



Evaluation Brief: Implementation and Outcomes of Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports: 2011–2014

by Kristin Reedy and Natalie Lacireno-Paquet

The focus of the Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) is to improve outcomes for all students by instituting system-level change across the classroom, school, district, and state. Such systemic change is accomplished through development of a coherent continuum of evidence-based, systemwide practices to support a rapid response to each student's academic and behavioral needs, and features frequent data-based monitoring for instructional decision making.

Kansas MTSS integrates what is known about the components of effective schools into a single framework for improved social and academic outcomes for all students. Core components include evidence-based curriculum, high-quality instruction, a comprehensive assessment system, data-based decision making, effective intervention, fidelity of implementation, ongoing professional development, and leadership within an empowering school and district culture.

Implementation of MTSS has grown rapidly in Kansas and is a key approach used for turning around low-performing schools in the state, with more than a third of all public schools implementing MTSS to date. A recently completed evaluation of the effort by WestEd found that Kansas MTSS is substantially contributing to improved student outcomes at the local level, as well as benefitting teachers, improving instruction, and supporting better school functioning.

Evaluation Findings

Who Participates in Kansas MTSS?

Finding 1: The scope and reach of MTSS as a statewide initiative is well established in Kansas. The

statewide MTSS “presence” is pervasive. The state may be at a “tipping point” in terms of statewide scale-up and installation of MTSS across the state.

At this point in time, 48.0 percent of the 1,472 schools in Kansas have participated in some level of formal MTSS training. These schools represent 67.0 percent of the 293 districts across the state, showing that approximately two-thirds of public school districts in Kansas have schools that have participated in MTSS formal training experiences (2005–2014). Eighteen districts have taken a districtwide approach to implementing MTSS. About 224,000 (43.0 percent) of all Kansas public school students are enrolled in schools that have participated in Structuring or Implementation training since 2008.

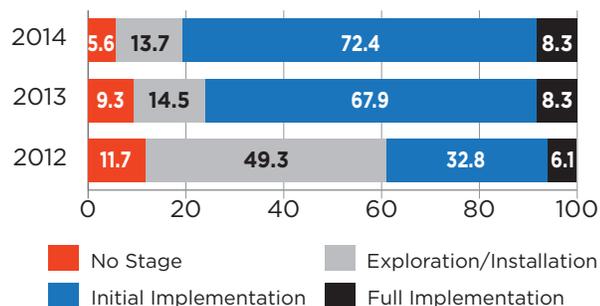
What Happens in Schools Implementing MTSS?

Finding 2: Schools are demonstrating the hallmarks of strong implementation of the Kansas MTSS framework; specifically, they are demonstrating strong leadership at the school and district level, high-quality core curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices, an empowering culture with increased teacher collaboration, data use, ongoing professional development, and the alignment and integration of school improvement initiatives. The consistent implementation of these practices

TABLE 1. Classification of Responding Schools by Stage of Implementation

Stage of Implementation	2012		2013		2014	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
No stage	77	11.7	55	9.3	31	5.6
Exploration	266	40.5	70	11.8	70	12.6
Installation	58	8.8	16	2.7	6	1.1
Initial Implementation	215	32.8	402	67.9	402	72.4
Full Implementation	40	6.1	49	8.3	46	8.3
Total Implementers	579	88.2	537	90.7	524	94.4
Total	656	100.0%	592	100.0%	555	100.0%

Source: Authors' analyses of primary data collected.

FIGURE 1. Percentage of Schools at Various Stages of Implementation, 2012 to 2014

Source: Authors' analyses of primary data collected.

results in a smoothly run system that is achieving its intended outcomes.

Finding 3: Implementation of MTSS at the school level is increasingly consistent with the Kansas MTSS framework. Schools are moving from exploration/learning about MTSS to more advanced implementation stages over time.

The 2014 statewide Kansas MTSS School Survey of Effective Instructional Practices yielded results that provided a snapshot of MTSS implementation in schools across Kansas. Respondents to the survey

reported that they were currently implementing MTSS (75.5%), with another 10.7 percent of respondents planning to implement. About 81.0 percent (448) of schools responding to the survey are implementing MTSS at the initial implementation level or higher, and this is likely an underestimate as it is based only on those schools responding to the survey. The majority are implementing in reading (84.8%). More than half of respondents are implementing in math (56.9%) and 43.7 percent of respondents are implementing in behavior (see Appendix B for a summary of the 2014 survey findings). The percentage of schools scoring at the full implementation stage remained stable at 8.3 percent for 2014. A similar pattern of responses was reported in 2012 and 2013 (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

What are the benefits of MTSS?

Finding 4: MTSS is substantially contributing to improved student outcomes at the local level as well as resulting in benefits to teachers, improved instruction, and school functioning.

Statewide, most respondents to the Kansas MTSS School Survey of Effective Instructional Practices reported that to “some extent” or “to a great extent” implementing MTSS has had a positive impact on

student outcomes: students scoring at benchmark (89.5%); students scoring as proficient on the state assessment (70.3%); a decrease in Office Discipline Referrals (77.1%); and a decrease in special education referrals (63.4%).

Universal screening assessment data from a sample of schools at full implementation shows gains on average for reading and math (except third-grade math), with the largest gains evidenced in kindergarten (see Figure 2).

However, hard data on student achievement/improvement are not available statewide. State assessment data are inconclusive as to any patterns or trends in the achievement levels of schools implementing MTSS.

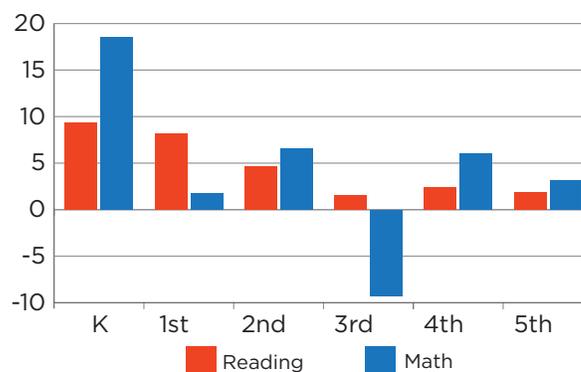
In survey data and interviews with the Core Team and case study sites, respondents report benefits to students, teachers, and schools as a result of implementation of MTSS. Survey responses show that schools are observing more students scoring at benchmark on the universal screeners, behavior is improving, there are fewer special education referrals, and student engagement and motivation has improved. Focus group and interview data indicate that schools and teachers are changing their attitudes and practices related to collaboration and shared responsibility for all students, developing a common language, and using data in their decision-making processes. MTSS helps schools to focus on strengthening the core curriculum and instruction as well as on interventions.

How Does the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) Support and Sustain the Implementation of Kansas MTSS?

Finding 5: KSDE has established an effective statewide infrastructure to support and sustain MTSS implementation.

Components include the MTSS Core Team, the cadre of Recognized MTSS Facilitators, the annual MTSS Symposium, an extensive and frequently updated website of materials, research, and resources on MTSS, and an ongoing dissemination plan

FIGURE 2. Change in the Percentage of Students at Benchmark, Fall to Spring, 2013/2014



Source: Authors' analyses of primary data collected.

implemented in coordination with the Technical Assistance System Network (TASN). Professional development materials are well aligned with national professional learning standards, such as the Learning Forward standards (2012).

Evidence from the 2014 school survey, Core Team, KSDE leadership, case study principal and administrator interviews and focus groups, the document review, and the MTSS website demonstrate that KSDE and the Core Team are effectively supporting implementation of MTSS with fidelity. Specifically, respondents to the 2014 school survey reported that, "to some extent" or "to a great extent," KSDE has established the necessary infrastructure to sustain and extend MTSS implementation over time (77.4%), that KSDE effectively disseminates information about MTSS (75.9%), that there are sufficient resources (76.0%), and that MTSS is clearly aligned with other state and local improvement initiatives (79.3%). Sixty-one percent of respondents agreed that there are sufficient MTSS Facilitators to support MTSS statewide.

How Has Kansas MTSS Implementation Changed Over Time?

Finding 6: MTSS implementation is being refined in Kansas to focus on the district rather than the individual school level, and to the use of an

“integrated model” where the areas of reading, math, and behavior are approached simultaneously.

The shift to investment at the district level using the integrated MTSS—a comprehensive, integrated three-tier (MTSS: CI3T) framework—will require increased capacity on the part of the Core Team. According to the 2014 school survey, a slight majority (56.1%) of respondents described MTSS as a “district-led” initiative; however, this does not necessarily mean that the district has taken a districtwide approach (as Wichita has done). Sixty-seven percent of Kansas districts have had schools who have participated in formal MTSS training, according to the data on annual training participation, while 18 districts have engaged in districtwide training and are taking a districtwide approach to MTSS.

What are the Next Steps for MTSS in Kansas?

Next steps for MTSS in Kansas may be summed up as, “Stay the course.” Investment in district-level capacity building, the strengthening of the Core Team, and continual adherence to the MTSS framework, as more and more districts and schools join the MTSS ranks, will sustain and expand MTSS over time. Investment in a statewide data system would enable KSDE to document the impact MTSS is having on student outcomes.

The evaluation activities over the past four years—from the annual online survey to the school case studies, the in-depth study of Wichita as the evaluation’s districtwide example to interviews with the Core Team—have provided a valuable perspective on sustainability of a statewide initiative such as MTSS—what it takes and what the challenges are. Staff buy-in and support, the integration and institutionalization of MTSS practices so that it becomes routine, the “way of doing things” and the umbrella for all school improvement efforts appear to be key. Training of staff, flexible scheduling, and the purchase of resource materials are all necessary but not sufficient. Sustained and continued district and school leadership support for MTSS through words and action are critical for statewide and local sustainability.

Kansas is both at a turning point and tipping point with regard to MTSS. The shift to a district-level focus for training and support and the move to the integrated model represent key decision-points in the process of statewide implementation. A scaling up tipping point may have been reached in terms of the number of schools and districts that are engaged in MTSS statewide. At this point in time, 48.0 percent of the 1,472 schools in Kansas have participated in some level of formal MTSS training. These schools represent 67.0 percent of the 293 districts across the state.

A stay-the-course/on-message approach from the state level on down appears to be the way to move forward with expansion and sustainability.

About the Evaluation

After a competitive request for proposal process, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) contracted with WestEd, an independent, not-for-profit research, evaluation, technical assistance, and professional development organization, to conduct an external evaluation of the Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS). The WestEd evaluation team’s task was to design, pilot, refine, and implement an evaluation system that measures the statewide progress of MTSS toward its main goal: creating a statewide system of support to local schools and districts in order to increase school capacity to use resources in ways that enable every child to be successful. The project provided formative and summative evaluation information to KSDE for improving and sustaining MTSS at the school, district, and state levels. Leadership and support from the KSDE Office of the Commissioner has been instrumental in the promulgation of MTSS as a framework for improving the education of all students.

The evaluation was guided by five evaluation questions:

Scope: How many schools and districts are participating in MTSS?

Implementation: Annually, how many schools and districts are (a) exploring the use of MTSS to meet students' academic and behavioral needs, (b) adopting and installing components of MTSS (e.g., assessments, curriculum, instruction, etc.), or (c) successfully implementing MTSS with fidelity?

Student Outcomes: How are students in schools and districts that are fully implementing MTSS performing?

Statewide System and Infrastructure: How effective are KSDE and MTSS Core Team activities in supporting statewide implementation of MTSS with fidelity by schools and districts?

Sustainability: How successful are schools and districts in sustaining MTSS?

WestEd designed a multi-year, mixed-methods evaluation system. The evaluation system was piloted and refined in 2011 prior to full implementation in 2012 through 2014. Key data collection activities included:

- » An annual survey, entitled the Kansas MTSS School Survey of Effective Instructional Practices, with responses from more than 500 schools per year;
- » Two-day site visits to six schools where core and intervention instruction and team meetings were observed, and interviews and focus groups with leadership teams, teachers, and staff were conducted;
- » A multi-day site visit to Wichita Public Schools that included interviews and/or focus groups with the Superintendent, leadership teams, the MTSS advisory team, as well as day-long visits to five schools (2 high schools, 1 middle school, and 2 elementary schools). Multiple cross-district focus groups were conducted with teachers, principals, and school-based MTSS Facilitators/coaches;
- » A follow-up visit to Wichita Public Schools that included interviews with the Superintendent, a group interview with the leadership team, and interviews with over ten focus groups with more than 100 teachers, coaches, and principals;

- » Periodic interviews with KSDE leadership;
- » Periodic interviews with all members of the Core Team;
- » Focus groups with Recognized MTSS Facilitators;
- » Document review;
- » Annual observation and participation in the Kansas MTSS Symposium;
- » Annual collection of grade-level universal screening data for selected schools; and
- » Annual analysis of school-level state assessment data.

The evaluation system was designed to give a complete picture of the implementation and early impact of MTSS. A mixed-methods design was used to provide a full and comprehensive view of MTSS implementation across Kansas from the perspectives of key stakeholders and participants and to offer an in-depth portrait of implementation in selected schools and districts across the state.

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This evaluation brief is drawn from the full evaluation report, *Implementation and Outcomes of Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports: Final Evaluation Report—2014*, which is available at http://www.kansasmtss.org/pdf/ex_eval/2015_KS_MTSS_Eval_Report.pdf

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