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Tiered **I**nterventions Using
Evidence-Based **R**esearch

2024-2025 Mental and Behavioral Health Webinar Series

Leveraging MTSS to Support Student Mental Health

TEA | Texas Education Agency · Texas SPED Support · The Meadows Center FOR PREVENTING EDUCATIONAL RISK · TEXAS The University of Texas at Austin

Goal and Objectives

Goal

To advance student mental health supports in schools through an integrated multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS)

Objectives

Participants will be able to do the following:

- Define a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).

- Understand how an MTSS can support student mental health.

- Describe actionable best-practices for how teams can effectively use data to drive decisions.

- Identify data points at the systems level and student level that schools/districts can use to assess their school mental health systems.

- Determine best practices strategies that can be implemented within an MTSS to address student needs
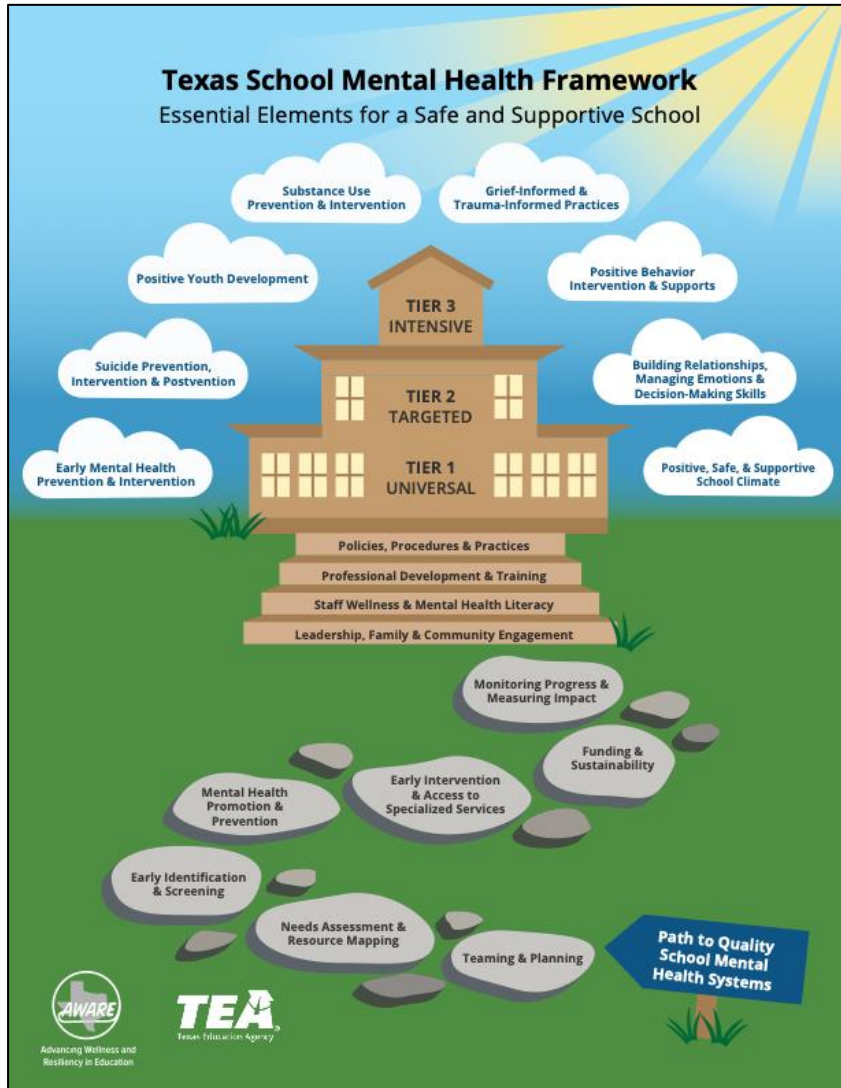
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What are
Comprehensive School
Mental Health Systems?

Definition of Comprehensive School Mental Health

Comprehensive school mental health systems provide a continuum of services and supports intended to:

- Promote a positive school climate

- Teach and support skills for social, emotional, and behavioral health

- Prevent mental health and substance use problems

- Intervene early to reduce the severity of mental health concerns; and

- Provide access to school-based and community-based interventions and supports to students and families.

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Texas School Mental Health Framework

- Visual graphic developed by TEA

- Helps schools visualize and plan how to implement a research-based process to deliver services and supports within a comprehensive school mental health system.

What is an MTSS for School Mental Health?

A Parent's Story

"My daughter was attending a school where she was obtaining a great deal of special education services but failing, skipping school, etc. I was advised that she should 'just drop out.'
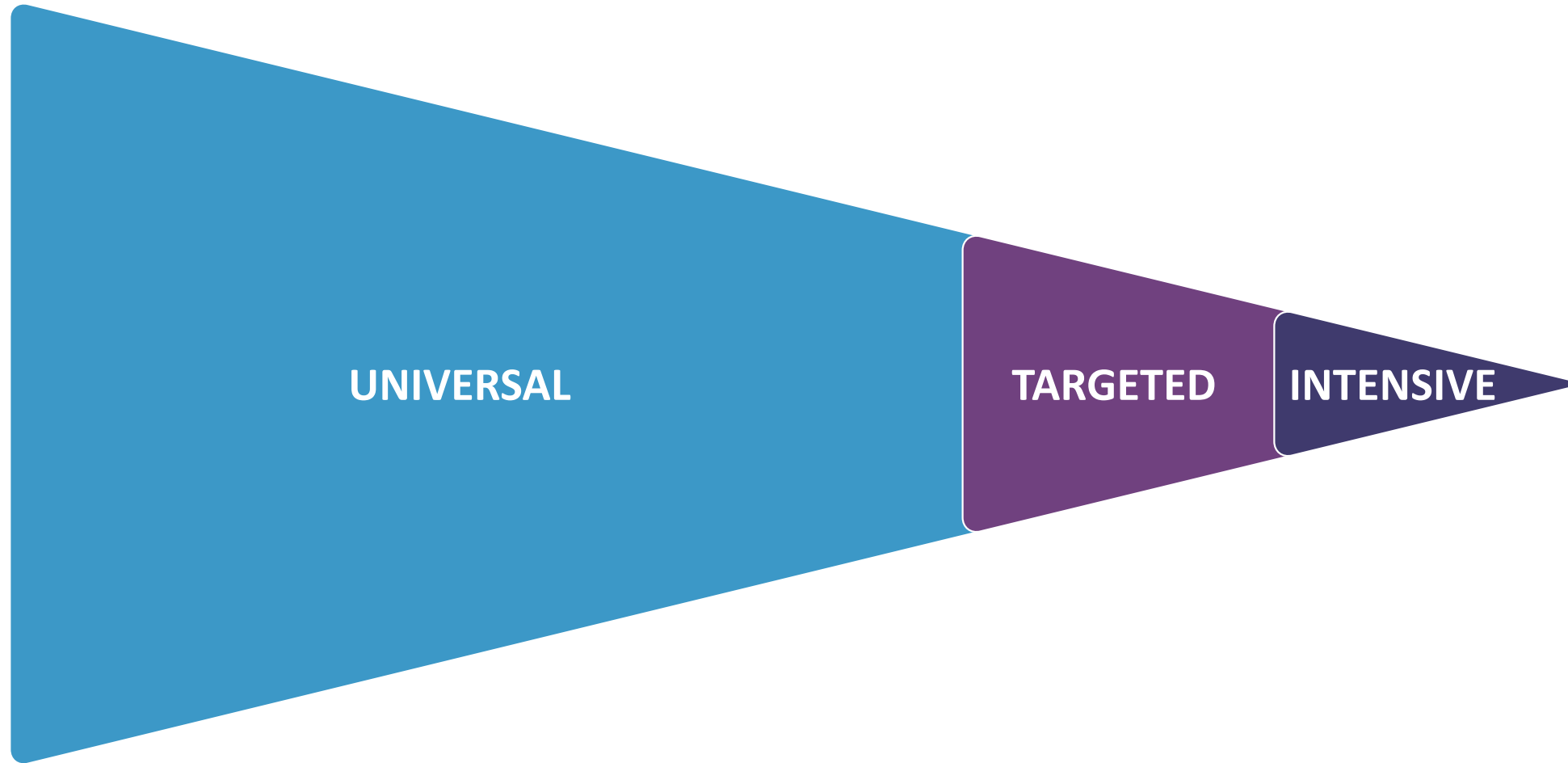
"I transferred her to a school using MTSS. On her first day, she told me that the teachers cared and that being in trouble was not cool. This was so strange to her that she wanted to leave. They showed her that it was OK to take risks and struggle, how to take pride in doing something she thought she could never do. They built close relationships with her. My relationship with her improved, and behavior at home improved.

"She [now] is an honor student in college and stays connected with her high school teachers. I love this school. The folks there brought the amazing girl that I knew was hiding underneath back to life."
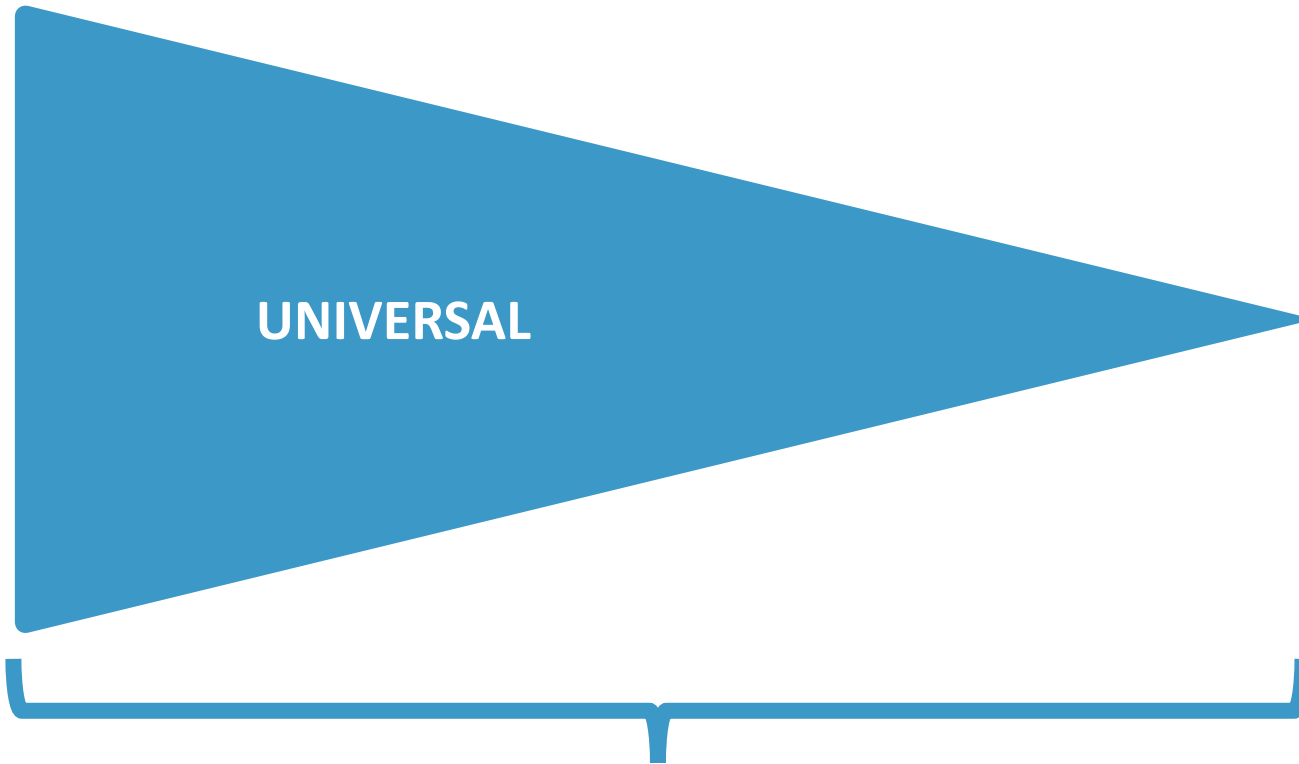
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MTSS Framework

- Provides an integrated system to support students' academic, behavioral, and mental health needs

- Uses assessment data to drive differentiated instruction for all students

- Assists with identifying students in need of academic and nonacademic supports

- Provides evidence-based intervention support to reduce academic, behavioral, and mental health skill gaps in students experiencing difficulty

- Promotes communication and collaboration among teachers and staff and with community partners to meet students' academic, behavioral, and mental health needs

- Engages caregivers as partners by communicating student progress, soliciting input, and connecting caregivers to community resources
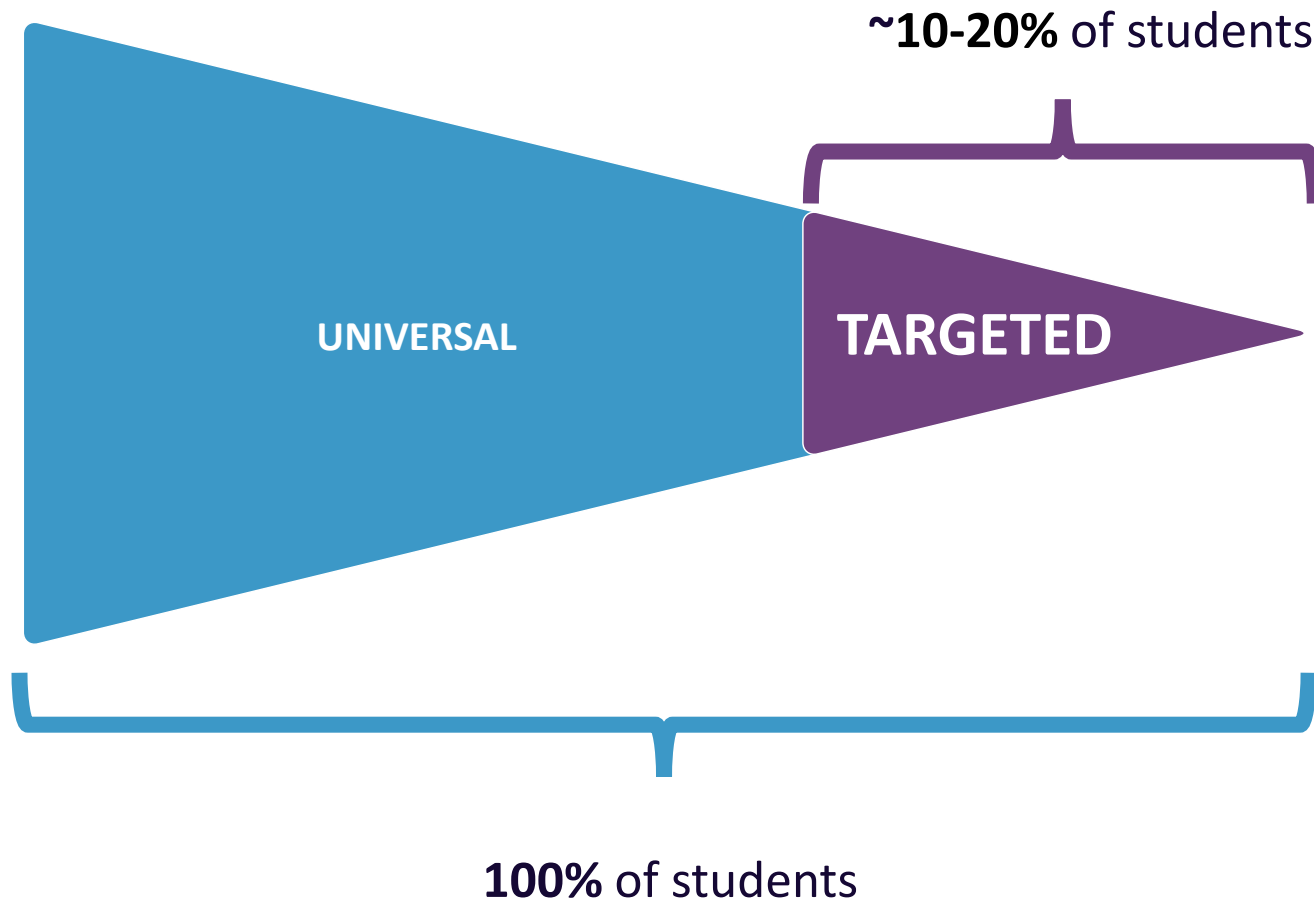
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Three-Tiered MTSS Framework

UNIVERSAL

TARGETED

INTENSIVE

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Universal Intervention and Supports

UNIVERSAL

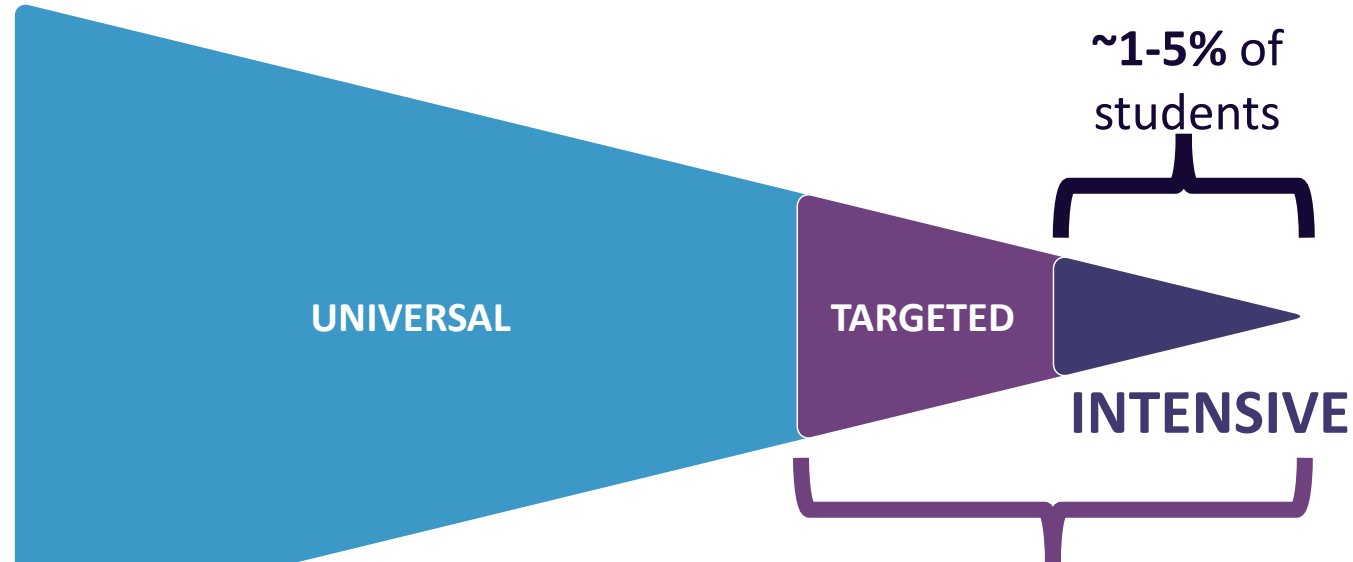- Also known as Tier 1 or primary prevention
- Designed for all students
- Occurs in general education classroom

Designed to meet the needs of 100% of students

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Targeted Intervention

~10-20% of students

UNIVERSAL

TARGETED

100% of students

- Also known as Tier 2 or secondary prevention
- Designed for students experiencing difficulty
- Can occur inside or outside of the classroom
- Provided in addition to Tier 1 instruction
- ~10-20% of students require targeted intervention

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Intensive Intervention

UNIVERSAL

TARGETED

~1-5% of students

INTENSIVE

- Also known as Tier 3 or tertiary prevention
- Designed for the following students:
  - Not making adequate progress in Tier 2
  - High intensity or frequency of

s require

Critical Reminder: MTSS may not be used to delay or deny an evaluation of a child suspected of having a disability and needing special education and related services.

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The Schoolhouse: The Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Foundational Features

- Policies, Procedures, & Practices
- Professional Development & Training
- Staff Wellness & Mental Health Literacy
- Leadership, Family, & Community Engagement

Correcting Misconceptions About MTSS

- A goal of Tier 1 is to reduce the need for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions and support. Though all tiers are designed to be preventive and proactive, emphasis must be on Tier 1.

- Tiers are not student labels. Tiers are levels of support. Children are **not** Tier 1, 2, or 3 students. They are **receiving** that level of **support**.

- Integrated MTSS implementation is perpetually under construction. It's not a fixed system. It's a process that requires flexibility, a willingness to make mistakes and learn from them, and consistency. Do not expect automatic results.

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Student Movement Between Tiers

- Tiers 2 and 3 **supplement** Tier 1; intervention **does not replace** Tier 1 instruction.

- Students do not necessarily move through the various tiers in a linear manner.

- Some students may require supports from multiple tiers for their different needs.

- The goal is for students to participate in the least restrictive environment— as much time in general education as possible.

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Core Mental Health Features of MTSS

- Effective teams that include community mental health providers

- Data-based decision making that includes school data beyond office discipline referrals and community data

- Formal processes for the selection and implementation of evidence-based practices across tiers with team decision making

- Early access to mental health support through comprehensive screening, including internalizing and externalizing needs

- Rigorous progress monitoring for fidelity and effectiveness of all interventions, regardless of who delivers them

- Ongoing coaching at the systems and practices levels for school and community professionals

Sugai & Horner, 2009

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MTSS: Optimizing Student Mental Health Supports

- Using MTSS can help establish a **single system of delivery** for supporting students' mental health needs.

  - Mental health specialists are part of the school team.

  - Outside referrals are processed through one team.

- Providing access is **not** enough.

  - Success is defined by outcomes.

  - Rigorous progress monitoring is key.

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MTSS: An Evolution

Response to Intervention

- Uncovering strengths and needs in **academic** skills
- Use of evidence-based curricula
- Explicit instruction
- Increasing intensity of supports (i.e., dose and frequency) based on need
- Teams make decisions about what and how to implement to support need (e.g., grade level)

ACADEMICS

Multi-Tiered System of Supports

- Uncovering strengths and needs in **academic and social-emotional-behavioral** skills
- Use of evidence-based curricula
- Explicit instruction **as prevention**
- Increasing intensity of supports (i.e., dose and frequency) based on **strength and need**
- Teams make decisions about what and how to implement to support need

ACADEMICS, BEHAVIOR, AND MENTAL HEALTH

Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports

- Uncovering strengths and needs in **social-emotional-behavioral** skills
- Use of evidence-based curricula
- Explicit instruction **as prevention**
- Increasing intensity of supports (i.e., dose and frequency) based on **strength and need**
- Teams make decisions about what and how to implement to support need

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, BEHAVIOR

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What Teaming Practices Should be Considered?

Establish a Single Set of Teams

- Identify need for merging teams with similar goals.

- Expand team membership.

- Establish roles and functions of teams across tiers of support.

- Consider role changes for staff.

- Establish team operating procedures and problem-solving approaches.

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Schools Can't Do This Alone

Who can you invite to join the effort?

- Community mental health service providers
- Child-serving agency personnel
- Local government officials
- Parks and recreation staff
- Librarians
- Youth

- Families
- Before- and after-school care providers
- Business owners
- Faith and community leaders
- Hospital staff
- Others…

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Who Should Be on the District/Community Leadership Team (DCLT)?

- School improvement personnel
- Professional development and teacher mentoring personnel
- Family and youth community leaders
- Social services personnel
- After-school personnel
- The Department of Recreation Services

- Administrative and teacher representatives
- Student supports director
- Law enforcement
- Board members
- Local MH provider or core service agency
- Special education director
- Juvenile services coordinator

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Integrated Teams: Inherent Role of Clinicians

Coaching and Facilitation

Coaching and Coordination

Coaching and Consultation

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Establish School-Level Procedures and Routines of an MTSS

- Develop a process for implementing universal screening.
- Develop a request for assistance process for identifying students who need additional supports.
- Develop routines for data-based decision making.
- Develop a process for selecting evidence-based interventions.
- Establish a process for tracking fidelity of all interventions.
- Establish a process for monitoring the outcomes of all interventions.

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How Can an Expanded View of Data Benefit an MTSS for School Mental Health?

Examples of Community Data

- Demographic data for the neighborhood, community, or district

- Community strengths and partnerships

- Homelessness rates

- Incarceration rates

- Drug use and rate of overdoses

- Military deployment schedules

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Expanded School and Community Data

Data Sources	General Trends and Key Findings
School Data	
Climate Survey	• 60% of students felt like they belong to the school community. • 80% of staff members felt like they belong to the school community. • 60% of students felt safe at school.
Youth Risk Assessment Survey	• 23% of students reported being in a fight one or more times during the last 12 months. • 6% of students reported they had been threatened with a weapon on school property.
Academic Health	• 80% of students were on track to graduate on time. • 70% of students were reading at proficiency.
Social Behavior Health	• 70% of students engaged in behavior resulting in 0 to 1 office referrals during the last 12 months. • 30% of students screened positive for anxiety.
Attendance Data	• 94% attendance rate was found with variability across subgroups.
Community Data	
Census Data	• 11% of families live in poverty. • 5% unemployment rate was found.
Community Assets and Wellness	• 50% of students live within a mile of a park or faith-based building.
Community Health Indicator	• 5% of homes in our community have elevated lead levels.
Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance Data: Health Risk Behaviors	• 15% of families are without health insurance (as compared to 6% districtwide). • 20% of families are affected by opioid misuse (as compared to 5% districtwide).

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Assessment Types in MTSS

UNIVERSAL
- Universal evidence-based practices
- Screening of all students
- Progress monitoring of at-risk students
- Data-based decision making

TARGETED
- Targeted evidence-based practices
- Progress monitoring
- Data-based decision making

INTENSIVE
- Diagnostics
- Intensive evidence-based practices
- Progress monitoring
- Data-based decision making

- Universal screening
- Progress monitoring
- Diagnostic assessment

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Universal Screening

Purpose

- Make a binary (yes/no) decision about which students are at risk for problems in reading, mathematics, writing, and behavior up to three times yearly

- Inform progress monitoring and/or administration of a diagnostic assessment

Considerations

- Identify all students who struggle, even if identifying some students who may not be at risk

- Conduct with every student

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Universal Screening in Behavior and Mental Health

Two types of data can be used to screen students' behavior and mental health:

- **Mass screening** based on short teacher questionnaires that nominate students with internalizing or externalizing behaviors (e.g., Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders)

- **Review of existing data**, including cumulative records, attendance reports, office referrals, and behavioral referrals

Romer et al., 2020

Resource: National Center for Intensive Interventions Website

- Tools charts (https://intensiveintervention.org/about-charts-resources):
  - Academic Screening Tools Chart
  - Behavioral Screening Tools Chart
- Display expert ratings on technical rigor
- Can be filtered by choosing specific areas (e.g., reading, mathematics) and grade levels (e.g., elementary, middle school)

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Resources for Behavior and Mental Health Screening

- **Texas School Mental Health Toolkit**
  https://schoolmentalhealthtx.org/school-mental-health-toolkit
  - School-Based Screening Tool Compilation

- **Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**
  www.pbis.org
  - Systematic Screening Tools: Universal Behavior Screeners

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Most Important Considerations

- Is the assessment **reliable and valid**?

- Is the assessment **used for its designed purpose**?

- Is the assessment **cost effective**? Does it avoid diverting significant funding from intervention?

- Is the assessment **directly related to intervention**?

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Develop Routines for Data-Based Decision Making

- Identify and review expanded data sources.

- Organize data sources into an easy-to-read format for ongoing review.

- Define entrance criteria and data thresholds.

- Identify thresholds at the system level.

Entrance Criteria, Thresholds, and Red Flags

- Consider entrance criteria and data thresholds to set for interventions.

- Monitor data, looking for patterns.

- Watch for large numbers of students demonstrating similar behaviors, such as the following:

  - Chronic absences

  - Tardies in specific classrooms

  - Self-reported anxiety

- Decide whether these numbers indicate a Tier 1 problem.

- Problems experienced by a smaller number of students indicate a need for more targeted interventions.

- Thresholds should also be set for individual students' behavioral patterns.

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Progress Monitoring

Purpose

- Monitor student learning in relation to instruction/intervention

- Adjust instruction/intervention based on progress

- Predict growth trajectories before a student falls behind

- Determine progress at student, class, school, and district levels in relation to instructional programs

Considerations

- Requires knowledge regarding how to move students through increasingly intense interventions and how to use data for efficient resource allocation

- Can be done with every student but should be done more frequently for students at risk for whom a teacher wants to monitor growth in a specific area

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Mental Health and Wellness Is Everyone's Job

To move past the model where a few staff members are the **only** response to students' behavioral and mental health needs, we must build the capacity of the **entire** staff.

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Developing a Positive School Climate and Culture

- Research demonstrates the importance of creating a school environment in which mutually supportive relationships among students, teachers, and parents can develop. Student success is greatest when teachers, students, and parents collectively work together.

- Creating an inclusive, supportive school climate and culture can be the first step to supporting student mental health and well-being.

Balfanz, 2007; Goodwin, 2010

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PBIS's Connection to School Climate and Culture

PBIS creates a stronger learning climate and culture by establishing a predictable environment with common language and practices that teach and reinforce positive behaviors—both prosocial and academic.

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PBIS Defined

PBIS is an evidence-based, multi-tiered framework that helps districts and schools organize and implement effective social and behavioral practices that support academic achievement for all students—especially students with disabilities.

What PBIS is **not**:

- A program

- A curriculum

- A one-time training

Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, n.d.; Sugai & Horner, 2020

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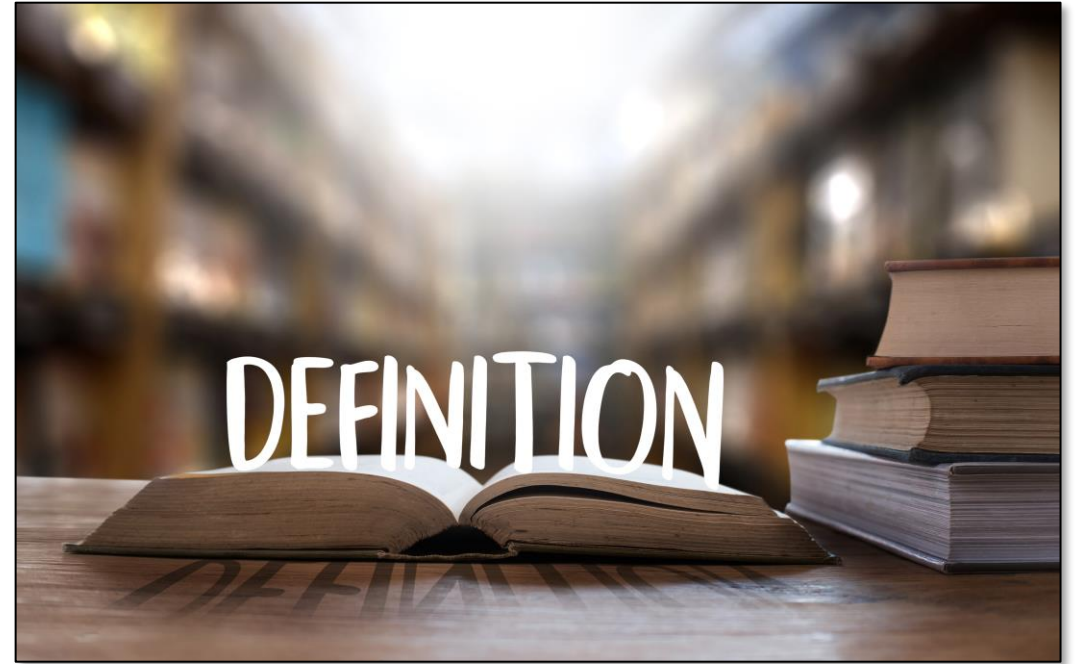
PBIS Is an Instructional Approach

- Emphasizes prevention: Proactive vs. reactive

- Creates predictable environments:
    - Common language
    - Common practices

- Teaches and acknowledges appropriate behavior: Similar to academic instruction

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Foundational Principles

- Students can learn positive behavior.

- Environments can be created to teach and reinforce these positive behaviors.

- Changing environments requires changing educator behavior.

- Systems of support are necessary for both students and educators.

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PBIS Framework

Proactive, preventive design

Common language

Adaptable to fit contexts and needs

Universal intervention   Targeted intervention

Intensive intervention
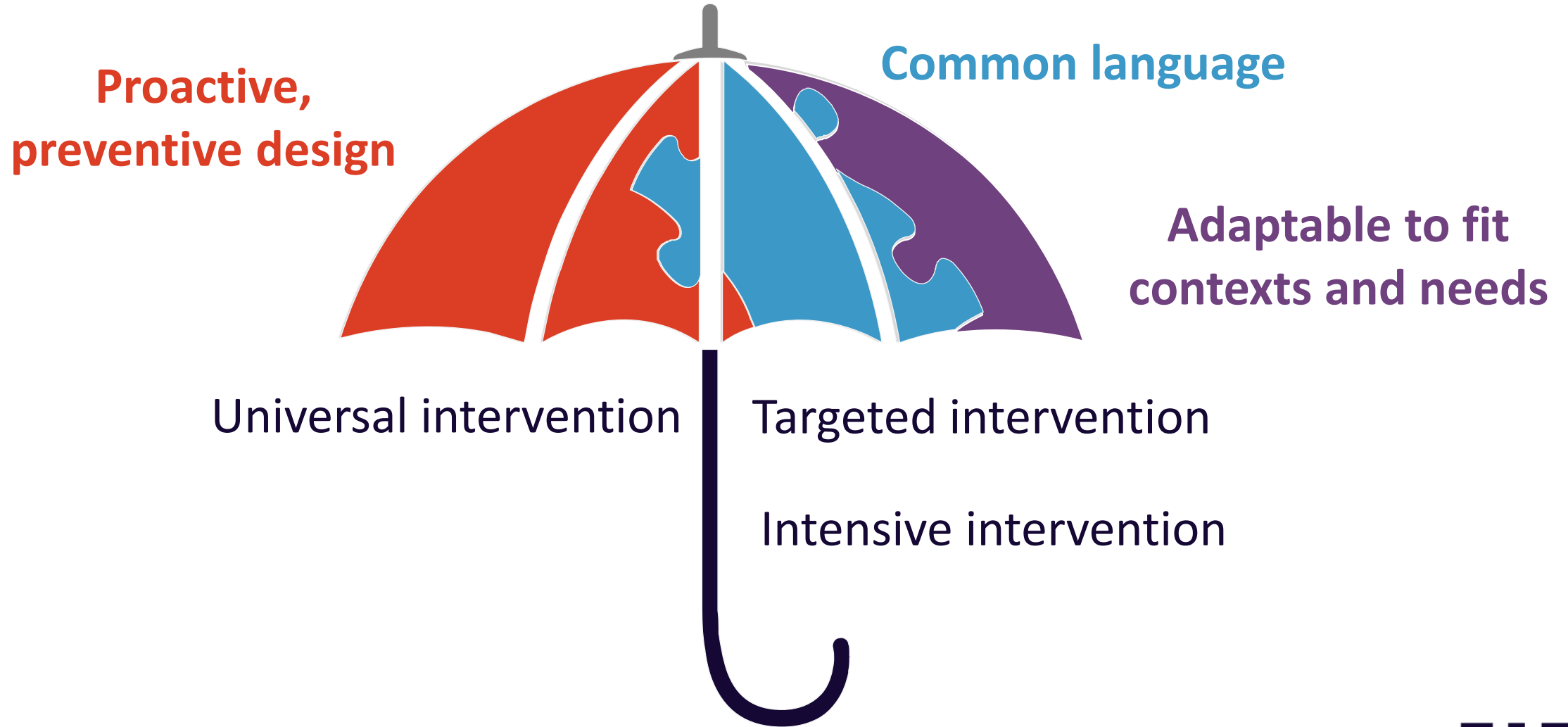
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The Interconnected Systems Framework

- Deliberate application of the multi-tiered positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) framework for all behavioral and mental health interventions (e.g., trauma-informed practices, bullying prevention, restorative practices)

- Alignment of all related initiatives through one system at the state, regional, district, and school levels

- Active participation of family and youth

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Relationships as Building Blocks

- Research demonstrates that teacher-student relationships have strong impacts on educational outcomes.
  - Positive relationships correlate with higher student engagement and higher student achievement.
  - For example, teachers who have **high-quality** relationships with their students have 31% **fewer** discipline problems.
- Positive teacher-student relationships are especially important for children from disadvantaged economic backgrounds and children with learning difficulties.
- Positive relationships are a foundation for student success. They are not, however, sufficient to improve student outcomes. They are a piece of the puzzle.

Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2009; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011

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Engaging the Family

All caregivers and families want their children to succeed.
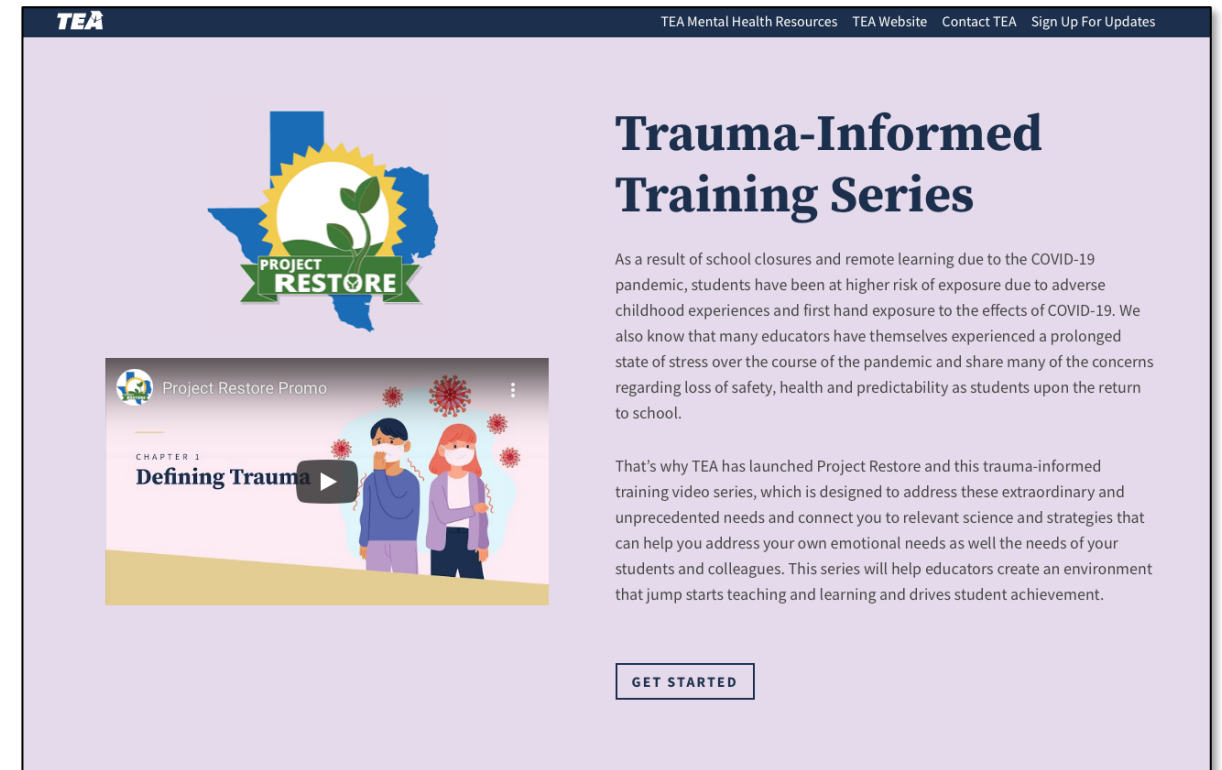
- Families who are informed and involved in this work are more likely to support it.

  - Work from a culturally responsive lens to build on caregivers' strengths to support their children's needs.

  - Collect family input to ensure that the systems, supports, and expectations for students at school are culturally relevant and meaningful to families.

  - Use various channels of communication to share information, such as schoolwide expectations and mental health strategies that are effective at school and might also benefit families at home.

  - Capitalize on existing formal and informal events, such as family nights.

- Some caregivers have had traumatic experiences with schools, authority figures, etc., so trauma-informed practices can facilitate family engagement.

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Engaging the Community

- Engaging social services agencies to connect with families through the school builds **trust** and **interaction**.

- Families receive information and training regarding mental health and wellness.

- Families and community partners promote social, behavioral, and well-being skills for all children.

- **To implement MTSS effectively, formalize institutional relationships within the community. Don't rely on personal relationships alone.**

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Resources for Implementation

- TIER online, self-paced courses
- Community resources
- Resources for Texas educators
- Mental health needs assessments

Self-Care Matters

Individual Level

- Prioritize **your** mental health.
- Build **your** resiliency.
- We can't teach what we don't know.
  - Teach
  - Model
  - Reinforce

School and District Levels

- Emphasize the mental health and wellness of all adults.
- Conduct needs assessments.
- Provide training, support, ongoing professional development, and opportunities to foster personal well-being.

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