Making Refinements to Your Tiered System of Supports Through Continuous Improvement Cycles

Continuous Improvement

An important part of developing or designing a whole-child aligned Tiered System of Supports includes the collection and analysis of data to ensure equitable learning experiences for all students. All systems, processes and structures put into place to support students should be guided by data as it relates to your school's context.

But how do you know that your Tiered System of Supports, as you designed it, is operating efficiently and is creating the equitable outcomes intended for students? What can the work your team has done to create and implement the system tell you about how well you are supporting staff and students, not only at the individual and group levels, but across the school community?

It is imperative to ask the right questions and leverage the right data to begin to answer the above questions and many others to support your school in making proactive and responsive, informed choices for creating a positive learning experience for all students through the implementation of a strong Tiered System of Supports.

Prior to discussing the phases of a Tiered System of Supports, the *Tiered System of Supports Health Assessment* was introduced to assist school teams with examining, refining or designing the foundational and operational aspects of a Tiered System of Supports aligned to whole-child design, keeping in mind both the technical and adaptive shifts that would be needed to support all students (and staff) through a whole-child lens.

Now that you have one way of assessing a whole-child aligned Tiered System of Supports in place, another layer of assessment is needed: cycles of continuous improvement. This additional layer uses Tiered System of Supports referral data to address the more adaptive aspects of your system of supports. By *continuous improvement* we mean an ongoing, continuous effort to improve or refine your system with the goal of providing better support for your school community. It is important to note that some schools may start with continuous improvement and determine that completing the *Tiered System of Supports Health Assessment* would be beneficial, as it might be determined that there is a

potential gap in the systems' operating procedures. For example, you might notice that there are students in need of additional support who have not yet been referred. The team may determine or realize that there are some challenges with the referral process and may revisit the *Health Assessment* to improve or refine that aspect of their system. See the table below for additional information on what continuous improvement is and is not.

Continuous Improvement Is …	Continuous Improvement Is Not …
• An iterative process • A way to better understand and improve interactions of people, processes and resources toward a common goal	• The implementation of a "silver bullet" solution • The implementation of technical fixes

Source: Valdez, et al., 2020; Park, et al., 2013

This is an opportunity to leverage referral data (student and teacher data), implementation data, and progress monitoring data to improve the quality of implementation and serve the needs of all students on a broader scale, as well as to build educator capacity to provide equitable learning environments and experiences to all students.

Your student support team can analyze data related to referrals and *Student Support Plans* to capture a snapshot of overall teacher practice and the functioning of your Tiered System of Supports within your school's context, both at the universal (Tier 1) level and at the Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels. This is important because we understand from a developmental perspective that students' needs change over time, and resources (inside and outside of school) can fluctuate. Therefore, continued assessment and refinement of how students are being supported within and prior to a referral to Tier 2 or Tier 3 is crucial to its effectiveness and the integration points between Tiers 1, 2, and 3.

For example, your school team may review their Tiered System of Supports data and notice most students were best supported by additional opportunities to develop a relationship with their teacher. This data point was indicated by the number of students who have a similar intervention as part of their student support plan. A principal might decide to create space for schoolwide relationship-building activities by revising the master schedule. This strategy is in response to the data, and can become a regular, ongoing practice during this school year and/or the following school year.

With regard to building educator capacity, referral and support plan data can also be reviewed to determine potential professional development offerings. For example, you might discover that teachers could benefit from relationship-building strategies to support the needs of their students or to support students with easing anxiety and frustration, then a calming strategy could be shared for schoolwide use.

Data Collection

It will be important to consider data that provides insight into the overall trends related to what strategies are being used at the universal level and how students are being supported through Tier 2/Tier 3. Below is an example of some of the data that might need to be collected to help make decisions about refinements you might make to your Tiered System of Supports:

☐ Date of referral and dates of review of student support plans
☐ Student demographics (name, teacher name, grade, languages spoken, etc.)

- ☐ Goal areas – brief 1–2-word description of the focus area of the goal
- ☐ Intervention support category (environmental, relationship, integrated skill, etc.) and details status of support plan (active, being monitored, or closed)

While this is not an exhaustive list of the types of data that could be collected, this type of data will provide a snapshot of the supports being provided. Collecting data that reflects a diverse set of information allows for a more holistic picture, and therefore increases the likelihood of making refinements or shifts to a system in a more equitable manner. A school team may notice that there have been some unintentional practices that reflect unconscious bias and, as a result, reinforces problematizing students.

There are many ways in which to capture the data you will use to identify trends upon which to take action. Potential platforms include Microsoft Office 365, Google Docs, and creating a table in a Word doc. This data can be entered by the note taker during or after the Tier 2 or Tier 3 meeting, or by the teacher/student support staff member following a 1:1 meeting. For a full list of the type of data to be documented, please see our sample *Data Tracker*. If this is the first time the school is collecting data like this, it is advised that the information be inputted prior to any scheduled meeting for continuous improvement. Access to this data should be provided for school leadership, student support members and teachers.

Potential venues to discuss and reflect on this data would ideally be during a tiered supports meeting or a leadership team meeting (based upon the staff and time availability) at your school. Each team member would respond to the questions on the data analysis portion of the planning doc. Ideally, members of the student support (or leadership) team would review the data individually and then share out noticings as a whole group. The note taker would document feedback from the team, and then the team would come to a consensus on the next steps. The frequency of monitoring such data should be no less than twice a year. However, it is helpful if this process mirrors or informs your already existing continuous improvement efforts. If you review student data trends on a quarterly basis, reflecting on your Tiered System of Supports at the same interval will support your overall improvement efforts.

As we conclude this aspect of the Tiered System of Supports, it must be emphasized that taking the time to look at data to be responsive to the whole school community is invaluable. While it takes time to do, it will also save time, as it allows the school teams to direct their efforts where they can be best leveraged and meet students where they are. This supports the goal of achieving equitable outcomes for *all* students.