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Multi-Tiered System of Supports: What Is the Role of a School Counselor?

by Brandie Oliver, Butler University

A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is a systematic data-driven program designed to address academic and behavioral concerns by utilizing both prevention and intervention strategies¹. School counselors are uniquely positioned to take a leadership role in the implementation of such programs due to their training in data analysis, program development, social/emotional skill development, evidence-based programming, and direct service delivery. Moreover, MTSS programs align well with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model².

The ASCA National Model has themes of advocacy, systemic change, leadership, and collaboration infused throughout. This intentional approach to comprehensive school counseling is designed to remove barriers to student success and position the school counselor to work strategically to help students reach their potential in the areas of academic, career, social and emotional development.

The MTSS process begins with collecting baseline data on every student in the school by using a form of screening. This can be done by needs assessment, referral mechanisms, or a more objective approach would be a universal screening instrument. If students are identified as needing further attention (need for academic and/or behavioral interventions), then they will be placed into the MTSS tiered system of support. This tiered system uses a decision-making team (that can be led by a school counselor) that meets to examine data, decide upon best-practice interventions, monitor the effectiveness of the interventions, and then decide on next steps for this student. The process is cyclical, as progress-monitoring data is collected periodically to determine future steps.

Collaboration is key within the MTSS model. The school counselor's unique skill set including relationship building, problem-solving, viewing problems through a solution-focused lens, and setting data-driven, goals places them in a key leadership position in the MTSS model. Figure 1 illustrates how elements within a comprehensive school counseling program and MTSS overlap and connect to the unique abilities and knowledge of a school counselor. Additionally, school counselors can assist in the selection and interpretation of the universal screening tool used as a guide for referrals and how to provide supports for students.

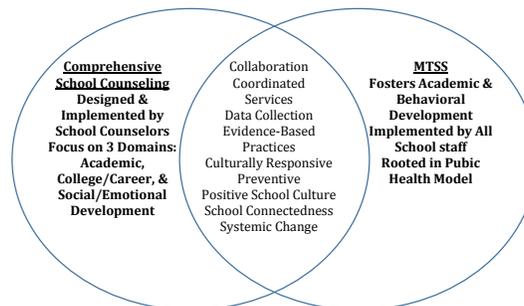


Figure 1: Adapted from Ziomek-Daigle, Goodman-Scott, Cavin, Donohue (2016)³

Tier 2 and 3. Tier 2 and 3 interventions are put in place for students whose needs are not being met by Tier 1 services and may include a variety of interventions. Possible interventions could include small group counseling, behavior plans, targeted classroom level interventions, or individualized interventions. Data collected during the tier one process is used to determine the best practice strategy for tier two implementation. Continuous monitoring and assessment takes place throughout each tier and modifications are made as necessary for student to be successful. Tier 2 and 3 interventions should not be one-size-fits-all, but driven by the needs of each unique student. School counselors are uniquely trained in the field of counseling and education. They are equipped to provide interventions, brief counseling, and work with all students in the school community.

Please contact me if you would like more information on how to align your school counseling program and MTSS in your school. Dr. Brandie Oliver, Butler University bmoliver@butler.edu

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