



MOVING FROM SILOS TO SYSTEMS

Minnesota’s Experience Developing and Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support Framework

Overview

On average, Minnesota students compare favorably with all other states on standardized test scores, graduation rates, and college readiness; however, it has some of the largest gaps in the nation on these measures by race and socioeconomic status. The Minnesota Department of Education, which has traditionally focused on accountability and compliance, funds six Regional Centers of Excellence to provide assistance to school districts identified as needing improvement. There are numerous divisions within the Minnesota Department of Education whose work touches on aspects of the Multi Tiered System of Support Framework (MTSS) (e.g., School Climate; Teaching and Learning; Special Education; Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion), and each division took its own approach to their work. As a result, many local organizations and school districts have been advocating for a consistent, equitable approach to statewide MTSS along with technical assistance to ensure all students are achieving academic, behavioral, and social success. In 2019, the new governor, commissioner of education, and Minnesota Department of Education executive team were determined to address this need and bring this MTSS work to fruition. Our Region 10 Comprehensive Center team—composed of partners from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, and Education Analytics—identified a key

Goals of Our MnMTSS Work

1. **Enhance capacity within the Minnesota Department of Education** by convening internal coordinated teams to support MTSS development and implementation.
2. **Develop the MnMTSS Framework** by engaging with diverse stakeholders across Minnesota to obtain information regarding their experiences of education as well as input on improvement, and identifying key principles of MnMTSS that are centered in remediating existing inequities in educational access and outcomes, and
3. **Support statewide implementation and maintenance of MnMTSS** by investing in the development of regional and district-level infrastructure, resources, and supports for MnMTSS implementation with fidelity.

opportunity to develop a unifying framework for guiding continuous improvement, connecting silos, and enhancing collaboration. In October of 2019, we embarked on a new project to support the state of Minnesota’s efforts.

A major purpose of this ongoing project was to develop a shared understanding and language among divisions of the Minnesota Department of Education regarding MTSS to more efficiently and consistently support local educational agencies (LEAs) and provide districts with tools, resources, and technical assistance to support implementation.

Presently, the MnMTSS framework is the school improvement framework endorsed and supported by the Minnesota Department of Education. In April of 2021, the Commissioner of Education included MTSS in her strategic plan. We subsequently partnered with the Department to build capacity to develop and implement a statewide MTSS framework; since 2020, we have collaborated with the Department to roll out a statewide MTSS framework along with an aligned suite of resources intended to guide schools’ and districts’ continuous improvement efforts toward ensuring positive social, emotional, behavioral, developmental, and academic outcomes for every student.

Project Description

The MnMTSS work began by establishing six teams at The Minnesota Department of Education composed of Department and Region 10 Comprehensive Center staff. Each team has a unique purpose and responsibility with clearly-defined roles. There is a clear process for how deliverables are created, revised, and finalized. Table 1 identifies the teams, responsibilities, and members involved in the process.

Project Outcomes

Over the past two years, our staff have worked with the Minnesota Department of Education to develop capacity. A state leader

Table 1. Inaugural MnMTSS Teams in Minnesota

Team	Roles/Responsibilities	Members
Executive Team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provides vision and connects all efforts to MN strategic plan 2. Commits resources 3. Communicates across all divisions of MDE 4. Reviews and approves all deliverables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet of Minnesota’s Commissioner of Education • Assistant Commissioner leads the work
Core Team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establishes and monitors goals for capacity building for support of MnMTSS across the state 2. Coordinates and integrates the work of relevant divisions within MDE into the MnMTSS infrastructure and implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDE staff representing each division • R10CC staff • RCE staff
Writing Team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creates deliverables in the form of written guidance for school districts for the project 2. Revises deliverables based on feedback from other teams and from field trials with school districts in the professional learning cohorts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R10CC staff • MDE staff • RCE staff
Professional Learning Planning Team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develops and delivers professional learning for school districts and charter schools in MnMTSS implementation 2. Continuously updates professional learning opportunities based on feedback from participants. 3. Pilots written guidance developed by the writing team and provides feedback to the writing team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDE staff • R10CC staff • RCE staff
RCE Partnership Team	Supports implementation of MnMSS in ESSA identified schools—primarily through on-site coaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDE staff • R10CC staff • RCE staff
Systems Consultation Collaborative	Supports statewide implementation of MnMTSS in all districts and charter schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R10CC staff • MDE staff • RCE staff • MSC staff

Note: MDE = Minnesota Department of Education; R10CC = Region 10 Comprehensive Center; RCE = Regional Centers for Excellence; MSC = Minnesota Service Cooperatives



we spoke with identified this capacity-building as an area of “tremendous growth” resulting from our work. Not only have our deliverables served to improve LEAs’ knowledge and skills in developing and implementing MTSS in their local contexts, our staff have also worked closely with Minnesota Department of Education and Regional Center of Excellence staff to build their own knowledge base and capacity to support LEAs. Department clients have attested that trusting relationships with our staff and “good, hard conversations” about necessary changes contributed to this capacity-building.

Within the Minnesota Department of Education, organizational efficiency has been increased by engaging in dialogues across divisions to ensure MnMTSS resources could be embedded into a wide range of initiatives. One state leader noted our staff were “willing to get people together in the same room to have that conversation” to ensure consistency in how language was being used across divisions (for example, around assessment).

In the area of policy capacity, state leaders celebrated the adoption of MnMTSS as the framework used to support continuous improvement of schools identified for support under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Furthermore, our team’s work to develop a fiscal guide for LEAs helps districts and schools source local, state, and federal funds to support local MTSS development and implementation efforts.

According to one state agency leader we spoke with, the big win of our MnMTSS work has been developing the Minnesota Department of Education’s resource capacity. To date, the Department and R10CC have developed the following nine resources:

1. State definition of MnMTSS
2. Glossary of terms
3. MnMTSS framework
4. Roadmap
5. District and school self-assessment measure

6. Professional learning guidebook
7. Teamwork guidebook
8. Statewide survey
9. Fiscal guide
10. District handbook template

Most importantly, we are facilitating MnMTSS network improvement communities that support over 100 LEA teams.

These resources have been developed to support ease of use among school districts and those supporting districts (e.g., RCE staff). The development process for MnMTSS deliverables has been intentionally designed to support the “braiding” of various statewide initiatives and to encourage the buy-in of the state and regional staff members who will use them. Such

integration of MnMTSS into Minnesota Department of Education processes and communications ensures that our contributions are sustainable long term.

Our staff and evaluators are measuring long-term change by administering an annual statewide survey to understand where school districts are in their own development and

implementation of MTSS. Results of the 2022 survey indicate that approximately two-thirds (65%) of respondents from across Minnesota indicated having accessed the MnMTSS framework, and 57 districts involved in the Department’s cohorts have been trained on finalized MnMTSS materials. These same districts have provided valuable feedback to our project staff to further refine MnMTSS materials and promote district use.

“Overall, thinking about the progress we’ve made over the last two years versus the last ten years, it’s pretty phenomenal,” states MDE Assistant Commissioner Bobbie Burnham. “It has a lot to do with our State MTSS Coordinator and the partnership with R10CC that has allowed us to make the progress we’ve had, and identified the direction we’re going. We have a direction that’s solid, and there’s momentum.”

In summary, the The Minnesota Department of

One state leader noted Region 10 Comprehensive Center staff were instrumental in bringing people together to ensure consistency in how language was being used across divisions.



Education has made significant progress in developing the MnMTSS framework. Cohorts of educators work together to assess their implementation needs and are guided by Minnesota Department of Education and our Region 10 Comprehensive Center staff to create action plans. In addition, implementation guidance created by these staff is used in cohorts, and feedback is collected to improve guidance on a regular basis. The work is now shifting to focus on supporting school districts as they implement the framework.

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—Bobbie Burnham, MDE