

Effective Instruction Collaborative

May 26, 2026



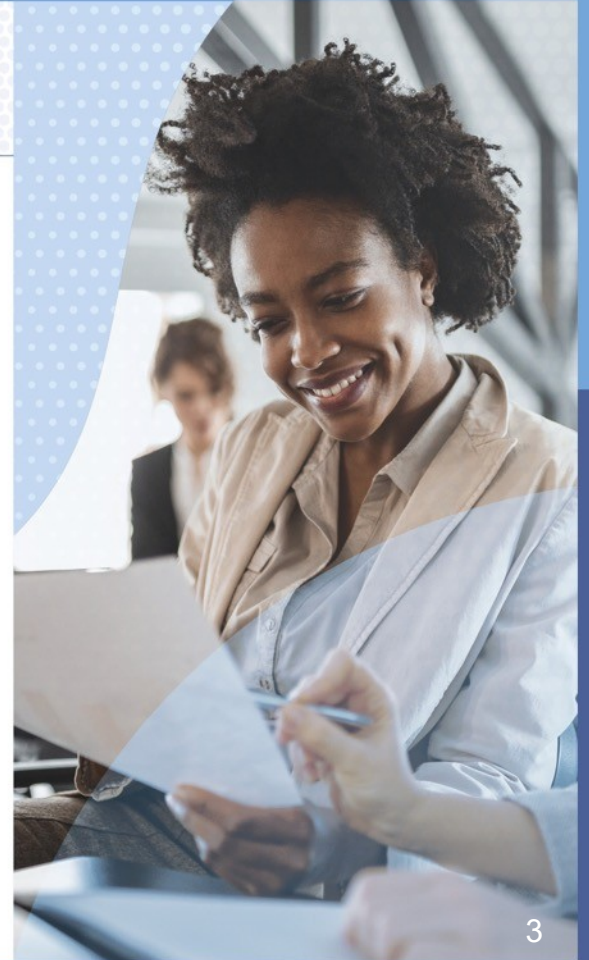
NCSI's Effective Instruction Priority Area: Goal

Build state education agency (SEA) capacity to provide leadership for effective instruction via evidence-based and high-leverage practices

- Know and understand the constructs of systems improvement
- Successfully apply that knowledge
- Effectively sustain and scale improvement over time to ensure deep and lasting impact

Agenda

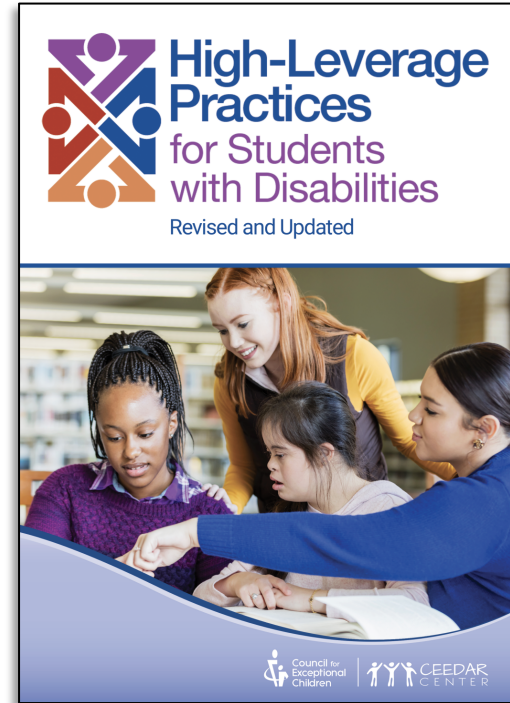
- Evidence in Action
- Addressing Common Misconceptions about SDI and MTSS
- Next Steps



Evidence in Action

Evidence in Action (1)

- 2024 revision of the [High-Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities](#) book is available as a free PDF



What Does the Research Say about HLPs?







- Review of 75 meta-analyses (2004–2019) on the 22 HLPs for K–12 special education
- Strongest evidence for instructional HLPs (especially intensive and explicit instruction)
- Evidence concentrated on younger students with higher incidence disabilities

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Literature Reviews

A Systematic Review of Meta-Analyses in Special Education: Exploring the Evidence Base for High-Leverage Practices

Gena Nelson, PhD ¹, Sara Cothren Cook, PhD², Kary Zarate, PhD ³, Sarah R. Powell, PhD⁵, Daniel M. Maggin, PhD ³, Kevallyn R. Drake, MIT¹, Allyson J. Kiss, PhD ⁴, Jeremy W. Ford, PhD ¹, Lin Sun, MA ⁶, and Daniel R. Espinas, MEd⁷

Abstract

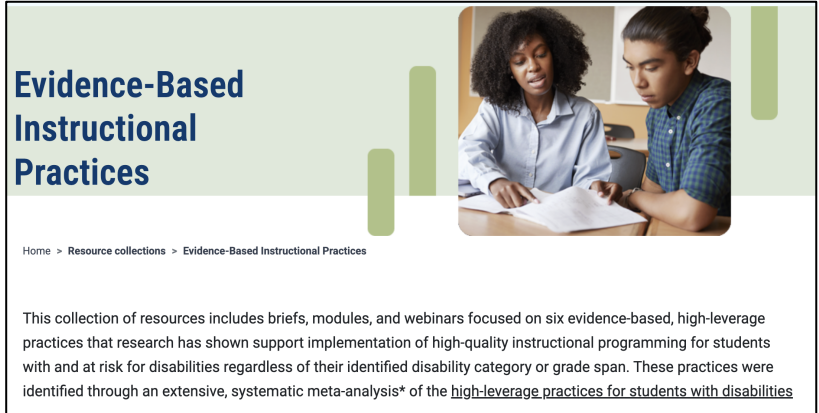
It is crucial that special education teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Despite federal legislation and efforts of the field to identify and disseminate evidence-based practices for students with disabilities, it is uncertain whether all special education teachers provide instruction based on the best available research. To better prepare special education teachers, McLeskey et al. proposed 22 high-leverage practices (HLPs). We conducted this systematic review of meta-analyses to provide an initial investigation of the experimental evidence reporting on the effectiveness of the HLPs for students with, or at risk for, a disability. Results indicated the largest amount of evidence from meta-analyses related to intensive instruction, explicit instruction, and social skills, with few meta-analyses reporting on collaboration and assessment. The results highlighted disproportional evidence according to disability categories. Implications for future research, practice, and teacher education are discussed.

Keywords

evidence-based practices, high-leverage practices, systematic review, special education

Related Resources from the PROGRESS Center

- Online modules
- Instructional briefs
- Webinars



Evidence-Based Instructional Practices

Home > Resource collections > Evidence-Based Instructional Practices

This collection of resources includes briefs, modules, and webinars focused on six evidence-based, high-leverage practices that research has shown support implementation of high-quality instructional programming for students with and at risk for disabilities regardless of their identified disability category or grade span. These practices were identified through an extensive, systematic meta-analysis* of the [high-leverage practices for students with disabilities](#)

The thumbnail image shows two women, one Black and one white, sitting at a table and looking at a document together. The background is light green with vertical bars of varying heights.

Addressing Common Implementation Challenges: MTSS and SDI

Today's Session

- Challenge 1: Understanding different tiered systems of support
- Challenge 2: Measuring tiered systems of support
- Challenge 3: Connecting Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) within MTSS



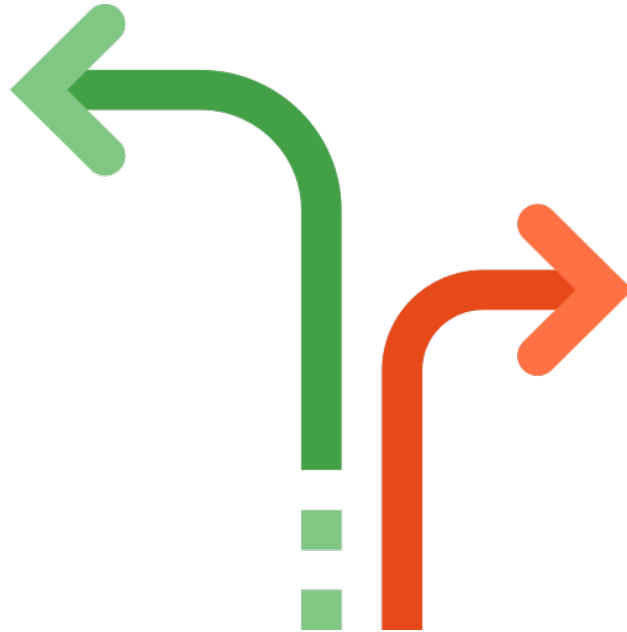
**What do you think
about when you
hear “Integrated
MTSS?”**



Tiered Systems of Support

Name	Primary Purpose	Primary Focus
Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS), Schoolwide PBIS (Sugai & Horner, 2009)	Improve behavior and/or social-emotional behavioral (SEB) outcomes	Behavior and/or SEB supports
Response to Intervention (RTI ; Fuchs et al., 2003)	Improve academic outcomes, often in literacy or reading	Academic supports
Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS ; Sugai & Horner, 2009)	Improve academic and SEB outcomes	Academic and SEB supports

MTSS Missteps: Siloed and/or Combined Implementation



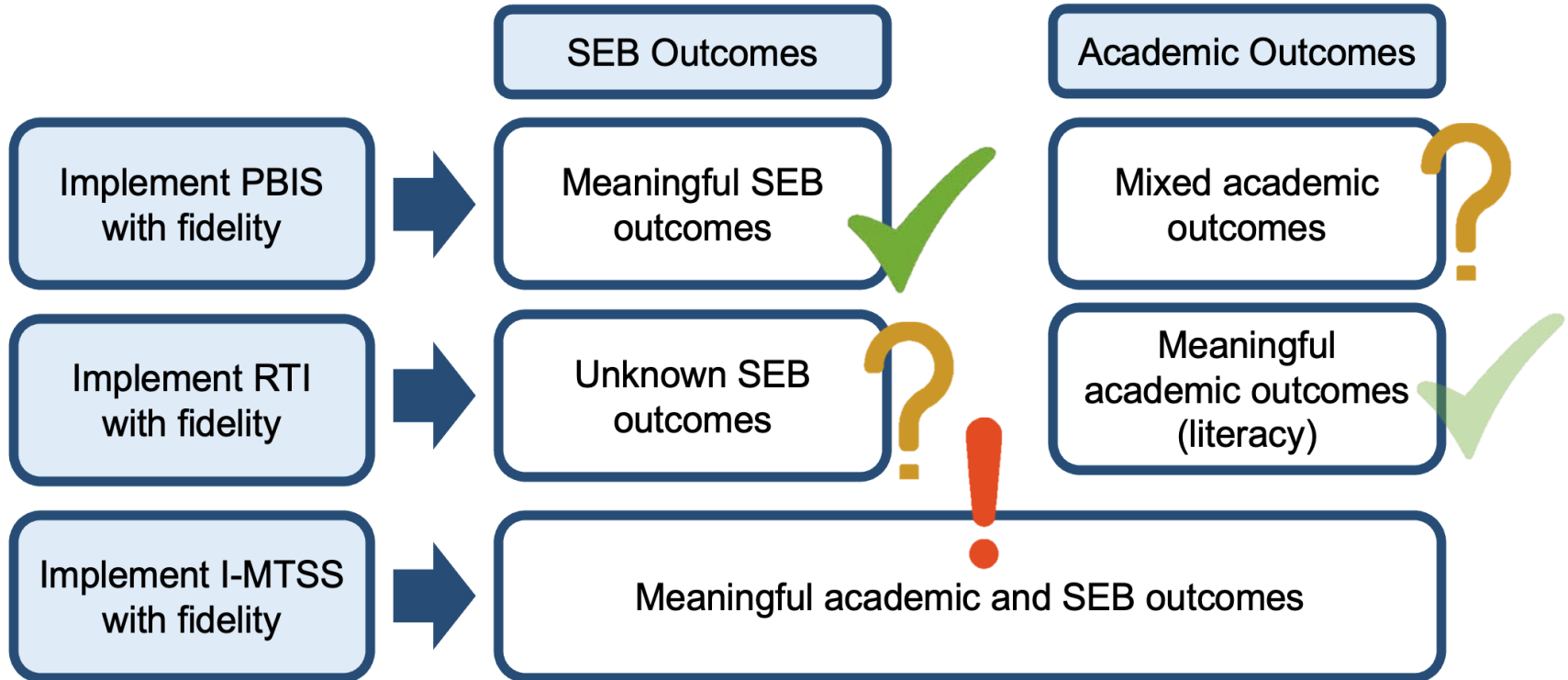
An Integrated Tiered System

Name	Primary Purpose	Primary Focus
Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS), Schoolwide PBIS (Sugai & Horner, 2009)	Improve behavior and/or social-emotional behavioral (SEB) outcomes	Behavior and/or SEB supports
Response to Intervention (RTI ; Fuchs et al., 2003)	Improve academic outcomes, often in literacy or reading	Academic supports
Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS ; Sugai & Horner, 2009)	Improve academic and/or SEB outcomes	Academic and/or SEB supports
Integrated MTSS (I-MTSS ; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016)	Improve academic and SEB outcomes	Strategically combined academic and SEB supports

I-MTSS Definition and Vision

"An Integrated Multi-Tiered System of Support (I-MTSS) is a comprehensive and equitable prevention framework for improving the outcomes of all students, including students with or at-risk for disabilities, through integrated academic and behavioral support."
(<https://mtss.org/overview/>, I-MTSS Research Network)

The Impact of an Integrated Tiered System on Students



The Impact of an Integrated Tiered System on Staff



Provides a **feasible** way to respond to rising academic and SEB needs

Promotes **efficiency** by de-siloing academic and behavioral supports



Lowers **staff burden** and **burnout** by streamlining teams and supports

Improves **staff trust, collaboration,** and **satisfaction**



Measuring Fidelity of MTSS

Measuring Tiered Systems of Support: Decision Guide

Measuring Tiered Systems of Support: Decision Guide

Background and Purpose

Given that many tools exist for measuring tiered systems of support to use. Some tools focus on the behavioral aspects of a tiered system inventory; Algossine et al., 2019), while others focus on the access Reading Tiered Fidelity; St. Martin et al., 2015). Other tools aim to behavioral aspects of a tiered system, like the [MTSS Fidelity of Implementation](#) (AIR® 2025). On the other hand, the [Tiered System of Support \(TSS\) Fidelity of Implementation](#) (Gandhi et al., 2024), assesses the degree to which a school district, or state make an informed decision about assessing tiered behavioral aspects of a tiered system. Consider the three questions select one or more measures to use.

1. **What are you trying to implement?** First, identify what the school is trying to implement. Think carefully about this, because what you intend to implement from what is being implemented. Review Table 1 to identify what measures to use regardless of what that system is called.

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Table 1. Types of Tiered Systems of Support

Name of Tiered System of Support	Other Names	Purpose	Distinguishing Feature of Tiered
Integrated MTSS (i-MTSS) (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive Integrated Three-Tier models (CIT; e.g., Lane et al., 2009) Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF; e.g., Eber et al., 2020) 	Improving student academic and behavioral outcomes	Focused on providing strategic academic and behavioral support
Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) (Sugai & Horner, 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State-specific names 	Improving student academic and behavioral outcomes	Focused on providing academic and behavioral support
Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS), Schoolwide PBIS (Sugai & Horner, 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective Behavior Support (EBS; Lewis & Sugai, 1999) PBIS (Sugai & Horner, 2002) MTSS-behavior (MTSS-B; Sugai & Horner, 2020) 	Improving student behavioral outcomes	Focused on providing behavior support
Response to Intervention (RTI) (Fuchs et al., 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Response to Instruction (Kame'enui & Simmons, 1998) MTSS-Reading (MTSS-R; Baker et al., 2010) 	Improving student academic outcomes	Focused on providing academic support

Note: Adapted from Pence, J. D., Arnold, A., Gandhi, A., Lemke, E., & Mujica, C. Integrated multi-tiered systems of support (i-MTSS). Manuscript under review. TRACKED Exceptional Children and MTSS Research Network. (2020). MTSS: What's in a Tiered System of Support Research Network, University of Connecticut. http://www.ctsps.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/64_MTS-5-16-20.pdf

2. **What questions do you want to answer?** Now, identify what questions your school state wants to answer about implementation. You might consider these research questions if you are conducting a study or your evaluation questions if you want to better understand implementation status at a school. Examples of questions might be:

- To what degree is the school integrating academic and behavioral support?
- To what degree are Tier 1 behavioral supports in place?

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Tool	Focus	Reliability	Validity	Grade Level	Administration Schedule	Approximate Time To Complete	Completed By
Self-Assessment Survey (SAS) (Kittelman, A., Izzard, S., McIntosh, K., Morris, K. R., & Lewis, T. J. (2024). Self-Assessment Survey: Evaluation of a Revised Measure Assessing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. <i>Assessment for Effective Intervention</i> , 53(4)508-524.1235226.	School-level PBIS	$\alpha = .96$	Not available	Not specified	Annually	20-30 minutes per person	Self-administered by school team
Individual Student System Evaluation Tool (ISSET) (Anderson, C.M., Lewis-Palmer, T., Todd, A.W., Horner, R.H., Sugai, G., and Sampson, N.K. (2012)	Tiers 2 and 3	$\alpha = .74-.96$	Concurrent: $r = .61$ (SAS)	Not specified	Quarterly, then annually, after 80% fidelity achieved	120-180 minutes	External evaluator
Benchmarks of Advanced Tiers (BAT) (Anderson, C., Childs, K., Kincaid, D., Horner, R. H., George, H., Todd, A. W., ... & Spaulding, S. (2009). Benchmarks for advanced tiers (BAT). <i>Educational and Community Supports</i> . University of Oregon & University of South Florida.	Tiers 2 and 3	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Not specified	Quarterly, then annually, after	Data unavailable	School-based team, with or without support from coach

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What's Happening In Your State?

- What type(s) of tiered systems are implemented in your state?
- To what extent are districts and schools implementing the tiered systems? How do you know?
- How has tiered system implementation impacted staff and students, particularly students with disabilities?

If MTSS is designed to support all students...how are students with disabilities being supported within MTSS in your state?

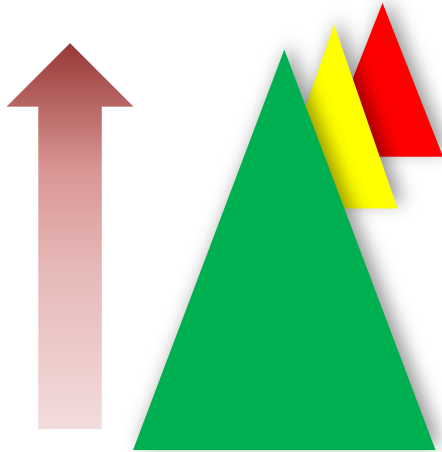


The Promise of Supporting Students with Disabilities within MTSS

- MTSS outlines a range of support and services that includes effective interventions, and evidence-based practices available to all students, including students with disabilities.
- Students, including students with disabilities receive services at any level/tier depending on need.
- Special education can leverage the features of MTSS to support students with disabilities (interventions and data).
- The IEP focuses on designing a program that addresses academic and functional needs.

The Reality of MTSS Implementation (Often)

Prior to referral: Student receives services at all levels, depending on need



After identified as a student with a disability: Student receives special education services through a parallel or separate system



Special
Education
Services
Provided

Leveraging the Data- Based Individualization Process: Lessons Learned from the National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII)

- Students with disabilities must have **access** to intensive intervention and many students who require intensive intervention also are students with disabilities.
- In schools implementing MTSS, students with disabilities may receive components of their intensive intervention across the levels of support.

Lessons Learned from NCII

- DBI can help educators design and deliver special education programming including
 - providing data for the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance,
 - help to set ambitious but realistic IEP goals and
 - collect ongoing progress monitoring data, and designing and delivering specially designed instruction.
- DBI should be part of the educational program for students with disabilities, not a separate process.



Your Insight

Can general education instruction and services be provided to all students through a Title I schoolwide plan or MTSS interventions be considered SDI?

MTSS and SDI: Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Letter to Chambers, May 9, 2012

'The IEP Team is responsible for determining what special education and related services are needed to address the unique needs of the individual child with a disability. The fact that some of those services may also be considered “best teaching practices” or “part of the district’s regular education program” does not preclude those services from meeting the definition of “special education” or “related services” and being included in the child’s IEP. The LEA must provide a child with a disability **specialy designed instruction** that addresses the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability, and ensures access by the child to the general curriculum, **even if that type of instruction is being provided to other children, with or without disabilities, in the child’s classroom, grade, or building.**'

Emphasis added. See also [OSEP Letter to McAndrews and Ramirez, September 5, 2024](#)

Reflections

- How are students with disabilities being supported within MTSS in your state?
- What guidance do you provide specific to students with disabilities and MTSS? Are there any implications for how that guidance supports or hinders the full integration of students with disabilities within MTSS?
- What questions are you asked by LEAs and schools?
- What challenges or barriers do you see?

Next Steps

Upcoming Event

- Partnership with Nate Levenson of New Solutions K12
- Presenter from Louisiana Department of Education
- [Interest form](#) now open; deadline is June 5

SAVE THE DATE

Lessons Learned from Louisiana's Best in the Nation Growth for Students with Disabilities

An NCSI SEA Workshop

WASHINGTON, DC
AUGUST 25–26, 2026

WestEd | Washington, DC
1140 3rd Street NE, #360, Washington, DC



Next Meeting

- **Tuesday, June 16, 2026**
- 11:30 AM -12:30 PM Eastern
- Topic: Kentucky's data-driven, tiered approach to professional development
- Questions or thoughts?
 - Reach out to us at ncsi-ei@wested.org



Thank You

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WestEd is the lead organization for NCSI. For more information about the work of WestEd, NCSI, and their partners, please visit www.ncsi.wested.org and www.wested.org

