

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and Integrated Student Support

Comprehensive student support has become increasingly important in education. It recognizes the interconnected factors influencing student success and aims to create a supportive environment that addresses the diverse strengths and needs of students. Many schools are implementing Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) and approaches to Integrated Student Support to respond to the complex needs of students. These approaches are compatible, but distinct. Since there is common confusion about the similarities and differences between these two approaches, this brief describes the relationship between the two.

What is a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)?

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) defines a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) as “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.” MTSS was designed to improve teacher instruction and to increase students’ chances to succeed by offering a range of services to “close the gap” for students with specific learning or behavioral needs. It is a framework that includes both Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

MTSS typically consists of three tiers or levels of support. Tier 1 provides universal support to all students. Tier 2 offers targeted interventions for those who need additional assistance; and Tier 3 provides intensive interventions for students with the most significant needs. Some of the interventions provide learning support, while others extend learning for students ready for more challenging work. The MTSS framework relies on data and staff collaboration to inform decision-making. Interventions are delivered in school and typically address academic or social-emotional-behavioral needs. Student progress is regularly monitored, and intervention adjustments are made to improve their effectiveness.

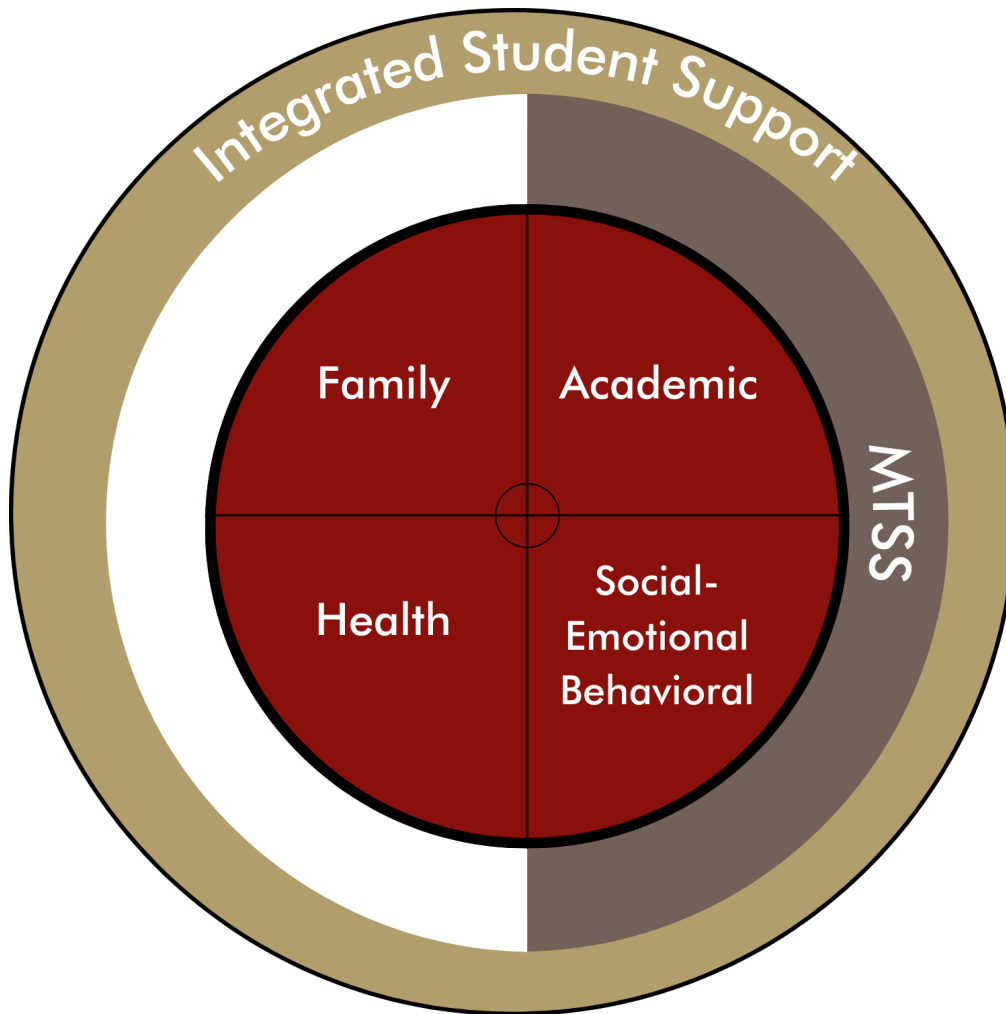


What is a system of Integrated Student Support?

“Integrated student support” was first referenced in ESSA. Integrated Student Support is an evidence-based approach for schools to provide student support by intentionally and systematically leveraging and coordinating the resources and relationships available in the school and in the surrounding community to address the comprehensive strengths and needs of each and every student in order to help promote healthy child development and learning.

Similarities and Differences

Similarities	MTSS	Integrated Support
Aim	To provide differentiated supports depending on student needs to all, some, or a few students	To provide differentiated supports to each student aligned with their needs, strengths, and interests
Intended outcomes	Improved student academic progress, attendance, and social-emotional development	Improved student academic progress, attendance, and social-emotional development
Resources	Resources are organized within a tiered framework	Resources are organized within a tiered framework
Differences	MTSS	Integrated Support
Mechanism of Change	Teachers incorporate evidence-based practices and high quality curricula to achieve intended outcomes	A tailored set of resources, relationships, and opportunities from the school and the surrounding community reach the right student at the right time, enriching, activating, and stabilizing each students' context for learning
Areas of focus	Academic and possibly social-emotional-behavioral	Academics, social-emotional-behavioral, physical and mental health, and family
Operationalization	A framework for organizing	A system for enacting the framework capable of getting the right resources to the right student at the right time
Locus	Interventions located in the school	Interventions located in the school or in community-based organizations and online services



Key takeaways

- Integrated student support and MTSS are compatible but distinct.
- Integrated student support is a systematic way for schools to enact MTSS.
- Integrated student support extends the MTSS framework to include the whole child. In addition to attending to academic and social-emotional-behavioral needs, integrated support includes support for health and family.

1 ESSA (2015). Every student succeeds act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-95 114 Stat. 1177 (2015-2016).

2 https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-assets/123184_book_item_123184.pdf
Harlacher, J., Sakelaris, T., Kattelman, N. (2014). Multi-Tiered System of Support. In: Practitioner's Guide to Curriculum-Based Evaluation in Reading. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-9360-0_3

3 Boston College Mary E. Walsh Center for Thriving Children (2022). National Guidelines for Integrated Student Support. Retrieved from: integratedstudentsupport.org.

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