



Georgia Department of Education

# Georgia's Tiered Connection

Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students

February 2019

## SUPPORTING THE WHOLE CHILD

### Understanding the WHY: How Do You Know it's Working?



Laura Brown

Across Georgia, there is increasing awareness that student outcomes are higher when districts and schools implement the elements of Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students with fidelity.

Implementation fidelity refers to the degree in which critical elements are implemented as intended. In order for districts and schools to know if these critical elements are implemented with fidelity, they must start by asking questions of their work. For example, they ask:

- Are we doing what we said we would do?
- Are our students progressing well with core instruction?
- How are students responding to the evidence-based interventions?

By examining artifacts associated with professional learning, scheduling, and assessments, teams begin to identify successes and gaps in implementing the framework. District and school team members verify this information with interviews and observations.

During "Fidelity February" districts and schools are encouraged to take a closer look at the artifacts associated with this work and to identify next steps. This ongoing process helps to strengthen implementation of the framework and creates a feedback loop that teams use to improve their work. As a result, students and their families will benefit for years to come.

*Laura C. Brown, Ph.D.,*

*Coordinator of Coaching Services*

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## NOW ACCEPTING COHORT 2 APPLICATIONS

### Interested in MTSS Implementation?

Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students is accepting applications for Cohort 2 through February 28, 2019.

Districts and schools interested in applying are encouraged to view the Application Awareness Webinar at [Georgia's MTSS](#). The application and additional implementation resources can be found online including [Georgia's Application Description](#) and [Georgia's Application Awareness Webinar](#).

**Applications must be submitted via email or postal mail.**

Please email applications to [gamtss@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:gamtss@doe.k12.ga.us).

Applications can also be mailed to:

Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students  
Attn: Karen Suddeth, Program Manager  
Special Education Services and Supports  
Georgia Department of Education  
205 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive SE  
1770 Twin Towers East  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Selected districts will be notified by April 1, 2019.



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## DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT: PAULDING COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

### Monitoring with Fidelity



Samuel Sabaka, Ph.D.

Paulding County's dedication to implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports stems from their goal to prepare all students to be successful.

"Our MTSS teams are using screeners and progress monitoring tools to measure student performance," said Sam Sabaka, Ph.D., district MTSS coordinator. "We use the data to

guide instructional decision making and ensure instruction and assessments are administered with fidelity to produce positive outcomes for students."

Paulding County Schools has established several methods for evaluating the fidelity of our MTSS processes, involving training, monitoring, and program evaluation.

"Annually, all staff receive district developed training on practices and procedures at the beginning of each year." School psychology staff, and all new RTI facilitators (one assigned to each of our 34 schools) are trained on their specific roles and expectations," said Dr. Sabaka.

The district utilizes an online database design that links research-based interventions to specific areas of need, ensuring alignment. The database also assists facilitators and the district coordinator in monitoring student populations in each tier, goal setting, progress monitoring data, and other aspects of the process.

"Once per year, we survey RTI facilitators at the local schools to assess their perceptions of the strengths and needs in their building. We also audit RTI files annually for quality and adherence to procedures. Quarterly, a team analyzes students who have had a change in tiered intervention, specifically to determine the level to which those decisions were driven by data."

Data checks are conducted on all students receiving tier 3 supports to ensure that data collection is occurring with fidelity. Dr. Sabaka said all data is shared with district leaders and used to develop professional learning and allocate resources.

Dr. Sabaka believes Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students will close the gap on issues related to the infrastructure required to deliver effective supports and the interdependency between academics and behavior, which is critical to achieving the district's ultimate goal.

## COACHES' CORNER



Dr. Stringer and her husband, John

### Regional Coach: Deshonda Stringer, Ed.D.

Deshonda Stringer, Ed.D., is currently supporting Paulding County educators to increase their awareness of the components of effective MTSS implementation

through Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students.

Dr. Stringer has a dual degree in mathematics and industrial engineering. Early in her career, she landed a job substitute teaching for a classroom with students with disabilities. She loved being in the classroom, which led her to pursue her master's degree in learning disabilities.

She strongly believes in taking a proactive approach to helping students by using the MTSS framework. "The framework helps educators place a greater emphasis on providing supports that help all students. It impacts not only struggling students, but also students who need enrichment or acceleration to reach their maximum potential."

Dr. Stringer believes fidelity is extremely important to achieve maximum results. "When we haven't thought through the whole process, and answered the tough questions, then we end up spending (and possibly



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wasting) money on interventions that are impossible to implement as intended.”

Dr. Stringer said implementing any intervention with fidelity is critical to MTSS implementation.

“Paulding County Schools has teams with good processes in place and are eager to refine and improve processes to move students to the next level.”

According to Dr. Stringer, the next area of focus will include a greater emphasis on strengthening the infrastructure at every level.

“In the age of accountability, schools are constantly being monitored and evaluated on how they are improving outcomes for all students. Georgia's MTSS will help us speak a common language and ensure that all students' needs are being met and student outcomes are improving.”

## INTEGRATING OUR WORK

### High Leverage Practices through Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students

CEEDAR's HLP Team

The High-Leverage Practices, often known as HLPs, were identified in the professional literature as a set of teacher practices which favorably impact student learning across various content areas. These 22 practices are divided into 4 overarching categories: collaboration, assessment, instruction, and social/behavioral learning. These are specific teacher practices that are likely to result in improved student outcomes for all learners. This means that whether students are in elementary, middle, or high school, whether they have an exceptionality of any type, or are new to the district, the HLPs can be successfully utilized to support the learning of all students in Georgia (i.e., Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students).

The inclusive nature of the HLPs allows them to align to the Georgia Department of Education's Systems of Continuous Improvement framework. This framework may be used by Local Education Agencies or school



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districts to consider ways to coordinate supports for learners. This framework intends to align work, foster collaboration, create a common language and approach for improvement. Additionally, the framework operates with the whole child at the center of consideration as decisions about the identification and implementation of evidence based practices and interventions occurs, including HLPs. Ensuring the success for ALL students is the central focus of this framework.

In an effort to demonstrate the integration of HLPs through Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students, the CEEDAR Center's HLP Team has developed an HLP webinar series and resources for all stakeholders interested and invested in positively impacting students and their learning. The HLP Team understands the success of our students is a collective effort, and our goal is to provide information that can be immediately utilized by P-12 teachers, building and central office administrators, and education preparation providers. In the HLP webinar series and resources, there is truly something for everyone!

If you missed one or more of the webinars or would like to view the recorded webinars and resources, please visit: [The CEEDAR Center](#).

## MTSS IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

### MTSS Implementation Step-By-Step Guidance



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Implementing Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students is not a single procedure but rather involves several steps.

This Implementation Step-By-Step Guide is intended to help schools and districts organize and carry out all of the activities that are needed to implement the framework with fidelity.

To download a copy of the guide, plus view fidelity worksheets and additional MTSS resources visit: [Georgia's MTSS](#).



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## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

### Best Practices for Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

The Division of School and District Effectiveness is hosting a series of Instructional Leadership Workshops. In May, the division will feature an MTSS Overview with national MTSS expert, Tessie Bailey, Ph.D., American Institutes for Research (AIR).

The session will answer what is a multi-tiered system of supports, define essential components, and explain how MTSS is impacting Georgia students and schools.

**Date:** May 14, 2019

**Location:** Georgia Department of Education, West Tower 20<sup>th</sup> Floor, Floyd Room

**Time:** 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

The deadline to register is March 14, 2019.

To find out more information or to register for the workshop, visit [MTSS Instructional Leadership Workshop](#).

## MTSS AWARDS

### Five Georgia Schools Recognized for Implementing Best Practices

The Student Support Team Association for Georgia Educators (SSTAGE) presented five district and school teams with the Star Award for Promising Practices.

The award is given to teams that are implementing the components of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports with fidelity. SSTAGE scored schools and districts using the organization's "Best Practices" rubric, which evaluates effective system problem-solving processes at each tier, and coordinated supports and resources. The teams were also evaluated on their systematic plans for parent/family communication and involvement, and ongoing professional learning and teacher support.

The 2018 winners were announced at the Best Practices Conference held in January.

### The winners included:

- Clark Creek STEM Academy
- Fayette County High School
- Jackson County School District
- Oak Grove Elementary School
- Rutland Middle School

To learn more about the honorees or SSTAGE, visit [sstage.org](#).

## STATEWIDE RESOURCES

### New Professional Learning Modules

Georgia's MTSS Professional Learning Unit 4 focuses on Progress Monitoring and how educators can select and evaluate appropriate progress monitoring tools for their students.

To access the module go to Georgia's MTSS website and click [Progress Monitoring](#).

## FEBRUARY NEWS



### Welcome Jason Byars!

Jason Byars is the new program manager for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

"In order to appropriately serve children in Georgia, we must understand all aspects of the student's life," said Byars.

"Factors such as adverse childhood experiences, academic skill deficits, exposure to traumatic events, and mental wellness all have an impact on how children respond to their learning environment. How we address these needs will greatly influence the climate and culture of our schools. PBIS in Georgia is dedicated to leading the nation in the collaboration of resources to meet the needs of every child."

To contact Jason or learn more about PBIS, [click here](#).