

# Data Use *Multi-State* Spotlight: Using MTSS Data to Improve Graduation Rates

**Challenge:** How can states promote data use within multi-tiered systems of support to improve graduation rates for students with disabilities?

Data-based problem solving within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) can help state education agencies and local education agencies (LEAs) improve graduation rates for students with disabilities. To facilitate problem solving within an MTSS, states and LEAs need efficient systems and processes for analyzing and integrating data across initiatives. Creating the infrastructure to support data-based problem solving can be a challenge. This spotlight shares how three states use different approaches to promote data use within an MTSS to improve graduation rates for students with disabilities. The spotlight concludes with recommendations for states facing similar challenges.

## Use an early warning system.



The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) needed a consistent and reliable method to identify students who were off track from graduating. PDE and stakeholders reviewed Dr. Robert Balfanz's research and determined that using an early warning system (EWS) is a key strategy for increasing the graduation rate for various subgroups of students, including students with disabilities. PDE found the following considerations are important when supporting the use of an EWS within an MTSS framework:

- *Allow sites to choose an EWS.* PDE partnered with Johns Hopkins University to develop a statewide EWS that LEAs can use for free. The PDE EWS [Dashboard](#) uses Attendance, Behavior, and Course Grades (ABC) to identify students at risk. Some LEAs choose to use other data systems.
- *Use uniform EWS metrics.* All schools analyze ABC data using the same metrics regardless of which EWS schools select (see metrics [here](#)).

- *Identify students and intervene early.* The PDE EWS system identifies students as early as middle school, before they are at risk for dropping out.
- *Assign coherent improvement strategies to students based on their needs.* For example, if a student is identified as off track in behavior, then the local leadership team may recommend a mentor for the student, using the *Check & Connect Student Engagement Intervention Model*. To support LEAs in selecting interventions based on their EWS data, PDE provided LEAs with a list of evidence-based practices.
- *Use EWS data for continuous improvement.* An EWS allows LEAs to see patterns in data for groups of students. For example, if an LEA sees a data pattern that suggests that many students are not on track toward graduation due to failing algebra, this pattern would alert the LEA that there may be a larger issue related to the MTSS Tier 1 core instruction for students who struggle or need more intensive support in this area.
- *Involve families and students in the process.* Schools involve families and students in the analysis of EWS data and selection of interventions. Students, including students with disabilities, also assisted with the development of a one-page [publication](#) in English and Spanish that provides strategies to increase students' chances of graduating from high school and decrease their chances of dropping out.

**Strategy: Provide Access to Data Use Tools**

Check out PDE's LEA *Data Tools to Increase Graduation Rates* by clicking [here](#).

Pennsylvania met its graduation State-Identified Measurable Result (SIMR) target for 2016–17, in part, by using an EWS to identify students with disabilities who were off track and by assigning appropriate coherent improvement strategies to meet the students' needs.

**Provide a comprehensive data system.**



Through its SSIP, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) identified a need for a single interface for LEAs to access multiple types of student data in timely manner. To address this need, NCDPI is currently in the initial implementation of its Every Child Accountability and Tracking System (ECATS). ECATS will provide equitable access to a robust data tool for all LEAs in the state to support problem solving at the state, district, school, grade, classroom, and individual

student levels. ECATS comprises various types of data collected as part of an MTSS framework within one database and will include the following features:

- *Single integrated interface.* ECATS will provide LEAs with a single interface that integrates MTSS, special education, and service documentation data.
- *Critical components of MTSS.* NCDPI designed the user interface and data dashboards with critical components of an MTSS in mind, particularly, the EWS. The EWS will seamlessly integrate academic, behavior, and attendance data and create aggregated data displays across multiple levels for identifying risk and targeting problem-solving efforts.
- *Free screening and progress monitoring.* To further promote equity, ECATS will support free screening and progress monitoring measures for literacy and mathematics that have been adopted or developed by the state.
- *Support of data analysis.* ECATS will support rigorous analysis of progress monitoring data, allowing school-based teams to isolate the effectiveness of specific interventions and practices for groups and individual students. Moreover, the system will house metrics related to the cost of programs, staff training, and data related to dosage of delivered supports.
- *Service documentation.* For students with disabilities, ECATS will provide tools for determining eligibility, developing an individualized education program (IEP), monitoring progress toward IEP goals, and determining the effectiveness of specially designed instruction within an MTSS.

**Strategy: Provide Access to a Comprehensive MTSS Data System**

To learn more about NCDPI's ECATS, click [here](#).

ECATS will provide just-in-time access to a multitude of data sources as teams engage in collaborative problem solving and continuous improvement efforts. NCDPI is seeing evidence of infrastructure alignment and improvements in graduation rates with the development of ECATS.

## Align communication, data collection, and evaluation plans across state initiatives.



The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) improved graduation rates for students with disabilities by aligning multiple MTSS-related state initiatives: State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG), School

Climate Transformation Grant, and Project Aware. The Virginia Tiered Systems of

Supports Research and Implementation Center (VTSS-RIC), partially funded through the SPDG, aims to support measurable improvements in attendance, academics, behavior and social-emotional health, and the use of data-informed problem solving. Similarly, the work of the SSIP focuses on increasing graduation rates, improving attendance, and decreasing disciplinary problems. VDOE realized that, to improve graduation outcomes for all students, the alignment of these initiatives needed to evolve to aligned processes. The state addressed this challenge using the following strategies:

- *Align communication between leadership teams.* VDOE realized that the communication and teaming structures for the different initiatives were limited. To address this challenge, stakeholders who are primarily involved on one team (e.g., SSIP Implementation) are now part of the feedback loop and teaming structure for other teams (e.g., VTSS-RIC). Stakeholders from one team attending meetings and being involved in conversations with stakeholders from other teams allows everyone to remain up-to-date on the latest terminology and reporting requirements.
- *Align data collection efforts.* Because all the initiatives had similar goals, the initiatives were also collecting similar data. VDOE aligned data collection efforts by creating one overarching data collection plan that supports achieving all initiatives. This process helps avoid duplicative data collection and analyses. Data and analyses are shared across initiatives.
- *Align coherent improvement strategies.* VDOE aligned coherent improvement strategies, such as creating a culture of attendance, across initiatives to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

**Strategy: Align MTSS Efforts K-12**

Check out Virginia's approach to MTSS by clicking [here](#).

Data show that the strategies for aligning initiatives in Virginia have positively impacted the graduation rate for students with disabilities; VDOE saw an increase, from 54.9 percent in 2013 to 63.7 percent, in 2016. In 2018-19, VDOE plans to further align processes by coordinating the initiatives' evaluation plans.

## Recommendations for States Interested in Using MTSS to Improve Graduation Rates

- Create or support a comprehensive data system for LEAs that allows for a single log-in to access data related to student outcomes, service documentation for students with disabilities, and implementation.

- Support local implementation of a variety of evidence-based practices to increase graduation rates.
- Build capacity of LEAs to use standardized data team meeting protocols to analyze EWS data and self-identify evidence-based practices that address local needs.
- Align MTSS-related initiatives at the state level and ensure that LEAs are provided with consistent messaging and recommendations regarding how they should align initiatives at the local level.
- Support LEAs in aligning local-level MTSS-related initiatives (i.e., positive behavioral interventions and supports, social-emotional learning, K–8 tiered interventions, special education requirements).
- Engage staff across various initiatives to identify how alignment can become more efficient and positively impact outcomes across projects.

#### Available Resources

- National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI), Technical Assistance State Facilitators (Find your state on the [map](#).)
- NCSI Data Use Team Technical Assistance Support (Contact: Kristin Ruedel at [kruedel@air.org](mailto:kruedel@air.org))
- NCSI Graduation Collaborative Service Area Lead (Contact: Tessie Bailey at [tbailey@air.org](mailto:tbailey@air.org))
- Visit the [Center on Response to Intervention](#) to access resources and learn more about multi-tiered systems of support.
- To learn more about customizing an EWS, see the American Institutes for Research Early Warning Systems [Pathway](#)
- National Dropout Prevention [Center](#)

*About this resource:* This resource was developed by members of the NCSI Data Use Service Area Team, including Kristin Ruedel (AIR), Gena Nelson (AIR), Zach Weingarten (AIR) and Tessie Bailey (AIR), and in collaboration with Matt Hoskins, Data Analyst and State Implementation Specialist, Exceptional Children Division, NCDPI; Victor Rodriguez-Diaz, Assistant Director, Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN); Laura Moran, Educational Consultant, PaTTAN; Maribel Saimre, Interim Director, Office of Student Services, VDOE; Jeffrey Phenicle, Director, Office of Special Education Program Improvement, VDOE. The content was developed under cooperative agreement number #H326R140006 (NCSI) from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government. Project Officer: Perry Williams.