

Study of Training in Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Behavior: Impacts on Elementary School Students' Outcomes

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Students' early problem behaviors in school can be disruptive and even hinder their learning and long-term success. To prevent and address these problem behaviors, schools across the country report adopting multi-tiered systems of support for behavior (MTSS-B). The MTSS-B approach seeks to change the school learning environment by consistently teaching and reinforcing good behavior for all students (Tier I), and then identifying and providing supplemental support to students who need it (Tier II). To add to the limited evidence on how well MTSS-B programs work, this study evaluated a promising, intensive program of MTSS-B training and technical assistance. About 90 elementary schools in six states were randomly assigned either to participate in the program or to continue with their usual strategies for supporting student behavior. During the first year of the program, Tier I strategies were introduced; Tier II strategies were added in the second year. Comparing student and teacher experiences in the two sets of schools measures the effectiveness of the program.

KEY FINDINGS

- **The MTSS-B program was no better than schools' usual strategy for students overall.** The program did not improve the disruptive behavior, any other student behaviors, or the achievement of students overall.
- **The program had behavioral and academic benefits for the 15 percent of students identified at the outset of the study as struggling the most with behavior.** At the end of the second year when full implementation supports occurred, this subset of students had significantly less disruptive behavior and higher reading test scores in participating than in non-participating schools. However, the effects on reading were not sustained in the follow-up year, after the program's training and assistance had ended. The program did not improve any other behavior outcomes or math in any year.

Summary of Effects of the MTSS-B Program on Key Outcomes

		End of Full Implementation Supports	Year After Implementation Supports Ended
Disruptive behavior	Students overall	●	Not measured
	Students initially struggling with behavior	+	Not measured
Reading	Students overall	●	●
	Students initially struggling with behavior	+	●
Math	Students overall	●	●
	Students initially struggling with behavior	●	●

- **The program helped put in place most intended MTSS-B systems and practices in participating schools, resulting in better classroom management and functioning and some aspects of school-wide climate compared to non-participating schools.** The program led to greater use of all classroom management practices measured and, consistent with these improvements, teachers were observed to have better control of their classrooms and fewer student disruptions. Staff members reported improved teacher-student relationships, academic focus among students, and staff collegiality but not other aspects of school climate such as perceived school discipline, which research has found to be closely linked to MTSS-B effectiveness.

This broad approach is being widely promoted and adopted. However, this study, in combination with earlier research, suggests that MTSS-B programs may be more beneficial when targeted to districts and schools where student behavior is a significant challenge.