ISSUE BRIEF NO. 6

State-Level Guidelines for Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Behavior (MTSS-B)

Background

Recent decades have brought momentum within U.S. schools toward a tiered educational framework in which data are used to connect students with the intensity of supports needed to match their individual needs. Although much of the attention to tiered frameworks was initially focused on the identification of students with specific learning disabilities (i.e. Response to Intervention, or RtI), there has been increased emphasis in recent years on multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) that integrate social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) supports.

The core components of an MTSS include
- screening all students proactively to identify those students at-risk
- implementing tiered intervention supports to meet students' level of needs, and
- monitoring student progress to inform decision making.

What it looks like to carry out each of these components (e.g., what tools should be used and how; what supports should be implemented and how often), however, varies significantly depending on whether the focus is on academics or SEB domains.

Review of State-Level Policy Documents

Although schools may draw from many sources of guidance, it is presumed that the regulations and guidelines developed by state departments of education will have a direct and notable influence on local education practice. In 2019, researchers from UConn and Northeastern University conducted a review of state department of education (DOE) websites to evaluate the extent of guidance for schools implementing multi-tiered systems of support for behavior (MTSS-B), particularly for Tiers 2 (targeted, small group intervention) and 3 (intensive behavior support plans, crisis intervention). As part of the review, 51 state DOE websites were reviewed with regard to the information provided on SEB interventions, progress monitoring techniques, and evaluation of response to intervention.

Key Findings

- **Roughly half (51%) of the state DOE websites provided some procedural guidance for MTSS-B**, but the type and level of guidance varied greatly across sites
  - **Only 8 state DOEs produced behavior-specific documents**, meaning that the resource focused exclusively on student behavior (as opposed to combined with academics)

- About **one-fifth (22%) of state DOEs did not provide any procedural guidance regarding implementation of Tier 2 and 3** within a MTSS-B

➢ Interventions and measures were more likely to be suggested on state DOE websites than information about how to use data to inform decision-making (how often data should be collected and reviewed; how to evaluate student responsiveness)
- **Slightly over one- third (35%) provided examples of the types of social, emotional and behavioral interventions** that might be used within a MTSS-B
  - At the **Tier 2 level**, most frequently referenced interventions included behavioral/social skills instruction, Check-in/Check-out intervention, mentoring programs, and self-management
  - At the **Tier 3 level**, the most common recommendation was to develop an individualized behavior support plan

➢ **Specific assessment tools for use in monitoring behavioral progress were mentioned by slightly less than half (41%)** of state DOEs. The most commonly cited progress monitoring tools included office discipline referrals, systematic direct observation, and teacher-completed ratings (e.g., point sheets, checklists)

➢ Very few state DOEs provided guidance around how data can be used to assess student response to behavioral interventions
- **Less than 1 in 5 state DOEs (18%) mentioned the frequency** with which schools should collect and review behavioral progress data
- **1 in 10 state DOEs discussed how to analyze behavior progress monitoring data** to determine whether a behavioral intervention has been successful

Key Implications

Only 3 state DOEs (Florida, Kansas, Missouri) were found to provide comprehensive procedural guidance regarding implementation of MTSS-B and might be used as models for other states. The high variability across state departments regarding MTSS-B suggests a lack of consensus and that additional research may be needed to understand which procedures lead to the most enhanced student outcomes.

For Additional Information

Briesch, A. M., Chafouleas, S. M., Nissen, K., & Long, S. (2019). A review of state-level procedural guidance for implementing Multi-Tiered Systems of Behavioral Support (MTSS-B). *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 22*, 131-144.