

Tiered System of Supports: Collaboration Phase



What Is It and Why Is It Important?

The purpose of the Collaboration Phase is to provide teachers with an opportunity to work collaboratively with peers, caregivers and/or other service providers to support students. During this phase, relevant stakeholders are sharing information, developing a better understanding of their students, and designing plans to support students' and teachers' needs. Improved collaboration with diverse stakeholders is important, particularly for schools with limited resources (online or in person). This aspect of supporting students provides an opportunity to leverage a diverse set of experts in and out of school in an equitable manner.

Each school has varied access to human resources that allow for some ideal foundations of meeting operations. The guidance provided below offers a suggestion for an ideal scenario, where teachers, caregivers and relevant stakeholders are given the opportunity to discuss students they are concerned about and learn from other stakeholders who provide valuable input. This also allows for a genuine opportunity to receive support from colleagues and, in many cases, from families, embodying a spirit of equitable collaboration and a deepening of relationships. Authentic teacher, caregiver and community participation is demonstrative of an inclusive space and thus reflects shared ownership, a principle of whole-child design.

Planning for and effectively implementing the Collaboration Phase, in a consistent way, is important for ensuring positive academic and social-emotional outcomes for students, building educator capacity, and dismantling the systems, structures and practices that continue in schools. Teachers can spend less time using punitive measures when reacting to how a student presents in their class, allowing students to remain in the classroom and learn with their peers.

Structures that support collection of comprehensive holistic data, coupled with input from multiple stakeholders, improve the quality of meetings, student support plan creation, implementation, and student/teacher relationships, among other benefits.

What Happens in the Collaboration Phase?

There are a few key activities that should occur during the Collaboration Phase:

1. A pre-scheduled meeting to discuss the student (1:1 between teacher and student support team member or with a group of team members) is planned and conducted in a confidential space with relevant participants invited (ensure teacher coverage where necessary)
2. Discussion of student context and analysis of student data
3. Development of a support plan that is communicated to relevant parties

Collaboration Is Key

There are several benefits to conducting structured meetings about students collaboratively, with a diverse set of perspectives, through an equitable whole-child design lens. Those benefits are as follows:

- There is an increased likelihood that processes and protocols are implemented with fidelity, improving the ability for more children to receive appropriate support sooner.
- Input from multiple stakeholders improves the quality of support offered and the student's overall school experience.
- Inclusion of varied perspectives is an equitable practice and will contribute to more equitable outcomes.
- Teachers feel supported and families feel included, making way for a true spirit of shared ownership and accountability.
- Sustainable protocols in place will help to eliminate additional meetings due to challenges with membership participation or lack of data.
- School teams are able to document trends, address any potential areas for growth, and apply supports in a more proactive manner, which can benefit all students.
- Placing emphasis on understanding the context of the whole child provides the opportunity for school staff to think holistically, likely reducing the use of punitive responses and allowing for increased instructional time for students.
- There is an increase in a positive/supportive environment for both students and staff.
- Student strengths are considered and leveraged, allowing them to express themselves while providing them with an authentic sense of belonging.

The Collaboration Phase at both Tier 2 and Tier 3 allows for the inclusion of diverse perspectives to provide input on details about student context and have a similar structure for doing so. However, there are some variations in how Tier 2 and Tier 3 meetings are conducted. To learn more, review these tools:

- *Collaboration Phase: Guidance for the Set-Up Team*
- *Collaboration Phase: Guidance for Meeting Participants*

In these tools, we go more in depth about the activities in this phase and the tasks associated with them and share some guidance on how to design and conduct meetings that facilitate an equitable experience for students and adults aligned to whole-child design. You will notice throughout these and the other tools the variation between Tier 2 and Tier 3 meetings.

What Else Do I Need to Know?

In order to engage in well-informed, holistic conversations about students, some pre-work is required by the teacher, as described in both the [Identification](#) and [Referral Phases](#). Teachers must collect and reflect on student data and their own mindsets and practices that support collaboration

The following are some examples of the pitfalls that can occur when supporting students in a way that is not collaborative, not as inclusive, or not consistent:

- Students needs are not met in a timely manner
- Limited perspective of the student, not holistic
- Teachers might feel unsupported, spend more time leveraging punitive measures
- Increase of students in need of referrals due to ineffective support strategies
- Relationship gaps between teachers and families continues or is deepened
- More time spent in more meetings
- There is an overemphasis on student support staff implementing solutions
- Very little collaboration; continuation of operating in silos, resulting in a lack of cohesion
- Little to no progress made on student academic achievement and social-emotional development
- Continued or deepened inequitable practices and systems unchecked
- The potential for a lack of, or limited, accurate data to ensure a positive school climate that nurtures the learner