

Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Academic Well-Being and Success: Strategies for Student and Teacher Support Teams



This fact sheet is one of four developed by a collaboration of U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools technical assistance centers to enhance state and district implementation of the [Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates](#) to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn in environments that are safe, inclusive, supportive, and fair. Please view the supporting fact sheets here: <https://t4pacenter.ed.gov/SupportiveSchools>.

Framing the Topic and Needs

To create inclusive, supportive, and safe learning environments for all students, it is critical for educators to identify and address students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs. It is equally important to identify possible changes to the classroom environment and the greater school environment, as well as supports that teachers need in order to be more successful in addressing students' needs. To achieve this, schools often establish student support teams (SSTs) to identify and assist students who need additional services or interventions and to support teachers in successful

implementation. SSTs are multidisciplinary teams of well-trained school staff members who are dedicated to identifying and helping students who exhibit signs of needing additional academic or behavioral support. SSTs provide timely, systematic assistance to these students and their teachers and connect them to appropriate interventions and supports.¹

SSTs typically include educators, administrators, and other student support professionals, such as school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and behavioral specialists. SSTs are referred to by different names across the country, including multitiered system of supports (MTSS) teams,



positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) teams, student intervention teams, and child study teams.² The most effective SSTs use data from a variety of sources—including student-specific data, such as attendance data and grades; school screening data; and data from [early warning data systems \(EWDS\)](#)—to provide early, systematic assistance to students and connect them to appropriate interventions and supports.

SSTs can help ensure that disciplinary policies are consistently applied and provide opportunities for students to learn and grow through relevant student intervention services and programs. In partnership with administrators and families,³ SSTs can help mitigate students' exposure to overly punitive disciplinary outcomes and keep the focus on supporting student success.

This fact sheet describes the positive and proactive approaches SSTs can take to support and respond to students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs. This includes implementing disciplinary policies and practices that are equitable and fair for all students.

Strategies or Practices to Address Needs

To develop and implement effective student supports and ensure teachers also have the skills and support needed, school leaders can convene SSTs and SSTs can engage in a combination of universal prevention and supports (Tier 1) and targeted and intensive supports (Tiers 2 and 3, respectively), as described below.

Strategy #1: Create High-Quality SSTs

- School leaders should establish and convene SSTs that comprise content experts (e.g., a school counselor, a school social worker, a school psychologist, and/or a reading specialist), a school administrator, at least one regular or special education teacher, and a trusted adult or someone with a strong developmental relationship with the student (e.g., a family member or a teacher who directly serves the student).⁴



- School leaders should schedule recurring SST meetings, ideally weekly or biweekly but at a minimum monthly.⁵
- SSTs should collaboratively develop consistent, time-bound decision-making protocols that drive their work and utilize reliable data points in their problem-solving, fidelity and progress monitoring, and continuous quality improvement activities.
- SSTs should plan and consistently implement school–family communication and collaboration plans to help build trust and buy-in, increasing the likelihood of students and families following through on and supporting interventions.

Strategy #2: Identify Students Who Need Additional Supports

- SSTs can bolster [Tier 1/universal prevention and supports](#) to provide a foundation for proactive support, prevent unwanted behaviors, and reduce the need for disciplinary action. SSTs can identify students and work to get them appropriate supports based on their needs by:

- Conducting or supporting [universal screening](#) to identify students who might benefit from selective interventions or services. Universal screening is typically a two-stage process. The first stage is universal screening for all students using a validated tool. The second stage includes more in-depth testing or progress monitoring for students who scored at or below the tool's predetermined cut score to confirm whether they are truly at risk.⁶
- Identifying, selecting, and implementing high-quality, evidence-based universal curricula, programs, and practices, as listed in the [What Works Clearinghouse](#). Ideally, initial vetting and selection are conducted at the state or district level, giving schools the opportunity to select from a short list of approved evidence-based interventions and preventions that best fit their school communities (i.e., are culturally and linguistically responsive/affirming and have been shown to be effective).
- SSTs can partner in [PBIS](#) or MTSS implementation. This includes communicating, coordinating, and collaborating with other site-level teams that holistically support students. Data sharing is another key component in these partnerships.
- SSTs can serve on disciplinary policy teams, core school safety planning teams, or student code of conduct committees. SST members' insights can help balance these teams in terms of decision-making, policies, procedures, and practices.

Strategy #3: Implement Tier 2 (Targeted) and Tier 3 (Intensive) Supports

To meet the needs and leverage students' strengths, SSTs can implement [Tier 2 \(targeted\)](#) and [Tier 3 \(intensive\)](#) supports. Specifically, SSTs can:

- Align and integrate evidence- or research-based targeted and intensive interventions and supports.
- Help customize and implement an [EWDS](#) by communicating what student data are collected, such as data on chronic absenteeism and other attendance-related data.
- Help establish indicator thresholds and the frequency and formats of data reporting.
- Directly provide and monitor the fidelity, progress, and effectiveness of targeted and intensive interventions.
- Ensure implementing teachers have the skills and additional supports needed to be successful.



- Connect students and families to an extended network of community-based child and family support service providers (such as community mental and behavioral health agencies) that have the capacity to provide deeper supports beyond the campus, school day, and school year.⁷
- Model effective school–home partnership practices and strategies (e.g., communication, coordination, and collaboration).
- Serve as student advocates who help ensure:
 - Collective accountability when it comes to assigning, implementing, and monitoring student responses to interventions;
 - That schools are tapping into students’ individual and collective protective factors and mitigating risk factors; and
 - Objectivity and fairness in discipline-related decision-making.
- Progress monitoring, follow-up procedures, and related documentation.
- Identify, bring in, and/or facilitate the training and professional development that SSTs and school staff members need to build their individual and collective capacities to do this work in a high-quality fashion.⁸
- Establish and sustain consistent communication, coordination, and collaboration mechanisms for authentic family partnerships.⁹

Systems Considerations

Administrators in the district and individual schools can support SSTs in implementing the practices described above by:

- Setting a mission-driven vision that spells out expectations about the intersection of student discipline and prevention, interventions, and supports to all stakeholders.
- Ensuring that SSTs have the resources they need to be effective (e.g., time, multidisciplinary personnel, role clarity, programming, and training).

In addition, SSTs benefit from systems that:

- Leverage timely and user-friendly disaggregated data that the SSTs need to do this work well.
- Develop and implement:
 - Time-bound school-based team meeting protocols that balance the solving of social, emotional, behavioral, and academic problems;
 - Objective, data-driven criteria for student referrals and problem-solving; and

Resources

This list of resources will help district administrators, administrators at individual schools, and SSTs learn about, plan for, and implement SSTs best practices.

- [The Michigan MTSS Technical Assistance Center](#) — take a deeper dive into developing, aligning, and implementing SSTs.
- [The U.S. Department of Education’s Issue Brief: Student Support Teams](#) — learn about some of the research on SSTs.
- [Systematic Screening Tools: Universal Behavior Screeners](#) — explore universal screeners and how to utilize them properly.
- The [What Works Clearinghouse](#) — learn more about vetting and selecting evidence-based programs.
- [The Center on PBIS](#) — learn more about developing and implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports.
- [The Texas Comprehensive Center’s EWDS database](#) — learn more about early warning data systems.
- [Attendance Works](#) — learn more about integrating attendance and chronic absenteeism into MTSS frameworks.

ENDNOTES

¹ Osher, D., Dwyer, K., & Jackson, S. (Eds.). (2003). *Safe, supportive and successful schools: Step by step*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West Educational Services.

² These teams are distinct from individualized education program (IEP) teams, although they may sometimes work together to support certain student cases. More information about IEP teams and the role they play in continuing to support the behavioral needs and other needs of students with disabilities who have IEPs can be found here: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/d/300.321>. For information about the rights of students with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, please see the website for the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>.

³ "Families" refers inclusively to parents, other family members, caregivers, guardians, and siblings, who may also be students.

⁴ Osher, D., Dwyer, K., & Jackson, S. (Eds.). (2003). *Safe, supportive and successful schools: Step by step*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West Educational Services.

⁵ Myer, M., Osher, D., Jagers, R., Kendziora, K., & Wood, L. (Eds.). (2019). *Keeping students safe and helping them thrive: A collaborative handbook for school safety, mental health, and wellness*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Press, ABC-CLIO.

⁶ Osher, D., Moroney, D., & Williamson, S. (Eds.). (2018). *Creating safe, equitable, engaging schools: A comprehensive, evidence-based approach to supporting students*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

For more information:



<https://bestpracticesclearinghouse.ed.gov>



<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov>



<https://rems.ed.gov>



<https://www.pbis.org/>



<https://selcenter.wested.org>



<https://oese.ed.gov/student-engagement-and-attendance-technical-assistance-sea-center/>



<https://t4pacenter.ed.gov>

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