proposed case study is investigating the implementation of the NeMTSS (Nebraska Multi-Tiered System of Supports) in Kearney Public Schools.

In order to conduct this study, I would like to send out a perpetual survey, developed by the NDE NeMTSS department to our K-12 teachers and administrators in the fall of 2019. I would also ask for 6-8 individuals for interviews on the implementation. Participation is completely voluntary. All information collected during this research will be kept confidential. No written reports or publications will contain any information that would identify study participants or their related school. Although there is no direct benefit to any of the participants, it I hope that the findings of this study will provide insight and suggestions for the district and potentially other districts in the state when implementing MTSS. Kearney Public Schools would be identified as a local case study participant.

Thank you for your anticipated support. I greatly appreciate your consideration of my request. Please respond via email if you have any questions or concerns or are willing for KPS to participate in the case study. I have also included a copy of the signed consent form for your review and signature. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Mrs. Chelsea Feusner

Appendix B

KPS MTSS Implementation Timeline

KPS MTSS Implementation Timeline
Revised: March 2019

Key: D=District level B=Building level

CIP 2016-2021	Year 1 2016-2017	Year 2 2017-2018	Year 3 2018-2019	Year 4 2019-2020	Year 5 2020-2021
Implementation Phase	Exploring, Adopting & Planning	Planning	Planning & Initially Implementing	Fully Implementing	Continuously Improving & Maintaining
Leadership & Commitment					
Current Status & Needs Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Analyze data, determine capacity & need for MTSS 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Prepare for and complete external team visits
Vision, Beliefs, Goals & Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Establish district vision, mission, core beliefs, school improvement goal/s • D: Review MTSS components, develop MTSS School Improvement plan • D: Assign action steps • B: Establish core beliefs & school improvement goal/s 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Evaluate implementation of MTSS School Improvement plan, modify and assign action steps • B: Develop MTSS School Improvement plan • B: Assign action steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Evaluate implementation of MTSS School Improvement plan, update plan and assign action steps • B: Evaluate implementation of MTSS School Improvement plan, modify and assign action steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Evaluate implementation of MTSS School Improvement plan, update plan, and assign action steps • B: Evaluate implementation of MTSS School Improvement plan, modify and assign action steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Evaluate implementation, update plan, and assign action steps • B: Evaluate implementation of MTSS School Improvement plan, modify and assign action steps
Commitment & Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Develop stakeholder commitment and leadership support 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B: Determine and develop level of stakeholder commitment and leadership support 		
Team Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Organize district MTSS School Improvement leadership team process • D: Establish regular team meetings (at least quarterly) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Conduct team process according to plan (at least 2x/year), evaluate and update • B: Organize building teams: leadership, collaborating (grade level or content), individual student problem solving • B: Establish regular meetings (leadership, collab teams, ISPS teams) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Conduct team process according to plan, evaluate and update • B: Conduct team process according to plan, evaluate and update 		

CIP 2016-2021	Year 1 2016-2017	Year 2 2017-2018	Year 3 2018-2019	Year 4 2019-2020	Year 5 2020-2021
Curriculum & Instruction					
Core Curriculum • Reading/Literacy • Mathematics • Social Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Maintain curriculum cycle • D: Align curriculum with state standards • D: Develop pacing and delivery guidelines • D: Outline social behavior framework (SEL/character ed, schoolwide expectations, classroom management, recognition system, correction/discipline system, ODR data management) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Train for district curriculum & differentiated instruction (new curriculum and/or new staff) • B: Implement district curriculum • Determine needed supplements and expectations for use • B: Select program/practices • D, B: train for social behavior framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Train for instruction (new staff) • D, B: evaluate effectiveness of curriculum, modify, and revise delivery expectations as needed • D: Monitor fidelity of implementation • B: Monitor fidelity of instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Train for instruction (new staff) • D, B: evaluate effectiveness of curriculum, modify, and revise delivery expectations as needed • D: Monitor fidelity of implementation • B: Monitor fidelity of instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Maintain fidelity of instruction
Instructional Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Establish model of instructional delivery practices • D: Train building trainers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Train & monitor delivery • D, B: Evaluate effectiveness, modify delivery expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Train & monitor delivery • D, B: Evaluate effectiveness, modify delivery expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Train & monitor delivery • D, B: Evaluate effectiveness, modify delivery expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Maintain model
• Tiered Instruction and Intervention • Reading/Literacy • Mathematics • Social Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Write draft Tier 1 Protocol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Finalize Tier 1 Protocol, evaluate implementation and assign action steps • B: Write draft Tier 1 Protocol • D: Explore Tier 2 options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Develop Tier 2 & 3 Protocols, evaluate implementation and assign action steps • B: Finalize Tier 1 Protocol, assign action steps, implement, evaluate implementation • B: Monitor fidelity of Tier 1 plan • B: Write draft Tier 2 & 3 Protocols • D, B: Train for interventions • D, B: Train to intensify interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Evaluate effectiveness of Tier 1, 2, 3 Protocols • B: Finalize Tier 2 & 3 Protocols, evaluate implementation and assign action steps • B: Monitor fidelity of Tier 1 plan • B: Monitor fidelity of intervention delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Maintain intervention fidelity
Schedule • Reading/Literacy • Mathematics • Social Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Establish schedule guidelines for Tier 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B: Establish master schedule for Tier 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Establish intervention schedule guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B: Include intervention times in master schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B: Revise/maintain intervention schedules

CIP 2016-2021	Year 1 2016-2017	Year 2 2017-2018	Year 3 2018-2019	Year 4 2019-2020	Year 5 2020-2021
Assessment					
Select Assessments • Reading/Literacy • Mathematics • Social Behavior	• D: Review or select universal screeners • D: Review or select outcome assessments	• D: Select bank of progress monitoring assessments	• B: Select progress monitoring assessments • B: Select diagnostic assessments		
Assessments Calendar	• D: Create initial assessment calendar	• D: Revise assessment calendar	• D: Revise assessment calendar • B: Add progress monitoring	• B: Monitor calendars, revise as needed	• B: Maintain assessment calendar
Universal Screening	• B: Complete baseline screening	• B: Complete benchmarking	• B: Complete benchmarking	• B: Maintain benchmarking practices	• B: Maintain benchmarking practices
Progress Monitoring		• D: Establish decision rules to target below-benchmark students	• B: Progress monitor below-benchmark students	• B: Progress monitor below-benchmark students	• B: Maintain progress monitoring practices
Diagnostic Assessments			• D, B: Train diagnostic and function of behavior assessments • B: Complete diagnostic and function of behavior assessment as needed	• B: Complete diagnostic and function of behavior assessment as needed	• B: Maintain diagnostic assessment practices

CIP 2016-2021	Year 1 2016-2017	Year 2 2017-2018	Year 3 2018-2019	Year 4 2019-2020	Year 5 2020-2021
Data-Based Problem Solving & Decision Making					
Data Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Provide training in data literacy at leadership level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Train building trainers • B: Provide training in data literacy to collaborating teams and individual student problem solving teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B: Train new staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B: Train new staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Maintain training
Schedule of Data Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Develop schedule for district, building level data review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Develop schedule for district, building level data review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Develop schedule for district, building level data review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Monitor schedules, revise as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Maintain schedules
Data Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Review district and building level data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Review district and building level data • B: Review student level data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Review district and building level data • B: Review student level data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Review district and building level data • B: Review student level data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, B: Maintain data reviews

CIP 2016-2021	Year 1 2016-2017	Year 2 2017-2018	Year 3 2018-2019	Year 4 2019-2020	Year 5 2020-2021
Community Engagement					
Board of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Present overview of district MTSS plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Provide updates at least 2x/year B: Provide updates to district leadership team at least quarterly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Provide updates at least 2x/year B: Provide updates to district leadership team at least quarterly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Provide updates at least 2x/year B: Provide updates to district leadership team at least quarterly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D, B: Maintain engagement
Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Present overview of district MTSS plan D: Present district expectations for buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Provide updates at least 2x/year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Provide updates at least 2x/year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Provide updates at least 2x/year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Maintain engagement
Parents/Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Present overview of district MTSS plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Provide update annually B: Present overview of building MTSS plan B: Provide updates per semester 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Provide update annually B: Present overview of building MTSS plan B: Provide updates per semester 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Provide update annually B: Present overview of building MTSS plan B: Provide updates per semester B: Provide opportunities to participate in Tier 3 intervention planning B: Provide regular progress reports per Tier 3 plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D, B: Maintain engagement
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Publish district MTSS overview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Publish district MTSS overview and update at least annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Publish district MTSS overview and update at least annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Publish district MTSS overview and update at least annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D: Maintain engagement

Appendix C

IRB

7/25/2019

<https://nugrant.unl.edu/messages/viewPrintedMessage.php>

July 24, 2019 Chelsea Feusner Department of Educational Administration Nick Pace Department of Educational Administration TEAC 141C UNL NE 685880360 IRB Number: 20190719586EX Project ID: 19586 Project Title: Implementation of MTSS Dear Chelsea: This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project for the Protection of Human Subjects. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects at 45 CFR 46 2018 Requirements and has been classified as exempt. Exempt categories are listed within HRPP Policy #4.001: Exempt Research available at: <http://research.unl.edu/researchcompliance/policies-procedures/>. o Date of Final Exemption: 07/24/2019 o Review conducted using exempt category 2b at 45 CFR 46.104 o Funding (Grant congruency, OSP Project/Form ID and Funding Sponsor Award Number, if applicable): N/A We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event: * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures; * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur; * Any protocol violation or protocol deviation * An incarceration of a research participant in a protocol that was not approved to include prisoners * Any knowledge of adverse audits or enforcement actions required by Sponsors * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research; * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff. This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board. If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office

at 402-472-6965. Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman, CIP for the IRB



6/18/2019

Kearney Public Schools Mail - Case Study



Chelsea Feusner <chefeusner@kearneycats.com>

Case Study

Kent Edwards <kenedwards@kearneycats.com>

Tue, Jun 18, 2019 at 3:19 PM

To: Chelsea Feusner <chefeusner@kearneycats.com>, Jason Mundorf <jasmundorf@kearneycats.com>

Chelsea,

Absolutely! I think this would make an excellent case study. I have copied Mr. Mundorf on this response as he will be able to support and facilitate you through this process. I am excited about the potential your study could bring to KPS and others. Let me know what I can do to further assist you. Thank you.

Kent

Appendix D

NeMTSS email permission for survey

NeMTSS

jbyers5824@gmail.com <jbyers5824@gmail.com>
To: Chelsea Feusner <chefeusner@keameycats.com>

Wed, Jun 19, 2019 at 1:06 PM

Chelsea,

You are welcome to use the self-assessment available on the NeMTSS website. You may download a paper/pencil version, or can request the survey monkey link as indicated on the site. Let me know if I can help.

Thanks for your interest in NeMTSS!

Jane Byers

[Quoted text hidden]

WARNING: THIS ELECTRONIC MAIL TRANSMISSION CONTAINS CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION INTENDED FOR THE PERSON(S) NAMED. ANY USE, DISTRIBUTION, COPYING, OR DISCLOSURE OF THIS INFORMATION TO ANY OTHER PERSON OR ENTITY IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED.

Appendix E

Online Survey Informed Consent



Online Survey Informed Consent

IRB Number # Project ID: 19586

Study Title: Implementation of MTSS

Invitation

Dear teachers and principals,

My name is Chelsea Fesuner. I am conducting a study on the implementation of MTSS in Kearney Public Schools. If you are 19 years of age or older and are a teacher or principal in Kearney Public Schools, you may participate in this research.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

This is a research project that focuses on the investigation of the implementation of the NeMTSS (Nebraska Multi-Tiered System of Supports) in Kearney Public Schools.

In order to participate you must be 19 years of age or older and are a teacher or principal in Kearney Public Schools

What will be done during this research study?

Participation in this study will require approximately 10-15 minutes. You will be asked to complete 26 questions on the implementation of NeMTSS. Participation will take place online.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

The level of risk for the participants is minimal. There is a risk of loss of confidentiality if the participants identify their surveys with their own name - they will be asked to not put their names on the surveys. There is a risk of discomfort if they do not like filling surveys. The survey may be 15-20 minutes, loss of time may be a discomfort for many individuals. There is the risk that some of the questions about your job or opinion may be uncomfortable.

What are the possible benefits to you?

The results of this study will be used to complete a dissertation on the implementation of NeMTSS in Kearney Public Schools for the completion of my doctoral program.

How will information about you be protected?

Your responses to this survey will be kept anonymous/confidential. A survey monkey will be used to gather data. Although the results of this study may be published, no information that could identify you will be included. No personally identifiable information (like the name of the respondent, address, school or grade level) will be collected through the use of survey.

What are your rights as a research subject?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator:

Chelsea Feusner at (308)627-0435 or chefeusner@kearneycats.com

Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact Office of Research & Economic Development at (402) 472-3123 or unlresearch@unl.edu.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

- Phone: 1(402)472-6965
- Email: irb@unl.edu

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw") at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or Kearney Public Schools.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of Informed Consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By clicking on the I Agree button below, your consent to participate is implied. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

I agree

I do not agree

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By completing and submitting your survey responses, you have given your consent to participate in this research. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Appendix F

NeMTSS Survey

MTSS Survey adapted from the NeMTSS Self-Assessment Survey		http://nemtss.unl.edu/resources/self-assessment/			
Date					
Position	Teacher or Administrator				
Level	PK, Elementary, MS, HS				
Component #1: Shared Leadership					
1. MTSS leadership team membership					
Category	1	2	3	4	
There is a representative MTSS leadership team	No district/building team with responsibility for leading the MTSS implementation	District/building teams are missing key members	District/building teams include members who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have authority to make decisions related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, and special education Are authorized to allocate resources (time, funds, personnel, etc.) Represent general and special education Building teams include district representation 	All of section 3 -AND- Decisions and actions made by the team are made based on data and proactively support MTSS essential components. Support for MTSS implementation is high	
2. Building staff engagement in MTSS					
Category	1	2	3	4	
Staff have consensus and engage in MTSS Implementation	Staff are not provided opportunities to gain understanding of the need for MTSS or to provide input on how to implement MTSS	Staff are provided opportunities to gain understanding of the need for MTSS	All of section 2 -AND- Staff has opportunities to gain understanding of its relevance to their roles and responsibilities	All of section 3 -AND- Staff has opportunities to provide input on how to implement MTSS	
3. Resource allocation for MTSS implementation					
Category	1	2	3	4	
Resources available to support MTSS implementation are identified and allocated	No process exists for mapping and allocating resources available to support MTSS implementation	Leadership team members are gathering information on the personnel, funding, materials, and other resources available to support MTSS implementation -AND/OR- Some resources are allocated based on need, but are not adequate for effective MTSS implementation	Most resources are allocated based on student need, are adequate for effective MTSS implementation, and plans for allocating the resources are established	Resources are allocated based on student need (as outlined in 3-point item) -AND- MTSS team evaluates the relationship between resource allocation and student outcomes at least annually and refines resource allocation based on strategies resulting in improved outcomes for students	
4. MTSS implementation planning					
Category	1	2	3	4	

<p>Component #2: Communication, Collaboration, and Partnerships</p> <p>5. Systematically sharing data with staff to ensure collaboration</p> <p>Category</p>	<p>A plan for MTSS implementation is developed and aligned with the school improvement plan</p>	<p>No plan for MTSS implementation exists</p>	<p>Leadership team is engaging district, family, and community partners to identify stakeholder needs, resources for, and barriers to MTSS implementation</p>	<p>All of section 2 -AND- As part of the school improvement planning process a plan is developed that specifies MTSS implementation</p>	<p>All of section 3 -AND- Decisions and actions made by the team are made based on data and proactively support MTSS essential components. Support for MTSS implementation is high</p>
	<p>Staff are provided data on implementation fidelity in addition to aggregated student level data to ensure improved student learning</p>	<p>Staff are not provided any data regarding implementation fidelity nor student outcomes</p>	<p>Staff are rarely (1x/year) provided data regarding implementation fidelity and student outcomes</p>	<p>Staff are regularly (2x/year) provided data regarding implementation fidelity and student outcomes</p>	<p>Staff are frequently (3x+/year) provided data regarding implementation fidelity and student outcomes</p>
	<p>6. Sharing the MTSS procedures and process for communicating implementation issues</p> <p>Category</p>	<p>Staff are provided with information on MTSS procedures and a process for communicating implementation issues with the MTSS team for problem solving</p>	<p>Staff are not provided with information about MTSS procedures or with a process for sharing issues/concerns or implementation barriers with the team</p>	<p>Staff receive inconsistent communication about MTSS procedures and decisions and a process for communicating implementation issues</p>	<p>MTSS team acts on input and feedback from staff regarding implementation issues</p>
	<p>7. Family engagement</p> <p>Category</p>	<p>Families engagement with MTSS is planned and feedback on engagement is used for continuous improvement</p>	<p>There is no evidence of family engagement activities</p>	<p>Family and community engagement are all of the following: • Defined and monitored with data • Linked to school goals in CIP/MTSS plan • Supported by procedures for facilitating 2-way communication</p>	<p>All of section 3 -AND- Feedback is gathered from families regarding their experiences related to the MTSS process (understanding of and involvement with) and used to improve family engagement planning</p>
<p>Component #3: Evidence-Based Instruction, Intervention, and Assessment Practices</p>					
<p>8. Evidence-based programs and practices</p>					
Category	1	2	3	4	

Evidence-based programs and practices are implemented with fidelity.	Programs and practices do not have evidence support indicating a high-likelihood they will work if implemented with fidelity	Programs and practices are evidence-based –BUT– not all are being implemented with a high degree of fidelity by teachers and interventionists	Programs and practices are evidence-based –AND– all are being implemented with a high degree of fidelity by teachers and interventionists	All of section 3 –AND– selected in alignment with student needs
9. Evidence-based effective instructional practices				
Category	1	2	3	4
Most teachers are consistently implementing effective instructional	Few teachers (less than 50%) are using effective instructional practices (based on	Some teachers (50-69%) are using effective instructional practices (based on	Most teachers (70-89%) are using effective instructional practices (based on	Almost all teachers (90-100%) are using effective instructional practices (based on
10. Effective school schedules				
Category	1	2	3	4
School schedules aligned to support multiple levels of intervention are consistently implemented	School schedules are not aligned to support multiple levels of intervention and high-quality instruction based on student need; inadequate time is available for interventions; schedules are inflexible and cannot support changes to student groupings	School schedules are partially or inconsistently aligned to support multiple levels of intervention and high-quality instruction based on student need; some additional time is built in for interventions; schedules are somewhat flexible and can support some changes to student groupings.	School schedules are aligned to support multiple levels of intervention and high-quality instruction based on student need; adequate additional time is built in for interventions; schedules are flexible and can support changes to student groupings as needed.	All of section 3 –AND– The school schedules are being consistently implemented and revised/revised based on data
11. Universal screening process				
Category	1	2	3	4
There is a systematic screening process and staff engage in ongoing professional learning for administration of assessments and use of data within the screening process	Screening process is used for some (not all) students –OR– Screening process is not utilized at least twice a year (or at frequency recommended by test developer)	Screening process includes valid and reliable screening measure(s) that is administered to all students at least 2 times per year (or at the frequency recommended by test developer) and administered by individuals who have been trained and have met reliability standard (as determined through fidelity checks/shadow scoring)	All of section 2 –AND– The MTSS team uses information from the universal screening process to evaluate the core system and identify students in need of intervention	Staff engages in ongoing professional development and coaching related to the administration of assessments and interpretation of the data/ data sources
12. Progress monitoring				
Category	1	2	3	4
Student progress specific to academic, behavior and social-emotional goals specified in intervention plans are monitored	Progress monitoring does not occur and student progress is not evaluated	Plans for monitoring progress toward expected student outcomes are developed	All of section 2 –AND– In most cases data are collected to monitor student progress and intervention fidelity	All of section 3 –AND– Changes are made to instruction/ intervention based on student progress
Component #4: Building Capacity/Infrastructure for Implementation				
13. Professional development and coaching for data-based problem solving				
Category	1	2	3	4

Professional development and coaching are provided for all staff members on data-based problem solving relative to their job roles/ responsibilities	Professional development does not focus on data-based problem solving or is not provided for all staff	Initial professional development on data- based problem solving is provided for all staff that includes the following elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Rationale for use of data-based problem solving● Problem-solving steps to address school-wide, classroom, small-group, and individual student needs● Roles and responsibilities for team members engaging in data-based problem-solving	All of section 2	All of section 3
			-AND- Ongoing professional development and coaching on data-based problem-solving is delivered that includes the following elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Differentiation of professional development based on staff roles/responsibilities● Coaching● Modeling, practice, and collaborative feedback on problem-solving steps● Support for collaboration and teaming skills	
15. Systems-level coaching				
Category	1	2	3	4
Coaching is used to support MTSS implementation (systems level coaching)	No coaching is provided to build staff capacity to implement the critical elements of MTSS	Initial coaching is occurring that is focused primarily on facilitating or modeling the components of MTSS	All of section 2	All of section 3
			-AND- Coaching activities are expanded to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Opportunities to practice● Collaborative and performance feedback	-AND- Data on professional development, implementation fidelity, and student outcomes are used to refine coaching activities
16. Fidelity data collection and use				
Category	1	2	3	4
Fidelity data are collected and used to inform decision making (e.g., identifying additional professional learning needs for staff, determining effectiveness of interventions)	There is no plan for monitoring implementation/fidelity of instruction	There is a plan for monitoring implementation/fidelity of instruction, but there is no evidence that implementation/fidelity data are collected	There is a plan for monitoring implementation/fidelity of instruction, and implementation/fidelity data are collected systematically	There is a plan for monitoring implementation/fidelity of instruction, implementation/fidelity data are collected systematically, and fidelity data are used for decision making
Component #5: Layered Continuum of Support				
17. Core academic practices				
Category	1	2	3	4

24. Data-based evaluation of effectiveness of instruction	Integrated data-based problem solving for student academic, behavior and social-emotional outcomes occurs across content areas, grade levels, and continuum.	Data on academic, behavior, and social-emotional outcomes may be collected, but data-based problem-solving does not occur across : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic, behavior and social-emotional Content areas Any grade levels Anywhere on the intervention support continuum 	Data-based problem solving occurs across 1 of the following 4: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 2 content areas (e.g., reading, behavior, social-emotional) At least 50% of grade levels Some areas of the intervention support continuum Only academic outcomes or only behavior and social-emotional outcomes 	Data-based problem solving occurs across 2 of the following 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 3 content areas At least 75% of grade levels A majority of the intervention support continuum 	Data-based problem solving occurs across all of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Across all content areas All grade levels The entire intervention support continuum
	Category	1	2	3	4
25. Decision rules for identifying students for intervention support	MTSS Leadership Team uses student data and implementation data to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction	MTSS Leadership Team does not use student data or implementation/fidelity data to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction	MTSS Leadership Team uses student data or implementation/fidelity data but not both to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction	MTSS Leadership Team uses both student data and implementation/fidelity data to evaluate effectiveness of instruction	-AND- Makes decisions regarding sustaining current implementation plan or planning for strengthening instruction based on evaluation data
	Category	1	2	3	4
26. Evaluating response to interventions for individual students	There are pre-established guidelines for decision making for identifying students to receive intervention support	There are no written decision rules for identifying students for intervention	There are written decision rules for identifying students for intervention that include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measure that will be used Criteria needed to be identified in need of intervention (cut scores for each measure) Intervention student will receive Frequency in which progress monitoring will occur Date by which intervention will begin 	All of section 2 -AND- Decisions are applied consistently (e.g., all students identified as needing intervention support receive it, students not identified as needing intervention are not receiving it, and interventions begin by date outlined in the decision rule) after each Universal Screening benchmark period	-AND- Makes decisions regarding sustaining current implementation plan or planning for strengthening instruction based on evaluation data
	Category	1	2	3	4

There are pre-established decision guidelines for evaluating effectiveness of interventions for individual students	There are no written intervention response rules used for determining adequate progress and decision making regarding support for students receiving intervention	Written response rules for determining adequate progress and guiding decision making regarding intervention support for individual students exist, but they are missing some of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of data needed for decision making • Amount of progress monitoring data needed for accurate decision making • Steps to follow when applying criteria needed to discontinue intervention, continue intervention, or intensify intervention • Use of graphed progress data • Fidelity data 	Response rules include all of the following information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of data needed for decision making • Amount of progress monitoring data needed for accurate decision making • Steps to follow when applying criteria needed to discontinue intervention, continue intervention, or intensify intervention • Use of graphed progress data • Fidelity data 	All of section 3 -AND- The team uses the response rules to determine effectiveness of intervention supports and next steps (i.e., when interventions for students need to be: continued, discontinued, faded, or intensified)
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