

A Whole-Child Approach to a Tiered System of Supports

Whole-Child Design

Educators are given the critical and challenging task of creating learning experiences that truly support each child and their individual development. Turnaround’s framework for school transformation, the Whole-Child Design Blueprint, outlines what the necessary integrated components and core practices are to support students holistically. **Whole-Child Design is not a program, a specific product or a checklist;** it is an approach to education reform grounded in the science of learning and development. Unlike prescriptive models and curricula, it is meant to be used as a visioning tool – and can be applied at all altitudes – in district policies, classroom practice and schoolwide systems (*such as a Tiered System of Supports – see below*), supporting educators to create more equitable environments and outcomes for students so all children can thrive. A Tiered System of Supports gives us the opportunity to build out a **system that reflects one of many ways to put whole-child design into action** from beginning to end.



Tiered System of Supports

Like many other systems in a school, a **Tiered System of Supports leverages and incorporates all aspects of Whole-Child Design.** It proactively and responsively addresses more than just students’ academic performance by considering the relationships, environments, and holistic knowledge, skills and mindsets a student will need to be supported and successful.

The purpose of a Tiered System of Supports is to provide a framework for an adaptive, responsive continuum of integrated supports for all students that vary in level of intensity. This system is designed to support teacher practice and consider a student’s academic, physical, social, and emotional/mental health and identity needs by mitigating barriers to learning and development, both inside and outside of the school setting.

Turnaround for Children’s approach to a Tiered System of Supports is similar to what is widely known as a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). For example, the structure of supports provided is organized by Tiers (Tiers 1, 2 and 3). Tier 1 is the foundation for practices implemented schoolwide for every student, and they become more personalized for students who might need support in Tiers 2 and 3. However, implementation of a whole-child approach to a tiered system of supports calls on a more integrated, comprehensive perspective, one that is designed based on four key principles: 1) recognizes and supports the needs of all children; 2) provides supports in an integrated way; 3) requires strong collaboration among all adults in a student’s context; and 4) operates with an understanding of the impact of trauma and adversity on learning and development.



Tiered System of Supports FAQs

Q: How does Turnaround's Tiered System of Supports enhance current approaches to MTSS?

Here are the enhancements:

- Grounded in the science of learning and development and acknowledges the impact of trauma
- Supports adult collaboration and builds educator capacity to reflect on broader schoolwide systems, structures, practices and mindsets that often lead to inequitable outcomes for students
- Emphasizes teacher reflections on their mindsets and practice, rather than "fixing" the child
- Designed for the intentional integration of academic and social-emotional/mental health needs
- Prioritizes student context (within and outside of school) as a lens to help deepen understanding and provide support accordingly
- Engages in a continuous improvement process to provide better support for your school community
- Leads with equity and prioritizes diversity of voices in the school community and home to create a more inclusive school environment for students, staff and families

Q: In what ways does this approach lead to equitable outcomes for students?

First and foremost, it is important to understand that a Tiered System of Supports provides universal supports that benefit *all* students, along with targeted and/or urgent supports that help students who need it the most. It is designed and implemented with equity as a lens and as an outcome by focusing on reflection of schoolwide systems, protocols and teacher practice that, in many cases, unintentionally reflect and reinforce biased treatment of students. It recognizes that all students have a voice, reflecting their unique strengths, pathways to learning, and individual context, that needs to be heard in order for them to thrive.

Keeping in mind the impact of historical and ongoing biased and racist perspectives reflected in the traditional design of and ongoing practices within school settings, the principles of a tiered system of supports grounded in the science of learning and development forces educators to think differently, and collectively, about how we support all students and each other.

Q: Do Turnaround's Tiered System of Supports resources include potential "interventions" to be used with students?

No. The resources provided will offer some context around understanding Turnaround's approach to a whole-child aligned Tiered System of Supports, along with tools to support schools in setting up the structure and practices, putting the perspective into action. Designing towards a [whole-child purpose](#) requires transformation, not simply tinkering around the edges of existing systems.

Q: If I want to improve my Multi-Tiered System of Supports, where should I start?

To get started, you can begin by clicking on any of the following links:

- [Tiered System of Supports Assessment Tools](#)
- [Getting Started](#)
- [Tools to Support Revising Through a Whole-Child Lens](#)
- [Turnaround's Point of View regarding a Tiered System of Supports](#)