



FOCUS AREA 3 > SCHOOL > INTEGRATE STUDENT SUPPORTS WITH SEL

Integrate Student Supports with Schoolwide SEL

Schoolwide SEL offers an opportunity to enhance existing systems of student support. Learning is an intrinsically social and interactive process, and schoolwide SEL supports students whether they are learning behavioral expectations, solving a complex math problem, joining a game of kickball during recess, or writing an essay from the perspective of a literary character. Schoolwide SEL, then, is neither solely a behavior support nor solely an academic support, but aligns with and complements all supports aimed at student achievement and well-being.

As you student supports to schoolwide SEL, use the **rubric or the questions below to identify areas for continuous improvement:**

Does the school provides a continuum of supports that meet the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of all students?

Has the SEL team has created common language and aligned all student supports and related programs and initiatives with schoolwide SEL goals and priorities?

Does the SEL team takes stock of all supports each year and strategically plan how to improve integration in the coming year?

How can Schoolwide SEL be integrated into the MTSS framework?

Many schools use a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) as a systemic, prevention-focused framework for addressing students' academic and behavioral needs through the integration and continuous improvement of systems and services.

A well-designed MTSS includes ([National Association of School Psychologists, 2018](#)):

- Universal, evidence-based supports that create a positive learning environment and engages all students in high quality learning.
- More intensive evidence-based supports for students who have higher levels of need.
- Screening to determine which students could benefit from additional supports.
- Progress monitoring of how students are responding to supports.
- Data-driven decision-making and problem solving.

Schoolwide SEL supports both the academic and behavioral “sides” of an MTSS framework, and can help create coordination across all tiers:

Tier 1 – Universal supports for all students: SEL teams may arise from or overlap with MTSS teams that focus on Tier 1 supports that meet the needs of all students. By establishing an SEL team that regularly focuses on improving the school climate and building a sense community, schools foster a safe, supportive learning environment for all students. Evidence-based SEL instruction and integrating SEL into academic learning also provides a foundation for high-quality core instruction in academics and SEL that supports all students.

Tier 1 supports are selected based on the needs of the entire student population, and the SEL and/or Tier 1 team monitors school-wide data to adjust supports as needed. Integrating SEL here is critical because this first tier of supports must be fully operational before schools can most effectively support more intensive student needs. Without this foundational tier, schools may find that that supports at Tiers 2 and 3 become over-accessed by students who may have otherwise been adequately served by Tier 1 supports.

Tier 2 – Targeted supports for some students: At Tier 2, evidence-based academic and behavioral supports are provided to students for whom Tier 1 supports are insufficient. These supports include classroom-based interventions or small-group interventions facilitated by qualified teachers, support staff, community partners, or other professionals. It's critical that students have supportive relationships with these staff, and schoolwide SEL can be leveraged to ensure that students' social and emotional needs are met as they receive behavioral and academic supports.

Schoolwide SEL also helps ensure a coordinated approach so that Tier 2 supports supplement and are aligned to Tier 1 supports.

Designing Schoolwide Systems for Student Success

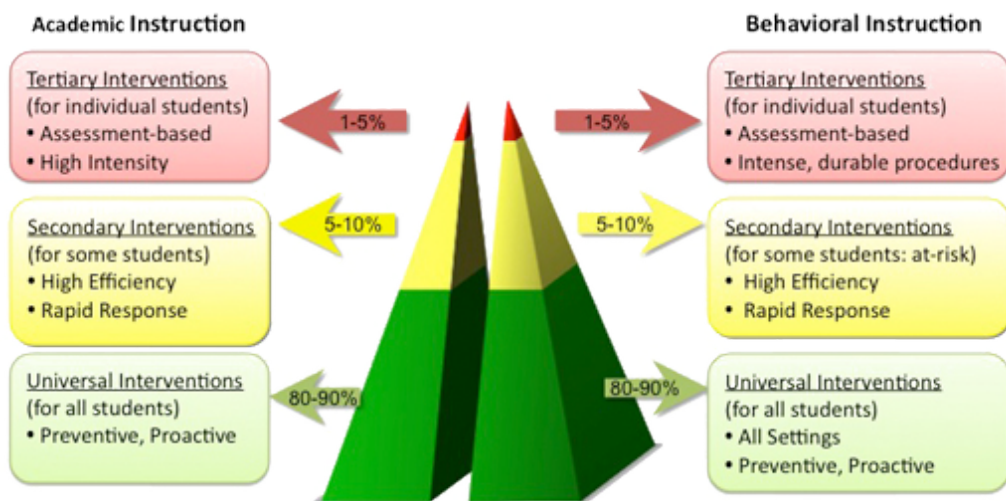


Image from: <https://www.pbis.org/school/mtss>

Tier 3 – Intensive supports for a few students: Highly intensive and individualized academic and behavioral supports are provided to students for whom Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports are insufficient. These supports may include wraparound supports or intensive instruction facilitated by qualified teachers, support staff, community partners, or other professionals. Schoolwide SEL is critical for ensuring that foundational relationships are established and that students' social and emotional needs are considered when receiving intensive supports. Additionally, schoolwide SEL helps support deeper connections with families and community partners who may play a large role in Tier 3 supports.

While SEL teams do not take on the roles of screening and progress monitoring student interventions, it's important that MTSS problem-solving teams that lead these Tier 2 and 3 supports pay close attention to students' social and emotional needs. This means that the SEL team may want to work closely with the school's Tier 2/3 teams to ensure coordination and alignment of social and emotional support.

Integrating SEL with PBIS

Many schools are already invested in PBIS systems that address the behavioral side of the MTSS framework. PBIS and SEL have many similar features but are not the same. Both schoolwide SEL and PBIS focus on creating safe and supportive environments, teaching students new skills, and using data to make informed decisions. Their explicit goals, however, differ in that PBIS seeks to ultimately increase positive behavior, while schoolwide SEL seeks to help students build competencies (e.g., understand themselves and others while forming strong relationships and building decision-making skills) that help students learn and navigate the world more effectively. The primary reason for this difference is that SEL and PBIS are grounded in different theoretical frameworks. While these two frameworks are different, they are not necessarily competing and often achieve similar outcomes (Bear et al., 2015).

Schools that are already deeply invested in PBIS can leverage their existing PBIS team to lead schoolwide SEL integration efforts. While continuing to use Tier 1 PBIS strategies (e.g., teaching, modeling, and acknowledging

schoolwide expectations, data practices, etc.), schools can use Focus Areas 2 and 3 in this Guide to begin integrating Schoolwide SEL.

These Focus Areas can strengthen any Tier 1 PBIS system by helping adults cultivate skills to effectively interact with students and create a positive school climate while simultaneously helping students build the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that they need to be able to carry out schoolwide expectations and excel academically.

For additional information, the University of Delaware provides an online [module on SEL and Schoolwide PBIS integration](#).

Identifying Supports for MTSS

The MTSS framework provides general guidelines for structuring each tier of support, but does not prescribe specific supports and interventions at each tier. This is because each school has different needs depending on the students they serve.

At its core, MTSS is driven by a decision-making process that uses high-quality data. This decision-making process is used to determine which supports will be needed to meet students' academic and behavioral needs at each tier. A Tier 1 system is effective when it meets the needs of at least 80% of the student population as determined by various data points (e.g., grades, attendance, behavior, test scores, surveys, etc.). While one school may get 80% of students to proficiency in math using only the core curriculum, another school may need the core curriculum plus trauma-informed teaching strategies. Another school may need the core curriculum plus additional instructional minutes.

The same is true for interventions at Tiers 2 and 3. A team of individuals assess the needs of the 20% of students who need additional academic and/or behavioral supports and layer in interventions to meet the needs of those specific students (RTI Action Network).