



EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENT FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE KANSAS MULTI-TIER SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS

Submitted to:

Colleen Riley, Special Education Services Team Director
Kansas State Department of Education
120 SE 10th Ave
Topeka, KS 66612-1182

Submitted by:

Natalie Lacireno-Paquet and Kristin Reedy
WestEd
Learning Innovations Program
781.481.1100
Email: npaquet@wested.org and kreedy@wested.org

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Executive Summary

The Kansas Department of Education (KSDE) has 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 will 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 is intended to provide formative and summative evaluation information to KSDE for improving and sustaining MTSS at the school, district, and state levels.

The first phase of the project involved an evaluability assessment designed to inform the development and implementation of the MTSS evaluation framework. An evaluability assessment explores the feasibility of conducting the evaluation and informs the evaluation design.

The MTSS Evaluability Assessment comprised the following activities: (1) a review of relevant MTSS documents; (2) the development of a preliminary logic model; (3) interviews with representative MTSS stakeholders; (4) a literature review focused on critical components of MTSS; and (5) an examination of relevant data sources available at the state and local levels.

The main findings from the Evaluability Assessment include:

1. The MTSS Logic Model and MTSS Conceptual Framework are well aligned and, along with the MTSS Innovation Configuration Matrix, will serve as a blue print for the development of the MTSS Evaluation Plan.
2. Stakeholders at the policy, practice, and program levels have a common understanding of the purpose, goals, and intended outcomes of MTSS.
3. Data sources are available from which to draw information on MTSS implementation and outcomes at the state and local levels.

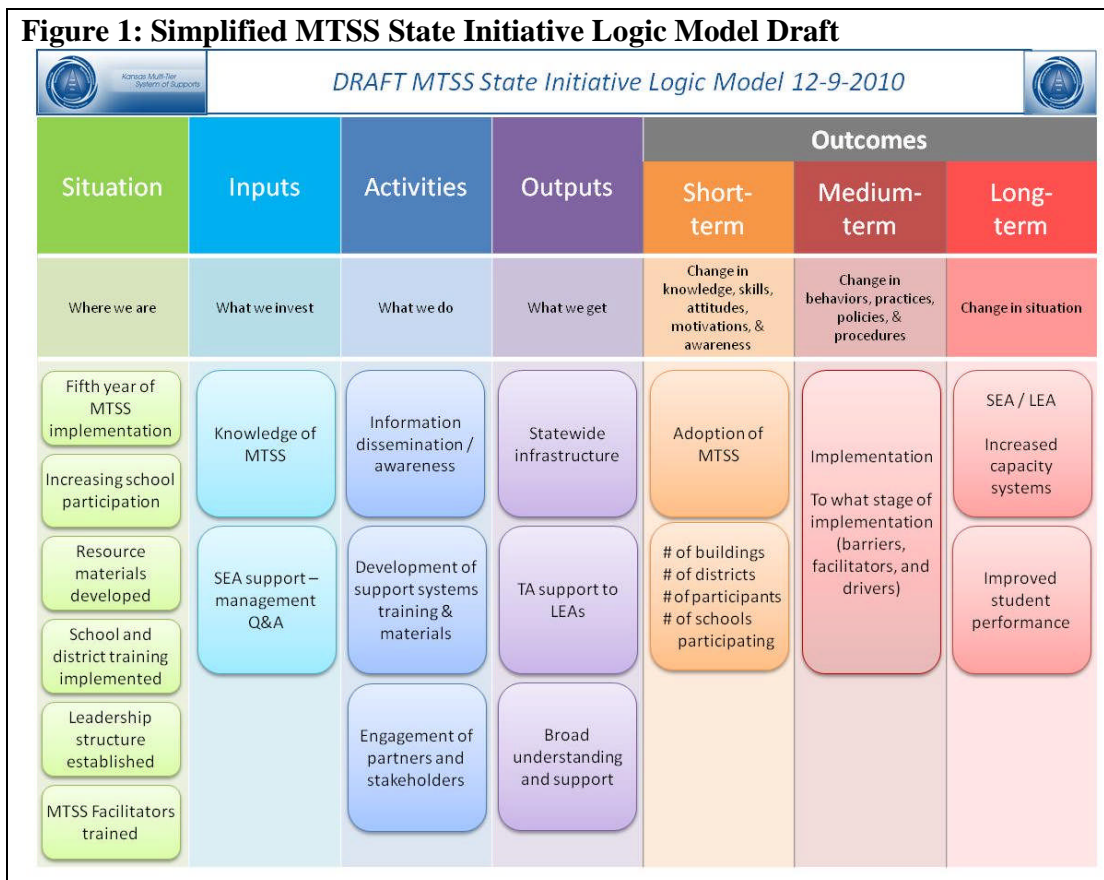
MTSS Logic Model

The MTSS Logic Model illustrates the underlying theory of change by linking project inputs and resources to objectives, outputs, and the short- term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes associated with the initiative. The WestEd evaluation team, in consultation with the MTSS Evaluation project management team, developed the MTSS Logic Model (Figure 1). The Logic Model is based on the MTSS Conceptual Framework

and the initiative’s goals, objectives, and standards for implementation. The five overarching evaluation questions for the MTSS Evaluation are addressed in the short, medium, and long-terms outcomes identified in the MTSS Logic Model. The evaluation questions include:

1. **Scope:** How many schools, districts, and early childhood settings are participating in MTSS?
2. **Implementation:** How effective are KSDE and MTSS Core Team activities in supporting statewide implementation of MTSS with fidelity by schools, districts, and early childhood settings?
3. **Student Outcomes:** How are students in schools, districts, and early childhood settings that are fully implementing MTSS performing?
4. **Statewide System and Infrastructure:** Annually, how many schools, districts, and early childhood settings 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?
5. **Sustainability:** How successful are schools, districts, and early childhood settings in sustaining MTSS?

Figure 1: Simplified MTSS State Initiative Logic Model Draft



Stakeholder Perceptions and Understandings of MTSS

Stakeholders, including state level leadership, MTSS Core Team members, Recognized MTSS Facilitators, and local-level practitioners were able to clearly articulate MTSS goals with remarkable consistency at the policy, program, and practice levels. They emphasized the goal of increasing shared responsibility for the education of all students and shared accountability for student outcomes. Not only was there commonality in describing the goals of MTSS, but stakeholders used a common language for talking about MTSS and its goals, objectives, and intended outcomes. They were also able to articulate a similar understanding of what MTSS looks like when implemented at the building level. Stakeholders reported some early signs of the impact that MTSS is having at the local level, including changes in infrastructure, culture, practice, and, to some degree, student outcomes. They expressed interest in the potential that the MTSS Evaluation has to provide more definitive information in these areas.

Data Quality and Availability

To gain information about data availability to inform the evaluation design, the evaluation team conducted a search and review of the KSDE website and selected district websites.

The MTSS Core Team maintains data on school and district participation in training opportunities, including the annual MTSS Symposium, and Structuring and Implementation trainings. Data collected by the MTSS Core Team include:

- Number of schools requesting support,
- Number of schools that have not been able to find support,
- Number of schools that requested help but could not get it,
- Number of schools at each phase (structuring or implementation),
- Stages of implementation for participating schools, and
- Satisfaction data from symposia and training participants.

There are no state requirements for data collection or reporting that apply to all districts or schools implementing MTSS. However, publicly available administrative data on schools, districts, teachers, and students are collected at the state level. Also available are data on graduation, dropout, and attendance rates across each demographic category. Limitations of the data, as presented on the KSDE website, suggest that the evaluation team will need to work with KSDE Information Technology staff to gain access to student level data and perform specific analyses on students, schools, or districts.

Interviews confirmed that universal screening is being conducted at the building level three times per year. These data are frequently kept in notebooks or folders and sometimes on local school or district databases. Some stakeholders reported keeping trend data over time on individual students in a local database. At the school district level, data used to track student behavior may include office discipline referrals, suspension, and expulsion data.

In addition to these state and local data, the MTSS Core Team has developed implementation tools, such as the Building Level Status Form, to assist schools in data collection. These tools may be adapted to serve as data collection instruments for the evaluation.

Conclusion

Based on the information collected and reviewed as part of the Evaluability Assessment, the WestEd evaluation team concludes that MTSS is a statewide initiative that is ready to be evaluated. While there are challenges related to the collection of data needed to assess the impact of MTSS on student outcomes, there are various options for documenting changes in student performance over time that either currently exist or can be developed.

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Introduction

The Kansas Department of Education (KSDE) has 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 will 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 is intended to provide formative and summative evaluation information to KSDE for improving and sustaining MTSS at the school, district, and state levels.

MTSS is a coherent continuum of evidence-based, system-wide practices that supports a rapid response to children's academic and behavioral needs, with frequent data-based monitoring for instructional decision-making to empower each Kansas student to achieve high standards. The focus of MTSS is system-level change across the classroom, school, district, and state.

The project will address five overarching evaluation questions:

1. **Scope:** How many schools, districts, and early childhood settings are participating in MTSS?
2. **Statewide System and Infrastructure:** How effective are KSDE and MTSS Core Team activities in supporting statewide implementation of MTSS with fidelity by schools, districts, and early childhood settings?
3. **Implementation:** Annually, how many schools, districts, and early childhood settings 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?
4. **Sustainability:** How successful are schools, districts, and early childhood settings in sustaining MTSS?
5. **Student Outcomes:** How are students performing in schools, districts, and early childhood settings that are fully implementing MTSS?

The first phase of the project involved an evaluability assessment designed to inform the development and implementation of the MTSS evaluation framework. According to the Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center (2003) primer on evaluability, "Conducting an EA [Evaluability Assessment] can tell the evaluator whether the program is able to produce the information required for a process evaluation, and whether the program meets the

other criteria for beginning an outcome evaluation” (p. 5). Essentially, evaluability assessment is a systematic process that helps identify whether program evaluation is justified, feasible, and likely to provide useful information (Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center, 2003). An evaluability assessment explores the feasibility of conducting the evaluation and informs the evaluation design.

The MTSS Evaluability Assessment comprised the following activities: (1) a review of relevant MTSS documents; (2) the development of a preliminary logic model; (3) interviews with representative MTSS stakeholders; (4) a literature review focused on critical components of MTSS; and (5) an examination of relevant data sources available at the state and local levels.

Organization of the Report

The MTSS Evaluability Assessment report is organized as follows: (1) a description of the MTSS Framework and its implementation, including the development of the MTSS Logic Model; (2) a review of the literature; (3) a summary of stakeholder understandings and perceptions of MTSS; (4) a description of the number of schools and districts that are currently planning or implementing MTSS; and (5) a discussion of data availability and quality issues. The report concludes with a summary of findings, a discussion of the implications that the evaluability assessment has for the evaluation of MTSS, and presents options for evaluation methods.

Multi-Tier System of Support Framework

The MTSS Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework was developed to visually represent MTSS (Figure 1). MTSS is described as an integrated system with essential components at the school and district level that support classroom- and building-based practices. The graphic illustrates that MTSS is more than a system of tiered interventions. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment form the core of the framework that supports all students while the components of leadership, professional development, and empowering culture support the core.

The triangle at the center of the framework represents students who receive assessments, high quality curricula, and instruction. More specifically:

- All students receive the core curriculum and instruction and universal screening assessments;
- Some students receive supplemental instruction, protocol-based curriculum and instruction, diagnostic assessment, progress monitoring assessment, and problem solving teams; and

- Few students receive intensive customized support based upon progress and response to core and supplemental instruction and curricula.

Figure 1 MTSS Graphic/Conceptual Framework



The inner circle of the framework represents the core instructional program and includes:

- Assessment, including universal screening, diagnostic assessment, progress monitoring, and outcomes/summative assessment;
- Curriculum, encouraging the use of high quality core, supplemental, and intensive curricula; and
- Instruction, encouraging the use of high quality core, supplemental, and intensive instruction.

The outer circle of the framework supports the core. Components that are necessary to support the inner core of the framework include:

- Leadership, including identified teams for various components, buy-in, communication, and culture;
- Professional development, including initial training, support for implementation, monitoring for fidelity, and ongoing support; and
- An empowering culture that involves all staff, involves parents, and informs everyone.

State Role

MTSS, as articulated in various KSDE documents, is a state level initiative that is decentralized, giving local schools and/or districts direct responsibility for implementation (see www.KansasMTSS.org). The structure, timeline, and process outlined in the model leave specific implementation details, including what curricula and assessments to use, the structure and operation of building level teams, and what interventions will be implemented, to be determined at the local level.

At the state level, MTSS has been supported through the development of a set of documents designed to introduce the MTSS Framework and the research behind it, its principles and practices, and a variety of tools designed to guide districts and buildings through the planning and implementation of MTSS (e.g., the MTSS Structuring¹ and Implementation Guides). A central component of state support for local implementation is through the provision of “recognized” facilitators that are trained to assist school buildings and districts as they move through the planning/structuring and implementation phases. State level leadership and resources:

- Support the development of materials;
- Disseminate information through a website and yearly symposium to introduce educators in schools and districts to MTSS; and
- Support the training and development of a network of facilitators who in turn work, under contract, to provide schools and districts with training and support to prepare for (structure) and implement MTSS at the local level.

Several state level leadership teams have been organized to develop and support MTSS implementation, to involve community and other educational stakeholders, and to advise KSDE and the MTSS Core Team, which is responsible for the overall management and direction of the initiative.

MTSS is a process, not a program. It is not an approach that can be bought or implemented overnight. Full development of a sustainable MTSS framework is estimated to take 2-5 years. According to the framework, schools and/or districts participate in planning/structuring and implementation process that outlines key decisions and decision points related to ensuring that the right organizational supports are in place. The process begins with structuring or planning, which can take anywhere from six months to two years. The implementation phase is next, while the final refinement phase is ongoing once full implementation has been achieved.

¹ “Structuring” is the starting point of MTSS training which focuses on developing the structures needed to implement MTSS.

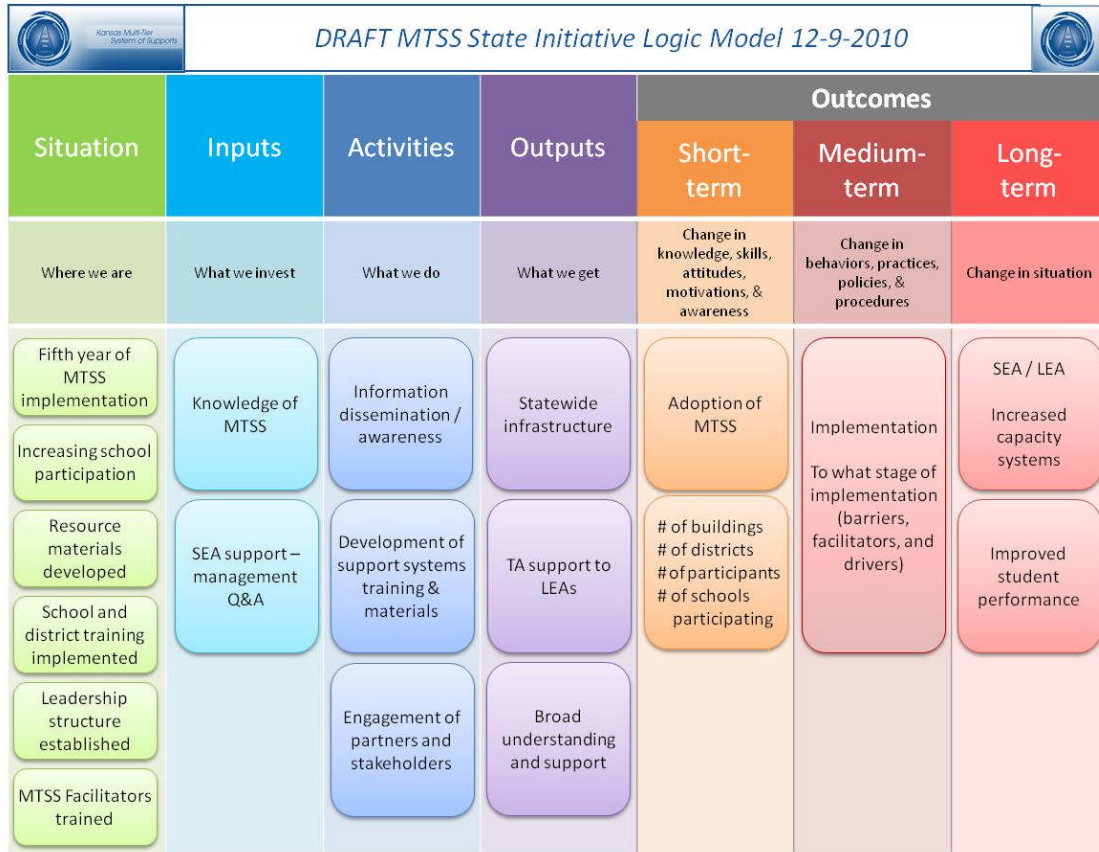
MTSS Logic Model

The MTSS Logic Model illustrates the initiative's underlying theory of change by linking project inputs and resources to objectives, outputs, and the short-, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. The WestEd evaluation team, in consultation with the MTSS Evaluation project management team, developed the MTSS Logic Model (Figure 2). The Logic Model is based on the MTSS Conceptual Framework and the initiative's goals, objectives, and standards for implementation. The five overarching evaluation questions for the MTSS Evaluation are addressed in the short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes identified in the MTSS Logic Model.

The MTSS Logic Model includes the following components:

- **Situation:** MTSS is in its fifth year of implementation. Extensive resource materials have been developed and training for schools and districts has been provided. Leadership structures have been established, facilitators have been trained, and the number of participating schools is steadily increasing.
- **Inputs:** Inputs are what have been invested in MTSS so far, including knowledge development, materials, training, and the development of state capacity to support local schools and districts.
- **Activities:** Activities include information dissemination and awareness, the development of training and materials, and the processes of communicating with and engaging stakeholders.
- **Outputs:** Outputs include the development of a statewide infrastructure, technical assistance and support to districts and schools, and development of broad-based understanding of and support for MTSS.
- **Outcomes:** Outcomes are “changes that occur showing movement toward achieving ultimate goals and objectives” (Frechtling, 2007, p. 22). Outcomes can be considered evidence of impact. The MTSS Logic Model conceptualizes short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes.
 - **Short-term outcomes:** Changes in adult knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivation, and awareness that occur in the short term.
 - **Medium-term outcomes:** Changes in behaviors, practices, policies, and procedures at the state, district, or school levels that occur over the medium term.
 - **Long-term outcomes:** Changes in the situation, including increased system capacity and improved student outcomes, which occur over the long term.

Figure 2 Simplified MTSS State Initiative Logic Model Draft



As part of the MTSS Evaluation Plan, performance measures or indicators will need to be developed for each of the outputs and outcomes of the MTSS Logic Model. Performance measures are qualitative and quantitative ways to define performance. They identify what is to be measured, the method of measurement, the data source, and the time period over which measurements are taken. Output measures are calculations of recorded activity or effort, expressed quantitatively or qualitatively. Outcome measures assess the results of a program compared to its intended purpose (Mulholland, 2003). For example, for the output “TA Support to LEAs,” the WestEd evaluation team will develop a measure and method for collecting evidence of the degree to which, in what form, and in what ways technical assistance (TA) support has been provided to schools and districts implementing MTSS. Measures will be described in detail in the Evaluation Plan.

Overview of Relevant Literature

This section presents a review of literature related to key issues in evaluating the implementation and impact of MTSS. It does not include the literature base for MTSS and its components, which are well documented in *Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports: Research Base (Version 2.0)* (KSDE, 2009a). The overview focuses on definition, measurement, and evaluation of:

- Systems change,
- Capacity building,
- Implementation, and
- Fidelity of implementation.

The focus on these four areas comes from the evaluation team’s understanding of MTSS, its goals, and key components, conversations with MTSS leaders at the state level, and telephone interviews with stakeholders. These concepts underlie the conceptual framework on which MTSS is based. Learnings from the literature review will influence the eventual evaluation design for MTSS.

Systems Change

There is no single accepted definition of “systems change,” yet it is frequently stated as a goal of educational initiatives and the subject of much educational research. Systems change is referred to as a “process designed to alter the status quo by shifting and realigning the form and function of a targeted system” (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang, 2007, p. 197). In this conceptualization, “the underlying structures and supporting mechanisms that operate within a system are altered, such as the policies, routines, relationships, resources, power structures, and values” (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2007, p. 197). An assumption of systems change initiatives is that the outcome of interest (e.g., change in behavior, improved outcomes, etc.) will not occur without changes to the

service delivery system that are designed to help achieve the goal (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2007).

Similarly, Supowitz and Taylor (2005) note “the theory of systemic reform states that, in contrast to individual programs that have limited efficacy because they inevitably run up against constraining and competing efforts and philosophies, a coherent complement of programs and policies can produce powerful reform by creating reinforcing and synergistic effects” (p. 204).

Different frameworks for understanding and undertaking systems change have been put forth in the literature. (See for example Behrens & Foster-Fishman, 2007; Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang, 2007; Kahn, Hurth, Diefendorf, Kasprzak, Lucas, & Ringwalt, 2009). Hall and Hord (2006) describe a systems approach simply as one that “examines the whole and its relationships to its parts” (p. 45).

Michael Fullan’s work focuses on systems change reform in educational settings. Fullan, Bertani, and Quinn (2004) suggest the following essential leadership actions as prerequisites to systems change at the district level:

- Establish collective moral purpose;
- Ensure that the right people have the right roles in the organization;
- Build capacity in school-, district- and system-level leaders;
- Build lateral capacity; that is, connect schools within a district or teams across the system;
- Learn through feedback and consistently refining the strategy;
- Know how to engage with and negotiate conflict productively;
- Establish a high-trust and high-demand culture;
- Leverage external partners for resources and expertise; and
- Make focused financial investments.

According to the literature, there are a variety of barriers to successful systems change. These include:

- Lack of monitoring,
- Leadership issues,
- Infrastructure barriers,
- Lack of support,
- Lack of buy-in,
- Lack of agreement on strategies, and
- Lack of a theoretical or conceptual understanding of what successful implementation would look like (Hall & Hord, 2006; Kreger, Brindis, Manuel, & Sassoubre, 2007).

Kreger et al. (2007) suggest that systemic change can also be hampered by the absence of “clear indicators to measure progress, assess strategies, and review activities in implementing systems change” (p. 303). Turnover of staff and leadership is another barrier that frequently interferes with the implementation of educational innovations.

The literature has special implications for evaluation of systems change efforts, such as the implementation of MTSS. Challenges to the evaluation of systemic change efforts include “specifying the intervention, defining measures of system alignment and broad scale implementation, and identifying groups against which to compare effects” (Supovitz & Taylor, 2005, p. 204). “System alignment” refers to what extent there is alignment or coherence between different components of the system. If an educational system is “coherent” its components or parts complement, support, and are aligned with each other rather than operating separately with different goals and intended outcomes. According to Kerins, Perlman, and Redding (2009), achieving coherence means ensuring coordination and consistency across programs within a state department and between the state department and its partners in a statewide system of support. At the state or district level, coherence refers to how states or districts are organized to provide systematic support for the improvement of their schools. It will be important for the MTSS Evaluation Plan to address the measurement of MTSS system alignment and coherence.

Capacity Building

Capacity building is a core concept in MTSS and one of the long term intended outcomes of MTSS at the state and local level. Capacity has been defined by Michael Fullan (2005, p. 4) as “the collective ability — dispositions, skills, knowledge, motivation, and resources — to act together to bring about positive change.” Capacity building has been described as “the systemic process by which an organization takes strategic action to create, enhance, or sustain its ability to efficiently and effectively carry out its declared mission and purpose” (New York Comprehensive Center, 2007, p. 2).

The central work of the MTSS Core Team is helping local districts and schools to build their capacity to implement MTSS. The MTSS Core Team develops materials for use in the planning/structuring and implementation process. They also develop and deliver training to Recognized MTSS Facilitators and to district and school staff. Professional development on the principles of MTSS and its core components is central to capacity building, but knowing how to implement an initiative is not the same as having the capacity for successful implementation.

There are several frameworks for examining capacity building in education that are referenced frequently in the literature, including Spillane and Thompson (1997), Century (1999), and Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000). In the earliest of these, Spillane and Thompson (1997) argue that “capacity” is more than individuals’ knowledge and skills in

an organization, but instead includes three key dimensions: human capital, social capital, and financial resources.

Century (1999) builds upon Spillane and Thompson's (1997) work to suggest four broad categories of capacity that address the individuals within the system as well as external contextual factors. These include:

- Human capacity: the “intellectual proficiency and will. Intellectual proficiency encompasses the knowledge, expertise, and understanding that the people leading and engaged in the . . . reform must hold. Will is comprised of the interest, patience, and persistence necessary” (p. 3);
- Organizational capacity: the “interaction, collaboration, and communication among individuals in the system. . . the interactions individuals have with one another shape a culture” (p. 4);
- Structural capacity: “the elements of the system which exist independent of human beings who may use or change those elements in order to function in the system. . . [including] policies, procedures, and formalized practices” (p. 4); and
- Material capacity: “the fiscal resources and other material supports available to the reform” (p. 5).

At the school level, Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000) proposed the following elements of capacity:

- School capacity: the “knowledge, skills, and dispositions of individual staff members” (p. 263);
- Schoolwide professional community: “staff sharing clear goals,” “collaboration and collective responsibility,” “professional inquiry,” and “opportunities for the staff to address the challenges they face” (p. 263);
- Program coherence: “the extent to which the school’s programs for student and staff learning are coordinated, focused on clear learning goals, and sustained over a period of time” (p. 263);
- Technical resources: “high-quality curriculum, books and other instructional materials, assessment instruments, laboratory equipment, computers, and adequate work space” (p. 263–264); and
- Principal leadership: “in most schools the principal has the legal authority to affect each of the above aspects of capacity, for better or worse, depending on the quality of leadership” (p. 264).

These different conceptualizations of “capacity” inform what the MTSS Evaluation Plan will need to address in order to evaluate the degree to which the long term outcome of increased state and local capacity has been achieved. Wing (2004) notes that evaluating capacity building requires negotiating how performance should be measured and defining the intended improvement or change; it also involves clarification of goals and timelines. Beesley and Shebby (2010) suggest using a logic model; developing indicators or

performance measures for each area of capacity building; and then analyzing data for information about “quality, relevance, and utility of project service” (p. 11). Finally, Century (1999) suggests creating a matrix for examining capacity in an evaluation across policy, instruction, and management subsystems. This may be an approach that will be useful for evaluating a complex, multilayered systems change initiative like MTSS.

Implementation

Implementation is defined by Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, and Wallace (2005) as “a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions” (p. 5). Implementation science refers to the research relevant to the scientific study of methods to promote the application of research findings into routine use. A synthesis of implementation science research is provided in the monograph by Fixsen, et al. (2005). It describes implementation as “a mission-oriented process involving multiple decisions, actions, and corrections.” They refine this definition as follows:

Implementation processes are purposeful and are described in sufficient detail such that independent observers can detect the presence and strength of the “specific set of activities” related to implementation. In addition, the activity or program being implemented is described in sufficient detail so that independent observers can detect its presence and strength (p. 5).

Fixsen, et al. (2005) conceptualize implementation along a continuum that includes six stages. Their conceptualization offers a structure that will be useful in the MTSS evaluation design as a way of assessing the degree or level of implementation demonstrated across schools and districts. The six stages of implementation include (1) exploration and adoption, (2) installation, (3) initial implementation, (4) full operation, (5) innovation, and (6) sustainability. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3 Stages of Implementation



Adapted from Fixsen et al. (2005)

Fixsen et al. (2005) provide descriptors of these stages, specifying the typical actions that occur at each point along the continuum.

In addition to stages of implementation, Fixsen et al. (2009; 2005) identify core implementation components or “implementation drivers” which help create and support behavior by those implementing an initiative (Fixsen, 2005, p.28). These implementation components are categorized into three areas: competency, organization, and leadership.

Competency drivers include staff selection, training, coaching, and performance assessments. Organization drivers include decisions to support data systems, facilitative administration, and systems interventions. Leadership drivers refer to adaptive and technical leadership.

Fixsen and other researchers have identified supports that are needed for successful implementation. These include training and professional development (Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevans, & Leaf, 2008), use of a purveyor who actively works to implement the practice or program with fidelity (Fixsen et al., 2009, p. 537), leadership (Hall, 2010, p. 246), and continuous program development and coaching (Fixsen, et al., 2005).

Understanding implementation science is central to the evaluation of MTSS. Evaluating statewide implementation of MTSS is one of the five overarching evaluation questions and a key mid-term outcome on the MTSS Logic Model. Defining the stages of implementation for MTSS will be an essential component of the MTSS Evaluation Plan.

Fidelity of Implementation

In order to assess the degree to which a program or intervention is having the intended effect, it is important to know whether the program is being implemented with fidelity (O'Donnell, 2008). As Dane and Schneider (1998) define it, fidelity is “the degree to which specified procedures are implemented as planned” (p. 23). Fidelity of implementation refers to the degree to which a program, curriculum, or intervention’s procedures and practices are being implemented according to the design.

To measure fidelity of implementation, the core or critical components of an intervention or program need to be clearly specified (Fixsen et al., 2005; Century, Rudnick & Freeman, 2010). The more specificity and clarity in the definition of the critical or core components of a program, the more easily and consistently it can be implemented (Century et al., 2010).

In terms of the evaluation of MTSS, fidelity of implementation refers to the implementation of MTSS according to the core components of the MTSS Conceptual Framework. The implementation of a particular intervention, curriculum, or assessment is not required. KSDE and the MTSS leadership and management team(s) have helped to define MTSS through the development of an MTSS Innovation Configuration Matrix (ICM) that describes “the principles and practices within a Multi-Tier System of Supports” or “what it looks like” when (1) fully implemented, (2) in progress of implementing, or (3) not implementing (KSDE, 2009b, p. 2). Innovation configurations can be used to “gauge progress of reform initiatives” and guide professional development (Champion, 2003). The MTSS Innovation Configuration Matrix will be helpful in the

development instrumentation for the MTSS Evaluation because it clearly articulates the essential characteristics of MTSS implementation for each of the components of the MTSS Conceptual Framework.

In the evaluation of MTSS, the evaluation team will need to determine the degree of fidelity of implementation in order to draw conclusions about the impact of MTSS on local capacity and student performance. The degree to which MTSS is being implemented as designed will also influence the evaluation team's understanding of any unexpected findings.

Stakeholder Understandings and Perceptions of MTSS

For the MTSS Evaluability Assessment, individual telephone interviews were conducted by WestEd evaluation team members. A total of 15 interviews were conducted with stakeholders representing the categories of policy (3 interviews), program (5 interviews), and practice (7 interviews). Policy-level stakeholders were leaders and managers at KSDE and members of the state-level MTSS Advisory Team. Program-level stakeholders represented individuals who were involved in or responsible for MTSS implementation at the state level: MTSS Core Team members and Recognized MTSS Facilitators. At the practice level, stakeholders were local-level administrators in districts or schools from across the state currently implementing MTSS, including central office administrators and several principals.

Clarity and Consensus Among Stakeholders

Stakeholders, including state level leadership, MTSS Core Team members, Recognized MTSS Facilitators, and local-level practitioners were able to clearly articulate MTSS goals with remarkable consistency at the policy, program, and practice levels, emphasizing the goal of increasing shared responsibility for the education of all students and shared accountability for student outcomes.

Stakeholders described MTSS as a systems change initiative, defining “the system” as including change at the classroom, building, district, and state levels. One noted that that MTSS is a *process* not a *program*. Others consistently referred to MTSS as a “framework” rather than a canned program that is purchased and implemented according to the publisher. The MTSS Conceptual Framework, i.e., the “graphic” and its components (leadership, empowering culture, etc.) were a common way of referring to what MTSS “is.”

Implementation

When stakeholders were asked what successful implementation of MTSS would “look like,” they varied in their points of view but also had commonalities. Policy-level

stakeholders noted the importance of leadership, changes in culture, coordination and communication, fidelity, and the establishment of the state framework and infrastructure to support MTSS at the local level.

Program-level stakeholders emphasized universal screening, using data to drive decisions about instruction, the ability to respond to student needs in a timely manner, flexibility, and a focus on all students. As one stakeholder described her vision for implementation of MTSS, at the “systems level . . . the adults would know how to look at data, what decisions to make based on the data, and that it really takes cooperation and collaboration of all the adults in the building to make it work. If all of those things are running well, there are other things that are needed: empowering culture, leadership, curriculum, instruction, and a tiered system of support . . . e.g., ‘the graphic.’ ”

Practice-level stakeholders described a vision for implementation of MTSS as gradual improvement and refinement over time, buy-in from everyone at the local level, improved communication and collaboration, and improved core instruction for all students.

One of the critical features that stakeholders consistently mentioned with regard to MTSS implementation was fidelity: (1) fidelity in local level implementation consistent with the core components of MTSS; (2) fidelity in terms of how districts and schools are being trained and coached by Recognized MTSS Facilitators; and (3) fidelity in terms of how state leaders are presenting MTSS at the state, regional, and local levels. They reported that there are on-site fidelity checks conducted by the MTSS Core Team regarding the work of the Recognized MTSS Facilitators. Fidelity observation tools are completed by MTSS facilitators and routinely collected by the MTSS Core Team. These data are used to make decisions about the type of support needed by facilitators as well as for revisions and refinement of training materials and processes.

Stakeholders reported a shared belief that MTSS implementation will gradually evolve, improve, expand, and scale up more broadly across the state with increased district-level leadership and involvement. They expect fidelity of implementation to improve across implementing schools and anticipate changes in student outcomes, including improved achievement scores on the state assessment, more schools making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), improved behavior, and improved graduation and attendance rates. They expressed interest in the potential that the MTSS Evaluation has to provide more definitive information in these areas.

Impact

Stakeholders reported that they are seeing early signs of the impact of MTSS at the local level, including changes in infrastructure, school culture, practice, and, to some degree,

student outcomes. They reported increased collaboration and cooperation, breaking down of silos, changes in “the conversation” among adults, and openness to sharing and reviewing data.

Stakeholders at the local level reported practice changes, such as increased fidelity in implementation of the curriculum and improvement in core instruction. They also reported observing early effects of MTSS implementation on student outcomes including improved achievement, fewer discipline referrals, and fewer students identified as at risk. Stakeholders reported an interest in knowing whether the early impacts they are seeing are also observed statewide.

Stakeholders noted that tremendous efforts have been made at the state level to develop materials, train facilitators to support schools, and provide professional development to local school personnel. They reported that, for the most part, materials and tools for local implementation are in place, facilitators are trained, and collaboration structures are established.

Summary

Overall there appears to be cohesion and consistency with regard to MTSS goals and objectives, a common language with which to talk about MTSS, and a common vision of what MTSS will look like in the future. Stakeholders are looking to the evaluation of MTSS to provide data on impacts on student outcomes as well as measures of less quantifiable changes such as school culture, collegial collaboration, acceptance of shared responsibility, and accountability for all students.

Data Availability and Quality

To gain information about data availability and quality to inform the evaluation design, the WestEd evaluation team first reviewed data on school building and district participation in MTSS. The evaluation team then conducted a search and review of the KSDE website and selected district websites. Stakeholders were also asked about data quality and availability through the interview process.

School Building and District Participation in MTSS

The MTSS Core Team tracks district and school participation in MTSS trainings and other events. These data are an indication of the extent to which MTSS is being implemented across the state.

Between September 2008 and December 2010, 162 different districts have participated in some MTSS training, either the “structuring” and/or “implementation” training. A total of 549 separate school buildings in 165 districts have participated in structuring and/or

implementation training for the period 2008/2009 through December 2010. The number of school buildings participating in training over time has grown as follows:

- 172 schools in 2008/2009.
- 262 schools in 2009/2010.
- 251 schools in 2010/2011.

In the 2010/2011 school year, 251 schools were receiving training and implementation support from one of nine education service centers and/or the MTSS Core Team. The training status of these schools is:

- Structuring - Unknown content area: 36 schools.
- Structuring - Behavior: 1 school.
- Structuring - Math: 9 schools.
- Structuring - Reading: 29 schools.
- Structuring and Implementation - Behavior: 53 schools.
- Structuring and Implementation - Reading: 41 schools.
- Implementation - Reading and Math: 5 schools.
- Implementation - Reading and Structuring Math: 1 school.
- Implementation - Reading and Structuring Behavior: 1 school.
- Implementation - Math: 6 schools.
- Implementation - Reading: 69 schools.

Reading is the most common content area in schools implementing MTSS. Many schools began structuring and implementing in the area of behavior in the 2010/11 school year as new training and implementation support materials were developed. Fewer schools are implementing in math, which may have implications for the MTSS evaluation design and sampling procedures.

State-level Data

The MTSS Core Team maintains data on school and district participation in training opportunities, including the annual MTSS Symposium, and structuring and implementation trainings. Data collected by the MTSS Core Team include:

- Number of schools requesting support,
- Number of schools that have not been able to find support,
- Number of schools that requested help but could not get it,
- Number of schools at each phase (structuring or implementation),
- Stages of implementation for participating schools, and
- Satisfaction data from symposia and training participants.

There are no state requirements for data collection or reporting that apply to all districts or schools implementing MTSS. However, publicly available administrative data on

schools, districts, teachers, and students are collected at the state level. Also available are data on graduation, dropout, and attendance rates across each demographic category. Limitations of the data, as presented on the KSDE website, suggest that the evaluation team will need to work with KSDE Information Technology staff to gain access to student level data and perform specific analyses on students, schools, or districts.

The KSDE Building, District, and State Report Card web page (<http://online.ksde.org/rcard/index.aspx>), updated each fall, contains state, district and school level performance summaries in standardized and customizable report card formats. The standardized report card contains reading, math, and science achievement summaries, by grade level assessed, across multiple demographic categories including gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, special education status, migrant status, and English proficiency. The report cards also provide a summary of enrollment by demographic category, graduation and attendance rates for all students, and a summary of the percentages of highly qualified teachers by content area. These standard reports are available for school years dating back to 2003/2004. Customizable reports on this page allow for the creation of graphical summaries of information contained in the report cards.

A feature of the customizable reports page is a school-to-school comparison option. When this option is selected, a number of comparable schools are provided for analysis. The initial comparable school selection is based on pre-selected criteria: whether the school is public or private, grade levels, the size of grades in the school, and the percentage of students eligible for the free and reduced price lunch programs. The selection criteria for comparable schools may be further refined by special education status, English proficiency, migrant status, and race/ethnicity composition. The availability of comparable schools may provide a comparison group for schools implementing MTSS.

Local-level Data

At the local level, stakeholders were asked about data that are collected and kept, reported, or recorded in schools implementing MTSS. In terms of student-level data, most building- and district-level respondents reported doing universal screening at the building level three times per year using either DIBELS, AIMSweb, or some other screening tool. Others also noted that they used the state assessment to track student progress over time. These data are frequently kept in notebooks or folders and sometimes on local school or district databases. Other student data kept at the local level may include common assessments that teams use to assess progress on grade level curriculum. Data used to track student behavior may include office discipline referrals, suspension, and expulsion data.

Local schools are also doing progress monitoring using DIBELS probes, AIMSweb, and other tools. As one stakeholder put it, “It’s very dependent on how each school wants to set it up. There is no consistent method for doing that statewide. It depends on what screening they are using.”

Classroom observation protocols are not standardized across schools/districts. One stakeholder referred to “walk throughs” as a measurement and teacher evaluation tool, but there does not appear to be a commonly used observation/evaluation system to ensure teacher fidelity of implementation.

Access to local data for evaluation purposes may be district-dependent. Larger districts with central office assessment personnel may have more capacity to report student progress data.

Stakeholders reported that schools keep an MTSS process manual that documents their system plan, including an implementation plan, a decision notebook, leadership team members and their functions, the identified core curriculum intervention, collaboration team functions, and how the school plans to conduct data analysis. This manual provides evidence that that school is implementing MTSS according to the identified core components. This information, however, is not collected at the state level.

When asked about the availability of baseline data that would help to document change over time, local stakeholders noted the availability of staffing information, state assessment performance, and screening data that would show the percentage of students scoring at grade level/benchmark. One stakeholder mentioned the AIMSweb “Stop Light” Report as a way of tracking progress over time.

In addition to these state and local data, the MTSS Core Team has developed implementation tools, such as the Building Level Status Form, to assist schools in data collection. These tools may be adapted to serve as data collection instruments for the MTSS Evaluation.

Data Quality

Data quality refers to the degree to which the data collected at the state level are valid and reliable, whether they are complete, consistently reported, timely and accurate. KSDE is working on data quality issues through the state’s Longitudinal Data Systems grant. There is a Data Quality Certification (DQC) program for local districts (<http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?alias=www.ksde.org/dqcprogram>).

Kansas has had an individual student identifier system since 2005. A Kansas student is not able to take a state assessment until they are entered into the system. Demographic as well as achievement data are collected. There is a state data warehouse. Data elements

maintained at the state level include student achievement, attendance, graduation rate, and dropout data. It is possible to track school performance in terms of achievement or how well different subgroups of students are performing, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc. Trend data are available over time. Statewide public data are only available at the district level, not the individual school level.

Data Collection Constraints and Barriers

The lack of a consistent data collection and reporting system for schools implementing MTSS is a constraint to the evaluation of MTSS impact on student academic performance. According to the program-level stakeholders, the state assessment is not sensitive enough to (1) accurately identify struggling students at the lower grades (in other words, a student may score at the proficient level on the state assessment but not meet benchmark on the local universal screening) and (2) document progress over short time intervals (in other words, it will take years for progress to show up on the state assessment). Screening three times per year appears to be a consistent practice. As one program level respondent put it, “If they are truly doing MTSS, they will be doing universal screening.”

Another data collection constraint may be the capacity of local schools to collect and report data in a format that can be used and accessed easily by the evaluation team. Schools without a local computerized database, which may be keeping track of student progress on paper, may not have the capacity to report according to evaluator requests. Schools are mostly keeping universal screening data in the online databases for the screener (e.g., AIMSweb) or keeping paper records at the school level. A stakeholder from one district reported uploading universal screening data into the district’s data system, thus being able to link to other individual student data. The issue of variability in assessments and ways of recording data will be a challenge to the evaluation process.

Stakeholders noted a number of concepts that they felt were critical for MTSS implementation but for which a valid and reliable measurements had not yet been developed. For example, changing the school culture and implementation with fidelity were two concepts that most respondents noted as critical to MTSS and ones that they would like the evaluation to measure.

Other limitations of state level data available on the KSDE Building, District, and State Report Card web page are that grade-level assessments cannot be displayed if the number of students assessed is less than ten (to protect student confidentiality), displays of the achievement measures and demographics are generally percentages without counts, and only the current year’s data is available (with the exception of static school-level and district-level reports), making it difficult to obtain longitudinal information with the customization tool. This suggests that the WestEd evaluation team will need to work with the KSDE Information Technology group to access the needed data or analyses.

Implications for the MTSS Evaluation

This section of the Evaluability Assessment Report describes the implications for the evaluation design and data collection.

The WestEd evaluation team's investigation into data availability identified several challenges. There are no state requirements for data collection or reporting that apply to all districts or schools implementing MTSS. However, publicly available administrative data on schools, districts, teachers, and students are collected at the state level. Also available are data on graduation, dropout, and attendance rates across each demographic category. As noted above, limitations of the data, as presented on the KSDE website, suggest that the evaluation team will need to work with KSDE Information Technology staff to gain access to student level data and perform specific analyses on students, schools, or districts.

The availability of data at the state and local levels puts limitations on the evaluation team's ability to measure the impact of MTSS on student outcomes. However, the anticipated use of in-depth case studies in selected districts and schools and the creative use of building-based universal screening data will provide evidence of preliminary outcomes from implementing MTSS.

Further, only a few schools are implementing the MTSS behavior or math components. This limits the evaluation team's ability to identify impacts in this area.

The WestEd evaluation team will need to work closely with the MTSS Core Team and KSDE MTSS evaluation project management team in evaluation planning in order to define key terms and develop indicators and performance measures. Throughout the evaluation, it will be important to be clear with respondents about the purposes for each data collection activity and to minimize or eliminate any duplication of data collection efforts.

Some of the other limitations and challenges facing the evaluation design include:

- The state assessment may not be sensitive enough to show student progress over short periods of MTSS implementation,
- Schools are using different universal screening instruments and progress monitoring tools, and
- It may be difficult to get consistently reported, valid, and reliable data on universal screening from local schools and districts.

Foreshadowing Evaluation Options

The table (Figure 4) on the following pages foreshadows evaluation options informed by this evaluability assessment. The first column lists the evaluation questions as outlined in the RFP. The second column contains data collection options that are based on information gained through the MTSS Evaluability Assessment. The final column contains additional notes or information to be considered in evaluation planning.

At this juncture, the evaluation team envisions three major features of the evaluation design: (1) an online statewide survey of schools; (2) a collection and analysis of Building-Level Status forms, and in-depth case studies of MTSS implementation in selected districts and schools.

The WestEd evaluation team anticipates conducting a statewide online survey of all schools. This survey will provide data to address several of the evaluation questions, including questions about stage of implementation, fidelity of implementation, and sustainability of MTSS. The survey will have different paths that a respondent will follow depending on how they answer initial questions. The first part of the survey will include questions that determine whether a school is implementing MTSS at all, is exploring the idea, or is not even considering MTSS. Those whose answers suggest they are implementing MTSS will follow a path with additional questions designed to document their practices and processes and gauge their stage of implementation. Responses to questions from those implementing MTSS will also provide information about facilitators and barriers to implementation. This type of survey is not without challenges, including designing questions to yield the desired information and obtaining an adequate response rate. However, it is also an efficient and effective way to gather data from a large number of respondents, in this case, school principals.

The WestEd evaluation team suggests using the Building-Level Status form (reading and math) as a key measure of student outcomes. These data, reported three times per year by schools for each grade level served, would provide a consistent measure of the percentage of students in each grade who are at benchmark, strategic, and intensive levels of intervention. The evaluation team will need KSDE support in obtaining these data from local schools.

The WestEd evaluation team plans in-depth case studies of schools or districts implementing MTSS to identify factors that facilitate and hinder implementation, illustrate fidelity of implementation in school buildings, and provide the qualitative data to help understand and contextualize survey findings. Case study sites will be followed over a period of approximately two years and include site visits, with observations, focus groups, and interviews, as well as document and data review. Case study sites will include a mix of early childhood, elementary, and secondary schools. They will also

include schools that are struggling with implementation and those that are fully implementing. Findings from the case studies will help KSDE and the MTSS Core Team develop a more detailed understanding of implementation, showcase what is working well in selected sites, and identify areas for improvement to strengthen statewide implementation, fidelity, and sustainability.

Conclusion

The MTSS Evaluability Assessment comprised the following activities: (1) a review of relevant MTSS documents; (2) the development of a preliminary logic model; (3) interviews with representative MTSS stakeholders; (4) a literature review focused on critical components of MTSS; and (5) an examination of relevant data sources available at the state and local levels.

The main findings from the Evaluability Assessment include:

1. The MTSS Logic Model and MTSS Conceptual Framework are well aligned and, along with the MTSS Innovation Configuration Matrix, will serve as a blue print for the development of the MTSS Evaluation Plan.
2. Stakeholders at the policy, practice, and program levels have a common understanding of the purpose, goals, and intended outcomes of MTSS.
3. Data sources are available from which to draw information on MTSS implementation and outcomes at the state and local levels.

Based on the information collected and reviewed as part of the Evaluability Assessment, the WestEd evaluation team concludes that MTSS is a statewide initiative that is ready to be evaluated. While there are challenges related to the collection of data needed to assess the impact of MTSS on student outcomes, there are various options for documenting changes in student performance over time that either currently exist or can be developed.

Figure 4 Evaluation Questions and Data Collection Strategies

Evaluation Questions	Data Collection Options	Notes
<p>1. How many schools, districts, and early childhood settings are participating in MTSS?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the numbers of schools, districts, and early childhood settings participating in MTSS increasing annually? • What progress is MTSS making toward statewide installation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of data provided by the Core Team on MTSS training participation over time • Disaggregate list based on district and/or school characteristics (e.g., how many Title 1 schools are implementing MTSS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphs and mapping software could be used to help visually portray change over time and distribution across state.

2. Annually, how many schools, districts, and early childhood settings 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), or (c) successfully implementing MTSS with fidelity?

- How many schools, districts, and early childhood settings move successfully from exploring participation in MTSS to adopting/installing MTSS and fully implementing the system over time?
- What factors facilitate or detract from participants' successful MTSS implementation (e.g., alignment of MTSS Framework with participant level needs, sufficient resources, initial impact on student achievement and behavior, ability to integrate MTSS with other improvement efforts)?
- Are schools, districts, and early childhood settings implementing all MTSS components (i.e., assessments, curriculum, instruction, data-based decision-making, leadership, and professional development)?

- An annual online survey to all schools statewide, with screener questions that lead to different paths for MTSS participants and non-participants
- Case studies of schools and a district implementation over time
 - Fidelity of implementation self-reports and observations
 - Site-based activities including interviews, observations, and document reviews

- This question explicitly addresses Fixsen's stages of implementation. The survey will have to be able to capture nuances between levels. The WestEd evaluation team will also need to work closely with Core Team and KSDE Leadership to identify the essential components of MTSS.
 - It will be imperative to identify and operationally define the critical features of MTSS at each stage of implementation.
 - To track change in survey responses over time (e.g., to see if a school moves from initial implementation to full implementation), the WestEd evaluation team will need to be able to track schools over time (have a way to link responses from one year to the next).
 - Pilot testing of survey and case study methods will be imperative.
-

3. How are students in schools, districts, and early childhood settings that are fully implementing MTSS performing?

- Are students more successful within the core curriculum?
- Are MTSS interventions positively influencing students' academic and behavioral performance?
- Does student performance continue to improve as schools and early childhood settings gain experience and expertise with MTSS?

- State-level assessment data over time for all schools implementing MTSS, disaggregated by subgroup
- State and district data for selected smaller group of schools (e.g., only case study sites, only 20 buildings, only one district), disaggregated by subgroup
- Collection and analysis of building-level status forms for reading and math and building-level office behavior referral data
- Analysis of administrative data from state and/or districts (dropout rates, graduation rates, absenteeism)
- Cross tabulate student outcomes data with survey responses regarding how long the school/district/program has been implementing MTSS and stage of implementation

- Is this question more concerned about whether students in those schools implementing MTSS improve compared to past (essentially within group pre-post) or is the concern with a comparison group of non-implementers?
- Need to consider a link between survey responses and schools in order to link survey responses (stage of implementation for the school) to student outcome data

4. How effective are KSDE and MTSS Core Team activities in supporting statewide implementation of MTSS with fidelity by schools, districts, and early childhood settings?

- Is information about MTSS disseminated effectively?
 - Are there sufficient resources, structures, staff, materials, and facilitation available statewide?
 - Are MTSS materials for master trainers, regional coaches, facilitators, schools, and early childhood settings effective in supporting MTSS implementation with fidelity?
 - How aligned are training programs and opportunities for master trainers, regional coaches, facilitators, schools, and early childhood settings with evidence-based professional development principles and practices?
 - What investments does KSDE make to improve MTSS statewide implementation and sustainability?
- Interviews or focus groups with KSDE Leadership and Core Team members
 - Focus groups at annual MTSS Symposium
 - Online survey will include questions about support
 - Case studies will also provide data about support for implementation
 - Interviews with recognized MTSS Facilitators
 - Observation of MTSS training and facilitation
 - Document and website review
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5. How successful are schools, districts, and early childhood settings in sustaining MTSS?

- How many schools, districts, and early childhood settings sustain the system (with fidelity of implementation) over time?
- How are schools, districts, and early childhood settings responding to sustainability challenges such as replacing staff and managing resources?
- How are MTSS frameworks, principles, and practices institutionalized by schools, districts, and early childhood settings?
- How is MTSS integrated with other improvement efforts?

- Interviews or focus groups
- Observations in case study sites
- Data and document review
- Online survey

- Will need to define “institutionalized”
 - Also assess the degree to which the state infrastructure has the capacity to scale up and sustain MTSS over time
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