

Inclusionary Practices and Systems:

# MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

## WHAT IS A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT?

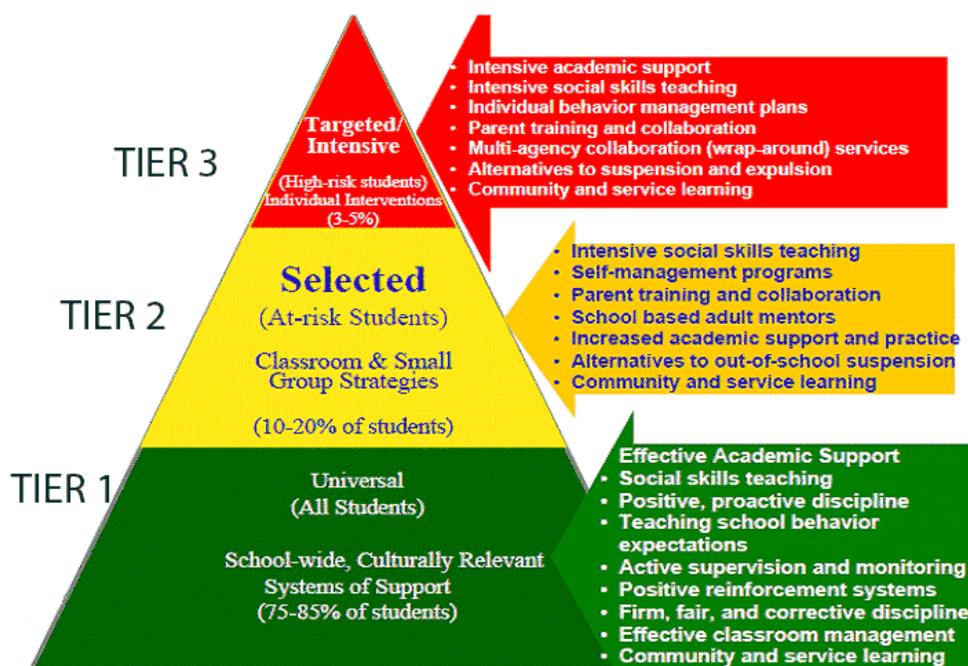
A Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) serves as a framework to provide a continuum of support for the whole child in a three-tiered system. Tier 1 refers to instruction that all students should receive. Tier 2 focuses on students needing extra academic support. Tier 3 instruction is directed at the small share (about 5%) of students who need individualized attention. MTSS provides for assessment and screening of students and data-based decisions. The MTSS approach helps schools identify students who are struggling and ways to intervene quickly. It is an overarching framework that can encompass a range of preventive approaches to supporting students, including Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI).

## WHY IS MTSS IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

MTSS supports the whole child across academic, behavior, and social-emotional growth areas.

## IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Ongoing data collection informs decisions to intervene, mark progress, and assess the effects of tiered supports.
- Data collection helps to determine if intervention needs to move to a higher or lower tier of support.
- MTSS encompasses PBIS and RTI tiers of support.



## **CASE STUDY: MTSS HIDDEN RIVER MIDDLE SCHOOL**

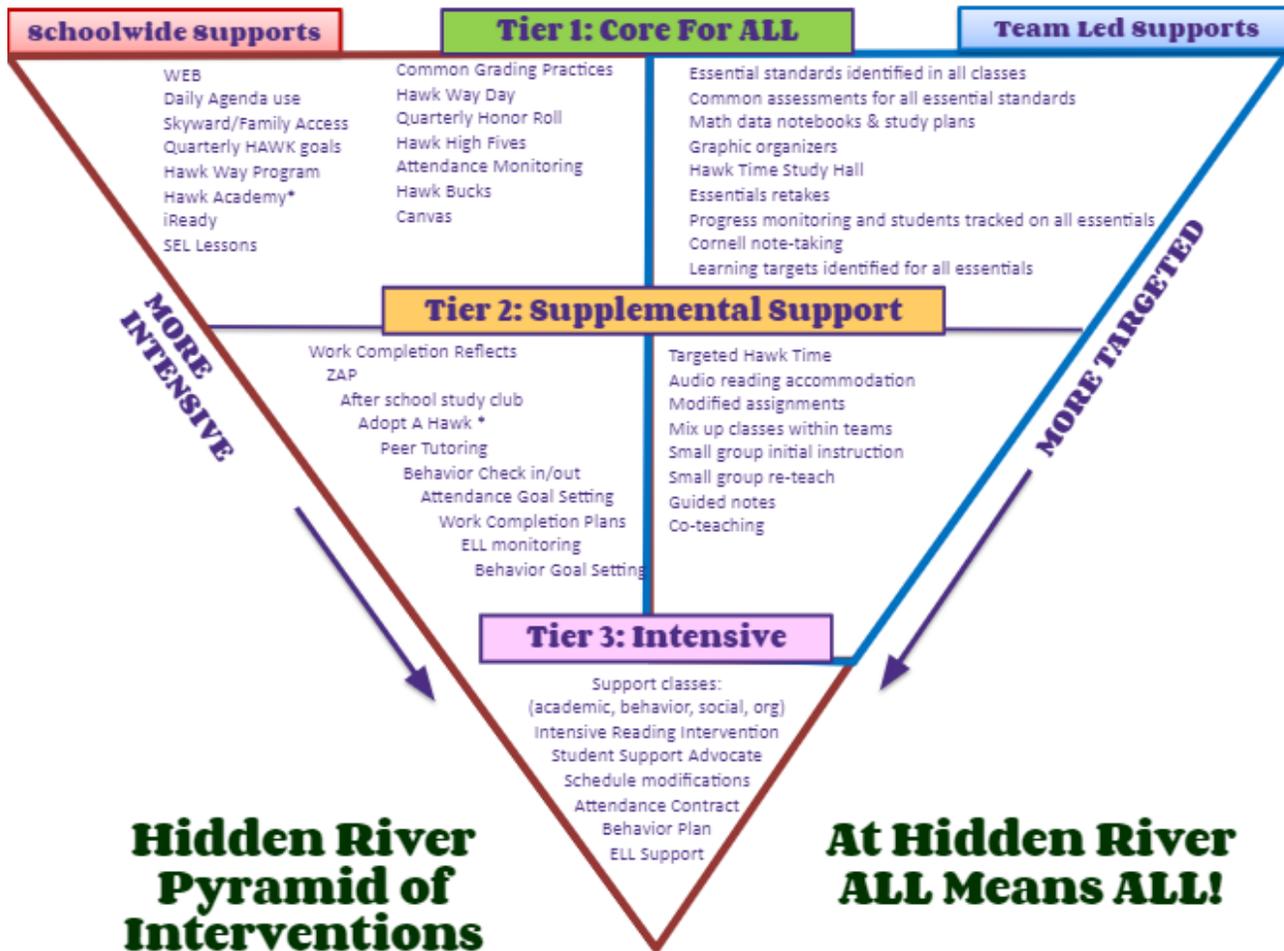
In 2015, Hidden River was a school where children with special needs were served in the special education room down the hall. This not only did not serve students in inclusive environments, it also put a heavy burden on special education teachers. This segregation of special education and general education also created a sense of “my students” and “their students” for teachers. With a school wide cultural shift toward a more inclusive vision of “ALL means ALL”, systems of intervention were built one step at a time. In the beginning of the journey toward more inclusive education for ALL students, it was important to come back to the Why and frame the work around this guiding question. The compelling Why, will drive the work forward.

As Hidden River created their MTSS pyramid, they first looked at what interventions and systems were already in place and effective. Taking this appreciative lens allowed Hidden River to leverage what was working and expand. Hidden River’s MTSS pyramid is inverted. What this visually represents is fundamental to the philosophy of MTSS-- that each tier is not a “place” but a service, or an intervention, that students access as a result of demonstrated need. In other words, ALL students access the essential skills and services that are in place at Tier 1. The inverted pyramid suggests that all of those services accessed in Tier 1 “flow downward” into Tier 2. So, if a student demonstrates a particular need for Tier 2 services or interventions, they continue to access everything in Tier 1. As needs heighten, students can access interventions highlighted in Tier 2 or Tier 3, but continue to access the Tier 1 core instruction. Second, the conceptual framework behind MTSS is a way to maximize our impact.

Hidden River’s MTSS model delivers on the school motto, “ALL MEANS ALL”. With strong school wide supports and interventions in place across the 3 tiers, student outcomes have improved. Hidden River’s foundation of MTSS is to ensure our teacher teams our collaborating on the “right work” of selecting essential standards, standards-based unit-planning and building of common assessments, delivering on the teach-assess / re-teach- re-assess student learning cycle, in order to then identify students for Tier 2 intervention. All of these components are necessary at the teacher team level to be able to identify students for intervention by name, by standard, by skill. This foundation at Tier 1 facilitates a focused approach to Tier 2 interventions, allowing Hidden River to assess the effectiveness of the interventions (in case there is a need for more individualized Tier 3 intervention for some students). On the school systems side, there

are leadership teams that look specifically at our school-wide positive behavior supports (ensuring we are balanced in building systems that *teach, reinforce, and respond* to expected and unexpected behaviors rather than just behavioral response routines-- these behavioral principles are present in all three Tiers of behavioral support systems and work) as well as our overall MTSS systems. This second leadership team looks at all of the academic, work habit, and procedural / routines we need to have in place school-wide to be in a better position to support students who demonstrate a need for more intensive supports. As a result of the work of these two leadership teams, the systems that are in place go through significant changes year-to-year based on the needs of the students at Hidden River Middle School. In fact, our “Pyramid of Interventions,” a visual model documenting our school-wide systems of support, goes through multiple revisions per year as we add, change, or take away systems that need updating.

One significant result of an approach that builds on the vision of “ALL means ALL” and a commitment to continuous, collective improvement, is that Hidden River staff get to *experience* a sense of collective teacher efficacy (one of Hattie’s leading indicators for accelerating student learning). At Hidden River, this is not something that is just read about, but is a concept that teams experience as they engage a student problem of learning, rely on each other to develop strategies and responses to that problem, and reflect on how it impacted student learning. There is no greater competency-builder than the ability to see firsthand the impact instructional or systems moves have on student learning, building capacity for future student learning challenges. Each of the systems or practices listed on the Hidden River Pyramid of Interventions model below is a particular idea that was developed to meet a particular need in time, as a reflection of this concept of collective teacher efficacy. Students, too, grow in their self-efficacy and belief in their own abilities as learners when they experience targeted lessons, strategies, and interventions that lead them to success. Hidden River’s lesson in this journey has been to simply dig-in and get started-- there will never be a point when a school is “ready” for perfectly designed interventions and systems. ANY school, though, can commit to a learning by doing approach, which will ultimately help teams of educators ask the right questions to develop the right types of systems and interventions that meet the needs of all students.



**RESOURCES**

1. **Eagle, J. W., Dowd-Eagle, S. E., Snyder, A., & Holtzman, E. G.** (2015). Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS): Collaboration Between School Psychologists and Administrators to Promote Systems-Level Change. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, 25(2/3), 160-177
2. **Prasse, David P., Breunlin, R. James, Giroux, Dorothy, Hunt, Jane, Morrison, Diane, & Their, Kimberly.** (2012). Embedding multi-tiered system of supports/response to intervention into teacher preparation. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal*, 10(2), 75-93.