

Featured

(1) *Designing a School Open House to Build Bridges with Families and Communities*

(2) *More About MTSS*

(3) *About PBIS and MTSS*

And, as always, you will find

(4) *Links to a few other resources relevant to continuing education*

**This community of practice *Practitioner* is designed
for a screen bigger than an iPhone.**

For discussion and interchange

>*Designing a School Open House to Build Bridges with Families and Communities*

Schools are located in communities, but often are islands with no bridges to the mainland. Families live in neighborhoods, often with little connection to each other or to the schools their youngsters attend. Nevertheless, all affect each other, for good or bad. Because of this and because they share goals related to education and socialization of the young, collaboration among schools, homes, and communities is a must if they are to minimize problems and maximize results. Schools that include (a) *home engagement* and (b) *community engagement* as major *student/learning support domains* not only can strengthen student and family engagement and commitment to enhance learning outcomes, but also enhance a sense of community.

Next time you are involved in a group discussion about how to improve schools, look around the table. After you note who is there, ask yourself which stakeholder groups are not represented (or are not effectively represented). Missing too often are the contributions of families, youth, and many other key community entities. This is the case despite policies that call for enhancing parent and community involvement. Policy makers do recognize that such involvement is essential to schools and schooling. However, as has been a common experience in operationalizing policy, verbal commitments have not been reflected in daily practice. (See *Engaging the Strengths of Families, Youth, and Communities in Rebuilding Learning Supports* .)

Here is an excerpt from an article that discusses how school open houses can play a role in this.

From: *Reimagining Open House: Connecting Families, Inspiring Learning, Building Community*

"...From elementary to high school, a school Open House is more than just an annual event; it is an opportunity to build strong connections between families, students, educators, and community partners.

When schools shift the focus beyond logistics to interactive learning experiences and community-building opportunities, Open House becomes a more meaningful event that supports student success through collaboration with families.

Engage families to take an active role and sometimes even a leading role in the planning and design of a school Open House or similar event is essential for making the event impactful. A collaborative approach between educators and families increases trust and transparency....

Open House is the first step in a dynamic family engagement journey. When the focus is shifted from school policies and procedures to the inclusion of the family and their role in their child's success, families feel valued and seen from the start. As a result, they become more invested.

This intentional approach transforms Open House into a catalyst that sparks lasting commitment.

Personalized Welcomes: Have student ambassadors or staff personally greet families, help them navigate the campus, and lead school tours for new families. Make individual name tags so first names are used when interactions occur among families and with teachers. Have the students create signs and posters welcoming families.

Interactive Classrooms: Instead of teacher presentations, showcase student work and let students explain their learning. Students and their families can create a visual representation of their goals, dreams, and aspirations for the future and share with other families and the teachers....

Create academic connections – relationships between teachers and families—to support learning inside and outside the school is why we engage families in the first place. These connections are built with open communication, personalized engagement, and shared goals....

Family–Teacher Learning Partnerships: Offer short, interactive lessons or model sample activities so families can see how key skills are taught in the classroom. Share practical tips for supporting learning at home....

Build a Sense of Community

A successful Open House creates a warm, welcoming environment in which families feel a true sense of belonging. When families feel included and connected from the start, they are more likely to stay engaged, support their child's learning, and contribute to the school's vibrant culture.

Family Connection Station: Set up areas where families can meet each other and sign up to join school groups like the family engagement team or participate in future workshops, coffee chats, and advisory meetings.

Community Resource Fair: Invite local organizations with themed booths and stations to share resources on tutoring, enrichment programs, and family support services. Invite local businesses, libraries, and colleges and universities...

Follow up with a post–Open House message thanking families for attending...

By strategically and collaboratively designing Open House as the first step in an ongoing family engagement plan, schools can foster stronger relationships, greater trust, and more active collaboration between home and school, ultimately leading to improved academic success, higher attendance, and higher graduation rates....

For more on enhancing home and community engagement, see our Center Quick Finds on:

- >[*Parent/Home Involvement and Engagement in Schools*](#)
- >[*Community Outreach for Involvement and Support*](#)

For discussion and interchange

>More About MTSS

As we noted last week, everyone wants to see better achievement scores. What widely gets in the way of this is the many students experiencing learning, behavioral, and emotional problems. Addressing such problems requires that student/learning supports are given a high priority in school improvement.

Unfortunately, those supports are too often sidelined in school improvement policy and practice.

The hope was that MTSS would bring student/learning supports to the forefront.

It hasn't.

We have discussed these matters for some time. See:

- >[*Rethinking MTSS to Better Address Barriers to Learning*](#)
- >[*MTSS: Strengths and Weaknesses*](#)
- >[*The MTSS Continuum: Essential but Not Comprehensive Enough – How to Make it Better*](#)
- >[*Examples of MTSS in Practice*](#)

> ***Building on MTSS to Enhance How Schools Address Barriers to Learning***

Most recently we wrote a commentary entitled: ***Moving Beyond MTSS to Transform Student/Learning Supports***. Here is an excerpt:

“... The term MTSS had been coined earlier as part of efforts to place Response to Intervention (RtI) and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) into a continuum of intervention. Recent research has stressed the concept of integrated MTSS (I-MTSS) – an approach that combines academic and behavioral supports (UConn I-MTSS Research Team, 2024)....

Over the last five years, a variety of concerns have arisen across the country about how well MTSS is meeting teachers’ needs for student/learning supports. Some concerns have zeroed in on the problems related to implementing the system changes.

Our concerns have stressed major limitations of MTSS, and we have noted that the approach is not doing much to end the fragmentation and marginalization that has long characterized the ways that schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students (<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/BuildMTSS.pdf>).

We suggest that it is essential to realize that more is involved in building a truly comprehensive system “to support a rapid response to students’ needs” involves more than a continuum of interventions. That is, while a full continuum is essential, it is just one facet of a comprehensive intervention system. Given this, we view the extensive focus on MTSS as diverting attention from the need for a fundamental transformation of how schools play their role in addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

We recognize that work done in relation to MTSS contributes to efforts to improve student and learning supports. However, as widely conceived, the MTSS framework is much too limited a perspective for ending the marginalization of student/learning supports in school improvement policy. Given the investment in MTSS, we suggest that the way forward is to evolve MTSS initiatives into an intervention framework and agenda that guides development of student/learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system.

See:

JUST RELEASED for 2025-2026

***An Agenda for Improving Student/Learning Supports:
A Month by Month Guide for Systemic Change with Existing Resources***

For discussion and interchange

>About PBIS and MTSS

From a Colleague: *Concerned about state departments of education and school districts rushing to embed Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) within a broader Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).*

“While integration can create alignment across academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports, it is important to recognize the potential disadvantages and risks of this approach. Without careful planning, merging PBIS into MTSS may dilute its effectiveness and compromise fidelity.

Disadvantages

1. Loss of Behavioral Focus – PBIS was designed as a comprehensive behavioral framework that emphasizes prevention, climate improvement, and reinforcement of positive behaviors. When absorbed into MTSS, the behavioral emphasis can be overshadowed by academic priorities, leaving schools with weaker systems for addressing discipline, climate, and social-emotional development.

2. Implementation Fidelity Challenges – PBIS is backed by decades of research, but its impact depends on faithful implementation. In an MTSS model, there is a risk of “watering down”

practices — for example, inconsistent reinforcement systems, weak data use, or superficial Tier 1 strategies. Schools may check the “MTSS box” without sustaining the depth of PBIS practices.

3. Role Confusion for Staff – Educators may experience uncertainty about whether PBIS is still a distinct framework or just a subset of MTSS. This confusion can result in fragmented implementation or duplication of effort, as staff feel pulled between overlapping initiatives.

4. Strain on Professional Development – Both PBIS and MTSS require robust professional development. When merged, specialized PBIS training may be reduced, limiting staff’s ability to implement core practices such as behavior-specific praise, reinforcement, and alternatives to exclusionary discipline.

5. Resource Allocation Concerns – Funding, staffing, and data resources may shift toward academic MTSS, reducing the resources available for behavioral specialists, PBIS coaches, or dedicated leadership teams. This undermines the supports necessary to sustain PBIS with fidelity.

6. Data System Complexity – PBIS often relies on targeted tools (e.g., office discipline referrals, Tiered Fidelity Inventory). When folded into MTSS, behavioral data may be lost within larger data dashboards, reducing the clarity and precision of behavioral monitoring.

7. Risk of a “Compliance Mentality” – In some districts, merging frameworks results in a focus on compliance (forms, checklists, reporting) rather than cultural change. This risks diluting PBIS’s core mission: building positive relationships and reinforcing prosocial behaviors as the foundation for safe, supportive schools.

Conclusion

Merging PBIS into MTSS offers the promise of systemwide alignment but carries real risks of weakening PBIS’s behavioral impact. State department of education and district leaders should carefully weigh these disadvantages before full integration.

Recommendations

>Clarify Roles and Responsibilities – Establish clear guidance on how PBIS coaches, MTSS coordinators, school leaders, and district staff interact so that behavioral expertise does not get diluted within broader MTSS teams.

>Embed Behavioral Expertise in MTSS Decision-Making – Ensure that staff with behavioral and climate expertise are represented on MTSS leadership teams and have equal weight in decisions about interventions, resources, and priorities.

>Maintain Tiered Fidelity Checks – Use PBIS fidelity tools (e.g., Tiered Fidelity Inventory, School Climate surveys) alongside MTSS progress monitoring so that behavioral fidelity is not overshadowed by academic measures.

Integrate Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

>Encourage PLCs to review behavioral data in tandem with academic data to highlight connections between school climate, engagement, and achievement.

>Communicate Value to Stakeholders – Clearly articulate to state leaders, local school boards, parents, and community partners how PBIS contributes uniquely to safe, supportive learning environments, even while operating under MTSS.

>Plan for Sustainability – Build multi-year funding and staffing plans that explicitly safeguard PBIS resources, rather than leaving them to compete annually with broader MTSS initiatives.

>Align but Do Not Collapse Language – Use MTSS to frame alignment but keep PBIS language visible in training materials, staff communications, and district documents to reinforce behavioral culture.

By taking these steps, state departments of education can more fully guide school districts and school districts can achieve the benefits of alignment without losing the behavioral depth and cultural change that PBIS was designed to bring to schools.

I served as Deputy State Superintendent in my state for 14 years and was proud that our state increased the number of schools implementing PBIS from 50 in 2007 to 1,400 by 2020. During that time, out-of-school suspensions declined by over 25% while graduation rates increased to over 85% from 65% in 2007. Improving school climate was an integral part of the cultural shifts that led to those positive outcomes.

I’ve studied school climate research from around the state, nation, and world and I’ve found compelling evidence that school climate positively impacts school safety, academic outcomes, behavior, and student attendance regardless of the location, type, or socioeconomic status of the school. Furthermore, the research and anecdotal stories across all types of schools show that PBIS is the most effective framework for improving school climate. I fear that rushing into merging PBIS into MTSS will jeopardize those gains.”

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

- >>Improving attendance by reducing suspension
- >>Both Sides Get Social-Emotional Learning Wrong
- >>In the voices of adolescents: Co-designing four curricular components of compassion programs to align with developmental needs
- >>Investigating Advanced School Surveillance Practices and Disproportionality
- >>Community and School Contexts in Youth Gang Involvement: Combining Social Bonds and Social Organization Perspectives
- >>School Leaders Often Use Student Feedback When Making Decisions
- >>What can educators do to elevate student voice?
- >>Tutoring was supposed to save American kids after the pandemic. The results? ‘Sobering’
- >>“An Agenda for Improving Student/Learning Supports: A Month by Month Guide for Systemic Change with Existing Resources”
- >>Juvenile Justice Update

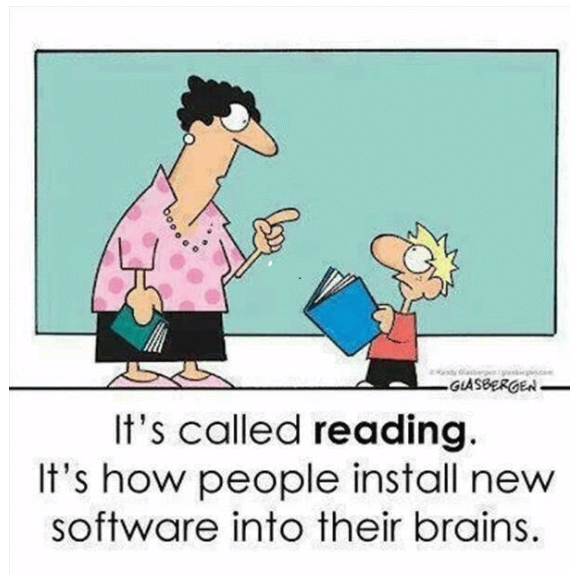
A Few Upcoming Webinars

For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center’s Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

- 9/17 Helping families support their child's mental health needs
- 9/17 Engagement of influencers in prevention
- 9/17 Understanding grief
- 9/17 Strategies to improve student engagement
- 9/17 Working toward positive outcomes
- 9/17 Artificial intelligence tools for school counseling
- 9/17 Supporting Unaccompanied youth
- 9/18 How parents can help anxious children
- 9/18 Emotional regulation and academic performance
- 9/18 Special education eligibility
- 9/18 The power of emotion regulation to drive k12 wellbeing
- 9/24 Family Engagement is the Foundation for Attendance and Learning
- 9/24 Preparing students for career paths
- 9/25 Understanding the IEP process
- 9/29 De-escalating children in distress
- 9/30 Building a culture where teachers stay
- 10/1 Determining McKinney-Vento eligibility with care
- 10/8 System change: A schoolwide comprehensive model
- 10/22 Addressing challenging behaviors
- 10/23 Addressing bullying in the Individual Education Plan

How Learning Happens (Edutopia’s series of videos explores how educators can guide all students, regardless of their developmental starting points, to become productive and engaged learners.)

Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth (webinar recording)



To Listserv Participants

- Please share this resource with others. (Everyone has a stake in the future of public education and this is a critical time for action.)
- Let us know what's going on to improve how schools address barriers to learning & teaching and reengage disconnected students and families. (We can share the info with the over 140,000 on our listserv.)

For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Looking for information? (We usually can help.)

Have a suggestion for improving our efforts? (We welcome your feedback.)

We look forward to hearing from you! Contact: ltaylor@ucla.edu

THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!

For new sign-ups – email Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.

THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER

Who Are We? Our national Center was established in 1995 under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project (which was established in 1986). We are part of the Department of Psychology at UCLA. The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor.