

## Challenge

How can we use a book study as one mechanism to develop educator and leader capacity, while providing a meaningful professional learning opportunity in a virtual environment?

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, State Education Agencies (SEAs) had to quickly move professional learning (PL) opportunities for educators to a virtual environment. This state spotlight presents how the Delaware Department of

Education (DDOE) implemented virtual collaborative book studies to develop the expertise and build the capacity of state, district, and school leaders and educators to establish an integrated multi-tiered system of support (MTSS).

## State Context

The DDOE developed a professional learning and technical assistance initiative that was an aligned effort between DE's State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and the DE State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG). The purpose of the DE SPDG was to implement, scale up, and sustain MTSS at the state, Local Education Agency (LEA), and school-level, and support the implementation of evidence-based literacy practices for K-3 students. The goal of the SSIP was to increase literacy outcomes for third grade students receiving special education

services in Delaware, with MTSS as a key strategy for accomplishing this outcome. DDOE's MTSS initiative, called DE-MTSS, supported the creation of MTSS infrastructure at the state and LEA level and provided training and coaching (all provided virtually this year), to district, charter, and school leadership teams and educators to build capacity to implement MTSS. Through the initiative, LEAs developed an MTSS infrastructure, aligned current initiatives with MTSS, and developed an action plan to improve MTSS implementation.



### Public School Facts:

Districts:

19

Schools:

215

Students:

138,414

Students with disabilities:

23,198

Source:

<https://reportcard.doe.k12.de.us/detail.html#aboutpage?scope=state&district=0&school=0>

Through extensive stakeholder engagement since 2018, DDOE developed MTSS regulations which were approved by the DE State Board of Education in October 2020, and which went into effect in July, 2021. DDOE staff and partners were instrumental in the development of the regulations and accompanying resources. To support implementation of MTSS, DDOE created and disseminated numerous resources. It also developed an MTSS website to disseminate these resources.

## Book Study Overview

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the MTSS PL shifted to a virtual environment. As the DDOE sought more virtual approaches for PL, it offered book studies to create an engaging virtual learning collaborative for state, district, and school leaders and educators to build their capacity to implement MTSS. The first book selected for a book study was *Integrated Multi-Tiered Systems of Support: Blending RTI and PBIS* (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). Due

to popular demand for this PL format, DDOE began a second book study, this time selecting *Leading Equity-based MTSS for All Students* (McCart & Miller, 2020). The first cohort of each book study began in January and February, 2021 respectively.

Book study participants engaged in monthly virtual meetings that included both breakout rooms for small group discussions and whole group format. In addition, participants posted their reflections

on a discussion board using the DE's Learning Management System (LMS). The DDOE purchased books for all book study participants and for those individuals who were on the wait list. Although actual attendance at each synchronous session varied, over 100 educators and school, district, and state leaders participated in at least one of the synchronous sessions of the two book studies.

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## Book Study Best Practices

Book studies are useful for developing educator and leader expertise because they incorporate many effective adult learning theory principles. A book study also provides an opportunity for participants to create a community focused on a common set of vocabulary and key learnings as an initial starting point for a new initiative. Although specific book study structures will vary depending on the needs of each site and professional learning community, groups undertaking a book study tend to:

1. Identify a topic for the book study.
2. Review and select a book, guide, or resource for the book study.
3. Establish group norms and develop a reading plan and schedule.
4. Engage in discussions about content in the book or resource.
5. Use ideas and strategies from the book that promote student achievement and study those strategies.
6. Evaluate the book study as part of a continuous improvement process, to understand effectiveness of the collaborative study.

## Impact of Strategies

An external evaluator conducted a survey of book study participants following the final session of each cohort. Sixty nine participants received a survey and 28 responded. Results indicated that 96 percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the book study increased their knowledge of the MTSS framework and their awareness of resources to support implementation of MTSS. Furthermore, 93 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the book study content was of high quality and one hundred percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the book study was relevant to their role and would help them in their current position.

In addition, qualitative feedback indicated that book study participants appreciated learning from others, hearing about implementation in other LEAs and states, and accessing the case studies in the books. Select quotes from the evaluation report are included below.

### *Q: What was the most beneficial aspect of the book study?*

- “I think [hearing the] perspective from other leaders in similar roles was pretty helpful and the book led to some focused conversations around systems and teaming which are two areas in which I think we all could improve.”

- “Having the opportunity to hear how a variety of individuals in schools and districts were anticipating how their integrated system was going to look.”
- “I liked having the chance to talk with other school leaders outside of my own school building.”
- “The tools provided were great and are going to be very useful.”
- “Gaining a better understanding of integrated MTSS and all of the components, common barriers, time commitment, leadership models, etc.”

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## Recommendations for States Facing Similar Challenges

- Consider book studies as one component of a comprehensive professional learning system. Book studies can be effectively implemented on a virtual platform. Book studies should not be the entire professional learning system, but one kind of learning opportunity in a larger professional learning system.
- Because book studies help various stakeholders construct shared knowledge and engage with rich discussions related to content, use the book as a jumping off point for discussions related to participants’ specific context. For example, DE used the book McIntosh and Goodman (2016), but engaged in discussions related to DE’s specific DE MTSS framework.
- Utilize the extant learning management systems or virtual platforms, that participants are likely familiar with, to promote engagement between the book study sessions.
- Evaluate the impact of the book study by examining participant engagement, reflections on quality, usefulness, and relevance of the book study discussions, and knowledge building components.
- Use breakout rooms to support discussions within the book study session, if there are a larger number of participants. Consider a variety of breakout groups, such as role alike breakouts, breakouts that look at case studies, district-team breakouts. Provide discussion prompts and protocols to guide the breakout room time.

## About this resource:

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## References

McCart, A., & Miller, D. (2019). Leading equity-based MTSS for all students. Corwin.

McIntosh, K., & Goodman, S. (2016). Integrated multi-tiered systems of support: Blending RTI and PBIS. Guilford Press.

### Resources:

Contact your NCSI TA facilitator at <https://ncsi-resources.wested.org/> for more information on implementing a book study approach to support building educator and leader capacity in your state.

#### For more information about book studies see:

**United Federation of Teachers Professional Book Study Guide**  
<https://www.uft.org/files/attachments/professional-book-study.pdf>

**FL DOE Professional Learning Toolkits: Book Study Guide**  
<https://fl01803656.schoolwires.net/cms/lib/FL01803656/Centricity/Domain/13712/PLC-Book-Study-Guidelines.pdf>