

Student Improvement Teams and the Multi-Tier System of Supports



Schools must have policies and procedures in effect to ensure that all children with exceptionalities (those who have disabilities and those who are gifted) and who are in need of special education and related services are identified, located, and evaluated (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008), also known as child find. Child find in Kansas involves a screening process for children from birth to age 5 as well as a general education intervention (GEI) process for children from kindergarten through age 21. GEI requires schools to have data-based documentation of appropriate instruction in regular education settings delivered by qualified personnel, repeated measures of academic achievement showing progress during instruction, and the general education interventions and strategies implemented for each child (K.A.R. 91-40-7). GEI can be conducted using two models: a school-wide approach to providing multi-tiered levels of intervention to support all children to achieve more successfully and individual child problem solving often referred to as student improvement teams (SIT, SAT, TAT, Care Team, etc.).

The student improvement team approach to GEI is typically used in schools that are not implementing the Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS). SIT teams carry out the steps of a problem-solving sequence, which results in the development of an intervention plan that documents the child's area of concern, the interventions implemented, the data reflecting the child's response to the interventions, and recommendations based on the child's response to the interventions. When schools start to transition to an MTSS framework, the SIT team may continue to function as a single separate team. However, once the building is fully implementing the MTSS framework, the collaborative teams within the building carry out the functions of the SIT or GEI team.

In schools fully implementing the Kansas MTSS use collaborative teams comprised of teachers and support staff responsible for analyzing data (screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring data) at the grade, classroom, small group, and individual student levels. The collaborative teams use data to group students, identify the instructional focus of the groups, ascertain the materials to be used for interventions, and evaluate the effectiveness of the supports being provided, thereby fulfilling the function of the SIT team. In large elementary buildings, collaborative teams are often grade-level teams; smaller elementary buildings may have both a primary team and an intermediate team. In secondary buildings, collaborative teams are often departmental or interdepartmental teams or professional learning communities (PLCs). As collaborative teams and leadership teams engage in the steps of MTSS Implementation, they carry out the steps of a problem-solving process and meet GEI requirements.

Although the specific steps of implementation vary for reading, math, and behavior implementation, the steps for all content areas of the Kansas MTSS result in data that meet the requirements for child find/general education interventions as described in Kansas Special Education Regulation K.A.R 91-40-7. Because collaborative teams use progress monitoring and other data to engage in problem solving, customize

interventions based on individual student needs, and intensify instruction for students not making sufficient progress, the need does not exist for a separate SIT team to carry out the same function for the building. Collaborative teams may ask certain specialists in the building (e.g., behavior specialist, reading specialist, special education teacher, school psychologist, speech/language pathologist) to assist with individual student problem solving to design customized interventions. If a building is implementing an MTSS, but not for all of the content areas (reading, math, and behavior), it is particularly important that a collaborative team include other staff necessary to develop, implement, and evaluate interventions for the specific area of concern.

If at any time the collaborative team suspects that a student may be a student with an exceptionality and/or may have a need for special education services, the team must refer the student for an initial evaluation. The Kansas MTSS process should not delay a student from receiving a special education evaluation, and parents must be informed of the nature of student performance data being collected, the general education services being provided, strategies for increasing the student's rate of learning, and their right to request an evaluation. Schools often use school newsletters at the beginning of the school year or other home/school communication practices to provide this information on parents' rights. If it is determined that a student needs to be referred, any student information collected throughout the Kansas MTSS Implementation process, including screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring data, may be used within the special education initial evaluation and eligibility determination process.

References

Kansas State Department of Education. (2008). *Kansas Special Education Process Handbook*. Available at <http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3152>