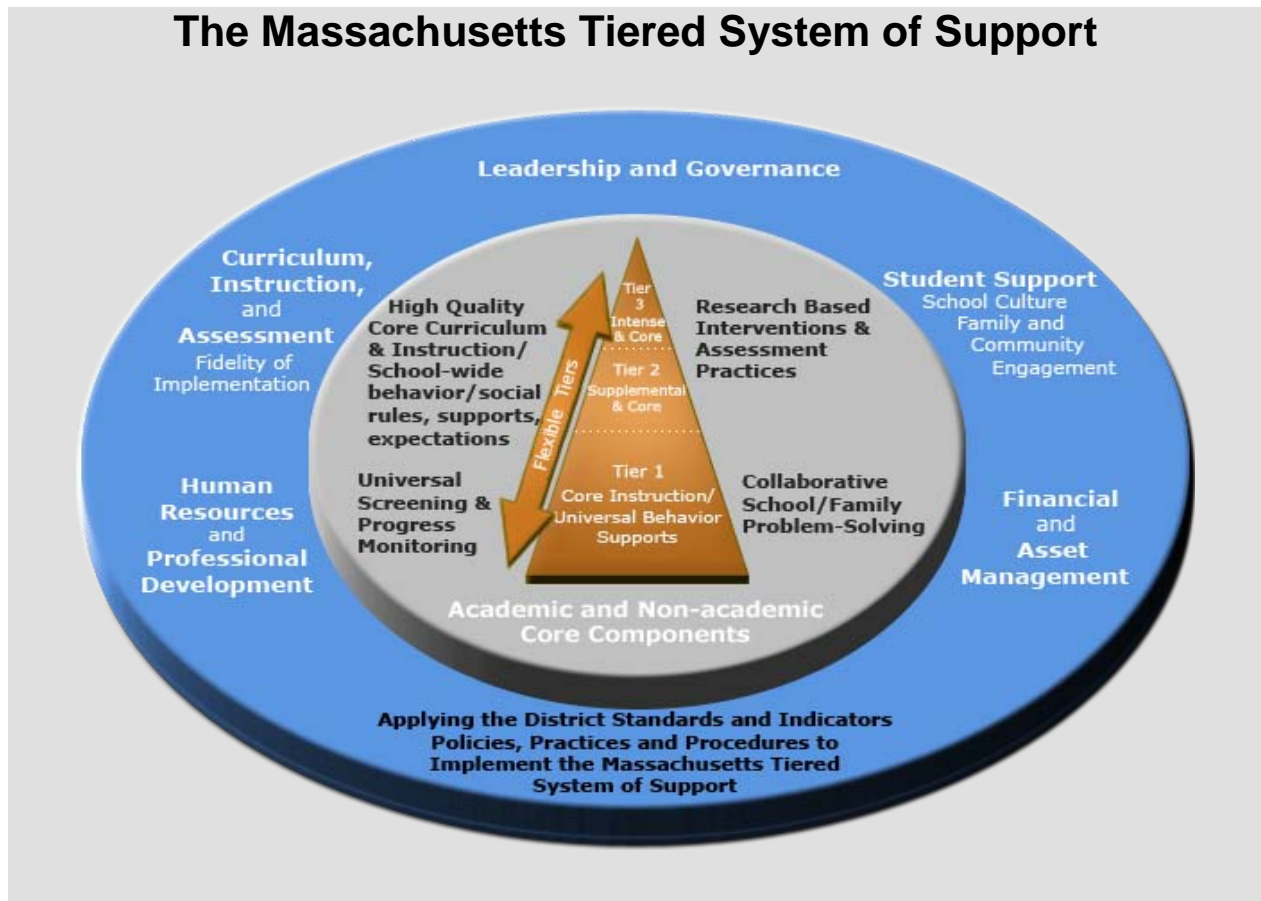


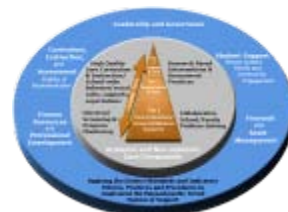
# The Massachusetts Tiered System of Support



## Chapter 1: Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Overview

Massachusetts has developed a blueprint outlining a single system of supports that is responsive to the academic and non-academic needs of all students. This blueprint, the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS), provides a framework for school improvement that focuses on system level change across the classroom, school, and district to meet the academic and non-academic needs of all students, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are academically advanced. It guides both the provision of high-quality core educational experiences in a safe and supportive learning environment for all students and academic and/or non-academic targeted interventions/supports for students who experience difficulties and for students who have already demonstrated mastery of the concept and skills being taught.

Schools and districts are encouraged to work toward an integrated approach to support students' academic and social-emotional competencies. All students receive academic instruction and behavioral supports that include differentiation and extension activities and are guided by the three Universal Design for Learning principles (multiple means of



representation, multiple means of action and expressions, and multiple means of engagement).

The MTSS blueprint describes the flexible tiers, academic and non-academic core components and school and district system of supports.

The flexible tiers represent a robust and responsive educational environment that provides students with a continuum of multiple supports to meet their needs. The tiers represent increasing intensity of academic and non-academic support and interventions. There is flexibility of the system and the programming to allow movement between the tiers (to both a more or less intensive type of support/intervention). To ensure that students eligible for special education services are able to access fully the system of tiered support, relevant information from their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) is to be incorporated into the design and implementation of instruction and assessments in all tiers.

The academic and non-academic core components of MTSS are:

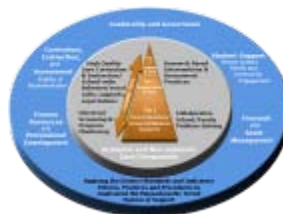
- high-quality core curriculum and instruction implemented with fidelity; and
- research-based academic interventions and assessment practices; and
- research-based behavioral interventions and supports; and
- universal screening and progress-monitoring; and
- collaboration and communication between educators and parents.

The school and district system of supports align with the District Standards and Indicators and provide the structure needed to develop the policies, practices, and procedures to successfully implement MTSS.

The District Standards and Indicators are:

- Leadership and Governance
- Student Support (School Culture, Family and Community Engagement)
- Financial and Asset Management
- Human Resources and Professional Development
- Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment (Fidelity of Implementation)

Developing this system of academic and non-academic support may represent a significant change for districts and schools—one that affects the entire school system and may require a long-term change process (of three or more years). Adhering to the blueprint is instrumental to the success of the tiered system of support.



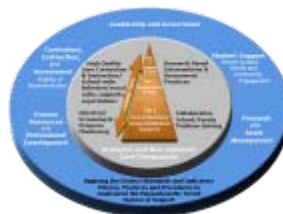
## Chapter 2: Flexible Tiers Overview

The flexible tiers represent a robust and responsive educational environment that provides students with a continuum of multiple supports to meet their needs. The tiers represent increasing intensity of academic and non-academic support and interventions. There is flexibility of the system and the programming to allow movement between the tiers (to both a more or less intensive type of support/intervention). The movement and the intensity are based on data from universal screenings, assessments, and progress monitoring, and the data drives the instructional decision making throughout the process. The tiered system is supported by incorporating technology as an instructional tool and part of a data collection system. To ensure that students eligible for special education services are able to access fully the system of tiered instruction, relevant information from their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) is to be incorporated into the design and implementation of instruction and assessments in all tiers.

### Condition for School Effectiveness

**IV. Effective instruction:** *Instructional practices are based on evidence from a body of high quality research and on high expectations for all students and include use of appropriate research-based reading and mathematics programs; the school staff has a common understanding of high-quality evidence-based instruction and a system for monitoring instructional practice.*

**VIII. Tiered instruction and adequate learning time:** *The school schedule is designed to provide adequate learning time for all students in core subjects. For students not yet on track to proficiency in English language arts or mathematics, the school provides additional time and support for individualized instruction through tiered instruction, a data-driven approach to prevention, early detection, and support for students who experience learning or behavioral challenges, including but not limited to students with disabilities and English language learners.*



## Chapter 3A: Core Components – Core Curriculum and School-wide Non-Academic Supports

### ***High-quality Core Curriculum and Instruction***

Curriculum, instruction, and assessments are aligned vertically (between grades) and horizontally (across classrooms at the same grade level and across sections of the same course). A method is established and implemented for assessing the effectiveness of the core curriculum on a routine basis. District and school leaders address instruction needs and strengths identified through active monitoring of instruction and ongoing use of formative and summative student assessment data. Qualified personnel are skilled in providing large- and small-group research-based differentiated instruction aligned with individual students' developmental levels and learning needs, and a system for formative feedback and decision-making is in place. All students receive academic instruction and non-academic supports that include differentiation and extension activities and are guided by the three Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles (multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expressions, and multiple means of engagement).

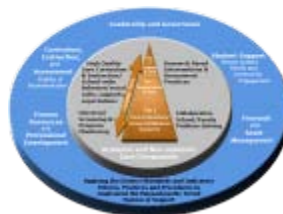
### ***School-wide Behavior/Social Rules, Supports, Expectations***

All students have access to non-academic supports that focus on the optimization of positive and productive functioning. Proactive and predictable classroom routines and a positive school climate are essential to the successful implementation of the tiered system of support. Classroom and school- wide expectations for all students must be clearly defined, communicated, and visually displayed in classrooms and throughout the school. The school climate should support positive relationships with adults/teachers/mentors to provide additional support and encouragement.

### **Condition for School Effectiveness**

*III. **Aligned curriculum:** The school's taught curricula are aligned to state curriculum frameworks and the MCAS performance level descriptions, and are also aligned vertically between grades and horizontally across classrooms at the same grade level and across sections of the same course.*

*IX. **Students' social, emotional, and health needs:** The school creates a safe school environment and makes effective use of a system for addressing the social, emotional, and health needs of its students that reflects the behavioral health and public schools framework.*



## Chapter 3B: Core Components - Universal Screening and Progress Monitoring

### ***Universal Screening and Progress Monitoring***

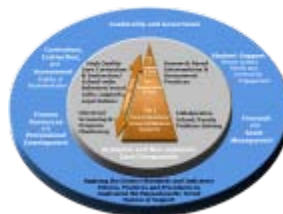
A universal screening system is in place and used by the school or district to assess the strengths and challenges of all students in academic achievement and social, emotional, and behavioral concepts, skills, and behaviors. A data collection and management system is in place for the purposes of screening, diagnostics, and progress monitoring. Data from continuous progress monitoring drive instructional decisions throughout the tiered process. Progress-monitoring data indicate student response to intervention and determine student movement through the tiers. Students' academic and non-academic progress is monitored with increasing frequency as they receive more intensive additional tiered supports/interventions. Additionally, information from assessments of the student's attention skills, participation behaviors, communication skills, memory, and social relations with groups, peers, and adults may be necessary to consider throughout the tiered system of support.

### **Condition for School Effectiveness**

*V. **Student assessment:** The school uses a balanced system of formative and benchmark assessments.*

## Chapter 3C: Core Components - Research-Based Interventions and Assessment Practices

Interventions and assessments are research-based and are valid and reliable predictors of future performance. Intervention and assessment procedures are sensitive to English language acquisition issues and used to distinguish these from other learning challenges. Interventions and assessments are time-efficient and administered by adequately trained staff. The assessment documentation of the student's progress collected through the flexible tiers is provided to the student's parents. The interventions supplement, enhance, support, and provide access to the core curriculum and are provided in addition to the core instruction/universal behavior supports.



## Chapter 3D: Core Components – Collaborative School/Family Problem-Solving

Teams use data-driven decision-making and problem-solving processes at the school, classroom, and individual student levels to make academic and non-academic decisions. Responsibility is shared among all educators (e.g., general education, special education, related services, English Language Education, Title I, and community-based representatives) for the progress of all students and parents are involved in the decision-making process across all tiers. School-level, grade-level, and student-centered teams meet collaboratively to review assessment data and make decisions. Time is scheduled for the grade-level and student-level teams to collaborate and conduct follow-up activities. All team members are aware of the necessary policies and procedures that must be in place to comply with special education regulations regarding the use of tiered instruction to determine eligibility for specific learning disabilities.





## Chapter 4A: District Standards and Indicators - Leadership and Governance

The school and district system of supports align with the District Standards and Indicators and provide the structure needed to develop the policies, practices, and procedures to successfully implement MTSS.

To ensure a successful system of academic and non-academic support, the district administration adheres to the model in their policy making and decision making for delivering instruction and providing non-academic supports.

The superintendent effectively delegates educational and operational leadership to principals, program leaders and administrators. Building principals provide leadership and support for the tiered model through the efficient and flexible use of time, personnel, fiscal resources. District leaders promote equity by distinguishing among the needs of individual schools, populations, and allocating adequate resources to the schools and students with greater needs. The building schedule is designed to support the tiered system of supports and there is appropriate allocation of time for implementation activities (e.g., screening, data analysis teams, progress-monitoring, intervention planning).

### **District Standard:**

**Leadership and Governance:** School committee and district and school leaders establish, implement, and continuously evaluate the effectiveness of policies and procedures that are standards-based, driven by student achievement data, and designed to promote continuous improvement of instructional practice and high achievement for all students. Leadership decisions and actions related to the attainment of district and school goals are routinely communicated to the community and promote the public confidence, community support, and financial commitment needed to achieve high performance by students and staff.

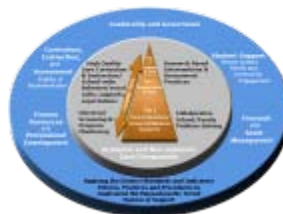
### **Condition for School Effectiveness**

**I. Effective district systems for school support and intervention:** The district has systems and processes for anticipating and addressing school staffing, instructional, and operational needs in timely, efficient, and effective ways, especially for its lowest performing schools.

**II. Effective school leadership:** The district and school take action to attract, develop, and retain an effective school leadership team that obtains staff commitment to improving student learning and implements a clearly defined mission and set of goals.

**VI. Principal's staffing authority:** The principal has the authority to make staffing decisions based on the School Improvement Plan and student needs, subject to district personnel policies, budgetary restrictions and the approval of the superintendent.

**XI. Strategic use of resources and adequate budget authority:** The principal makes effective and strategic use of district and school resources and has sufficient budget authority to do so.



## Chapter 4B – District Standards and Indicators - Student Support *School Culture, Family, and Community Engagement*

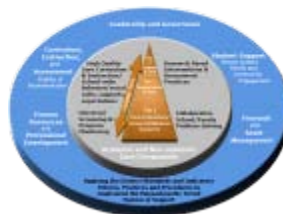
The school and district system of supports align with the District Standards and Indicators and provide the structure needed to develop the policies, practices, and procedures to successfully implement MTSS.

### **School Culture**

All school and district personnel are committed to the principles central to development and implementation of a successful tiered system of support while promoting a healthy school culture that sets high expectations and encourages success for all students. Creating a climate that promotes mental health and positive social, emotional, and intellectual growth for students is understood and practiced by every member of each school community. The district has policies, procedures, and practices that promote student high achievement, support course completion, reduce grade retention, and encourage on-time graduation. District and school staff adjust policies and practices to provide additional academic and non-academic programs or supports by using aggregated and disaggregated data on student participation and achievement. The district and its schools work to promote equity through inclusive classrooms and programs that use an integrated services model. District and school policies and practices promote student attendance, which is continuously monitored, reported, and acted upon. District and school policies and practices also help all students make effective transitions from one school, grade level, or program. Policies, procedures, and practices are also implemented to: 1) reduce suspensions, exclusions, and other discipline referrals; 2) minimize dropping out, and 3) recover dropouts.

### **Family and Community Engagement**

District and school personnel demonstrate awareness and sensitivity to cultural, linguistic, and other aspects of family diversity (e.g. disability, socioeconomic, etc). The district ensures that parents are provided information on the tiered system of supports (academic and non-academic), including an overview of the system and ways to support their children at home. The overview may include an explanation of interventions, assessments, and expectations of the model. Parents are invited to participate in the decision-making process throughout the tiered system and regular updates of intervention, goals, and formal assessment results are provided to parents when students receive services in more targeted tiers. Parents are informed of their right to request a special education evaluation at any time during the tiered process. Community partners and providers such as human service agencies, corporate and civic sponsors, and higher education give students and families access to health, social, recreational, and supplemental educational services and may include prevention, enrichment, early intervention, and intensive/crisis response services.





### **District Standard:**

**Student Support:** *The district provides quality programs for all students that are comprehensive, accessible and rigorous. Student academic support services and district discipline and behavior practices address the needs of all students. The district is effective in maintaining high rates of attendance for students and staff and retains the participation of students through graduation.*

### **Condition for School Effectiveness**

**VIII. Tiered instruction and adequate learning time:** *The school schedule is designed to provide adequate learning time for all students in core subjects. For students not yet on track to proficiency in English language arts or mathematics, the school provides additional time and support for individualized instruction through tiered instruction, a data-driven approach to prevention, early detection, and support for students who experience learning or behavioral challenges, including but not limited to students with disabilities and English language learners.*

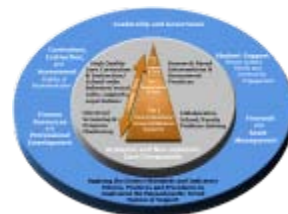
**IX. Students' social, emotional, and health needs:** *The school creates a safe school environment and makes effective use of a system for addressing the social, emotional, and health needs of its students that reflects the behavioral health and public schools framework.*

**X. Family-school engagement:** *The school develops strong working relationships with families and appropriate community partners and providers in order to support students' academic progress and social and emotional well-being.*

## Chapter 4C – District Standards and Indicators - Financial and Asset Management

The school and district system of supports align with the District Standards and Indicators and provide the structure needed to develop the policies, practices, and procedures to successfully implement MTSS.

When developing the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support, fiscal and asset management is key to the success. Resources must be used strategically to ensure all students have the opportunity to learn and are held to high expectations. The community annually provides sufficient financial resources to ensure educationally sound programs and quality facilities, with a sufficient district revenue levy and level of local spending for education. The district's budget and supplemental funding are adequate to provide for effective instructional practices and adequate operational resources. As part of its budget development, the district implements a review process to determine the cost-effectiveness of its programs, initiatives, and activities. The district has a system in place to pursue, acquire, monitor, and coordinate all local, state, federal, and private grants. The district implements an effective system to monitor special revenue funds, revolving accounts, and the fees related to them to ensure that they are managed efficiently and used effectively for the purposes intended and to advance the district's improvement plan. The district actively seeks ways to leverage resources and expand capacity through collaboration with such external and community partners. Student needs and performance data drives the fiscal and asset management process.



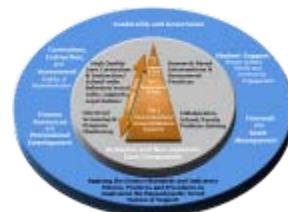
**District Standard:**

**Financial and Asset Management:** *The district engages in a participative, well-documented, and transparent budget process that uses student achievement as a factor in the overall budget. The district acquires and uses financial, physical, and competitive capital resources to provide for and sustain the advancement of achievement for all students enrolled in the district. The district regularly assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of its financial and capital assets and has the ability to meet reasonable changes and unanticipated events.*

## Chapter 4D – District Standards and Indicators - Human Resources and Professional Development

The school and district system of supports align with the District Standards and Indicators and provide the structure needed to develop the policies, practices, and procedures to successfully implement MTSS.

District and school organization, culture and structures create a climate conducive to adult learning through effective communication, ongoing professional improvement and joint responsibility for student learning. Professional development programs and services are based on district priorities, information about staff needs, student achievement data, and assessments of instructional practices and programs at each school. The district professional development calendar allows sufficient time and flexibility for professional development in the components of the tiered system of support. Ongoing professional development is job-embedded, carefully planned, and includes topics and skills essential to the implementation of a tiered system of support. The district has policies and practices to secure candidates who are committed and qualified to meet student needs and provide high quality instruction in their content area. Teachers have regular, frequent department and/or grade-level common planning and meeting time to improve implementation of the curriculum, instructional practice, and universal behavior supports. Specific school personnel are identified for advanced training in particular components of the tiered model (data analysis, interventions, progress monitoring) to build capacity of the program and sustainability of the model. The district places a high priority on retaining and maximizing the impact of effective professional staff by providing new roles and opportunities for growth. Through effective supervision practices, administrators identify the strengths and needs of assigned staff in order to plan effective implementation of district and school initiatives, assess the application of skills and practices learned from professional development, provide staff with opportunities for additional professional development and support and provide frequent, high-quality feedback focused on professional growth.



**District Standard:****Human Resources and Professional Development**

*The district identifies, attracts, and recruits effective personnel, and structures its environment to support, develop, improve, promote, and retain qualified and effective professional staff who are successful in advancing achievement for all students.*

**Condition for School Effectiveness**

**VII. Professional development and structures for collaboration:** Professional development for school staff includes both individually pursued activities and school-based, job-embedded approaches, such as instructional coaching. It also includes content-oriented learning. The school has structures for regular, frequent collaboration to improve implementation of the curriculum and instructional practice. Professional development and structures for collaboration are evaluated for their effect on raising student achievement.

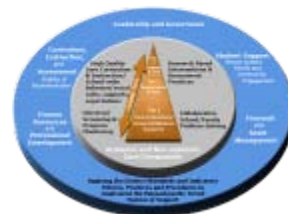
**VI. Principal's staffing authority:** The principal has the authority to make staffing decisions based on the School Improvement Plan and student needs, subject to district personnel policies, budgetary restrictions and the approval of the superintendent.

## Chapter 4E – District Standards and Indicators - Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The school and district system of supports align with the District Standards and Indicators and provide the structure needed to develop the policies, practices, and procedures to successfully implement MTSS.

There is fidelity of implementation based on a process for monitoring and evaluating the components of the tiered system. These components include the core curriculum, universal behavior supports, interventions and the work of the specialists, data collection and analysis, progress-monitoring, outreach to families, and effective staffing of problem-solving teams. The district has an established documented process for the regular and timely review and revision of curricula that is guided by: 1) the three Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles (multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expressions, and multiple means of engagement), 2) valid research, 3) the analysis of MCAS results and other assessments and 4) input from professional staff. Responsibilities of specific persons and their roles are clearly defined and there is a system for formative feedback and decision-making related to the tiered system of support.

The district and each of its schools have leadership that ensures the curriculum, instruction, and assessments are aligned vertically (between grades) and horizontally (across classrooms at the same grade level and across sections of the same course) and there is continuous collection and timely dissemination of data. The leadership is highly effective at analyzing and using data to drive decision making including prioritizing goals, maximizing effectiveness in allocating human and financial resources, and to initiate, modify, or discontinue programs and services.



**District Standard:**

**Curriculum and Instruction:** The curricula and instructional practices in the district are developed and implemented to attain high levels of achievement for all students. They are aligned with components of the state curriculum frameworks and revised to promote higher levels of student achievement.

**Assessment:** District and school leadership use student assessment results, local benchmarks, and other pertinent data to improve student achievement and inform all aspects of its decision-making including: policy development and implementation, instructional programs, assessment practices, procedures, and supervision.

**Condition for School Effectiveness**

**III. Aligned curriculum:** The school's taught curricula are aligned to state curriculum frameworks and the MCAS performance level descriptions, and are also aligned vertically between grades and horizontally across classrooms at the same grade level and across sections of the same course.

**IV. Effective instruction:** Instructional practices are based on evidence from a body of high quality research and on high expectations for all students and include use of appropriate research-based reading and mathematics programs; the school staff has a common understanding of high-quality evidence-based instruction and a system for monitoring instructional practice.

**V. Student assessment:** The school uses a balanced system of formative and benchmark assessments.

**VIII. Tiered instruction and adequate learning time:** The school schedule is designed to provide adequate learning time for all students in core subjects. For students not yet on track to proficiency in English language arts or mathematics, the school provides additional time and support for individualized instruction through tiered instruction, a data-driven approach to prevention, early detection, and support for students who experience learning or behavioral challenges, including but not limited to students with disabilities and English language learners.

