



School-wide Behavioral Support and Bullying Prevention within the MTSS Framework

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The Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) is an overarching framework for school improvement that assists schools in redesigning resources with a focus on system level changes across the classroom, school, and district to meet the academic and behavioral needs of all students. To achieve this, resources must be used in effective and efficient ways to enable every student to be successful in his or her learning environment with thoughtful and intentional efforts made to create a positive, safe, and orderly environment.

Many researchers have noted the importance of safety and its influence on student achievement (c.f., Brand et al., 2008; Gronna & Chin-Chance, 1999; Milam et al., 2010). According to Marzano (2003), "...a safe and orderly environment is a critical aspect of effective schooling. A school that does not attend to this factor risks undermining all other efforts at school improvement" (p. 54). Providing physically safe and emotionally secure environments is important for students and school staff. The Kansas State Board of Education adopted the following position on this issue in February 2011:

"The State Board recognizes bullying as a serious issue that creates a negative school environment and inhibits students' ability to learn. For this reason, the State Board supports current state statute requiring each local board of education to adopt and implement a plan to address bullying, including a provision for the training and education of school staff members and students. Each plan should include a method to report incidents of bullying. The State Board encourages Kansas schools to include in their plan a framework for appropriate responses to bullying activities that reinforces and encourages positive conduct and ensures the safety of all students."

Successful prevention of bullying behavior involves teaching adults and students (1) what bullying looks like, (2) what to do before and when bullying behavior is observed, (3) how to teach others what to do, and (4) how to establish a positive and preventive environment that reduces the effectiveness of bullying behavior (Ross, Horner, & Stiller, 2009). An effective behavior support system, like MTSS, is a proactive and preventive school-wide behavioral support system, not just a behavioral "program" or set of reactive strategies. The Kansas State Board of Education's mandate to reinforce and encourage positive conduct is inherently embedded within the MTSS framework, whereby promoting an environment in which the bullying prevention practices described above can be integrated.

The *Kansas MTSS: Structuring Behavior Supplement* guides schools through creating a proactive and preventive school-wide behavioral support system. While there is great flexibility within the MTSS framework for customizing the MTSS for individual districts and buildings, there are required practices that will be found in all districts and buildings. Some of these required practices that help establish physically safe and emotionally secure environments are:

- Agreeing to a small number (e.g., 3-5) of positively stated building-wide expectations for student/adult behavior
- Clearly defining and teaching expected behaviors to all students in a systematic manner
- A system for recognizing students who display the building's expected behaviors
- A list of clearly defined unacceptable behaviors and how they will be handled by staff
- A process for consistent collecting and reporting of behavior offenses

- A system for consistent collection and analysis of data regarding behavior of all students and building level systems

These practices are an integral part of creating the framework for a systemic approach to addressing school-wide behavior and are part of all school-wide behavior systems such as MTSS, PBIS, Safe & Civil Schools, and others. When low-level problem behaviors are mitigated through a core behavioral curriculum (Tier 1) that is taught to ALL students, additional time and resources are created so leadership teams can focus more targeted and intensive resources on pervasive behavioral issues, which may include bullying behaviors.

When using MTSS or other schoolwide, systemic approaches (e.g., PBIS, Safe & Civil Schools) to address behavior there is a focus on the importance of consistency among the adults in the building, both with regard to their own behaviors and interactions with students as well as their recognition of agreed upon acceptable student behaviors and responding to unacceptable behaviors through correction and re-teaching. By focusing on positive, preventative approaches to behavior the adults in schools teach students what behaviors are acceptable in the school setting and encourage behaviors incompatible with bullying behaviors. As building leadership teams create the MTSS to address behavior they learn to look at environmental structures that may be perpetuating inappropriate or undesirable behaviors at school. For example, one of these structures is supervision, or lack of supervision. Students who are inclined to engage in bullying behavior look for areas where adults are not likely to be monitoring (e.g., bathrooms, hallway junctions, etc.). By improving active supervision in all areas of a building, schools can decrease the likelihood of bullying behavior. Use of data at the building system level helps to identify problem areas in the building that may require restructuring or improved supervision.

There are many commercially available bullying prevention curricula and programs available to schools. Such resources can be integrated into the school-wide framework for MTSS. Schools and districts are encouraged to investigate any bullying resource prior to its implementation to ensure alignment and consistency with the practices promoted by Kansas MTSS.

References

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