



# MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

Mobilization Guide



This document was developed in collaboration with Novak Education Consulting and Rodriguez Educational Consulting Agency (RECA).



# Table of Contents

|                                |       |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| ★ Introduction                 | 4     |
| ★ MTSS Readiness Flowchart     | 5     |
| ★ MTSS Diagnostic              | 6     |
| ★ MTSS Blueprint               | 7     |
| ★ MTSS Visual                  | 8     |
| ★ Defining the Team            | 9     |
| ★ Video Facilitation Guide     | 10-17 |
| ★ MTSS Self-Assessment         | 18    |
| ★ MTSS Toolkit & Clearinghouse | 19    |
| ★ References                   | 20    |



## INTRODUCTION

A multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) is a system designed to provide equitable access to education and meet the needs of *all* students by ensuring that schools optimize data-driven decision making, progress monitoring, and evidence-based supports and strategies with increasing intensity to sustain student growth.

MTSS is not just about tiered interventions, but rather how all the systems in a school or district fit together to ensure a high quality education for all students.

Building a multi-tiered system of support in your district is a big undertaking, but a worthy cause. In order to be successful, it is critical that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of what MTSS is and, most importantly, how to use evidence-based practices to remove the barriers that prevent all students from learning at high levels.

If that all sounds like a lot, you may be wondering where to begin. This guide is here to help.

Throughout this document, we will introduce you to resources that will assist you and your district or school with understanding the most current research on MTSS and how to get started building a system that will address the needs of all students.

Get started with the MTSS Readiness Flowchart on the next page.



# MTSS READINESS FLOWCHART

## FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS



Start

Get mobilized!  
Start by testing  
your knowledge.  
Take an online  
diagnostic  
to assess  
your current  
understanding of  
MTSS. **page 6**

Read the  
Massachusetts MTSS  
Blueprint to build on  
your current knowledge  
of MTSS.  
**page 7**

The MTSS visual provides  
a reminder of the  
different touch points we  
should keep top of mind  
when planning. Explore  
and unpack the visual.  
**page 8**

Once you have a good  
understanding of MTSS,  
it is time to start defining  
your leadership team for  
implementation.  
**page 9**

Your leadership team can  
further build understanding  
and help spread the word  
of MTSS throughout your  
education community using  
the video facilitation guide.  
**pages 10 - 17**

Complete the MTSS  
Self-Assessment.  
**page 18**

Access additional  
resources to support  
your planning and  
implementation  
efforts with the MTSS  
Clearinghouse.  
**page 19**





# MTSS DIAGNOSTIC

Assess your current knowledge of MTSS by taking this diagnostic assessment.

[Access the assessment here](#)



## MTSS RESOURCE MTSS DIAGNOSTIC



### Directions

A diagnostic assessment is a form of pre-assessment that allows educators to determine learners' knowledge, and skills prior to instruction. This diagnostic assessment is intended to be used to determine current understanding of the research and theory behind the design and delivery of effective multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).

Use this tool during leadership team meetings, faculty meetings, or during professional development sessions as a pre-assessment to determine prior knowledge about MTSS. Given anonymously, this can help teaching and learning teams embrace variability and can increase motivation to explore the MTSS Blueprint and corresponding tools to learn more about how to best meet the needs of all students.



### Pre-Assessment Questions

1. Based on the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), choose the best definition of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).
  - a. a systematic approach that addresses conditions for creating successful and sustainable system change while supporting staff through competency drivers
  - b. a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students' needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision-making
  - c. a framework that schools use to provide targeted support to struggling students, supporting academic growth and achievement, but it also behavior and social emotional needs
  - d. an integrated, multi-tiered system of instruction, assessment, and intervention designed to meet the achievement and behavioral needs of all learners
2. There are six key tenets of the MTSS framework. Which of the following is NOT one of the six key tenets.
  - a. All students are capable of grade-level learning with adequate support
  - b. MTSS is rooted in proactivity and prevention
  - c. Every educator should reinforce reading comprehension skills across the content area in Tier I
  - d. Decisions and procedures are driven by school and student data



# MTSS BLUEPRINT

The MTSS Blueprint defines each of the components for a robust Multi-tiered System of Support.

[The Blueprint can be accessed here.](#)



**Why MTSS?**

All students in Massachusetts are capable of success. While we lead the nation in performance on multiple measures, we still have students who are not experiencing the success they deserve.

Recent reports such as "Review of Special Education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts: A Synthesis Report" by Hehir and Associates (2014) and "No. 1 for Some: Opportunity and Achievement in Massachusetts" by the Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (2018) demonstrate the consequences of an inequitable education system for students with disabilities, students who are English learners, students living in poverty, and students of color in Massachusetts.

This is not because they can't or don't want to learn. We must recognize that many of our schools are not organized to meet the needs of all learners (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014).

Although some students face barriers that have the potential to interfere with their ability to make optimal progress, there is evidence that schools and classrooms can raise student achievement despite these barriers (Hattie, 2018; Meyer, Rose, and Gordon, 2014).

For example, through efforts such as wrap-around services, the use of evidence-based interventions, trauma informed practice, and strategies to

engage all learners, and address factors that impede success, Schools can minimize and improve student outcomes. Equitable, tiered, universal supports that address behavior, and social-emotional needs that are culturally sustaining and evidence-based are essential to MTSS. MTSS is a system designed to ensure that all students, who can and will succeed with our support.

**SECTION 2**

**FOUNDATIONAL FRAMEWORK & FOCUS**

**UDL (Universal Design for Learning)**

Universal design for learning (UDL) is a framework that reduces barriers in instruction, proactively provides appropriate accommodations and supports, and allows for high-achievement expectations for all students, regardless of their unique mix of strengths and weaknesses, by providing options and choices for students to personalize their learning. UDL is an educational framework based on research in cognitive neuroscience that guides the development of flexible learning environments that can accommodate learner variability.

**UDL FRAMEWORK COMPONENTS**

- Multiple Means of Engagement**  
The Why of Learning
- Multiple Means of Representation**  
The What of Learning
- Multiple Means of Action & Expression**  
The How of Learning

The UDL framework, first defined by David Rose, Ed.D. of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) in the 1990's, calls for creating curriculum from the outset that provides:

- Multiple means of engagement to tap into learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn,
- Multiple means of representation to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge, and,
- Multiple means of expression to provide learners options for demonstrating knowledge and skills.

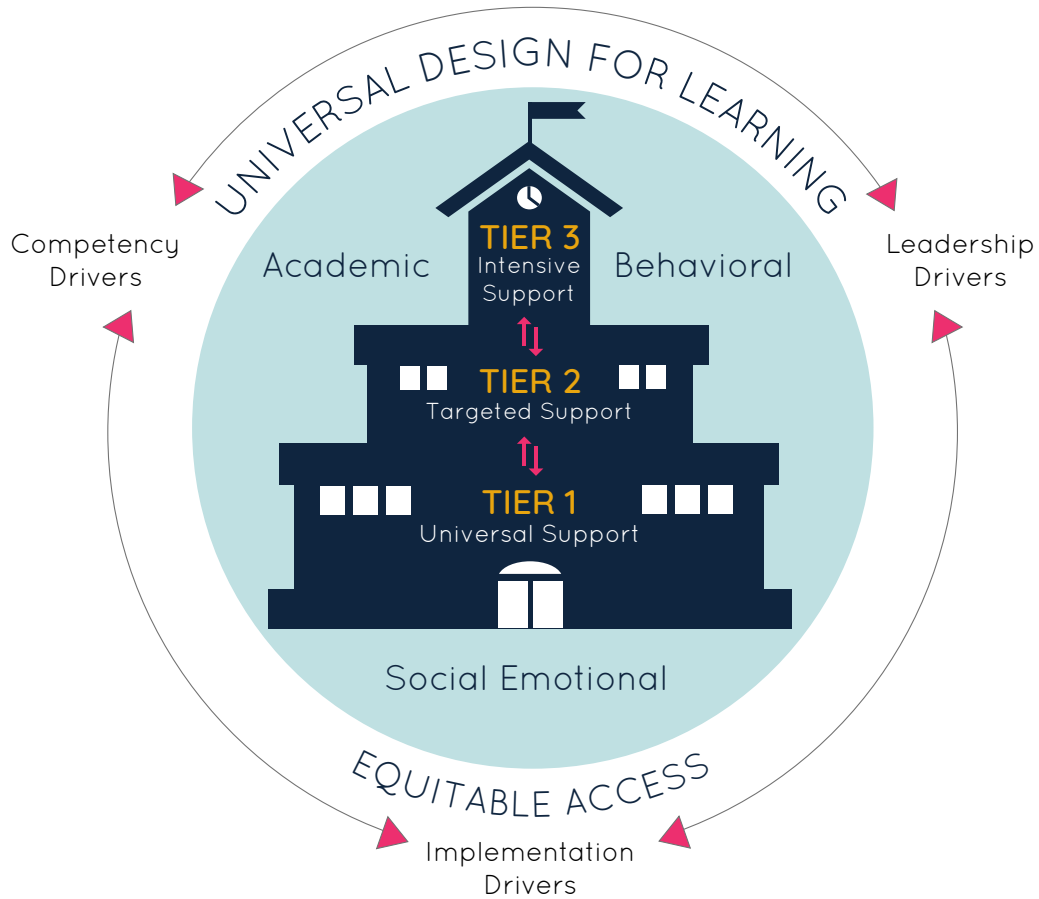
Instructional planning, as defined in the UDL literature, has four parts: goals, methods, materials, and assessments (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014). UDL is intended to increase access and engagement in learning by reducing physical, cognitive, intellectual, and organizational barriers, as well as other obstacles. Instructional goals, through the UDL lens, focuses on standards-based instruction and the design of instruction that allows all students to have equitable access to grade-level standards in learning experiences that are engaging and personalized to their needs. UDL principles also lend themselves to implementing inclusionary practices in the classroom, including behavioral and social emotional teaching and learning.



## THE VISUAL

### Multi-Tiered System of Support

To read a document unpacking the MTSS visual, [click here](#).



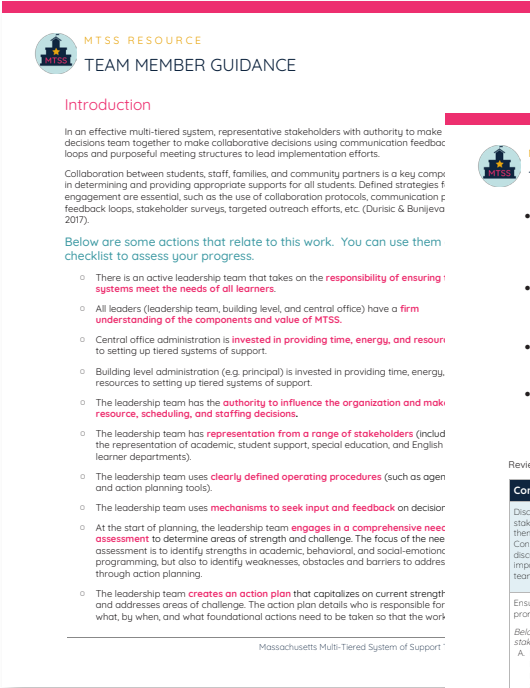




# DEFINING THE TEAM

Read guidance and tips on creating your implementation team for MTSS.

[The team member guidance document can be accessed here.](#)



**Introduction**

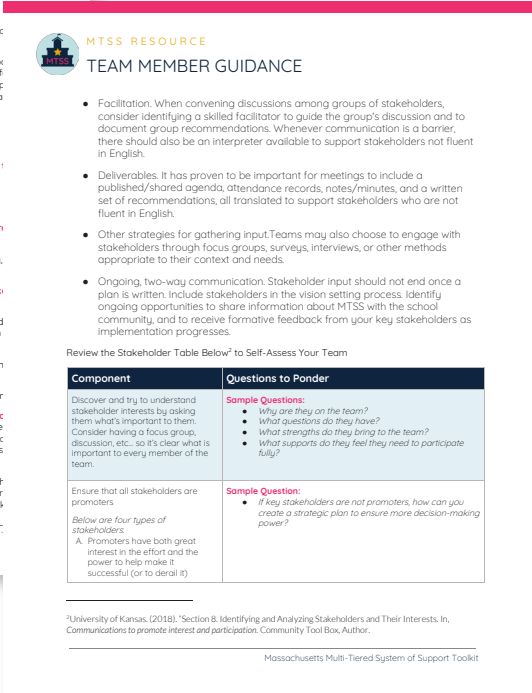
In an effective multi-tiered system, representative stakeholders with authority to make decisions team together to make collaborative decisions using communication feedback loops and purposeful meeting structures to lead implementation efforts.

Collaboration between students, staff, families, and community partners is a key component in determining and providing appropriate supports for all students. Defined strategies for engagement are essential, such as the use of collaboration protocols, communication feedback loops, stakeholder surveys, targeted outreach efforts, etc. (Dunnic & Burijeva 2017).

Below are some actions that relate to this work. You can use them as a checklist to assess your progress.

- There is an active leadership team that takes on the responsibility of ensuring systems meet the needs of all learners.
- All leaders (leadership team, building level, and central office) have a firm understanding of the components and value of MTSS.
- Central office administration is invested in providing time, energy, and resources to setting up tiered systems of support.
- Building level administration (e.g. principal) is invested in providing time, energy, resources to setting up tiered systems of support.
- The leadership team has the authority to influence the organization and make resource, scheduling, and staffing decisions.
- The leadership team has representation from a range of stakeholders (include the representation of academic, student support, special education, and English learner departments).
- The leadership team uses clearly defined operating procedures (such as agendas and action planning tools).
- The leadership team uses mechanisms to seek input and feedback on decision.
- At the start of planning, the leadership team engages in a comprehensive needs assessment to determine areas of strength and challenge. The focus of the needs assessment is to identify strengths in academic, behavioral, and social-emotional programming, but also to identify weaknesses, obstacles and barriers to address through action planning.
- The leadership team creates an action plan that capitalizes on current strengths and addresses areas of challenge. The action plan details who is responsible for what, by when, and what foundational actions need to be taken so that the work

Massachusetts Multi-Tiered System of Support



**Facilitation.** When convening discussions among groups of stakeholders, consider identifying a skilled facilitator to guide the group's discussion and to document group recommendations. Whenever communication is a barrier, there should also be an interpreter available to support stakeholders not fluent in English.

**Deliverables.** It has proven to be important for meetings to include a published/shared agenda, attendance records, notes/minutes, and a written set of recommendations, all translated to support stakeholders who are not fluent in English.

Other strategies for gathering input. Teams may also choose to engage with stakeholders through focus groups, surveys, interviews, or other methods appropriate to their context and needs.

Ongoing, two-way communication. Stakeholder input should not end once a plan is written. Include stakeholders in the vision setting process. Identify ongoing opportunities to share information about MTSS with the school community, and to receive formative feedback from your key stakeholders as implementation progresses.

Review the Stakeholder Table Below<sup>2</sup> to Self-Assess Your Team

| Component  | Questions to Ponder  |
|--|--|
| Discover and try to understand stakeholder interests by asking them what's important to them. Consider having a focus group, discussion, etc., so it's clear what is important to every member of the team.  | <p><b>Sample Questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why are they on the team?</li> <li>What questions do they have?</li> <li>What strengths do they bring to the team?</li> <li>What supports do they feel they need to participate fully?</li> </ul> |
| Ensure that all stakeholders are promoters<br><i>Below are four types of stakeholders:</i><br>A. Promoters have both great interest in the effort and the power to help make it successful (or to derail it) | <p><b>Sample Question:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If key stakeholders are not promoters, how can you create a strategic plan to ensure more decision-making power?</li> </ul>  |

<sup>2</sup>University of Kansas. (2018). "Section 8. Identifying and Analyzing Stakeholders and Their Interests. In Communications to promote interest and participation. Community Tool Box. Author.

Massachusetts Multi-Tiered System of Support Toolkit



## MTSS VIDEO FACILITATION GUIDE

|          |    |  |
|----------|----|--|
| MODULE 1 | 11 | Introduction to MTSS Visual                      |
| MODULE 2 | 12 | Introduction to Implementation Science           |
| MODULE 3 | 13 | Unpacking the Leadership Drivers                 |
| MODULE 4 | 14 | Unpacking the Competency Drivers                 |
| MODULE 5 | 15 | Unpacking the Implementation Drivers             |
| MODULE 6 | 16 | Universal Design For Learning & Equitable Access |
| MODULE 7 | 17 | Tiers are Not a Location                         |

## MODULE 1

# INTRODUCTION TO MTSS VISUAL

This module introduces the new Massachusetts MTSS visual and helps to answer the question: WHAT is the MTSS Blueprint and WHAT does MTSS look like in MA?



### Tools

- ★ [Unpacking the MTSS Visual](#)



### Discussion Questions

Choose one or more of the following questions and discuss, tweet, or write a reflection.

- ★ Why does MTSS need to support teachers as well as students?
- ★ How can the MTSS visual help you when designing educational experiences?
- ★ How can we ensure that a high-quality Tier 1 foundation is accessible for all students, regardless of variability?



### Resources

- ★ View this [one page fact sheet](#) from Understood.org on what MTSS is and is not.
- ★ [Read the MA State ESSA Plan](#)
- ★ Read about [5 Myths and Truths about the MTSS Framework and Young Children with Disabilities](#)
- ★ [Explore the Every Student Succeeds Act: Summary of Key Provisions](#). Pg. 6 specifically focuses on all references to multi-tiered systems of support

## MODULE 2

# INTRODUCTION TO IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE

This module unpacks the outside drivers around the model and why it's important for leadership to elevate and celebrate teachers through robust professional development, coaching and a focus on universally designed, inclusive practice as well as the development of integrated and sustainable district strategies to ensure a tiered continuum of evidence based practices. This module answers the question, WHAT is implementation science and why will it help to improve the outcomes of all students.



CLICK HERE TO WATCH  
MODULE 2 VIDEO



## Tools

- ★ [MTSS Self-Assessment](#)



## Discussion Questions

Choose one or more of the following questions and discuss, tweet, or write a reflection.

- ★ What are the goals of implementation science?
- ★ Identify challenges to increasing the use of evidence-based practices in your school or district.



## Resources

- ★ Visit the [National Implementation Research Network](#)
- ★ Review the [Implementation Science and Practice BRIEF in the Education Sector](#)


## MODULE 3

# UNPACKING THE LEADERSHIP DRIVERS

This module introduces the research and rationale for a focus on shared responsibility & collaboration, research-based practice, resource allocation, and optimizing stakeholder engagement in MTSS work. This module makes connections between the leadership driver and the Ed Eval rubrics on leadership.

## Multi-Tiered System of Support

| STANDARD ID:  | STANDARD ID:   | STANDARD ID:  | STANDARD ID:   |
|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Instructional Leadership</b>   | <b>Management and Operations</b>   | <b>Family and Community Engagement</b>  | <b>Professional Culture</b>  |
| <b>A. Curriculum Indicator</b><br>1. Standard-Based Unit and Lesson Support   | <b>A. Environment</b><br>1. Operational Systems and Routines<br>2. Social Emotional Well-Being<br>3. Student Health and Safety   | <b>A. Engagement Indicator</b><br>1. Family Engagement<br>2. Community and Stakeholder Engagement | <b>A. Commitment to High Standards Indicator</b><br>1. Commitment to High Standards<br>2. Mission and Core Values<br>3. Meetings |
| <b>B. Instruction Indicator</b><br>1. Student Engagement<br>2. Quality of Effort & Work<br>3. Meeting Diverse Needs                             | <b>B. Human Resources Management and Development Indicator</b><br>1. Recruitment and Hiring Strategies<br>2. Induction, Professional Development, and Career Growth Strategies | <b>B. Sharing Responsibility Indicator</b><br>1. Student Support<br>2. Family Support             | <b>B. Cultural Proficiency Indicator</b><br>1. Policies and Practices  |
| <b>C. Assessment Indicator</b><br>1. Variety of Assessment Methods<br>2. Adjustments to Practice  | <b>C. Scheduling and Management Information System Indicator</b><br>1. Time for Teaching and Learning  | <b>C. Communication Indicator</b><br>1. Culturally Proficient Communication                       | <b>C. Communications Indicator</b><br>1. Communication Skills  |
| <b>D. Evaluation Indicator</b><br>1. Educator Goals<br>2. Student Learning Measures<br>3. Observations and Feedback<br>4. Ratings and Alignment | <b>D. Law, Ethics, and Policies Indicator</b><br>1. Laws and Policies<br>2. Ethical Behavior   | <b>D. Family Concerns Indicator</b><br>1. Family Concerns   | <b>D. Continuous Learning Indicator</b><br>1. Continuous Learning of Staff<br>2. Continuous Learning of Administrator            |
| <b>E. Data-Informed Decision-Making Indicator</b><br>1. Data-Informed Decision Making<br>2. School Goals  | <b>E. Fiscal Systems Indicator</b><br>1. Fiscal Systems  |   | <b>E. Shared Vision Indicator</b><br>1. Shared Vision Develop  |
| <b>F. Student Learning Indicator</b>  |  |   | <b>F. Managing Conflict Indicator</b><br>1. Response to Disagreement   |



CLICK HERE TO WATCH MODULE 3 VIDEO



## Tools

- ★ [Team Member Protocol](#)
- ★ [MTSS Action Plan Review Tools](#)
- ★ [MTSS Theory of Action Sample](#)
- ★ [Review Protocol](#)



## Discussion Questions

Choose one or more of the following questions and discuss, tweet, or write a reflection.

- ★ What are the differences between technical problems and adaptive challenges and how can they impact the development of a multi-tiered system of support?
- ★ Think about the best leader you have ever worked with/alongside. How did they exemplify expertise in both technical problems and adaptive challenges? Share specific examples.



## Resources

- ★ Read this article or watch this video containing [great self-assessment questions for leaders on leadership drivers](#)
- ★ [Watch these Leadership Team \(ILT\) Modules](#)
- ★ [Elementary Scheduling Guidance](#)
- ★ [Secondary Scheduling Guidance](#)

## MODULE 4

# UNPACKING THE COMPETENCY DRIVERS

This module explores a focus on high quality professional development through the MA DESE PD standards, the importance of feedback (Model Feedback surveys and connection to Ed Eval rubrics and what the expectations are for teachers), and a comprehensive coaching model.

### Multi-Tiered System of Support

6. HQPD advances an educator's ability to apply learnings from the professional development to his/her particular content and/or context.



CLICK HERE TO WATCH  
MODULE 4 VIDEO



### Tools

- ★ [Professional Development Guidance](#)
- ★ [UDL Interview Questions](#)



### Discussion Questions

Choose one or more of the following questions and discuss, tweet, or write a reflection.

- ★ Consider the best PD you have ever attended. Discuss its impact using the 10 high quality PD standards and discuss how it built your competency as a result of the standards.
- ★ Does your school or district provide high quality professional development using the high quality PD standards? If so, what specifically aligns and what do you need to work on? If not, what do you believe is the most important aspect to address first?
- ★ Consider how your colleagues discuss the use of Educator Evaluation as a means to improve teacher competency. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current model?



### Resources

- ★ View the [Massachusetts Standards for High Quality Professional Development](#)
- ★ [View this article by Marzano on the two purposes of educator evaluation](#)



## MODULE 5

# UNPACKING THE IMPLEMENTATION DRIVERS

This module focuses on the importance of data-based decision making and standards-based instruction, making connections back to the overall design of the Blueprint as well as the connection to implementation science.

- ★ the monitoring of implementation fidelity
- ★ the use of robust data and assessment systems
- ★ the use of standards-driven curriculum/instructional models

### Tiered Continuum of Evidence-Based Practices

Evidence-based practices, instruction, and systems are provided to students by tier. Universally designed practices and supports are intrinsic to all tiers. The supports provided to students are defined by their needs.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) emphasizes the use of evidence-based activities, strategies, and interventions (collectively referred to as "interventions").

The term "evidence-based" means an intervention that demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other *relevant outcomes*. The criteria for identifying "evidence-based" interventions based on each of ESSA's four levels are as follows:

- ★ **Strong evidence** from at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study;
- ★ **Moderate evidence** from at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-



CLICK HERE TO WATCH  
MODULE 5 VIDEO



## Tools

- ★ [Fidelity Measures Guidance](#)
- ★ [Potential Root Causes](#)



## Discussion Questions

Choose one or more of the following questions and discuss, tweet, or write a reflection.

- ★ Consider how often data-based decision making occurs in your school/district. What structures are in place to ask the following questions on an ongoing basis to inform instruction. What are the data telling us? What can we learn from the data? How can we change our practice in light of the data? What other data do we need to collect?
- ★ What does it mean to be standards-based in practice?



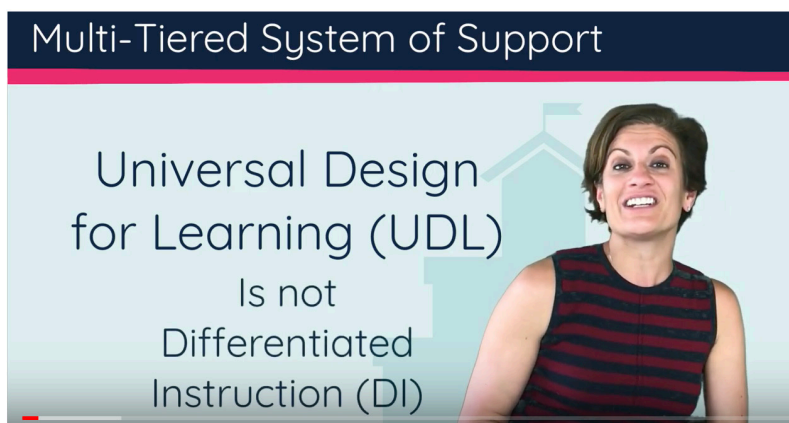
## Resources

- ★ Read this chapter on the [Importance of Data-Based Decision Making](#)
- ★ This article outlines [A Brief History of the Role of Standards in Education Reform](#)

## MODULE 6

# UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING & EQUITABLE ACCESS

This module introduces the UDL framework, the UDL principles and the UDL guidelines and how they provide all students with equitable access and engagement. This video highlights that UDL is not just about academic instruction but also behavioral and social emotional support for all students.



 [CLICK HERE TO WATCH MODULE 6 VIDEO](#)



### Tools

- ★ [UDL Self-Assessment](#)



### Discussion Questions

**Choose one or more of the following questions and discuss, tweet, or write a reflection.**

- ★ After viewing the video and the UDL Implementation Rubric or the UDL Progression Rubric, where are you in your UDL practice?
- ★ How does implementation of Universal Design for Learning optimize equitable access for all students?



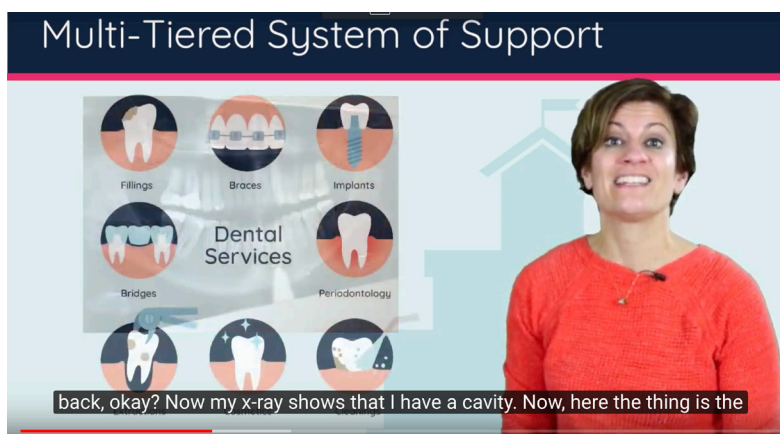
### Resources

- ★ Review the CAST [UDL Guidelines](#)
- ★ Explore the [UDL Implementation Rubric](#)
- ★ Self-assess your current teaching practices using the [UDL Progression Rubric](#)

## MODULE 7

# TIERS ARE NOT A LOCATION

This module discusses the three tiers of a multi-tiered system and how they are not related special education status. This video clarifies that special education students are first general education students and that all students deserve equal access to rigorous, grade-level, standards-based instruction. This module introduces the nature of flexibility in tiers and a focus on data-based decision making and the importance of UDL for ALL students in Tier 1.



 [CLICK HERE TO WATCH MODULE 7 VIDEO](#)



### Tools

- ★ [MTSS & Special Education](#)
- ★ [MTSS Dental Analogy](#)
- ★ [Data-based Decision Making Guidance](#)
- ★ [Curriculum Scope and Sequence Protocol](#)
- ★ [Literacy by Level](#)



### Discussion Questions

Choose one or more of the following discussion questions and discuss, tweet, or write a reflection.

- ★ How is an ideal MTSS system like an ideal system of oral health and tooth care?
- ★ How would you describe MTSS to a parent who asked about the district MTSS plan, using the dental analogy?
- ★ Why is it so critical for all students to receive equitable access to Tier 1 with supplemental support, if necessary?



### Resources

- ★ [Learn more about “supplement, not supplant” guidance of Title 1 in ESSA](#) and consider how it relates to layered supports in a multi-tiered system of supports
- ★ [6 Principles of IDEA](#)



## MTSS SELF-ASSESSMENT

**Complete the MTSS Self-Assessment to determine where your district or school currently stands in the planning process.**

Access a copy of the self-assessment [here](#)

This self-assessment is intended to be used by a planning team at the school or district level. You may choose to individually rate each item and collectively discuss to come up with a rating agreed upon by the group or you may choose to discuss as a group and come up with an overall group rating. You may choose to look at each component in a holistic manner (academic, social/emotional, and behavioral) or choose one particular area and focus your survey on that (e.g. academics). This assessment was intended to take between 40-60 minutes to administer. Actual time will vary depending upon the composition of your team and disposition of its member for discourse.

[Access Self-Assessment](#)



## MTSS TOOLKIT & CLEARINGHOUSE

Search for and access tools, resources and protocols to get help with MTSS planning and implementation at the Massachusetts Tools for Schools Clearinghouse:

[www.matoolsforschools.com](http://www.matoolsforschools.com)



## REFERENCES

Bryk, A.S., Gomez, L., Grunow, A. & LeMahieu, P. (2015). Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better. Harvard Education Publishing, Boston MA.

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2019). The Six Core Principles of Improvement. Retrieved from <https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/our-ideas/six-core-principles-improvement/>

Friend, M. & Cooke, L. (2013). Interactions collaboration skills for school professionals (7th edition). Boston, MA: Pearson.

University of Kansas. (2018). "Section 8. Identifying and Analyzing Stakeholders and Their Interests. In, Communications to promote interest and participation." Community Tool Box, Author. Retrieved from <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/promoting-interest-and-participation-initiatives>